
AU Regional Task Force Against the Lord's Resistance Army Mission

I. Activity Summary

Overview

After two and a half decades of the insurgency by Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda and (from 2007) in neighboring countries, including large-scale atrocities against civilians, the African Union in 2011 initiated a regional effort, supported by the United Nations and the United States, to counter the LRA. The initiative succeeded in bolstering the military effort to track down LRA combatants, weaken the structure of the armed group, and garner international attention towards the LRA issue. The AU-led, UN-supported effort faced challenges due to regional instability, relationship dynamics between countries, and logistical and funding issues, but overall has contributed to increasing LRA combatant defections and fewer attacks on civilians.

Background

For most of the span of the war, the LRA was a domestic issue in northern Uganda, and the borderlands of southern Sudan. The Ugandan army was unable to achieve a military resolution to the conflict. Peace talks were initiated in 2006 by the Government of Southern Sudan, which involved relocating the LRA forces outside Uganda to camps in southern Sudan and DRC. Although the peace talks failed, this marked the end of LRA military operations in Uganda and the beginning of peace and reconstruction. The peace talks' collapse coincided with an unsuccessful military operation against LRA bases mounted by international troops, at the behest of the US.

Thereafter, the LRA started to operate in lawless, ungoverned areas of neighboring countries, namely Central African Republic, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Its troops hid in vast forested regions beyond the reach of the governments of these countries. In response to this, and to international outcry against the atrocities perpetrated by the LRA, the AU established the Regional Cooperation Initiative against the LRA (RCI-LRA), and accompanying military component, the Regional Task Force (RTF). Since the RCI-LRA and RTF were established, the LRA's strength has weakened significantly and its leadership structure has fragmented, resulting in an overall decrease in operations and number of attacks on civilians.

Joseph Kony founded the LRA (previously known as the Uganda People's Democratic Christian Army and the Uganda Christian Democratic Army) in 1988 to counter the Ugandan government led by Yoweri Museveni. Known for attacking civilian populations and using particularly brutal tactics, the LRA is widely ascribed to have combined "an apocalyptic spiritualism with opportunistic politics and warlordism."^[1] Troops travel in small groups and often uses young boys and girls as porters, as combatants, and for other assistance. The LRA abducts children into forced recruitment, brainwashes and uses them as combatants, and takes young girls as sex slaves, as well as perpetrates crimes such as rape, sexual violence, mutilation, among others atrocities. Kony has claimed the LRA is fighting for the Acholi people of northern Uganda, but those civilians have born the brunt of attacks and operations have expanded outside of Uganda into neighboring countries.

The LRA's size, strength, and activities have varied greatly since its establishment. In its early years, the group fought the Ugandan government and military by targeting civilians in the northern part of the country. In the mid-1990s, the LRA began receiving support from the Government of Sudan and operating in the borderlands of southern Sudan. It lost Sudanese support in 2005 when the Government of Sudan signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and instead established rear bases in ungoverned areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Since its withdrawal from Uganda in preparation for the Juba peace talks in 2006, there has been no attack on Ugandan soil. Instead it has operated and perpetrated attacks in the three other neighboring countries (South Sudan, CAR, and DRC).^[ii]

While it is difficult to document exact figures for number of members and changes over time, it is thought that the group had more than 2,000 combatants at its peak in the late 1990s and early 2000s.^[iii] This number has fluctuated but decreased significantly as the Ugandan military and the international community has increased pressure on the group. The LRA was thought to have around 800 soldiers in 2008 and around 165 by the end of 2013.^[iv] Reports by local and international non-governmental organizations are somewhat consistent with the UN Secretary General's: in May 2015, the UN cited number of LRA combatants between 150-200 troops,^[v] but cited several hundred troops, not as high as 800, around 2006.^[vi]

The Ugandan government and military have attempted to defeat the LRA using a variety of methods, but it is often civilians that are caught in the crossfire. In 1996, the government tried to isolate and abandon LRA soldiers by moving people into "protected villages," which ultimately became displacement camps with poor health and sanitation. The Ugandan military carried out counterinsurgency operations, the forced displacement of civilians, and also provided support for other rebel groups to fight the LRA.^[vii] In turn, the LRA continued to attack the civilian population, claiming those they attacked were supporting the government. Although the majority of grave crimes were committed by the LRA, the Ugandan military allegedly committed atrocities such as torture and mass displacement against civilians, which were referenced by the former ICC prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo but never fully investigated.^[viii] Due to increased pressure by the Ugandan military, the LRA spread to areas outside the northern part of the country and infiltrated more villages, leading to further displacement of civilians. According to UNCHR, at the height of the conflict in 2005, there were 1.84 million internally displaced persons in northern Uganda, living in 251 camps.^[ix] For displacement in all four LRA-affected countries, the Norwegian Refugee Council's Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre cites the number at 2.5 million people when including both refugees and IDPs. As of 2013, an estimated 420,000 people were still displaced due to LRA violence in the four affected countries, with 30,000 located in Uganda.^[x]

During the 1990s and 2000s, the government of Uganda and other international actors have attempted to use non-military tactics, including mediation and negotiation, to bring peace to the region. Betty Bigombe, then Ugandan Minister for the Pacification of the North, led negotiations between the government and the LRA in 1993. These negotiations failed in the final stages due to the LRA requesting blanket amnesty and asking for more time to regroup (viewed as buying time) before signing an agreement. As the negotiations were unraveling, President Museveni announced an ultimatum for the LRA to sign an agreement, and the armed group pulled out. Subsequent efforts by the Community of Sant'Egidio of Rome have also been unsuccessful in reaching an agreement.

The closest the LRA and the Ugandan government has come to reaching an agreement was in a two-year historic process initiated and mediated by the government of South Sudan that began in Juba in 2006 and ended, officially, when Joseph Kony failed to sign an agreement in 2008. Donor countries, including Canada, pressured Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni to participate in negotiations, and initiated funding through UN OCHA.^[xi] Riek Machar, then vice president of the autonomous government in South Sudan, was the chief mediator, although he had an obvious stake in the peace negotiations due to the LRA's operations in his country. The UN appointed a Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the LRA-affected Areas, former President Joaquim Chissano. The UN also provided the security and logistical support for

the talks through the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS). This combination of political, technical and material support made possible a remarkably credible peace process.

In August 2006, both sides signed a cease-fire so that a comprehensive peace agreement could be developed. Although the peace process did not result in a complete peace agreement, it achieved its first major goal: an end to active hostilities in northern Uganda. The peace process went a considerable distance towards completion, illustrating the readiness of both sides to engage in serious political negotiations. The outstanding issues remaining were the last two pages of the cover text (mutual commitment to implement the signed three other protocols to be signed by Kony and Museveni, to be done in Juba). Joseph Kony was reluctant to sign, partly because of his deep distrust of Museveni and the international community, and partly because he feared that there could be no provision that overruled the arrest warrant issued by the ICC. The mediation was also beset by the usual problems of violations of ceasefires, inconsistent demands by the rebel mediators (partly reflecting their internal divisions), walkouts by rebel representatives (usually following Ugandan ceasefire violations), involvement of other local actors that wanted to broaden the agenda, and pressure for a quick result from the international community.^[xii]

Throughout, Joseph Kony refused to attend, due in part to an indictment by the International Criminal Court, and in 2008, he failed to sign the Final Peace Agreement.^[xiii] The death knell for the talks was an international military operation aimed at destroying the LRA leadership in DRC, an attack that confirmed Kony in his paranoia. A few months later, adding an exclamation point to the end of the peace process, the LRA committed one of the worst massacres near Dungu in DRC killing more than 400 civilians.

Since the talks broke down, the LRA has continued to attack populations in CAR, DRC, and South Sudan. From limited data, several trends have been identified. Firstly, the LRA commits a higher number of attacks during the dry season and trails off during the rainy season around May through November. According to the LRA Crisis Tracker, the number of people killed per attack steadily decreased from 2010 to 2012, suggesting that the armed group is intentionally killing fewer people or may be losing the capacity to do so.^[xiv] As the LRA moved out of Uganda, attacks increased in both CAR and DRC. There was also a dramatic drop in civilian abductions from 2010 to 2011 and the number stabilized in 2012, but did not reach the same heights as prior to 2010.^[xv] The AU force and regional countries' military operations, in addition to support from the US and EU, have increased pressure on the LRA; increasing defections has caused the group's leadership and strength to fracture.

AU Regional Task Force

In August 2009, the AU Assembly discussed prospects for an AU-led effort to eliminate the LRA, as well as encouraged member states to "renew their efforts, including military action."^[xvi] The idea of a regional task force was officially introduced in October 2010 at the first AU Regional Ministerial meeting on the LRA. Following several other meetings and an assessment trip, the AU Assembly recommended the authorization of a Regional Task Force in July 2011.^[xvii]

In July 2011, UNSC held a rare, private meeting to discuss LRA issues with the AU permanent observer to the UN, Tété António, and the four permanent representatives from CAR, DRC, South Sudan, and Uganda. Before June 2011, the last UNSC meeting to specifically discuss LRA issues was held in November 2009, a year and a half earlier. During this meeting, António presented the AU's proposal for a UN-supported regional force to coordinate anti-LRA efforts. The purpose of the initiative was to encourage "sustained coordinated action" by regional countries to address the LRA problem.^[xviii] The proposal envisioned four components including, "1) a Regional Task Force, or RTF, consisting of contributions from the four regional armies [CAR, DRC, South Sudan, and Uganda]; 2) a AU special envoy for the LRA; 3) a RTF headquarters which would house a joint operations center; and 4) a joint coordination mechanism, responsible for coordinating efforts between the AU, the regional governments, and partners."^[xix]

On November 22, 2011, the AU PSC authorized the joint task force. The initiative was mandated to “strengthen the operational capabilities of the countries affected by the atrocities of the LRA, create an environment conducive to the stabilization of the affected areas, free of LRA atrocities, and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to affected areas.”^[xx] A task force of this format was one of the first examples of an AU-led peace and security effort that required buy-in and significant contribution from the affected countries. Special Envoy for the LRA issue, Francisco Caetano José Madeira, was appointed to oversee the new initiative and coordinate its development. The four troop contributing countries would provide for their own military contingents, without funding from the AU. Other components such as the AU Special Envoy would be funded by both contributions from the EU and assistance from the AU, and provided logistical support by UNOCA. The Joint Operations Centre and the RTF Headquarters were to be funded by the AU through voluntary contributions. According to the AU Chairperson’s Report on the Operationalization of the AU-led Regional Cooperation Initiative Against the LRA, the contributing countries would be responsible for other needs of the mission and partner countries could make bilateral agreements pledging support.^[xxi]

The RCI-LRA, the coordinating body, and accompanying military component, the Regional Task Force (RTF), were operationalized in March 2012. Throughout the LRA’s lifetime, several affected countries have experienced instability and political transitions due to other domestic issues. For example, after South Sudan gained independence in 2011, its leaders had more autonomy and decision-making power to address the LRA problem militarily. In the early stages of AU initiative’s development, the government of DRC downplayed the threat that the LRA posed to civilians, reflecting its reluctance to get involved, but became more active after continuous diplomatic engagement by Madeira and other officials.^[xxii] Once troops deployed, South Sudanese and Congolese troops were hesitant to take action, and most operations were led by Ugandan troops.

The RCI-LRA represented a new, ad-hoc initiative that required buy-in and direct support from regional powers affected by the conflict. The mission includes non-military aspects such as encouraging defections and garnering material and political support from international and regional powers. It also has an accompanying military force, to “neutralize the LRA and bring to an end its atrocities and destabilizing activities,” that has conducted operations in LRA-affected areas.^[xxiii] However, as of June 2013, only 3,350 troops out of the authorized 5,000 had been contributed (Uganda, 2000; DRC, 500; South Sudan, 500; CAR 350).^[xxiv] Since then, many troops have deserted their posts due to the civil wars in both CAR and South Sudan. The international arms embargo on South Sudan has however exempted South Sudanese units engaged with the RTF.

In an unprecedented move, the US government provided 100 US Military Special Forces in October 2011 for logistical and intelligence support to track down senior LRA leaders. Although the US troops are armed, they are only authorized to use force in the case of self-defense.^[xxv] From the perspective of the US government, working through an AU-authorized initiative allows the US to effectively engage in the region and support counter-LRA activities. According to a report published by The Enough Project, a senior US diplomat stated that the AU mission “enables us to do things we could not do alone. The AU has more leverage over the countries and has sustained relationships and cultural similarities that we do not have. We are seen as part of the AU, which is hugely important for this mission.”^[xxvi] Through the State Department, civilian conflict experts were also deployed to engage with and coordinate a variety of actors, including NGOs, civil society groups, local leaders and UN missions.^[xxvii] From 2009 to 2012, the State Department allocated \$56 million for “supplies, equipment, and logistics support to African forces engaged in counter-LRA operations.”^[xxviii] The Department of Defense allocated \$22.5 million in 2012 and \$17.7 million in 2013.^[xxix] In addition to US support, the European Union originally pledged 9 million euros for humanitarian assistance for LRA-affected communities in March 2012,^[xxx] and then donated another 2 million euros in March 2014.^[xxxi]

The UN Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) was tasked by the Security Council with developing a UN regional strategy for “humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding assistance” to LRA-affected

areas.^[xxxii] In June 2012, the UNSC approved a new, comprehensive UN strategy to support the RCI-LRA and RTF in the fight against the LRA and help victims and affected communities, submitted by letter from the UN Secretary General to the President of the Security Council. The strategy contained five objectives including, “(i) implementation of the AU-led Regional Cooperation Initiative against the LRA; (ii) enhancement of efforts to promote the protection of civilians; (iii) expansion of current disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration activities to cover all LRA-affected areas; (iv) promotion of a coordinated humanitarian and child protection presence in all LRA-affected areas; and (v) provision of support to LRA-affected governments in the fields of peacebuilding, human rights, rule of law and development.”^[xxxiii] According to researchers John Ahere and Dr. Grace Maina, the UN recognized the need for additional international support, especially financial, for the RCI-LRA to be successful, after the task force was slow to acquire troops and lacked resources and material. They write, “The strategy therefore represented a framework in which international cooperation on the LRA issue would be fostered and resource mobilization undertaken to address funding limitations.”^[xxxiv] Setting up the RCI-LRA showed political will and commitment on behalf of the AU and four affected countries, but logistical and financial support were still needed.

Although the RTF was authorized in late 2011 and established in early 2012, operations were slow to start due to lack of troops, funding issues, and poor equipment and resources. The Enough Project, an advocacy organization, cited “lack [of] capable troops and resources, clear command and control, an access to key LRA safe havens” as challenges facing the RTF.^[xxxv] These issues suggest that operational and logistical, bureaucratic, and political challenges stifled the RTF’s effectiveness soon after it was established. Significant operations started by mid-2013.

In combination with diplomatic efforts of the UN, the AU, and other governments, the RTF cited progress and success in countering the LRA, through military encounters and increasing defections. In terms of early successes, after launching *Operation Monsoon* in August 2013, several military camps were destroyed and many LRA leaders fled, resulting in the defection of some soldiers. According to the AU, there has been an overall reduction in LRA attacks and abductions since RTF military operations began.^[xxxvi]

LRA Operational Capacity and Effectiveness of AU Mission

However, these trends have seemed to vary. From 2010-2013, UN OCHA recorded a 50 percent decrease in LRA abductions and a 75 percent decrease in number of people killed by the LRA.^[xxxvii] Despite earlier progress, in 2014, UNOCHA documented a decrease in LRA attacks (157 discrete attacks), but an increase in the number of abductions (434 people abducted) from the prior year.^[xxxviii] The LRA Crisis Tracker notes that most of the attacks during the 2014 uptick in violence can be attributed to looting of basic goods for survival, suggesting that the LRA is struggling and perpetrating opportunistic violence, which indicates another success in terms of weakening the group’s ability to survive.^[xxxix] As of February 2015, the number of LRA attacks remained about the same and the number of deaths from attacks reduced by 50 per cent, but the number of abductions increased by 61 per cent since 2013.^[xl] The varying trends may be the result of fluctuating conflict and instability in LRA-affected countries such as South Sudan and CAR, as the LRA thrives in areas of weak governance.

While abductions have both increased and decreased at different points in time, RTF operations with support from international actors have also resulted in civilian successes, such as contributing to a number of senior-level defections of LRA combatants and commanders. Dominic Ongwen, one of five senior LRA commanders indicted by the ICC, surrendered to U.S. Special Forces in CAR in January 2015.^[xli] This event was seen as a huge success of growing military pressure on the LRA. Since 2012, more than ten top rebel leaders have either defected, been killed by military commanders, or were executed on behalf Joseph Kony’s orders. These men include Sam Opio (defected), Okat Odhiambo (killed), Okello Okutti (defected), Samuel Kangul (killed), Denis Obol (killed), and Otim Ferry (killed), among others.^[xlii]

Counter-LRA efforts include encouraging defections and coordinating a DDR process as a key part of the strategy. As of 2013, a range of actors including “local civil society groups, the international organization Invisible Children, the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Congo (MONUSCO), and US military advisers,” were testing out a variety of methods in order to encourage LRA fighters to leave the armed group and return home.^[xliii] In collaboration with U.S. efforts, local and international NGOs have broadcasted “come home” messages and sent out information pamphlets in an effort to encourage defections. However, it is possible that the wide dissemination of LRA-related media messages, compared to the overall low level of threat posed by the group itself, contributes to the political profile and the fear generated by the LRA. A report by researchers Phil Lancaster and Ledio Cakaj cite several challenges to DDR for the LRA: limited designated funding among total military and humanitarian spending, uneven implementation among LRA-affected areas, bureaucratic inefficiencies relating to coordination among many actors, and lack of interest from regional governments.^[xliv] As defections continue and the LRA loses its strength in numbers, the RCI-LRA and RTF seem to lack a coordinated DDR process that would facilitate long-term reintegration for returning soldiers, many of whom have been deeply affected and traumatized from abduction and years of militarization.

Despite the military successes and defections detailed above, other analyses of the AU RTP are more critical. Researchers Phil Lancaster and Ledio Cakaj write that the RTF, under the auspices of the RCI-LRA, “continues to be plagued by a lack of funding, poor logistics, and political challenges that render it virtually ineffective.” The authors cite communication issues, varying relations among the four affected countries, and lack of material and tactical capacity for regional soldiers to eliminate the LRA. They also write that the initiative is seen as “a hollow exercise in diplomacy” and suggest its efforts have failed to be effective.^[xlv] Despite logistical challenges, the RCI-LRA, with strong support from the US, has contributed to weakening the LRA structure, the decrease of attacks on civilians, and the increase of defections. The data on progress made in degrading the capacity the LRA is compelling, even if it was not necessarily caused solely by the RCI-LRA.

II. Key Issues, Dilemmas, and Lessons Learned

1. Regional instability

Continued regional instability, in addition to new conflicts, has remained an issue for the AU-led, UN supported fight against the LRA in central Africa. Other armed groups and increases in violence pose new, more immediate threats in countries also affected by the LRA. Although the LRA remains a threat, it is a modest one compared to others. Countries may need to use military forces and financial resources for other domestic issues such as other conflicts within their borders, addressing other humanitarian crises, or dealing with general poverty. Regional instability may also affect the relationships between countries, which is an important factor when there is a multi-national military force conducting cross-border operations. Political dynamics, due to regional instability, also threaten a coordinated fight to counter the LRA. After the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo released its November 2012 report accusing Uganda and Rwanda of supplying arms to and supporting rebel group M23, Uganda threatened to withdraw support from RCI-LRA and RTF.^[xlvi] Not only does the region’s instability affect the relationships between the governments, it can also provide “de facto safe havens” for armed groups. The civil wars in South Sudan and CAR have left national forces unable to secure and control their own territories, and RTF troops have deserted their posts. The total collapse of functioning government allows the LRA to operate unchallenged and provides an opportunity to regroup and recruit more members.

2. Regional actors’ interests, intentions, and commitment

While the RCI-LRA and RTF demonstrate political will on behalf of the AU and four most-affected countries in central Africa, having a military force made up by regional forces present challenges in terms of interests, intentions, and commitment. CAR, DRC, Uganda, and South Sudan all have a stake in stopping atrocities

committed by the LRA, but other interests may drive involvement in regional affairs. For one example, donors have contributed significant military funds to strengthen the Ugandan military's fight against the LRA. These funds have often been siphoned off and misused due to endemic corruption. This dynamic illustrates how the presence of conflict can be lucrative. Additionally, as demonstrated by the Second Congo War, neighboring countries, including Uganda, have other incentives for being involved in a conflict, such as natural resources. The fact that the Ugandan military was engaged in DRC for reasons other than security, demonstrates how material and monetary benefits during war often perpetuated conflicts, impacting the intentions and commitment of regional actors.

3. Influence of LRA supporters and spoilers

Prior to the 2005 CPA, the Khartoum government had armed and sheltered the, in response to Uganda's support of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM).^[xlvii] Although Uganda and Sudan agreed to stop supporting the other countries' rebel groups in 1999, it was reported in 2013 that Sudan allowed the LRA to establish "safe havens" on the border with South Sudan.^[xlviii] In the case of a transnational-armed group operating in four countries and causing instability and spillover in others, powerful spoilers, such as Sudan, have the potential to impact regional efforts. These types of spoilers are important to consider in terms of negotiation and mediation, a counter-LRA strategy, and regional partners. The RCI-LRA and RTF is not equipped to deal with the presence of political spoilers, as the AU Special Envoy is the only focal point for these types of issues. The initiative focuses heavy on the RTF and the military aspect, leaving a gap in tools to address the political situation.

4. National sovereignty issues and allowing operations by foreign troops, as part of the RTF

Since the authorization of the RCI-LRA and RTF in 2011, relationships between the four affected countries have been periodically strained. In order for trans-national military operations to be conducted, all countries must be committed to the initiative or else the effort's feasibility and effectiveness is threatened. For example, from April to September 2013, the Séléka-led government in CAR announced a ban on foreign forces in the country, as it aimed to stabilize its own conflict.^[xlix] (The ban on RTF troops was not enforced.) Additionally, Ugandan forces were banned from operating over the border in DRC, although the FARDC had been unsuccessful in tracking down LRA soldiers.^[l] Although the AU PSC authorized the regional force and the four affected countries agreed to those terms, there was no mandate that would allow RTF troops to force their way into one of the countries. Issues of sovereignty in terms of regional cooperation remain a challenge for the counter-LRA mission.

5. Unpredictable funding and financial support

CAR, Uganda, DRC, and South Sudan were to contribute national troops and provide financial resources for the RTF, but funding for the headquarters, joint command centers, and the Special Envoy position remains an issue. At the June 2013 AU PSC meeting on the LRA, Ambassador Ramtane Lamamra highlighted a major financial challenge for RCI-LRA and RTF operations. He stated, "there is the lack of predictable funds for sustainable supporting the operations of the RTF Headquarters and the activities of the JCM Secretariat/Office of the Special Envoy."^[li] Although the US and the EU have provided support (US has only provided training and logistical support, not monetary), more financial resources are needed. UNOCA and the UN Security council have recognized the need for funding and have aligned the UN regional strategy to focus on developing a "framework in which international cooperation on the LRA issue would be fostered and resource mobilization undertaken to address funding limitations."^[lii] It is unclear whether the stated commitment to mobilizing funds for the RCI-LRA and RTP have materialized into actual support.

6. Response to an armed group must be tailored to its specific strategy, tactics, leadership, and ideology

At its peak, the LRA had only 2,000 soldiers but was able to terrorize an entire region, evade capture, and cause harm to hundreds of thousands, if not millions when considering displacement, of people. The LRA's success in being able to operate without defeat for so long reflects the need to tailor a response based on how a group functions and survives. The group moves in small bands of combatants and uses locations that are difficult to access, such as areas in the jungle, as bases from which to launch attacks. The Ugandan military's previous attempts to defeat the LRA caused harm to the wider civilian population of Uganda, and pushed the armed group outside of the country, where it gained strength and attacked other civilian populations. Governments, regional partners, or broader international actors must consider a group's tactics, leadership style, and ideology when crafting a response strategy.

7. Weak governance allows LRA to thrive, yet no task force focus on governance or building institutions

A clear lesson from how the LRA operates places great emphasis on strong states with sustainable institutions and effective governance. The LRA has been able to flourish and continue to operate due to lawless pockets of unstable states with weak governance. While institution building is part of a broader agenda, it is directly linked to the perseverance of the LRA. If weak governance is a major factor in this intractable conflict, increasing governance capacity and building institutions should be part of the regional strategy, rather than only focuses on the military aspect.

8. A primarily military approach falls short of addressing all protection issues and reintegration

The regional initiative has focused largely on the military component, the RTF, which has played a large role in weakening the LRA. The RTF has decreased the LRA's capacity to commit attacks, deterred attacks in areas where troops are deployed, and has deployed protection units in some areas.^[iiii] These efforts address protection in the short-term, but may not be sustainable in the long-term. For example, RTF activities, with support of US military advisers, have encouraged an impressive number of defections. However, the task force does not supply resources for reintegration or offer any long-term strategy to help demobilized combatants.^[liv] Additional civilian advisors as part of the RCI-LRA and RTF may be beneficial in rounding out the strategy so that it is less heavily focused on military aspects.

III. Literature Review

Reports/Scholarly Work

Agger, Kasper, "Blind Spots – Gaining Access to Ares Where the LRA Operates," The Enough Project, November 2013

This article highlights challenges for the RTF to access hard-to-reach areas, specific to each country (DRC, CAR, and South Darfur) where the LRA operate. The brief offers recommendations to international actors, including the EU, AU, UNSC, and the World Bank. Recommendations range from establishing a regional agreement allowing RTF access to pursuing diplomatic engagement on the LRA with Sudan, as well as establishing a separate funding mechanism for infrastructure development so that RTF troops can access LRA areas.

Ahere, John and Dr. Grace Maina, "The never-ending pursuit of the Lord's Resistance Army: An analysis of the Regional Cooperative Initiative for the Elimination of the LRA," ACCORD, March 2013

This policy brief gives an overview of the LRA and the history of international response to combat its forces. It outlines the uniqueness of the RCI-RTF and presents several important challenges such as

regional actors' interests, intentions, and commitments, national sovereignty, political dynamics, and lack of financial support. The report calls for a rigorous review of past attempts in fighting the LRA, so the RCI-RTP can make use of the lessons learned and avoid repeating previous mistakes.

Arieff, Alex and Lauren Ploch, "The Lord's Resistance Army: The U.S. Response," Congressional Research Service, May 15, 2014

Although this report focuses on U.S. support rather than the AU initiative, it provides background information on the LRA's activities and changes over time. This source was used to compare changes in violence perpetrated by the LRA during the group's duration. It chronicles the history of US involvement in counter-LRA activities, as well as more recent support, in conjunction with the RTI-LRA and RTF.

Lancaster, Phil and Ledio Cakaj, "Loosening Kony's Grip: Effective Defection Strategies for Today's LRA," The Resolve, July 2013

In addition to key background information on previous counter-LRA efforts and DDR strategies, this report presents pressing challenges for fighting the LRA. It is not focused only on the RCI-LRA and RTF, but provides important context that affects the mission, including regional instability and dynamics, logistical and operational shortcomings, and challenges to DDR. Lancaster and Cakaj are critical of the RTF, arguing that it has largely been a hollow diplomatic gesture rather than creating significant change on the ground through effective military operations.

"In New Light: protection of civilians, the Lord's Resistance Army and the African Union Regional Task Force," Conciliation Resources, May 2015

Though this article primarily focuses on the task force's impact on protection of civilians, it is one of the most recent publications on the AU RTF. The article is useful for understanding the initiative's emphasis on the military approach and some of its shortcomings for the long-term protection of civilians. Relevant points include lack of capacity for sustainable reintegration, the introduction of new protection issues such as sexual violence against women by RTF troops, and the dominance of Ugandan military operations.

"The State of the LRA in 2015: 8 key trends in LRA activities," The Resolve, Invisible Children, February 2015

This resource, compiled by NGO/advocacy groups The Resolve and Invisible Children, is the most up-to-date report tracking LRA combatant numbers, defections, attacks, locations of attacks, and illicit trade networks for ivory, gold, and diamonds. The report also discusses other armed groups that attack civilians, as well as details the LRA's rocky relationship with the Séléka in CAR. Exact figures on the LRA are difficult to come by, but this report provides the most recent set of data (other sources, except for UN OCHA reporting on number of attacks and abductions, have not been updated since about 2013).

UN/AU Documents

"Communiqué," African Union Peace and Security Council, November 22, 2011

"Communiqué," African Union Peace and Security Council, May 22, 2012 – renews authorization for one year

"Communiqué," African Union Peace and Security Council, June 17, 2013 – comments on political events in CAR, renews authorization for one year

“Statement by the President of the Security Council,” United Nations Security Council, June 29, 2012 – commends creation of regional initiative, requests the Secretary-General to keep the Security Council updated of the initiative’s progress

“Statement by the President of the Security Council,” United Nations Security Council, December 19, 2012 – commends initiative’s efforts, welcomes LRA defections, notes ICC arrest warrants

“Statement by the President of the Security Council,” United Nations Security Council, May 29, 2013 – expresses concern about the pause of counter-LRA operations in CAR due to the crisis, promotes coordination of MONUSCO, BINUCA, and UNMISS in counter-LRA efforts

“Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Africa and on the Lord’s Resistance Army-affected areas,” United Nations Security Council, May 6, 2014

[i] “Basic History,” The Resolve, Updated July 2010, available at: <http://www.theresolve.org/the-lra-crisis/basic-history/>

[ii] Michael Wilkerson, “Why Can’t Anyone Stop the LRA?” *Foreign Policy*, April 15, 2010

[iii] “The State of the LRA in 2015: 8 key trends in LRA activity,” LRA Crisis Tracker, February 2015

[iv] Ibid.

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