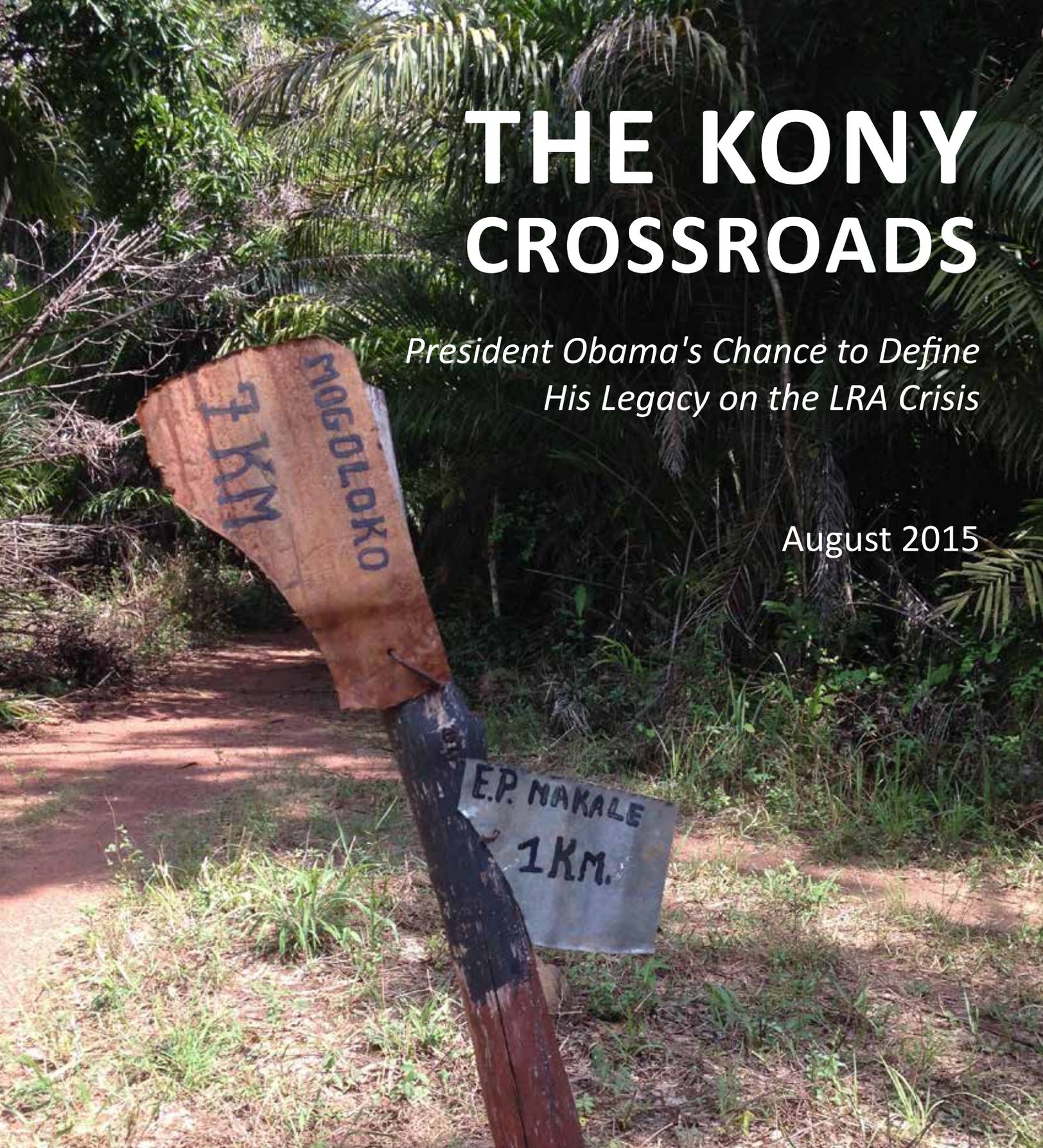


THE KONY CROSSROADS

*President Obama's Chance to Define
His Legacy on the LRA Crisis*

August 2015



THE KONY CROSSROADS

*President Obama's Chance to Define
His Legacy on the LRA Crisis*

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Executive summary and recommendations | 3 |
| Map: LRA area of operations and trafficking networks | |
| I. Inside the LRA: The evolution of Kony's rebel force | 8 |
| Graph: The fate of Ugandan LRA combatants | |
| II. The LRA in the context of regional crises | 14 |
| Graph: Trends in LRA violence | |
| Graph: Civilian displacement in LRA-affected areas of Congo | |
| III. Great expectations: Assessing the US military's counter-LRA mission | 22 |
| Map: Military deployments and LRA attacks | |
| IV. Defeating the LRA: The US role | 30 |
| Graph: Trends in LRA combatant capacity | |
| V. Beyond Kony: Building resilient communities | 35 |
| VI. The LRA and President Obama's legacy on atrocity response | 39 |
| VII. Conclusion | 41 |
| Methodology | 42 |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Five years after signing *The Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act* into law, President Barack Obama's response to the LRA crisis promises to be one of his most high profile and enduring legacies in Africa and in the field of atrocity prevention and response. The 2010 LRA legislation, cosponsored by a bipartisan coalition of 64 US Senators and 201 Representatives, required that President Obama deliver to Congress a comprehensive plan to deal with the LRA crisis. The White House boldly took up Congress's mandate, releasing an ambitious strategy that aimed to protect civilians, dismantle the LRA's command structure, encourage defections from the LRA, and assist affected communities. Its release had a ripple effect on the African Union and United Nations, both of which subsequently issued counter-LRA strategies aimed at improving coordination among regional governments, UN peacekeeping missions, and humanitarian agencies active in LRA-affected areas.

President Obama revealed the flagship initiative of his counter-LRA strategy in October 2011 with the announcement that the US would deploy approximately 100 military advisers to assist regional forces authorized under the AU's counter-LRA Regional Task Force (RTF). In what became known as Operation Observant Compass (OOC), the US advisers have worked primarily with Ugandan forces deployed in eastern Central African Republic (CAR), the most capable and equipped of the RTF contingents. They have also trained national contingents from the CAR, the Democratic Republic of Congo (Congo), and South Sudan, and collaborated with civil society actors on innovative "Come Home" defection campaigns using leaflets, radio messages, and aerial loudspeakers.

Since the 2010 legislation was passed, combined counter-LRA initiatives have made significant progress against the rebel group. LRA killings and mass child abductions have dropped dramatically and more than 350 women and children have escaped long-term captivity within the LRA. Several notorious commanders, including International Criminal Court-indictees Dominic Ongwen and Okot Odhiambo, have either defected or been killed. The total number of fighters at Kony's disposal has dropped from approximately 400 in 2010 to about 190 today. Despite this progress, Joseph Kony, having outlasted

three US Presidents over the previous 28 years, is on pace to survive President Obama's remaining time in office. Kony has maintained control over a weakened but coherent command structure, and LRA groups still attack civilians across vast swaths of the CAR and Congo with little risk of being pursued. The number of LRA attacks and abductions has fluctuated considerably in recent years, defying the narrative that counter-LRA efforts are making consistent, irreversible progress in addressing the crisis. Total LRA attacks and abductions dropped from 2011 to 2013 only to rise in parts of eastern CAR and northeastern Congo in 2014 and into 2015. In the meantime, Kony and his immediate entourage operate largely from South Darfur and the neighboring Sudanese-controlled Kafia Kingi enclave, where Ugandan RTF troops are unwelcome.

The LRA's exploitation of safe havens in Congo and along the South Darfur-Kafia Kingi border has been essential to its continued survival. US and Ugandan RTF forces, already facing diplomatic constraints in accessing these safe havens, also lack the intelligence and airlift capabilities needed to pursue LRA commanders there. Reduced military pressure – US and RTF forces have not had a significant battlefield victory against the LRA since June 2014 – has protected senior LRA commanders and helped them minimize the flow of rank-and-file defectors. LRA leaders also traffic ivory taken from elephants killed in Congo to Kafia Kingi and South Darfur, where they purchase supplies and munitions. These opportunistic relationships allow Kony and his immediate entourage to resupply without committing attacks that could give pursuing forces intelligence on their location.

Counter-LRA operations have forced the rebel group to curtail its most shocking atrocities, but even this has had mixed effects. The LRA's reduction in killings and mass abductions has given the crisis a dwindling profile, making it difficult for US and international diplomats to prioritize it alongside other pressing issues when engaging Khartoum, Kinshasa, and other regional capitals. Policymakers also feel less urgency to address the LRA's access to safe havens and other persistent obstacles that stand in the way of a decisive end to the insurgency. In the absence of a clear vision for resolving the crisis, US and international officials continue to invest in more politically expedient

responses to the crisis, such as emergency humanitarian aid and UN peacekeeping operations. These efforts do mitigate the suffering of some civilians in LRA-affected areas, but they fail to reach many of the hundreds of thousands who have been displaced by the conflict and ultimately do little to improve the status quo. Peacekeeping and humanitarian resources in LRA-affected areas are also increasingly limited by regional and global crises. In Congo, over a dozen international aid groups and the most capable UN peacekeeping forces have withdrawn from LRA-affected areas since late 2013, even as LRA attacks and abductions there have since risen considerably.

President Obama's legacy on the LRA will depend on whether his Administration exercises the leadership needed to move beyond mitigation of the crisis towards its definitive resolution. The President and US Congress deserve credit for reducing the LRA to a shadow of its former self, but they cannot rest until the LRA command structure is dismantled and the group no longer poses a significant threat to civilians. A renewed effort to reach this goal must be centered on diplomatic and military initiatives that disrupt LRA safe havens in Kafia Kingi, South Darfur, and north-eastern Congo. The President must also ensure the advisers and their RTF partners have the intelligence, logistical resources, and necessary access to conduct operations to arrest Kony and senior LRA officers and aggressively expand defections campaigns in their safe havens.

Implementing such a strategy will require President Obama to resist pressure to significantly downsize the US adviser deployment. Should the fragile counter-LRA coalition disband and US and Ugandan RTF troops prematurely withdraw from LRA-affected areas, Kony's forces will continue to attack, abduct, and displace civilians across central Africa. Though Kony is integral to the LRA's current command structure, he eventually could seek to bestow power on a younger generation of Ugandan fighters in the LRA that includes his sons and former bodyguards. If given the chance to rebuild, the LRA could metastasize further by deepening ties with armed groups involved in illicit trafficking networks, further integrating non-Ugandan abductees into the officer ranks, and resuming mass atrocities.

At the same time, the Administration and its partners must look beyond Kony. The LRA has preyed on communities that are marginalized by their governments and face threats from other armed groups. For President Obama's counter-LRA strategy to bear lasting fruit, the US should invest in programs that spur longer-term economic recovery, reinforce community resilience, holistically reintegrate LRA escapees, and address governance and human rights concerns. Though even a decisive defeat of the LRA and boosted assistance to affected communities is far from a panacea for a troubled region, it would have a stabilizing effect and allow hundreds of thousands of people to return home. The successful execution of President Obama's counter-LRA strategy could also provide valuable lessons to his Atrocities Prevention Board and future US Administrations about how strong interagency cooperation, investments in early warning mechanisms and community cohesion, and light-footprint military deployments can help prevent and respond to atrocities by insurgent groups across the continent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Working in concert, the White House, State Department, USAID, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Defense Department and US military personnel should:

Reauthorize Operation Observant Compass and strengthen ties with partner forces

- Reauthorize the deployment of US military advisers to forward operating bases in the CAR and Congo until the LRA command structure is dismantled and the LRA no longer threatens civilians;
- Strengthen field-level relations with RTF and UN peacekeeping partners;
- Deploy an additional US government civilian field representative to be based between Obo, CAR, and Dungu, Congo, with a rotation that is staggered with that of US military advisers;

Disrupt LRA safe havens and trafficking networks in Kafia Kingi and South Darfur

- In cooperation with the Ugandan military, conduct operations aimed at apprehending senior LRA officers operating in eastern CAR and the Kafia Kingi enclave;
- Establish a more sustained presence of US and RTF troops in CAR's Haut Kotto prefecture and South Sudan's Western Bahr el-Ghazal State;
- Prioritize the development of a common diplomatic strategy aimed at securing Sudan's cooperation in denying the LRA safe haven within Sudanese-controlled territory and allowing RTF troops to pursue LRA forces there. This strategy should include the involvement of:
 - The AU LRA special envoy and the AU High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP)
 - US Special Representative for Sudan and South Sudan and the US ambassador to Sudan
 - The Ugandan government
 - The head of the UN Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to the African Union (UNOAU)
 - The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR)

- Ensure relevant UN Security Council documents highlight the presence of LRA forces in Sudanese-controlled territory and call for Sudan's cooperation with the AU counter-LRA effort;
- Work with the AU, UN peacekeeping missions, and UN Panels of Experts on the CAR to investigate reports that Seleka, the Sudanese military (SAF), and commercial traders are providing material support to LRA forces;

Prevent LRA forces from attaining safe haven and illicit ivory in Congo

- Expand cooperation and information sharing with authorities in Garamba National Park to deny the LRA access to illicit ivory, and expand funding of the park's conservation initiatives;
- Support the development of a network of protected areas stretching from Garamba National Park and the Bili-Uele Protected Area in Congo to the Chinko Reserve in eastern CAR in which authorities in each location cooperate on information sharing and anti-poaching efforts;
- Continue working with MONUSCO to provide logistical support and training to Congolese RTF units conducting counter-LRA operations;
- Encourage the Congolese government to allow Ugandan RTF troops to conduct limited, time-bound counter-LRA operations in northeastern Congo;

Improve airlift and intelligence support to US and RTF troops

- Ensure OOC commanders have the flexibility to request and deploy, in a timely manner, airlift and intelligence assets that are appropriate for counter-LRA operations, with particular focus on operations in Kafia Kingi and other areas where senior LRA commanders frequent;
- Ensure US military intelligence personnel deployed to OOC have in-depth, long-term expertise on the LRA crisis;

- Aggressively declassify intelligence on the LRA and proactively share it with RTF forces, UN peacekeeping personnel, and civil society, so that all actors may contribute to and benefit from a common operating picture of LRA activity;
- Prioritize consistent engagement between US military advisers and nomadic herders, traders, artisanal miners, hunters, and other actors that have frequent contact with LRA groups;

Expand the scale and geographic range of defection campaigns

- Double the scale of all defection messaging efforts over the next year, including leaflets distributed, aerial loudspeaker missions flown, and the hours per week that UBC shortwave radio and regional FM radios play Come Home defection programs;
- Expand the geographic reach of defection messaging into the CAR's Haut Kotto prefecture, Congo's Bas Uele district, the Kafia Kingi enclave, and South Darfur;
- Encourage the Ugandan government to communicate a consistent policy regarding which LRA combatants will be offered amnesty and which ones will face charges if they defect;

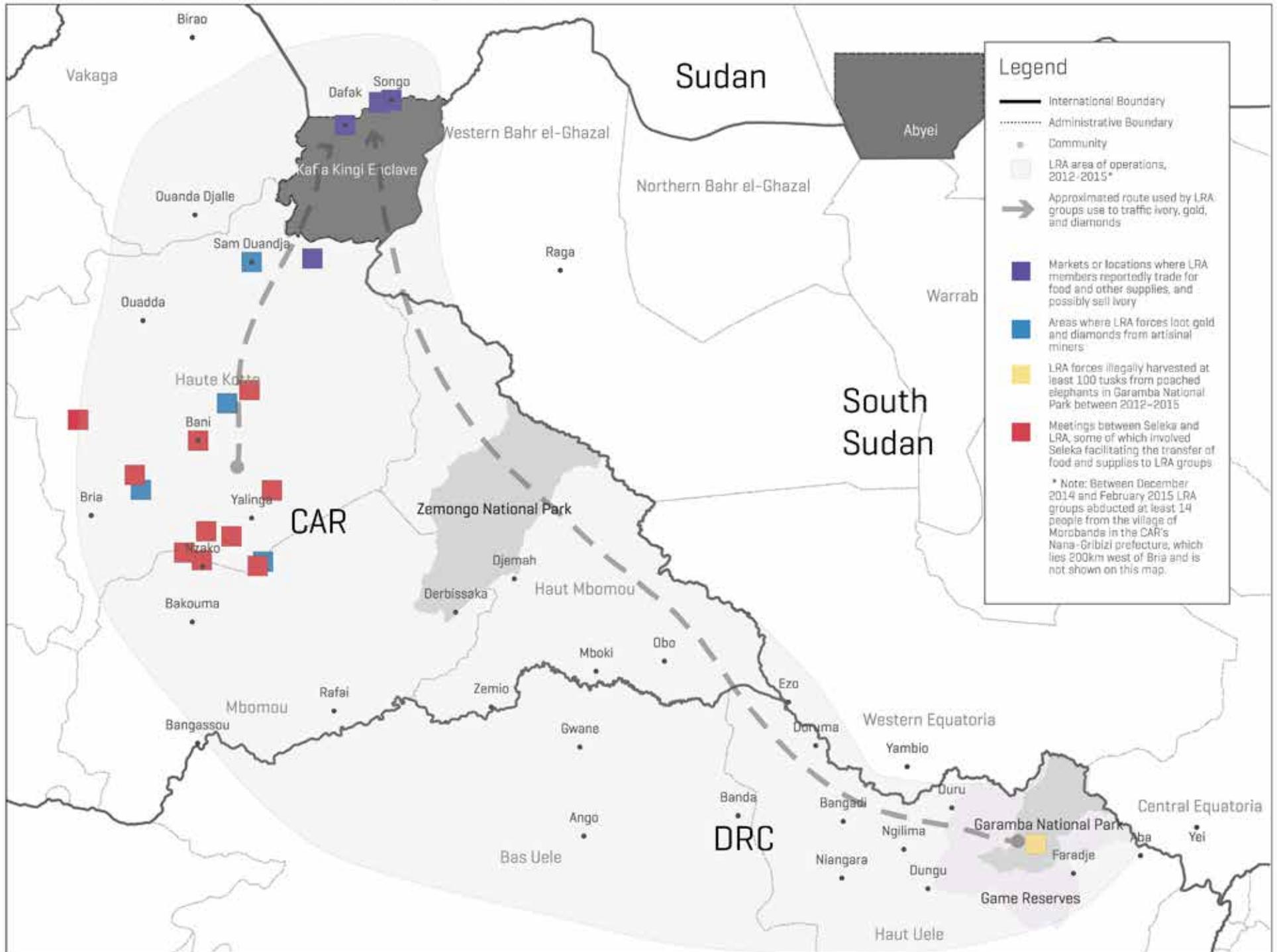
Promote civilian protection, human rights, and rule of law in RTF partner countries

- Work with RTF partner forces to ensure counter-LRA operations fully integrate civilian protection strategies and comply with international humanitarian and human rights law;
- Encourage the AU to deploy civilian protection experts to the field to help RTF forces develop operational guidelines on accountability and civilian protection;
- Ensure that partnerships with RTF forces on counter-LRA operations do not dilute US diplomacy to address pressing human rights and governance crises, particularly in Uganda;

Building community resilience

- Complete the USAID assessment of recovery and protection needs in LRA-affected areas, and use it to develop a comprehensive strategy for US programming that does the following:
 - Expands holistic, community-based programs to support the reintegration of children and adults who have returned from the LRA;
 - Builds the capacity of local civil society to peacefully resolve communal conflict;
 - Integrates expanding the capacity building of local civil society organizations into all grants to international NGOs operating in LRA-affected areas;
- Encourage the European Union and World Bank to support reintegration and economic recovery initiatives in LRA-affected areas, including the rehabilitation of key roads;
- Encourage UN peacekeeping missions, including MINUSCA, to rehabilitate roads in LRA-affected areas that will enhance cross-border travel;
- Pressure OCHA and humanitarian actors in Congo to develop an assessment of humanitarian and recovery needs in LRA-affected areas, including those of people no longer officially counted as displaced.

LRA area of operations and trafficking networks



I. INSIDE THE LRA: THE EVOLUTION OF KONY'S REBEL FORCE

The LRA has evolved considerably since Joseph Kony formed the group in the Acholi region of northern Uganda in the late 1980s. Since the collapse of the Juba Peace Talks in 2008, it has morphed from a political rebellion to a criminal gang that exists for the benefit of a handful of senior commanders. Scattered across four countries in an area the size of California, small LRA groups have developed a variety of survival strategies that include looting rural farms, accessing local markets, and extorting communities for food in exchange for minimizing attacks. Kony's immediate entourage has increasingly relied on the trafficking of illicit ivory, gold, and diamonds to acquire needed supplies without attracting the attention of pursuing Ugandan troops. Kony has maintained a remarkable degree of control over the LRA's command structure, marginalizing his rivals and using incentives and fear to deter defections and inspire loyalty. However, he appears to have lost touch with at least some LRA groups, and recent defections from his entourage may be a sign that his grip on the LRA is eroding. Furthermore, the LRA's reliance on Kony and a dwindling core of Acholi fighters bodes ill for the group's future unless he can groom a successor and integrate non-Acholi abductees into the command structure.

From northern Uganda's rebellion to Kony's rebellion

Kony's LRA was the heir to a series of rebellions against President Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Movement/Army, whose atrocities in northern Uganda in the late 1980s and early 1990s sparked significant local sympathy for the LRA.¹ In 1994, the LRA established an alliance with the Sudanese government, which provided the group with material support and allowed it to shift its bases to southern Sudan. Over the next decade the LRA's conflict with Museveni's regime became embroiled in a larger proxy war, as the Ugandan government supported South Sudanese rebels against Khartoum.² The LRA maintained an active presence in northern Uganda even as it shifted its focus towards southern Sudan,

1 For a concise history of the early stages of the LRA conflict, see Refugee Law Project, "Behind the Violence: Causes, Consequences, and the Search for Solutions to the Conflict in Northern Uganda," February 2004.

2 For more detail on the LRA's history in South Sudan, see Mareike Schomerus, "The Lord's Resistance Army in Sudan: A History and Overview," Small Arms Survey, September 2007.

sometimes returning to retaliate against Ugandan military offensives. However, the LRA's brutal tactics, including massacres, mutilations, and child abductions, steadily eroded the group's popularity in northern Uganda.

The Lord's Resistance Army preys on civilians... Its leadership, indicted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity, has no agenda and no purpose other than its own survival.

—President Barack Obama, 24 May 2010, Statement upon signing *The LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act*

The LRA's presence in southern Sudan became increasingly tenuous following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which led to the gradual withdrawal of the SAF from the region. In 2006 Kony shifted the LRA's bases to Congo's Garamba National Park and agreed to participate in peace talks with the Ugandan government, mediated by South Sudanese Vice-President Riek Machar. The Juba Peace Talks placed the LRA near the center of dialogue between the Ugandan government and northern Ugandans, enhancing its political credibility. Civilian negotiators appointed by the LRA, despite having a minimal political base at home and little trust among the LRA's military command, played a leading role in widely publicized discussions about the future of transitional justice and economic recovery in war-affected areas of Uganda.

The LRA's heightened influence over the future of northern Uganda was short-lived. Kony's mistrust in the negotiations process caused him to re-isolate the LRA military command and resume large-scale abduction raids in anticipation of a return to hostilities. In December 2008, following several unsuccessful attempts to bring Kony back into the process, the Ugandan government launched Operation Lightning Thunder against LRA bases in Garamba National Park. The US-supported military strike failed to capture Kony, but it forced him into hiding and scattered LRA groups further away from Uganda. By this time,

hundreds of thousands of displaced northern Ugandans had already taken advantage of the ceasefire to return home and begin rebuilding their communities after decades of war. The Ugandan government, having relaxed its unpopular forced displacement policy, made further political overtures to northern leaders, including promises to initiate a transitional justice process in the country.

As northern Ugandans took more control over negotiating their future within the country, the LRA became increasingly irrelevant. This dynamic created an existential crisis for the LRA's Acholi fighting force, which Kony has long motivated by citing the political grievances of northern Ugandans. Acholi defectors in recent years have testified to the growing disillusionment within the LRA towards Kony's ideology, as many fighters realize that the idea of returning triumphantly to overthrow the Museveni regime is unrealistic given the dwindling fighting force and its distance from Uganda. Many now see the LRA as an armed group whose function is primarily to serve the interests of Kony and a handful of senior officers.³

Reliance on illicit trafficking

The narrowing of the LRA's *raison d'être*, from political to personal, has been compounded by the LRA's growing involvement in the trafficking of illicit ivory, gold, and diamonds. For the first two decades of its existence, the LRA had minimal, if any, involvement in trafficking illicit natural resources, lending credibility to Kony's claim that the LRA served a higher, more political purpose than personal enrichment. Kony used the LRA's simple, frugal lifestyle as a motivational tool, telling his fighters that it differentiated them from other rebel groups and corrupt Ugandan government officials that sought material wealth.⁴

This began to change in 2009, when LRA forces acting on Kony's orders established contact with SAF troops near Dafak, in the Sudanese-controlled Kafia Kingi enclave between South Darfur and South Sudan. Kony hoped that the SAF would allow the LRA to use Kafia Kingi as a safe haven from Ugandan military operations in neighboring eastern CAR and resume the material support they had provided to LRA forces

3 Author interviews with ten former LRA combatants, Gulu, Uganda, 9-13 September 2014, 27-30 November 2014, and 10-12 July 2015. See also Ledio Cakaj and Phil Lancaster, "Loosening Kony's Grip: Effective Defection Strategies for Today's LRA," The Resolve LRA Crisis Initiative, July 2013.

4 Cakaj and Lancaster, "Loosening Kony's Grip," 2013.

before the Juba Peace Talks. The SAF did provide LRA groups with limited supplies from 2009 through at least 2013, though less than Kony had hoped. Their more lasting contribution to the LRA's survival was to help the LRA develop contacts among a network of traders in the border area between the towns of Dafak and Deim Bushara in Kafia Kingi, Songo in South Darfur, and Sam Ouandja in northeastern CAR. The region has long been a hub in the flow of illicit minerals and wildlife products from central Africa into Darfur and Khartoum. As the LRA became more familiar with these trade networks, Kony recognized that LRA forces in eastern CAR and northern Congo, who were already sending food supplies to LRA groups in Kafia Kingi, could also be tasked with collecting ivory, gold, and diamonds.

Since 2012, LRA groups have killed and harvested the ivory from at least 50 elephants in Congo's Garamba National Park, likely more, sending the valuable commodity north to Kony's group in Kafia Kingi.⁵ In 2013, LRA groups in eastern CAR began looting gold and diamonds from artisanal miners and collecting large amounts of cash during raids on civilians. Most of these illicit materials have been sent to Kony's group, which uses them to purchase food, other basic supplies such as soap and medicine, and munitions in the border area between Kafia Kingi, eastern CAR, and South Darfur.⁶ At times, LRA members have had the freedom to travel directly to market towns such as Songo and exchange goods. Often LRA groups have simply traded with civilians they happen to encounter. In other cases, traders have sought out LRA camps, and some reports indicate the LRA arranges pre-set rendezvous with trusted traders via satellite phone.⁷

The ability to resupply via illicit trade networks in this border area has an important strategic value for the

5 The LRA shipped substantial amounts of ivory in late 2012, when LRA commander Binany Okumu delivered several dozen tusks to Kony's group, and in late 2014, when LRA commander Awila delivered between 40 and 50 tusks to Kony's group. The Resolve, Enough Project, and Invisible Children, "Kony to LRA: Bring me ivory, gold, and diamonds," 19 November 2014.

6 Author interviews with former LRA combatants, Gulu, July 2015. See also: The Resolve, Enough Project, Invisible Children, "Kony to LRA," 2014.

7 Paul Ronan and Michael Poffenberger, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Sudan's Harboring of the LRA in the Kafia Kingi Enclave, 2009-2013," The Resolve, April 2013. Author interviews with civil society representatives, Obo, CAR, 7 February 2015. Author interviews with former LRA combatants, Gulu, November 2014.

LRA, providing Kony and his most senior officers with an additional layer of security from Ugandan and US forces trying to gather intelligence on his location. LRA attacks on civilians elsewhere are often quickly reported to Ugandan and US forces, forming a crucial stream of intelligence on the location of LRA groups. But access to markets for illicit materials in South Darfur and Kafia Kingi allows Kony's entourage to acquire needed supplies while minimizing attacks on civilians, a dynamic that is reflected in the low number of LRA attacks reported there and in neighboring areas of the CAR. It also provides a disincentive for traders to provide US and Ugandan troops with information on the LRA, as the defeat of the rebel group would disrupt their access to a profitable source of illicit goods.

Complex relations with civilians and Seleka

Kony's entourage has not been alone in developing more creative survival strategies in recent years. LRA groups operating in eastern CAR and northeastern Congo have long relied on looting civilians by force to acquire needed supplies, but in recent years they have increasingly sought less violent ways to survive. LRA groups in these areas periodically seek permission from local leaders to have free access to local markets, or try to purchase food from civilians using cash they looted during previous raids.⁸ Though LRA forces have been known to employ such strategies in the past, the splintering and shrinking of LRA groups may be forcing them to take a less aggressive approach to civilians more frequently.

Nowhere have LRA groups been bolder in establishing ties with local civilians and authorities than in the diamond-rich area in eastern CAR between Nzako, in Mbomou prefecture, and Bria, in Haut Kotto prefecture. In September 2013, LRA commander Otto "Sam" Ladere initiated a series of meetings near Nzako with Seleka forces, who had recently come to power in a coup.⁹ He urged Seleka officers to give his group food and medicine, promising that senior LRA commanders, including Kony himself, were interested in surrendering. After initial parleys, Seleka forces

⁸ Author interviews with former LRA combatants, Gulu, September 2014. Author interviews with witnesses to LRA requests to access local markets, Tadu, Congo, 23 February 2015.

⁹ Ladere reportedly initiated these meetings without Kony's permission, and was later chastised by Kony for doing so. Author interviews with former LRA combatants, Gulu, July 2015.

and civilian leaders began giving LRA groups food and supplies in an ill-fated attempt to encourage defections and address community concerns about LRA violence.¹⁰

The negotiations failed to entice any LRA combatants to surrender, but they established a precedent for peaceful contact between LRA groups, Seleka forces, and civilian authorities and traders. The negotiations eventually morphed into opportunistic trading relationships that gave LRA groups new avenues to acquire needed food supplies. Seleka forces have met with LRA groups on at least 12 occasions near the towns of Nzako and Bria since September 2013, often giving them supplies such as cassava and other food, gumboots, medicine, solar panels, and rope to assist in river crossings.¹¹ Unconfirmed reports also indicate that traders based further northeast in the town of Sam Ouandja, which lies just 50km from Kafia Kingi, have also periodically exchanged goods with LRA forces.¹² On several occasions, LRA commanders have reportedly given Seleka officers and civilians stolen minerals in exchange.¹³

However, Seleka officers have no overarching strategic directive to cooperate with the LRA and have little loyalty towards LRA fighters. Seleka factions previously associated with the UFDR (one of the Central African rebel groups that later joined Seleka) have a degree of mistrust for the LRA stemming from clashes between the two groups in northeastern CAR in 2010. On several occasions Seleka forces have facilitated the surrender of LRA defectors to

¹⁰ Michel Djotodia, a senior Seleka leader and the former self-imposed president of the CAR, personally approved the outreach in an attempt to gain favor with the international diplomats condemning Seleka's chaotic rule. Paul Ronan, "The backstory on Kony's 'surrender talks,'" *The Resolve*, 21 November 2013.

¹¹ Author interviews with former LRA combatants, Gulu, September 2014 and November 2014. Author email exchanges with NGO representative, Obo, May 2015. Author interviews with civil society leaders and Seleka representatives, Bria, CAR, 29 June – 3 July 2015. See also UN Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic, "Letter dated 28 October 2014 from the Coordinator of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2127(2013)," S/2014/762, UN Security Council, 29 October 2014.

¹² Author interviews with civil society representatives, Obo, February 2015. Author interviews with former LRA combatants, Gulu, November 2014.

¹³ Author interviews with former LRA combatants, Gulu, September 2014.

US or Ugandan troops, including Dominic Ongwen in January 2015. In other cases, Seleka officers have reportedly worked with community leaders to offer LRA groups food simply in an attempt to encourage them to minimize looting raids on civilians.¹⁴ One such arrangement was brokered by Seleka officers in mid-2014, leading to communities along the Bria-Yalinga axis to provide LRA groups with food. Seleka officers reportedly brokered a similar agreement in April 2015 to provide an LRA group operating along the Bria-Ouadda axis with food. The most recent contact between LRA commanders and Seleka forces occurred in June 2015, when Seleka officers and local authorities met LRA commanders Angola Onen Unita and Olorworo in the village of Ngoundja, east of Bria. They reportedly gave the LRA group food and encouraged them to defect, but though LRA forces camped near the village for several days they eventually departed.¹⁵

Kony's grip on the LRA hierarchy

The increasingly complicated web of relationships connecting LRA groups to local civilians and authorities help LRA groups survive in an otherwise harsh environment, but they may also threaten Kony's grip on the LRA. Kony's decision to move LRA groups farther away from Uganda and commit atrocities against non-Acholi civilians in the CAR, Congo, and South Sudan is in part a deliberate strategy to alienate his fighters from the local population and make the prospect of navigating back home to Uganda seem impossible. Peaceful interactions between LRA fighters and civilians break down those barriers, occasionally even leading to personal friendships that help LRA fighters defect. In other cases, they help LRA groups survive without having to operate directly under Kony's control, as is the case with the group led by Onen Unita and Olorworo. Their group, which has been operating independently since being attacked by Ugandan military forces in April 2014, reportedly established

contact with Seleka officers near Ngoundja in June 2015 without Kony's permission.¹⁶

Still, Kony's ability to maintain a tight grip on the LRA's command structure, despite widespread disillusionment among the rank-and-file and the scattering of LRA groups, is remarkable. He has done so in part by preventing other LRA officers from developing alternative centers of power and by consolidating his position as the group's sole center of gravity. When necessary, he has executed senior LRA officers whose popularity threatens his supremacy within the organization, such as when he killed his chief deputy, Vincent Otti, in 2007. Otti had a loyal following within the LRA and had gained additional prominence through his engagement with the press and mediators during the Juba Peace Talks. In 2012 and 2013, Kony executed several Acholi officers for raping abducted girls or openly questioning his leadership and the wisdom of continuing the LRA rebellion.¹⁷

More frequently, Kony demotes senior officers who displease him and places them under the supervision of more loyal commanders. Many stay loyal in the hopes of regaining his favor and their status within the group. Kony demoted Caesar Achellam, one of the longest-serving officers within the LRA, during the Juba Peace Talks, re-promoted him after Otti's execution, and then marginalized him again before he finally escaped in May 2012. Kony also demoted Alphonse Lamola in 2012, only to elevate him as the commander of several LRA groups operating near the CAR's Haut Kotto prefecture soon after Ugandan RTF forces killed LRA commander Samuel Kangul in November 2013.¹⁸ Dominic Ongwen, who was a close ally of Vincent Otti, slowly lost Kony's trust following Otti's execution and reportedly disobeyed several orders to rendezvous with Kony in 2009.¹⁹ Though he remained influential among the LRA's rank-and-file, Kony placed him under the watch of more loyal commanders. After being beaten and threatened with execution at Kony's stronghold in Kafia Kingi in late 2014, Ongwen surrendered to Seleka forces in northeastern CAR in January 2015.

14 Author interviews with former LRA combatants, Gulu, September and November 2014. Author interviews with civil society leaders and Seleka representatives, Bria, June – July 2015.

15 Author interviews with civil society leaders and Seleka representatives, Bria, June – July 2015. Photo of LRA-Seleka meeting on file with author.

16 Author interviews with former LRA combatants, Gulu, September 2014 and July 2015.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Philip Lancaster, Guillaume Lacaille, and Ledio Cakaj, "Diagnostic Study of the Lord's Resistance Army," International Working Group on the LRA, World Bank, June 2011.

Deaths, defections, and demotions within the senior officer ranks offer opportunities for ambitious younger fighters to seek Kony's favor and the benefits of promotion. LRA officers receive no regular pay, but promotions can give rank-and-file fighters greater access to abducted "wives" and reprieve from the arduous physical labor of gathering food and setting up camp. Kony frequently promotes younger officers who have served as his personal bodyguards and gained his trust. Kony promoted Aligach, a former bodyguard in his late twenties, to replace the LRA's second-ranking officer, Okot Odhiambo, after he was killed in late 2013.²⁰ Kony also promotes officers who lead daring missions and succeed in bringing him illicit goods. In late 2014, Kony promoted Major Awila for successfully transporting at least 40 elephant tusks from Garamba Park to his group in Kafia Kingi in late 2014.²¹

Kony also elevates the status of those closest to him. He has promoted Ali, one of his eldest sons, to a senior operational position where he acts as gateway for other officers seeking access to Kony. Another of his elder sons, Salim, oversees the LRA's logistical and financial transactions, of which the LRA has historically kept a close record.²² Kony also has numerous "wives," some of which are armed and act as bodyguards. One of these armed "wives" is a young Congolese Zande woman abducted in 2008 who has since risen to prominence in Kony's inner circle.²³ In addition to incentives, Kony also motivates rank-and-file Acholi fighters with fear. Defectors are deterred by the knowledge they will be beaten, demoted, or even killed if they are caught. Kony is also a master manipulator who seeks to tightly control information flow within LRA groups. His propaganda frequently seeks to undermine the credibility of Come Home messages by claiming that Acholi defectors are killed or imprisoned after they record radio messages or are photographed for leaflets.

Despite his best efforts, recent defections from Kony's group could signal Kony is having difficulty maintaining control over even his own entourage. In December 2014, LRA combatants helped Dominic Ongwen defect despite Kony's orders that he be closely su-

20 Author interviews with former LRA combatants, Gulu, November 2014.

21 Ibid.

22 Author interviews with former LRA combatants, Gulu, September 2014, November 2014, and July 2015.

23 Author interviews with former LRA combatants, Gulu, September and November 2014.

pervised. In May 2015, seven LRA fighters made one of the most daring defections from the LRA in recent history. The seven, which included four Ugandan Acholis and three abductees from South Sudan and Congo, were all bodyguards to Kony or officers in his inner circle. To help engineer their escape, they reportedly attacked Kony's group, though they did not kill anybody. They later fended off several attempts by Kony loyalists to recapture them.²⁴

A future for the LRA?

Kony's Machiavellian tactics have consolidated his power within the LRA, but they have made the group's command structure ill-suited to stay cohesive in his absence. Neither Kony's sons nor any other LRA officers have a power base strong enough to consolidate control of disparate LRA groups if Kony dies or is captured. Even if Kony remains free and healthy, only approximately 150 Acholi fighters remain. Since 2006, when the LRA was last active in Uganda, the LRA has been unable to replace Acholi fighters who have defected or been killed.²⁵ Few children born to Acholi parents within the LRA have reached an age where they have been able to be trained as fighters.²⁶

In the absence of new Acholi fighters, the LRA has tried to expand its fighting capacity by abducting and training non-Acholi youth from the CAR, Congo, and South Sudan. During the Juba peace talks, the LRA took advantage of the lack of military operations to commit raids aimed at abducting large numbers of youth, many of whom were then trained as laborers and soldiers in the large camps the group had built in Garamba National Park. However, Ugandan and US military pressure has limited the LRA's ability to abduct, feed, and train young abductees, and the LRA has committed few of its trademark mass child abductions since 2010. LRA commanders have even released some long-term abductees, in part because

24 Author interviews with former LRA combatants, Gulu, July 2015.

25 One exception to the LRA's inability to recruit additional Acholi men since 2006 was during the Juba Peace Talks, when several joined the LRA. These included Okello Mission, who advised Kony on the legal implications of the proposed peace agreement, and David Olanya, Kony's half-brother.

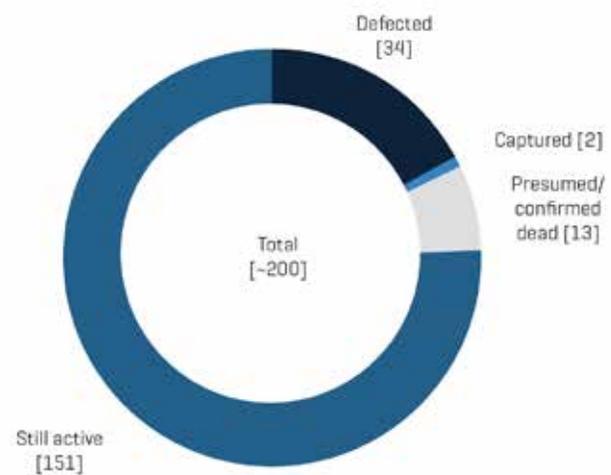
26 One senior Acholi officer who defected from the LRA in 2014 put this number as low as two, comprising only Kony's sons Ali and Salim. Several other young boys born into LRA captivity could eventually become fighters, including several of Kony's sons who are currently between the ages of nine and 12. Author interview with former LRA combatant, Gulu, September 2014.

their groups struggle to feed large numbers of women and children.²⁷ However, testimonies from children abducted as recently as 2014 indicate that the LRA is still training some non-Acholi youth to become fighters.²⁸

Non-Acholi abductees have little incentive to stay within the LRA, other than fear of being killed if they do escape. Many come from communities that have been victimized by the LRA and flee the group whenever they have the chance.²⁹ Those who stay within the LRA have a secondary status compared to their Acholi counterparts and are forced to shoulder the burden of setting up camps and gathering water and wild food. Girls and women are also usually forced to become “wives” of Acholi LRA commanders, while young males are forced into the frontlines during LRA raids. Approximately 30-50 of the non-Acholi young abductees who have been groomed into trusted fighters remain in the LRA, most of which hold junior ranks.³⁰

The LRA’s only hope for sustainability is if Kony is allowed to groom a successor and provide incentives for non-Acholi to stay within the LRA. Kony’s sons have yet to cultivate enough respect and fear within the LRA’s ranks to inspire loyalty, but that could change if they are given enough time to build a power base with their father’s blessing. To better motivate non-Acholi fighters, Kony could promote those who are most loyal and successful in carrying out missions to senior officer positions where they would have to do less physical labor and be allowed to take forced wives. Kony could also use the proceeds from the group’s growing involvement in illicit resource

trafficking to provide more material incentives to non-Acholi officers. Finally, Kony could attempt to update the LRA’s ideology to incorporate the political grievances that the Zande and other ethnic groups have against national authorities in Bangui, Kinshasa, and Juba. Though this scenario appears unlikely, its manifestation would be a much longer-term security threat to the region than the LRA currently poses.



Fate of Ugandan male combatants active in the LRA as of 1 January, 2013

27 The most recent series of releases came in August and September 2014, when LRA forces released more than 70 long-term women and children abductees in Congo on Kony’s orders. The Resolve, Enough Project, Invisible Children, “Kony to LRA,” 2014.

28 Debriefing notes viewed by the author from two Central African youth who escaped the LRA in 2015.

29 Many escapees wander in the bush for weeks or even months before reaching safety. Others have likely perished in the region’s vast forests from dehydration, starvation, or exposure after escaping the LRA.

30 A majority of non-Acholi fighters are given the rank of Corporal and Sergeant, the two lowest ranks within the LRA. Several have been promoted as high as 2nd Lieutenant. Author interviews, former LRA combatants, Gulu, September and November 2014. For more on the function of ranks within the LRA, see Ledio Cakaj, “A Brief Explanation of Ranks,” LRA Crisis Tracker.

II. THE LRA IN THE CONTEXT OF REGIONAL CRISES

Since 2006, the LRA has operated in the border region encompassing eastern CAR, northeastern Congo, western South Sudan, and parts of South Darfur and the Sudanese-controlled Kafia Kingi enclave. This region is among the most remote and marginalized on the continent, with sparse infrastructure and a limited formal economy. The people living there are not a notable constituency in any of the four national capitals, giving ruling elites little incentive to directly respond to the LRA violence or request more robust international interventions. The explosion of civil conflict in the CAR and South Sudan since 2013 has further sidelined the crisis, while continued geopolitical tension between Kampala and Kinshasa and Kampala and Khartoum has inhibited cross-border coordination in closing off LRA safe havens. AU and UN envoys tasked with coordinating a more coherent regional response to the crisis have failed to fundamentally alter these dynamics.

Kony has exploited the fractured regional politics deftly. After witnessing the robust international response to the large-scale child abductions and massacres the LRA committed from 2008-2010, Kony issued strategic orders for LRA fighters to reduce civilian casualties during attacks, gambling that the LRA could survive long enough that the US military would move on and the RTF would disband. Even though LRA abductions increased in 2014 compared to the previous two years, the lack of any headline-grabbing massacres or mass child abductions has allowed LRA violence to continue to slip below the international radar.

The LRA continues to commit atrocities across the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and South Sudan that have a disproportionate impact on regional security.

—President Barack Obama, 23 April 2012, Remarks at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

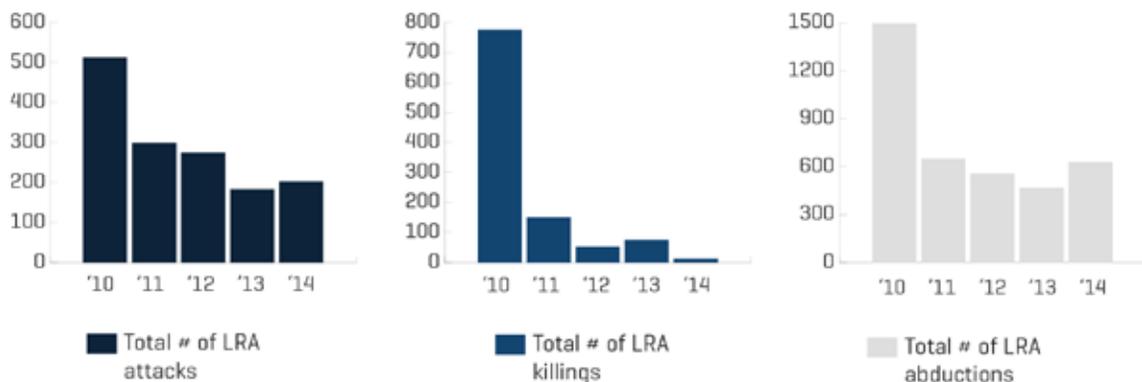
The AU and UN LRA strategies

Under pressure from the US and European donors following President Obama’s release of a US counter-LRA strategy in 2010, the AU and UN moved to improve regional coordination on the LRA crisis. In 2011, the AU named an LRA envoy and established mechanisms for regular regional coordination meetings. In March 2012, the AU officially launched the Regional Task Force, which aimed to bring together forces from the national militaries of the CAR (FACA), Congo (FARDC), South Sudan (SPLA), and Uganda (UPDF).³¹

Unlike previous AU missions that were fully mandated by the AU Peace and Security Council, the Council “authorized” the RTF. While participating countries hoped that the AU umbrella would spark an influx of foreign military assistance, little such support mate-

31 To avoid confusion between regular national military forces and those tasked to the AU RTF, this report will not use the acronyms FACA, FARDC, SPLA, or UPDF to refer to troops from those militaries tasked to the RTF.

Trends in LRA violence



rialized. The US continued to provide long-standing logistical support bilaterally to the Ugandan RTF contingent, while the EU committed only to supporting the AU envoy's office and a small headquarters under the AU RTF commander in Yambio, South Sudan. The AU and Western donors saw the creation of the RTF primarily as a political construct to improve regional coordination and provide a legal framework for the presence of Ugandan forces in South Sudan and eastern CAR.

Little investment has been made in building out a civilian component to the RTF since its launch. No civilian AU personnel have been deployed to RTF sector headquarters in Obo (CAR), Dungu (Congo), or Nzara (South Sudan) to help implement the AU strategy and expand the mission's capacity to monitor protection threats and engage civilian populations.³² Communication between the sector headquarters has improved over the past year, but the component forces rarely coordinate operations. The non-Ugandan military officers deployed to the RTF headquarters often have a minimal role, as the overall RTF commander has always been a Ugandan that mostly coordinates with the commander of the Ugandan RTF contingent. Information sharing between the RTF forces and the AU LRA envoy and Secretariat in Addis Ababa is also irregular.

In late 2011, leadership by the US and UK led to the UN Security Council taking up the LRA crisis for the first time since the collapse of the Juba Peace Talks in 2008. A November 2011 presidential statement by the Council asked UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to develop a regional strategy intended to support the AU's efforts and better coordinate the alphabet soup of UN aid agencies and peacekeeping missions operating in LRA-affected areas.³³ Secretary Ban Ki-moon appointed Abou Moussa, the head of the UN office for Central Africa (UNOCA), to work with Ambassador Francisco Madeira, the AU's LRA envoy, to make the AU and UN counter-LRA strategies coherent and substantive on the ground.

³² For more on the formation of the RTF and its struggles to develop civilian protection strategies and mechanisms, see Ben Shepard, "In New Light: protection of civilians, the Lord's Resistance Army and the African Union Regional Task Force," Conciliation Resources, May 2015.

³³ UN Security Council, "Statement by the President of the Security Council," S/PRST/2011/21, 14 November 2011.

From 2012 into early 2014, Moussa and Ambassador Madeira spearheaded some progress in regional cooperation, such as convincing post-coup Seleka leaders in the CAR to continue allowing Ugandan RTF troops to operate in the country. Madeira also traveled to Khartoum to raise concern about the LRA's presence in Kafia Kingi. However, they lacked the diplomatic firepower to fundamentally alter the geopolitical tensions underlying the discordant regional response to the LRA crisis, such as Kinshasa's refusal to allow Ugandan troops into its territory to pursue the LRA and Khartoum's harboring of the LRA in Kafia Kingi and South Darfur.

Both Moussa and Madeira transitioned to new posts in early 2014, and their successors have yet to develop as strong of a working relationship. Abdoulaye Bathily, the new head of UNOCA, has been more focused on the negotiations concerning the CAR's political transition, limiting his capacity to address LRA-specific diplomatic challenges. Lt. Gen. Jackson Tuwei, much to the disappointment of donors and international partners, was far less communicative and collaborative than Ambassador Madeira during his first year on the post.

Exploiting Congo's security vacuum

The Congolese government has reacted to the rollout of the AU and UN counter-LRA strategies with a combination of indifference and grudging cooperation. President Joseph Kabila relented to US diplomatic pressure by the Bush Administration to allow Ugandan troops onto Congolese territory for the launch of Operation Lightning Thunder in December 2008. Following its initial failure, the Congolese government allowed Ugandan troops to continue operations in the LRA-affected areas of Orientale Province's Haut Uele and Bas Uele districts, even ordering FARDC troops to coordinate on some operations. In September 2011, Kinshasa reversed course, ordering Ugandan troops to leave the country. Since then, Congolese government officials have frequently minimized or denied that the LRA still has a presence in the country, much to the frustration of affected communities.³⁴ Regular FARDC forces deployed in the Ueles have often been unpaid and poorly fed, and have frequently been more of a threat to civilians than a protective force.³⁵

³⁴ Author interviews with civil society leaders, Dungu, Congo, 2 April 2013, 25 February 2015.

³⁵ For instance, see Human Rights Watch, "Trail of Death: LRA Atrocities in Northeastern Congo," March 2010.

Their human rights record has reportedly improved in recent years, and they serve as a frontline defense for many communities. The LRA has made Congolese troops pay for this role in recent months, killing 14 soldiers since October 2014 after only killing three in the previous three years.³⁶

In February 2013, after nearly a year of delays, the Congolese government officially handed over 500 troops to the AU RTF. US military advisers based in Dungu began training a unit composed of the best Congolese RTF soldiers in late 2013 and have made encouraging progress since then.³⁷ With additional logistical support from the UN peacekeeping mission in Congo (MONUSCO), the Congolese RTF unit has conducted sustained operations in the forested hunting reserves surrounding Garamba National Park for several months. As of March 2015, they have yet to come into contact with LRA groups, but their ability to conduct such operations is a marked improvement from the previous status quo.³⁸ The US advisers and Congolese RTF unit have also improved cooperation with park rangers at Garamba National Park, who have become more aggressive in pursuing poachers and armed groups operating in the park since mid-

2014.³⁹ The Park, which receives some support from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, has also expanded conservation programs that seek greater buy-in from surrounding communities.

MONUSCO's expanded role in assisting the Congolese RTF was sparked by a visit to Dungu in late 2014 by the mission's chief, Martin Kobler, who urged the peacekeeping forces there to be more proactive in protecting civilians. Since 2005, MONUSCO forces have provided some security to large towns and primary roads in Haut Uele district and provided some logistical support to the Congolese RTF unit and regular FARDC forces. But logistical constraints, lack of accountability, and operational rigidity prevent them from pursuing LRA forces or quickly responding to LRA attacks, leading to the mission's oft-contentious relations with war-weary community members.⁴⁰ In 2014, MONUSCO redeployed its most capable troops in Haut Uele, a contingent of Guatemalan Special Forces, further reducing its capacity to protect civilians. MONUSCO's DDRRR team, once the standard-bearer for innovative defection messaging in LRA-affected areas, has been decimated by a loss of trust among community members and delays in filling vacancies in over half of the team's open positions.⁴¹

Military protection and pursuit operations also have been limited in neighboring Bas Uele district, which is even more remote and sparsely populated than Haut Uele. The Bili-Uele Protected Area encompasses a large portion of the northern half of the district, but there are few groups working there and none that can prevent the LRA from operating. In September 2013, relying heavily on logistical support from the US military, the Congolese RTF contingent launched a rare assault that destroyed an LRA camp where the group

36 LRA Crisis Tracker, statistic calculated 20 July 2015. Unless otherwise noted, all statistics concerning LRA attacks, abductions, killings, force capacity, and returnees are attributable to the LRA Crisis Tracker, a joint project of The Resolve LRA Crisis Initiative and Invisible Children. Data can be accessed at <http://www.lracrisistracker.com/>.

37 Author interviews with MONUSCO personnel, US military personnel, civil society leaders, and AU RTF officers, Dungu, 22-28 February 2015. Under a separate initiative not conducted by US military advisers deployed on the counter-LRA mission, the US government funded the training of the FARDC's 391st battalion in 2011 and 2012. US officials succeeded in convincing the Congolese government to deploy the battalion to LRA-affected areas, but it faced logistical constraints and hostility from other FARDC units and had little engagement with LRA forces. In late 2012, it was redeployed to eastern Congo, where it was responsible for grave human rights abuses that prevent the US from continuing to support it, even if it were to be returned to the Ueles. See John Vandiver, "US-trained Congolese battalion among units accused of rape," *Stars and Stripes*, 10 May 2013.

38 Author interviews with US and Congolese RTF military officials, MONUSCO officials, and Congolese civil society representatives, Dungu, 22-28 February 2015.

39 Though the LRA does poach elephants in Garamba National Park, other armed groups have killed a majority of the elephants poached there in recent years. Author interviews with Garamba National Park management, Nagero, Congo, 24 February 2015. See also Kristof Titeca, "Ivory beyond the LRA: why a broader focus is needed in studying poaching," *African Arguments*, 17 September 2013.

40 Solidarity and Integral Assistance to Destitute People (SAIPED) and The Resolve LRA Crisis Initiative, "Healing MONUSCO's Image: Community perceptions of the UN peacekeeping mission in LRA-affected areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo," July 2014.

41 SAIPED and The Resolve, "Healing MONUSCO's Image," July 2014. Author interviews with UN officials and civil society representatives, Dungu, Tadu, and Faradje, Congo, and Kampala, Uganda, 24 February – 3 March 2015.

had been so comfortable it had built huts and cultivated crops.⁴² It has conducted further operations in early 2015, but neither the Congolese RTF unit nor MONUSCO have or are planning on a sustained presence there. Ugandan RTF forces based to the north in Central African towns that border Congo, such as Obo and Mboki, lack permission to operate in Bas Uele, and President Kabila may be unlikely to allow them to re-enter in advance of Congolese elections scheduled for 2016. The US and Ugandan governments have not pressured the Congolese to allow Ugandan troops to cross the border in recent years, in part because they lack the troops and logistical capacity to conduct sustained, simultaneous operations there and in the border region between the CAR and Kafia Kingi, which is a higher priority.

Overall, the LRA has committed more than 1,160 attacks in Congo since 2010, more than double the amount in eastern CAR and South Sudan combined.⁴³ Though LRA attacks and abductions in Congo dropped for three consecutive years from 2011-2013, they rose by 10% and 66% respectively in 2014. The pace of abductions in Congo only has increased again in the first half of 2015, with the LRA abducting 297 people in the first six months of the year, compared to 154 in the first six months of 2014.⁴⁴

The LRA's impact on security in the Ueles extends beyond the attacks they commit. LRA violence has also further destabilized an area already plagued by poor governance, contributing to an environment that encourages a variety of criminal actors to prey on civilians. In particular, Garamba National Park's dense forests and lucrative wild game attract LRA fighters, rogue Congolese soldiers, local poachers, and heavily armed Sudanese and South Sudanese poachers. Using the forest for refuge, these armed groups attack travelers and villages on roads running west and south of the park. They periodically use tactics similar to the LRA's, sometimes intentionally, making it difficult for protection actors to identify perpetrators.⁴⁵

42 Author interviews with UN officials, Dungu, 12 October 2013.

43 LRA Crisis Tracker, statistic calculated 16 July 2015.

44 Ibid.

45 LRA forces committed 112 attacks against civilians in affected areas of Haut Uele district in 2014, compared to 65 by unidentified armed groups and 23 by identified other armed groups. LRA Crisis Tracker, statistic calculated 14 May 2015.

DISPLACEMENT MONITORING IN CONGO

From 2010 through mid-2013, reports released by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that the number of internally displaced persons and refugees from LRA-affected areas of Congo consistently hovered between 317,000–369,000. However, from June 2013–March 2014, OCHA's displacement estimates there dropped by more than 60%, from 338,145 to 130,628.⁴⁶ Many donors interpreted the reduced displacement figures as a sign that counter-LRA operations had significantly improved security in northeastern Congo and allowed people to return home.⁴⁷

Though the severity of LRA violence in Congo had diminished compared to its peak from 2008–2010, overall levels of LRA attacks and abductions remained relatively steady or even increased from 2012–2014.⁴⁸ Though some people did return home during this period, a lesser-known reason behind the reported drop in displacement is that some displaced persons, particularly those who fled their homes earlier in the conflict, were designated as having reintegrated into their host communities.⁴⁹ However, anecdotal evidence from northeastern Congo indicates that many people no longer officially counted as displaced still consider themselves to be displaced and unable to return home to pursue their livelihoods.⁵⁰

46 OCHA, "LRA Regional Update (April – June 2013)," 25 July 2013. OCHA, "LRA Regional Update (January – March 2014)," 14 April 2014.

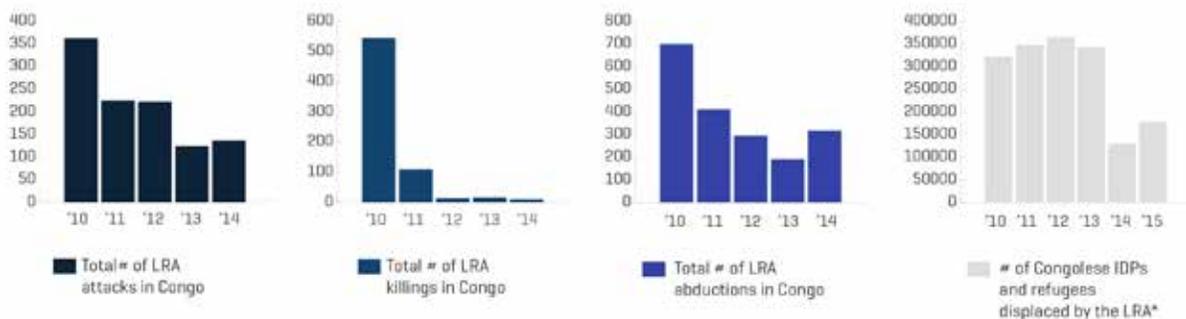
47 For instance, see: UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General on the Activities of the UN Regional Office for Central Africa and on the LRA-affected areas," S/2014/319, 6 May 2014; UN Security Council, "Statement by the President of the Security Council," S/PRST/2014/8, 12 May 2014. The State Department quoted an earlier OCHA report showing a similar reduction in displacement numbers, see US State Department, "Fact Sheet: US Support to Regional Efforts to Counter the Lord's Resistance Army," 24 March 2014.

48 Both LRA Crisis Tracker and OCHA statistics show a leveling off or increase in LRA attacks and abductions in northeastern Congo from 2012-2014. For OCHA statistics, see OCHA, "LRA Regional Update (Oct-Dec 2014)," 24 February 2015; and OCHA, "LRA Regional Update (October-December 2013)," 22 January 2014.

49 The decision to change the displacement status of some civilians in the Ueles was the result of assessments conducted by the humanitarian cluster system.

50 Author interviews with civil society leaders, Dungu, 12 October 2013, 25-26 February 2015.

Civilian displacement in LRA-affected areas of Congo



* Data on LRA attacks, killings, and abductions taken from the LRA Crisis Tracker. Data on displacement calculated using OCHA's LRA Regional Updates for Quarter 1 (January – March) from 2010 – 2015.

Donors' interpretations of OCHA's displacement numbers may have influenced their decisions to reduce funding for humanitarian and protection programs in LRA-affected areas of Congo in 2013 and 2014, which forced a majority of the international aid groups and UN agencies operating there to withdraw.⁵¹ Recent OCHA statistics indicate displacement in LRA-affected areas of Congo rose by 40% between September 2014 and March 2015, likely a response to increased LRA attacks and abductions in the country.⁵² Donors, quick to cut funding when they thought security improved in 2013, have been slow to respond to these developments. The fluctuating nature of LRA violence and humanitarian needs demonstrates that donors and policymakers should be wary of making quick decisions to cut services in LRA-affected communities, and should ensure they understand the reasons underlying changing displacement reporting before adjusting levels of humanitarian assistance to populations in need.

51 Even if donors had a more accurate understanding of the needs in LRA-affected areas of Congo, the drop in donor resources may have been inevitable given the increased humanitarian needs in other areas of the country, highlighting concerns about the overall lack of foreign assistance available to respond to humanitarian crises in the broader region.

52 OCHA reported a total of approximately 178,000 people displaced within or from LRA-affected areas of the Ueles in March 2015, compared to 124,000 in September 2014. See OCHA, "LRA Regional Update (July – September 2014)," 10 November 2014; and OCHA, "LRA Regional Update (January – March 2015)," 19 May 2015.

How chaos in the CAR benefits the LRA

The LRA launched its first major attacks in eastern CAR in March 2008, when ICC-indictee Okot Odhiambo abducted dozens of people from the town of Obo during the Juba Peace Talks. Ugandan troops first deployed there in mid-2009 as they pursued Kony's group across the border from Congo. Former Central African President Francois Bozizé was largely content to allow Ugandan RTF troops to operate in southeastern CAR from 2009–2012, occasionally restricting their access to sensitive, mineral-rich areas such as Sam Ouandja and the Bakouma–Nzako corridor. Not by coincidence, the LRA has committed most of its large scale abduction and looting raids in the CAR in those same areas, including a daring attack on a French-owned uranium plant in Bakouma and the abduction of 70 people in several nearby raids in mid-2012.⁵³

The Seleka coup in March 2013 and subsequent explosion of sectarian tensions not only further relegated the LRA crisis to the geopolitical sidelines, it also created more space for the LRA to operate. The coup shut down counter-LRA operations for several months and forced the US to abandon a newly-constructed base in the town of Djemah and consolidate their military advisers in the more secure town of Obo. In late 2013, LRA groups used this opportunity to establish contact with Seleka forces in near Nzako, sparking the opportunistic relationships that persist to this day. When Ugandan RTF troops wrested control of Nzako from Seleka in mid-2014, LRA groups

53 Author interviews with civil society and local government officials, Bangassou and Bakouma, CAR, 26-29 October 2012. See also, Human Rights Watch, "Central African Republic: LRA Attack Near Hunting Reserve," 9 July 2012.

moved further north and west. In December 2014, an LRA group abducted 11 children in the village of Morobanda in Nana-Gribizi prefecture, over 200km further west than any other previously recorded LRA attack in the country.⁵⁴

In total, LRA forces committed 67 attacks on civilians and abducted more than 300 people in eastern CAR in 2014, more than in any of the previous three years.⁵⁵ LRA attacks in eastern CAR have dropped significantly in 2015, with only 22 attacks and 39 abductions recorded in the first half of the year. However, LRA violence has still proven to be disruptive in areas such as eastern Haut Kotto prefecture, where a series of LRA attacks near the town of Bria suppressed civilian movement along major roads and forced some artisanal diamond miners to temporarily abandon their work.⁵⁶

Some European and UN officials have been reluctant to integrate responses to the LRA crisis into broader stabilization and political transition processes in the CAR following the Seleka coup. MINUSCA, the UN peacekeeping force in the CAR, has largely left security in the southeast to Ugandan RTF troops, who helped slow the spread of sectarian tensions there from western and central CAR. However, an outbreak of violence between nomadic Mbororo and agricultural communities near the town of Zemio in November 2014, which left three people dead and 14 others injured, demonstrated the potential for the fragile security in southeastern CAR to unravel.⁵⁷ The CAR government and MINUSCA will have to eventually take more responsibility for stabilizing the southeast, as Ugandan RTF forces have neither the mandate nor the capacity to rebuild fractured communities. Their presence in the CAR is linked to the LRA crisis, and a rapid Ugandan withdrawal is possible if they capture Kony or decide the pursuit is no longer worth the cost. MINUSCA also faces pressure to respond to LRA activity in areas of Mbomou and Haut Kotto prefectures, particularly near Bria, which lie beyond

the sustained reach of Ugandan forces. The mission's plans to expand peacekeeper deployments into the southeast and Haut Kotto are an encouraging step. However, MINUSCA commanders will have to improve upon MONUSCO's inability to quickly respond to scattered LRA attacks in remote areas if they hope to avoid a similar breakdown in relations with local communities.

Improved security in South Sudan

LRA groups frequently targeted South Sudan's Western Equatoria State from 2007–2011, but have only attacked civilians there on five occasions since 2012.⁵⁸ The presence of Ugandan troops in Western Equatoria has undoubtedly played a key role in deterring LRA attacks, though their base is mostly used as a logistical hub for operations in eastern CAR. Troops from the SPLA and peacekeeping mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) are notoriously less effective against the LRA, but have provided a measure of protection for major towns.⁵⁹

However, military forces should not receive primary credit for the decrease in LRA activity in Western Equatoria. The expansion of mobile phone and road infrastructure in the post-referendum period, the latter partially funded by USAID, has allowed for faster travel and better communication between remote communities. In addition, Western Equatorian officials are popularly elected, unlike their counterparts in eastern CAR and northeastern Congo. They have proactively worked with religious and cultural leaders to strengthen community-level responses to the LRA crisis. Most notable have been local self-defense groups, known as Arrow Boys or Home Guards, which operate with the approval and logistical support of community and local government officials. They have helped push LRA groups out of Western Equatoria and patrol rural agricultural centers, allowing displaced persons to return to their homes and fields.⁶⁰

54 Debriefing notes viewed by the author from two Central African youth who were abducted by the LRA in Morobanda in December 2014 and later escaped. Author email exchange with NGO representative, Obo, 4 May 2015.

55 LRA Crisis Tracker, statistic calculated 20 June 2015.

56 Author interviews with traders and diamond miners, Bria, June – July, 2015.

57 UN News Centre, "In Central African Republic, UN team investigates outbreak of sectarian violence," 24 November 2014.

58 LRA Crisis Tracker, statistic calculated 12 June 2015.

59 Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "Kony 2013: U.S. quietly intensifies effort to help African troops capture infamous warlord," *Washington Post*, 28 October 2013.

60 Author interviews with community leaders, government officials, and Arrow Boy leaders in Yambio, Ezo, Nzara, and Tambura, South Sudan, 2010–2013. See also Danish Refugee Council and Danish Demining Group, "Armed Violence and Stabilization in Western Equatoria," April 2013.

Despite this progress, the LRA remains a threat to South Sudanese civilians. LRA groups still manage to periodically attack communities along South Sudan's border with Congo, including the abduction of 11 people in January 2015. LRA groups were also suspected, but not confirmed, to be responsible for several attacks on civilians in South Sudan's Western Bahr el-Ghazal State in January 2015, an area they frequently travel through en route to Kafia Kingi.⁶¹ LRA violence has also exacerbated tensions between Zande communities and the Dinka-dominated South Sudanese military forces in Western Equatoria State, which date back to clashes between the two groups following the end of Sudan's civil war in 2005. Though the Zande have largely stayed neutral in the political and sectarian conflict that has engulfed other parts of South Sudan since December 2013, recent reports of youths attacking SPLA soldiers in Western Equatoria could be a sign that long-simmering frustration is rising to the surface.⁶²

The Kafia Kingi Conundrum

The lack of coordination and collective political will in the international community's response to the LRA crisis is no more apparent than in the group's continued ability to freely exploit the Kafia Kingi enclave and neighboring areas of South Darfur. Since 2010, the group has used these areas as a safe haven from Ugandan RTF operations and as an access point to barter illicit ivory and other natural resources for basic supplies and munitions. Five years after the LRA's presence there was first reported, and three years after satellite imagery showing LRA camps there was publicly released, the international response has failed to decisively disrupt what has become the LRA's most important lifeline for survival.⁶³

Despite widespread agreement that the LRA's presence in Kafia Kingi has been crucial to its ability to survive, the international diplomatic response has been weak, inconsistent, and ultimately unsuccessful in dislodging the LRA. The contentious relationship Western and UN diplomats have with Khartoum forces them to expend what little political leverage

they have on higher-priority issues such as violence in Darfur and Sudan-South Sudan relations. Geopolitical tension between Khartoum and Kampala, including the periodic presence of Darfuri rebel leaders in Uganda, provides an additional disincentive for Sudan to cooperate in counter-LRA operations. Without strong political leadership to address the Kafia Kingi conundrum, international responses to the LRA crisis are skewed towards more politically expedient efforts, such as supporting emergency humanitarian programs and peacekeeping operations in LRA-affected areas of the CAR and Congo. These efforts have limited benefit for local communities, but bring the crisis no closer to an end.

Though disjointed, current diplomatic efforts provide some foundation for a more robust response. US officials periodically raise the matter with the Sudanese government, and more sustained and high-level engagement from Secretary of State John Kerry and US Ambassador Donald Booth could yield results. At the UN Security Council, the US, UK, and non-permanent members such as Australia, Portugal, Germany, Luxembourg, and Slovenia have succeeded in overcoming Russian objections to include mentions of the LRA's presence in Kafia Kingi into the Council's biannual presidential statements on the LRA and UNOCA.⁶⁴ Though they are not legally binding, the Council's statements have proven to be an embarrassment to Khartoum, which has periodically issued denials of the LRA's presence in Kafia Kingi. In May 2014, the Sudanese foreign ministry went as far as to invite the AU to come to Kafia Kingi and investigate these reports.⁶⁵ The AU and Lt. Gen. Jackson Tuwei have been slow to take Khartoum up on its offer, though they have made recent progress in planning a trip to Sudan.⁶⁶

61 For links to relevant news articles and further analysis, see Paul Ronan, "Did the LRA kill 13 people in South Sudan this week?," *The Resolve*, 30 January 2015.

62 Radio Tamazuj, "Bakosoro warns youths over attack on SPLA," 2 June 2015.

63 Ronan and Poffenberger, "Hidden in Plain Sight," 2012. See also Enough Project, "Lord's Resistance Army Finds Safe Haven in Darfur," 11 March 2010.

64 Most recently, see: UN Security Council, "Statement by the President of the Security Council," S/PRST/2015/12, 11 June 2015.

65 "Letter dated 14 May 2014 from the Permanent Representative of the Sudan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council" S/2014/345, UN Security Council, 16 May 2014.

66 Author interviews and email exchanges with international diplomats, Washington DC, USA, April and May 2015.

Denied official permission to operate in Kafia Kingi and South Darfur, Ugandan RTF forces have taken the initiative to conduct periodic, highly secretive operations on suspected LRA positions in Kafia Kingi.⁶⁷ Though they have reportedly had some success, the political sensitivity of the operations prevents the Ugandans from gathering consistent intelligence or conducting sustained operations there, greatly reducing the chances they will succeed in capturing senior LRA leaders. By using Kafia Kingi and South Darfur as a safe haven, the LRA has in many ways neutralized US and Ugandan RTF operations, evidenced by their failure to score a major military victory against the LRA since June 2014.⁶⁸

67 For example, see Elizabeth Rubin, "How a Texas Philanthropist Helped Fund the Hunt for Joseph Kony," *The New Yorker*, 21 October 2013.

68 Ugandan RTF Operations in April-June 2014 resulted in the capture of Okello Charles and the defection of three other LRA officers, including Sam Opiio. Since then, no news about RTF operations resulting in LRA deaths or defections has been released publicly.

III. GREAT EXPECTATIONS: ASSESSING THE US MILITARY'S COUNTER-LRA MISSION

When President Obama announced the deployment of nearly 100 US military advisers to assist the AU RTF in October 2011, he sparked high expectations in LRA-affected communities that the US intervention would quickly result in Kony's capture and the defeat of the LRA. Over three years later, predictions of such rapid success for the US counter-LRA mission have proven to be too optimistic. While the explosion of regional security crises is partly to blame, the success of the mission also has been hampered by frequent rotations of US advisers, poor logistical and resource allocations, and fluctuations in US relations with RTF forces.

I have authorized a small number of combat equipped US forces to deploy to central Africa to provide assistance to regional forces that are working toward the removal of Joseph Kony from the battlefield. I believe that deploying these US Armed Forces furthers US national security interests and foreign policy and will be a significant contribution toward counter LRA efforts in central Africa.

- President Barack Obama, 14 October 2011,
Letter to Congress regarding the LRA

Despite these challenges, the US deployment has helped keep the AU RTF member forces committed to continued counter-LRA operations. The US has also provided airlift and intelligence support to RTF forces that has improved protection of civilians and degraded the LRA's fighting capacity. US advisers have also taken on a leading role in campaigns that have encouraged dozens of LRA fighters to defect and could play a critical role in the collapse of the rebel group should Kony be captured or killed.

Partnership with Ugandan RTF forces

The Obama Administration was careful to frame the announcement of the US military deployment in October 2011 as a move to boost the capacity of all regional military forces working under the AU RTF authorization. US advisers made progress in training

a small contingent of South Sudanese RTF troops, helping them conduct cross-border operations to destroy LRA camps in Congo's Garamba National Park in late 2013. However, the splintering of the SPLA just months later in the civil conflict in South Sudan has severely limited their ability to partner with US advisers. Similarly, the March 2013 coup in the CAR stymied US plans to train FACA troops in Obo.⁶⁹ The US advisers' proactive and innovative support to the Congolese RTF force, described above, has been more promising and has been a catalyst for the improved cooperation between the RTF, MONUSCO, and the Garamba Park rangers.

Regardless, it was clear from the beginning of the adviser deployment that Operation Observant Compass would be primarily focused on supporting the Ugandan RTF contingent, the only force among the four national militaries with well-equipped, capable troops that were available for counter-LRA operations. OOC commanders initially deployed teams of approximately 15 US Special Forces to forward operating bases in Nzara, South Sudan, and Obo and Djemah in the CAR, the locations of the Ugandans' primary counter-LRA bases.⁷⁰ The US placed the OOC command element and logistics hub in Entebbe, Uganda. These arrangements reflect the close working relationship between the Ugandan and US governments on regional security issues, which includes US support to Ugandan forces deployed with the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and over a decade of logistical and intelligence cooperation on counter-LRA operations.

Despite the history of cooperation between the UPDF and US military, the establishment of a consistent, productive working relationship between the two forces on counter-LRA operations has been

⁶⁹ US advisers have resumed training of Central African and South Sudanese RTF units in recent months. Author interview with US military officer, Kampala, July 2015.

⁷⁰ US military personnel were also deployed to Dungu in 2011 as liaisons to the Joint Intelligence and Operations Centre (JIOC), which also includes representatives from MONUSCO, FARDC, and the Ugandan and Congolese RTF forces. In 2013, one of the US military adviser teams was split between Nzara and Dungu. In subsequent adviser rotations, as the US has expanded efforts to train the Congolese RTF contingent, there has been a full team stationed in Dungu.

challenging. US Special Forces deployed to forward operating bases rotate out every six months, at which point they are replaced by a new team that often has a different approach in how they build relationships with Ugandan RTF commanders and seek to execute counter-LRA operations.⁷¹ The frequent rotations severely limit the opportunities for US advisers to build a consistent rapport with Ugandan officers and absorb the operational context in enough time to provide useful advice and support. Early US adviser rotations were further handicapped by inadequate overlap with the teams they were replacing, leading to disjointed and inconsistent US engagement, though this process has improved in the past 18 months. Senior Ugandan commanders in the field, many of whom have years or decades of experience pursuing the LRA, have now worked with more than a half-dozen US Special Forces teams on six-month rotations and are skeptical of how much value-added each successive batch of advisers can offer them. The Ugandan RTF field commander, a Colonel, outranks the US Majors that lead US adviser teams in the field, which can also hinder frank communication.⁷²

Though Ugandan troops are deployed for longer periods than their American counterparts, poorly timed rotations have also hindered operational effectiveness and relationship building. In late 2014, the Ugandan RTF rotated in a fresh battalion that was largely inexperienced in forest counter-insurgency warfare. They were deployed with little advance notice to US advisers just before the dry season, when counter-LRA operations are logistically more feasible to conduct. Several promising intelligence leads on LRA groups were reportedly sidelined during this time as the new troops underwent training. The Ugandan military also has an incentive to rotate out many of its best officers and troops and redeploy them to AMISOM, where they receive higher salaries and better training.

The Ugandan government's uncertain commitment to the counter-LRA mission also poses a challenge to

71 From October 2011 until March 2015, US troops deployed in forward operating bases were primarily part of the US Army 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne). In March 2015, troops from the 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne), a National Guard unit, transitioned into the forward operating bases.

72 Author interviews with military personnel, Kampala and Entebbe, September and November 2014. The overall US commander of OOC has most often held the rank of a Colonel, but is based in Entebbe.

the US-Uganda partnership. Though the US provides logistical support to the Ugandan RTF contingent, the Ugandan government bears a significant financial burden in supporting troops on the counter-LRA mission.⁷³ The LRA has also faded as a political issue in northern Uganda, meaning capturing Kony and defeating the LRA would bring diminished political gain to President Museveni. Ugandan government officials have periodically signaled that financial constraints and lack of adequate national interest may force them to withdraw from the AU RTF. These self-imposed deadlines have been regularly extended, but they reinforce concerns within the US Defense Department that the US military's only viable partner could force a premature end to the mission.

US concern about Uganda's deteriorating human rights and governance record also poses a challenge to cooperation on the counter-LRA mission. Activists are concerned that Uganda's RTF deployment reinforces a security-focused lens to US engagement with President Museveni that dilutes its willingness to pressure his regime on domestic issues.⁷⁴ US officials have remained adamant that security cooperation with Uganda does not impinge on its engagement on human rights and governance matters, and it has reacted substantively to the onerous Anti-Homosexuality Act.⁷⁵ But the looming Ugandan presidential and parliamentary elections in early 2016 could further exacerbate tension between US imperatives to cooperate with the Ugandan government on regional security, including the counter-LRA mission, and also address human rights and governance issues.

73 Ugandan military resources have been stretched even more thin since the controversial deployment of Ugandan troops in South Sudan in defense of President Salva Kiir's regime.

74 In recent years, Ugandan government officials have continued to crack down on opposition parties, civil society groups, and vulnerable minorities, often using legislative vehicles such as the Anti-Homosexuality Act and the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) Bill. For an overview of the human rights situation in Uganda, see the Human Rights Watch country page for Uganda, available at <https://www.hrw.org/africa/uganda>.

75 For instance, when White House officials announced the deployment of CV-22 Osprey aircraft to support Ugandan RTF counter-LRA operations in March 2014, they also announced several diplomatic steps intended to pressure the Ugandan government to withdraw support for the Anti-Homosexuality Act. Grant Harris and Stephen Pomper, "Promoting Regional Security and Protecting Human Rights in Uganda," White House, 24 March 2014.

Unsteady airlift and logistical support

US support to Ugandan counter-LRA operations predates the formation of the RTF, stretching back to when the LRA was active in northern Uganda.⁷⁶ In December 2008, the US also provided a team of military advisers and non-lethal equipment to Ugandan forces for the launch of Operation Lightning Thunder against LRA camps in Congo's Garamba National Park.⁷⁷ The mission failed to capture or kill any senior LRA officers or integrate civilian protection strategies, sparking massive LRA reprisals that left more than 850 people dead in what become known as the Christmas Massacres.⁷⁸ The failure of Operation Lightning Thunder, green-lighted in the last weeks of the Bush Administration, motivated Congress to press the Obama Administration to develop a more comprehensive approach to the crisis, leading to the introduction of the LRA legislation that passed in 2010.

Activist groups attempted to use the bill as leverage to attain US support for counter-LRA operations that were less dependent on Ugandan troops, but ultimately the Administration chose to strengthen Uganda's pursuit operations while pressing UN peacekeeping forces and national militaries to improve civilian protection. With active support from Congressional defense authorizations and appropriations committees, the Obama Administration has provided a consistent baseline of funding to counter-LRA operations. From FY2009-FY2013 the State Department and Defense Department dedicated over \$125 million to fund private contractors that provided Ugandan counter-LRA forces with additional logistical assistance, including fuel and several MI-8 helicopters.⁷⁹ The Defense De-

partment also funded the deployment of additional airlift support beginning in 2011, and now exclusively controls airlift and logistical assistance to Ugandan RTF forces.⁸⁰

US airlift and logistical support under the Obama Administration has played a critical role in operations that have captured or killed LRA commanders, encouraged defections, and protected civilians from LRA attacks. But gaps persist. In particular, US and Ugandan troops frequently lack the airlift capacity and flexibility to conduct simultaneous operations against multiple LRA groups or conduct leaflet drops and aerial loudspeaker missions during intensive military operations.⁸¹ This dynamic has worsened as LRA groups have moved further west into the CAR and Congo and north into Kafia Kingi and South Darfur since 2010. Most US-funded aircraft are based in the logistical hubs of Nzara, South Sudan, and Obo, in the southeastern corner of the CAR, which are increasingly distant from where senior LRA leaders operate. Ugandan and US officers have also differed on the ideal protocols for planning aircraft deployments, with Ugandan officers frequently requesting more flexible and rapid response missions while US advisers have prioritized more thorough advance planning.

76 For instance, US security assistance to Uganda on counter-LRA operations in the 2000s included the formation of a joint counter-terrorism cell and the provision of non-lethal equipment, such as high-tech surveillance gear and heat sensors. International Crisis Group, "Northern Uganda: Understanding and Solving the Conflict," April 2004.

77 The US dedicated a team of 17 advisers and analysts, and provided satellite phones, intelligence, and \$1 million in fuel to the Ugandan military for the operation. Jeffrey Gettleman and Eric Schmitt, "US Aided a Failed Plan to Rout Ugandan Rebels," *The New York Times*, 6 February 2009.

78 Human Rights Watch, "The Christmas Massacres: LRA Attacks on Civilians in Northern Congo," February 2009.

79 For an overview of US support to RTF forces on counter-LRA operations, including Congressional legislation, see: Alexis Arieff and Lauren Ploch, "The Lord's Resistance Army: The US Response," Congressional Research Service, 15 May 2014. Additional information regarding funding levels and provision of MI-8 helicopters are from author interviews with RTF officers and US government officials, April 2013 and July 2015.

80 Ibid.

81 Author interviews in Washington DC, Entebbe, and Obo, October 2013 and December 2014.

THE OSPREYS' FALSE START

Periodically, operational needs communicated by US military personnel in the field have been mistranslated upon reaching planning officials in the Defense Department, leading to inefficient allocation of resources and political capital. In March 2014, President Obama notified Congress that he was authorizing the deployment of Osprey tiltrotor aircraft and additional US military personnel to support counter-LRA operations.⁸² The deployment was aimed at addressing remaining gaps in airlift capacity facing US and Ugandan RTF troops. The move required months of considerable political lift within the US government and made national media headlines when it was announced. However, the Ospreys' deployment was plagued by competing priorities for their use on the continent and concerns from US personnel in the field that they were not appropriate tools for the counter-LRA operational context.⁸³ After an initial deployment of several weeks, they have yet to be deployed again for counter-LRA operations, raising questions about why the Defense Department requested the White House to deploy the Ospreys instead of other aircraft that would have been more suited to the context and more consistently available to the mission.

The US military has also faced challenges in providing logistical support to US forces deployed in small towns in South Sudan and the CAR, the latter of which lacks quality roads and airstrips.⁸⁴ In the first months of their deployment, US advisers lived in basic camps they often built for themselves that resembled those of the Ugandan RTF forces. In Nzara and Obo these bases were located within the Ugandan military camp, allowing Ugandan and US officers to have organic, face-to-face interactions. However, in 2012 the Defense Department contracted a private defense company to construct prefabricated bases at these locations that required a much heavier footprint, similar to the logistical model used in large US deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. The contractor, with little experience in the region, severely underestimated the cost of constructing the bases, one of

which was closed and destroyed in early 2013 just weeks after it opened due to security concerns following the Seleka coup in the CAR.

Many US advisers in the field did not welcome the expanded logistical footprint. Contracted personnel, who assumed the provision of basic services such as food preparation and medical support, were deployed in forward operating bases in numbers that rivaled those of actual US military advisers. The new bases also hurt trust-building between the US advisers and their Ugandan counterparts by insulating US troops behind isolated, walled-off encampments and inundating them with amenities to which Ugandan troops, many of whom spent weeks on arduous bush treks pursuing LRA forces, did not have access. The contractor-built base in Nzara, South Sudan, was at least built within the Ugandan military base, but its counterpart in Obo, CAR, was built 4km from the Ugandan military base, on the opposite side of the town.⁸⁵

Challenges gathering intelligence

US troops face similarly daunting challenges in collecting, analyzing, and sharing intelligence on LRA group locations and movements. LRA groups are often separated from each other by hundreds of miles, moving via small footpaths, shunning major roads and rarely building huts or permanent camps. Groups communicate and set rendezvous locations using High-Frequency (HF) manpack radios and "runners," a system that is low-tech but surprisingly effective and difficult to track.

US intelligence collection has been set back by the deployment of aerial assets that are ill-suited for pursuing LRA groups. In FY2013, Congress authorized \$50 million for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance efforts in support of counter-LRA operations.⁸⁶ As with the Ospreys, Pentagon planners had difficulty understanding the operational context, deploying several intelligence assets with technologies that struggle to detect activity from a group such as the LRA that has a light logistical footprint and uses

82 Harris and Pomper, "Promoting Regional Security and Protecting Human Rights in Uganda," 2014.

83 Author interviews with US government officials, September 2014 and March 2015.

84 Aside from liaison officers, US military advisers were not permanently deployed to Congo until 2013. Teams deployed there since have been located at the MONUSCO peacekeeping base, limiting the need for additional logistical contracts.

85 Information concerning the contract to build US military bases taken from author interviews in Nzara, Entebbe, and Obo, September 2012, March 2013, and September 2014.

86 National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013 (P.L. 112-239), passed into law on 2 January 2013.

arcane communications technologies.⁸⁷ Additionally, most aerial assets have been based out of Entebbe, meaning they spend much of their flight time simply traveling to the LRA area of operations and have little “time on target” in peripheral regions, such as Kafia Kingi, where senior LRA officers congregate.⁸⁸ One particular plane outfitted with advanced ISR capabilities was deployed and operated by a private defense contractor for months at the cost of millions of dollars before being withdrawn after it provided little useful intelligence.⁸⁹ Such mismanagement has distracted from the methods of intelligence collection that are more effective in detecting LRA groups and adds a price tag that costs the mission political support amongst Congressional and Administration officials in Washington.

Ugandan and US troops have increasingly focused on developing human intelligence that can tap into the networks of traders, nomadic herders, poachers, and armed groups that encounter LRA groups in the bush. Developing contacts with such groups requires patience and the willingness to dialogue with a range of civil society actors, but the resulting information can provide valuable tips on the location of LRA groups. Such tips are independently valuable, and can also help aerial intelligence assets focus in on LRA groups with greater precision.⁹⁰ US military advisers have also expanded efforts to establish a more sustained presence in areas of the CAR and South Sudan closer to Kafia Kingi than their current bases in Obo and Nzara, moves that greatly increase their ability to access information streams closer to where Kony and his entourage are operating.⁹¹ In 2014, US military advisers established a presence in the UNMISS base in the town of Raga in Western Bahr el-Ghazal, though they later pulled out. In 2015, US advisers have periodically traveled to Sam Ouandja to meet with Seleka officials and better understand the operating environment on the CAR side of the Kafia Kingi border.

87 Author interviews in Washington DC, Entebbe, and Obo, September 2013, October 2013, February 2014, September 2014, and December 2014.

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.

90 For an excellent overview of intelligence collection and analysis challenges from a US military officer with experience on counter-LRA operations, see Stephen Draper, “Intelligence in Complex Environments,” *Small Wars Journal*, 1 August 2014.

91 Author interviews in Washington DC, Kampala, Entebbe, and Obo, September 2014 and December 2014.

The effectiveness of both human intelligence networks and aerial intelligence collection has been hampered by inadequate mechanisms for analyzing and sharing intelligence. Ideally, intelligence analysts can use raw data from human and aerial assets to further refine where intelligence collections efforts take place, creating a positive feedback cycle. But the US military has few intelligence officers with long-term experience on the LRA crisis, and none consistently deployed to Entebbe or forward operating bases.⁹² Intelligence gathering and analysis is most often focused on immediate operational priorities, with inadequate effort made to build up a more contextual, long-term understanding of the LRA’s modus operandi and internal dynamics.⁹³ US military protocols also dictate that significant amounts of US intelligence on LRA activity is classified, even when it has little bearing on US national security interests or immediate counter-LRA operational planning.⁹⁴ These protocols have severely limited the ability of US troops to share useful intelligence with RTF partner forces and civil society partners who could provide valuable contextual feedback to US advisers and put US intelligence to use for their own civilian protection and counter-LRA initiatives.

92 Author interviews in Washington DC and Entebbe, September 2013, February 2014, and December 2014.

93 For instance, many long-term returnees are not adequately debriefed regarding the LRA’s modus operandi and internal dynamics. This dynamic is reinforced by frequent rotations of intelligence officers, and because Operation Observant Compass has never been authorized for more than one year at a time. Author interviews, Entebbe and Washington DC, September 2013 and February 2014.

94 “A further obstacle to adopting a common information environment is the US military’s habitual fixation with classified information at the exclusion of all else... [US military officials] must take a hard look at information flowing in and decide if it truly needs to be classified. They must then aggressively seek to declassify information and share it with traditional and non-traditional partners.” Draper, “Intelligence in Complex Environments,” 2014.

Surprising success of defection campaigns

When President Obama announced the deployment of US military advisers in October 2011, there was little public indication they would play an active role in promoting defections from the LRA.⁹⁵ Instead, the focus was on how they would assist RTF troops to pursue top LRA leaders and improve civilian protection. Once they arrived in the field, however, US advisers proactively embraced defections efforts, led by a small Military Information Support Operations (MISO) team. They began working in close coordination with local civil society leaders and international NGOs such as Invisible Children, and more infrequently with MONUSCO's understaffed DDRRR office. US advisers have also received invaluable support from a rotating cast of US State Department personnel from the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilizations Operations that have been deployed to the field to assist US counter-LRA efforts. In addition, they have partnered with the State Department's Office of Global Criminal Justice to develop messaging related to the War Crime Rewards Program, which was expanded in 2012 to, among other things, allow the US to offer rewards leading to the capture of LRA leaders indicted by the ICC.⁹⁶

Since 2011, this informal coalition has developed a multi-faceted model for delivering defection messaging to LRA groups. US forces alone have dropped over one million leaflets over LRA-affected areas of the CAR and Congo since 2011, often utilizing photos and messages of recent LRA defectors.⁹⁷ They have also rehabilitated FM radio stations that play Come Home messages in Obo, Mboki, and Djemah in the CAR and

Dungu, Faradje, Banda, and other communities in Congo. The US advisers and Invisible Children have also partnered with the Uganda Broadcast Corporation (UBC), whose Acholi-language shortwave Come Home programs are popular with LRA commanders and have greater geographic reach than FM programs. US military advisers have also pioneered the use of aerial loudspeaker missions, where speakers playing Come Home messages are strapped to aircraft and flown over areas of suspected LRA activity. Civil society partners help generate locally appropriate content for Come Home messages and sensitizing community members on how to safely accept and facilitate LRA defectors. Advisers have periodically utilized a Defense Department rewards program to disburse small grants to community projects focused on defections campaigns.

These combined efforts have proven to be an invaluable tool in encouraging at least 34 Ugandan LRA combatants to defect since 2013, a 17% reduction in the number Kony had at his disposal at the beginning of that year. Each combatant defection translates into a direct reduction in the LRA's capacity to commit attacks, and defectors provide invaluable intelligence on LRA movements and internal dynamics. Each escapee is also one fewer LRA member potentially killed or wounded during military operations, a fact especially important given that most were abducted and forced to join the group against their will. Defection campaigns are cost-effective compared to military operations and can be deployed in areas where military forces are unable to reach, though they often work best in tandem with military offensives that can scatter LRA groups and give combatants a chance to escape their superiors.

The limited scale and geographic reach of defection messaging vehicles remains a constant challenge for US personnel and their partners. The FM radio stations rehabilitated by US troops have little reach into LRA safe havens in Congo's Bas Uele district or along the CAR-Kafia Kingi-South Darfur border area. Come Home programs on UBC, arguably the most effective defection tool, only run for a handful of hours each week. The US also lacks enough long-range airlift capacity to consistently drop leaflets or conduct aerial loudspeaker missions over LRA groups, even in areas where they are known to be operating. At times, MISO personnel have had to deal with onerous bureaucratic obstacles to unlock approval or funding

95 For instance, White House communications regarding the announcement of the deployment did not mention that the US military advisers would be involved in defection campaigns. President Barack Obama, "Letter from the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate Regarding the Lord's Resistance Army," 14 October 2011.

96 The program was expanded by Congressional legislation that authorized "the issuance of monetary rewards for information leading to the arrest or conviction in any country, or the transfer to or conviction by an international criminal tribunal, of any foreign national accused of war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide." As the only remaining ICC-indicted commander in the LRA, Kony is the only current LRA officer covered by the War Crimes Rewards Program. See Department of State Rewards Program Update and Technical Corrections Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-283), passed on 15 January 2013.

97 US State Department, "Fact Sheet," 2014.

for their projects, including rapid reaction initiatives aimed at capitalizing on the defection of LRA combatants such as Dominic Ongwen.

Those messages that do reach LRA members are vulnerable to Kony's adept propaganda, which uses cultural miscues in defection messages and outright lies to undermine their appeal. Defection partners have yet to fully embrace several key lessons learned, such as the importance of ensuring that defectors are featured repeatedly in leaflets and radio messages in the months and years after their escape. Doing so counters LRA propaganda that defectors are featured on leaflets and radio programs immediately after they escape only to be subsequently killed by the Ugandan military. In some cases, Kony's propaganda simply exaggerates the truth, such as the fact that there is little reintegration support for Acholi LRA combatants who escape the LRA.⁹⁸

The frequent rotation of US troops has hampered efforts to improve the scale, reach, and quality of defection messaging.⁹⁹ Civil society partners in the CAR, Congo, and South Sudan report that US adviser teams that are active in defection efforts and community outreach are sometimes followed by teams that focus more exclusively on collaboration with RTF forces on military operations.¹⁰⁰ Across multiple rotations, this can lead to uneven implementation of defection projects and weakened relationships with civilian partners. The deployment of MISO personnel in Obo in recent years has mitigated this dynamic to some extent, but even they rotate out of the field frequently.

98 Author interviews with former LRA combatants, Gulu, September and November 2014.

99 More so than the Special Forces teams, some MISO personnel have had multiple tours on the counter-LRA mission, allowing them to build on previous experience when implementing defection projects. However, they are primarily based in Entebbe and rely on commanding officers and troops in forward deployed bases who more frequently rotate out to guide and implement their work.

100 Author interviews with civil society leaders, Obo, 6 April 2013. Author interviews with civil society leaders, Entebbe, 4-5 March, 2015.

UGANDA'S AMNESTY ACT AND THE FUTURE OF LRA DEFECTIONS

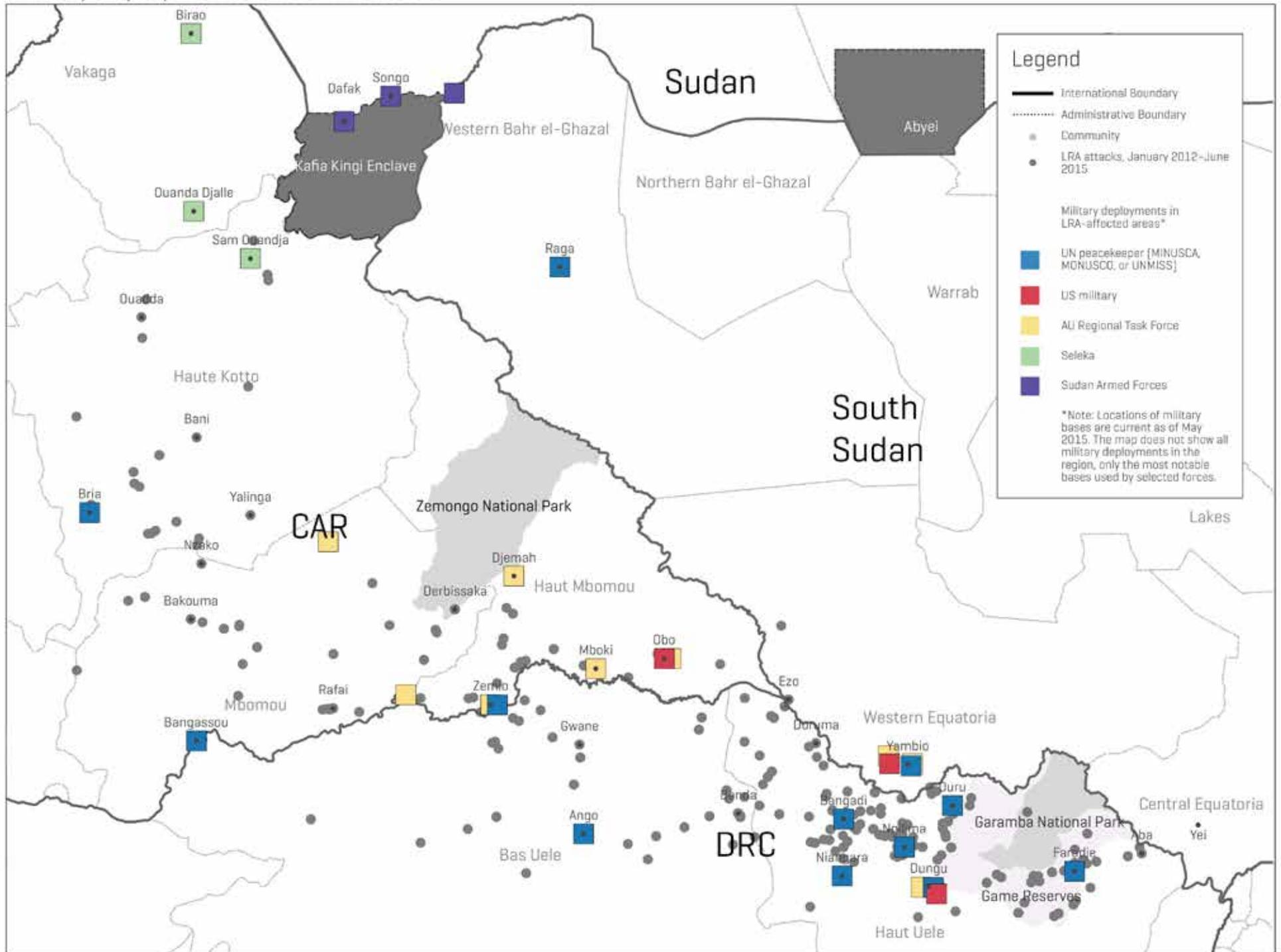
Countering Kony's propaganda has been made more difficult by the lack of clarity on the implementation of Uganda's Amnesty Act, which has been a key tool for encouraging defections from the LRA for over 15 years. The Act is still popular among many northern Ugandans, but has come under criticism for providing a blanket amnesty for senior LRA officers responsible for egregious human rights abuses. In 2012 the Ugandan Minister for Internal Affairs allowed the Act to lapse, before reinstating it a year later.¹⁰¹ The Act has also been challenged within the Ugandan government. In 2010, Uganda's Directorate of Public Prosecutions (DPP) sought to set a precedent of excluding some LRA officers from the amnesty process by charging former LRA commander Thomas Kwoyelo with war crimes. In April 2015, the Ugandan Supreme Court finally issued a decisive ruling on the Kwoyelo case, overruling lower courts by clarifying that the DPP does have the power to exclude former LRA members from the amnesty process.¹⁰² The DPP has yet to clearly communicate what level of atrocities LRA officers will have to be accused of to risk prosecution upon returning home. Such uncertainty in the amnesty process is likely to create a disincentive for LRA officers, and even some low-level LRA combatants, who are weighing the risks and benefits of defecting.¹⁰³

101 "Rebel Amnesty Reinstated in Uganda," IRIN, 30 May 2013.

102 Among other things, the ruling stated that the Act was never meant to provide amnesty for the types of crimes on civilians for which many LRA commanders are responsible. For analysis of the ruling, see Sharon Nakandha, "Supreme Court of Uganda Rules on the Application of the Amnesty Act," International Justice Monitor, 16 April 2015.

103 The case of former LRA commander Caesar Achellam illustrates the current confusion in how the Ugandan government handles LRA defectors. Achellam, one of the few old-guard LRA officers who willingly joined the group in the 1980s, was taken into custody by the Ugandan RTF forces in May 2012. Since then he has been held in loose detention at a Ugandan military base in Gulu, Uganda, allowed to leave only occasionally. The DPP has issued an arrest warrant for him, but the military has reportedly refused to turn him over to civilian authorities. To complicate matters further, the Ugandan Amnesty Commission awarded Achellam with an amnesty certificate in March 2015, a move that seemingly contradicts the DPP arrest warrant but nonetheless has not resulted in Achellam being allowed to leave military custody.

Military deployments and LRA attacks



IV. DEFEATING THE LRA: THE US ROLE

The “defeat” of the LRA is within reach, despite the challenges US and RTF forces have confronted in recent years. The LRA faces an existential crisis, lacking popular support, a means to rebuilding its core Acholi fighting capacity, or a viable succession plan for a future without Kony. The group’s command structure would fracture if US and RTF forces were to capture or kill Kony, as no other officers have the ability to consolidate control over the LRA. Though a few hardliners may try to reconstitute a small force, they would find little support among the rank-and-file fighters. Such a scenario would provide an ideal opportunity to encourage remaining LRA members to defect.

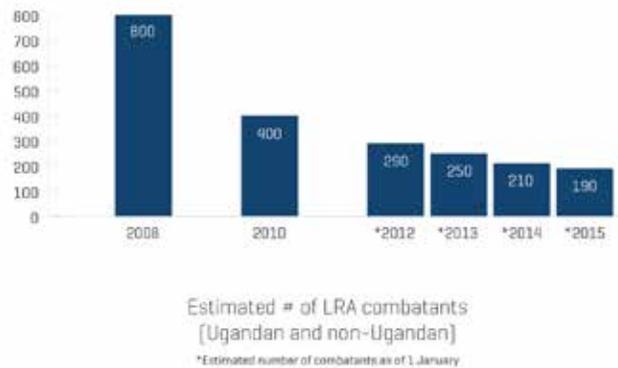
President Obama must address persistent gaps in his counter-LRA strategy for such an optimistic scenario to play out. He should reinvigorate diplomatic efforts to prevent the LRA from exploiting safe havens, while also ensuring US advisers and their RTF partners have the resources, access, and operational flexibility needed to pursue LRA commanders in Kafia Kingi and Congo. This will require reauthorizing the US military adviser deployments in forward operating bases in the CAR and Congo. President Obama must also make clear that US efforts go beyond a sole focus on capturing Kony by expanding Come Home defection campaigns and ensuring the group no longer poses a significant threat to civilian protection. Should he allow the LRA to outlast his Administration, as it has outlasted so many previous US Administrations, President Obama will run the risk that the group will rebuild and resume more violent atrocities against civilians.

United States forces are working with select partner nation forces of the AU-RTF to enhance cooperation, information-sharing and synchronization, operational planning, and overall effectiveness. The United States is pursuing a comprehensive strategy to help the governments and people of this region in their efforts to end the threat posed by the LRA and to address the impact of the LRA’s atrocities.

- President Barack Obama, 14 October 2011
Six Month Consolidated War
Powers Resolution Report

Reauthorizing the US adviser deployment

The current authorization for US military advisers to be deployed in support of OOC extends through October 2015.¹⁰⁴ Even though LRA abductions are on the rise and Kony remains at large, support for reauthorizing the mission is not uniform within the Obama Administration. US officials initially described the adviser deployment in terms of “months, not



years,” and in the eyes of some Defense Department officials the increasing strain placed on US troops and funding by counter-terrorism efforts in West Africa, the Sahel, and the Middle East have overstretched US military capacity and sparked a need to refocus and reprioritize US deployments.¹⁰⁵ Given that the LRA poses a minimal threat to US citizens and regional governments, Operation Observant Compass is seen by some as a mission that should be significantly downsized or terminated. The slow pace of progress in degrading the LRA command structure, the uncertainty of Uganda’s commitment to the RTF, and concerns that Congressional Republicans are growing impatient with the mission’s accumulating logistical and personnel costs have fueled such views.

¹⁰⁴ Initially, the White House led an arduous interagency decision-making process every six months to determine whether the mission would be extended. In October 2013 and again October 2014 the US reauthorized the deployment for a full year, giving planners a greater window of time to develop and implement counter-LRA strategies.

¹⁰⁵ Author interviews with US government officials and Congressional staffers in Washington DC and Entebbe, October 2013 and December 2014. For the prediction that the deployment of US military advisers would last “months, not years,” see: Lisa Daniel, “Official: Troops in Central Africa for Months, Not Years,” American Forces Press Service, 25 October 2011.

Despite the wishes of some Defense Department officials, the White House is unlikely to completely terminate the adviser deployment and assistance to the RTF. It is also unlikely to accept a Trojan horse termination, in which the mission is officially extended but drastically downsized by closing forward operating bases in the CAR and Congo, leaving only a small coordination cell in Entebbe. Either scenario would likely result in the pullout of Ugandan troops, which would leave hundreds of thousands of civilians more vulnerable to violence by the LRA and increase the likelihood that sectarian conflicts in the CAR would spread into areas currently under Ugandan control. A US withdrawal from forward operating bases would also give LRA forces a chance to rebuild their fighting force and scale up illicit trafficking. At home, it would be a stinging admission of failure on one of the President's most high-profile initiatives in Africa. It would draw the ire of members of Congress and grassroots activists in the US who have given the Administration a clear political mandate to decisively end the LRA crisis and strengthen the precedent for US response to situations of international mass atrocities.

Instead of terminating or drastically downsizing the mission, the White House should ensure the Defense Department develops proposals for how to translate the lessons learned of the first four years of Operation Observant Compass into tangible progress in the field. In reauthorizing the mission, the Defense Department should seek to strengthen the continuity and consistency of the partnerships between US advisers in the field and RTF contingents. The US should also seek to mitigate the upheaval that comes with rotating US adviser teams every six months. In addition to keeping a State Department field representative based in Entebbe, the Defense Department should facilitate the deployment of an additional State Department field representative to the US military base in Obo, with frequent travel to the US base in Dungu. Alternatively, a civilian Defense Department staff member could take on such a position. In either scenario, the civilian field representative could be deployed for six-month rotations that are staggered with those of the US military advisers to help ensure continuity in US relations with both RTF and UN peacekeeping partners. They would also be more likely to deepen engagement with local civil society leaders who are willing to share information on LRA activity and partner on defection campaigns.

Improving airlift and intel support

The Defense Department must also streamline and improve bureaucratic processes for fulfilling requests from OOC commanders for airlift and intelligence support to the mission. Defense planners must rely more on field personnel with experience working on the LRA crisis to avoid replicating previous mismanaged deployments and ensure airlift and intelligence assets are appropriate to the counter-LRA context. In the field, US advisers should be given the freedom to develop more flexible flight plans that lower US and RTF response times to LRA attacks, defection opportunities, and intelligence on the location of LRA commanders.

In the words of one former US military intelligence analyst, "Removing Kony and his LRA from the battlefield is, foremost, an intelligence problem."¹⁰⁶ To improve intelligence collection, US military advisers and their civilian counterparts should be encouraged to prioritize consistent engagement with nomadic herders, traders, artisanal miners, hunters, and other groups that have frequent contact with LRA groups. Such engagement should be institutionalized within the mission so that incoming advisers teams are briefed on how important such engagement is and how to best pursue such intelligence in LRA-affected areas. The Defense Department should also deploy aerial and ground-based assets that take advantage of tips from human networks and complement the overall intelligence picture of where LRA groups are operating and how they are surviving. The Department should also seek to deploy US intelligence analysts to the field that have experience on the LRA crisis and encourage them to do deeper analyses of the LRA's internal command structure, movement patterns, and interactions with civilians and other armed groups. To make their job easier, analysts and forward deployed advisers should be encouraged to aggressively declassify information on LRA activity and proactively share it with RTF forces, UN peacekeeping personnel, and civil society groups, so that all actors may contribute to and benefit from a common operating picture of LRA activity.

¹⁰⁶ Draper, "Intelligence in Complex Environments," 2014.

Disrupting LRA safe havens in Kafia Kingi

For five years, Sudan has allowed the LRA to steadily deepen its roots in the border areas between Kafia Kingi, South Darfur, and northeastern CAR and use the region to sell illicit ivory and shield senior LRA commanders from US and RTF operations. The poor relations and limited leverage the US and its partners have with Khartoum is often cited as an excuse to minimize engagement with Sudanese officials on the issue. However, Khartoum may prove willing to cooperate if confronted with even a light mixture of pressure and incentives because the weakened LRA provides it with little strategic value. The US and its partners should employ a diplomatic strategy aimed at securing Sudan's cooperation on three fronts: stopping any provision of support to LRA forces by the SAF; arresting or expelling any senior LRA commanders who venture into territory it controls; and allowing Ugandan RTF troops to pursue LRA forces into Kafia Kingi and South Darfur.

Diplomatic outreach to Khartoum will require a united front from the international counter-LRA coalition. The AU and UN must energize – quickly – their engagement of Khartoum. This will require cooperation between AU special envoy Lt. Gen. Jackson Tuwei, the AU HIP mediators, UNOCA chief Abdoulaye Bathily, and UNOAU Special Representative Haile Menkerios. Ideally, all four offices would convene in coming months to develop a strong message and send a representative to Khartoum to deliver it. The US can strengthen their hand by ensuring the UN Security Council continues to highlight the presence of LRA forces in Sudanese-controlled territory.

The US should also encourage Ugandan government officials to engage with Sudanese officials directly or through forums such as the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. The Ugandan government should explore what steps it could take, such as expelling representatives of Darfuri armed groups from its territory, to secure Khartoum's cooperation in counter-LRA efforts. Finally, the US should strengthen its own bilateral engagement with Khartoum. US Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan Donald Booth should be more proactive in elevating the LRA crisis with Sudanese officials. He should work closely with the US Charge d'Affairs in Khartoum, Ambassador Jerry Lanier, who is familiar with US counter-LRA efforts from his previous stint as US ambassador to Uganda.

Meanwhile, US and Ugandan troops should not sit idle in hopes that Sudan has a change of heart. Until Khartoum demonstrates a tangible willingness to cooperate, US and Ugandan forces should conduct joint operations to apprehend Kony and senior LRA officers operating in Kafia Kingi and prevent them from selling illicit natural resources.¹⁰⁷ To facilitate operations in Kafia Kingi, OOC commanders should continue efforts to establish a base or staging location near Sam Ouandja in the CAR and Raga in South Sudan. Establishing a more permanent presence in Sam Ouandja will require delicate relationship building with the Seleka forces that currently control the town, which should be done in coordination with the US Embassy in Bangui and MINUSCA officials.¹⁰⁸ The US should also facilitate the movement of Ugandan RTF troops to locations closer to the Kafia Kingi border.

Having a more sustained presence closer to Kafia Kingi will ease each stage of conducting operations. It will allow US advisers to build information networks with Seleka troops, traders, and LRA attack victims who come into contact with LRA groups and provide a staging ground for operations against LRA commanders, which may require temporary surges of US airlift capacity. Finally, a US presence closer to Kafia Kingi will improve the reach of defection campaigns targeting Kony's group, which should include radio programming, leaflet distributions, and aerial loud-speaker flights. Such campaigns also serve to sensitize Seleka forces and civilians on how to facilitate LRA defections and incentivize them to share information on LRA activity by highlighting the Defense Department's rewards program and the State Department's War Crimes Rewards program.

107 According to the terms of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that led to the partitioning of Sudan and the birth of South Sudan, Kafia Kingi belongs to South Sudan. US and Ugandan troops may use this to provide legal justification for conducting operations there, as South Sudan is party to the AU's regional counter-LRA operation. Such a justification would not be valid in justifying RTF operations in South Darfur proper however, making it less likely the US and RTF would plan operations there unless they had the permission of the Sudanese government.

108 Seleka officials based in Sam Ouandja were upset that they did not receive any rewards money from the US government for their role in transferring LRA commander Dominic Ongwen into US custody in January 2015. "LRA's Dominic Ongwen 'capture': Seleka rebels want \$5m reward," BBC News, 9 January 2015.

Preventing LRA attacks and poaching in Congo

The US must work to overcome the inertia that has allowed northeastern Congo to become a safe haven and source of illicit ivory for LRA groups. US advisers should continue training and providing intelligence and airlift to the Congolese RTF unit. The capacity of the Congolese RTF unit will remain limited, so the US is smart to encourage them to concentrate operations in areas near Garamba National Park, which is close to their logistical hub in Dungu. The US should also ensure that recent progress in securing MONUSCO's logistical support to the RTF and enhanced civilian protection patrols in Haut Uele is not lost.

US military advisers should develop better intelligence on LRA groups operating in Bas Uele district and assist Congolese RTF troops in conducting short, targeted operations there when opportunities develop. US and Ugandan officials should work with the AU to reengage the Congolese government on obtaining permission for Ugandan troops to conduct cross-border operations in Bas Uele when they have intelligence on LRA group locations or are in hot pursuit of LRA groups fleeing from eastern CAR to Congo.

The US should also build on promising efforts to collaborate with natural resource management officials to close off the LRA's access to Garamba National Park and the Bili-Uele Reserve. US advisers stationed in Dungu should expand cooperation and information sharing with authorities in Garamba Park and provide training to their park rangers if necessary. The US should also expand funding for the US Fish and Wildlife Service to support the rangers and community-based conservation programs. The ultimate goal should be establishing a network of protected areas stretching from Garamba Park and the Bili-Uele Protected Area in Congo to the Chinko Reserve in eastern CAR in which authorities in each location cooperate on information sharing and conservation efforts.

Expanding defection campaigns

The US military's defection campaigns in LRA-affected areas have been, dollar for dollar, its most valuable contribution to the US counter-LRA effort. The US role in defection initiatives will be even more critical in the coming months because Invisible Children and other partners are downsizing their messaging campaigns. The recent drop in combatant defections from the LRA is less an indication of declining

will among LRA members to defect and more a reflection of the struggles current campaigns have in reaching LRA groups. US defense officials from the various command headquarters that oversee OOC must embrace defection messaging and ensure it is institutionalized more strongly in the mission. They must ensure OOC commanders and adviser teams in the field understand that defection campaigns are a core piece of their work and integrate them into their regular work plans, including offensive operations in pursuit of LRA groups. US defense officials must also provide the mission with the funding to expand defection campaigns and cut red tape that prevents MISO teams from spending allocated funds and rapidly responding to opportunities, such as the defection of senior LRA commanders.

In the field, US advisers and the MISO team should have a simple goal: double the scale of all their defection messaging efforts over the next year. This goal should encompass leaflets distributed, aerial loudspeaker missions flown, and the hours per week that UBC shortwave radio and regional FM radios play Come Home defection programs. Doing so will require expanded airlift capacity for the mission so that leaflet distribution and loudspeaker missions are not halted when pursuit operations require expanded airlift support.

US defection campaigns must get smarter as well as expanding in scope. US military personnel and State Department field representatives should engage more deeply with civil society groups to ensure communities are willing and prepared to help LRA combatants who attempt to surrender. They should also continue to build relationships with Ugandan former LRA combatants and civil society leaders and incorporate their advice to nuance defection messages to minimize Kony's counter-propaganda efforts. The State Department should also encourage the Ugandan government's Department of Public Prosecutions to develop and communicate a consistent policy regarding which LRA combatants will be offered amnesty and which ones will face charges if they defect.

Promoting protection and human rights

The increase in LRA attacks and abductions since 2014, particularly in northeastern Congo, highlights the need for US military advisers, RTF forces, and UN peacekeeping missions to more deeply integrate civilian protection strategies into counter-LRA operations.¹⁰⁹ Several recommendations already mentioned above, such as declassifying information about LRA activity and expanding two-way communication with NGOs and civil society groups, could achieve progress towards this goal at minimal cost. Such engagement will require US military advisers to more consistently and proactively engage with community leaders in Obo, Dungu, and other LRA-affected areas, perhaps by reviving weekly community meetings. The State Department should also encourage the AU to deploy civilian protection experts to the field to advise RTF forces and develop operational guidelines on accountability and civilian protection.

US military advisers should also work with RTF partners to ensure any operation aimed at pursuing LRA groups include plans for how to mitigate risks to civilians in surrounding communities from subsequent LRA attacks. Though the LRA has committed few reprisal attacks in recent years, they frequently launch resupply raids on civilians if military operations destroy their food supplies. US advisers should also help Ugandan RTF forces incorporate tactics into their operations that seek to minimize the risk of harming women, children, and other unarmed abductees within LRA ranks.

The Obama Administration must also ensure that its focus on counter-LRA operations does not dilute US diplomacy to address pressing human rights and governance crises in the region. This is particularly important in Uganda, which may try to use its close working relationship with the US in addressing the LRA crisis to deflect attention from its poor human rights and governance record. While the US will likely face the most domestic pressure to respond to anti-homosexuality legislation, equal attention is needed on the restriction of political space in the country, particularly as the 2016 national elections approach.

109 For more in-depth recommendations on how these forces can improve civilian protection, see: Shepard, "In New Light," 2015, and SAIPED and The Resolve, "Healing MONUSCO's Image," 2014.

V: BEYOND KONY: BUILDING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Defeating the LRA would dramatically improve day-to-day security for hundreds of thousands of people living in eastern CAR, northeastern Congo, and western South Sudan. It would encourage displaced persons to return to their homes and fields and spur economic activity. It would also remove a source of friction between affected communities and their national governments and give authorities an opportunity to address the conditions that marginalized these communities and made them susceptible to LRA violence in the first place. Still, ridding the region of the LRA is just one step towards rebuilding affected communities that have suffered widespread displacement, mass abductions, and collective trauma.

We are committed to working...in pursuit of the future of peace and dignity that the people who have suffered at the hands of the LRA deserve.

—President Barack Obama, 24 May 2010,
Statement upon signing *The LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act*

If President Obama is to help LRA-affected communities beyond catching Kony, he will have to ensure his counter-LRA strategy fulfills its promise to be a comprehensive response to the crisis. Since 2010, USAID and the State Department have supported some innovative projects aimed at protecting civilians, reintegrating ex-LRA abductees back into their communities, and healing the wounds left from a brutal conflict. But US programs have frequently been underfunded, delayed, and hampered by a lack of coordination and vision. In his remaining 18 months in office, President Obama will have to expand US investment in civilian protection, reintegration, and economic recovery programs and encourage the European Union, World Bank, and other institutional donors to do the same. More importantly, given pressure on the US foreign aid budget, the White House must lean on USAID officials to develop a more comprehensive vision for programming in LRA-affected areas and emphasize more timely and efficient project implementation.

Case study: Gaps in reintegration support

One of USAID's most pressing challenges is addressing the lack of reintegration support available to people who escape the LRA and the communities to which they return home. In northern Uganda, one of the most enduring legacies of the conflict is the tens of thousands of youth and adults who were abducted by the LRA. At the peak of the crisis there in the 1990s and early 2000s, community organizations and donors funded robust reintegration programs that provided psychosocial counseling and fast-tracked skills development to some returnees, as well as community sensitization campaigns to mitigate social stigmatization. Since 2006, the last year the LRA was active in northern Uganda, the number of Ugandans escaping from the LRA has slowed considerably, leading to a tremendous drop in donor funding for reintegration programs.



Young Central African girl who spent several months in LRA captivity after being abducted in the town of Djemah. © Paul Ronan

Still, more than 55 Ugandan adult male combatants and 62 Ugandan women and children have returned from the LRA since 2012, many having spent over a decade in captivity.¹¹⁰ Upon returning to northern Uganda, they are met by a crumbling reintegration infrastructure that is ill-equipped to assist them. This infrastructure has particular difficulty absorbing the periodic large influxes of Ugandan women and

¹¹⁰ LRA Crisis Tracker, statistic calculated 16 June 2015.

children who escape from the LRA, including large groups in March 2013 and August 2014. They typically receive several weeks of care and counseling before being left to fend for themselves with whatever limited support family members are able to provide them.¹¹¹

Reintegration support for Ugandan combatants who defect from the LRA or are captured by military forces is also minimal. Senior LRA officers are frequently held in custody in the town of Gulu by the Ugandan military for months after they escape. Though they enjoy limited freedom of movement, they receive no counseling or educational training and are unable to work.¹¹² Some former combatants have joined the Ugandan military to fight the LRA, either under pressure from military officials or for lack of better options, though this practice has waned in recent years.¹¹³ The Amnesty Commission has been decimated by funding cuts from its former donor, the World Bank, and largely ignored by the Ugandan government, creating long delays in giving LRA returnees amnesty certificates. In March 2015 the Amnesty Commission finally addressed its backlog, distributing certificates to more than 80 people who had returned from the LRA in recent years in an event funded by international agencies.¹¹⁴ Despite the renewal of the Amnesty Act in May 2015, the Commission's future remains unclear, as reports indicate Amnesty Commission branches in northern Uganda were shut down and staff laid off in April 2015.¹¹⁵

Since 2008, the LRA has abducted over 6,500 people from the CAR, Congo, and South Sudan.¹¹⁶ Most of these abductees have escaped, were intentionally released by LRA commanders, or were captured by military or self-defense forces. At least 350 have spent six months or more in the LRA and have experienced repeated trauma. Many have been forced to kill and attack other civilians and do intensive labor. Girls and women have been raped and forced to bear children for LRA officers. Many more returnees have

been held in captivity for three or fewer days, typically forced to carry looted goods towards LRA camps after their community is attacked. Even these short-term abductions are traumatic for survivors, who fear for their lives and are often subject to beatings and physical exhaustion during the ordeal.

Central Africans, Congolese, and South Sudanese who escape from the LRA face a series of obstacles during the reintegration process. UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the Ugandan military have worked out standard operating procedures for receiving returnees and settling them with families or into host communities, but those who escape the LRA in a country other than their country of origin frequently spend weeks or months in transition. USAID, UNICEF, and NGOs have funded programs to provide some children who return from the LRA with counseling and educational assistance, but several of these programs have been shut down due to lack of funding. Little international support has ever been provided to the thousands of adults who spent time in LRA captivity.¹¹⁷

LRA-affected communities in the CAR, Congo, and South Sudan who shoulder the burden of integrating LRA returnees are highly stressed. Returnees' family members and neighbors, even if they have not been abducted by the LRA, have frequently been the victims of other forms of LRA violence. One study found that 71% of respondents in Western Equatoria had been directly affected by LRA attacks (e.g. direct violence, displacement, theft) and 17% had a household member killed by the LRA.¹¹⁸ This collective trauma, set in the context of decades of economic exclusion and political marginalization, limits the ability of communities to help returnees address their trauma and rebuild their livelihoods. Some returnees, particularly those who exhibit "strange" behavior and women with children fathered by LRA commanders, face some form of social exclusion.¹¹⁹

111 Interviews with former LRA members and community leaders, Gulu, September and November 2014.

112 Ibid.

113 Ledio Cakaj, "Too Far from Home: Demobilizing the Lord's Resistance Army," The Enough Project, February 2011.

114 Alex Otto, "Top LRA commanders, Returnees Undergo Ritual Cleansing," Uganda Radio Network, 9 March 2015.

115 Author email exchange with NGO representative in Gulu, May 2015.

116 LRA Crisis Tracker, statistic calculated 16 June 2015.

117 Dr. Emilie Medeiros, "Back but not home: supporting the reintegration of former LRA abductees into civilian life in Congo and South Sudan," Conciliation Resources, August 2014.

118 Danish Refugee Council and Danish Demining Group, "Armed Violence and Stabilization in Western Equatoria," 2013.

119 Lindsay Branham and Jocelyn Kelly, "We Suffer from War and More War: Assessment of the Impact of the Lord's Resistance Army on Formerly Abducted Children and Their Communities in Northeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo," Discover the Journey and Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, 2012.

Community organizations, often linked to traditional or religious institutions, have had some success pioneering reintegration programs despite limited resources. In several Central African communities, LRA returnees have formed a “victim’s association” that provides assistance to new returnees, peer counseling services, and gives returnees a voice in the community. In Congo, the Mama Bongisa Center for Reintegration and Development has helped women abducted by the LRA or otherwise victimized by the conflict form support groups and start small businesses that help them support their families. In South Sudan, the Inter-Church Peace Committee, composed of six Christian denominations, has conducted several community healing programs that combine conventional trauma healing techniques with traditional Zande cultural practices.

USAID’s counter-LRA struggles

USAID and the State Department have been the lead agencies in implementing the civilian programs that fall under the umbrella of President Obama’s LRA strategy. A majority of US aid to LRA-affected areas, over \$87 million since 2010, has been dedicated to food assistance, humanitarian protection, health and livelihoods initiatives, and other emergency aid programs.¹²⁰ USAID has provided an additional \$8.5 million in assistance since 2010 to UNICEF to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of children who have escaped LRA captivity, as well as other youth affected by LRA atrocities.¹²¹

USAID has also launched several innovative protection and recovery programs in LRA-affected areas, including a partnership with Vodacom to expand mobile phone coverage in northeastern Congo. The \$300,000 project provided nearly 50,000 civilians in four LRA-affected communities with mobile phone coverage. The agency also supported cash-for-work programs in Haut Uele to boost small businesses and rehabilitate community infrastructure. In 2012, USAID launched its most ambitious program to date, the Secure, Empowered, Connected Communities (SECC) initiative, which has aimed to strengthen civilian early warning networks, community protection strategies, social cohesion, and FM radios in LRA-affected areas of the CAR and Congo. Some USAID programs have greatly increased civilian security despite not being specifically targeted at the LRA crisis, such as the

agency’s national road-building program preceding South Sudan’s independence that helped improve access for aid groups and military forces to remote areas in Western Equatoria vulnerable to LRA attack.

However, USAID has struggled to find the funding necessary to fully implement the vision outlined in President Obama’s counter-LRA strategy, which was released in November 2010, the same month as a landslide of fiscal conservatives were voted into Congress. Since then, Congress has enacted significant cuts to State Department, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPs) appropriations, which include most US foreign aid.¹²² Renewed humanitarian crises in the CAR, Congo, and South Sudan have further stretched USAID’s more limited resources. With the support of grassroots activists, Congressional appropriators have set aside \$20 million in recent budgets for USAID programming in LRA-affected areas, which has mitigated cuts to assistance there.

The implementation of the projects in LRA-affected areas that USAID has been able to fund have been frequently delayed. The mobile phone tower project in eastern Congo was first conceived in 2010 and planned for completion by the fall of 2012, but implementation was repeatedly delayed, in part due to logistical and security barriers and challenges in working with Vodacom.¹²³ The towers were finally installed in four locations between April and December 2013. The implementation of SECC’s early warning program in LRA-affected areas of eastern CAR was also delayed, partially due to the coup and outbreak of sectarian violence.

USAID’s checkered track record in LRA-affected areas cannot be blamed entirely on limited funding and regional insecurity. Frequent staff turnover, poor coordination, and inadequate on-the-ground oversight have played a major role in USAID’s struggles to form a coherent vision for its programs in LRA-affected

122 Congressional SFOPs appropriations in FY2010 and FY2011 were approximately \$49 billion each year, and have hovered between \$39-\$42 billion from FY2012-2015. These numbers include only “enduring” programs, not Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding, which targets only Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Susan B. Epstein, Marian L. Lawson, and Alex Tiersky, “State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs: FY2016 Budget and Appropriations,” Congressional Research Service, 9 April 2015.

123 Author interviews, Washington DC, Dungu, and Kampala, April 2013, October 2013, and September 2014.

120 US State Department, “Fact Sheet,” 2014.

121 Ibid.

areas and ensure that its partners are implementing programs efficiently.¹²⁴ USAID has struggled to find a home for the LRA portfolio, which requires coordination between several different country offices in east and central Africa and was recently shifted from USAID's regional office in Nairobi to its office in Kinshasa. In Congo, coordination between the existing HF early warning system and a new system supported by SECC has been uneven and slow, raising concerns that the USAID program may add limited value to civilian protection efforts there without steps to improve collaboration.¹²⁵

In late 2013, USAID hired a contractor to conduct an assessment of programming possibilities, but the assessment was repeatedly delayed. Consequently, it will not be completed in time to inform how the \$10 million Congress dedicated for LRA-affected areas in its FY2015 budget will be spent, limiting USAID's ability to ensure that it is enacting the programs that fill the most urgent protection and reintegration needs.

Improving foreign aid in LRA-affected areas

President Obama still has time to strengthen his modest legacy of civilian assistance to LRA-affected communities over the remaining 18 months of his tenure. This will likely require White House staff to lean harder on USAID to ensure its programs better target areas of need and are implemented more efficiently. Senior USAID officials should provide more stable and consistent oversight on the LRA portfolio, allow staff to travel more frequently to LRA-affected areas, and ensure the needs assessment is completed without further delay. Ultimately, USAID should develop a strategy for its programming that is coordinated with other projects both in LRA-affected areas and in the broader region. Realizing such a vision will require Congress and the Administration to expand, even if slightly, funds dedicated to LRA-affected communities.

USAID should particularly prioritize reintegration and community cohesion programs that benefit adults and children who have returned from the LRA, while also providing benefits to traumatized communities receiving LRA returnees. Such programming should

incorporate an array of tools that can be customized as appropriate by communities, including inter-communal dialogue, vocational training, community infrastructure improvements, and trauma counseling and psychosocial support. Such programs can mitigate the risk of localized flare-ups of conflict as well as help prevent other armed groups from finding a foothold in the region.

USAID should also seek to fill gaps in civilian protection mechanisms, including by replicating the cheap but effective mobile phone tower model to areas where they do not currently exist. USAID should also begin expanding programs to strengthen livelihoods in LRA-affected communities and promote local markets and economic recovery. In all its programming, the agency should ensure more of its funding builds the capacity of community organizations that have an intimate understanding of and a long-term presence in affected communities.

European donors, the UN, and the World Bank must also bear a greater burden in assisting LRA-affected communities. The White House and State Department should use bilateral meetings and biannual LRA experts' forums organized by UNOCA to pressure them to expand programming that incorporates longer funding cycles. In particular, international partners should fund reintegration projects and economic recovery initiatives, including infrastructure improvement. In particular, the latter should include the long-awaited rehabilitation of the severely degraded road between Obo and South Sudan, a key cross-border trade link and access route for aid groups and military forces.

¹²⁴ Author interviews, Washington DC, Entebbe, and Kampala, September 2014, December 2014, and March 2015.

¹²⁵ Author's full disclosure: Invisible Children, The Resolve's partner on the LRA Crisis Tracker project, provides funding and support to the existing HF early warning network in Congo.

VI. THE LRA AND PRESIDENT OBAMA'S LEGACY ON ATROCITY RESPONSE

President Obama has made significant strides in institutionalizing prevention and response to mass atrocities within US foreign policy. In particular, he launched the Atrocities Prevention Board (APB) in April 2012, which seeks to improve interagency coordination and strengthen US efforts to prevent and respond to mass atrocities.¹²⁶ Though the APB has not played a leading role in shaping US policy towards the LRA crisis, Administration officials have frequently cited the US counter-LRA strategy as an example of its atrocity response record.¹²⁷ While President Obama's counter-LRA strategy is still active, its implementation so far does provide lessons for how the US can better prevent and respond to mass atrocities.

One of the most enduring lessons of President Obama's response to the LRA crisis is the importance of having a White House-level strategy in developing a comprehensive, whole-of-government response to the crisis. The failure of Operation Lightning Thunder to anticipate and prevent massive LRA reprisal attacks in 2008 demonstrated the disastrous consequences of military strikes that fail to incorporate civilian protection strategies and adequate aid to affected communities. The 2010 LRA bill, by requiring President Obama to develop an interagency strategy, sparked greater coordination between the State Department, USAID, and Defense Department and a more comprehensive US approach to the crisis. White House officials used the counter-LRA strategy as a reason to develop a regular rhythm of high-level interagency meetings, both at the principals and deputies level, and to exert pressure on individual agencies to deliver on their responsibilities. The steady, bipartisan pressure from Congress to implement the strategy strengthened the hand of Administration officials

¹²⁶ The Board has been challenged by an overall lack of dedicated resources in the Administration, difficulties coordinating between different US agencies and departments, and inadequate communication with NGOs and Congress. James Finkel, "Atrocity Prevention at the Crossroads: Assessing the President's Atrocity Prevention Board After Two Years," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Center for the Prevention of Genocide, September 2014.

¹²⁷ President Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum," Speech given at United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 23 April 2012; Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights Dr. Sarah Sewall, "Making Progress: U.S. Prevention of Mass Atrocities," Speech given at Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 24 April 2015.

pushing for a more robust response to the crisis. Grassroots lobbying was critical in generating bipartisan support for both the 2010 bill and subsequent Congressional letters and legislation concerning implementation of the strategy, even after several champions of the 2010 bill left office.

It is part of our regional strategy to end the scourge that is the LRA, and help realize a future where no African child is stolen from their family and no girl is raped and no boy is turned into a child soldier.

—President Barack Obama, 23 April 2012,
Remarks at the United States Holocaust
Memorial Museum

Operation Observant Compass also provides valuable lessons on the US military's potential role in atrocity response. Though Ugandan RTF forces have continued to play the leading role in counter-LRA operations, US logistical support and military advisers have helped realize the significant progress to date on dismantling the LRA's command structure and reducing the group's worst mass atrocities. In the field, the collaboration between the State Department's rotating LRA field representatives and OOC commanders has established a positive precedent, with the former providing an important bridge to civil society groups, UN agencies, and diplomatic partners. The collaboration between military advisers, the State Department, and civil society groups on defection campaigns and civilian early warning networks also provides a partial model for how the US can address other mass atrocity crises on the continent. US boots on the ground also elevated the profile of the counter-LRA strategy within the US government, ensuring the continuation of regular high-level interagency meetings on the crisis even as LRA atrocities became less severe in recent years.

However, Operation Observant Compass has also highlighted the need for future Administrations to boost civilian programming aimed at preventing and responding to mass atrocities. Even though the President's strategy emphasized a comprehensive response to the LRA crisis, its implementation has also highlighted the tremendous imbalance in the

resources available to the Defense Department versus the State Department, USAID, and other civilian agencies. Annual LRA-focused USAID and State Department programming has been dwarfed by what the Defense Department has spent on counter-LRA efforts each year since deploying US military advisers in late 2011. This imbalance is reflective of a broader disparity between foreign aid and defense spending that has been a consistent feature of the US budget for decades and has been exacerbated by more fiscally conservative Congresses since 2010. Though USAID officials must be held to account for inadequate oversight and attention to projects that were delayed or limited in impact, inadequate funding has provided them little margin for error. USAID's funding shortages have also prevented it from scaling up projects that showed promise, such as the expansion of mobile phone infrastructure. In the meantime, Operation Observant Compass has been allowed to make massive investments, such as certain contracts for aerial intelligence assets and the construction of elaborate military bases, whose per-dollar value-added was extremely low. Future US responses should emphasize a more balanced approach that includes greater investment in civilian early warning networks, reintegration and trauma healing programs, and programs to jumpstart local economies and livelihoods in affected communities.

VII. CONCLUSION

President Obama's legacy on the LRA crisis will ultimately be most acutely felt by the hundreds of thousands of civilians who continue to live in fear of LRA attacks. If his strategy ultimately fails and the counter-LRA coalition disbands, the LRA will have the space it needs to once again rebuild, strengthen its fighting force, and expand attacks and abductions across eastern CAR, northern Congo, and South Sudan. But with decisive leadership in the remaining months of his presidency to strengthen the counter-LRA coalition, President Obama could succeed in dismantling the LRA's command structure, encouraging LRA com-

batants to defect, and permanently ending the LRA's predatory attacks. Equally important to President Obama's legacy on the LRA crisis is whether USAID and other donors are able to expand programs in affected areas to rebuild shattered livelihoods, reintegrate those who have escaped from the LRA, and heal traumatized communities.

METHODOLOGY

The author collected information contained in this report from a variety of sources, including firsthand interviews with 15 former members of the LRA. Additional interviews were conducted with civil society leaders and aid workers in LRA-affected areas; representatives from the United Nations, African Union, and donor countries; and representatives from regional governments and military forces.

Most interviews took place during field research conducted in October 2012, October 2013, September and November 2014, and February and July 2015. Locations visited during these research trips include: Bakouma, Bangui, Bria, Obo, and Sam Ouandja, CAR; Bitima, Dungu, Faradje, Nagero, and Tadu, Congo; Yambio and Nzara, South Sudan; and Entebbe, Gulu and Kampala, Uganda. Extensive information was also collected from a review of existing literature on the LRA crisis, as well as previous interviews in LRA-affected areas conducted by the authors.

To protect sources, the author has withheld the exact locations and dates of interviews, or the precise affiliation of interviewees, in some footnotes.

ABOUT

Published

© August 2015 The Resolve LRA Crisis Initiative

Author

Paul Ronan (@pauldronan) is a co-founder of The Resolve, and currently serves as the Project Director. He co-manages The LRA Crisis Tracker, a project that analyzes trends in LRA violence and activity. Paul travels frequently to Uganda and LRA-affected areas of the CAR, Congo, and South Sudan. He is also a frequent contributor to media outlets, Congressional briefings, and think tank forums. Prior to co-founding The Resolve, he worked in the Caritas International and Franciscans International UN advocacy offices in New York.

Cartography and Graphs

Kenneth Transier is the primary cartographer and designer for the LRA Crisis Tracker.

Design

DUO Designs, www.duodesigns.net

Cover photo

Road sign near Duru, Congo. © Paul Ronan