



Completing the Mission

U.S. Special Forces Are Essential for Ending the LRA

Kasper Agger

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enough

The project to end genocide and crimes against humanity

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COVER PHOTO

In this Sunday, April 29, 2012 file photo, U.S. Army special forces Master Sergeant Eric, center, who would only give his first name in accordance with special forces security guidelines, speaks with troops from the Central African Republic and Uganda, in Obo, Central African Republic, where U.S. special forces have paired up with local troops and Ugandan soldiers to seek out Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The LRA Crisis Tracker group, which tracks the Joseph Kony-led LRA, said in a report released Thursday, Feb. 7, 2013 that the LRA killed 51 civilians across Central Africa in 2012, a huge drop in the number killed from the two previous years .

AP PHOTO/BEN CURTIS, FILE

Executive summary

The mission to end the deadly Lord's Resistance Army, or LRA, rebel group is regaining momentum. Offensive operations, which were suspended due to the violent coup in the Central African Republic, or CAR, have restarted. Programs to spur defections are increasing and growing numbers of fighters are escaping from the LRA. The small group of U.S. military advisors sent to boost the counter-LRA mission has had a game-changing impact thus far, reducing LRA attacks by more than 50 percent,¹ and in mid-September, the Obama administration extended the mission into early 2014. Some progress is also being made in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or DRC, where U.S. advisors are training 500 Congolese soldiers allocated to counter the LRA,² though much work remains there.

In October 2011, President Barack Obama announced that he would authorize the deployment of approximately 100 U.S. military advisors to work with local partner forces. The U.S. troops were to advise and assist with “the goal of removing from the battlefield Joseph Kony and other senior leadership of the LRA.”³ The American troops serve as a force multiplier for Uganda's offensive counter-LRA military operation, and they work together with soldiers, making up the regional A.U. force from South Sudan; the CAR; and the DRC. The advisors' mission has demonstrated President Obama's commitment to an atrocity prevention strategy.

U.S. advisors and their African partners have made progress in significantly reducing LRA attacks, increasing LRA defections, improving human security and protection for civilians, increasing intelligence collection and analysis, and improving logistics with supply lines. LRA attacks have dropped by 53 percent over the past two years,⁴ and LRA killings decreased by 67 percent from 2011 to 2012.⁵ At least 31 Ugandan LRA fighters—15 percent of the core fighting force—have defected over the past 18 months. The number of defections this year exceeds those of the previous two years combined.⁶ The rebel group is weaker than ever before, and local residents feel safer. Because of this increased security, local communities across the region strongly support the U.S. advisors.⁷

Some U.S. policymakers have considered withdrawing U.S. forces from the field and transitioning to a conventional training mission similar to those provided by militaries in other countries and far away from the counter-LRA operations.⁸ The hands-on operational support provided by Americans, however, has been a critical component to the success of the mission. Thus the decision not to move to a conventional army training approach far away from the operations was wise, as it would have had a serious impact on Uganda's mission and given Kony time and space to regroup the LRA once again.



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The LRA's numbers are down because of defections, and key commanders have been removed. The LRA's core senior command structure, however, remains intact.⁹ As long as Kony remains leader, he will keep the LRA together with a combination of fear, intimidation, and spiritualism. Under his command, the LRA maintains its ability to regroup, abduct new recruits, and relaunch deadly attacks against civilians. The senior command of the LRA is currently responding to the U.S. deployment by lying low. Their strategy has been to avoid large-scale attacks that would draw attention to the group. They operate in small, mobile groups, and they hide in remote areas. Sources on the ground tell the Enough Project that the senior LRA command could renew attacks if the U.S. advisors leave.¹⁰

The strong partnership between U.S. advisors and the Ugandan army forms the backbone of the counter-LRA mission, and neither is capable of operating as effectively singlehandedly. Uganda relies on the training, logistical support, and advanced technology provided by the United States, and U.S. troops rely on the Ugandan command structure and the Ugandans' experience addressing the LRA issue, as well as their ground presence and knowledge of the terrain. Removing one partner would significantly weaken the efforts of the other, undermining the entire counter-LRA effort and allowing the LRA to rebuild its forces and threaten the safety of civilians.

A senior official in the Obama administration acknowledged that "as long as the LRA's leader Joseph Kony and other top commanders remain at large, the LRA will continue to pose a serious regional threat which undermines stability and development."¹¹

Beyond the immediate scope of the counter-LRA operation, the U.S. advisors' mission has implications for broader efforts to promote regional stability and could serve as a model for strategic U.S. support within and outside Africa. Numerous interwoven conflicts destabilize Central and East Africa, making the region a safe haven for the LRA and other armed groups that inflict terror on civilians and threaten U.S. national security interests. The U.S. efforts foster military cooperation among neighbors with shared interests in defeating the LRA and ending conflicts.

Recommendations

The Obama administration should support the U.S. military advisors' mission until Joseph Kony and other senior LRA commanders are apprehended

U.S. advisors and their military and civilian partners should increase their support for programs that promote LRA defections

Additional safe reporting sites, where LRA members can surrender peacefully, are needed to facilitate defections from LRA groups. Such sites are needed in the remote locations of northern CAR, South Darfur and Bas-Uele District in the DRC. Understanding what drives defections of senior and mid-level commanders and tailoring a strategy to these drivers could enhance the programs and increase the number of defectors.

U.S. advisors and their military and civilian partners should pursue direct communication with senior and mid-level LRA commanders to spur defections

LRA defectors consistently say that commanders and even whole groups wish to leave the LRA. Their fear of retaliatory attacks from civilians and security forces, combined with a lack of knowledge about how and where to surrender, prevent such group defections. Using the intelligence they have gathered about the LRA groups and their locations, the U.S. advisors should help facilitate direct outreach to mid-level commanders and groups that wish to defect. U.N. peacekeeping missions, such as the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic, or BINUCA; the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan, or UNMISS; and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or MONUSCO, should do more to provide logistical and administrative support to facilitate LRA outreach and defections.

U.S. Special Envoy Russ Feingold should increase diplomatic pressure on regional states and urge the governments to facilitate access to all areas where the LRA is hiding

A combination of limited access and limited capabilities has hampered the efforts of regional actors to pursue LRA commanders. LRA leaders, for example, are likely hiding in the Bas-Uele District and Garamba National Park in the DRC. Congolese forces based nearby lack the capacity and logistical means to pursue the LRA within their national borders. Ugandan forces that are part of the African Union Regional Task Force, or A.U.-RTF, are based across the DRC border in the CAR and are capable of deploying to Bas-Uele and Garamba. The Ugandans, however, lack authorization to conduct cross-border missions to apprehend senior and mid-level LRA commanders in the DRC. Senior LRA commanders also find safe harbor in Sudanese-controlled areas of South Darfur. The Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) do not pursue these LRA leaders, and the Sudanese government does not allow A.U.-RTF forces to access the area. Special Envoy Feingold should increase diplomatic pressure on regional governments to allow A.U.-RTF forces to conduct counter-LRA operations within these areas.

The United States, European Union, and other international donors should provide financial and logistical support to fully operationalize the A.U.-RTF mission and create a Special Forces Elite Unit

The military component of the A.U. mission, the Regional Task Force, urgently needs logistical and financial support to realize its full potential. Soldiers contributed by the CAR, the DRC, and South Sudan remain largely idle, while the 30 A.U. commanding officers based in Yambio, South Sudan, have yet to issue their first command. The troop-contributing countries must start to provide basic support for their soldiers and show much greater political cooperation to attract the crucial financial support to operationalize the mission. Fully furnished and financed, the mission could protect civilians, participate in cross-border operations, improve regional stability, and help bring an end to the LRA. Furthermore, there is a need for a well-trained and equipped A.U. Special Forces Elite Unit within the RTF to conduct specialized missions to apprehend senior LRA commanders in remote locations.

The political and operational environment

The U.S. advisors are deployed to the field for a period of approximately six months at a time; they then rotate back to the United States, and a new team of advisors arrives. U.S. Africa Command specifies that the mission is “not an open-ended commitment, nor is there a specific timeline associated with it.”¹² The continued deployment of the advisors is regularly reviewed and assessed.¹³ Throughout June and July, uncertainties

about the future of the mission were growing, since, at that time, an extension had not been confirmed. During a local security meeting in Obo, CAR, attended by the Enough Project, international and local nongovernmental staff members sought clarification directly from the advisors about how much longer the mission would continue. U.S. advisors replied, “We are here to help counter the LRA and accomplish the mission. We have not heard anything else than that.”¹⁴ Enhanced transparency in the decision-making process regarding extension of the advisors’ mission would help curb such uncertainties and improve long-term planning.

U.S. advisors stepped into a remote and politically unpredictable corner of Africa. The region has porous borders, dense terrain, multiple rebel groups, and a range of other actors with conflicting alliances and uncertain degrees of political and military control. Despite such daunting obstacles, the small group of U.S. advisors has demonstrated its flexibility and accomplished a great deal. American diplomats can leverage this success to promote more effective and self-sufficient security coordination across the region.

The March 24, 2013, military coup in the CAR, led by the Seleka alliance of rebel groups, shows one kind of challenge the U.S. advisors face. The coup in the CAR forced a suspension of counter-LRA operations in the country. This suspension was a temporary setback for the efforts to end the LRA, and it provided the rebels with an opportunity to regroup, rebuild, and find new areas to hide.¹⁵ Despite initial hostility toward the Ugandan forces—seen as close allies of ousted CAR president François Bozizé—the Seleka leaders are gradually responding to international pressure, becoming more cooperative. They have signed a written statement to confirm their support for continuing Ugandan and U.S. operations.¹⁶ Meanwhile, the African Union is working to establish an African-Led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic, or AFISM-CAR, to stabilize the country.¹⁷ The Seleka alliance remains tenuous and fraught with internal wrangling over leadership, control of natural resources, and oversight for the large numbers of undisciplined soldiers who continue to attack civilians and loot property.¹⁸ Timely diplomacy from the United Nations and the African Union, however, has prevented Seleka forces from entering the southeastern part of the CAR, where U.S. and Ugandan forces are based.¹⁹

The U.S. advisors in the CAR focus mainly on enhancing Ugandan-led military offensives in the CAR and promoting LRA defections. The advisors have also worked to a limited degree with soldiers from the CAR national army, the Central African Armed Forces, or FACA, though fewer than 70 FACA soldiers contribute to the A.U.-RTF operations in the CAR. Their small numbers and almost complete lack of transportation options limit their capacity to lead offensive operations, though FACA soldiers do provide some protection for civilians and refugees.²⁰ These contributions notwithstanding, counter-LRA efforts in the CAR depend heavily on the U.S. advisors and the Ugandan army remaining deployed and continuing their operations.

U.S. advisors based outside the CAR face another challenge in poorly supported and uneven troop contributions from neighbors. South Sudan and the DRC have been slow to join the counter-LRA efforts. The South Sudanese army—the Sudan People’s Liberation Army, or SPLA—contributed 500 soldiers to the A.U.-RTF in September 2012 and deployed them to a makeshift camp next to the U.S. and Ugandan barracks in Nzara, South Sudan.²¹ Since then, the South Sudanese troops have been largely inactive. They are not patrolling the major roads or deploying to collect intelligence or protect vulnerable villages near the borders of the CAR and the DRC. The Congolese government is downplaying the threat from the LRA, and Congolese Army General Jean-Claude Kifwa told journalists in March 2012, “We have reduced the capacity of the LRA. For us it’s no longer an issue of defense. It’s a public order issue.”²² At least 325,000 civilians remain displaced in LRA-affected areas of the DRC, and most LRA-related attacks and abductions have taken place in the DRC.²³ Despite downplaying the LRA crisis, the Congolese government finally contributed 500 FARDC soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo, or FARDC, to the A.U.-RTF in February 2013. These soldiers were posted to the army’s logistical headquarters in Dungeni, DRC,²⁴ but they have not yet conducted any significant counter-LRA operations.²⁵ The United States has deployed a handful of advisors to the DRC, mainly based in Dungeni, with shorter postings to remote locations such as Duru, DRC. The majority of their work is focused on intelligence gathering and LRA defection efforts. U.S. advisors are also training and advising the 500 FARDC troops allocated to the Regional Task Force, thus increasing their ability to counter the LRA.²⁶ The efforts by U.S. military advisors to train troops from the region show how a small U.S. investment in a challenging environment can still pay dividends in promoting sustainable regional solutions and improving security.

The U.S. advisors also face the complication of LRA leader Kony’s move into the disputed Kafia Kingi enclave in South Darfur.²⁷ Pursuing Kony in this area is highly complicated because the enclave is claimed by both Sudan and South Sudan but controlled by the Sudanese government, which deploys its forces in the area.²⁸ The Sudanese government denies the LRA’s presence in its territory and does not allow access for counter-LRA operations.²⁹ There are reports that SAF officers support the LRA by providing food and some bullets and medicine, at times in exchange for ivory supplied by the LRA.³⁰

The advisors have responded to the shifting political realities with a great deal of flexibility and continue to focus on the areas where they can have the most immediate impact. From the onset of the deployment, the majority of their focus was on the Ugandan soldiers who were already pursuing the LRA in the CAR. The advisors wanted to focus on “those aspects that work,” such as training and logistical support to Ugandan-led operations.³¹ This flexible hands-on approach also became evident with the suspension of operations in the CAR, which directed additional attention toward defection efforts in the DRC. While this approach is commendable, U.S. advisors need greater political investment from regional partners for the mission to succeed. Senior LRA commanders hide in areas where capable forces are denied access. The weak and fragmented

Seleka alliance is unable to share information or contribute forces to the counter-LRA efforts. Overall, greater diplomatic investments could bring all players to the table. An A.U. forum would be preferable in this diplomatic effort, but U.S. diplomacy can play an instrumental role in enabling talks at the highest political level. Without increased regional cooperation and commitment to the mission, the senior LRA commanders could regroup and unravel the hard-won efforts of many.

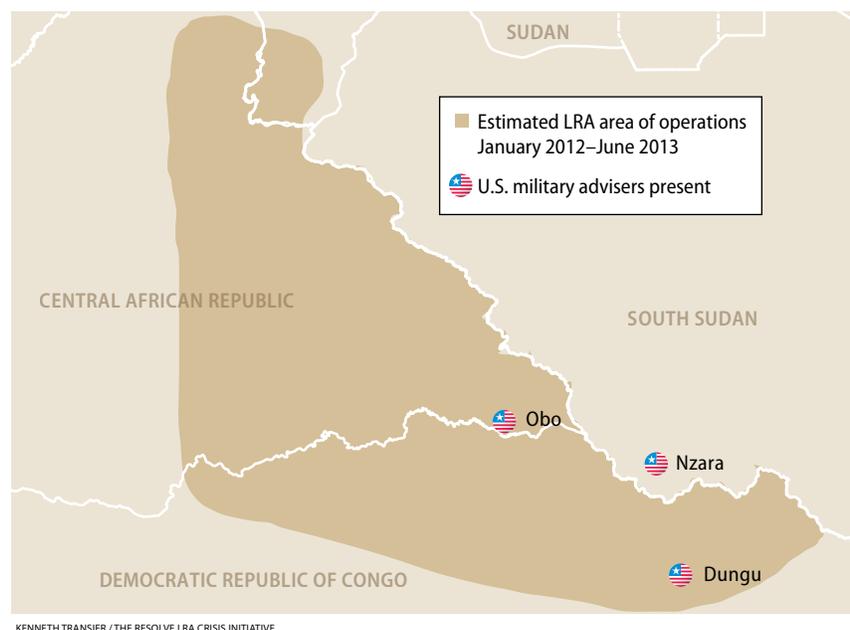
Why they are supported locally: The U.S. advisors' strategies to help end the LRA

Despite the challenging political and operational environment in which the advisors work, they have made notable progress toward ending the LRA, apprehending its senior leadership, and protecting civilians. Their efforts make up a multipronged approach that encompasses protecting civilians; promoting defections; collecting, analyzing, and sharing intelligence; logistical support; and providing hands-on military training and practical advice to partner forces from Uganda, the CAR, the DRC, and South Sudan.

Civilian protection and local support

The advisors have an immediate impact through their interactions with local leaders and civilians in the communities where they are deployed. Civilians in the volatile southeastern part of the CAR, in particular, express huge gratitude for the advisors, who provide them with a much-needed sense of security. Local people and civil society leaders in Obo and other villages across the country staged peaceful protests and wrote letters of appeal to encourage the advisors and the Uganda People's Defence Force, or UPDF, to remain deployed, despite political turmoil following the military coup in the CAR³² that led to widespread human rights abuses and lootings.³³ A youth leader in Obo told the Enough Project:

*We felt fear when we heard that the U.S. and UPDF were to pull out [which was rumored when the operations were suspended]. We were getting ready to flee to South Sudan. We know what [LRA and Seleka] rebels have done in other areas so we are afraid to stay here without protection.*³⁴



Local people also support the advisors directly by providing valuable information about tracks and other signs of LRA movements in the bush. Subsequent investigation then enhances the general intelligence analysis of LRA movements. Key members of civil society work directly with the advisors through weekly security meetings, and they convey messages to the broader local community.³⁵



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U.S. advisors also help curb local disputes by working with community leaders and security forces to mitigate violence directly. In May 2013, U.S. forces played a supportive role when CAR and Ugandan soldiers captured 40 South Sudanese men who were part of a larger group attempting to attack and loot Obo, CAR.³⁶ CAR soldiers and the local gendarmerie are being trained by and work hand in hand with the U.S. advisors to strengthen their ability to address unexpected security threats and improve long-term stability.

Promoting defections

U.S. advisors have the greatest direct impact on fortifying and expanding programs to promote LRA defections. Prior to their arrival, the counter-LRA forces had implemented few defection programs. Only a handful of local nongovernmental organizations, or NGOs; the international NGO Invisible Children; and the U.N. peacekeeping missions promoted defections. Since deploying, the U.S. advisors have considerably increased defection efforts by dropping fliers, promoting new and improved come-home messages, and introducing a helicopter-mounted speaker system to transmit defection messages to areas without radio reception. Working closely with local civil-society leaders and military partners, the U.S. advisors have helped establish safe reporting sites across the LRA-affected areas, where local security forces and civilians have agreed to receive LRA defectors peacefully.³⁷

Intelligence collection, analysis, and information sharing

U.S. advisors have greatly improved intelligence collection and analysis by introducing sophisticated technical tools, such as aerial surveys, satellite surveillance, and predictive mapping. Selected local community leaders have been given Thuraya satellite phones to strengthen early warnings and promote quick, efficient transmission of information about LRA incidents. The technology has facilitated data collection and reporting about LRA attacks that has fed strategic analysis, but the technical tools have also helped U.S. and local forces better analyze the debriefing interviews of defectors. These interviews are analyzed in close partnership with Ugandan intelligence officers who have extensive knowledge about the LRA tactics. Some of this information is shared regularly through security meetings at the Combined Operation Fusion Centers, or COFCs, that bring together local security forces, NGOs, U.S. advisors, and local leaders. The technology and workflow have improved the intelligence-gathering effort by enabling a broader range of groups to share information to target LRA groups with individual defection messages. Former high-ranking LRA commander Caesar Acellam, for example, has been broadcasting live messages to individual members of the LRA from a helicopter. Confidential sources indicate that information about the movements of senior LRA commanders, as well as about the composition of their groups and where they hide, has increased considerably.³⁸

Logistical support

U.S. logistical support with transportation has facilitated a vital component of the counter-LRA mission. The United States provides funds for fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters. These aircraft are critical components of sustained military operations, and they enable timely deployment and the resupplying of troops in remote areas where the LRA operates—areas with extremely limited infrastructure and poor roads. Counter-LRA military operations would collapse without logistical support for transportation. Despite logistical support, the commanding officers from all of the counter-LRA forces—including the advisors—repeatedly identify insufficient transport options, poor infrastructure and remoteness of the LRA affected areas as top challenges for the mission to end the LRA.³⁹



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Military training and advice to partner forces

U.S. advisors are not authorized to engage militarily with the LRA, except in self-defense, and they cannot participate in operations in which military engagement is expected. Military training for regional counter-LRA forces is a key part of the advisors' strategy to dismantle the LRA. The majority of the training has been directed toward UPDF, but soldiers from the other LRA-affected countries have also received training. Basic offensive and defensive training involves helping nonsenior staff—such as foot soldiers and commanders of platoons with 15 to 25 soldiers—improve their tracking, coordination, and jungle-fighting skills. U.S. advisors also provide specialized training for special missions and instructions on how to utilize technical equipment such as night-vision goggles.⁴⁰ U.S. advisors provide training in debriefing techniques and intelligence collection through combined field patrols with partner forces, a more conducive environment than the barracks. A Ugandan soldier expressed his appreciation for these opportunities and emphasized the importance of promoting these lengthier combined field-tracking patrols with partner forces. He told the Enough Project:

The Americans have taught us so many things, like how to surround the rebels you want to capture them alive. We also learned about first aid and new things like jungle tactics and patrolling.⁴¹

Small-unit tactics-training subjects

- Offensive and defensive combat tactics, including attack and retreat
- Reconnaissance, debriefing, and intelligence gathering
- Urban and rural jungle patrol
- Combat engineering, including road blocks, simple shelters for the night, defensive positions, digging foxholes, and placing scouts at strategic locations
- Weapons handling, including shooting range, assembly, maintenance, and cleaning of weapons
- Silent sign communication during jungle tracking

LRA strategy and senior commanders' movements

Although the numbers are impossible to verify, there are an estimated 500 total members of the LRA, out of which approximately 250 are believed to be armed fighters.⁴² Despite the relatively small numbers, the LRA retains the ability to conduct large-scale massacres and destabilize the border regions of at least four countries: the CAR, the DRC, Sudan, and South Sudan. One of the worst massacres perpetrated by the LRA was carried out by a group of only 25 to 40 fighters, who killed at least 321 civilians and abducted more than 250 civilians in the Makombo area of Congo in December 2009.⁴³

The core command structure of the LRA has remained largely made up of Acholi people; Acholi is the dominant ethnic group in Northern Uganda from which the LRA originates. The LRA prefers to operate in small groups of 5 to 10 armed fighters but occasionally gathers in larger groups to receive orders, discuss strategy, and distribute supplies. Kony uses spirituality and superstition to create cohesion and keep control of the group.⁴⁴ A former LRA fighter explained to the Enough Project:

*When they [the LRA] first get you, they give you some local medicine to drink. This makes you want to stay in the bush, only, you don't think about anything else, you even forget home and you don't feel hungry for many days and your eyes become so sharp like an animal. We also drink the medicine before we go to fight. There are different kinds of medicine for different missions. If you don't drink the medicine they [the commanders] will kill you.*⁴⁵

Kony remains the undisputed leader of the LRA, and he exercises direct control over the group despite its dispersed nature and large area of operation. He communicates with his commanders via high-frequency radio, satellite phone, human messengers, and cell phones, when a network is available. His two oldest sons, Salim and Ali—both born in the bush—are in their early 20s and gradually rising through the ranks of the LRA. Defectors have told the Enough Project that Kony gave them Arabic names because of the strong relations that the LRA has with Sudanese authorities.⁴⁶ Intelligence suggests that Kony, with a group of 50 to 60 armed fighters, remains active in the border region of northern CAR and the Kafia Kingi enclave that straddles the borders between the CAR, South Sudan, and Sudan.⁴⁷

Kony's second in command, Okot Odhiambo, is believed to be in the DRC. Operating out of the axis stretching from Pasi to Banda, he has long preferred this border region, from which he can cross easily from the CAR into the DRC to get supplies and elude Ugandan soldiers.⁴⁸ Defectors report that another key figure, senior commander Dominic Ongwen, has been stripped of his rank within the LRA because he refused to follow orders from Kony.⁴⁹ Ongwen is believed to operate west and north of Derbissaka, CAR, in the Vovodo-Chinko river system, where he has kept a position for at least 12 months. Despite being demoted, Ongwen continues to exercise considerable influence within the LRA due to his long history with the group, extensive military knowledge, and personal relations with other senior commanders.⁵⁰

In early 2012, LRA defectors reported that Kony had ordered his fighters to limit the killing of civilians and restrict their attacks to looting for food and other necessities.⁵¹ This was a deliberate strategy to avoid drawing attention to themselves and revealing their hiding places.⁵² In September 2012, LRA fighters told a group of Congolese civilians that the LRA fighters “are not going to kill the population, but are only looking for food.”⁵³ Although LRA fighters continue to kill and wound civilians, the total number of people killed by the LRA in 2012 was the lowest it has been since 2007.⁵⁴ The LRA maintains its capacity to rebuild, and U.N. reports estimate that the LRA activities have displaced some 420,000 civilians.⁵⁵

Reports indicate that a particularly gruesome sequence of incidents involving the LRA took place in June 2013, east of Sam Ouandja, in the northeastern part of the CAR. On June 16, military officers from the Seleka alliance in the CAR reported that 16 civilians had been killed by the LRA. They said six civilians were decapitated, and their heads were placed on tree trunks.⁵⁶ The attack was reportedly carried out in retaliation against village residents who killed four LRA rebels who had attacked the village.⁵⁷ Local contacts in Sam Ouandja told the Enough Project that a group of 15 to 20 suspected LRA fighters had attacked a handful of small villages on the road from Ouadda to Sam Ouandja between June 20 and June 24. The group reportedly killed six civilians, decapitating two. It also abducted 41 civilians and released 33 of them after a few days. Two young boys and two girls are among those who remain with the attackers.⁵⁸ When asked how they knew that the LRA group had carried out the attack, they explained:

*We know it's LRA from the way they do their "business," how they kill and abduct people. We don't know anyone else who does [it] like this. They came from the direction of southern Darfur, and the people in the group spoke different languages. Some spoke Arabic, and some spoke languages that we did not understand and had never heard before. [...] The group returned back towards Sudan.*⁵⁹

Local security forces that include U.S. advisors confirmed to the Enough Project that they also suspect the LRA carried out the attacks.⁶⁰ These recent events serve as a sharp reminder of the group's sustained ability to kill and kidnap civilians and conduct other atrocities. The four young abductees who remain with the group could become the next generation of rebel soldiers.

Conclusion

The U.S. advisors in Central Africa represent force multipliers for a counter-LRA operation that relies on their assistance to succeed. These advisors represent the means to consolidate military partnerships and enhance regional security in an area that would otherwise become a safe haven for terrorists. They offer a viable framework for security cooperation in a region where this is very limited. U.S. advisors also represent a means to reinvigorate and sustain the Ugandan government's decades-long commitment to capture Kony and extinguish his murderous rebel group, which first took root in Northern Uganda in 1987. Americans provide Ugandan troops and other partner forces with an important means to train their soldiers and operate more effectively, while at the same time taking into consideration the region's broader interests. Most of all, the U.S. advisors represent hope, protection, and safety for vulnerable civilians who have known too little of it.

The LRA has been considerably weakened. It operates in small groups and is largely hiding in remote areas. Crucially, the core senior leadership remains intact, and without complete disintegration and apprehension of the senior leadership, the group maintains the ability to recruit, rebuild, and sustain its operations. The U.S. advisors should remain forward deployed on the ground in Central Africa to help bring an end to the LRA.

President Obama, American lawmakers, and the American people should show Kony and the other senior LRA commanders that the U.S. commitment is stronger than that of the LRA. Keeping a small number of U.S. military advisors in Central Africa, where they continue to make a game-changing impact, could further that goal.

Endnotes

- 1 This analysis is based on a year-to-year comparison of January 1 to May 31, 2011—before the U.S. advisors' deployment—and January 1 to May 31, 2013—after the U.S. advisors' deployment—in all areas of LRA activity. See Invisible Children + Resolve, "LRA Crisis Tracker," available at <http://lra-crisistracker.theresolve.org/> (last accessed September 2013).
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- 4 This analysis is based on a year-to-year comparison of January 1 to May 31, 2011—before the U.S. advisors' deployment—and January 1 to May 31, 2013—after the U.S. advisors' deployment—in all areas of LRA activity. See Invisible Children + Resolve, "LRA Crisis Tracker," available at <http://lra-crisistracker.theresolve.org/> (last accessed September 2013).
- 5 Invisible Children, "About the #ZeroLRA campaign," available at <http://invisiblechildren.com/citizen/about-the-campaign/> (last accessed September 2013).
- 6 Phil Lancaster and Ledio Cakaj, "Loosening Kony's Grip: Effective Defection Strategies for Today's LRA" (Washington: The Resolve LRA Crisis Initiative, 2013), available at <http://www.theresolve.org/loosening-konys-grip/>.
- 7 Invisible Children, "Handwritten responses from citizens in CAR," Invisible Children blog, April 2, 2013, available at <http://blog.invisiblechildren.com/2013/04/02/handwritten-responses-from-citizens-in-car/>.
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- 11 Donald Yamamoto, statement within "Deployment of U.S. Forces in Central Africa and Implementation of the Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act," Hearing before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, 112th Cong. 1st sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2011), available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-112hhrg70947/html/CHRG-112hhrg70947.htm>.
- 12 U.S. Africa Command, "U.S. Africa Command Fact Sheet: U.S. Military Support to African Efforts to Counter LRA" (2013).
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Information from COFC meeting, Obo, Central African Republic, June 24, 2013.
- 15 Kasper Agger and Sasha Lezhnev, "Policy Alert: U.S. Diplomacy and A.U. Diplomacy Needed to Halt Kony's New Chance to Regroup," Enough Said, June 24, 2013, available at <http://www.enoughproject.org/blogs/us-and-au-diplomacy-needed-halt-konys-new-chance-regroup>.
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Enough is a project of the Center for American Progress to end genocide and crimes against humanity. Founded in 2007, Enough focuses on the crises in Sudan, South Sudan, eastern Congo, and areas affected by the Lord's Resistance Army. Enough conducts intensive field research, develops practical policies to address these crises, and shares sensible tools to empower citizens and groups working for change. To learn more about Enough and what you can do to help, go to www.enoughproject.org.

