

INTERNATIONAL WORKING GROUP ON THE LRA

Diagnostic Study Of The Lord's Resistance Army

June 2011



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The International Working Group on the Lord's Resistance Army (IWG-LRA) was initiated in June 2010 following a meeting of interested parties to coordinate their efforts on the LRA issue. In November 2010, the IWG-LRA commissioned this Diagnostic Study to inform its members and arrive at a common understanding of the issues and challenges facing the countries where the LRA is operating. The report was first shared with the IWG-LRA at its meeting of June 2011 and presented to the International Conference for the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) at its meeting on Negative Forces in September 2011.

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DIAGNOSTIC STUDY OF THE LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY

Introduction

Since the failures of the Juba Peace Talks and Operation Lightning Thunder, there has been much public discussion about ways and means of dealing with the challenge posed by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). However, few attempts were made to analyze the political, historical and military dimensions of the problem in a coherent way. The aim of the LRA Diagnostic Study is to arrive at an adequate contextual description of these three main elements of the LRA problem in order to facilitate discussion among the members of the International Working Group (IWG) on the LRA.

The study was conducted over the period December 2010 – April 2011 by a small team of experts working in close collaboration with a network of established researchers. In addition to interviews and consultations with diplomats, representatives from engaged agencies and governments, academics and military officers, the study team members conducted a series of field visits to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Uganda and South Sudan. Visits to the Central African Republic (CAR) were not possible due to time and logistical constraints.

Main Findings

There is little political consensus on what could or should be done about the LRA. This Study identifies three distinct points of view, thereafter referred to as "school of thoughts". Adherents of the first school of thought share the belief that putting the LRA on the agenda of the international community as a critical political issue is counterproductive. Indeed, they see the LRA first-and-foremost as a symptom of the general lack of local capacity to enforce state authority in remote areas of fragile states. Called the *state building* school, the main argument supporting its view is that the LRA is a criminal organization that would continue to exist in some form until the LRA-affected countries' security institutions are improved through long-term international technical assistance.

The second school of thought, categorized according to its support for a decisive *military solution*, includes representatives from a set of agencies and interests who see no other solution to the LRA challenge except for the application of military force, including the targeting of the group's leadership.

Finally, there are those who think that the best hope for an end to the violence is through the recourse to negotiations with members of the LRA as part of a comprehensive strategy.

The depth of disagreement is both divisive and unhelpful but is unlikely to be resolved without much further discussion grounded on a more exhaustive analysis than is currently available. However, there seems to be strong agreement on at least one factual premise: that the LRA has been scattered and

reduced in numbers to the point that it is in what is now termed to be in “survival mode.” Research for this study suggests that this premise is based on a mistaken understanding of the history of the LRA. The LRA’s current tactical and strategic decisions can be seen as consistent with a pattern relevant to its adaptive nature and its ability to recover from hard hits. As a result, the threat posed by the LRA to civilians could still increase in scope and expand in territory in the months to come.

However, the main political issues affecting a consensus, at least within areas currently affected by LRA attacks, revolve around perceptions of relevance within the national dynamics of Uganda and each of the three countries directly affected – the DRC, CAR, and South Sudan. In some ways, the issues reflect the conflict between *realpolitik* and classic liberal political thought about individual rights and states’ duties to protect citizens. Unfortunately, the communities targeted by the LRA occupy space within weak states, with poor capacities and limited political will to deal with the problem. And even if political interest led to more concern for those affected, civilians could not expect adequate protection from within their own political systems without generous external support. But the will to provide external assistance is sapped by the disagreements outlined above.

The study includes a review of the operational history of the LRA in an attempt to delineate some of the factual premises necessary to greater political consensus. Illustrating ways in which the LRA has operated successfully over decades against a numerically and logistically superior Ugandan People’s Defense Force (UPDF), this part of the study lays out reasons why present characterizations of the LRA as being in ‘survival mode’ may be mistaken. Drawing upon a collection of interviews with former LRA combatants and cooperative military sources within the UPDF, the historical section of the study shows how the combination of inspired leadership, strategic thinking, good intelligence and appropriate adaptation to their operational environment have allowed the LRA to generate havoc for more than two decades in four different countries in Central Africa. This section includes an account of the LRA’s recruitment and training systems as well as studies of the evolution of their command structures and communications systems.

The fourth section of the study contains a simplified military context, looking carefully at the implications of the operating characteristics and capacities of the LRA, as well as some of the forces deployed to confront the armed group.

The fifth section contains short discussions of alternative ways of dealing with the LRA, including negotiation, the attempt to separate and reduce LRA leadership through direct contacts, and the relative importance of attempts to develop better communications infrastructure in the region. This section considers a number of limitations affecting each possibility in a context limited by political, resource and time constraints.

The study concludes with arguments in support of more serious analysis, more realistic planning based on better research, and the need to review the capacities of existing structures to address an exceedingly complex context. Ultimately, the study argues that the responsibility to protect civilians imposes an obligation to find alternatives to approaches that are clearly not working.

DIAGNOSTIC STUDY OF THE LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY (LRA)

Section I - Background, objectives & approach and assessment of the LRA challenge

Background

The failure of the Juba Peace talks between the LRA and the Government of Uganda was followed almost immediately by a set of violent events that is still generating aftershocks in the three neighboring countries most directly affected by LRA operations: the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Sudan. The sequence of these events is significant though hasty attribution of cause to incidents that require further study has added to the general confusion associated with the LRA. However, the launch of Operation Lightning Thunder (OLT), a UPDF military offensive campaign against the LRA, and the deployment of Congolese and United Nations troops into the region were followed very quickly by a string of atrocities attributed to the LRA, including two successive massacres over the Christmases of 2008 and 2009 that left many observers questioning the effectiveness of protection measures put in place by the various military forces in the region. These events, particularly the massacre of December 2009 in the Makombo area of Haut Uélé, DRC, provoked questions about the wisdom of offensive operations against the LRA without adequate accompanying measures to protect civilians in the area of operations.¹

The need to understand better the causes and correlations linking behaviors of both the LRA and the set of military forces arrayed against them is critical to developing coherent policy. At the moment, calls for strong action against the LRA from agencies such as Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the Enough Project compete with calls for negotiation from the network of European NGOs for advocacy on Central Africa (EurAc) and regional religious and cultural leaders. Groups from both sides of this divide urge the need for a coherent and coordinated strategy yet each grounds its arguments on different perspectives that reflect fundamental differences in belief about both the evidence available and its interpretation. Given the number of lives already lost in the midst of what appears to be a policy morass, it is urgent that a

¹ Clement Ochan, "Assessing Uganda's Cross-Border Pursuit of the Lord's Resistance Army," Tufts University, Feinstein International Center (Boston, Feb. 2009); Joost van Puijenbrock & Nico Plooijer, "How EnLightning Is the Thunder?: Study on the Lord's Resistance Army in the Border Region of DR Congo, Sudan and Uganda," IKV Pax Christi (Utrecht, Netherlands, Feb. 2009); Human Rights Watch, *The Christmas Massacres: LRA Attacks on Civilians in Northern Congo* (New York, Feb. 2009); Mareike Schomerus & Kennedy Tumutegyeize, "After Operation Lightning Thunder: Protecting Communities and Building Peace" (London: Conciliation Resources, April 2009); and Julia Spiegel & Noel Atama 'Finishing the Fight against the LRA,' Enough Project, 2009. For broader criticism of the handling of the LRA campaign, see also, Ronald Atkinson, (1) "Revisiting Operation Lightning Thunder," *Insight, The Independent* (Kampala, 9 June 2009); (2) "From Uganda to the Congo and Beyond: Pursuing the Lord's Resistance Army" (New York: International Peace Institute, Dec. 2009); and (3) "Afterword: A Perspective on the Last Thirty Years," in *The Roots of Ethnicity: The Origins of the Acholi of Uganda*, rev. ed. (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2010).

serious attempt be made to better understand all the relevant factors affecting the full range of policy alternatives, including the possibility of negotiation, and the challenges and limitations associated with all other approaches.

Though little has been written about the military history or composition of the LRA, a number of studies of its behavior and impact already exist. These can be studied to extract useful operational information that could be of benefit to diplomats, military planners, human rights activists and humanitarian actors alike. When studied together with research drawn from former LRA fighters and other military sources, it is possible to tease out a preliminary understanding of historical patterns which suggest consistent strategies and tactics used by the LRA.

However, little has so far been written about the various civil and military capacities of the countries now composing the LRA area of operations, and even less about the limitations that flow from the relative strengths of their military forces and the tactical advantages for either side entailed by strategy, time, space and terrain. Yet many of the calls for action made by humanitarian or human rights agencies would seem to impose protection obligations that are well beyond the capacities of the forces available. Similarly, calls to mobilize civilian defense or negotiations seem to reflect a limited grasp of the historical, political, social and cultural conditions that currently exist across the region. This leads to calls for unrealistic policy decisions and to strategies that have so far failed either to protect civilians or to contain the LRA. It is not, however, unreasonable to argue that military operations so far have achieved some useful outcomes through attrition. It might also be argued that these military operations would not have been possible had it not been for the intelligence gathering opportunities generated by the negotiations that preceded them.

This study is grounded on the belief that none of the current strategies in use by the forces and agencies in the region are adequate to the challenge presented by the LRA and that a rigorous study of the history of the LRA, the operational context, the potential for a negotiated solution, the relative capacities of the forces available and the political issues affecting the availability of resources as well as the likelihood of their use is the first step to generating more creative and effective solutions. It is the view of the study team that humanitarian work can only mitigate a situation that requires, ultimately, a comprehensive resolution, including political/ security/ and development aspects, if basic conditions of human dignity are to be restored to the affected region.

Objectives and approach

This LRA Diagnostic Study sets out to describe the broad set of problems posed by the LRA, including regional and international capacities and commitment to address them. Recognizing that the success of any strategy will depend on the accuracy and completeness of the description and analysis that precedes it, this document is focused on the LRA and the political and operational context in which it operates, and offers only preliminary recommendations.

The study combines analysis, review of existing sources pertaining to relevant historical, cultural and psychological factors, field research and expert peer review. The study was carried out between November 2010 and April 2011. It began in November 2010 with a brainstorming workshop involving a select group of technical and academic experts. The workshop allowed for a refinement of the study's objectives, methods and work plans. However, a policy issue arose at this point that eventually prevented the team from fielding the full set of competencies required to complete the study and this

resulted in a delay over December and January while other options were explored.² In the end, it was decided to proceed with an analysis of general factors and the political context and to assemble a first draft of an operational history without the assistance of a technical military expert.

It was also decided to include a short discussion of those military factors that seemed to follow logically from the other portions of the work, even without the assistance of a qualified military expert who would have been able to conduct a satisfactory analysis of the military situation and to assist with the identification of militarily relevant correlations elsewhere in the Diagnostic. The objective was also to develop a network of technical contacts and identify consultants who can be engaged to pursue specific lines of enquiry in future research. The study has been reviewed by two independent expert consultants.

Method

After the initial experts meeting in November 2010, a small team of consultants was assembled, and produced an Inception Report, which was shared with IWG members and discussed at a meeting in January 2011. A team of three expert consultants then conducted a review of documents and a series of interviews and field visits that included formal visits to the two United Nations Department of Peace Keeping Operations (UN DPKO) missions in the LRA-affected area as well as discussions with government and military leaders, civil society representatives, religious leaders and engaged NGOs. This included discussions held in national capitals of IWG members and regional states. Several efforts to reach Bangui for similar discussions foundered on logistics and security issues. Finally, the study team worked closely with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Reintegration and Resettlement (DDRRR) staff including several meetings in Goma.

This study is the result of a collaboration in which each expert researcher wrote up his own findings, after which these were assembled into a single document. The order of presentation of research proceeds from a short discussion of political context through a brief operational history of the LRA to a discussion of some of the implications that can be drawn from the previous sections for both military and non-military approaches.

Difficulty in a common assessment of the LRA challenge

At a conceptual level, the set of problems posed by the presence and actions of the LRA in the four affected countries constitutes a direct challenge for those who hold to principles set out in UN Security Council Resolution 1674 (2006), which articulates states' responsibilities to protect their own populations (known as R2P). The section below on politics describes conditions of *realpolitik* that seem to underpin political decisions taken both in the region and by the international community through the United Nations and the African Union (AU). In some cases, political leaders challenge the truth of reports of the LRA presence in their country while other leaders acknowledge the problem but believe that it is beyond their capacity to handle and therefore requires outside assistance. Uganda's government and military leaders, on the other hand, have often promised quick and easy victory over the LRA, even as the group, now operating far beyond Uganda's borders, diminished as both a military and political priority throughout 2010.

² The TDRP mandate did not permit the funding of a military study of this type and no other member of the IWG felt comfortable with the idea either.

As will be explained below, international partners may agree in principle about the nature of the threat, but seem in practice to be waiting for someone else to act upon it. In the meantime, the LRA problem is not adequately addressed and the Azande community in particular – situated astride the borders of northeastern DRC, western South Sudan and southeastern CAR where the LRA is active – pays the price. The challenge to adherents of R2P is to determine how collective agreements expressed in Resolution 1674 are to be translated into meaningful protective action in cases where either the political will or the physical capacity to act effectively does not exist –or where those actions that are being taken are not working.

It would be a grave mistake to write the LRA off as a spent force. It is worth remembering that a very small number of LRA fighters, sometimes operating in groups composed of as few as five,³ were able to generate hundreds of internally displaced persons (IDPs⁴) in Southern Sudan while allegedly operating as allies of the Government of Sudan.⁵ It should also be remembered that this method of operating in small dispersed groups was used effectively in Northern Uganda between 1988 and 2005. In short, the effectiveness of the LRA does not depend on its size but on its deliberate use of terror attacks, its exploitation of the weaknesses of opposing armies, an understanding of its own strengths and weaknesses, and its strategic selection of areas of operation that cut across national boundaries and military areas of responsibility.

It would also be a mistake to underestimate the capacity of Joseph Kony to analyze his situation and to adapt accordingly. He has survived several near defeats in the past and is skilled at adapting his strategies and tactics to maximize his own effectiveness against much stronger opponents. Neither should one forget the period when the LRA was reportedly supported by Khartoum⁶ during the civil war with South Sudan, nor the LRA tactical defeat of the UPDF at the battle of Imotong Mountains in 2002. One of the earliest reports of the LRA occupation of Garamba Park included an account of them capturing a Park Ranger and debriefing him on geography over a period of weeks. As will be discussed in detail below, reports from former fighters indicate a training system that takes new recruits through progressive stages of experience and training culminating in leadership posts for the most gifted and reliable among those who began as captives. The LRA has intelligent leadership with long experience of fighting and surviving against superior forces.

The LRA is now widely considered to have lost its political relevance in Uganda and to have been reduced to a “survival mode”⁷ of operations. However, its *survival* has been at the cost of at least 2,000 dead, 2,800 or more abducted and over 350,000 displaced.⁸ It succeeded in generating this much harm during the period since the start of OLT, in other words, while on the run from a US-supported military operation by up to 4,500 UPDF soldiers who were supposedly operating in loose collaboration with UN peacekeeping mission (MONUSCO), Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC),

³ Interview with Director of Operations, SPLA, Juba, 29 March 2011

⁴ OCHA LRA Regional Update dated 7 April 2011

⁵ Interview with Director of Operations, SPLA Juba, 29 March 2011

⁶ The team did not have the chance to travel to Khartoum and so rely on open source material with reference to the LRA-Sudan connection. See inter alia. Dagne, Ted (2011) Uganda: Current Conditions and the Crisis in North Uganda. Congressional Research Service, Washington D.C, USA, pp.6-7 Schomerus, Mareike (2007) The Lord's Resistance Army in Sudan: a history and overview. HSBA working paper, 8. Small Arms Survey, Geneva, Switzerland, pp.24-27 and Prunier, Gérard. 2004. 'Rebel Movements and Proxy Warfare: Uganda, Sudan and the Congo (1986– 99).' African Affairs, Vol. 103, No. 412, pp. 359–83.

⁷ See the previous section on political issues for a discussion of the level of consensus on this point.

⁸ INTERSOS, “The Lord’s Resistance Army: A Regional Approach to a Regional Problem” April 2011, p2. Similar figures are found in relevant OCHA and HRW reports.

Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and Armed Forces of Central Africa (FACA). It should be remembered that victory has too often been declared in Northern Uganda only to have the LRA re-appear.

Many sources – including UN and international NGO reports – indicate an upsurge in small-scale attacks since the beginning of this year; this is the same point in time that the use of the term “survival strategy” began to gain currency.⁹ In the past, periods of heavy abduction and looting by the LRA have preceded increased military activity. The recently reported pattern of small-scale attacks in which few firearms were used is suggestive of what military forces call “live training” and may indicate that the LRA is using the period of relative security from UPDF pursuit to convert new recruits abducted over the past months into skilled fighters. This could be read as part of a process to prepare for prolonged operations away from their traditional area of operations in Northern Uganda rather than as a mere necessary adaptation for survival.

Though there is a consensus that the core elements of the LRA fighting force consist of less than 250 Acholi, there is little known about the numbers of new recruits who either have been or are in the process of undergoing conditioning and training. It should be remembered that many if not most of the LRA senior officers began as captives. The question now is the degree of confidence Kony places in his non-Acholi subordinates and the effectiveness of conditioning methods adapted to controlling Acholi when applied to Azande or other ethnicities. It is possible that there is a much larger potential force of combatants available than currently assessed.

It is also difficult at the moment to assess accurately the level of armaments and the numbers and nature of weapons and munitions available to the LRA. Some of the military support items received and cached during the period of Sudanese support have been captured or used but, without accurate knowledge of how much was cached in the first place, it is impossible to calculate what is left. It would be consistent with Kony's past practice to mask his strength by restricting the use of firearms and dispersing his forces so that only small numbers are reported at any one time.

Finally, it should be remembered that the LRA only has to survive to succeed. As long as it is present, it is capable of generating insecurity in the region. To survive, it needs only to avoid, as much as possible, direct contact with superior armed forces and continue to resupply itself from vulnerable civilians. As long as it retains the freedom to choose the time and place of its attacks, it retains the tactical and strategic initiative.

⁹ UNOCHA publishes a monthly report mapping LRA attacks across their area of operations. The term “survival” has been used in military briefings given by MONUSCO and the UPDF over the past few months.

Section II - Political Context

Legacy of two successive failures

In late December 2008, the Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF) launched Operation Lightning Thunder against the LRA in Haut Uélé, in the Congolese Orientale Province, marking the de facto end of any lingering hope of success for the Juba Talks. These had begun with much optimism in 2006.¹⁰ During OLT, US-backed aerial strikes missed their main target, Joseph Kony, and the poorly coordinated deployment of 1,200 Ugandan and 3,500 Congolese ground forces allowed for massive retribution against civilians by the LRA. Hoping to diffuse the pressure of the UPDF military offensive, the rebels dispersed into small mobile groups over large areas in the DRC, in neighboring Sudan, and the CAR.¹¹

The double failure of the Juba Process and the military strike had a profound impact on the approaches adopted by regional and international stakeholders to deal with the LRA. Of great consequence was the loss of influence of the main civilian figures who had participated in the Juba process and who had worked under the premise that the LRA problem was closely linked to the political situation in Northern Uganda. The influence of these individuals was quickly supplanted by another group of specialists – who championed a more militarized, DDRRR¹²-focused approach. According to these specialists, the Juba Peace talks had revealed Kony's unequivocal rejection of a peaceful settlement, and thus the necessity for a strategic paradigm centered on neutralizing Kony and his top lieutenants while reducing the LRA's strength through military attrition and defections.¹³

The authorization to deploy UPDF forces into three LRA-affected countries demonstrated the regional reach of the LRA, while paradoxically marking the declining threat of Kony's group in Uganda. Negotiated at the highest level, the conditions set for this authorization were never explicitly revealed. Three months after the launch of OLT in Congo, the Ugandan and Congolese Ministers of Defense announced a transfer of responsibility to the FARDC and attended a withdrawing ceremony of UPDF troops in the town of Dungu on 15 March 2009.¹⁴ In reality, Ugandan forces remained in the region to continue chasing the commanders of the LRA. Renewed horrendous mass crimes triggered a lasting deterioration of humanitarian conditions in the region. This negative development helped human rights

¹⁰ For a critical analysis of the Juba process, see in particular "Part Three: Peace and Justice", in Tim Allen and Koen Vlassenroot (eds.), *The Lord's Resistance Army – Myth and Reality* (Zed Books, London, New York, 2010), pp. 187-278, and "Part One: The Juba Peace Talks", in Pal Wrange and Onyango John Francis (eds.), *The International Criminal Court and the Juba Peace Process or Global Governance and Local Friction*, (forthcoming).

¹¹ See *Twenty-seventh report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, S/2009/160, 27 March 2009, pts. 19-21. In pt.21: "Reports indicate that more than 700 people have been killed and many hundreds of others, primarily children, have been abducted since the start of the joint operations. As a result of those attacks, 180,000 people have fled their homes and more than 16,000 Congolese have sought refuge in Southern Sudan."

¹² DDRRR – program approaches innovated in the Great Lakes region aimed at disarming and repatriating foreign armed groups to their country of origin.

¹³ Interviews for the Diagnostic Study, Europe, United States, Africa, February to March 2011.

¹⁴ "Dungu: le retrait des troupes ougandaises a démarré", Radio Okapi, 16 March 2009.

organizations in Washington to mobilize US policy-makers behind the need for a new comprehensive approach to solve the LRA issue.¹⁵

Simultaneously, the leadership of the UN peacekeeping mission in DRC (MONUC, now MONUSCO) was undermined by widespread criticisms from the humanitarian community, which complained about the inability of the blue helmets to protect civilians despite assisting FARDC troops in military operations in Orientale Province as well as in the Kivu region.¹⁶ Its authority was further reduced by political tensions with Kinshasa, to the point that in November 2009, Congolese President Kabila called for the first time for the UN peacekeepers to start withdrawing. The UN Security Council resisted this call and negotiated benchmarks for a future drawdown. The issue of closing down the peacekeeping mission had however been raised by the host country and thus such a demand could be reiterated.

Meanwhile, the UN Mission in the CAR and Chad (MINURCAT), although appreciated by local authorities in eastern Chad and Northern CAR, was ordered by N'Djamena to complete the withdrawal of its 1,500 uniformed personnel by end 2010, ahead of presidential elections eventually held in April 2011. In Sudan in 2009 and 2010, the 10,500-strong UN Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS) focused on supporting the referendum on the future status of South Sudan and managing tensions between Khartoum and Juba. As Southern independence is scheduled for early July 2011¹⁷, tensions have been rising, culminating on 21 May 2011 with the northern army forces moving into Abyei, the capital of the disputed border region.

Following a spike in LRA attrition rates in 2009, military pressure on the LRA dramatically reduced through 2010. In the face of limited intelligence and mobility challenges, the UPDF decreased the pace of their initial aggressive operations. Small groups of LRA combatants learnt how to cross boundaries to benefit from poor coordination between UN missions and national armies. The chase after the top rebel commanders slowed progressively to a stop as tensions between Ugandan military and the other national forces revealed the lack of cohesion of the anti-LRA coalition. In the absence of formal security provided by the regular armed forces in South Sudan, paramount chiefs from the Azande community in Western Equatoria formed groups of militias known as "Arrow Boys."

After some allegedly unsuccessful attempt to secure support from Khartoum in 2009 and 2010,¹⁸ Kony and the LRA have been profiting from this lull in UPDF operations and from the inconsistent international attention to regroup in Orientale Province, DRC.¹⁹ Despite optimistic statements from Kinshasa and from the military spokesperson for MONUSCO that the group has been dramatically

¹⁵ Human Right Watch was the first organization to reveal the extensive scale of retribution from the LRA after the OLT in "The Christmas Massacres, LRA attacks on Civilians in Northern Congo", Human Right Watch, February 2009. This report, followed quickly by other publications from many non-governmental organizations, called the attention of the US Congress on the negative consequences of the US-backed OLT.

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch, "Eastern DR Congo: Surge in Army Atrocities - UN Peacekeeping Force Knowingly Supports Abusive Military Operations", November 2, 2009

¹⁷ South Sudan celebrated its independence on July 9, 2011.

¹⁸ Analysts suspect that two attempts were undertaken, one in October 2009, and a second in September 2010.

¹⁹ This subject will be developed in the next section below.

weakened,²⁰ the LRA continues to operate in three countries (DRC, CAR and South Sudan), as recently established by the UN Office of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).²¹

No consensus on the LRA issue

Since the launch of OLT in December 2008, the LRA has operated in “survival mode,” focused on deflecting military pressure while attempting to re-establish support networks in Sudan. While the analysis of LRA history that this study presents below demonstrates that the LRA has endured similar phases in the past and adapted accordingly, this assessment of the LRA’s current operational mode represents one of the very few points of agreement widely shared among the fifty academics and analysts, humanitarians and human rights advocates/activists, UN officials, diplomats, and military officers who have been interviewed for the political section of this study. Indeed, the consultations conducted for this project revealed a striking lack of consensus on the scale, scope, nature and severity of the LRA issue. Broadly, three distinct “schools of thought” emerged from these interviews, each presenting a different narrative of the LRA and suggesting a different approach for addressing the issue.

The “state-building” school

This school is mostly made of European diplomats and senior officials in the UN and in African governments. According to this school of thought, the UPDF’s offensive campaigns of recent years have been overwhelmingly positive, resulting in the increased attrition of LRA members. Scattered over a large area, the LRA faces difficulties in cohesion, external support and communication. Basically agreeing on an estimated strength of approximately 250 core Ugandan fighters in the LRA, proponents of this school assert that the LRA is now a law-and-order issue that could soon be reduced to irrelevance in a corner of Central Africa that has traditionally suffered from small-scale banditry.

Within the context of this perspective, neither of the regimes in Uganda or Congo perceives Kony as a major threat to their security and political interests. Understood as a law-and-order issue, the challenge posed by the LRA calls for the establishment and strengthening of the authority of the various states in the region. Those who advocate this ‘state-building’ approach contend that international policies developed to address what they perceive as the artificial political significance of the LRA are counterproductive and could potentially provide indirect legitimacy to the LRA’s agenda. Instead, dismantling the LRA is defined as a cross-border responsibility, dependent on regional security cooperation and necessitating increased levels of support for capacity building.

The best course of action, according to this view, is for the international community to support initiatives announced by the AU to maintain the isolation of the LRA, as there is a pragmatic recognition that the UN’s role cannot be extended beyond stepping up DDRRR activities to encourage defections and humanitarian assistance. While continuing to pay close attention to the risk of renewed external support to the rebels, the “state-building” school urges other international partners to develop a coherent approach for improving local governance, promote regional ownership and treat the politically divisive issue of the International Criminal Court (ICC) involvement with caution.

²⁰ See “*La LRA perd ses capacités opérationnelles selon Mamadou Gaye*”, Radio Okapi, 30 March 2011.

²¹ OCHA demonstrated that the first quarter of 2011 had witnessed a significant increase in the number of LRA incidents. In three months 107 attacks had been reported in the three countries. See LRA Regional Update: DRC, CAR and south Sudan – January – March 2011, OCHA, April 7, 2011

The “military solution” school

Proponents of this school are mostly found among Ugandan officials as well as in the USA and in NGOs focused on human rights. Advocates of a “military solution” argue that Kony was given a chance to settle the LRA issue peacefully but failed to take the Juba process to its positive conclusion. According to this view, Kony’s current agenda is (if it ever was) no longer politically motivated, but based instead on the pathological rewards provided by being a warlord. The horrendous nature of the crimes committed by the LRA justifies the use of force to remove Kony and his top lieutenants from the battlefield. Deprived of its original leaders, the “military solution” school argues that the threat posed by the LRA would be significantly reduced.

The challenge with this approach, however, lies in combining the right military resources and strategy, while at the same time ensuring the protection of civilians from likely retaliation by the remaining fighters. Methodical cordon-and-search operations over the LRA-affected area would require a number of effective troops that the UPDF, FARDC, FACA, and Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) combined still cannot realistically commit.

Two different approaches are being promoted. The first approach consists of international partners providing extra support for selected units of military forces already deployed in the region. With consistent regional cooperation and joint planning, the supported units should be able, it is posited, to localize and neutralize the top leadership of the LRA. The second proposal, labeled the “apprehension strategy,” consists of using highly capable foreign military assets, including airmobile military special forces and field-deployed intelligence capabilities, to supplement the existing security presence in narrowly targeted operations. The argument motivating this strategy is that 25 years of unsuccessful efforts by the UPDF to chase Kony demonstrate the need for direct foreign involvement. The ICC arrest warrants against Kony and two other LRA figures provide a valid legal framework for international intervention. In both of these approaches, a combination of better cross-border coordination and more assertive actions from UN peacekeepers is assumed to provide protection of the population during military operations.

The “re-engagement” school

This school is comprised mostly of academics and diplomats with a strong background in Uganda, and program officers in humanitarian NGOs. Part of them promotes attempting to negotiate with Kony while another part promotes a more modest approach in encouraging community leaders to open dialogue with local LRA commanders. According to the “re-engagement” school, past military actions against the LRA – designed to be decisive – have systematically triggered further violence against local populations and have failed to achieve their objectives. Former abductees returning to their communities have faced ostracism. The strategy of engagement implemented in the Juba process succeeded in providing a large amount of information about the LRA, exposed sympathizers from the diaspora, and temporarily reduced the level of insecurity.²² Juba failed largely because the international parties partaking in the talks had conflicting approaches and were unable to express a coherent message. Moreover, in their view, the antagonistic stance of President Museveni and the lack of clarity regarding the scope of the ICC process further undermined the negotiations. Many of the former international mediators in Juba, including UN officials, have lost credibility as facilitators of a peaceful settlement.

²² There are opposite views regarding improvement in the LRA-affected areas during the Juba talks. Some observers assess positively the impact of the negotiation rounds on immediate security while others analyze that Kony used this period of lesser military pressure to regain strength and reorganize.

Over the last few years, the link between the LRA and Northern Uganda has admittedly been further weakened. Still, proponents of the “re-engagement” school emphasize the historical dimension of the group, arguing that the connection between the Acholi and the LRA could be stronger than is now widely assumed. As the interests of Kony, the LRA commanders, mid-level officers and the ranks are likely to differ, members of this school argue that the focus of new initiatives should not be limited to only a handful of LRA members. They stress the importance of understanding the group’s cohesion and the exact structure of the leadership.

This school criticizes what it perceives as the “quick fix” approach adopted by international partners, favoring instead an increased role for local intermediaries, including religious leaders, who they argue should be encouraged to re-engage LRA members on behalf of communities.²³ Over the long-term, progress is not linear. Positive opportunities would arise from consistent efforts at the ground level.

Lost momentum at the regional and international levels

OCHA counts 350,000 LRA-induced IDPs across the region and reports that the first quarter of 2011 has witnessed a significant increase in the number of LRA incidents, which will likely lead to even greater displacement.²⁴ However, governments in Kinshasa, Kampala, Bangui and Juba are facing other political and security challenges. The LRA poses no direct threat against the regimes in place and it has no known link with local secessionist movements. Since it is not a priority, other than in the context of protection of civilians, national authorities invest only few resources in dismantling the LRA. With such a humanitarian crisis impossible to ignore, the UN, the AU and the US are still looking to formulate their own new coherent strategies.

UN troops in the three LRA-affected countries have been unable to protect the population. With MONUSCO in the lead, the different peacekeeping missions in the region are slowly adopting new DDRRR plans. The successful implementation of these plans is, however, circumscribed by limited resources and personnel, and higher priorities for other mandated tasks. The anti-LRA strategy developed by the US Administration remains modest in terms of the detail it provides, the political support it has garnered within the Administration and the funding it has received.²⁵ The AU authorized a symbolically important meeting dedicated to the LRA in October 2010, but real consensus on how to deal with the situation has yet to emerge in the capitals of LRA-affected countries. Europe has been attentive, but waiting for the US and/or the AU to show leadership. In such circumstances, local civilian authorities and community leaders struggle to coordinate field initiatives and to define their role in the current military-led approach. Local, regional and international responses to the threat of the LRA remain fragmented and inadequate.

Regional mobilization without adequate resources

At present, UPDF units are authorized to operate in the three countries where the LRA is present.²⁶ These units receive a limited amount of technical and intelligence assistance from the United States. In

²³ For a deeper understanding of this school of thought, see in particular Mareike Schomerus and Kennedy Tumutegyeize, “After Operation Lightning Thunder: Protecting Communities and Building Peace”, Conciliation Resources, April 2009.

²⁴ OCHA registered 348,490 IDPs in the three LRA affected countries in April 2011 as a direct consequence of LRA activities. LRA Regional Update, OCHA, op. cit.

²⁵ *Strategy to Support the Disarmament of the Lord’s Resistance Army*, Government of the United States of America, Washington D.C., 24 November 2010.

²⁶ This may be about to change. Reports of a withdrawal from DRC had begun to circulate at the time of writing.

theory, the UPDF pursue the rebels while other national troops are tasked with the responsibility of protecting civilians, with the support of UN peacekeepers deployed within the region. Statements made by the Ugandan authorities, and directed at foreign audiences, present the LRA not only as a regional problem but also as an international one. However, rather than prompting a mobilization of more resources to address the issue, such statements seem to dilute responsibilities. Inside Uganda, the LRA question has slipped from the list of national priorities. Specialists interviewed for this study remarked that the LRA was seldom mentioned during the last presidential campaign. Incumbent Ugandan authorities addressed the struggle in Northern Uganda as a settled issue and referred to the LRA as a defeated group presenting no direct threat to the country's population. Between 2009 and 2011, the number of UPDF dedicated to finding Kony and his top lieutenants was reduced by two-thirds, as resources were directed to other priority issues in Karamoja and Somalia.²⁷

In the DRC, the Minister of Defense has repeatedly and publicly minimized the significance of the LRA.²⁸ Until very recently, Kinshasa has resisted calls to deploy its best troops to Orientale Province, including battalions that have been trained by foreign partners.²⁹ With presidential elections scheduled for late 2011, the DRC could face increasing political tensions and greater insecurity in other corners of its territory. In contrast to Kinshasa's disinterest in the LRA and unwillingness to deploy resources, the government of CAR has denounced the LRA presence on its soil. It has called for greater international military assistance so that its own forces can substitute for the UPDF and carry out operations within the country. Still, the FACA have an effective front-line strength of only 1,500-2,000 soldiers, the rest of the troops being made of personnel with poor military skills. The decision taken by Bangui in 2007 to encourage local armed groups to provide security against the LRA in North eastern CAR has had limited impact on the LRA but has been largely detrimental to efforts aimed at enforcing law and order in this area.³⁰

Observers also express doubt as to whether South Sudan can mobilize sufficient capacities to contain the LRA in Western Equatoria, although "Arrow Boys" from the Azande community have organized themselves towards this end. In October 2010, on the sidelines of an AU summit in Bangui, a set of political and military decisions was proposed to enhance regional cooperation against the LRA.³¹ A team

²⁷ Ledio Cakaj, "Too Far from Home: Demobilizing the Lord Resistance Army", The Enough Project, February 2011. UPDF troops were also heavily deployed during the Ugandan elections and, more recently, during "walk-to-work" protests of high food and fuel prices (discussed further below).

²⁸ E.g., "Menaces de la LRA à Dungen: controverse entre gouvernement et société civile locale", Radio Okapi, 19 March 2011.

²⁹ In April 2011, Congolese authorities granted authorization to deploy a light infantry battalion trained by the US from Kisangani to the LRA's area of operations. The US, Belgium, UK and China all provided bilateral training to individual battalions in the year 2010. Angola and South Africa were also involved in military assistance of Congolese troops in the past, but their respective bilateral relationship with Kinshasa has turned sour over the last few years.

³⁰ In particular, the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (UFDR), a group led by Zacharia Damane and mainly made of ex-combatants from Northern Uganda, has received governmental support since April 2007 to counter the LRA in North eastern CAR. It has provided justification for the group to refuse joining DDR programs and has exacerbated disputes along ethnic lines in its area of operation. Also see HRW, "CAR/DR Congo: LRA Conducts Massive Abduction Campaign: New Regional Strategy Needed to Protect Civilians and Rescue Children", 11 August 2010.

³¹ See "Communiqué de Presse sur la Réunion Régionale Ministérielle sur la LRA tenue à Bangui, en RCA les 13 et 14 Octobre 2010", African Union, 14 October 2010. During a meeting of the International Working Groups (IWG) on Foreign armed groups in Brussels on 13 January 2011, the AU reported on the outcomes of its LRA meeting. They included organizing a Joint Brigade, setting a Joint Operation Cell and designating a AU Special Envoy.

of technical experts from AU member-states was mandated to look into the conditions for the implementation of these decisions. The team presented its first set of findings at the next AU meeting in early June 2011. While this initiative is currently underway and might deliver positive results, diplomats interviewed for this study caution that the AU's resources are already stretched with other priority issues, including Somalia, Darfur and South Sudan.

Against this backdrop, interviewees expected future discussions to focus on reorienting US military assistance currently provided to the UPDF towards a new AU initiative. In addition, measures aimed at improving the coordination of existing national forces are likely to be announced, instead of measures to address the key requirement of enlarging the spectrum of strategic capabilities.

Without the UPDF's military pressure, the LRA will likely reorganize and consolidate its command and control apparatus. With no new major resources available, international partners would likely welcome a strong statement authorizing the UPDF to continue operating across borders.

It remains to be seen how the AU intends to engage the regime in Khartoum on this issue. The regional organization could secure a long-term commitment from the authorities of Northern Sudan to declare its non-allegiance with the LRA. Following up on the diplomatic dialogue that led to the peaceful referendum in South Sudan, creative ways could be explored for Khartoum to provide further assistance in addressing the LRA threat. In case the Sudan peace process falters, the LRA is likely to re-emerge as a further destabilizing element.

UN efforts to do “more of the same, but better”

Following the publication of the Human Rights Watch report on the 2009 Christmas massacre,³² several international NGOs have carried out LRA-specific advocacy campaigns in New York. Not all NGOs advocate for the same set of policy decisions. Some human rights NGOs promote increasing foreign involvement in a military solution while other humanitarian NGOs focus on exploring new ways of protecting civilians.³³ They agree, however, that the UN is insufficiently involved on the issue. The UN Security Council has resisted their joint calls to put the LRA on its agenda and advocacy groups have expressed disappointment over the absence of US leadership in New York. Instead, several members of the Council have argued that the AU is the proper forum for multilateral decision-making related to the LRA.

The Security Council's disengagement on this issue came at the same time as it increasingly insisted on the protection of civilians in mandates authorized for the various UN peacekeeping missions deployed in the Central Africa region. UN officials, however, have argued that peacekeeping missions such as MONUSCO, UNMIS and MICOPAX³⁴ do not have sufficient capabilities to carry out this task effectively at a time when host governments are regularly calling for these missions to withdraw. Given these resource constraints, the focus is instead on improving peacekeeping performance at “constant means.” In theory, this would be achieved through increased coordination among missions, UN humanitarian,

³² Op Cit, HRW, 16 February 2009.

³³ For instance, through their respective office in New York, HRW is strongly promoting the “apprehension strategy” while Oxfam focuses its lobbying effort at the UN on implementing best practices related to the protection of civilian norms (PoC).

³⁴ MICOPAX is the Peace Consolidation Force of the Economic Community of Central Africa (CEEAC). It comprises 500 military peacekeepers. The priority in the mandate of the mission was to support the general elections in CAR held in January 2011 and to conduct the DDR of former rebels.

development, civilian protection, and DRRR initiatives supported by foreign donors,³⁵ and clarifying the line of command at the strategic level.

To date there has been a lack of clarity on who is the UN focal point on the LRA; either UN DPKO or the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) have taken the lead, the latter in favor of political coordination from its office in Libreville. In that context, the UN seems only to be considering a containment strategy coupled with a reinforced political dialogue with the LRA-affected countries. Such an approach does not address the critical concern on the ground that the deployment of UN troops has had little deterrent effect on the LRA.

The US strategy and international partners

In 2009, a group of American and international NGOs created significant momentum in the US Congress behind the issue of the LRA.³⁶ As requested in the LRA Disarmament and Uganda Recovery Act, the US administration outlined in November 2010 a strategy to support the disarmament of the LRA.³⁷ Africa specialists who have observed this policy process from Capitol Hill assess that interagency deliberation was hampered by two interrelated problems from the start. First, the absence of a budget line specifically dedicated to the LRA strategy in the legislation limited its scope. Most of the funds in the Peacekeeping Operations appropriation account of the US State Department are allocated for programs in South Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire and Somalia. Second, the initial congressional champions for the LRA issue left office after the last mid-term elections, creating a vacuum and weakening the political support on Capitol Hill.³⁸

In the short-term, the US Strategy calls for incremental improvements of the current military approach rather than the adoption of a game-changing approach. In addition to formal political support for the AU, humanitarian assistance, and some funds for mobile phone and radio towers in Northern DRC, the US Strategy focuses in practice on removing the senior leadership of the LRA by stepping up assistance to the UPDF and, potentially, to the FARDC. The intent is to integrate the protection of local populations and the pursuit of Kony into a single operational mechanism designed by the US military.

Despite the uncertainty of the past months created by the debate over the US budget for the fiscal year 2011, the US administration has been able to dedicate roughly the same amount of money for support to the UPDF as it did in 2009 and 2010.³⁹ The Africa Command of the US military (AFRICOM) was planning to deploy US advisors with African battalions during the summer of 2011 in order to be able to report progress for a review in Congress in November 2011⁴⁰. The US Department of Defense has not yet

³⁵ Current projects include building mobile phone and radio towers in Northern DRC to set an alert network for civilian protection.

³⁶ Oxfam, HRW, The Enough Project, Invisible Children and Resolve were particularly active in lobbying US Congressmen and Administration officials.

³⁷ *Strategy to Support the Disarmament of the LRA*, Government of the United-States of America, op. cit.

³⁸ Senators Russ Feingold (D-WI) and Sam Brownback (R-KS), who introduced the legislation on the LRA in May 2009, were either defeated in the last mid-term elections in the USA (Feingold), or retired (Brownback).

³⁹ This financial effort is hardly sustainable without a dedicated budget. NGOs active on Capitol Hill in Washington assessed that the US administration committed \$14 million to support the UPDF in LRA operations for 2011, including \$12 million transferred from the Peacekeeping Operations funds initially allocated for SSR programs in Sudan.

⁴⁰ On October 14, 2011, the US announced it was sending 100 military advisors to Uganda to support the regional forces pursuing the rebel group. See the State Department release : <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/10/175523.htm>

authorized the deployment. Even if granted, this initiative remains entirely contingent on the continuing willingness of the Ugandan and Congolese authorities to cooperate. Jealousy and suspicion regarding UPDF activities have led the three neighboring countries currently affected by the LRA to question the long-term presence of the Ugandan troops on their territories. While many analysts fear that this UPDF-centric strategy is not sustainable, the different government agencies involved agreed during the summer of 2010 that it was the only realistic course of action. Still, the US administration has singled out the LRA issue as an important one. It specifically mentioned the armed group for the first time in its FY2012 budget request.⁴¹ Advocacy organizations are now pushing to ensure that this specific mention exists in the budget that the Congress is due to pass in the last months of 2011. More importantly for the long-term scope of US actions, this pressure aims at ensuring that funds are directly tagged for the implementation of the strategy – tentatively at a level close to \$50 million.

US officials approached their European counterparts to assist in implementing the strategy in July 2010. In particular, the Americans envisaged an important role for France in CAR. France contributes largely to the MICOPAX budget while her troops are used to operating in francophone Africa, and support the SSR program of the FACA. Before the crisis in Libya, France was preparing the drawdown of *Operation Epervier* in Chad. A redeployment of the 950 French military from the Army and the Air Force in Chad could have created opportunities for temporary reinforcement of the 240 French troops in CAR.

French officials had expected that the US and the EU would discuss the principle of a multilateral – not bilateral – initiative in the fall 2010. From interviews conducted in Washington, Paris and Kampala, it seems that no concrete steps have been made to establish coordination between the US and French military on the issue of the LRA. Independent observers in Paris report that France would have no appetite for opening a new front – even though limited in size and (supposedly) duration – since it already plays a leading role in operations in Libya and Cote d’Ivoire, and to a lesser extent in Afghanistan and in Lebanon.

Diplomats from other European countries have not signaled a willingness to go beyond supporting future AU initiatives, MONUSCO DRRR projects, and expanding radio or cell phone coverage.

Local community leaders committed to keeping the door open for dialogue with the LRA

Since the end of 2008, the prominent public figures who led the negotiations with Kony have disengaged from the issue of the LRA. Several European activists and academics who witnessed the Juba process indicate that—if a possibility would arise—resorting to less-known individuals to conduct discreet mediations would be more effective in re-establishing contact with Kony than using high-profile personalities.⁴² The same sources report that the priority given to forced disarmament since OLT also temporarily marginalized local community leaders involved in the Juba talks. Indeed, a coalition of local leaders from the four LRA-affected countries still intends to play a larger role.

Almost three years into the military operations, community leaders denounce the lack of commitment from their respective governments, militaries and from the international community to make the

⁴¹ The US State Department released a budget request of \$292 million for the Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) appropriation account for FY2012 that include support to the SPLA and the FARDC. One of the smaller highlights titled “Africa Conflict Stabilization and Border Security” has a proposed funding level of \$7.6 million. “Countering the Lord’s Resistance Army in Central and East Africa” is listed as one of several priorities under this highlight.

⁴² Interviews for the Diagnostic Study, Paris, London, The Hague, Antwerp and Stockholm, February 2011.

protection of the population a priority.⁴³ Some religious authorities and traditional chiefs are skeptical of the prospects of eventually neutralizing the LRA through military means, and have begun looking into ways to reengage the LRA at an individual level. The core message for rebel fighters and abductees is that it is still possible to return to their community of origin. Incentives and sensitization are directed to LRA members as well as to the receiving communities.

Reflecting demands articulated by these community leaders, a coalition of NGOs, EurAc, has reintroduced the concept of dialogue with the LRA to European audiences. Since October 2009, IKV/Pax Christi coordinates a regional network involving religious authorities from all the LRA-affected countries. Several national initiatives are also underway: one with the Justice and Peace Commission in Yambio supported by Cordaid, one with religious leaders in Dungu supported by IKV/Pax Christi, and one with the Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative (ARLPI) in Northern Uganda supported by Conciliation Resources. In one case, collaboration was developed with MONUSCO DDRR to refine the content of radio broadcasts aimed at facilitating voluntary surrenders. Most local leaders remain reluctant to broaden such collaboration, as they fear being drawn into UN politics.

No credible collective response to the threat of the LRA has yet been articulated

In the first quarter of 2011, OCHA confirmed the killing of 68 civilians and the abductions of 178 others by the LRA. Attacks have caused 33,300 new IDPs in the DRC, 2,000 in CAR and 2,800 in South Sudan.⁴⁴ During the same period MONUSCO DDRR demobilized and repatriated to Uganda only four LRA ex-combatants.⁴⁵

The regrouping of the LRA in Orientale Province very near the South Sudan border is likely to generate new crises, including in South Sudan where local tensions involving Mbororo and Azande groups organized into civilian defense forces could trigger ethnic clashes.

Disconnected from a major new initiative, the extension of DDRR activities in Orientale Province, the deployment of MONUSCO units in Bas Uélé—where the UN mission is currently not present—and new measures such as amnesty legislation for DRC similar to the one existing in Uganda, funding of new justice and reconciliation programs supported by local NGOs, or revalorization of reintegration packages would likely encourage slightly more demobilization of LRA combatants but are unlikely to be enough to reverse the negative trends of the last months.

Stronger military action might change the current dynamic, but any positive impacts will be durable only if protection of civilians, DDRR and conditions for a peaceful return of former combatants are integrated into the planning process. A military strategy focusing on neutralizing Kony should account for the possibility that the LRA can replace its leadership or become a coalition of semi-autonomous groups.⁴⁶ A new strike, whether successful or not, will trigger a wave of retribution against the population that the current defensive forces on the ground cannot prevent. The likelihood of success for any military approach still remains uncertain even with the deployment of high-end military capabilities

⁴³ In a letter read in all the churches of the territory of Dungu on 20 March 2011, the Bishop of Dungu criticized the government for minimizing the threat posed by the LRA. See "L'évêque de Dungu appelle le gouvernement à agir contre la LRA", Radio Okapi, March 21, 2011.

⁴⁴ LRA Regional Update, OCHA, op. cit.

⁴⁵ MONUSCO DDRR statistics, updated on 7 April 2011.

⁴⁶ See International Crisis Group, "A Regional Strategy beyond Killing Kony", Africa Report N°157, 28 April 2010.

that only a limited number of developed countries possess. No international stakeholder is yet ready to supply key-enabling military assets.

Western diplomats appear to be reluctant to reconsider a return to establishing any kind of dialogue with the LRA. The US strategy released in November 2010 does not mention initiating new talks with the LRA as an option. Foreign countries are not ready to publicly support reengagement initiatives that have not been tacitly approved by Kampala. They fear that it would be perceived as interfering with the political sovereignty of Uganda and Congo at a time when the goodwill of their respective Heads of State is required both for an upcoming general election in the DRC and the importance of Uganda in Somalia. For many policy-makers, an agreement is unlikely to be reached since OLT made Kony even less likely than before to trust a negotiation process. They assess that he is a pragmatic paranoid who would only use new negotiations to reaffirm his control and authority over his followers.

With very few exceptions, all of the 50-plus specialists interviewed for the political section of the diagnostic study expressed great doubts over whether current international responses to the LRA threat would in fact end the issue once and for all. All the individuals consulted expressed deep frustration over the lack of credible options to deal with the LRA and the absence of political momentum in the region to develop such options. Many among them pointed to the difficult challenge for the international community to re-open a high-level dialogue on the LRA issue, including the strong objections of Presidents Museveni and Kabila. The fact that neither the US nor the EU has appointed new Special Envoys to the Great Lakes Region is of great concern for many of the interviewees who believe that a regional approach is essential.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ In the second half of 2010, Howard Wolpe stepped down as American special adviser to the Great Lakes region, and former European Union special envoy to the Great Lakes region, Roland Van der Geer, took a new post as EU head of delegation to South Africa.

Section III – An Operational History of the LRA

The LRA has displayed behavior typical of a rebel group with some characteristics of a regular army as well as elements more commonly attributed to a cult. This multidimensionality has contributed to a general lack of understanding and, in turn, to a common tendency to underestimate the LRA. The confused aspect presented by the LRA accounts, in large measure, for the Ugandan government's inability to deal with it effectively, either through military efforts or peace talks. The purpose of this section is to review the historical operational record of the LRA in an attempt to clear up some of the confusion.

Significant misunderstandings persist. For instance, the LRA has recently been described as weak due to having dispersed into small groups in three different countries. However, a study of their history indicates that the LRA often operated in small scattered groups even at its peak strength. Over time, the LRA has not necessarily been a homogeneous organization but rather has been composed of small groups operating at least semi-independently of each other, all reporting to Kony.⁴⁸

The use of small group structures was a strategic decision on Kony's part. The widely held belief that the LRA is a group of bandits operating without a coherent strategy is mistaken. This decision was made to facilitate overall control (it does not allow other commanders to create power bases), to limit opportunity for collusion (competition and animosity between group commanders have often been encouraged by Kony), and to enable maximum mobility which has been key to the LRA's longevity. Recently, the LRA's strategy has been to "survive" and maintain open corridors of movement in DRC while trying to secure outside support, especially from Sudan.

The LRA's fighting strength is also commonly underestimated. Statements from Ugandan Army spokespeople to the effect that the LRA currently has only 250 fighters, and is therefore significantly weakened, betray a lack of understanding or acceptance of the challenges at hand. Even if the LRA is indeed operating with 250 fighters, the number is consistent with estimates of LRA core power over many of the years when it was causing chaos in Northern Uganda. Furthermore, the LRA's past history and current modus operandi suggest that they can wreak havoc with a small number of fighters, as witnessed in mid-December 2009 when an estimated 30 LRA fighters massacred over 300 Congolese civilians (and caused thousands of internally displaced) in Makombo, Haut Uélé.⁴⁹

LRA general characteristics

Secrecy

Secrecy allows for better control and mental conditioning of the fighters inside the LRA, ensures intelligence is not leaked to the Ugandan army and creates a shroud of mystery that tends to discourage pursuing armies. Maintaining secrecy in the LRA is a strategic decision on Kony's part and is intended to take advantage of the "ignorance" of the world outside the LRA. Kony appears to understand that one

⁴⁸ There is a lot of emphasis in the LRA on operating in small units as seen in the 'families': small groups with a commander, referred to as *lapwony* (teacher, in Lwo) in charge, his "wives," military escorts and domestic workers or young girls called *ting-ting*.

⁴⁹ HRW, "Trail of Death: LRA Atrocities in North Eastern Congo" 2010.

cannot defeat the enemy one does not know, and consequently masks the LRA behind a curtain of mystery. The rituals performed in the LRA, some military in nature, others religious, are in part designed to maintain the secrecy and mystery of the LRA—much like a secret society or a cult.

Kony has jealously guarded secrecy within the LRA, punishing with death those who try to escape and mutilating those who speak of the LRA to outsiders. There was a serious effort over time to minimize the exposure of LRA fighters to foreign (non-military) actors as observed in interactions with peacemakers such as Betty Bigombe, Carter Centre representatives and religious figures.

The Juba talks provided the first exposure for many LRA fighters to the outside world and, in the process, weakened the LRA.⁵⁰ For the first time the outside world caught a glimpse inside the LRA, learned about the top commanders and their external supporters. The talks also allowed some limited interaction with the rank and file. Ultimately, the talks led directly to the killing of Vincent Otti, the LRA's chief negotiator, and the subsequent defection of a host of commanders including director of operations Opiyo Makas.

Flexibility

Kony has consistently tried to maximize his options over the years. This can be seen in two main tactics; (1) in allying or cooperating with different groups, regardless of their ethnic, ideological or religious orientation (These include the West Nile Bank Front, mostly Madi or Alur from West Nile, the Equatoria Defense Forces and other South Sudanese militia of various ideological leanings and ethnicities but all allied to Khartoum, the northern Sudanese government and Allied Democratic Forces); and (2) in participating in peace talks while preparing at the same time for hostilities as seen particularly in the last 10 months of the Juba Talks, which ended officially on 14 December 2008.

Adaptability

The LRA is able to adapt quickly to changing circumstances. Though they operated initially in compact groups conducting attacks in military formation, eventually this changed to hit and run tactics operating in smaller very mobile groups. Today LRA groups tend to “melt” when attacked, dispersing from 20-30 fighters in ones or twos, regrouping after in pre-arranged rendezvous (RV) locations. Furthermore LRA groups have been remarkably adaptable to different terrain, including living in relatively dry lands in Southern Sudan in the late 1990s, in lush areas in mid to 2000s in Garamba Park and in arid conditions recently in and near South Darfur.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Kony must have been aware of the pernicious effects the exposure had on his troops as such talks usually ended in commanders defecting as in the case of Sam Kolo after talking to Betty Bigombe in 2005 or a couple of mid-level commanders such as Moses Rubangangwey after talking to Catholic priests in Northern Uganda 2002-2003. The latter episode prompted Kony to threaten to kill Catholic priests (interviews with Carlos Rodriguez, November 2010 and February 2011). Kony, however, still agreed to participate in the Juba Talks, an indication perhaps that he might have been serious about the peace talks after all.

⁵¹ According to former LRA combatants there were at least two different LRA missions to Southern Darfur, one in October 2009 and another in August/September 2010. According to an SPLA officer a small team of LRA fighters remains in Southern Darfur, north of Kafia Kingi.

Susceptibility to exogenous events

Despite its inward focus, the LRA, unlike a typical cult, is surprisingly affected by outside events. LRA commanders, including Kony, are well informed about events not only in Northern Uganda and Uganda in general but also about the outside world. Their most common source of news is radio broadcasts. In 1996, for instance, Kony promised to stop all attacks against civilians so that they could vote for Paul Ssemogere, a challenger to President Museveni in the presidential elections. Attacks on civilians are also sometimes the result of exogenous events, often in response to deals made in countries' capitals to attack the LRA or claims from those capitals that the LRA are weak and incapacitated. It is plausible, for instance, that an increase in LRA attacks against FARDC soldiers in the months of February and March 2011 came as a response to public statements by Congolese officials that there are few or no LRA fighters in Congo.⁵²

LRA commanders are known to be avid listeners of Ugandan and foreign radio stations, particularly the BBC World Service. The content of news broadcasts, often misinterpreted or misunderstood, is known to be discussed in relation to the LRA. In conversations with various interlocutors such as Betty Bigombe and Joyce Neu, formerly of the Carter Centre,⁵³ Kony has made references to Jonas Savimbi's death, rebellions in Chechnya and Thomas Lubanga's trial in the ICC, all in relation to the LRA and Kony's position.

Efforts are also made to control what happens inside the LRA when outside events threaten to disrupt the cohesion of the troops. The killing of Commander Otti Lagony in 1999 on Kony's orders seems to have been carried out partly in response to an amnesty act for rebel fighters being passed at the time in the Ugandan parliament. In addition, LRA propaganda disseminated by commanders, increased in 1999. Fighters were told to not believe Ugandan government lies and that they would all be slowly poisoned or killed if returning to Uganda.

Recently the propaganda has continued in an effort to stop combatants from defecting. In a response to Ugandan government (and DDRRR) radio messages encouraging defections, LRA commanders ordered that privates were not allowed to listen to radios. News can also trigger strategy change, mostly in order to protect the group from any perceived threats; another indication of the flexibility and adaptability of the LRA. Kony ordered groups in Congo to stop large scale killing of civilians after the December 2009 Makombo attack after he heard on the radio about the US anti-LRA bill.

Predictability

Yet, time and again LRA commanders have gone back to using old, tried-and-tested tactics. For example, after not being able to use satellite phones and walkie-talkies, the LRA returned to their former use of messengers and pre-arranged RVs, something they have been doing since the late 1980s. The hit and run tactics and splintering into small groups when attacked are strategies used since the mid-1990s. The current "survive, wait and see" strategy has been often employed by the LRA in the past with the aim

⁵² Statements made by various officials, civilian and military. The Congolese army force commander stationed in Dungu, Haut Uele, Lt. Colonel Nasibu Babu Nadoo was heard on BBC News saying that the "over the last two years we have successfully neutralized Kony" and "there are only 18 LRA left here." Mike Thompson, "Who can stop the LRA," BBC News, 18 February 2011. A large LRA attack against Congolese army barracks in Bamangana took place on February 24 where at least six Congolese soldiers were killed.

⁵³ Interviews with Betty Bigombe, November and March 2011 and Joyce Neu, 24 March 2011.

of holding out until a new opportunity presents itself. And LRA retaliatory attacks on “soft” (usually civilian) targets following military offensives against them are signature tactics utilized by the rebel group over and over again.

Command and control

Kony’s absolute power in the LRA

The importance of Joseph Kony to the LRA cannot be underestimated. In many ways, Kony is the LRA. His roles in the organization throughout the years confirm his absolute power. Kony has been and remains the chairman of the LRA, its chief priest, military strategist, political officer and even top doctor.⁵⁴ From the inception of the LRA until at least May 2009 when Kony left Congo and moved to CAR, he was consulted on everything including what to do with misbehaving “wives,” what dreams meant, how to go about attacking villages or government soldiers and even what to do with objects found by other commanders.⁵⁵

Kony has been described as a charismatic leader by former combatants.⁵⁶ Many former fighters refer to him respectfully as “*mzee*,” the Kiswahili word for elder, or “number one” or “teacher” (*lapwony*). Other people formerly in the LRA have spoken of him as a loving father and a caring commander, unusual qualities for someone accused of having caused so much suffering to so many. Fear however lies at the heart of the positive descriptions given by former combatants. Such fear seems often based initially on Kony’s seeming ability to hear and see everything, but for anyone even contemplating defection or opposition to Kony of any sort the fear which mattered most was the fear of revenge. Kony has worked hard to ensure he was feared ultimately as a military man rather than respected as a spiritual leader.

In the early days of the LRA’s existence, Kony’s reliance on spirits was nearly all-consuming. Spirits, which Kony claimed to be channeling, were in charge of everything in the LRA, from tactics to personal behavior and hygiene. Orders were literally conveyed as having emanated from a particular spirit. Some spirits were violent and ‘responsible’ for ordering the execution of people outside and inside the LRA while others were more peaceful.⁵⁷ Kony was often regarded as having no particular agency apart from being a vehicle for the spirits which gave him extraordinary powers nevertheless.⁵⁸ For many Ugandan men and women who grew up believing in good and bad spirits, it was not hard not to believe in Kony’s role as a spirit medium.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Former combatants say Kony is often consulted on the kinds of medicinal herbs to use for various illnesses

⁵⁵ In a transcript of LRA communications recorded by the Uganda’s intelligence service on 23 May 2005, a commander asks Kony via radio about what to do with the horn of a sheep he came across, taking it to be an omen of some sort. Kony’s signaler responds that Kony will talk about its meaning when he meets the commander personally.

⁵⁶ A former combatant said Kony sounded like President Museveni, he could give speeches for hours and he also “spoke English perfectly”; the latter claim is dubious judging from recorded interviews with Kony in 2007 .

⁵⁷ Legend has it that a particularly violent spirit ordered that Kony’s three brothers who had joined him early on had to be killed.

⁵⁸ Betty Bigombe recounts talking to a former combatant in the mid-1990s who was very afraid that Kony was listening to their conversation despite being in Gulu town. Interview with Betty Bigombe, Kampala, 22 March 2011.

⁵⁹ Interviews with various people in Northern Uganda, including Dennis Ojwee, Gulu, 5 December 2010 etc.

By the late 1990s however, Kony seems to have become a military commander in his own right while still retaining spiritual powers. In 1999, right after ordering the execution of his deputy, Otti Lagony, Kony told LRA commanders that the spirit would only come to him in his dreams to “inspire” him.⁶⁰ At this time, Kony assumed full agency in his role as LRA overall commander. While he continues to refer to the spirits, particularly chief among them being the Holy Spirit, Kony has emphasized his role as military commander, eclipsing his mystical persona.

Kony’s role in the LRA’s hierarchy

Kony has been in sole charge of the LRA since its inception in 1987. There was a potential rivalry when Odong Latek, a brigadier in the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA), joined Kony in the late 1987 but it ended with Latek’s killing by the National Resistance Army (NRA) in 1988. Other commanders, especially ones with a military background, who Kony perceived as threats, were either executed or punished.

By 1999 the then-second in command, Otti Lagony – a former soldier in the UNLA – reportedly became convinced that the LRA could not defeat Museveni militarily and asked Kony to consider coming out of the bush.⁶¹ The Ugandan parliament was, at the time, discussing a proposed Amnesty Act (passed in early 2000) aimed at encouraging rebels to return to Uganda peacefully without prosecution. According to Rwot Oryang Lagony, an Acholi traditional chief and close relative of Otti Lagony, Kony feared a mass defection of LRA fighters taking advantage of the proposed amnesty.⁶² The killing of Lagony, decided by Kony as a preventive measure against possible defections as well as to eliminate a potential threat to his own position, was the first recorded high-level execution in the LRA, and an illustration of Kony’s absolute power over the group.

Kony’s increasing emphasis on his military role was possibly in part because of Sudanese support. This support helped increase recruitment into the LRA in the second half of the 1990s, leading to a force numbering thousands of people.⁶³ By 1999 Kony referred to himself as a Major General and took over military strategy without openly invoking the spirits any longer.

By the early 2000s, Vincent Otti, had become prominent in the LRA, partly due to his charisma and leadership – he was mentor to a few promising young commanders such as Dominic Ongwen and Ochan Bunia, both holding the rank of brigadier in the LRA today – which is why he was put in charge of the LRA advance party to Garamba, Congo, in September 2005. Otti was also able to brush aside successfully other commanders, as indicated by the near-demise of Caesar Achellam, a former junior officer in the UNLA and a contender for the number two position in the LRA.

In August 2006, immediately after the UPDF killed Raska Lukwiya, Kony’s deputy at the time, Otti accused Achellam of having received money from the Sudanese Vice-President, Riek Machar, and of planning to leave the LRA. Kony believed Otti and decided, perhaps for practical reasons, to spare Achellam, but demoted him and took away his escort – a public humiliation. According to a former LRA commander, Kony kept Achellam around because of the latter’s relationship with the SAF and his good

⁶⁰ Interviews with Ray Apire, former LRA commander, Gulu November, December 2010 and February 2011.

⁶¹ De Temmerman 2009, p. 157.

⁶² Interview with Rwot Oryang Lagony, Kampala, 10 March 2011.

⁶³ Schomerus, 2007, p.12. As Schomerus discusses in her paper, it is impossible to determine the real number of people in the LRA camps at the time. The rather exaggerated number of 10,000 people, including women and children has been suggested in the past although the number of armed people was perhaps between 2,000-3,000.

knowledge of Arabic.⁶⁴ After Kony had Otti killed in October 2007, Achellam, who was still under “house arrest” at the time, regained his rank status but not the position of Kony’s deputy. This was given instead to the younger Okot Odhiambo. Achellam later became useful to Kony when he was dispatched, after OLT, to reestablish contact with the SAF.⁶⁵

Otti’s death in October 2007 was a transformative moment in the LRA, in three ways. First, Kony showed that 20 years after the founding of the LRA his power remained absolute; secondly, a transfer of influence took place from older to younger commanders; and lastly, it is possibly the beginning of the first serious split within the LRA, as Dominic Ongwen, who openly opposed the execution of Otti, may have used the scattering of the LRA in the aftermath of OLT as an opportunity to operate independently of Kony.⁶⁶

It is possible that Otti was planning to leave the ranks and take with him a large number of fighters, as Kony accused him. There is reason to believe that the Ugandan government infiltrated the LRA with the aim of convincing Otti to either defect and/or possibly kill Kony.⁶⁷ Kony did not like the involvement of Otti in the peace talks, perhaps because he was receiving a lot of attention as the main LRA interlocutor.⁶⁸ Kony decided to take no risks and ordered Otti’s killing, along with three officers including his chief bodyguard, Captain Pope, and one of Otti’s sons, who had joined the LRA during the Juba peace talks.⁶⁹

At least one commander, Colonel Thomas Kwoyelo⁷⁰, alias Latony, was publicly shamed, his escort was removed and he was left without a rank. According to former combatants, Kony told Kwoyelo, “you know what you did; I am letting you live as a reminder to others of what will happen to them if they try the same as Otti and yourself.”⁷¹ Kony then proceeded to say that he was a General who kills, and that “no one has heard of a General who prays,” thus emphasizing his transformation from a spiritual guide to a military commander.⁷²

Dissent and a possible split in the LRA

By ordering the killing of his second in command, who was immensely popular in the LRA—many former LRA still refer to him as a good *lapwony* (teacher/commander)—Kony was willing to risk serious dissent

⁶⁴ Achellam was in charge of handling SAF officers when the LRA had bases in Sudan.

⁶⁵ According to interviews with former combatants, Achellam has been in charge of liaising with SAF officers during the last two years.

⁶⁶ At least six accounts of the circumstances and death of Otti and others were collected for this report, including from a former combatant who claimed to have seen the bodies of Otti and others.

⁶⁷ Interviews with Ugandan security operative and Ugandan politician, Gulu and Kampala, February and March 2011.

⁶⁸ Interviews with Makas, G.O, Gulu, November, December 2010 and February 2011. Here and in other footnotes initials of interviewees are used to protect their identity at their request.

⁶⁹ Two of the officers, Ben Achellam and Otim “Record” were killed because of their close relationship to Otti; both hailed from Atiak, Otti’s birthplace. Another officer, Major Swaib Adimani, alias “Adjumani,” was from Madi (close to Atyak), was killed a day before Otti, accused as the person planted by Otti to kill Kony.

⁷⁰ Kwoyelo’s trial before the International Crimes Division of Uganda’s High Court started in July 2011. The trial stopped on September 22 when the constitutional court ruled that Kwoyelo qualified for amnesty under the Amnesty Act.

⁷¹ Interview with G.O., R. and Opiyo Makas. Gulu, November 2010, February 2011.

⁷² Els de Temmerman and Henry Mukasa, ‘How LRA Deputy Vincent Otti was killed,’ New Vision, 9 December 2007.

within the ranks in order to consolidate his power. Many commanders, including director of operations and Otti confidante, Opiyo Makas, left the ranks immediately after the execution of Otti. Makas believes that Kony spared Kwoyelo in order to deter other defections.

As noted above, it is possible that Dominic Ongwen's open disagreement with Kony over the order to kill Otti had prompted a decision on Ongwen's part after OLT to act independently of Kony. A former bodyguard to Kony who came out in March 2010 claimed that Kony sent at least three envoys to DRC to bring Ongwen to CAR between May 2009 and February 2010 but that Ongwen apparently refused to meet with them.⁷³

In a reversal of Kony's gradual shift away from the spiritual aspects of his leadership to more purely military ones, Kony over the last two years has actually increased the use of spiritual propaganda in the LRA. This can be seen most clearly in the role that Kony has given to a new wife he "married" recently. Unusually, Kony brings this young woman, a Sudanese Zande named Foisha, to his council with top commanders, a first in the LRA. He claims that the Holy Spirit has instructed him that together with this wife, Kony will finally overthrow Museveni. Interestingly it appears that this is a new strategy aimed at encouraging LRA fighters through the tough times of the last two years. However, Kony has also continued to use violence to keep his commanders in line, as was seen in July 2010 when he ordered the killing of Major Peter Olooya alias "Adioch," allegedly believing that he was about to defect.⁷⁴

Influence shifts from senior to younger commanders loyal to Kony

The death of Otti appears to have caused a shift in the power immediately below Kony. Kony explained to fighters the reason for executing Otti, which was framed as a power struggle between the two command centers of the LRA: High Command headed by Kony and Control Alter headed by Otti, with the participation other top commanders. Kony claimed that Otti and Control Alter commanders wanted to kill Kony and take over High Command (even though technically Control Alter was under Kony as overall commander and chairman of the Lord's Resistance Army/Movement).

Whether the story was true or not, Kony used it to increase the power of the High Protection Unit (HPU), his personal escort. Kony's bodyguards had always had influence in the LRA – proximity to Kony seems to have consistently included increased power. However, in 2008 HPU became the sole conveyor of Kony's orders. The head of HPU, Lt. Colonel Otto Agweng, became Kony's most trusted soldier as well as his advisor and personal envoy. In October 2009, Agweng led a mission to South Darfur where an LRA delegation made contact with officers from the Sudanese Armed Forces. Upon his return to Kony's position in CAR, Agweng was promptly promoted to Colonel.⁷⁵

Senior commanders were then systematically shunned, including one of the oldest commanders, Brigadier Opuk, who had been in Control Alter under Otti. Despite his senior rank, Opuk was placed in the first brigade under Lt. Colonel Achellam Smart, a Kony protégé. Caesar Achellam (no relation), who was next in line after Otti for the deputy job, was overlooked for the younger Okot Odhiambo who was in his mid to late 30s. Colonel Santo Alit, another senior commander, was also shunned – he was still a Colonel in 2009 when the UPDF shot him in CAR – possibly due to his position in charge of logistics

⁷³ Interview with G.O, Gulu, 2 February 2011.

⁷⁴ Interviews with Makas and G.O.

⁷⁵ International researcher's interview with Okello Mission, Kampala, 16 June 2010.

during the peace talks and his consequent exposure to foreigners.⁷⁶ The only senior commander who maintained his influence was Brigadier Bok Abudema who enjoyed Kony's trust and who pushed for and was personally present at Otti's execution.

The dismantling of Control Alter and the loose function it served – as a sort of council of LRA high commanders – has ensured that no recognized institution apart from Kony himself can make important decisions in the LRA, such as choosing a successor if Kony is killed or captured. There is however an understanding amongst former combatants that Odhiambo would take over if Kony is captured or killed, although it is not impossible that Otto Agweng, possibly in collaboration with one of Kony's sons— there are at least two in their early 20s who were born in the bush and move with Kony—might also try to take over.⁷⁷

Given the tendency of LRA commanders to always plan ahead, it is highly probable that plans have already been made to deal with Kony's possible death. This is suggested by Kony's movements separate from Odhiambo and Achellam in order to avoid the elimination of the top leadership in a single blow, and reports that Kony's half-brother – Major Olanya, who bears apparently a striking resemblance to the LRA chairman—has been impersonating Kony recently.

It is likely that in the case of Kony being killed, LRA commanders will try to keep it a secret from the rest of the fighters or deny it as Ugandan government lies. If Kony is captured, it is likely that some LRA commanders will remain operational forming a loose alliance with other LRA groups and continue similarly to what they have done in the past two years.

Operational strength in the LRA over the years – A handful of hard-core fighters

In the past two years, Ugandan army officers have stated that the LRA has no capacity to cause harm due to reduced numbers, which the UPDF have estimated at 250-300.⁷⁸ It is likely that, while the overall LRA fighting force numbers over 400, the "core" of the LRA, mostly from Northern Uganda, does not surpass 250 fighters. Given, however, the history of LRA in the past to cause violence with very few fighters, 250 is a worrying figure. As noted above, in 2009 about 30 LRA fighters killed over 300 civilians in Makombo, Congo.⁷⁹

Arguably, the number of committed, well-trained and conditioned fighters has never surpassed a few hundred even when the LRA total fighting strength measured in the thousands. An international researcher who studied LRA commanders during 2002-2003 believes that "at that time the LRA core

⁷⁶ Yet according to a Ugandan researcher who spoke to Alit in 2007 during the peace talks, Alit "who seemed a reasonable man," was very loyal to Kony. Interview with Mike Otim, Kampala, 13 December 2010.

⁷⁷ Various interviews with former combatants suggest this line of thinking. At least one interviewee, who was one of Kony's bodyguards, suggested that one of Kony's sons was being groomed by Kony as a possible successor.

⁷⁸ The Ministry of Defense spokesperson, Lt. Colonel Kulayigye, told a journalist in January 2010, "The LRA's capacity to create havoc is no more," before information of an LRA group killing over 300 civilians in Congo in December 2009 had filtered out. Richard Ruati, "Ugandan army outlines OLT achievements on LRA rebels in 2009," Sudan Tribune, 11 January 2010.

⁷⁹ Interview with MONUSCO official, Goma, 18 February, 2011.

numbered no more than 150-200 fighters, but people who could hold guns were about 600-800.”⁸⁰ There has always been a high prevalence of recruits in the LRA over the years that revolve around a core group of fighters. The new recruits tend to either escape when they can or be killed in battle due to their lack of training and experience. Those who make it in the LRA past an average of five years become by default core fighters.

The combination of defections and fighters killed by the Ugandan army between 2002, during Operation Iron Fist, and 2007 with Otti’s killing, left the number of “real fighters in the LRA at about over 200 or so,” according to a Ugandan intelligence officer with years of experience in the LRA.⁸¹ While the LRA has been weakened over the past two years, it is premature to regard them as lacking capacity since the number of the core fighters is not much lower now than what has been throughout the years.

Organizational structure

See Appendices 2, 3 and 4 for detailed charts of LRA organizational structure in 1998, 2008 and 2011.

1998

One of the striking things about the organizational structure of the LRA in the late 1990s was its high degree of organization and its resemblance to a regular army. Former combatants talk of entering a highly regimented lifestyle when arriving in camps in Sudan from Uganda, complete with daily “roll calls” and military parades. A typical experience involved being assigned to a battalion where recruits were thoroughly questioned about their area of origin, date of birth, family members and other genealogical information, all of which was noted down by administration officers. Usually, new recruits underwent a medical checkup and received treatment for diseases or wounds they might have sustained during the arduous trip from Uganda to South Sudan. They would then be “purified” with shea-nut oil, “holy water” and ashes before being subjected to heavy beatings, which were part of their initiation into the LRA. The recruits would then receive military uniforms and gumboots supplied by the Sudanese, and start military training.

Still, it is unclear whether the military structure worked well in practice, especially since Kony exercised arbitrary power as described above. Officer ranks and positions were assigned by Kony alone, as he saw fit, which must have had a confusing effect on hierarchy. At times he demoted high-ranking officers to privates while leaving them in charge of their military units. Such was the case with Otti Lagony, who was demoted in 1996 to private while still being in charge of intelligence for the entire LRA.⁸² The importance of Control Alter or the military council (Kony has been known to refer to Control Alter as the Joint Chiefs of Staff) is therefore questionable. While it would appear that Control Alter should have constituted the “brains” of the LRA, in practice Kony often gave orders directly to brigade and even battalion commanders without consulting Control Alter or the relevant top commander inside Control Alter. It is for this reason that some former combatants refer to Control Alter as another LRA brigade.

Kony’s behavior, especially his use of spirits, makes it difficult to consider the LRA as a regular army. The spirits, which were in charge of particular aspects of life in the LRA, including giving out military orders, were in effect also in direct competition with Control Alter—yet another example of Kony (via spirits) ignoring his top officers, many of whom were former soldiers in the Ugandan military pre-NRA. Similarly,

⁸⁰ Interview with Chris Burke, formerly of Carter Centre, Kampala, 23 November 2010.

⁸¹ Interview with Ugandan intelligence officer, Gulu, 2 February 2011.

⁸² Interview with F. Ochen, Gulu, 3 February 2011.

certain individuals associated with the spirits and Lakwena (Holy Spirit) in particular were also more influential than the top military commanders and could often give military orders as interpretations of messages from the spirits.⁸³

Kony's personal security detail was also outside of the normal LRA command structure. Central Brigade's sole purpose was to provide security for Kony and his family. There were two units within Central Brigade—essentially Kony's first line of defense—Home Guard, responsible for the security of Kony's family, and "High Protection Unit," (HPU or HAPPO), Kony's second line of defense. Within HPU, there was the personal security detail for Kony and his *aide de camp* (ADC), Kony's third and immediate line of defense. Over the years, Central Brigade, where only trusted people were admitted, became a breeding ground for young, violent commanders who rose quickly in influence within the LRA. A few prominent examples include Brigadiers Ochan Bunia and Dominic Ongwen, as well as Lt. Colonels Okumu Binansio 'Binany' and Okot "Odek."

2008

In 2008 the organizational structure of the LRA was similar to that of 1998, with a few significant exceptions. By 2008 the LRA organizational chart appears much simpler than ten years earlier. Control Alter had either been disbanded or lost significance, while HPU had taken on the functions of Control Alter. The number of combatants was smaller in 2008, estimated at around 800-1000 fighters, or about one third of the LRA strength in its peak in 1998-2000.⁸⁴ The brigades were much smaller, probably around 150 combatants in each. Moreover, because as part of the Juba peace talks then underway the LRA were primarily based in settled, organized sites in Garamba Park in northeastern DRC, there was an emphasis on self-reliance in the LRA which meant that many fighters spent most of their time working in large fields of sorghum, maize and vegetables—a shift from a purely military to a more "civilian" existence.

By 2008, the LRA forces were divided into six different camps, unlike Sudan in 1998 where there were two or three major camps with a few groups operating in Uganda. In April 2008, when convinced that the peace talks were not going to succeed, Kony started to prepare for possible military alternatives. One new camp, called Nigeria, had been established 50 km to the west of Garamba National Park, near Bitima. There were at least five named camps inside Garamba, known as Cover, Anyica (Luo for coldness), Swahili, Gangboo (Luo for vegetable garden) and Angula (a Luo traditional name). Kony's headquarters and family were located at Swahili camp but he maintained residences in all the other camps. For instance, in late 2007, Vincent Otti, Ben Achellam and Otim "Record" were called to a meeting at Kony's house in Anyica camp, before they were executed.⁸⁵

From the end of 2007 until Operation Lightning Thunder in late 2008, Kony reportedly moved every few days, with his escort, staying at different camps to avoid possible attacks. It was therefore not unusual for Kony to leave his camp, as he did on 14 December 2008, the day Operation Lightning Thunder was launched. If he had not already been alerted about the operation a day or two before, as sometimes claimed, it is very likely that Kony was alerted to incoming helicopters by LRA fighters in Camp Nigeria,

⁸³ This was the case for instance with the LRA 'High Priest' Abonga 'Papa,' who had a powers of a top commander in the LRA before he came out in 2006. Similarly Kony's personal secretary who takes notes, amongst other things, of Lakwena's orders acts as a commander of one of Kony's personal protection squads.

⁸⁴ Various interviews with former combatants and MONUSCO officials.

⁸⁵ Interview with G.O., Gulu, 3 February 2011.

as the helicopters would have had to fly close to Bitima en route from Dungu to Garamba. Kony would have had ample time to move and a selection of safe places to go to avoid the Ugandan offensive, which he did successfully.

2011

The structure of the LRA today has changed from that of 2008 mostly due to the fact that Kony has been moving, in close proximity to groups led by Odhiambo and Caesar Achellam, since May 2009. The constant movement of LRA top commanders coupled with the lack of reliable communications—satellite phones and radio calls are seldom used due to fear of signal triangulation—has resulted in a less centralized organization. Many of the groups, particularly the ones in DRC led by Dominic Ongwen, have been operating almost entirely independently for over 16 months.

Operating in scattered groups over vast territories does not necessarily mean that the LRA is weaker. As mentioned above, it is important to note that even at the peak of its strength in the late 1990s, many groups in the LRA operated far from the group's main bases in southern Sudan. Such was the case, for instance, with Kwoyelo's and Ongwen's groups, which operated north of Kitgum at least until the Juba Talks were well underway, only joining Kony in Garamba in early 2007. Even when the entire LRA was based in Garamba, the troops were divided into the six different camps noted above operating as separate entities and responding directly to Kony.

Modus operandi

Tactics and training

Kony learned from the failure of Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Movement that military tactics and training were keys to survival and success. Having had little military experience himself, Kony found help from Odong Latek, an Acholi officer in the UNLA and overall commander of the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA).⁸⁶ Latek shared with Kony a deep mistrust of Museveni which led to his refusal to sign a peace agreement with the NRA in 1988. Together with a few Acholi officers, some of whom remain in the LRA, Latek joined Kony who led one of the few rebel groups remaining in Acholiland by 1988.⁸⁷

The influence of former UPDA soldiers in today's LRA was profound. Military training on attack formations, hit and run and ambush tactics, as well as handling guns of various calibers took on the same importance as praying.⁸⁸ After Latek's death in 1989, military training continued under other former UPDA soldiers such as Mixman "Opuk" (tortoise) Oryang, who is still referred to as "UPDA" today by LRA combatants, and Caesar Achellam.⁸⁹ However, until the mid-1990s training had been ad hoc. In 1995 this changed as LRA groups moved into bases in Sudan's Central and Eastern Equatoria and training in the LRA—overseen by officers from the SAF—started to resemble that of a regular army.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Heike Behrend refers to Latek as "supreme commander" of the UPDA. Heike Behrend, *Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirits*, Oxford, 1999.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Behrend, 1999, p. 182.

⁸⁹ Interview with Ray Apire, Gulu, 2 February 2011.

⁹⁰ Interview with Francis Ocen, former LRA Director of Signals, Gulu, 3 February 2011.

Former LRA combatants talk of a regimented daily routine during their time in Sudanese camps. Each day included morning parades, daily drills in various military tactics and handling of sophisticated weaponry, including anti-aircraft guns (12.7 mm being an LRA favorite⁹¹), anti-personnel mines and SAM7 missiles. Makas, former Director of Operations in the LRA, says he and other LRA commanders were trained not only in Juba but also in Khartoum on SAF bases. “We were taught how to use 82 mm mortars, RPG7s, SPG9 73 mm and B10 recoilless rifles.”⁹²

Various tactics were practiced daily and included attacking in formations LRA combatants refer to as “L or C shaped,” which LRA commanders modified to their liking. “The Arabs taught us how to take on the Ugandan army but they were cowards, they would not stand up when fighting like we did,” said a former fighter, referring to the explicit order from Kony that fighting had to be done standing erect advancing against the enemy. Fighters were also trained in search and destroy tactics, still used in attacks against villages. This involved learning to encircle a target and positioning attackers to avoid friendly fire and minimize the possibility of escapees.

SAF officers trained the LRA in clearing out trenches, a way to deal with SPLA fighters. A former combatant said that “the Dinkas [SPLA] were tall” and could be easily hit when standing up in the open so they fought in trenches where they could mow down advancing LRA fighters. “The smallest LRA rebels—those who could move unseen through the bush—were then sent to the trenches to shoot as many Dinkas as possible and clear out fast, before they were hit.”⁹³

Training in ambush tactics were seen as especially relevant in engaging the Ugandan army. A well-rehearsed move, according to former combatants, involved an advanced LRA party, usually 10-15 fighters, making contact with Ugandan army troops and retreating hastily towards a well-set up ambush manned by a large LRA group with at least a couple of fighters manning PK machine guns in elevated positions. “It had to be done quickly,” said a former combatant, “in the hope that the Ugandan soldiers would immediately come after us rather than call for artillery cover or air support.”⁹⁴

A great deal of training and learning came about as a practical necessity. Such is the case with knowing how to avoid being seen by encircling aircraft, a learned experience from years of facing Ugandan army gunships. “Everyone in the group, including the newly abducted, knew exactly what to do when a helicopter appeared. We were told to walk in silence so we could hear the noise of incoming helicopters, to quickly find cover mostly in the bushes or under trees and make sure everything that could reflect in the sun including our fingernails were shielded or not facing upwards,” said a former combatant.⁹⁵ LRA combatants also mastered moving unseen under helicopters by covering their heads in cassava leaves and crawling in the grass.⁹⁶

Training and learned experience were attuned to serve mobility in the bush, including learning how to confuse trackers (walking backwards, splitting into many groups and reuniting a few miles after) and

⁹¹ See for instance Intelligence Briefing, 6/9/2004, “Kony summons Odyambo to base ahead of mission to Uganda,” *The Independent*, 17 February 2010.

⁹² Interview with Opiyo Makas, Gulu, 2 February 2011.

⁹³ As recounted by “Norman” in *Aboke Girls, Children Abducted in Northern Uganda*, Els De Temmerman, Kampala, 2009, p. 72.

⁹⁴ Interview with G.O. Gulu, November 2010 and February 2011.

⁹⁵ Interview with R. Gulu, 2 February, 2011.

⁹⁶ *Aboke Girls*, p. 22.

how to increase chances of success when attacking villages. Reconnaissance plays a key role in the latter and is something LRA commanders take very seriously. In every LRA group there are Intelligence Officers (IOs) whose duty is to gather as much information as possible about hostile forces and locations the group is about to attack.

Reconnaissance

Reconnaissance is a crucial component of LRA tactical procedure. Hours before attacking, LRA scout units, usually composed of approximately five fighters, abduct a few individuals from the area about to be attacked. The abductees are then questioned thoroughly on everything there is to know about the areas they come from (troops in the area, markets, geographical features, houses of local chiefs, religious and governmental buildings and medical clinics), a procedure conducted by the group commander and the IO. LRA commanders decide whether to attack based on the information received. The abductees are threatened with death if found to be lying, some may be killed during the interrogation to scare others or may be brought along when the attack takes place to act as guides or to be killed if they had lied during the interrogation.

The insistence on mastering their operating environment has been a key element of LRA survival in the past. Such was the case toward the end of 2005 when Vincent Otti and a group of about 120 LRA fighters crossed the Nile to move to DRC from Southern Sudan. Immediately upon arriving in Garamba National Park, LRA combatants abducted a park ranger and forced him to “show the LRA around,” as a Ugandan intelligence officer put it.⁹⁷ In a matter of days, Otti and his fighters had mastered their new territory, assigning names to particular locations including valleys, streams and elevations.⁹⁸ This proved crucial when a few weeks later, in January 2006, Otti’s group came in contact with 80 Guatemalan peacekeepers. Knowing the territory well allowed the LRA group to retreat, and later deploy 11 fighters to encircle and ambush the Guatemalan peacekeepers allegedly killing eight and injuring many more.⁹⁹

As the LRA moved to DRC and the fighting slowed down during the Juba Peace talks, training became less rigorous. After Operation Lighting Thunder and continuing today, military training is done “on the job,” as many groups are constantly on the move. There are unconfirmed claims, however, that two new training camps were recently set up in South Darfur where Sudanese officers have allegedly resumed training the LRA.¹⁰⁰

Survival

It is impossible to underestimate the ability of LRA fighters to survive under the hardest of circumstances. All of the members of LRA groups, including top commanders, have learned to live on little food and water. Their extraordinary ability to survive, even when constantly on the move, gives LRA fighters an edge over all pursuing armies.

⁹⁷ Interviews with Ugandan officer, Gulu, November 2010 and February 2011.

⁹⁸ Assigning names to places they operate is an important LRA practice which ensures not only that the fighters know their territory well but also that such knowledge is internal to the LRA, not understood by others as names are usually in Luo.

⁹⁹ Interview with G.O., Gulu, 3 February 2011.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with SPLA Director of Operations, Juba, 29 March 2011.

Nature often provides the biggest challenge to LRA survival. The combination of constant movement and the scarcity of water mean thirst is one of the common causes of death in the LRA, especially among newly abducted captives, who have no one to look after them. "A young man we took in Namutina fell to the ground, dying of thirst. I realized that one Acholi guy [fighter] had taken his bottle of water by force and drunk it," said a former combatant.¹⁰¹ This type of predatory behavior directed at people outside but also inside the LRA accounts to a large extent for combatants' survival rates and illustrates how senior commanders ruthlessly preserve their own lives at the expense of their followers.

People in the LRA employ every possible trick to survive and their conditioning allows them to endure extreme hardships. Former combatants talk about surviving for days by licking the dew off leaves every morning, drinking each other's urine and digging for water. As a former combatant explained, "we could tell which parts of the earth might have little water deep down. We would then dig with sticks and fingers until we found wet dirt, then put our shirts on top of the dirt and suck really hard. It was never enough but we kept alive like this."¹⁰²

"Normal" food is more often than not unavailable to the rank and file in the LRA. They depend on leaves, roots, wild berries and fruit, lizards, insects and small birds for sustenance when nothing else is available. Desperation from hunger frequently causes LRA fighters to kill civilians for their food. Surviving on little and looting food wherever and however they can, including killing people for it, gives the LRA an advantage regular army troops cannot match. "We live on the air we breathe," said a former commander, "unlike the Ugandan soldiers who have to wait for the helicopter to bring them their posho [maize meal] and beans."¹⁰³

Ideology & religion

It is commonly assumed that LRA ideology is about establishing a regime based on the Biblical Ten Commandments or that the LRA ideology revolves entirely around Kony. Such views are incomplete and misleading when taken out of context. As an LRA researcher says, "active LRA fighters have said that they do not fight the war for the chairman (Joseph Kony). They see themselves as fighters for their people, the Acholi, whom they believe to be marginalized, abused, and excluded from Uganda's development by an oppressive regime."¹⁰⁴

Like other rebellions that predate it in Northern Uganda, the LRA was formed essentially on legitimate grievances and fear of domination experienced, or perceived, by the Acholi population. It is important to note that senior LRA commanders were aware first-hand of violence perpetrated by NRA soldiers in Northern Uganda in 1987. As a Catholic priest who was based in Kitgum at the time says, "the first NRA to arrive after the UNLA soldiers had left for Sudan were the *kadogos* [child soldiers] who initially behaved well but later started to beat people up and demand that all guns were handed over. Some former UNLA soldiers were too afraid to surrender worrying that they would all be killed as Amin had done with the Acholis. They instead joined the UPDA or Alice [Lakwena], and later - Kony."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Interview with G.O., Gulu, 3 February 2011.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Interview with former LRA commander, Gulu, 2 February 2011.

¹⁰⁴ Mareike Schomerus, 'The Lord's Resistance Army in Sudan, A history and overview,' Small Arms Survey, September 2007, p. 12.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with F.J., Gulu, 3 February 2011.

Thus in the beginning, the LRA was based on a spirit of genuine rebellion; a group trying to overthrow those in power because of a series of perceived injustices, hardly unusual at the time given that Museveni had just come to power through a similar process, and in the two years after Museveni came to power “some twenty-seven different rebel groups were reported to be resisting the government.”¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, reports of Sudanese support to the LRA in the late 1990s and early 2000s relay the “legitimization” of the LRA—they were no longer just an irrelevant group of fighters in a remote corner of Northern Uganda. It is not hard to see that Kony and a few older commanders might still believe in the “righteousness” of their cause and the possibility of succeeding in their quest, something they impart to younger generations of fighters.

While the overall ideology has evolved over time—mirroring a tactic of precisely the same sort used throughout Uganda’s post-colonial politics, including by President Museveni and the NRM/A going back to the “bush war” that brought them to power—Kony has continued to nurture an ethnic theme of the Acholi against the Banyankole, the Western Ugandan tribe of President Museveni.¹⁰⁷ It is not uncommon to hear former LRA combatants in their teens refer to the “treacherous Ankole” (a reference to the Peace Talks between Okello and Museveni in 1985, derided by the Acholi as the Peace Jokes) or the Bantu wanting to eradicate the Nilotic people.¹⁰⁸ Such discourse, almost certainly initiated by Kony and senior commanders, is maintained in order to motivate fighters who regard the UPDF as controlled by Ankole officers. Whether or not Kony really believes he will eventually overthrow Museveni, LRA commanders have continued to tell their fighters that their aim is to take Kampala. Promises of positions in the army and government when Kony becomes President of Uganda continue to be made, not only to Ugandan fighters but also Sudanese and Congolese.

Scholars of the conflict have pointed out that the Acholi rebellions of Alice Lakwena, and eventually Kony, were not only about defying Museveni, but also about challenging the established order in Acholiland of politicians and elders considered corrupt and sinful.¹⁰⁹ Being in the LRA provided more than just protection from the NRA, it offered Kony and his fighters a parallel structure where they decided what was right and wrong. Given tendencies toward authoritarian rule by their governments, it is not surprising that the allure of challenging the established order remains strong, not only for Kony and the Acholi soldiers, but also for the Congolese, Sudanese and Central Africans.

Religion, or rather a unique blend of Christian and Acholi traditional beliefs, has been effectively used to legitimize the movement, bonding together recruits and even more importantly providing a code of conduct that has been key to troop cohesion. Religion-inspired behavior, such as refraining from committing adultery (i.e., not sleeping with other commanders’ wives) has helped avoid conflict among

¹⁰⁶ Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, 2008, p. 69.

¹⁰⁷ On the use of ethnic stereotyping and demonizing by Museveni and the NRM, see Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 2010, “Afterword.” The term Ankole is also used in a derogative form by LRA and akin to warrant death. In the January 1997 Palabek massacre in Northern Uganda (north of Kitgum) LRA soldiers told people there they were treacherous like Banyankole after massacring over 410 people in retaliation against people from the area for disclosing LRA hidden ammunitions to the UPDF. See Gersony, “The Anguish of Northern Uganda,” July 1997.

¹⁰⁸ This theory is widely discussed in Northern Uganda more generally. People in Gulu for instance mention the arrival in the district in 1987 of current Rwandan President Paul Kagame, at the time in the NRA, leading a group of other NRA fighters including many who were under 18 and from Western Uganda, as evidence of attempted “domination of the Tutsis.”

¹⁰⁹ For example, see Adam Branch, “Exploring the roots of LRA violence: political crisis and ethnic politics in Acholiland,” in *The Lord’s Resistance Army, Myth and Reality*, Tim Allen and Koen Vlassenroot eds., London 2010, pp. 36-37; Finnström, 2008, pp 218-19.

troops. Religion in the form of convincing combatants they are fighting for and are protected by God has helped to encourage valor on the battlefield.

It is incorrect to ignore the importance of the Acholi beliefs in the supernatural, as is the case with the spirits. Usually regarded as a sign of the LRA's "backwardness," the significance of spirits and their various roles in daily life are today commonly accepted in Uganda.¹¹⁰ LRA combatants are not the only ones who believe in the power of spirits, the malice of evil practitioners of witchcraft and Kony's supernatural powers. Various interviews with UPDF officers and high Ugandan officials indicate that despite public pronouncements to the contrary, the LRA's enemies share some of the same beliefs and fears of the otherworldly as LRA combatants do.¹¹¹

The emphasis on religion and widely accepted beliefs in spirits and the supernatural have helped to create the "perfect soldier." But this is only one element in the process. The typical, usually Acholi, LRA combatant not only believes in the cause for which he is fighting for spiritual or religious reasons, but also for political ones, and he also observes strict military practices of training and fighting techniques and adheres to a code of conduct that includes not drinking alcohol or consuming drugs.¹¹²

Religion, specifically aspects related to Catholicism, has acted as a bonding element for the non-Acholi troops, particularly the Zande from all three countries, who are overwhelmingly Catholic (as are also the Acholi). Singing Christian songs and praying—something the new recruits are immediately taught to do in Acholi Luo—as well as "traditional" or hybrid religious practices of anointing new recruits with shea-nut oil and "holy water" are well thought and carried-out bonding practices in the LRA.

LRA ideology has evolved throughout the history of the organization. So have techniques of indoctrination and control. According to interviews with former combatants, the LRA can be appealing to teenagers, even though they were abducted and forced to participate, because of the status and benefits associated with being a fighter. For senior commanders, including Kony, participation in the LRA may not have provided the means to the end they desire but has rather become an end in itself. This is possibly true for most of the privates also, particularly those who have spent a considerable amount of time in the bush already. But while ideology formed partly on a history of ethnic and regional resentment provides some motivation for fighters remaining in the LRA, it is now the status they achieve which has become the salient reason for continuing the fight.¹¹³

Status

Being in the LRA confers on senior commanders a status to which they could not otherwise aspire. "Kony is the most famous person in Uganda," said a former commander who himself felt he has been an important person in the past; particularly when being flown to Khartoum and interacting with senior

¹¹⁰ See for instance Finnström, 2008.

¹¹¹ The course of an interview with a Ugandan official was typical. It began with the official ridiculing Kony for "pretending to be talking to spirits," and ended with the officials claiming, "Kony is a son of Satan and capable of deeds outside of this world."

¹¹² In a recent interview with "Rambo," a former LRA combatant who surrendered to the Congolese troops and spent four nights in the FARDC base in Doruma, he said, "the Congolese soldiers are not what we in the LRA consider to be real soldiers, they were drinking all night and smoking marijuana, you get shot in the LRA for doing those things."

¹¹³ For a good discussion of spirituality in the LRA see Kristof Titeca 'The Spiritual Order of the LRA' in Allen and Vlassenroot 2010.

Sudanese officers. “I am amazed LRA commanders decide to leave the ranks,” said a Ugandan intelligence agent. “One day I saw Makas in Gulu digging a ditch for a 1,000 shillings [50 cents] a day. Here was this former commander who had hundreds of men under him in the bush working to survive.”¹¹⁴

LRA commanders continuously promote among the rank and file, the significance of being a soldier by reinforcing the notion of military status as superior to that of civilians. There are very clear procedures commanders follow to “transform” recruits from civilians to soldiers which include beating and forced killings. Such initiation rituals aim not only to break and rebuild the psyche of the newly abducted so that they will accept their new fate, but also to make them feel part of a group bound together by often cruel bonding exercises and brainwashing. Rituals such as anointing the recruits with shea-nut oil serve to signify entry into the LRA. This marks such recruits as having become fighters, clearly distinguishable from civilians, whom the LRA refer to as *waya* (ants) or *funu* (pigs).¹¹⁵

Bonding practices and rituals intended to reinforce the special status of LRA fighters continue throughout their time in the LRA. The use of military ranks is a particularly important part of the structure of status reinforcement. Given for bravery shown in the field, ranks in the LRA are similar to ranks in the UPDF, an attempt to legitimize the rebellion as well as to encourage fighters to fight hard. It is not surprising that after years in the LRA, many combatants feel a sense of belonging to the organization. “Kidega was a commander, he was 20 years old. He wanted to die in the bush; everybody close to him had already died there. I miss him but I know he will never come out,” said a young woman, former “wife” of the subject, who managed to escape from the LRA.¹¹⁶

The significance of status conferred by the LRA is not lost on the rank and file. “I was in charge of 15 people in the LRA,” said a 17 year old former combatant, “now that I am out, my mother orders me to collect wood.”¹¹⁷ The increased freedom within the organization and respect enabled by their status as LRA fighters, in stark contrast to the lack of opportunities for recognition or status back home in Northern Uganda, have made many former combatants express regret for leaving the LRA, despite the extreme living conditions and dangers of life in the bush.

Communications

Given the challenge of retaining cohesion while operating in groups scattered far apart from one another, communication has been of enormous significance to the LRA. From early days, messengers—runners carrying messages from one commander to another—were the preferred method of communication. From 1995 onwards, commanders started to use two-way radios (walkie-talkies) and by the late 1990s LRA groups were using radio calls. According to Major Ochen, a former director of

¹¹⁴ Interview with Ugandan intelligence agent, Kampala, 22 November 2010.

¹¹⁵ For an in depth discussion of the experience of recruits in the LRA including reasons for staying in the rebellion see Blattman and Annan ‘On the nature and causes of LRA abduction: what the abductees say,’ in Allen and Vlassenroot, 2010.

¹¹⁶ Excerpt from interviews with former combatants conducted by an international NGO carrying out psychosocial support. D.I. 18 years old.

¹¹⁷ Interview conducted by international psychologist, Subject I.

communications (chief signaler) in the LRA, over 200 people were trained by SAF officers by 1999 in operating and fixing radios as well as in the use of codes.¹¹⁸

The LRA maintained a strict practice of opening radios at 9 am in the morning and checking in at the top of every hour until 9 pm, after which radio silence was observed. Kony, who almost always spoke through his signaler, received reports of attacks and situation reports covering each day's events. Detailed reports, however, of particularly large attacks were expected to be given in person to Kony. By 2000-01, as the Ugandan army started to eavesdrop on LRA chatter, the LRA increased their use of coded messages.

A Ugandan intelligence officer who studied the LRA forms of communication for over five years in the late 1990s and early 2000s says that signalers in the LRA used both simple and sophisticated coded messages when communicating by radio. Keys to decode messages, or *tonfases* as the LRA calls them, were put together by top commanders with the aid of signalers. The keys were then given names and disseminated by messengers to all signalers. The signalers would then give the message referring to the particular key needed to decode it. Names given to keys ranged from "African Leaders" category (e.g., Mandela) to random words in Luo, English or Kiswahili.¹¹⁹

Keys could be as simple as numbers corresponding to a word in English or Luo (e.g., 1-private, 2-military, 3-AK47, 19-water, etc.). In this case a message over the radio could be (in Luo): "Suspicion of 2 near your area." More complicated keys involved numbers corresponding to letters in particular words (e.g., ANGOLA – A=1, N=2, G=3, O= 4, L=5, A=1). Particularly sensitive messages were "double-coded," signalers used the original key, numbers corresponding to particular words (which was referred to as GANG MA COL – Luo for "Africa") as well as using the second method of using numbers referring to letters in particular words.

But as LRA signalers were captured or defected to the Ugandan army, LRA commanders (particularly Vincent Otti) started to create complicated keys. According to Ugandan intelligence agents, in the early to mid-2000s, LRA coded communications evolved to a sophisticated level that proved extremely challenging to break.¹²⁰ There was an increase in jargon and use of nicknames (e.g., "collect the water" for "cross the river"). Crucially, the messages became esoteric, understood only to commanders in question (e.g., Otti to Kony – *Cross the road where Kapere's Mteso wife escaped and turn right where we had posho with Ochan Bunia.*)¹²¹ "It was impossible for us to know what this meant," said a Ugandan intelligence officer, "even after interrogating former signalers in the LRA, who did not know either."¹²²

Other messages were made up of words corresponding to a particular letter forming a different message. Again, the words used were also known mostly to commanders in the LRA (e.g., 1. the name of your third son, 2. Sudanese tribe, 3. name of your chief security. This formed: 1. NONO 2. LUTUGU 3. ODONGO. Nono means "nothing" in Luo, Lutugu was a code word for "food" and Odongo was a code word for "water." Hence the message would be: "send food and water."¹²³)

¹¹⁸ Interviews with F. Ochen, Gulu, 2 February 2011

¹¹⁹ "LRA's Communication Method," Uganda External Security Organization, Confidential, March 2007.

¹²⁰ Various interviews with former and current intelligence agents, Gulu and Kampala, November, December 2010 and February and March 2011.

¹²¹ Transcript from intercepted communication, Ugandan External Security Organization, 27 February 2006.

¹²² Interview with ESO agent, Kampala, March 2011.

¹²³ Ibid.

By the early 2000s LRA commanders came into possession of satellite phones, one allegedly supplied to them by the Carter Centre and others taken from foreigners attacked in Sudan.¹²⁴ During the Juba Talks, the LRA received many more satellite phones; Kony is reported to have had at least 16 at one point in 2007.¹²⁵ It is unclear where the air time for the satellite phones came from, although it was reportedly from LRA sympathizers in the diaspora and international non-governmental organizations which wanted to maintain open channels of communication with Kony and other commanders.¹²⁶ Kony, was, however, convinced that Jonas Savimbi of UNITA was killed by a satellite phone-guided missile and refused to touch them, using instead his signaler.¹²⁷

Satellite phones were mostly used until May 2009 when Kony rightly guessed they were being monitored by the Ugandan army (with US help), their signal triangulated and the position of user attacked by Ugandan helicopter gunships. Walkie-talkies and radio calls have stopped being used altogether. There has been sporadic use of satellite phones since 2009, mostly in the form of coded text messages. Some commanders send their signalers with satellite phones 20 kilometers away from the main group, where calls are made before they immediately return to the original location. There have also been reports that some commanders, particularly Ongwen, are taking advantage of recent coverage in some areas of South Sudan to use cell phones to communicate with people in Uganda.

Most of LRA commanders, however, have gone back to using only messengers (runners) to communicate. Pre-arranged rendezvous (RV) places are also used. Some of the Congo groups, for instance, used pre-arranged RVs to meet at the first of every month from January to May 2009 when they were attacked by the UPDF soldiers who had intercepted a runner and extracted info about the RV location.¹²⁸ Written letters are also used, usually pinned to a tree or hidden under a rock near a RV location where other commanders check frequently.

Weapons

The AK 47 is the weapon most used in the LRA. Other weapons include the G3, FN rifles and PK machine guns. There are also a handful of M16s looted throughout the years, particularly after an attack against Garamba Park Rangers. Many of the LRA groups also possess and use RPG7s. There has been a reported shortage in ammunition for most of the weapons LRA groups use today. Most of the ammunition for LRA weapons had been hidden (buried) by LRA commanders during the time in Garamba. Guns and ammunition, particularly AKs, are usually taken from soldiers that LRA fighters kill, especially FARDC troops. Other sophisticated weaponry that the LRA has used in the past includes B10s and SPG9 recoilless guns, as well as anti-tank and anti-personnel mines and SAM7 missiles.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Kony asked a representative of an international organization for a satellite phone in 1999 and received it a year or so later. At least three expatriates were robbed of their sat phones by the LRA in 2005 in Sudan.

¹²⁵ Interviews with former LRA combatants, Gulu, November, December 201 and February 2011.

¹²⁶ Interview with former LRA members of delegation to the Juba talks, Gulu and Kampala, November 2010 and March 2011. Interview with former escort to Kony, Gulu, 3 February 2011. The latter said, "there was a satellite phone which appeared to have unlimited airtime, and Kony used it frequently in 2006 and 2007."

¹²⁷ At least three former combatants have recounted the story of President Museveni calling Kony in November 2008 which was answered by Michael Epedu (technician), Kony's signaler. Kony refused to handle the phone and reportedly fled the camp.

¹²⁸ This led to the killing of the notorious brigade commander, Okello Kalalang.

¹²⁹ Former combatants talk of never mastering the SAM7 and needing help from SAF officers to recalibrate the missiles due to problem with the batteries.

Strategy

The LRA seems to have followed a strategic plan of some kind or other from the beginning of its existence. Decisions to cooperate with other rebel groups, participate in peace talks, launch military action, use mutilation, and so on, were all part of a strategic thought process. LRA commanders have played a key role in shaping the actions of the LRA through their proximity to Kony. The decision to move to DRC was influenced by Vincent Otti, who convinced Kony to do so and undertook an explanatory mission in September 2005, before establishing an LRA base and then ensuring that Kony reached Garamba safely in 2006.

Kony, however, has always had the last word on strategy. His orders are relayed by radio or messengers and are often explicit (detailing how many people to abduct and what to loot). Commanders of attacking groups are then expected to report back to Kony in person or, if far away, call in using coded language. Kony has continued to dictate strategy in the LRA even as different LRA groups are operating far from one another. Immediately post OLT, Kony ordered the deployment of troops in various areas inside DRC and CAR, an order most groups have largely obeyed while Kony and two top commanders tried to rekindle the relationship with the SAF.

Use of strategy can also be observed in efforts to maintain organizational cohesion and encourage LRA fighters, particularly non-Ugandans, to continue to fight. Kony and other top commanders tell the non-Ugandan fighters that they will too receive high posts in the Ugandan army and government when the LRA overthrows Museveni. It is also likely that Kony's assertions that his Sudanese wife, Foisha, has been chosen by the Holy Spirit to aid him to overthrow Museveni are intended to create a "bond through marriage" with the Sudanese element in the LRA.

Strategy these days in the LRA entails a "wait and see" approach with the hope that opportunities for more decisive action will materialize soon. Kony rightly understands his troops can outlast the regional hunt as the Ugandans and Congolese soldiers eventually lose interest or the ability to keep up. Such a strategy in fact seems to be working.

Based on interviews with former combatants and reports of recent movements of LRA groups in Congo, Garamba remains an important location for Kony and LRA commanders. It is perhaps a combination of factors such as proximity to Uganda and South Sudan, hidden caches of ammunition in the mid-2000s, an abundance of water and wild animals and the fertility of the land that make Garamba an appealing location to the LRA. Relative proximity to other rebel groups in Ituri, particularly the Allied Democratic Front, might also make Garamba a good location for LRA bases.¹³⁰ It is unlikely, although not impossible, that LRA groups would at any time in the foreseeable future attempt reentry in Uganda. For now, it is sufficient to a long term strategy that they survive.

¹³⁰ According to interviews with former combatants, in late 2007 Bok Abudema led a recon group south of Ituri allegedly to make contact with a former Ugandan rebel group, the People's Redemption Army. Allegations about a possible cooperation between the LRA and ADF have also been made in the past but have not been confirmed through our research.

Section IV - Military Context

Geography

The current LRA area of operations covers territory roughly the size of the southern half of France. It is intersected by borders separating the DRC, CAR, South Sudan and Uganda and includes open savannah, open canopy forest and close canopy jungle. It is believed that the LRA preferred administrative area is centered in Garamba Park, in north eastern DRC. Roads are poor or impassable in much of the area though there are several main routes that have been recently improved or under rehabilitation. The region is drained by a number of tributary rivers that impede passage during the rainy season, including the Garamba, Dungu and Kibali. The region is inhabited by the Azande as well as other smaller ethnic groups practicing farming, fishing and hunting and gathering. Mbororo cattle herders follow traditional patterns of migration following seasonal availability of pasturage. Most settled inhabitants live in scattered small villages or on homesteads.

Communications are poor with cell phone coverage only in major centers like Dungu, Yambio and Faradje. There are several HF radio communications facilities operated by religious missions or NGOs scattered through the region. Rainfall patterns have become slightly unpredictable but the seasons are generally separated according to rainfall (rains from September through December and February through April). Terrain in the southern part of the region is very heavily forested with thinning cover and longer dry seasons going north.

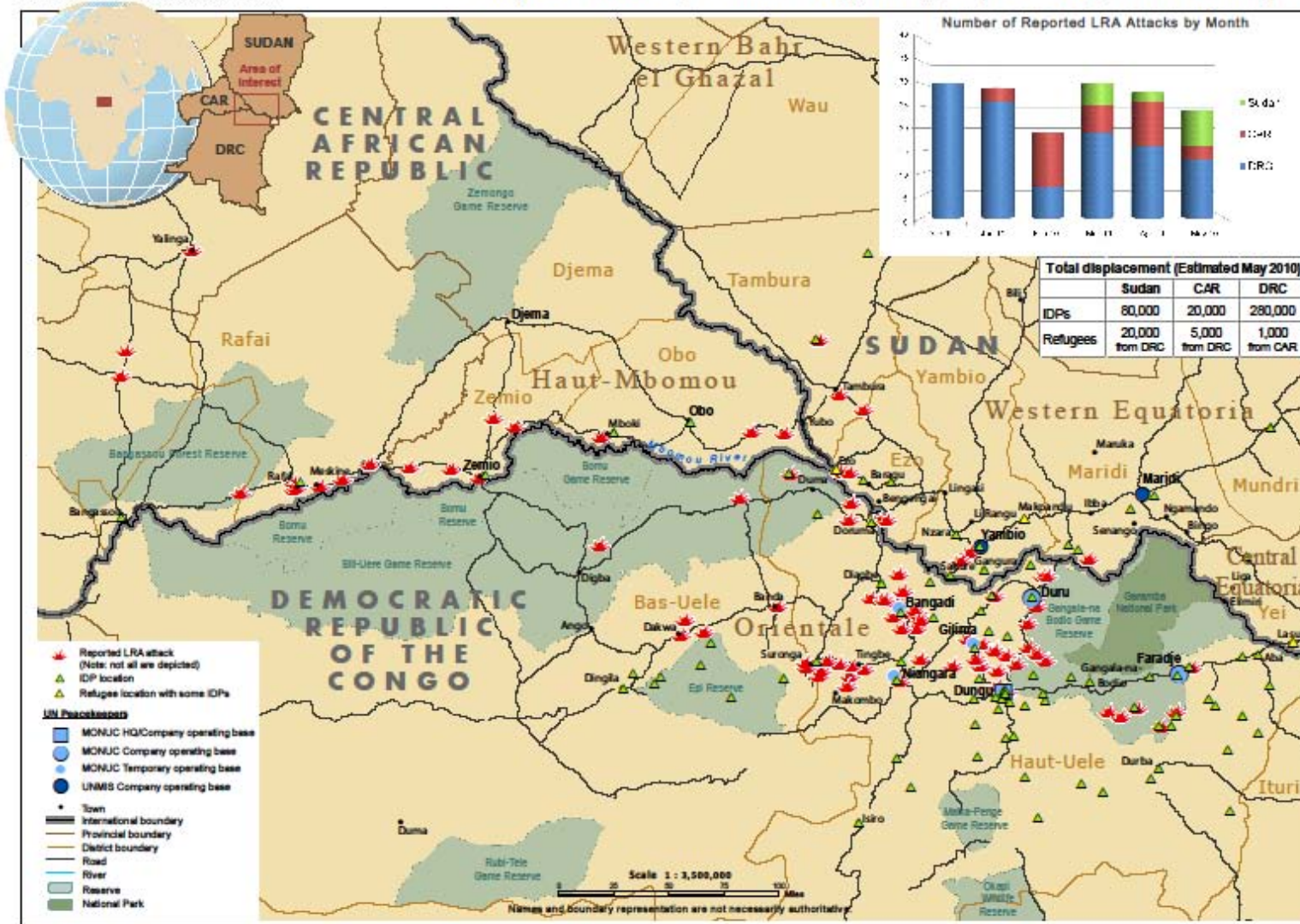
Though the research team attempted to find a correlation between rainfall, harvest cycles or other natural recurring phenomena and LRA operations, no observable pattern was discernable during the past several years. However, there is a curious paradox in Kony's need to live off the land in the very areas where the egregious effect of his operations is to empty the land of the host population. The LRA are parasitic to the extent that they produce nothing of their own and depend on the production of others for all their logistical requirements.¹³¹

The LRA have devoted considerable effort to ensuring that they know their chosen areas of operation well. As mentioned in Section II, there is at least one documented case in which they have captured a park ranger for the specific purpose of collecting detailed geographical information. From reports of former abductees it is clear that many captives abducted over the years have been used for the same purpose. In addition, the LRA strategy of multiple abductions across their areas of operation ensures them a ready supply of guides and interpreters.

The map below depicts the LRA area of operations and provides some data on displacement and LRA incidents.

¹³¹ The LRA have been known to plant crops in areas in Garamba Park, DRC and near Juba, Sudan during periods of relative peace.

Lord's Resistance Army
 Reported Attacks (Dec 2009 - May 2010), Displacement, and Peacekeepers



LRA characteristics and capacities

The structure and organization of the LRA have been described above. To review, significant characteristics and capacities that affect military operations include:

- A unified command structure with a capacity for central control of small group independent (or semi-independent) operations through a system that combines strategic guidelines with tactical freedom.
- Charismatic leadership based on skillful use of fear, discipline, demonstrated survival skills and cultural and religious beliefs.
- A demonstrated capacity for analysis and development of attack plans designed for specific purposes such as incapacitating local defenses, terrorizing local populations or exploiting boundaries between opposing forces.
- A demonstrated preference for extreme physical violence as well as deliberate psychological operations against civilian targets.
- High off-road mobility on foot. The LRA has been reported as able to cover up to 50 kilometers per day cross country.
- The ability to understand the pros and cons of appropriate technologies such as GPS, satellite and cell phones.¹³²
- The capacity to understand the vulnerabilities of the above and to adapt accordingly.
- The ability to recruit and train new fighters by a combination of force, psychological conditioning and effective training.
- The capacity to conduct well-coordinated attacks, sometimes very close to government or UN military installations, and to escape.¹³³
- The capacity to operate at night.
- Excellent battlefield and operational discipline.
- The proven capacity to thrive in hostile environments and among people who both hate and fear them.
- A capacity to live off the land indefinitely.

Taking into account the long period of alleged Sudanese support, one must also assume a certain level of advanced training shared among the senior officers of the LRA. In addition, the way in which the LRA conducted large-scale atrocities in response to the actual or reporting of military operations against them suggests a fine understanding of the role of the international media. Finally, the pattern of small-scale killings and abductions over the past 16 months suggests some uncertainty among LRA leaders about the possibility of a more serious international response, particularly by the USA. This in itself is cause for concern that the LRA leadership may have understood the importance of Information Operations and may be intentionally keeping the level of violence below the international radar.

Successful guerilla forces of the 20th century largely followed Mao Tse Tung's dictum that they should "swim among the people like fish in the sea." Doing so offers two major benefits: (1) direct operational (particularly intelligence) and logistics support during the operational phase of a revolution, and (2)

¹³² Interview with Opiyo Makas, former LRA Operations Officer working directly under Vincent Otti, Ndjili Airport, December, 2007. Makas turned over his GPS along with a detailed explanation of how the LRA used waypoints for prearranged meetings. He also explained how they used Sat phones and solar chargers within their overall communications standard operation procedures.

¹³³ The attack on Faradje on the night of 8 February 2011 took place within a kilometer of a MONUSCO company operating base – UN Security Meeting, Dungu, 11 Feb 2011.

increased political support for a victorious guerilla force once the revolution succeeded. To build off this imagery, the LRA swims among the people like hungry sharks, making no effort to win their support. One consequence of this is that an indeterminate portion of their fighting force consists of forced recruits, many of whom are children. The LRA simply takes what it needs by force and deliberately alienates itself from popular support in the process. One intentional effect of this strategy is that it ensures a hostile reception for any would be escapee. Of course, it should be noted that the LRA are not the only guerilla force to use these sorts of strategies.¹³⁴

This is one way in which the LRA leadership applies an idea familiar to students of Sun Tzu in which one of the arts of a skillful commander is to maneuver his own troops into dangerous positions so that they have no option but to fight. It is important when trying to understand Kony's tactics to see that much of what he does is intended to ensure the cohesiveness of his command. This may include deliberate orders to commit atrocities so that the senior commanders who lead particular operations believe themselves trapped by fear of ICC indictment. However, in adapting a deliberate strategy of terror, Kony prejudices any hope of political legitimacy in the eyes of the communities he has targeted and undermines the credibility of negotiations precisely because of the consistent pattern of his past behavior.

The LRA strategy of terror and forced recruitment creates both opportunities and challenges for opposing forces. In the first place, there is likely to be a significant number of hostages on the LRA side of any confrontation. These may include active combatants at various stages of "conversion" and/or recently captured prisoners. It would be contradictory to conduct military operations in the name of protection that resulted in consistently high casualty rates among the population of LRA hostages. However, in cases where hostages are in fact forced recruits and are being used in an attack against civilians, it will be very difficult to avoid treating them as combatants. At the same time, the presence of new abductees slows down the LRA if they are in flight (particularly when fleeing from the sight of an attack). Hostages force the LRA to devote military resources to guard or control them (dependent of course on the level of confidence in their loyalty) and forces LRA leaders to choose between losing recruits and their own safety.

The LRA has been successful in adapting its tactics and strategies to the risks posed by advanced reconnaissance and surveillance techniques. These adaptations include skillful use of dispersion, camouflage, excellent use of natural cover and operating over long periods and distances without the use of radios or phones. It has not been possible to intercept communications traffic for nearly two years and yet the LRA continues to operate and may even occasionally unite for command meetings and specific operations.¹³⁵

In addition to normal humanitarian and law-of-war considerations in these situations, LRA commanders must take into account the likely presence in the area of numbers of international NGOs and UN agencies with access to international media. Operational successes and failures will be observed and reported, which might influence political decisions affecting the campaign.

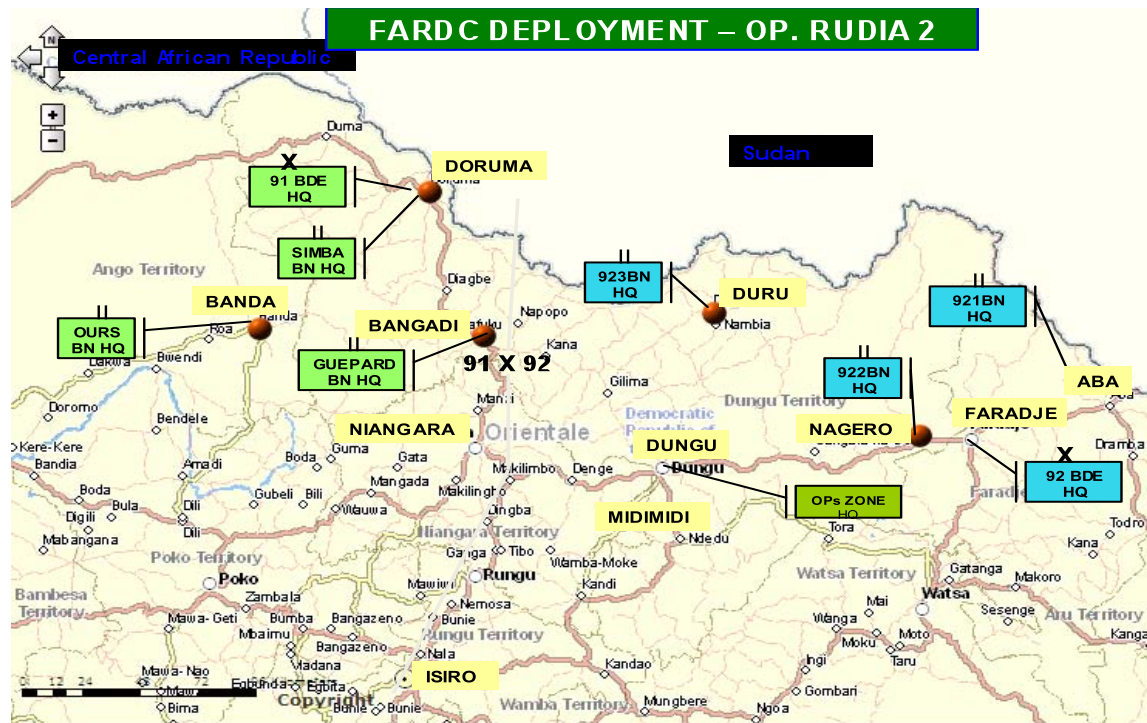
¹³⁴ A broader study of this subject would generate a number of comparable cases but is beyond the scope of this paper. Comments here are intended solely for the purpose of indicating particular characteristics that should be kept in mind during operational planning.

¹³⁵ Confidential interview with knowledgeable military source, Kampala, March 2011.

Available forces

There is no single military force structure incorporating all the forces engaged in operations against the LRA. There is, however, a loose coalition comprised of the following forces:

- **DRC**
 - FARDC – two brigades of lightly armed infantry deployed as per the map below



Source: MONUSCO briefing dated 16 Feb 2011

- MONUSCO: a small Joint Intelligence and Operations Centre, one battalion of Moroccan infantry and one company of Uruguayan special forces both equipped on UN Peacekeeping scales, 6 transport helicopters, deployed in Dunga, Faradje and Niangara.
- UPDF: a pursuit force of approximately 1,500 men including tracking units and some rented civilian light transport helicopters. Their headquarters is in Nzara, near Yambio, in South Sudan, and deployment of forces is considered confidential.
- SPLA: A brigade-sized force of light infantry headquartered near Yambio.
- FACA: Approximately 150 light infantry headquartered in Obo.

Unfortunately, the information above is of little use without an accompanying detailed analysis of forces deployed and their operational capabilities, equipment, intentions, deployment, mobility, leadership, morale, logistics, medical and other technical military factors beyond the capacity of the Diagnostic Study Research Team. However, the following passing observations are included in hopes of helping orient future research:

- FARDC military leadership in Dungu denies the presence of the LRA in DRC and believes that all recent attacks can be attributed to bandits or undisciplined elements of other armies.¹³⁶
- FARDC units are mistrusted by local communities in DRC and accused of harassing their own civilians instead of protecting them.¹³⁷ They have had little success against the LRA and a very poor record of operational reliability and respect for human rights.
- MONUSCO troops operate from fixed administrative positions, in daylight, and do not patrol off road or pursue LRA units. Their reactions to attack are limited to securing the scene after the fact. They have neither the mandate nor the equipment to conduct more aggressive operations but can, and do, provide limited logistical support to the FARDC.
- UPDF troops have been essentially inactive since mid-2010 and have reported few recent successes. Their forces are not well coordinated with other forces in the region and are not directly linked to protection operations. Moreover, there seems to be an increasing priority to use reliable troops to handle domestic security issues in Uganda so one may expect a further reduction in numbers, as already noted, substantially down from 2009 levels.
- FACA is operationally and logistically ineffective against a force as dispersed and as mobile as the LRA.
- The only indirect fire support available to any of the forces deployed is helicopter gunships; which do not fly at night and have weather limitations well known to the LRA.

¹³⁶ Interview Col Bruno, Commander, FARDC LRA operations, Dungu, Feb 2011.

¹³⁷ Interview, civil society leader, Dungu, Feb 2011.

Section V - Alternative Approaches

As noted in the introduction to this study, there is no consensus on the issue of the LRA. This has led over the past two-and-a-half years to the consideration of a number alternative approaches to the status quo in dealing with the group. These approaches include:

1. Arrest of Joseph Kony and other leaders indicted by the ICC.
2. Negotiation either with Joseph Kony or with his subordinate commanders.
3. Direct persuasion aimed at individual LRA combatants (DDRRR approach).
4. Empowering local defense capacity.
5. Investing in humanitarian support and development, including roads, bridges and cell phone coverage.

Investment in humanitarian support to mitigate the effects of LRA violence is generally taken as a given in each approach and will not be discussed further here beyond remarking that technical humanitarian interventions on their own can only mitigate, not stop, the violence and other problems associated with the LRA.

It is also worth noting that the argument for each of the alternative approaches begins with the claim that it is necessary to do something different since the military approach has not worked.

Arrest LRA leaders

The idea of applying international law through the arrest and trial of LRA leaders¹³⁸ on charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity or gross violation of human rights seems, on the surface, preferable to an outright insistence on military action. However, given the unlikelihood that the leaders in question would surrender peacefully, in addition to the characteristics of the LRA as a fighting force and the other features of the operational environment outlined above, only a military force well organized and equipped could in actual practice have the capability to execute the International Criminal Court arrest warrants.

Police forces, as a rule, are simply not equipped, manned or structured to cope with arrests of individual leaders of armed military forces – and certainly not those with the characteristics ascribed to the LRA. While the distinction between urging the arrest of LRA leaders and calling for military action may be important from the perspective of mandates of certain institutions, it is a distinction that makes no difference at the operational level. However, it is possible that military operations in this context might reasonably be considered “police actions,” which could orient the overall goal of either military or police operations against the LRA as directed towards justice rather than military victory. However, even in this scenario it is difficult to imagine justice being achieved without a full-scale military action that targets both the leaders and all potential successors within the LRA.

¹³⁸ Joseph Kony, Raska Lukwiya, Vincent Otti, Okot Odhiambo and Dominic Ongwen have been indicted by the ICC. Lukwiya was shot and confirmed dead by the UPDF in August 2006 and Otti is believed to have been killed by LRA in September 2007, confirmed by many former LRA fighters but no one knows where his body is.

Negotiation

The history of failed attempts to negotiate with Joseph Kony is open to a number of interpretations beyond the scope of this paper to fully explore. However, in addition to the complication presented by the ICC indictments against Kony and his top lieutenants, the behavior of LRA elements over the past few years is so far beyond the pale of acceptable norms that it is difficult to imagine how either international or local communities could be persuaded simply to turn a blind eye to the recent past. For this reason, it is difficult to find the consensus needed to ensure that negotiations could be conducted fairly or to convince the LRA that the results of a favorable negotiation could ever be accepted by the broader population.

The main problem for a negotiated strategy now is the lack of any LRA political traction in the region. Neither the Government of Uganda nor the Acholi community feels the weight and urgency of the LRA as they once did. Though the LRA are still considered a problem, they are a distant one and other priorities have pushed them into the background of politics. Indeed, the Government of Uganda can claim to have solved the problem militarily insofar as they have pushed the LRA out of sight and sound of most Ugandans. They can also claim that they have done everything possible to bring the Juba peace talks to a successful conclusion only to have Kony refuse to sign the final agreement.¹³⁹ It would appear from our investigations in Uganda that most northerners are, for the time being, resigned to accepting their government's position as the "lesser evil" – at least until some other option becomes apparent.¹⁴⁰ Further, the consensus seems to be that negotiations with Joseph Kony will go nowhere simply because of his profound and pervasive mistrust – of nearly everyone. When taken together and put in the present context, the LRA is of scant interest to any of the existing central governments in the region and thus is unlikely to find anyone willing to take them seriously enough to consider them worth talking to, or indeed the risk of raising their profile again.

When considered from the context of the DRC, the LRA has become an embarrassment to the incumbent President during the run up to elections, and has simply been dismissed. The government of the DRC has declared repeatedly that the LRA is not in the DRC and refuses to consider it a problem.¹⁴¹ Even if the government changes its policy, it is difficult to imagine a starting point for negotiation given that Kony has no political position with respect to the power in Kinshasa and has no stated political objectives relevant to the DRC. The same can be said of South Sudan and the CAR.

At a lower level, there is a new initiative arising through the agency of the Catholic Church through which it is hoped that negotiations with the LRA can be launched. However, it is clear that, in the words of one senior South Sudanese Army officer, "the power Kony wants is in Kampala, nowhere else". Thus, the challenge remains to find some way to convince the Government of Uganda to re-open a process that they have closed and nailed shut with military operations that have further sapped the trust that would be needed even to take the first steps towards negotiations. Perhaps a change of government might open a way that is at the moment scarcely imaginable, but for the time being there seems little to

¹³⁹ This paragraph is not meant to imply that there was not bad faith on both sides of the negotiating table. See Allen and Vlassenroot as well as Soto, *op.cit.*

¹⁴⁰ Recent political problems in Uganda notwithstanding. It is as yet not clear how the post-election opposition will play out in the context of the LRA.

¹⁴¹ In addition to comments repeated by the Minister of Information in February and March 2011, reports from the last Great Lakes Contact Group Meeting, 15 April 2011 indicate a hardening of the Congolese Government position and an agreement binding the UPDF to withdraw from DRC by 15 June 2011, ostensibly because there are no LRA for them to chase, confidential source, 16 April 2011.

be gained from launching new negotiations unless credibly initiated or backed by Joseph Kony himself¹⁴².

A further complication arises from the profound lack of trust between those believing in the need for negotiation and military or political leaders. The history of previous attempts to negotiate contains frequent mention of deliberate deception by military commanders promising a quick military victory and using pre-agreed meetings to ambush LRA negotiators¹⁴³. This has poisoned the waters to a degree that highlights a need for some reliable way to rein in government military forces as part of any eventual negotiations.

The prospect of negotiating with individual commanders remains, and does seem to offer some hope of further reducing the LRA. As mentioned above, Kony can ill afford to lose any of his reliable senior commanders. However, this strategy, even if successful, will only achieve a partial success unless complemented by persistent pressure on other fronts.

Voluntary persuasion – DDRRR

There is some hope that skillful use of information operations through the agency of MONUSCO's DDRRR program may reduce the numbers of LRA fighters by encouraging defectors. The techniques to accomplish this are simple in concept but extremely difficult to implement for several reasons. First, the core groups of LRA fighters are unlikely to be persuaded to disarm because they have shown repeatedly that they are well entrenched in their present positions. For reasons outlined in previous sections of this report, status, fear of reprisal, fear of ICC indictment and brutal reprisal by Kony against anyone suspected of wanting to defect all play a role. Add to this the poor treatment of returnees by the governments in the region and the likelihood of being forced into the UPDF to be used in counter LRA operations¹⁴⁴ and it becomes difficult to see how the idea of a peaceful return home can be sold. In addition, Kony's terror tactics coupled with frustration among his target communities over the lack of protection afforded by their own governments or the UN all push towards an extremely hostile human environment for those wishing to disarm. Finally, Kony will certainly react to any success by increasing abductions and forced recruitment and/or by new atrocities aimed at vulnerable civilians.

Other difficulties include the challenge of finding ways to get messages directly to LRA fighters. In a zone with virtually no radio or telephone coverage, messages are difficult to transmit. However, the DDRRR Section of MONUSCO has a record of imaginative solutions and is at present in the process of developing and implementing a communications strategy that shows some hope.¹⁴⁵ While a DDRRR approach makes good sense as a complement to other actions, it will not achieve the ultimate goal of protecting civilians against the LRA.

Empowering local defense groups

Citizens in all of the countries threatened by LRA attack could call on their right to self defend for the simple reason that their own governments are not able to protect them. However, it is one thing to recognize a right to self-defense and another to enable it by providing weapons and training. Indeed,

¹⁴² A number of interlocutors were met in the course of this research who claimed that several new personalities have come forward offering to broker talks based on special access to Kony. The consensus among all consulted was that so far these offers are not reliably made.

¹⁴³ See, for instance, Santos, *op.cit.*, ch 5.

¹⁴⁴ Cakaj, Ledio, *"Too Far from Home: Demobilizing the Lord's Resistance Army"*, Enough Project, February 2011

¹⁴⁵ Discussions, MONUSCO DDRRR, Goma, February and March 2011.

steps to arm the Arrow Boys (Azande local defense militias) taken by the successive governors of Western Equatoria¹⁴⁶ have generated considerable controversy – and nervousness – in Juba.

But where central governments are either not interested in or incapable of providing the necessary protection and where no other agency, such as a UN Peacekeeping Mission, has a mandate to protect civilians on behalf of a government, then it seems a matter of simple logic to consider enabling self-defense. From a practical point of view, this could exacerbate the LRA problem unless steps were taken to ensure that weapons provided to the Arrow Boys or other militias did not become magnets for LRA attack. Such steps might entail setting up a communications and support system through which local militias could call on government military forces to back them up if and when attacked or could be developed further by linking rapid reaction capacity to local knowledge and tracking skills of the Arrow Boys.

Though the danger of launching yet another militia in DRC or South Sudan is well understood, this particular case calls for special consideration. The Azande have a tradition of self-defense and a strong sense of collective responsibility.¹⁴⁷ In this case, the wisest course for governments in the region might be to get in front of the problem by supporting the Arrow Boys and formally incorporating them into national protection structures, if only to prevent the evolution from needful desperation to resentful armed opposition.

Humanitarian and development approaches

Humanitarian operations can, and are, doing much to mitigate the effects of LRA attacks. By providing emergency medical care, shelter, food, water and sanitation and some limited psycho-social interventions, those hardest hit can at least be helped to deal with the consequences of LRA violence. But this does not solve the protection problem and could never offer more than limited compensation for harm done. Humanitarian operations, no matter how effective, could never restore lives lost or repair mutilated bodies.

Taking into account discussions in the previous sections, it must be assumed that the LRA will target humanitarian operations if they feel these pose a threat or offer easier solutions to their own logistical problems than pillaging local communities. The LRA has done so frequently in the past and may have already begun to do so again in eastern DRC. There is little danger that close cooperation between military and humanitarian agencies will be construed by the LRA as anything other than better protection of resources that they would have attacked had military forces not been present. The case is not one in which there is a political implication to the provision of escorts or the physical protection of humanitarian deliveries, though there may indeed be some human rights implications of engaging with national armies with such consistently poor records of respect for civilians. Indeed, the largest challenge may come from the need to protect humanitarian supplies once they have been delivered. There is a real danger, based on historical precedent, that food or medical supplies, for instance, will act as a magnet to the LRA.

While it seems a simple truism to state that one of the main enabling conditions of LRA impunity in the region in question is the lack of communications, it should be remembered that communications systems are neutral and can be used by anyone. Good roads, for instance, facilitate trade and rapid response at the same time that they provide rich targets for attack. Similarly, cell phone systems that would allow rapid calls for help from victim communities would also serve as means through which the

¹⁴⁶ Interview, governor of Western Equatoria, 26 March 2011, Yambio.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

LRA could better coordinate attacks. Though Kony and his senior commanders may not choose to talk on phones themselves they are certainly capable of having others speak for them to avoid monitoring. This is not to suggest that development is not an essential part of the long term solution to security in the LRA affected region but only to argue that development must be part of a larger process that takes into account the ways in which various achievements, such as the establishment of better cell phone networks, may be used by the LRA.

Finally, few discussions of alternatives take adequate account of the factor of time. As argued above, there is a strong possibility that time will play to the advantage of the LRA as it will use it to recruit and train enough new troops to pose a more serious threat to the region. The length of time needed for this is incalculable but it remains the case that there is a need for urgency and consequently for realistic consideration of the amount of time necessary to implement any alternative strategy.

Conclusions

This study has attempted to draw a picture situating the LRA within a particular political, historical and military context. Though the analytical description that results is far from complete at this stage, a number of conclusions emerge.

One of the key problems affecting all possible solutions to the LRA phenomenon is the collective inability to agree on the scale, scope and relative importance of the problem. Politicians and human rights and humanitarian actors have different interests and responsibilities and do not necessarily agree on either evidence or analysis concerning the LRA. Soldiers generally see military factors clearly but in this case seem to have fallen in line with the positions of their various governments to the extent that the military dimensions of the problem are nowhere clearly articulated or described. As a consequence, raw intelligence is scarce, analysis is even scarcer and agreement on the relative significance of factors is virtually nonexistent.

To add further to the confusion, intelligence gathered over the years by the UPDF has not been formalized in documents that might be shared with other armies for whom the LRA are a new problem. Finally, those who believe a negotiated solution is still worth pursuing will have to overcome the strong conviction of others that such a solution is impossible because of Kony's total disinterest or unreliability on this issue.

For reasons which are not yet clear, most discussions about military options begin with an unexpressed assumption that only those forces now in place can be included in any plan. While this may reflect political realities of the moment, it obscures the actual scale of the military problem posed by the LRA when considered from a purely technical perspective. This approach is unlikely to generate a favorable result for the simple reason that the resources needed to achieve it are insufficient and ineffective, and whose inadequacy has yet be considered in relation to actual needs.

In any case, it is clear from even a cursory analysis offered here, that the proposed solutions to the LRA problem have not been grounded on a professional military technical assessment (what used to be

known as Command Estimate), and that such solutions as have been proposed fall far short of what is needed to deal with the LRA threat to civilians.

It is, however, quite clear that a passive or purely defensive interpretation of the requirements of civilian protection will simply not work. The motivating idea behind the strategy in use today is that the combined forces of the three host countries plus the two UNDPKO missions can provide protection bubbles while the UPDF conducts search-and-destroy operations among them. However, the UPDF has only been partially successful and is not tied into the protection activities of other armies. Each UPDF operation, even if it creates LRA losses, provokes new LRA attacks. As long as the ensuing attacks are conducted against civilians who are not within various protective bubbles, which are very small indeed, then the LRA can simply walk away with loot and new captives, demonstrating in the process that the armies arrayed against it are powerless to protect civilians. Military presence is not, in itself, sufficient. The troops present have to be effective and this entails a much higher level of active engagement than is currently visible. This is partly a question of numbers of troops available – but it is also a question of their employment.

When considering the various political positions taken by state leaders in the region and the political factors analyzed in the first section of this report, it is clear that there will be little real protection provided by the UPDF, FARDC, FACA or SPLA – no matter what the needs are on the ground. In fairness, this is not just a matter of will but also an issue of capacity, and whether the armies in question have the requisite expertise or logistical capacity needed. If there truly is a “responsibility to protect” civilians then there truly is a need to identify to whom it applies. If the solution were simply a matter of political will then it might be possible to find a diplomatic compromise to generate the necessary agreement to act.

The current state of humanitarian and human rights engagement with the LRA problem has generated considerable political attention and some very useful information. However, there is as yet no system for tracking abductees or for conducting systematic investigations of incidents that might help restrain some of the more misleading rhetoric coming out of the region. These would appear to be relatively easy problems to solve. At the very least, it would seem obvious that a system to track abductions and returns, by name, is needed.¹⁴⁸ Secondly, a reliable system to investigate and report LRA incidents is also needed.¹⁴⁹

Finally, in the highly politicized operational environment that constitutes the zone of LRA operations today, it is clear that the civilian population of the region will continue to bear the burden of host government incapacity unless some other credible and substantial protection presence can be deployed. At present, the best hope for a timely and reliable protection presence throughout the LRA-affected zone is through the agency of UNDPKO. But this is unlikely to happen unless the UN Security Council takes more interest than it has so far shown, and unless Member States provide the military and civilian resources needed to generate a protection system that actually works.

¹⁴⁸ Such a system was developed and maintained in Uganda by UNICEF in 2000, but appears to have lapsed.

¹⁴⁹ MONUSCO has already deployed such a system in DRC but nothing yet exists for CAR or South Sudan.

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APPENDIX 2. LRA ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE IN 1998

Total force – approx. 3,000-5,000 (including women and children)

Maj. General Joseph Kony (chairman of LRA/M and head of High Command)

Central Brigade – Brig. Odong Achellam
 High Protection Unit (HPU or HAPPO) – Capt. Akocha
 Chief Bodyguard – Lt. Kapere
 Director Home Guard – Maj. Odong

Religious Affairs – Jenaro Bongomin ‘Papa’
 Chief Controller – Onen Aciro Kop ‘Unita Angola’
 Secretary/Lakwena’s interpreter – Okodi Paul

Control Alter (or Military Council) - General Otti Lagony

Vice Chairman/Advisor to Kony – Kenneth Banya, Army Commander – Otti Lagony, Deputy Army Commander- Lukwiya Raska, Director of Intelligence – Vincent Otti, Head of Training- Mixman Opuk, Political Wing – Sam Kolo, Director of Operations – Okello Matata, External Relations (i.e. with SAF) – Caesar Achellam, Medical Unit – Santo Achita, Finance – ‘Lubwa’ Bwone, Chief Signaller – Colonel Michael Anywar or Colonel Patrice Lumumba, Divisional commander – Charles Tabulay.

‘Jogo’ Division - Brigadier Charles Tabulay

Div. Hdqrs, Chief of Staff, Operation Room, Admin, Coms., Yard, Medical, Logistics, Technical (engineers, technicians etc.)

Stockree Brigade – Bok Abudema

Gilva Brigade – Ochan Bunia

Sinia Brigade – Ceasar Achellam

Trinkle Brigade – Alphonse Lamola

1 st Battalion	1 st Batt.	1 st Batt.	1 st Batt.
2 nd Battalion	2 nd Batt.	2 nd Batt.	2 nd Batt.
3d Battalion	3d Bat.	3d Batt.	3d Batt.
Int. officer	I.O.	I.O.	I.O.
Signaler	Sign.	Sign.	Sign.
Support (Artillery)	Support	Support	Support
Admin.	Admin.	Admin.	Admin.
Religious/Yard	R/Y.	R/Y.	R/Y.
Medic/Sick Bay	M/S.B.	M/S.B.	M/S.B.

APPENDIX 3. LRA ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE IN 2008

Total force – approx. 1,000-1,200 (including women and children)

Joseph Kony – Chairman, Head of High Command/Control Alter

Kony's headquarters – LRA's Operational Centre (Camp Swahili)

Major Binansio Okumu 'Binany' – Head of Central Brigade

Lt. Colonel Otto Agweng – Head of HPU

Captain Okumu Dombola – ADC/Chief Bodyguard

Captain Otika – Deputy Chief Bodyguard

Captain Justine Atimango – Secretary/Lakwena's interpreter

Army Structure

Okot Odhiambo – Army Commander, Vice Chairman of the LRA/M and Commander 'Nigeria.'

Bok Abudema 'Oringa Sisto' – Divisional Commander/Deputy Army Commander/Deputy Commander of 'Nigeria.'

Control Alter

Director of Operations – Lt. Colonel Charles Arop, Director of Signals – Major Michael Epedu 'Technician,' Director of Logistics – Brigadier Ochan Bunia, Director of Intelligence – Dominic Onwgen, Religious Affairs – Colonel Angola, Director of Training – Brigadier Opuk, Director of Finance – 'Lubwa' Bwone, Sick Bay – Captain Santo Acheta (security chief/Sick Bay – Captain Vincent Oyenga).

Brigades (3 battalions per brigade)

1st Brigade – Lt Col. Okot 'Odek'

2nd Brigade – Major Patrick Okello 'Kalalang'

3rd Brigade – Major Okot 'Atiak'

4th Brigade – Lt. Colonel Charles Arop

APPENDIX 4. LRA ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE IN 2011

Total force – approx. 400-600 (including women and children)

Joseph Kony – Chairman, Commander of Control Alter/High Command, 80-100 combatants

Colonel Otto Agweng – Head HPU

Captain Otika – ADC/Personal Envoy

Captain Justine Atimango – Lakwena's Secretary

Capt. Obwoya – Home Guard (Kony's family security)

Lt. Abili – Signaller

Col. Leonard 'Lubwa' Bwone – Finance/Advisor

Lt. Ojara – Sick Bay/Kony's doctor

Okot Odhiambo – Group Nigeria Cmdr (40-60) Caesar Achellam. cmdr. (20)

Col. Acaye Doctor – grp. Cmdr. (15-20) Col. Alphonse Lamola - Deputy

Col. Onen Unita – grp. Cmdr. (15-20)

Maj. Olanya – grp. Cmdr. (20-40)

CAR group 1 – Lt. Col. Achellam Smart - (between CAR and DRC, north of Ango) (15)

Brg. Opuk – Advisor?

Maj. Kidega Murefu 'Min Tigi-Tigi' - Deputy

Capt. Labalpinyi – Signaler

CAR group 2 – unknown commander. South of Obo. Possibly Lt. Col Opiyo Sam. (10-15)

Dominic Ongwen group – between DRC and Sudan (15-20) – possibly a renegade group

Lt. Oloya – Chief Security

Congo Groups:

- 1) Lt. Col. Binany (25-30)
Captain Obol – Deputy and satellite group cmdr. (20)
- 2) Lt. Colonel Otto Ladere (15-20)
Maj. Odano – deputy
- 3) Colonel Lutwala (10-15)
Capt. 'Chongwok' (*dog's knee*) - Deputy
- 4) Lt. Col. Okot Odek (15-20)
Lt. Okello 'Punu' (*pig*) – Deputy
- 5) Brigadier Ochan Bunia – Sick Bay (15-20)
Capt. Santo Acheta – Doctor
- 6) Lt. Col. Opiyo Sam (10-15) – Possibly group south of Obo CAR.
Maj. Ochan Nono Labongo - Deputy
- 7) Major Odong Murefu (Bas Uele/Poko, probably KIA)
- 8) Major David Lakwoo (Bas Uele/ Ango, probably KIA)

APPENDIX 5. RECOMMENDED FURTHER RESEARCH

In order to complete the following sections in the historical section, further research is recommended:

- 1) Operational Structure in 1988
- 2) Movement/orientation (secondary roads, rivers, mbororo paths. Orientation through geographical features, position of sun and moon, maps, GPS, etc)
- 3) More on: current strategy of 'survive and wait' and use of violence as strategy
- 4) Cooperation with other armed groups (WNBF, EDF and attempt to link with PRA and ADF)
- 5) Key commanders' profiles
- 6) Dissent in commander ranks (and file) due to: 1) outcome of rebellion; Otti Lagony and to an extent Vincent Otti and possibly James Opoka, 2) ideology and modus operandi; V. Otti now perhaps Ongwen, 3) tribal origins. Adjumani, WNBF fighters and sub clans (to be researched). 4) jealousy and survival. Fighters vying for Kony's attention as well as trying to survive. 5) For adultery/ maintaining cohesion.



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