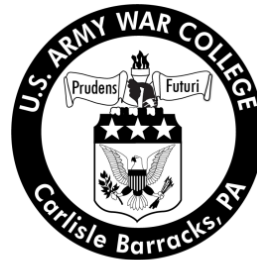


# Strategy Research Project International Fellow

## The “Lord’s Resistance Army” Wicked Problem

by

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Uganda Army



United States Army War College  
Class of 2012

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**THE “LORD’S RESISTANCE ARMY” WICKED PROBLEM**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Since 2007 the military forces of Uganda, South Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the UN forces in the DRC have grappled with the challenge of ending the threat posed by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) remnants currently hiding in the Garamba jungles. These jungles connect Uganda, DRC, South Sudan and CAR. By hiding and operating in the Garamba, the LRA has become a common denominator providing a platform for the affected countries to cooperate and coordinate their efforts. In 2005, LRA was considerably decimated and degraded by the Ugandan Army, forcing the remnants to flee from northern Uganda. However, it is puzzling that despite the efforts by the four countries, the LRA remnants have continued to survive and wreak havoc in the DRC, CAR and South Sudan. The four countries are, no doubt, very much concerned and have committed resources to deal with the threat. But as long as these resources are not well coordinated, the threat is likely to continue. The purpose of this research is to critically analyze the current counter-LRA strategy, identify the gaps or weak points and make recommendations for designing an effective strategy for ending the conflict.



## THE “LORD’S RESISTANCE ARMY” WICKED PROBLEM

The “Lord’s Resistance Army” (LRA) conflict is now almost 25 years old, and continues to be a security threat not only to Uganda’s national security interests-where it originated, but indeed the neighboring countries including the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Republic of South Sudan (RoSS) and the Central African Republic (CAR) - where the LRA is currently marauding and wreaking havoc in its wake against civilians. The LRA’s leadership is based on Joseph Kony who is suspected to be hiding in the CAR. Kony claims to be a “prophet”, and had expressed intention to establish a theocracy in Uganda based on the Ten Commandments of God, hence the organization’s name. The LRA, however, uses terrorist methods and its activities are not consistent with Christian values.

Militarily, the LRA is weak but has managed to survive for all this time because it avoids conventional warfare with regular formations, has no static bases and hides in challenging terrain. Additionally, between 1992 and 2002 the LRA developed external links and was assisted by the Government of Sudan. Khartoum gave the LRA assistance in exchange for attacks against the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), and the Government of Uganda that it perceived was “supporting” the SPLA. During operations in northern Uganda, the LRA attacks were focused more on remote and unprotected villages. It is estimated that between 1992 and 2006, LRA killed hundreds of civilians, abducted thousands and displaced over two million from their homes. The scale of LRA atrocities was repugnant and provoked international intervention.

Between 1988 and 2008, deliberate efforts were made by the Government of Uganda to resolve the LRA conflict by peaceful means. Several rounds of negotiations were held but the latest and most outstanding was the “Juba Peace Talks” that lasted from 2006 to 2008. However this initiative, like other earlier ones, did not succeed because the LRA leader Joseph Kony refused to sign the final agreement.<sup>1</sup>

While the negotiations were in progress, the LRA shifted its bases from southern Sudan to the DRC. The refusal by Kony to sign the peace agreement coupled with the persistent attacks by the LRA on villages in the DRC, South Sudan and CAR led to the resumption of hostilities. In December 2008, the combined forces of the DRC, Uganda, South Sudan and CAR attacked the LRA with a view to ending the violence. However, the Operation did not succeed as planned.

This paper argues that although the military offensive did not succeed in ending the LRA attacks, the ultimate solution to the conflict lies in modifying the current military approach. In October 2011, the United States President authorized the deployment of 100 US troops to assist the region’s militaries in putting an end to the LRA. Civil Society Organizations including Human Rights Watch applauded the move, adding credibility to the military option.<sup>2</sup> The commitment of resources by the United States brings a sense hope and optimism in ending the conflict, but this paper will argue that unless the affected governments and people in the region fully cooperate and graft a suitable strategy, peace will still be elusive.

The aim of this paper is to evaluate the current counter-LRA efforts by the region’s militaries and make recommendations to help formulate a suitable strategy for ending the conflict. To this end, the paper will describe the historical background to the

conflict, highlight the causes and impact, evaluate the current strategy, and make recommendations for ending the conflict.

### Background

In January 1986, the National Resistance Movement/Army (NRM/A) came to power through an armed struggle that defeated the government of Gen Tito Okello, who had himself in 1985 come to power through a military coup against Dr Milton Obote's government (colloquially referred to as Obote II).<sup>3</sup> Gen Okello was an Acholi by tribe, and had used the Acholi faction of the then Ugandan Army- the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) for the coup.<sup>4</sup> Milton Obote had come to power in 1980 following a widely disputed election, which prompted sections of Ugandans under different groups to take up arms.<sup>5</sup> The rebel groups included the Popular Resistance Army (PRA) and the Uganda Freedom Fighters (UFF). The most organized of these groups happened to be the PRA led by Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. PRA later merged with UFF to form the NRA which in 1995 was renamed the Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF).

The NRM/A had a robust political program, promising the restoration of democracy, the restoration of security, and the consolidation of national unity among other core objectives, and became attractive to its audiences especially the educated elite and the peasants in the countryside.<sup>6</sup> These promises were attractive because the socio-economic and political environment in Uganda was appalling and characterized by a high number of refugees, existence of various ethnic-based insurgent groups, absence of the rule of law, general economic decay and endemic political instability. Whereas, the UNLA relied heavily on military force and applied brutal force in the combat zones to clear what they perceived to be rebel "hideouts."<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately the

military-centric approach, as it were, had the third- order effect of antagonizing and alienating the otherwise neutral population in the contested areas. Consequently, the NRA had more supporters in central Uganda, which was the epicenter of the war, and was able to build a formidable force.

In 1985 Dr Obote and Gen Okello had strong disagreements which resulted into a military coup by the Acholi faction of the Army.<sup>8</sup> Following the coup, Gen Okello tried to conciliate his junta with insurgent groups and in particular the NRM/NRA, although this did not work out. The NRM/A was more interested in transforming the political environment than simply sharing power with Okello's regime which, in its view was distrustful and was not interested in ending human rights violations.<sup>9</sup> Fighting between the NRA and the government therefore continued and intensified, with the latter having the upper hand. Eventually by 1986 the UNLA had culminated, thus handing victory to the NRM/NRA government.

Having taken over leadership, the NRM/NRA embarked on a campaign to expand its control, build trust and stabilize the country. Discipline in the NRA was strictly enforced to demonstrate an end to impunity and promote the rule of law. As a mechanism for national reconciliation, all the defeated UNLA soldiers were recalled for absorption in the NRA.<sup>10</sup> However, haunted by what had earlier befallen their Acholi brethren in the 1970s, when Obote was overthrown by Amin,<sup>11</sup> and fearing possible prosecution for war crimes, most of the former Acholi soldiers did not turn up. At this time the government was still expanding its control over the whole country and its ideological reality was still unclear in the north. The Acholi veterans instead fled to

southern Sudan where they reorganized themselves under a rebel group known as the “Uganda People’s Democratic Army” (UPDA).

In August 1986 the UPDA launched a surprise attack on the NRA position at Bibia (near the border with the Sudan).<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that this marked the beginning of what would later become a protracted wicked conflict in the history of Uganda. In the battles and engagements that followed, however, the UPDA was defeated. In an effort to resolve the conflict and further demonstrate good will towards the Acholi community, the government offered “amnesty” to the UPDA rebels and agreed to negotiate with the leaders. In 1988 the government reached a peace agreement with the UPDA leaders and close to 10,000 former UPDA rebels were absorbed into the NRA.<sup>13</sup> However, some Acholi still nursed hatred against the NRM/NRA and went out of their way to organize for war under different ethnic-based groups. Their ultimate interest was political power.

In 1987 the Acholi veterans who still disliked the NRM teamed with their kinsmen and formed another rebel group known as the “Holy Spirit Movement (HSP)”. This group was under the leadership of a “priestess” called Alice Auma Lakwena (a cousin to Joseph Kony). Lakwena postured herself as a spirit medium, preaching to her audiences that the Acholi were “born-fighters” and could defeat the NRA by casting off witchcraft and using spiritual power embedded in their Acholi culture. She succeeded in mobilizing a big followership because by this time the general population in Acholi was still unhappy with their loss of power. Lakwena convinced her fighters to be armed with stones and that (with her magical power) the stones would turn into grenades when

hurled at the NRA.<sup>14</sup> She also convinced them to smear their bodies with shear nut oil and that this would serve as body armor to deflect NRA bullets.<sup>15</sup>

Inspired by superstition and Lakwena's mythology, and armed with stones and rifles the HSM fighters recklessly attacked and charged at the NRA defenses during the day, in waves, shouting, running and hurling stones.<sup>16</sup> Their only support weapons were machine guns. As would be expected, their strategy proved counter-productive and many of them were killed.<sup>17</sup> In November 1987, the HSP was defeated after crossing to eastern Uganda-an alien territory. Upon defeat, Lakwena fled to Kenya for safety leaving behind a leadership vacuum in HSM.<sup>18</sup> Soon this vacuum was filled by Joseph Kony who mobilized the HSM and UPDA remnants under a new umbrella called the "Uganda Christian Democratic Army." It is this group which he later named the "Lord's Resistance Army".<sup>19</sup>

The LRA started its armed violence in 1988 in the Acholi sub-region of northern Uganda. Initially the LRA was friendly to the Acholi and used guerrilla tactics mainly against government security forces.<sup>20</sup> In 1994 the LRA lost much of its popular support base among the Acholi.<sup>21</sup> At this time the majority of the Acholi had lost faith in armed violence against the government, which had demystified its political agenda and was implementing programs to empower them. From then on, the LRA radically changed its operational approach from guerrilla tactics against government forces to terror tactics mainly against civilians, especially the Acholi whom they deemed as "traitors".<sup>22</sup> At the same time, as earlier pointed out, the LRA looked outward and established friendly ties with the Government of Sudan.<sup>23</sup> The LRA then acted as a proxy for Khartoum and in return Khartoum gave the LRA weapons, ammunitions, training uniforms, food and

allowed it to use its territory.<sup>24</sup> The involvement of Khartoum complicated the counter-insurgency campaign for the UPDF, and is one of the key factors that have contributed to the resilience, brutality and longevity of the LRA conflict.

During its operations in northern Uganda, the LRA committed atrocities including summary executions, torture and mutilation, razing villages, recruitment of child soldiers, child sexual abuse, rape, forcible displacement, looting and destruction of property.<sup>25</sup> The scale of the atrocities, as earlier indicated, provoked the intervention of the international community. The LRA was henceforth declared a terrorist organization by the U.S, which began to extend technical support to the Government of Uganda to end the unnecessary suffering of civilians caused by the LRA.<sup>26</sup> In October 2005, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants against Kony and four other senior LRA leaders including Vicent Otti, Okot Odyambo, Dominic Ongwen and Raska Lukwiya, indicting them for war crimes and crimes against humanity.<sup>27</sup> None of them has been arrested, but Vicent Otti and Raska Lukwiya have since died. In May 2009 the United States President Baraka Obama signed into law the “Lord’s Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act”, legislation aimed at stopping Joseph Kony and the LRA.<sup>28</sup> This initiative was, in 2011, followed by the deployment of the troops indicated in the introduction.

In 2006, during a ceasefire with the government of Uganda, the LRA was asked to mobilize its fighters and assemble at Ri-kwang-Ba in South Sudan, pending negotiations for lasting peace and reconciliation. However, as the negotiations were in progress, the LRA decided to shift into the Garamba jungles in eastern DRC. Even here, the LRA did not refrain from attacks on civilians. Initially the attacks were on a

marginal scale, but later surged and reached alarming proportions after the failure of the Juba Peace Talks and “Operation Lightning Thunder” (OLT). Consequently between September 2008 and December 2010, the LRA killed more than 2300, abducted more than 3000, raped women, and forced abducted children to commit horrific crimes.<sup>29</sup> In addition, over 400,000 people in the region fled their homes for fear of LRA attacks including 260,000 from the DRC.<sup>30</sup> The major objective of the LRA attacks could have been to put pressure on the ICC to lift the arrest warrants against their leaders. However, having committed more atrocities in different countries, it is uncertain if a waiver by the ICC could incentivize the LRA to stop their signature activities and return to sign the Juba peace agreement.

There are no accurate accounts, other than speculation, about the numerical strength of the LRA. Some intelligence assessments put the figure around 400 fighters, while others claim the LRA could be as big as 3000 fighters living together with about 1500 women and children.<sup>31</sup> What is true, however, is that the current composition of the LRA is multinational including children abducted from Uganda, the DRC, CAR and South Sudan. The children are reported to have been indoctrinated by the LRA and trained to kill.<sup>32</sup> Some of them are forced to kill their own parents to facilitate a break with their background.<sup>33</sup> The LRA’s preference for child soldiers is rooted in the assumption that children are malleable and easier to indoctrinate.

### Causes of the LRA Conflict

The Refugee Law Project working paper No11, listed five reasons as the causes of the rebellion by the Acholi veterans and their kinsmen. First, that they feared reprisals for what many perceived to be Acholi-led massacres in the Luwero triangle during the early 1980s. Second, that they were upset at the loss of political and economic power

as a result of Museveni's breaking of a 1985 power-sharing agreement and the destructive cattle raids that they believed were sponsored by the NRM. Third, that they were afraid the new government believed to be controlled exclusively by western Ugandans would marginalize them after their dominance in the national Army. Additionally, they believed they were defending themselves against atrocities committed by certain battalions of NRA troops in 1986-7, and finally, that they saw violence as the only means to address these grievances after witnessing Uganda's successive violent power struggles since independence.<sup>34</sup>

While it is true there were some cattle raids by armed Karamajong from north eastern Uganda, the problem of cattle rustling existed long before the coming to power of the NRM government. The Karamajong acquired a large cache of arms during the fall of Amin between 1978-79, and had also been given arms by the Acholi-led regime to assist them in fighting the NRM government.<sup>35</sup> Between 1986 and 1989 the cattle raids surged, affecting not only the Acholi but other districts including Karamoja itself. This was principally due to the security gaps created by the reduction in forces when NRA units were redeployed to address the threat of insurgency in Acholiland.<sup>36</sup> The government could not, therefore, have sponsored the destructive raids.

It is important to note that after taking over leadership, the NRM formed a broad based government. The intention was to facilitate national reconciliation, promote peace and unity as enshrined in its political program.<sup>37</sup> Consistent with this program, the first cabinet appointments included leaders from the old opposition parties and fighting groups. It was in the same spirit that between 1986 and 1988, up to four northern politicians served as full cabinet ministers and eleven served as deputy ministers or

ministers of state.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, as earlier indicated, over 10,000 former UPDA fighters were absorbed into the LRA following the 1988 UPDA negotiations with the government. Although the perception of marginalization lingered on and was used by the Acholi for waging war, there was no evidence of systematic marginalization. This was more of a problem of false perception than reality.

It is true soldiers of one NRA unit deployed at Namukora behaved contrary to the NRA code of conduct, which was acknowledged by the government and corrective action taken.<sup>39</sup> However, whether this misbehavior was one of the causes for rebellion against the government, in the manner waged by the LRA, would be a good subject for further research. Otherwise, it is reported that by this time the NRA had a very cordial relationship with the local population.<sup>40</sup>

The above review, therefore, leaves this paper with two plausible causes which are considered as the major factors that provided cause for the conflict and violence. These are: the fear for prosecution; and the desire of the Acholi to restore their lost glory by recapturing political power.

The struggle by the Acholi for political and military hegemony in Uganda is traceable to the colonial history of Uganda, and particularly the colonial “Divide and Rule” policy.<sup>41</sup> By implementing this model, the British colonial administration intended to facilitate the efficient administration of Uganda, although it ended up creating a foundation for future ethnic-based power struggles. Consequently at independence in 1962, the government of Uganda led by Sir Edward Mutesa (as President) and Dr Milton Obote (as executive Prime Minister) inherited a factionalized political landscape and system in which the civil service was largely dominated by southerners and the

security forces by northerners.<sup>42</sup> Colloquially, the northerners included the Nilotics from Acholi, Lango, Kakwa and Teso among others, and the southerners included the Bantu tribes from Buganda, Bunyoro, Ankole and Busoga.<sup>43</sup>

The said ethnic-based division of labor with all its political and economic ramifications was re-enforced by the religious-based party politics that followed independence and continued until 1986. Catholics were associated with the “Democratic Party” and the Protestants with the “Uganda People’s Congress.” Modern day politics have, however, significantly succeeded in undermining the politicization of religion. In 1966 the Army commanded by Iddi Amin (a Kakwa by tribe from north western Uganda) was deployed by Obote to overthrow the government of Sir Edward Mutesa (a southerner from Buganda). This development marked the beginning of the ethnic-based power struggles and also introduced the militarization of politics in Uganda as a vehicle for ascendancy to political power.<sup>44</sup>

It is important to note that the 1966 coup effectively disenfranchised Ugandans, and placed political power effectively in the hands of the Lango and Acholi who then took most appointments in key government positions. By 1971, the relationship between Obote and Amin had become tense, and Amin was to be arrested and replaced. When Amin learnt of the plot, he quickly mobilized the non-Acholi/Lango section of the army and overthrew the government. At this time Dr Obote was out in Singapore attending a commonwealth conference.

After the coup, Amin embarked on a campaign to purge the army and the civil service of the people he suspected were Obote’s supporters, especially his tribesmen (the Langi) and cousins (the Acholi).<sup>45</sup> During the purge, many Acholi and Lango were

killed and those who survived fled into exile in Tanzania where Obote had taken refuge.<sup>46</sup> Amin ruled Uganda with an iron fist for nine years causing some Ugandans, especially the educated elite, to go into exile. He also had poor relations with Tanzania, which had given refuge to Ugandan dissidents.

In 1979, after Amin had attacked Tanzania and occupied the Kagera Salient, the Tanzanian People's Defense Forces and the Ugandan exiles who organized themselves under the "Uganda National Army (UNLA)" counter-attacked and after struggling for about five months, defeated Amin.<sup>47</sup> It is worth noting that although UNLA was composed of different tribes, it was predominantly officered by the northerners (especially the Acholi and Lango) who had taken refuge in Tanzania. These northerners saw the takeover as a golden opportunity to punish those who served under Amin's ruthless regime, and to restore their hegemonic position which had been grabbed from them.

The Lango and Acholi leaders made no effort to reconcile the country or build a national army with a fair national representation. Instead they prepared themselves to effectively dominate power by recruiting more youths from their tribes into the security forces.<sup>48</sup> They also created a big tribal militia for contingency.<sup>49</sup> To legitimize their hold on power, in 1980 they organized elections in which four political parties participated. These included: Uganda Peoples' Congress (UPC) led by Dr Milton Obote, Democratic Party (DP) led by Paul Ssemogerere: Uganda Patriotic Movement (UPM) led by Yuwari Museveni; and the Conservative Party (CP) led by Mayanja Nkangi. As was expected, the results were manipulated in favor of UPC which was viewed as representing the political aspirations of the Acholi and Lango.<sup>50</sup> Thus, political power was once again

with “popular” blessings in the hands of the two northern tribes (the Lango and their cousins the Acholi).

However, the political engineering did not augur well and soon led to insurgencies by dissident groups against the UPC government. The most organized and powerful of the groups happened to be the NRM/NRA. In the meantime there was tension and struggle between the Lango and the Acholi over the sharing of resources and positions. The Acholi felt they were marginalized on resources and yet they were bearing the brunt of the war.<sup>51</sup> This led to the coup of 1985 by Gen Okello against Dr Obote, thus shifting power into the hands of the Acholi. However, before the Acholi could fully get established, they were removed by the NRM/NRA. The Acholi who had always viewed themselves as a martial tribe felt greatly upset by this development.<sup>52</sup> They therefore decided not to surrender but wage armed rebellion which they assumed was the only mechanism for acquiring political power and for their own redemption.<sup>53</sup>

The fighting between the NRA and UNLA lasted five years, and Luwero district being close to the capital in Kampala, was the epicenter of the fighting. As earlier pointed out, the NRA attached a lot of value to popular support and with effective mobilization enjoyed much support among the local population. Meanwhile the government lost support because the UNLA responded to NRA attacks with indiscriminate brutality. In the process many people close to the operation area in Luwero were killed and their property destroyed by the UNLA.<sup>54</sup> The UNLA soldiers thought they could deter the local people from supporting the insurgency by punishing suspected collaborators. They instead ended up alienating them and fueling support for

the NRA. Once defeated, the UNLA soldiers feared they would be pursued and punished by the NRA like they had done to others and hence the rebellion.<sup>55</sup>

### LRA Activities in the DRC

The year 2006 was a tipping point in the LRA conflict. In 2005, the Khartoum government and the Sudanese Peoples' Liberation Movement signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement thus formally ending the war between the two. This development extinguished the very basis on which Khartoum gave military assistance to the LRA and used it as a proxy. Meanwhile the UPDF had been allowed by Khartoum to pursue the LRA in southern Sudan and had intensified military offensive both in northern Uganda and southern Sudan. Feeling increasingly isolated in both Uganda and the Sudan, and faced with imminent destruction by the UPDF, the LRA sued for peace. This led to the initiation of ceasefire and the "Juba Peace Talks." While the talks were in progress, as earlier indicated, the LRA shifted into the Garamba national Park, split into small mobile groups and continued to conduct attacks against civilians.

To stop the LRA from further killing civilians and destabilizing the central African region, in December 2008, Operation "Lightening Thunder" was conducted against the LRA by the regional military forces of Uganda (UPDF), DRC (FARDC), South Sudan (SPLA) and CAR. Some LRA fighters were killed and others surrendered but the operation did not succeed in ending the attacks, killings and abductions in the region.

The region's militaries in the LRA affected areas are still trying to deal with the LRA threats but are face with various challenges, including the fact that the area of operation is remote, lacking basic road and communications infrastructure. The troops also need additional critical capabilities to increase their chances of apprehending or removing LRA top commanders from the battle field. Until these forces are appropriately

equipped and effectively coordinated, the LRA is likely to continue to be elusive thus posing serious security challenges to all the countries in the region.

### Impact and Implications of the LRA Attacks

Apart from the pervasive sense of human insecurity which the LRA has generated in the Central African region, the violence has exposed the security challenges and risks inherent in leaving some national frontiers ungoverned or with limited security infrastructure. According to the International Crisis Group, the border area where the Congo, South Sudan and the CAR meet is practically ungoverned.<sup>56</sup> And that the state authorities operating from distant capitals do not have the institutional capability or reach to control their frontier regions, thus making them ideal locations for the LRA to survive.<sup>57</sup> The violence has also exposed the weakness inherent in the policy of unilateralism in the context of contemporary security challenges posed by transnational non-state actors. The affected countries have to view the LRA as a regional threat and establish a regional mechanism to work collaboratively, share information, pool resources, coordinate efforts and lobby for more international support. It is important that the intervention of the U.S. and the Congressional approval of action against the LRA should be viewed as a golden opportunity and optimally leveraged to lobby for the badly needed capabilities.

The humanitarian impact of the LRA conflict in the region has been monumental: tens of thousands of people have been killed; thousands of people especially children abducted and over two million displaced. Some of the children who were abducted were used as child soldiers and young girls as sex slaves. Some of the children rescued, still suffer from psychological trauma and may take long to recover fully. Some children were shunned because their parents believed they had committed atrocities

against their relatives or neighbors. In Acholi sub-region many children who were lucky not to be abducted grew on the streets of urban or sub-urban areas and as internally displaced persons (IDPs) in a non-traditional setting. Others were orphaned and deprived of the requisite family support system. These categories of children may become future security risks if not properly rehabilitated. In the DRC, CAR and South Sudan a similar humanitarian environment has since 2008 unfolded due to attacks by the LRA.

Economically, the LRA has been responsible for major economic disruptions in all the affected countries in terms of the destruction of the social infrastructure, loss of life or livelihoods of the affected populations and other investments. At the national level the affected governments will have to spend more on the military and by implication less on investment for development. During the protracted war against the LRA in northern Uganda, the government experienced a reduced ability to attract external investments and inability to take full advantage of opportunities such as expansion of the tourist sector and agricultural development for exports. A reduced tax base inevitably affected government revenue.

Research commissioned by the coalition of more than 40 local and international NGOs known as Civil Society Organizations for Peace in Northern Uganda (CSOPNU) showed that the conflict in northern Uganda constrained economic and social development across the whole of Uganda. The organization found that the conflict cost at least \$100 million per year (about 3% of the GDP) which by the year 2002 was higher than the annual budget of the Ministry of Health.<sup>58</sup>

Currently low-intensity counter-LRA operations are going on in the central African region and this will inevitably translate into more costs that would otherwise be used for development purposes, hence increased impact of the conflict.

### The Current Strategy

After the failure of the Juba peace talks in 2008, it became clear that Kony had no interest in peace, was resuming hostilities and working to replenish his ranks with abductees. It was also clear that the LRA had no regard for the lives of the people of the DRC, CAR and South Sudan, and would continue to do pillage unless stopped. As earlier indicated, the region's leaders therefore decided to launch a new military offensive against the LRA.<sup>59</sup> This decision by the Region's Leaders to undertake "joint military action" underscored the fact that the LRA conflict was no longer exclusively a Ugandan problem but a regional issue, whose resolution would require the effective coordination of the different national militaries. This was in itself a positive step.

On 14 December 2008 Operation Lightning Thunder was launched, as earlier indicated, against the LRA. This operation had technical and logistical support from USAFRICOM. The offensive involved air strikes on the LRA bases in the initial phase, followed with an assault by ground forces.<sup>60</sup> The planners of OLT had assumed that the air strikes would have a decisive effect on the morale of the LRA, and the resultant shock would make it easy for the ground troops to deal with the survivors. Although the operation did not proceed as planned, conceptually it was a good strategy because there was intelligence and the scenario was appropriate for a conventional type of operation. However, the LRA fighters have since changed tactics, split into small groups and are mobile. This requires a completely different approach with different capabilities.

During OLT, dozens of LRA officers were killed or captured or simply surrendered and LRA's core fighters were reduced to an estimated 150 or 200, in addition to the accompanying women and children.<sup>61</sup> However, the LRA recovered quickly and even conducted more attacks against civilians. This was because the LRA leadership especially Kony was not put out of the battlefield. The LRA is maintained as a cohesive force by a common conviction of its fighters in the "mythical powers" of Kony, and their fear of his brutality against deviants". Kony is thus the strategic "Centre of Gravity" (CoG) of the LRA. The CoG is the source of power that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act. The elimination of Kony can therefore have a "dominoes effect" on the LRA, in the same way the "Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola" (UNITA) disintegrated when its leader Jonas Savimbi was killed.<sup>62</sup> UNITA like the LRA had fought against the legitimate government of Angola for over a generation. The only fundamental difference between the two is that UNITA had a political agenda and joined elective politics in Angola after Savimbi's death.<sup>63</sup>

Following OLT, the LRA retaliated by attacking and terrorizing the local communities in the central African region.<sup>64</sup> The history of the LRA is replete with incidents of revenge on unprotected communities whenever its bases were attacked by the military.<sup>65</sup> One vivid example was in 2002 when their bases in southern Sudan were attacked by the UPDF, and they responded by crossed into and attacking villages in northern Uganda.<sup>66</sup> Based on this pattern, an effective military strategy needs to include the simultaneous deployment of offensive forces to track the LRA with the deployment of defensive forces to ensure the effective protection of civilian communities and critical infrastructure in the LRA affected areas.

It is important to note that the protection of communities is a very challenging task requiring adequate resources to cover all suspected areas, the establishment of early warning mechanisms and coordination with friendly forces. The resources required include networked radio communication systems, security road networks and rapid response capability. The U.S government through USAID is currently funding projects in the DRC to expand existing early warning networks to remote communities.<sup>67</sup> This is a good opportunity which needs to be expanded to cover all the LRA affected areas.

The protection of communities also requires a lot of focus, and can best be done by local forces that naturally have higher stakes in their properties than foreign forces. The strategy of countering the LRA in the DRC, CAR and South Sudan therefore, requires the establishment of a well equipped security force of home guards (neighborhood watchers) as was done with remarkable success in parts of Uganda to protect vulnerable communities against rebel attacks, and recently in Iraq and Afghanistan by the U.S against extremist Islamists.

The establishment of home guards runs the risk of militarizing the region and may not be easily acceptable by the DRC, CAR and South Sudan. However, by sharing experience with Uganda, these countries can overcome the associated fears. In Uganda the home guards were rewarded and demobilized after the war, and those who wished to join the Army were enlisted and taken for professional training after meeting the minimum requirements. The same procedure can be adopted by the DRC, CAR and South Sudan.

For the military campaign to succeed, the forces in the theatre including the UPDF, the Congolese Army (FARDC), United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), SPLA, the Central African Army and the local defense forces need to be effectively networked and coordinated via radio and liaison arrangements.

Meanwhile for effective coordination, these different forces need to establish an appropriate command and control structure, common operations procedures and rules of engagement. They will also need a “Joint Command and Control” structure, and a “Joint Intelligence Fusion Centre”. Critical capabilities required include air assets, since counter-insurgency operations are by their very nature “Joint Air-Land Operations”.

Although air power has shortcomings in a densely forested and jungle terrain like in central Africa, technically airpower can provide considerable advantages to counter insurgency forces. Air power can help maneuver forces to overcome rough terrain and poor transport networks which constrain mobility.<sup>68</sup> It can also respond quickly with precision fires and move foot troops immediately to vantage points. Air power can be used to deliver ordnance and logistics including food and medical supplies to troops in remote areas, and can also help in facilitating communications between units as a base station, over watch and coordination of units converging on a common objective from different axes.

It is of great advantage that 100 U.S. servicemen were deployed to re-enforce the regional militaries in the campaign against the LRA. They bring along experience, and will improve command and control, planning and coordination. However, the counter- LRA campaign also requires technical hard ware for intelligence collection and

rapid movement of troops to vantage points. The militaries currently tracking the LRA are lacking in these critical capabilities. There is need, as earlier pointed out, for the region's leaders to take full advantage of the Congressional approval to lobby for more support. While testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on February 2004 about the LRA, U.S Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is quoted to have said:

I have been following the Lord's Resistance Army for more than 15 years. I don't understand why we cannot end this scourge. And we (the U.S government) are going to do everything we can to provide support we believe will enable us to do that.<sup>69</sup>

The emphasis on the military approach need not obscure the fact that counter-insurgency operations are inextricably "civil-military operations." Although military efforts are necessary and sometimes primary during counter-insurgency, they are only effective when integrated into a "comprehensive strategy" employing all "instruments of power". The instruments of power available to a nation include political, military, economic and information. The integration and coordination of these tools in appropriate measures is the key to ending the LRA conflict. This integration requires the crafting of a comprehensive strategy of which military strategy is only a component. The challenge, however, is how to build consensus across the affected states and to put this into effect.

The involvement and participation of international organization including the UN, AU, EU, NGOs, and the local community leaders adds legitimacy and credibility to the regional initiative and should be viewed as a great opportunity. It demonstrates their concern for the security of the people in the region and willingness to contribute in fixing the problem. There is need, therefore, to craft a strategy that capitalizes on and can leverage on their sense of urgency before they shift attention to other conflict areas.

Their involvement inevitably comes with its own challenges and would require the establishment of an overarching leadership to facilitate greater cooperation. The importance of this was recognized by the AU which has appointed a Special Envoy for the LRA affected areas.

### Legal Approach

In an effort to encourage defection from the LRA, the government of Uganda in 2000 passed a legislation called “The Amnesty Act”. This in effect meant that the LRA defectors who denounced rebellion would not be prosecuted in the courts of law. They would instead be given blanket amnesty and a comprehensive resettlement package. This was a good innovation because it has managed to remove from the LRA over 20,000 fighters, thus saving lives and reducing the strength of the LRA by encouraging defections.<sup>70</sup> The Act is also popular among the communities in northern Uganda because the majority of LRA combatants were forced to join against their will.<sup>71</sup>

However, some analysts have argued that although the act is helpful to the state and the direct beneficiaries, it is not a sufficient conflict sensitive tool at the individual or community level because it does not facilitate accountability for past mistakes.<sup>72</sup> This argument has merit but does not make much political sense in the circumstances because the most pressing need is to end the LRA atrocities and avert the increase of the victims. The issue of peace building, although fundamental for lasting peace, can still be addressed using traditional mechanisms at the appropriate time. The issue of reconciliation and accountability for past mistakes was exhaustively discussed between the government and the LRA during the Juba peace talks.<sup>73</sup> The same agreement can still be revisited if Kony shows up and signs a peace agreement.

In October 2005, as earlier pointed out, the International Criminal Court unsealed the arrest warrants for the key leaders of the LRA. It is, important to note that the ICC action helped to put the LRA in the spotlight by “criminalizing” its activities. Additionally, the ICC action had the positive effect of raising a “red flag” against potential or actual LRA supporters, and requiring signatories to the Rome statute to execute the arrest order. It therefore provided a legal and moral basis for action.

Unfortunately, the arrest warrants have not been able to reduce or end the commission of crimes by the LRA. During negotiations, the arrest warrants were used by Kony as an excuse for not signing the peace agreement, thus discrediting the relevance of the indictments. Some civil society organizations especially the Acholi Religious Leaders even went out of their way to demand for the arrest warrants to be withdrawn in the interest of peace. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has, however, insisted that the warrants must be executed.<sup>74</sup> It is important to note that the warrants have a strategic effect, and should be viewed as such against impunity not only in the context of Kony but other armed groups which do not respect Human Rights and the Law of War. For lack of exposure on how the international system works, Kony seems to believe that he will continue to elude arrest and prosecution. This may explain why the arrest warrants have not deterred the LRA from committing further crimes. Withdrawing the arrest warrants may not stop the conflict, but encourage Kony to demand for more concessions.

### Information Operations

Reports and briefings by various International Agencies including MONUSCO, UNMISS, the region’s military units and the International NGOs (Human Rights Watch, Resolve, Enough, International Crisis Group) operating in north eastern DRC, South

Sudan and CAR have through their communications made it possible for the international public to know about the wickedness of the LRA, and the humanitarian plight of the displaced communities in the Central African region. Although the reports and narratives have not dissuaded the LRA from committing further atrocities, they have succeeded in galvanizing international response and practical action against the LRA. The U.S increased its commitment and the UNSC has made declarations condemning the LRA and encouraging the region's states to fully cooperate against the LRA. In November 2011, African leaders through the AU declared LRA a "terrorist organization" further raising the red flag against the LRA and isolating it.<sup>75</sup> This declaration will discourage any sovereign entity from giving support or sanctuary to the LRA.

There has also been many defections from the LRA thanks to information circulated through leaflets and radio broadcasts targeting the LRA. This has helped to save lives and mitigate the potential risks of a military offensive on abductees. The new offensive needs to fully integrate and step up "information operations" as one of the supporting tools for ending the LRA conflict. As part of civil-military operations strategy, there is need to fully utilize the information capabilities of all the NGOs operating in the region in a coordinated manner to mobilize resources for the campaign, isolate the LRA, encourage defections and keep the world informed of progress.

### Recommendations

There is need for the affected countries to deepen cooperation, view the LRA conflict as a common security threat and allocate sufficient resources for the on-going campaign. It is necessary that they take full advantage of the involvement and current mood of the international community, especially the United States, to lobby for and acquire the critical capabilities required for the campaign. There is great advantage in

the fact that at the moment, the LRA has no external assistance, no local political support, and has limited equipment. LRA's survival is simply dependent on the gaps in security deployments, mobile way of life and remote jungle hideouts, which can be overcome with good organization, suitable strategy and technical support from the international community.

Aware that Kony and the LRA will not seek to negotiate in the absence of intensive military pressure, there is need to launch and sustain robust military operations against the LRA. While the offensive is in progress, the civilian communities in LRA affected areas should be effectively protected. This requires the development and separate employment of light mobile (offensive) infantry units and zonal (defensive) units both supported by air forces. The zonal/defensive units need not necessarily be regular forces but Para-military forces recruited from the local indigenous communities mentored and supported by regular forces (including UN troops) operating in the LRA affected areas.

To improve coordination of the regional militaries involved in the counter-LRA campaign, there is need to establish appropriate coordination systems and mechanisms including a Combined Joint Command and Control structure, a Combined Joint Intelligence Centre, Common Operating Procedures and Rules of Engagement.

To reduce the problem of remoteness, poor coordination and movement of forces or supplies across the theatre of operation, the international community should be requested to assist in opening up "security road networks" and "telephone booster stations." As part of the new counter-LRA strategy, the U.S. government is already

doing some related projects, and should be requested to cover the entire theatre. This will by itself have a psychological effect on the LRA fighters.

There is need to fully integrate and coordinate the military efforts with the civilian efforts in a comprehensive counter-LRA strategy covering the developing of the affected region, humanitarian assistance to displaced persons, mobilization of resources, reporting on progress of the operations and management of defectors. This should be done by establishing an inter-agency mechanism to facilitate constant and effective communication between the civil authorities and all other agencies involved in ending the conflict. The African Union Special Envoy for the LRA affected areas could provide the leadership for the regional Inter-Agency organization.

The ICC arrest warrants should not be suspended but widened to include crimes committed outside Uganda in the DRC, CAR and South Sudan. Suspending them will symbolize a weakness on the part of the international community in enforcing International Law and dealing with acts terrorism. The Amnesty Law should remain in force to encourage defections and resettle them. The DRC, CAR and South Sudan should also adopt a similar act to cover their nationals in the LRA. Meanwhile, information operations in LRA affected areas should be stepped up to encourage the defections.

### Conclusion

The “Lord’s Resistance Army” conflict has over time evolved from what was a local Ugandan conflict into a regional transnational conflict affecting the security of civilians in the DRC, CAR and S. Sudan. The LRA has killed and abducted hundreds of civilians including children, and has also displaced hundreds causing a humanitarian crisis. The LRA is therefore a common threat to the national security interests of all the

four countries. The LRA has no external support, is comparatively weak in terms of personnel and equipment, and has survived this far by avoiding contact with regular military formations and hiding in challenging terrain. However, due to various operational and technical challenges faced by the region's militaries involved in dealing with the LRA, the LRA has continued to pose a threat to the peace and stability in the region. This paper has labored to examine and highlighted these operational and technical challenges, and has made recommendations that could assist in formulating an effective strategy.

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