



# Mission in the Balance

Challenges for U.S. Advisors in Helping to End the LRA

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Kasper Agger May 2012



**enough**

The project to end genocide and crimes against humanity

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**COVER:** U.S. Army special forces Captain Gregory, 29, from Texas, right, 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, Sunday, April 29, 2012. Obo was the first place in the Central African Republic that Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) attacked in 2008 and today it's one of four forward operating locations where U.S. special forces have paired up with local troops and Ugandan soldiers to seek out Kony. (Ben Curtis/AP)

## Executive summary

The U.S. military advisors deployed against Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army in central and east Africa are starting to make progress in tracking the group, but serious challenges remain to make the mission a success. The elusive rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army, or LRA, continues to attack and displace civilians in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic, and LRA units have been allegedly sighted in South Sudan and Sudan. In fact the LRA has had and continues to have an uninterrupted route from their hideouts in southeastern Central African Republic all the way toward Darfur. The current strength of the LRA is estimated to be 250 to 300 fighters. Despite its small size, the group continues to terrorize large areas of central Africa. This report, which is based on a field visit to the Central African Republic in March-April 2012,<sup>1</sup> analyzes progress and challenges in the military and non-military initiatives to end the LRA.

Despite the recent arrest of the LRA's fourth-highest ranking commander, Major General Caesar Acellam, current efforts aimed at apprehending the LRA leadership and disbanding the group are greatly under-resourced and slowly getting underway. For example, it took four months for the U.S. military advisors to be fully deployed to their forward operating locations and set up bases there. Meanwhile, field research shows that the LRA is *not* in "survival mode," as many analysts have suggested, but rather the contrary. The LRA continues to extend its area of operation. Recent attacks and abductions show that the LRA remains a highly capable rebel force. The first quarter of 2012 witnessed a sharp increase in LRA-related incidents in the affected areas, with the LRA being responsible for at least 53 attacks, nine deaths, 90 abductions, and the continued displacement of more than 445,000 civilians across the region.<sup>2</sup>

In order for the advisors to succeed in apprehending the LRA's senior leadership and encouraging commanders and fighters to leave the group, several major obstacles must





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be addressed. More Special Forces are needed to penetrate the vast jungles and to pursue more effectively Kony and his top deputies. Non-Special Forces are also in short supply; further deployment is urgently needed to protect civilians from LRA attacks and abductions. Enhanced intelligence gathering and transportation capabilities are critical if the whereabouts of LRA groups are to be located in real time and if the regional forces are to respond rapidly. The militaries involved must be able to access all areas where the LRA operates. Lastly, LRA-specific defection initiatives and DDRRR (Demobilization, Disarmament, Repatriation, Resettlement, Reintegration) programs must also be increased in scale and intensity across the region.

President Barack Obama's April 23, 2012 announcement to extend the deployment of the military advisors was a welcome restatement of his administration's commitment to ending the LRA.<sup>3</sup> The advisors are strengthening intelligence gathering about the LRA; facilitating forums where intelligence is shared; and improving the performance of the Ugandan military, the most engaged military in the loose regional coalition fighting the LRA. But unless key challenges are addressed urgently, the mission is likely to fail.

Finding the LRA is not an easy task. Even sophisticated aerial surveillance equipment is challenged by the thickness of the forest, high temperature, and the sheer size of the area where the LRA is hiding.

Recent reports suggest that Joseph Kony has left the Central African Republic, or CAR, and has crossed into Darfur, possibly receiving support from the Sudanese government. It is unclear where Kony's group is currently located. Kony's ability to move from CAR to Darfur unimpeded is highly troubling and clearly shows that more forces are needed to cover all of the areas where the LRA is and could become active.

The Ugandan army, the most capable force pursuing the LRA, must have full access to all LRA-affected areas in CAR and the northwest corner of South Sudan. Negotiations must result in Ugandan forces gaining permission to re-enter the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where they have been unable to operate for over seven months on the orders of the Congolese government.

The quest to end the LRA can only succeed through a multifaceted strategy where the affected countries and international partners work closely together on military and nonmilitary initiatives. The time for debate is over; policymakers across the region and internationally must take the necessary steps to end the continued suffering of civilians who pay the ultimate price for the horrible atrocities committed by the LRA.

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## Significant progress on the ground

### *Improved capabilities for collecting intelligence*

The U.S. advisors are using manned and unmanned surveillance flights over a wider area than was previously possible and are likely using thermal sensing to "see through" dense foliage. The exact location of the top LRA commanders is still not known, but the improved intelligence gathering capabilities is gradually closing the information gap. This is a significant improvement. Before the arrival of the advisors, intelligence was limited to the interrogation of defectors, interviews with civilians, and tracking the LRA in the bush. Improved intelligence will enable the forces in the field to prepare operations to apprehend the senior commanders and protect civilians. The capture of Major General Acellam could yield a treasure trove of information about the LRA.

### *Improved military coordination*

The advisors have established four "Combined Operations Fusion Centers," or COFCs, located in Obo and Djema, Central African Republic; in Dungu, Democratic Republic of Congo; and in Nzara, South Sudan. The COFCs are small offices with communications equipment where intelligence officers from CAR, Congo, South Sudan, and Uganda share intelligence about LRA movements and commanders plan joint military operations. The COFCs are also working closely with humanitarian agencies and the United Nations to inform local communities about hot-spot areas of LRA activity.

### *Increased commitment from the national armies to end the LRA*

The presence of the advisors has refocused the national armies in their military campaign to counter the LRA. The fact that the advisors are on the ground and actively working with the armies appears to have improved their performance and commitment to end the LRA. Soldiers and senior officers from Uganda and the Central African Republic told the Enough Project that the presence of the U.S. advisors has demonstrated that they are not alone in the fight against the LRA, thereby boosting their morale.

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## Key challenges and recommendations

Despite significant progress since the deployment of the advisors, key challenges remain in the quest to bring an end to the LRA.

### *Troops actively pursuing Kony and the top leadership must be given full access to LRA-affected areas in CAR and Congo*

The most capable troops in active pursuit of the LRA—the Ugandan People's Defence Force, or UPDF—are prohibited from entering Congo and some areas in CAR, including northern CAR where the LRA has likely sought refuge. Given the urgency of the issue, President Obama should personally call on Congolese President Kabila to allow the UPDF to pursue the LRA in Congo and protect civilians. U.S. policymakers should also work hand in hand with the African Union to support the practice that all pursuit missions have full access to operate in all of the LRA affected areas, including all areas of CAR and potentially Darfur and Chad. Regional forces carrying out these operations should be held accountable for their behavior to ensure that civilian protection is a core principle of their mission.

### *Allow U.S. advisors to work further away from their bases*

The U.S. advisors should be given more operational freedom, which would enable them to go further away from their military base and work with the offensive track teams that are actually fighting the LRA. This would enable the advisors to provide more effective practical training.

### *Deploy more troops to close the gap on the LRA*

The number of Special Forces and other troops dedicated to the pursuit of Kony and the top leadership remains too small to apprehend the LRA leadership or protect civilians. Large areas of Congo, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan are without any significant military deployment.

U.S. policymakers should make a high-level push to ensure that more Special Forces are deployed to apprehend the LRA leadership. Uganda should be asked to contribute a greater number of Special Forces, but if this is not possible, Special Forces should be sourced from outside the affected countries. South Africa would be a possible contributor.

### *Enhance intelligence gathering*

While progress has been made, there is still a need for enhanced intelligence capabilities. Infrared technology should be used, and night flights need to be increased. Given the immense area in which the LRA operates, the advisors should expand their efforts to gather human intelligence about the current strategy of the LRA and identify the locations of LRA groups. In particular, the advisors should work closely with communities and local leaders throughout the affected areas and ensure that defectors are thoroughly and effectively debriefed. Great care must be taken to prevent retaliation by the LRA against those sharing information. The strategic deployment of additional troops can also improve intelligence gathering.

### *Increase capacity to transport and supply troops by helicopter*

The vastness and remoteness of the area where the LRA operates makes it impossible for forces to thoroughly cover it on foot. More transport helicopters are needed to extend the reach of the soldiers and enable the rapid deployment of forces deep inside the jungle. Helicopters are also needed to supply the troops in the field, which continues to be a serious challenge to the teams pursuing the LRA. Soldiers have been forced to hunt and forage for food, because they did not receive supplies for long periods of time.

The United States should provide helicopters to support the transport needs of the operation throughout the operational area, especially in CAR and in Congo.

### *Enhance protection of civilians through early warning, more troops, and military police*

The civilians continue to suffer from LRA attacks due in part to the region's remoteness and the lack of troops. Early warning systems with walkie-talkie stations, radios, and SMS networks are slowly being introduced to positive effect in Congo but remain virtually absent in most parts of CAR and South Sudan.

The United States should as a matter of urgency use funds already been allocated for civilian protection to support the expansion of such systems. For this effort to be most effective, it should be done in close cooperation with the U.N. missions in each of the affected countries and through local organizations.

An increased presence of troops and military police to some of the unprotected villages would go a long way toward protecting civilians. The United States and European countries should increase pressure on the national governments to ensure that they deploy more troops to the affected areas.

### *Encourage defections by increasing radio coverage*

Ending the LRA requires a more extensive focus on defection strategies. Radio coverage must be increased considerably, as a way to reach out to potential defectors in the LRA and sensitize communities about the LRA. Large parts of the LRA-affected areas remain without radio coverage. The need for radio coverage is especially great in CAR. Radio stations





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should be created in the following locations in CAR: Rafai, Zemio, Mboki, Derbissaka, Djema, and Sam Ouandja. In Congo, radio stations are needed in Ango, Digba, and Aba.

USAID is planning to provide funding for greater FM radio coverage, but this should be done as rapidly as possible and must be buttressed by other donors because of the vastness of the territory where the LRA operates. Creative means, including helicopter transport of radio equipment to build radio towers in isolated areas of northeastern Congo and CAR as well as the use of “radios in a box,” radios powered by small solar panels, by the regional militaries during their operations, should be pursued. The Obama administration should utilize some of the funds that have already been allocated to set up radio towers in key villages across the affected areas. This should be done through the local embassies and in close partnership with the U.N. agencies and local actors on the ground, like Radio Zereda in Obo, CAR, and Catholic churches.

#### *Roads need to be cut and improved*

The isolated jungles where the LRA operates have little or no infrastructure, which makes the rapid movement and supply of troops difficult. New roads and paths inside

Ricardo is a radio presenter and one of the founders of Radio Zereda, ‘Radio Peace,’ in Obo. The radio broadcasts a daily Peace Program where they encourage people to defect from the LRA.



the jungle are vital to gradually diminishing the areas where the LRA can operate freely, since roads can be patrolled more regularly and efficiently. The troops are literally cutting their way through the jungle at the moment.

Renovation of the vital supply line via the Nzara-Bambouti-Obo-Djema road that brings military supplies to the Ugandan forces in CAR is urgently needed to speed up resupply and lower logistical costs.

The Obama administration and the European Union should commit funds to infrastructure development and work closely with international and local partners to implement the projects.

#### *Support the A.U. initiative*

The mobilization of a 5,000-strong force authorized by the African Union is an encouraging development that could bring the much-needed troops on the ground. But the fact remains that the mission is severely underfinanced and that considerable funds are needed to secure long-term deployment and to cover the military and logistical expenses. Furthermore, it must be ensured that the troops have sufficient supply lines to provide them with food and water, since this is not available in the affected areas, where civilians largely survive on humanitarian aid.

The United States should encourage the European Union to increase their support for the African Union and pressure the European Union to include funds to the national armies in their general contribution to the A.U. mission.

## Military operations against the LRA as of May 2012

This map shows the deployment of the U.S. military advisors, the Combined Operations Fusion Centers (COFC), national armies involved in LRA operations, main LRA groups, and hotspots



**X LRA abductions near Darfur:** LRA attacked, looted and abducted 17 people in this area between March 1-7, 2012. None of the abducted have returned as of May 22, 2012.

**1 Derbisaka, CAR:** UPDF forward operational hub, serving the tracking teams inside Zemongo Forest.

**2 Djema, CAR:** U.S. base with 20-25 military advisors. Main hub for Ugandan army (UPDF) operations in CAR. Connected by road and air with military base in Nzara, South Sudan. Combined Operations Fusion Center (COFC) Location.

**3 Maboussou, CAR:** Most eastern UPDF location on the main route from Bangui. Its main function is to secure the vital supply line from Obo to Djema.

**4 Mboki, CAR:** UPDF soldiers permanently present to protect civilians and as a buffer zone for Obo.

**5 Obo, CAR:** UPDF base that serves supplies going in and out of Djema. U.S. base with 20-25 military advisors. COFC Location.

**6 Ezo, South Sudan:** UPDF military base.

**7 Nzara, South Sudan:** U.S. advisors working together with the UPDF. Headquarters for UPDF operations in the region. COFC Location.

**8 Dungu, DRC:** Two U.S. advisors embedded with the U.N. Stabilization Mission in Congo (MONUSCO) Joint Intelligence and Operations Center (similar to COFC).

**Vast ungoverned area:** UPDF claim that Kony has left the Zemongo forest and is close to Darfur. LRA is likely to move freely north of Zemongo, since there is no permanent military deployment in the area.

**Zemongo Forest:** Active LRA groups operate in the Zemongo forest. They have an uninterrupted route towards northern parts of CAR. UPDF believe that LRA senior commander Okot Odhiambo is in this area.

**Smaller LRA groups:** Hot-spot triangle with concentration of small LRA groups of 5-10. Primarily looting supplies from civilians. Mostly short-term abductions. Only a few Central African Republic army (FACA) soldiers in Rafai and Zemio.

# Analysis of the status of the LRA in Central Africa

*“It’s rare that we meet them [the LRA] these days. Not like in 2008 and 2009 when we met them all the time [in the bush]. They used to move in big groups, now they are only 5-10 when we meet them.” – Mbororo cattle herder<sup>4</sup>*

The majority of reported LRA activity during the last 12 months has been concentrated around three main areas: the border region between Congo and South Sudan; south-eastern parts of CAR, with concentration along the border toward Congo; and finally around the Zemongo forest in CAR, extending north along the border with South Sudan, reaching the southern tip of Darfur in Sudan.<sup>5</sup>

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## LRA activity in Congo and South Sudan

During the first quarter of 2012, there were no reports of LRA-related incidents in South Sudan and the situation has been improving, gradually, with approximately 13,000 people returning home during the first quarter of this year.<sup>6</sup> Despite the relative security in these areas, it should be noted that violence from Congo can easily spill over the border and that 57,000 people remain displaced due to the LRA.

Congolese civilians have been less fortunate and continue to suffer from LRA atrocities. During the first quarter of 2012 there were reports of 33 attacks, three deaths, and 51 abductions. With 344,398 people living as internally displaced or refugees, Congo continues to host the largest LRA-induced displacement and the highest number of incidents across the region.<sup>7</sup> The majority of attacks and abductions run along the Faradje-Dungu-Bangadi-Doruma line just south of the border with South Sudan.<sup>8</sup>





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Gunships are used by the Ugandan Army to transport troops and supplies deep in the jungle where the soldiers are hunting for the LRA.

### *Three LRA groups in Congo*

Recent reports suggest that the LRA has split into three main groups in Congo. One group of 20-25 LRA, commanded by Vincent Binany, operates between Faradje and Gangala Na Bodio; a second group headed by Sam Otto Ladere, is mainly active to the west of Dungu in the triangle between Bangadi, Niangara, and Ngilima; and finally a group of 8-10 LRA dominates the vertical Dungu-Duru axis.<sup>9</sup> This group is suspected to be led by Dominic Ongwen, who is one of the highest ranking commanders and against whom the International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant.

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### *Analysis of LRA activity in the Central African Republic*

*“They [the LRA] are rarely abducting new recruits. Their attacks are small and quick, generally targeted towards food and other basic necessities. We see abductions for a few hours or a few days. They are mainly used as transporters. Some stay longer, but most of them are released again.” – U.S. military advisor, Obo<sup>10</sup>*

### *Main locations with LRA activity in CAR*

The LRA is currently active in large parts of CAR, as far east as Rafai in Mbomou prefecture and onto Zemio, Obo, and Djema in the Haut-Mbomou prefecture. LRA-related incidents have been observed through all areas of the two provinces and even in the far north of the country in Vakaga prefecture, close to Darfur. It was in this northernmost prefecture where the LRA attacked, looted, and abducted 17 people from Sam Ouandja and Yangou between March 1 and 7, 2012.<sup>11</sup>

### *Two main groups of LRA in CAR: Joseph Kony's presence*

Intelligence suggests that the LRA has split into two main groups in CAR. The main group is headed by Joseph Kony and the smaller one is possibly led by one of Kony's top deputies, Okot Odhiambo.<sup>12</sup>

Kony's group is believed to have left their hideout in the Zemongo forest, north of Djema, and to be en route toward Darfur. A senior Ugandan officer in Obo told the Enough Project that Kony is less than five kilometers from Darfur and speculated that he might have already crossed into Sudan. Recent press reports have highlighted the Ugandan army's claim that Kony's group is moving into Darfur or is in Western Bahr el Ghazal state in South Sudan at the point where the borders of South Sudan, Sudan, and CAR meet.<sup>13</sup> A former LRA "wife" who was recently repatriated to Yambio, South Sudan, said that Kony's group was in southern Darfur.<sup>14</sup> It is estimated that Kony moves with a group of 100 to 150 mainly Ugandans, with 30 to 50 of the group armed.<sup>15</sup>

Okot Odhiambo is reputed to be the second in command of the LRA and he has repeatedly been connected to LRA activity in southeastern parts of CAR.<sup>16</sup> The Odhiambo group is estimated to number between 30 and 60 people and is believed to have remained in the Zemongo forest, possibly to act as a buffer zone for the Kony group and to maintain communication with smaller splinter groups along the border between CAR and Congo. Their position enables the transportation of looted materials from civilians along the border to the more isolated groups further inside the forest.<sup>17</sup>

### *The LRA is currently operating in small groups*

Smaller groups of the LRA ranging from 3 to 10 people are attacking civilians and looting along the CAR-Congo border where they regularly cross between the two countries. Recent events show that even small groups of the LRA can cause serious harm to the local population. On March 12, 2012, six civilians were abducted from Rafai village and on March 21 three LRA combatants looted several households for food, clothing, and cell phones. The majority of reported LRA activity is concentrated in the triangular area between Rafai, Zemio, and Djema.<sup>18</sup>

Small-scale attacks are typical for the way that the LRA currently operates. The LRA tends to move in groups of 3 to 10 combatants who conduct fast and well-organized attacks against civilians to secure food, clothing, and other basic necessities. They typically abduct

a few people, who will be used as porters to transport the stolen goods to a secure location in the bush and then are released within hours or after a few days. It should be noted that the group also continues to carry out killings and long-term abductions.<sup>19</sup>

#### *The Zemongo forest: a perfect place to hide*

The Zemongo forest and the jungles that stretch all the way to southern Darfur offer the perfect hiding ground for a rebel group like the LRA. Part of the area is a dense forest with permanent rivers and seasonal flooding. This creates a thick and dense jungle wherein the LRA have easy access to fresh water and wild fruits, and the ability to hunt game.

Three civilians who recently escaped from the LRA said that they had been able to survive inside the jungle for five months while they were hiding from the LRA and waiting for the water to come down before they were able to cross the river. They managed to survive “on wild yams and river water.”<sup>20</sup>

#### *The LRA is also surviving via trade and looting of nomadic tribes*

The area is “virtually a no-man’s-land, with almost no permanent settlement,” said a humanitarian aid worker in Bangui.<sup>21</sup> The only people who come through the area are nomadic tribes and poachers. There is persistent information about trade of food, arms, ivory, and diamonds between the LRA and some nomads, while other nomads are simply being looted like other civilian populations.<sup>22</sup> With or without the trading of supplies with nomads, the fact remains that the LRA is largely able to survive inside the jungle without much need for contact with the outside world.

#### *Kony’s possible presence in Darfur*

Information that Joseph Kony has left the Zemongo forest and is headed north toward Darfur is worrying and, unfortunately, a possible scenario. Since the summer of 2010 when the Ugandan army were ordered by CAR President Francois Bozizé to withdraw from Sam Ouandja in Vakaga prefecture, the LRA have had an uninterrupted route from the Zemongo forest all the way to Darfur. The March 1 and 7 abductions close to Sam Ouandja in the north show that the LRA is in the area, with the possibility that Kony is among them.

Several U.S. diplomats who were interviewed for this report told the Enough Project that they do not know the exact location of Kony, but that they believe he is in CAR, probably somewhere north of Djema. This is not the first time that Kony has moved toward Darfur. Kony and his top LRA commanders were reportedly active in the area in early 2011.<sup>23</sup> The latest issue of *Africa Confidential* also reported that Kony is in CAR near the border of South Sudan and Sudan.<sup>24</sup> On April 23, 2012, Radio Dabanga reported that the Darfur rebel group Sudan Liberation Movement-Minni Minawi, or SLM-MM, claims that Kony is moving freely in southern Darfur and that he is working with Sudanese government militias and security service officers, under the supervision of the ruling National Congress Party.<sup>25</sup>





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Whether or not Kony is indeed in Darfur and is supported by the Sudanese Armed Forces, or SAF, and the Khartoum government is difficult to verify, as there is no clear evidence at the moment. But the fact remains that Kony and the LRA continue to have free passage north of the Zemongo forest all the way to Darfur, since there are no forces deployed north of the forest. This is highly disturbing. The relatively easy movement of the LRA throughout the region challenges the current military capability and deployment. In short, more forces are needed to cover all of the areas affected by the LRA.

The U.N. operates the only regular flights from Bangui, the capital in the Central African Republic, to Obo. The flight takes around 4 hours and involves several landings in small villages along the way.

*The LRA is gathering information about the U.S. military advisors*

*"They [the LRA] looted all our food and we were not allowed to move for a long time. They asked us many questions about the U.S. military. Where are the U.S. troops? How many are they in Obo? Are they in other villages? How many are they? How many arms do they have? Do they also have helicopters? How are they working together with the Ugandan army? Is it true that they will also go to the bush and hunt for us?" – Mbororo herder, Obo<sup>26</sup>*

This incident was described to the Enough Project by a group of Mbororo herders who were looted by five LRA combatants 50 kilometers north of Obo, CAR, between March 1 and 5, 2012. The Mbororo were held captive for a few hours until a man they described as a “senior LRA commander” arrived to question them before they were released.

The LRA is clearly aware of the U.S. deployment and is trying to obtain information about their capabilities and military plans. Furthermore, it should be noted that recent LRA attacks within the Rafai-Zemio-Djema triangle could be an attempt to divert attention and military pressure away from the groups in the Zemongo forest currently experiencing increased military pressure from the Ugandan army.

## Ongoing efforts to apprehend the LRA

*“The remoteness of the LRA is a major challenge. We get information about [LRA] incidents that are 1 to 2 weeks old, and then it takes another week to reach the place of the sighting. By then the LRA is long gone.” – U.S. military advisor<sup>27</sup>*

### *Military deployment in the LRA-affected areas of Congo*

- **The FARDC**, the Congolese army, has deployed its 391st battalion with 750 soldiers to the LRA-affected areas. The 391st battalion has been trained by U.S. officers from AFRICOM.<sup>28</sup>
- **MONUSCO**, the U.N. peacekeeping force in Congo, has deployed 1,200 peacekeepers to Province Orientale, with the main mandate to protect civilians.<sup>29</sup> They have very limited offensive capabilities.
- **The U.S. military advisors** have two officers embedded with MONUSCO. They are based in Dungu and mainly work on the sharing of cross-border intelligence.

### *Military deployment in the LRA-affected areas of South Sudan*

- **The SPLA**, the South Sudanese army, operates from the main base in Yambio.
- **The UPDF**, the Ugandan army, has set up a military base in Nzara, which functions as their main logistical hub for their operations in CAR.
- **The U.S. military advisors** are also using the Nzara base as a transit point for flights in and out of CAR and they work at the base to analyze and share intelligence with the Ugandan army.

### *Military deployment in the LRA-affected areas of CAR*

- **The FACA**, the national army of the Central African Republic, has deployed approximately 100 soldiers to the LRA-affected areas, mainly in small villages along the border toward Congo.



- **The Ugandan army** has deployed approximately 800 soldiers to CAR, with the main bases in Obo and Djema.
- **The U.S. military advisors** have established small military bases in Obo and Djema, with 20-30 advisors in each location.

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## Military and nonmilitary activities to end the LRA in CAR

### Status of the U.S. military advisors in the Central African Republic

The U.S. advisors have established “forward operating locations” in Obo and Djema. These are small military bases, from which they live and work. The locations are very basic with tents surrounded by a tall grass fence and barbed wire.

The advisors, 20 to 30 in each location, are well-trained Special Forces or Green Berets from the U.S. Army, with international experience in counterinsurgency operations from conflict zones like Afghanistan and Iraq. Some are trained for combat, while others are engineers, intelligence officers, and medical doctors.

The advisors have been on the ground in CAR since the beginning of 2012. When the advisors arrived in Obo they were allocated a thickly forested area where they cut down the trees, dug out drainage channels, and generally cleared the area for their use. All of their equipment was flown in by small planes, since the airstrip is too small for any large cargo plane. The cumbersome logistics of the operation mean that the advisors only recently started to focus on their actual military objectives as opposed to the practicalities of establishing and furnishing a base in a remote area. “It is still early days,” said a U.S. diplomat describing the status of the mission.<sup>30</sup>

The U.S. advisors in the field seem to be focusing on four main areas of work: improving the gathering of intelligence, sharing of intelligence, advising the Ugandan army, and improving the local infrastructure.

#### *Improved intelligence capabilities*

First, the advisors are working to generate accurate and reliable intelligence about the movements and operations of LRA. They conduct manned and unmanned flights that take surveillance photos, and there is a possibility that they are utilizing thermal censoring to locate people in the bush. The photos are then analyzed, and the intelligence is shared with the Ugandan army and passed on to the Ugandan tracking teams that are directly engaging with the LRA.



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More than 8000 people have sought refuge in Obo village because of the insecurity created by the LRA .

### *Sharing of intelligence through the Combined Operations Fusion Centers*

Second, the advisors are sharing intelligence and improving military coordination between the armies of the affected countries. They are finalizing the Combined Operations Fusion Centers, or COFCs, in Obo and Djema in CAR, Dungu in Congo, and Nzara in South Sudan. Buildings have been made available and COFC meetings are already taking place. The buildings are soon to be equipped with computers and communications equipment to facilitate improved communications between the four armies. In practice, this means that in CAR soldiers from FACA, the UPDF, and the U.S. advisors will be in the same room and hence be able to share information about LRA movements across borders. The COFCs have also started to inform humanitarian agencies and the local population about recent LRA movements in an effort to improve civilian protection. The COFCs are also publishing a newsletter with analysis of the latest LRA incidents and security hot-spots. The newsletter is distributed to civilians, NGOs, and humanitarian agencies.

### *Hands-on military advising to the Ugandan army*

Third, the U.S. personnel are advising and coaching the Ugandan army in military planning and strategy. They are giving practical hands-on advice to the Ugandan soldiers before missions, and they do joint debriefings and evaluations after the pursuit missions.

### *Minor infrastructure development*

Fourth, the advisors are slowly starting to improve the local infrastructure by facilitating renovation of a few bridges and roads, though there is much more to be done on this front.

### *Relations between the U.S. advisors and the civilian population*

*“We [the local population in Obo] were very excited when the U.S. arrived, but we were expecting faster results. We actually don’t really know what they are doing. But I believe they will finish Kony and remove him from the bush.” – Civilian, Obo<sup>31</sup>*

The U.S. military advisors have been well received by local communities in the southeastern parts of CAR, though it should be noted that expectations about the capabilities and the mandate of the advisors are unrealistically high. Several people in Obo continue to believe that the United States will bring hundreds of soldiers, planes, and tanks to finish the LRA.<sup>32</sup>

The perception that the U.S. advisors are moving slowly and not achieving tangible results is growing among the local population. Hence more should be done to bridge expectations and inform local communities about the actual work of the advisors. Chiefs, elders, and church leaders would be a natural place to start this type of dialogue.

### *Relations between the U.S. advisors, the UPDF, and the FACA*

The UPDF and FACA soldiers on the ground also welcome the arrival of the U.S. advisors, especially the Ugandan army, whose representatives express that “The assistance from the U.S. is vital, both in terms of funds and equipment,” and that “The sharing of intelligence and information is very good.”<sup>33</sup> Several humanitarian workers confirmed that the advisors have “made the Ugandan army work more and respect civilians better.”<sup>34</sup>

An international diplomat who is working closely with high ranking FACA officers in Bangui told the Enough Project:

*“The increased attention and direct involvement of the U.S. military meant a lot to FACA. They feel that this is a clear recognition of their work and mandate, that the U.S. is supporting them. This is very important for an army that is overstretched and practically unable to defend the national territory.”*



## Status of the Ugandan army in the Central African Republic

*“We [the UPDF] know that this will take time and that finding Kony is not easy. People need to be patient. But we have one major problem; the area is still too big for the force at hand.” – Senior UPDF officer, Obo<sup>35</sup>*

As of April 2012 the Ugandan army has maintained a permanent military deployment in Mboki, Obo, Djema, Derbisaka, and Maboussou. The number of soldiers in each location varies, but it is estimated that the total force numbers just around 800 troops.<sup>36</sup>

### Operational setup

The main hub for the Ugandan army operations in CAR is based out of Djema, which is served by the UPDF base in Nzara, South Sudan. Gunships fly between the two towns, and supplies are driven in via the Nzara-Bambouti-Obo-Djema road.

Besides the main base in Djema with 100 to 200 troops, the Ugandan army also has 10 mobile tracking teams, each with 20 to 40 soldiers, deployed inside the Zemongo forest. These are the forces on the ground that are actually tracking and actively engaging with the LRA. The tracking teams receive supplies through Derbisaka, which is on the southern tip of the forest.

One of the main logistical and financial challenges for the Ugandan army is that all supplies for the tracking teams have to be flown in by air, since the road from Djema to Derbisaka is completely inaccessible. The tracking teams move on foot and are mainly armed with AK-47s, RPGs, and larger machine guns.

There are fewer soldiers in Mboki, Obo, and Maboussou, with an estimated 100 in Obo and approximately 50 to 100 in Mboki and Maboussou. They are not taking an active role in the fight against the LRA but are deployed to protect the vital supply line between Obo and Djema. Their military presence in the area also provides some degree of security for civilians, and they do joint patrols with FACA on the main roads inside and outside the villages.

## Relations between the Ugandan army and the civilian population

There have previously been isolated incidents of violent confrontations between civilians and members of the Ugandan army and reports of abuse of civilians by the UPDF. It appears, however, that relations have been gradually improving. One humanitarian worker told the Enough Project:

“We don’t experience any major problems with the UPDF and FACA in their relations with the civilian population. There have been minor incidents, but no repeated or coor-



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minated abuse. Yes, there are women in the barracks and some are also having sex with the soldiers, but the soldiers are not hostile towards the women.”<sup>37</sup>

The feelings of general improvement of the civilian-military relationship were repeated by several civilians, local chiefs, and Catholic priests in Obo.

Hundreds of people attend the Sunday service at the Catholic Church where they experience a sense of community and togetherness, which is severely lacking in a society where people are struggling to survive.

### Status of FACA in the Central African Republic

FACA soldiers are permanently deployed along the border with Congo and with soldiers in Bangassou, Rafai, Zemio, Obo, and Djema. The total number of FACA soldiers in the LRA affected areas is estimated to be 105.<sup>38</sup> With the main deployment in Bangassou, there are approximately 5 to 10 soldiers in each of the other villages: Rafai, Zemio, Obo, and Djema. The FACA soldiers are largely poorly equipped, are forced to share a few AK-47s and old rifles, have limited transport options, and largely rely on the Ugandan army to supply them with fuel.<sup>39</sup>

### Main areas of work

FACA soldiers are notorious for taking no part in the actual fight against LRA. One of the local chiefs in Obo explained, “They [FACA] never go to the bush, they stay in their barracks.”<sup>40</sup> A member of Parliament on the National Defense Committee told the Enough Project:

*“FACA won’t go and hunt the LRA, they will always stay in town. They don’t see the LRA as their main problem. And if they did, they don’t have the military equipment to engage the LRA. You have to understand that the attention of the government is in the northern part of the country, fighting rebels from Chad.”<sup>41</sup>*

Political control of CAR is largely based on dominance of the northern and eastern part of the country near Chad, a region from which several successful rebellions have been launched.<sup>42</sup> President Bozizé openly stated, “I took power with Chad’s help,”<sup>43</sup> and the International Crisis Group concluded, “Bozizé was brought to power in 2003 by France and Chad.”<sup>44</sup>

During his April 2012 visit to Washington, D.C., Colonel Jean-Francis Bozizé, CAR’s deputy minister of defense and son of President Bozizé, admitted that government efforts to disarm rebel groups in CAR “has stalled due to a lack of resources.”<sup>45</sup> Margaret Vogt, the special representative and head of the U.N.’s Integrated Peacebuilding Office, BINUCA, in the CAR, said, “The government has been unable to deploy the resources necessary to control its territory.”<sup>46</sup> The LRA is one of among at least five rebel groups currently operating in CAR.

“The capacity of FACA is stretched. They are juggling numbers here and simply don’t have the manpower to deploy capable forces to this part of the country [the LRA-affected prefectures],” an international diplomat working with security sector reform in CAR explained.<sup>47</sup>

The combination of low political priority, virtually no strategic importance for the control of CAR, and an overstretched army has led to the current situation where the southeastern part of the country is highly marginalized and the Ugandan army is the only force actively pursuing and engaging the LRA on the ground in the Central African Republic.

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### Defections from the LRA and DDRRR efforts in CAR

“We are getting information that a lot of LRA wish to come out, but they fear what will happen once they escape. We need to inform these LRA that they will not be killed and that they will be reintegrated.” – *Humanitarian aid worker, Obo*<sup>48</sup>

Distribution of leaflets and radio messages are the only defection initiatives currently utilized in CAR. The leaflets are distributed by the Ugandan army tracking teams at

major crossings in the bush, and Mbororo herders also drop leaflets when they move throughout the area.

#### *Radio messages encourage defections from the LRA*

*“I was on the radio where I told about my experiences in the bush, I talked about the shock and trauma that it was to come back home. But I also told about the opportunities and that we have a victims association where we support each other, talk to each other and try to make some money through farming.” – Former LRA member, Obo<sup>49</sup>*

Radio messages are broadcasted by Radio Zereda in Obo. The current reach of the radio is five kilometers, but is in the process of being enhanced with a new antenna that will increase the coverage to 65 kilometers.<sup>50</sup> Zereda broadcasts every evening for 30 minutes. The show encourages LRA rebels to escape by informing them that they will be reunited with their families when they come out from the bush.

Former LRA fighters are also brought on the radio to tell about their experiences and the joy of coming back home. Part of the show is directed toward the local population, telling them to welcome people who return from the LRA and to inform the local officials in case they encounter someone who has escaped from the LRA.<sup>51</sup> Many former LRA members have been attacked by local communities while trying to escape, so the need for community sensitization through radio programming is acute.<sup>52</sup>

These types of messages are instrumental in increasing defections from the LRA. There are several confirmed cases of people having escaped from the LRA because they heard the radio messages. The broadcasting of testimonies from people who have already defected appears to be the most effective way to increase defections from the LRA. Their messages can be directed specifically toward certain groups and individuals still in the bush.<sup>53</sup>

Expansion of radio stations to other parts of CAR could help to increase defections from the LRA. There is an extensive network of Catholic churches across the region with the capacity to facilitate the setup and maintenance of a network of radio towers.<sup>54</sup> Zereda confirmed that they would be able to broadcast for longer hours and train more employees to manage new radio stations, provided that funds are made available.<sup>55</sup>

#### *DDRRR processes are facing challenges*

*“Azande [the local tribe in southeastern CAR] returnees are usually easily welcomed by the community, but we know very little about how the process is happening and the long-term effects of abductions. Ugandan returnees is a major challenge, since the local community has been beating and killing them. We have to get them early so that we can protect them.” – Humanitarian aid worker, Obo<sup>56</sup>*





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The Mbororo herders track through the bush when they go to sell their cattle in the neighboring villages. This involves great risks of attacks from the LRA.

Once people do manage to escape and defect from the LRA, proper *demobilization, disarmament, repatriation, resettlement, and reintegration*, or DDRRR, processes must be in place. Unfortunately, in CAR this is not currently the case. A prime example is the case of a Congolese man who defected from the LRA while in CAR. He was held by the Ministry of Defense for more than five months before he was repatriated back to his home in Congo, simply because no one knew how to handle the case.<sup>57</sup>

Women and children who escape the LRA usually go through the DDRRR process facilitated by UNICEF but there are no formalized processes about how to handle older male defectors. This is a serious concern and an area where BINUCA, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Defense and the U.N. missions in the other affected countries, should play a much more active role to ensure a proper DDRRR process.

“No one offers a clear alternative to life in the bush,” a humanitarian aid worker in Obo pointed out. “Why should someone choose a risky escape from the LRA, when the alternative is to live in an IDP camp? Or even worse, to be harassed and beaten up by the local population.”<sup>58</sup>

The fact is that this type of information does travel to the bush, and there have been confirmed cases of LRA defectors who have been beaten up and even killed by the local communities in CAR. In particular, Ugandan defectors face considerable risks once they escape because local communities are hostile toward them.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, much more is needed to be done to protect defectors and to secure proper reintegration processes for former LRA fighters. Without this, increased defection initiatives are likely to have a minor impact.

## Conclusion

The arrival of the U.S. military advisors to central and east Africa has contributed to significant progress on the ground. Intelligence and surveillance capabilities have improved considerably with aerial reconnaissance and the possibility of thermal imaging. Sharing of intelligence across the borders is improving, and some of the national armies are pursuing the LRA with greater intensity than demonstrated previously.

However, defection initiatives, infrastructural development, and protection of civilians still suffer greatly from a lack of funds and political prioritization.

The disturbing fact is that the LRA continues to operate freely in the border area between Congo, CAR, and South Sudan. News that Kony may have left the Zemongo forest and is moving toward Darfur is highly troubling and fundamentally challenges the current military plan. Additional forces to cover the increase in the area of operation are needed.

Several commentators and reports have indicated that LRA is in “survival mode.”<sup>60</sup> This report does not agree with that analysis. Instead we have found that the LRA is able to move freely in the border region, has increased its area of operation, and continues to be responsible for lootings, attacks, and abductions in central Africa.

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## Endnotes

- 1 The Central African Republic was chosen as the area of study, since this is where most of the military offensive is taking place and because this is where the majority of the U.S. military advisors are working with the forces that are actually fighting the LRA on the ground. The Central African Republic was also chosen since the findings and complexities here mirror those in the other LRA-affected countries.
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- 3 Karen Parrish, "U.S. Supports Pushback Against Lord's Resistance Army," American Forces Press Service, April 25, 2012, available at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=116080>.
- 4 Interview with Mbororo cattle herder, Obo, South Eastern Central African Republic, March 25, 2012.
- 5 See Annex 1 with a map of LRA incidents drawn from the LRA crisis tracker, from May 2010 to May 2012. Readers who wish to learn more about the previous years of the LRA conflict should consult: Tim Allen and Koen Vlassenroot, "The Lords Resistance Army, Myth and Reality" (2010); and Ledio Cakaj, "The Lord's Resistance Army of today" (Washington: Enough Project, 2010), available at, <http://www.enoughproject.org/publications/lords-resistance-army-today>.
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- 9 "The LRA is down but not out," *Africa Confidential*, April 13, 2012 (53) (8).
- 10 Interview with U.S. military advisors, Obo, Central African Republic, March 22-26, 2012.
- 11 UNOCHA incident database; LRA crisis tracker.
- 12 Interview with the Ugandan army, Obo, Central African Republic, March 22-26, 2012; Interview with international diplomats, Bangui, Central African Republic, March 27- April 2, 2012; Interview with international LRA researcher, Kampala, April 2012.
- 13 AFP, "Rebel chief Kony in Sudan – S. Sudan border areas," April 30, 2012, available at <http://news.yahoo.com/rebel-chief-kony-sudan-sudan-border-areas-110344192.html>. BBC News, "Ugandan Army says Sudan is backing Joseph Kony's LRA," April 30, 2012, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17890432>.
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- 15 Ibid.
- 16 The World Bank, "Diagnostic Study of the Lord's Resistance Army" (2011); Resolve, "Peace Can Be" (2012).
- 17 Interview with the Ugandan army, Obo, Central African Republic, March 22-26, 2012; Interview with international diplomats, Bangui, Central African Republic, March 27-April 2, 2012; Interview with international LRA researcher, Kampala, April 2012.
- 18 Interview with UN official, Bangui, Central African Republic, March 27-April 2, 2012; LRA crisis tracker.
- 19 Ibid. And interview with humanitarian workers and international diplomats, Bangui, Central African Republic, March 27-April 2, 2012.
- 20 UNHCR, "Recovering from the Lord's Resistance Army," March 30, 2012, available at, <http://reliefweb.int/node/486710>.
- 21 Interview with humanitarian aid worker, Bangui, Central African Republic, March 27- April 2, 2012.
- 22 Interview with the Ugandan army officers, Mbororo herders, U.S. military advisors, Obo, Central African Republic, March 22-26, 2012; Interview with MONUSCO officials, Kampala, February 2012.
- 23 Sudan Human Security Baseline Assessment "Lord's Resistance Army," Small Arms Survey, February 2011 update. <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org>
- 24 "The LRA is down but not out," *Africa Confidential*.
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- 30 Interview with US military advisors, Obo, Central African Republic, March 22-26, 2012.
- 31 Discussion with several civilians and displaced people in, Obo, Central African Republic, March 22-26, 2012.
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- 33 Interview with senior officer in Ugandan army, Obo, Central African Republic, March 22-26, 2012.
- 34 Interview with international humanitarian aid worker, Obo, Central African Republic, March 22-26, 2012.
- 35 Interview with senior officer in Ugandan army, Obo, Central African Republic, March 22-26, 2012.
- 36 Interviews with humanitarian aid workers, U.N. officials, U.S. diplomats, the Ugandan army, and other LRA researchers, Obo, Bangui, and Kampala, March and April 2012.
- 37 Interview with international humanitarian aid worker, Obo, Central African Republic, March 22-26, 2012.
- 38 Interviews with international diplomats that work security sector reform in CAR and with local researcher, Bangui, Central African Republic, March 27-April 2, 2012.
- 39 Interview with FACA soldiers, Obo, Central African Republic, March 22-26, 2012; Interviews with international diplomats and humanitarian aid workers, Bangui, Central African Republic, March 27-April 2, 2012.
- 40 Interview with local Azande chief, Obo, Central African Republic, March 22-26, 2012.
- 41 Interview with MP and member of National Defense Committee, Bangui, Central African Republic, March 27- April 2, 2012.
- 42 Readers seeking further information about the political history and conflicts in Central African Republic should consult the excellent reports by International Crisis Group. International Crisis Group, "Anatomy of a Phantom State" (2007); "Untangling the Political Dialogue" (2008); "Keeping the Dialogue Alive" (2010), and "Dangerous Little Stones: Diamonds in the Central African Republic" (2010), all available at, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic.aspx>.



- 43 International Crisis Group, "Anatomy of a Phantom State" (2007).
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 "Experts Discuss Hunt for LRA and Security Sector Reform in Central African Republic," African Centre for Strategic Resources, April 11, 2012, available at, <http://africacenter.org/2012/04/experts-discuss-hunt-for-lra-and-security-sector-reform-in-central-african-republic/>.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Interview with international diplomat, Bangui, Central African Republic, March 27- April 2, 2012.
- 48 Statement from humanitarian aid worker during a COFC meeting, Obo, Central African Republic, March 22-26, 2012.
- 49 Interview with former LRA member, Obo, Central African Republic, March 22-26, 2012.
- 50 Interview with employees of Zereda radio, Obo, Central African Republic, March 22-26, 2012.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 For more information, see Ledio Cakaj, "Too Far from Home" (Washington: Enough Project, 2011), available at <http://www.enoughproject.org/files/Too%20Far%20From%20Home%20FINAL.pdf>.
- 53 Ibid. And interview with chairman of Zande Victims Association in Obo, Central African Republic, March 22-26, 2012.
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- 55 Interview with employees of Zereda radio, Obo, Central African Republic, March 22-26, 2012.
- 56 Interview with humanitarian worker, Obo, Central African Republic, March 22-26, 2012.
- 57 Interview with U.N. diplomat, Central African Republic, March 27- April 2, 2012.
- 58 Interview with humanitarian aid worker, Obo, Central African Republic, March 22-26, 2012.
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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](http://www.enoughproject.org).

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