Policy & Practice Brief
Knowledge for durable peace

ISSUE
024
March
2013

The never-ending pursuit of the Lord's Resistance Army: An analysis of the Regional Cooperative Initiative for the Elimination of the LRA

By John Ahere and Dr Grace Maina[1]

There has recently been heightened concern regarding the activities of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), one of the most deadly insurgent movements in Africa. The LRA can best be described as a quasi-religious-rebel armed group that began operating in the Acholi region of northern Uganda in 1986, but has now grown into a regional concern due to its expanded activities in the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and South Sudan. In response to the activities of the group, the Africa Union (AU), the United States of America (USA) government and the members of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) have jointly decided to address the growing threat that the LRA poses to regional peace and security. Supported by the international community, these actors formed an international military force to eliminate the LRA and its leader, Joseph Kony. Questions have been raised as to whether the response by the international community is commensurate with the threat posed.[2] This Policy & Practice Brief provides a reflective analysis of the existence of the LRA, exploring why the capture of LRA members has been elusive. It critiques current approaches employed to defeat the LRA and makes recommendations on how the proposed pursuit of the movement can be strengthened to increase chances of success. It also emphasises the relevance of the historical underpinnings and legacy of the LRA's cause, including the regional and international dynamics that inform the involvement of various actors towards ending and resolving the LRA dispute.

REUTERS

Ugandan soldiers walk in a forest bordering the CAR, the DRC and South Sudan to track down LRA rebel leaders (April 2012)

Introduction

Perhaps the most unique characteristic of the LRA is its regional focus and geographical fluidity. The LRA started as a religious movement whose members sought to achieve a Uganda ruled in strict accordance with the Bible's Ten Commandments. Given these roots, the LRA is widely considered to be an extremist Christian faction. However, the movement has, in the past, also articulated various concerns about the marginalisation of northern populations

ACCORD
THE AFRICAN CENTRE FOR THE CONSTRUCTIVE RESOLUTION OF DISPUTES

by the Government of Uganda under President Yoweri Museveni and, initially at least, positioned itself as an advocate for these populations and a product of Uganda's political history. The LRA, although recently reported to be dispersed and greatly diminished in number, still continues to wreak havoc within the Central Africa region. The movement's activities have drawn the attention of continental bodies and the international community, in particular the US government.[3]

Overview of the LRA

The last two decades have witnessed the LRA rebel movement's involvement in violent contestations with the Government of Uganda. Over time, the LRA has been accused of brutally violating local populations in the CAR, the DRC and South Sudan. However, the trajectory of events from the formation of the LRA indicates that the rebel movement has been, and remains, a threat to peace and security in northern Uganda. Uganda has a violent past, having experienced post-independence fissures, coups and wars. This legacy has shaped the political and economic atmosphere in the country. With the exception of the independent government of 1962, every presidential regime in the country, including the current incumbent, came to power through violent coups.[4] Following the signing of a cessation of hostilities agreement in September 2006 between the Government of Uganda and the LRA, northern Uganda has been relatively calm and free of attacks from the movement. The agreement also paved the way for the holding of peace talks in Juba, South Sudan. These talks ended in April 2008 without anything being resolved following Kony's refusal to sign the final agreement.

During the early years, the LRA's attacks were initially restricted to the Acholi-inhabited districts of Gulu, Kitgum, Pader, Amuru, Nwoya, Agago and Lamwo. However, the movement activated the concern of the country when the conflict shifted to include the eastern districts of Soroti, Katakwi and Palisa, and the West Nile districts of Arua and Adjumani.[5] The rebels are responsible for the deaths and displacement of thousands of people in the CAR, the DRC and South Sudan. About 65,000 people have been killed in northern Uganda alone, mainly by the LRA.[6] The geographical expansion of the LRA's activities was a turning point in the Ugandan government's commitment to eliminate the rebels or engage in peace talks. What is clear to date is the manner in which the conflict devastated different districts, which are now undergoing post-conflict recovery processes.[7]

Often, the LRA war has been summarised as the handiwork of a religious fanatic, a crazy man.[8] It is believed by many that Kony does not operate in his own capacity but as a messenger of the spirits.[9] A key question is whether the LRA is merely a guerrilla outfit or one which presents some political challenges that need to be addressed. Gersony (1997) was adamant that the LRA's struggle was devoid of political content and that the group's indiscriminate actions against the local populations were proof of that fact.[10] Prunier (2004) contended that the war was simply a proxy war between the governments of Sudan and Uganda.[11] To him, the LRA had no clear political mandate and was simply used as a tool by the Sudan government against the Ugandan government, which at that time was viewed as supporting the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).[12]

Doom and Vlassenroot (1999) argue that there was a political rationale in the activities of the LRA.[13] They maintain that the movement did have a clear political message in the initial stages, which faded when the war became an end in itself, as opposed to being a means to achieving particular articulated objectives. In their opinion, Kony only began attacking his own people when he felt that they did not support him.[14] The Refugee Law Project (2004) argues that while the LRA might have had a political agenda, the main challenge was the movement's inability to effectively articulate it.[15] The LRA did see itself as a force fighting for the people, as evidenced by their demands during the peace negotiations in Juba.[16] In the negotiations, the movement demanded, for instance, the disbanding and reconstitution of the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) to better reflect a national character. The International Crisis Group puts forward that, although the LRA might have had a political agenda, this was rendered invalid by the group's constant abuse of the human rights of local populations.[17] Even though the LRA continues to justify the use of violence as a means to advance their cause, it is too simplistic to disqualify the validity of the group's political agenda on the basis of their use of violence.

Early in 2012, representatives of the UPDF alleged that the LRA continued to receive support from the Sudanese government. This followed the capture of a member of the LRA who was wearing a Sudanese military uniform and in possession of Sudan-issue weapons and ammunition.[18] The Ugandan army intimated that it had information that the LRA was moving into Sudan, including areas controlled by the pro-government Janjaweed militia.[19] The Ugandan government's accusation that Sudan was supporting the LRA was not new, but pointed to the existence of old tensions and suspicions between the two states on the issue of the movement.

Even though the LRA continues to justify the use of violence as a means to advance their cause, it is too simplistic to disqualify the validity of the group's political agenda on the basis of their use of violence

In September 2012, it was alleged that the LRA had abducted 55 people. This attack exposed the challenges that the Ugandan army, together with regional forces and 100 US Special Forces, faced in tracking down and eliminating the movement.[20] The abductions and violent activities of the LRA in the CAR in 2012 do raise the question of whether the group is driven by political motives and, if yes, what are those particular intentions? When analysing current LRA activities, it is important to consider whether the latest patterns of destruction in the CAR and the DRC are merely attempts by Kony to ensure his survival at any cost, or whether the LRA's activities are beyond Kony's control. It is important to note here that the implications of the failed peace talks and the International Criminal Court (ICC) indictments have relegated Kony to a space in which he has nothing to lose, making him a desperately dangerous opponent and the LRA even more elusive.

Assessing strategies employed against the LRA in the past

Various strategies have been employed in attempts to end the operations of the LRA in northern Uganda. In order to formulate a stronger strategy to respond to the LRA conflict, it is imperative that one understands some of the strategies previously employed and their shortcomings.

Military strategies

Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni has been a strong advocate of military solutions to the LRA problem, as evidenced by the different offensives he has launched against the rebel group. Many of the early years of the LRA conflict were marked by attacks between the movement and government forces, which at that time were known as the National Resistance Army (NRA).[21] In 1991, the NRA launched Operation North, which aimed to isolate the LRA from local populations. The government stopped all road transport across the Nile and cut off all communication with the North, imposing a media blackout and seizing all radio stations in the region. Anyone who spoke against the operation was regarded a collaborator with the LRA and punished for it. By 1994, Betty Bigombe, then State Minister for northern Uganda, acted in her capacity as mediator to seek a peaceful resolution to the dispute between the LRA and the Government of Uganda through dialogue. Bigombe almost succeeded, but as talks proceeded the government issued a seven-day ultimatum to the LRA to surrender or face the wrath of the army. The LRA rebels chose the latter and the war continued.[22]

Operation North was launched as a military counter to the renewed activities of the LRA. Some aspects of this operation involved the formation of militia groups, called Arrow Boys, which were mandated to assist the government to fight the rebels. Thousands of men were mobilised to protect their families and fight the LRA. It is argued that the formation of the Arrow Boys was intended to beef up the military, which did not have the capacity to counteract LRA attacks on its own.[23] The rebels viewed the communities which contributed men to the Arrow Boys as having betrayed them. They stepped up their offensives against civilian populations in retaliation. Kony and his troops carried out rampant attacks in which they cut off the hands, lips and ears of those they suspected of working with the Arrow Boys.[24] Therefore, the Arrow Boys operation had to be abandoned. In the same month it ended, attacks on local populations ceased. During this operation the government placed communities in protected camps, as villages were seen as easy targets. The government also suspected that villagers were providing the LRA with logistical support essential to their survival and the use of protected camps was a way of cutting off this support. The government began a process of training home guards whose role it was to protect the new camps. These individuals were, however, under-trained and under-armed, presenting easy targets for the LRA. Furthermore, the LRA was better equipped for war in comparison to the UPDF.

The LRA's increased attacks brought to the fore the question of Sudan's involvement in the activities of the movement. In March 2002, as part of a diplomatic agreement between Museveni and his Sudanese neighbours, Sudan allowed the UPDF to launch an aggressive attack on LRA bases situated in Sudan. The UPDF launched Operation Iron Fist, aimed at uprooting the LRA from its bases in southern Sudan. While the government claimed success, on the basis that Kony no longer had permanent bases near the Ugandan border from where he could launch attacks into the country, civil society groups noted that the operation was the biggest mistake made by the government, because it resulted in a dramatic increase in the numbers of internally displaced people and made the security situation worse.[25] The operation also resulted in the extension of the LRA's operational area from Gulu, Pader and Kitgum districts to the districts of Lira, Apac, Katakwi and Soroti.[26]

At the end of 2008, the UPDF launched a military offensive against the LRA in the DRC. This operation was instigated after the LRA and the Government of Uganda failed to reach a final agreement during the Juba peace talks. The offensive, called Operation Lightning Thunder, was supported by the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) and the Central African Armed Forces (FACA).[27] Analysts argue that this operation in many ways was not well thought out and bore striking resemblance to Operation Iron Fist. Civil society organisations (CSOs) were vocal in their opposition to militarism as an option or a means to end the LRA's offensives. The launch of the operation elicited mixed reactions. It was criticised for creating an avenue through which the LRA regrouped into smaller formations to attack the local populations and abduct children to join their cause. To some, the operation was successful in scattering the LRA,

but not in ending the war. Still other analysts described it as a complete military failure because it turned out to be a poorly executed incursion that resulted in more suffering and upheaval for thousands of Congolese citizens.[28]

Dialogue and mediation

Other efforts to address the threat of the LRA have been largely diplomatic, with former State Minister Bigombe trying to mediate the conflict by coordinating dialogue between Joseph Kony and the government. There have also been various regional and international mediation efforts attempted between the parties to this conflict. In 2006, peace talks were initiated in Juba under the auspices of the Government of South Sudan. These negotiations successfully managed to bring the parties to agree to the terms of a peace agreement. However, Kony failed to honour his commitment to the peace process. After the UPDF attacked an LRA base in Garamba, Kony repeatedly refused to avail himself to sign the peace accord that would end the conflict in 2008. The inability to reach a final agreement has been viewed as a failure to deal with various dynamics relating to dialogue and negotiations, which some believe was the result of pressure from the international community on President Museveni's government and thus devoid of political blessing and will.[29] Despite the positive attempts and developments geared towards establishing normalcy in the north of Uganda, the failed peace agreement is a continuing concern for many northerners and for the East Africa region as a whole. There are many who believe that resolution of the LRA conflict could have been found through dialogue, but that this was undermined, in part at least, by the ICC issuing arrest warrants for top LRA commanders on international criminal charges of rape, murder, mutilation and forcibly recruiting child soldiers.

Isolation through amnesty and the search for justice

Another action by the Government of Uganda was to issue amnesties to perpetrators of violent crimes. The government used an old political formula of offering pardons to insurgents as a means of ending intractable conflict.[30] Through the Amnesty Act of 2000, pardons were offered to all Ugandans engaged or engaging in acts of rebellion against the Government of Uganda since 26 January 1986.[31] This move aimed to weaken the LRA and isolate its top leadership. There are those who argue that amnesty should have been offered to all, including the LRA leadership, and that the ICC indictments should have been withdrawn. Analysts widely considered the involvement of the ICC in the LRA conflict as a move that curtailed the conclusion of the conflict and increased the adverse ramifications on populations in northern Uganda. There are those, however, who argue that this action encouraged Kony to start negotiating and as such was a good move on the part of the government. Currently, amnesty to the LRA in Uganda is no longer available. This continues to raise debates about peace and justice and the next option in ensuring the resolution of the LRA conflict.[32] Some have criticised the selective nature of granting amnesty to former LRA fighters. The current state of affairs, however, with the LRA posing a regional threat and the lack of diverse options to resolve the conflict, points to the possibility that the ICC's involvement might have compromised the space for dialogue and peaceful resolution.

How is the LRA able to exist, survive and thrive?

Given the different initiatives undertaken to address and respond to the LRA conflict, one wonders how the LRA continues to thrive or even exist. There are various reasons that could explain the survival of the LRA. Whether these reasons are accurate or not, it is vital that they are understood.

The Sudan factor

It has been argued that the Sudanese government's constant replenishing of the LRA's supplies contributed to strengthening the movement's resilience. There have been allegations put forward that if it were not for Sudan's involvement and its support for LRA activities, the UPDF would have defeated the LRA. However, it is doubtful that it was only Sudan's support that strengthened the LRA. Years after Sudan withdrew its support and allowed Uganda's forces to destroy the LRA's operational bases in South Sudan, the UPDF has still not been able to capture Kony.

Inherent weakness of government forces in comparison to the LRA

The LRA is regarded as a well-trained and equipped armed group with a strong command structure and perseverance. While the LRA cannot boast of its dominance and strength today, the group's ability to adapt to the harsh terrain in which it operates indicates that a more consolidated and well processed plan of action is needed if the group is to be defeated. The movement's ability to adapt is evidenced by its survival and expansion into the DRC and CAR. In previous engagements the UPDF was, on the whole, less prepared in comparison to the LRA.[33] It was the UPDF's lack of capacity and training, poor morale, competing engagements in the DRC and grand-scale corruption that significantly contributed to the success of the LRA.[34]

Beneficiaries of the spoils of war

The war has become a lucrative source of income and wealth for certain key individuals. High-ranking military officers, government officials and powerful LRA rebels benefited as a result of the war. This raised questions regarding whether both the government and the LRA were committed to

ensuring an end to the war. A good illustration of how government profited is evidenced by information in the army pay rolls which showed that payment was done to about 10,000 'ghost' soldiers.[35] The Ugandan government has been a regular recipient of donor support, which makes up half of the national budget. Some of the funding received is meant for spending on defence, with the primary intention being to strengthen the UPDF's capacity to exterminate the LRA. Donor support is mainly received from bilateral development partners (especially under the ambit of the Northern Uganda Reconstruction Programme) who have been focusing on achieving an end to the long-drawn conflict in northern Uganda. Given the corruption involved in administering donor funds in Uganda that has been alluded to,[36] a question may be raised regarding whether the donor funding is contributing to improving the situation or perpetuating the conflict. The donor community and the funds they disburse present a questionable dynamic for those working to end this conflict. Receipt of some donor funds could in many ways have contributed to inhibiting efforts to end the conflict.

Failure of intention

There are those who argue that the government's failure to capture and defeat the LRA was intentional. They explain that the Museveni government was unwilling to end the war because it served the administration's own interests and that there were political reasons for allowing the conflict to continue. The Museveni government is accused of using the war to prevent political mobilisation that could bring about the end of the president's reign. Many individuals, especially from the north, believe that the war was a strategy to camouflage a slow genocide aimed at eliminating them as a people.[37]

International dividends

The US government also had a stake in this war, with President Museveni's government receiving military aid and diplomatic support for efforts to defeat the LRA. In exchange, Museveni served as a conduit to the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) which had been at the forefront of waging war on the Khartoum government. Recently, the US sent 100 Special Forces to hunt for Kony.[38] Many Ugandans are opposed to the involvement of the USA as they believe that it will result in the death of more innocent civilians.[39] The Museveni regime continues to spend huge amounts of its budget on the military, justifying this expenditure as being essential to the war effort against the LRA.

Local support

There have been claims that the LRA had some sort of support from the Acholi population, both locally and abroad. These claims, however, have been largely unproven and it is doubtful that if the LRA was acting as an agent of the local community, they would inflict suffering on the very people they were acting for.

Regional Cooperative Initiative for the Elimination of the LRA (RCI-LRA)

Over the past year renewed international interest in the LRA from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the AU and the US has resulted in improved coordination of efforts aimed at dismantling the rebel group. A major outcome of these efforts is the AU-led Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army (RCI-LRA). The RCI-LRA, which launched its operations in March 2012,[40] is an example of the ideal active cooperation required between the UN and the AU in tackling security issues which pose massive challenges in Africa.[41] The initiative was originally launched on 22 November 2011 by the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) to be implemented for an initial period of six months. It was designed to have three components: the Joint Coordination Mechanism chaired by the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security and composed of the defence ministers of the affected countries (CAR, DRC, South Sudan and Uganda); the Regional Task Force (RTF), numbering 5,000 soldiers and composed of national contingents from the affected countries; and the Joint Operations Centre, a component of the RTF, staffed by a total of 30 officers.[42]

The RTF has been tasked with protecting the local populations who are deemed to be most vulnerable to rebel attacks, and to track and combat LRA elements. Where necessary, the RTF was given the responsibility of assisting with the delivery of humanitarian assistance to affected populations. The specific nature of the RTF deployment is termed 'authorised' as opposed to 'mandated'. Under authorised deployment, each country provides for the needs and requirements of its respective troops without the AU's contribution. However, the AU covers the needs of the 30 officers serving in the Joint Operations Centre.[43]

The US government's support to the RTF has been provided through the secondment of 100 armed Special Forces to provide advice in the hunt for Kony and the LRA. The US Special Forces have their headquarters in Uganda, with bases in Nzara (South Sudan), Obo and Djemah (CAR), and with limited presence in the DRC. Within their operational mandate, the US military advisors are not to engage in any military confrontation with the LRA rebels unless necessary for self-defence.[44] Since their arrival, they have helped streamline logistical and intelligence support to Uganda's military forces which are primarily focused on pursuing senior LRA commanders in southeast CAR.[45] This has led to more intense military pressure on LRA groups and enabled more rebels to escape. The advisors

have established operations and intelligence fusion centres in forward operating bases. They have also worked with US State Department field staff dedicated to countering LRA efforts to improve cross-border information sharing on LRA activities among both military and civilian actors, and to strengthen civilian protection efforts. US advisors and civilian staff have also played a key role in expanding distribution of 'come home' messages through handing out leaflets and FM radio broadcasts aimed at encouraging defection of LRA combatants in southeast CAR.[46]

In June 2012, the UNSC approved a new UN strategy on the LRA that seeks to support implementation of the RCI-LRA and to coordinate the activities of UN actors operating in LRA-affected areas. The strategy focuses on five key objectives:[47]

- Implementation of the RCI-LRA;
- Enhancement of efforts to promote the protection of civilians;
- Expansion of current disarmament, demobilisation, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration activities to cover all LRA-affected areas;
- Promotion of a coordinated humanitarian and child protection response in all LRA-affected areas; and
- Provision of support to LRA-affected governments in the fields of peacebuilding, human rights, rule of law and development, so as to enable them to establish state authority throughout their territory.

The UN acknowledged that, whereas the four affected countries have demonstrated the political will to tackle the LRA issue, international cooperation, including financial support, was required. The strategy therefore represented a framework in which international cooperation on the LRA issue would be fostered and resource mobilisation undertaken to address funding limitations.

The RCI-LRA ultimately aims to achieve better coordination among troops from the four LRA-affected states. It is conceived as an *ad hoc* and flexible arrangement aimed at enhancing effectiveness to deal with the LRA, a problem which has dragged on for decades. The RCI-LRA has a multi-pronged approach on both military and non-military fronts in all the affected countries. This is crucial since military operations cannot resolve the underlying causes of a conflict. Military force can only serve to stem violence and provide the necessary stability to allow peacebuilding efforts to succeed.[48]

Threats to the RCI-LRA initiative

While the RCI-LRA's efforts to coordinate and encourage a coherent approach are refreshing and ground-breaking there are challenges, both structural and of will, that might affect the effectiveness of this operation. Given the historical overview presented in this brief, it is possible to appreciate the irony of recurring problems that are likely to undermine this well-intentioned joint initiative.

The challenge of state consolidation

As a contingency of post-independent states, all four countries in question struggle with ensuring effective control over their geographical territories. They have all experienced civil strife that significantly weakened the central government's control over the entire state. The LRA has managed to operate in these countries over a period of time, due to the inability of the governments to maintain full control over their territories. There are many ungovernable spaces in most of these states that make it easy for bandits and rebels to thrive undeterred.

The CAR has endured many decades of political and military upheavals that have had negative consequences on the country's stability. There is chronic inadequacy of infrastructure, with very little effective government presence outside the capital, Bangui. Furthermore, the massive territory of the DRC and the sophisticated web of external interventions and insurgencies experienced after the second Congo war (August 1998 to July 2003) have rendered the DRC essentially wholly ungovernable. Throughout its history, the central government has never succeeded in establishing political order backed by the rule of law.[49] As a newly independent country, South Sudan also faces enormous challenges in consolidating its rule in the entire country, while total control of the northern Ugandan region has been an on-going challenge for the Ugandan government. Human security issues in this area have been a concern not only for the government, but also for many humanitarian and development agencies. Close to the border with the DRC, the northern and western parts of Uganda continue to be insecure as a result of the ripple effects of clashes in the DRC.

The inadequacy of government control over their respective territories has encouraged the LRA and its operational bases to thrive. The porous nature of the borders between the CAR, the DRC, South Sudan and Uganda have also made it easier for affected community members, militia and rebel groups to arm themselves. In light of the fact that these countries have experienced armed conflicts spanning the last decade, the insecure nature of their borders has created vulnerable belts which rebel groups like the LRA have exploited. Insecure borders and the inability of states to fully control their territories are both factors that are bound to counteract the effectiveness of the RTF in the fight against the LRA.

'Undermining' the sovereignty of the CAR

A critical concern for all four countries involved in this initiative is how to protect the legitimacy of their sovereignty once they have allowed foreign troops to enter their borders. This thinking should be considered within historical narratives of a state's involvement in the domestic affairs of another state. During the first and second Congo wars (November 1996 to May 1997 and August 1998 to July 2003), the presence of foreign forces participating in the wars compromised the sovereignty of the DRC. This is because these countries were essentially interested in determining the post-conflict outcomes with regard to the governance system.[50] The unclear intentions of the Ugandan army in the DRC were a source of discontent and mistrust between DRC and Uganda, and still continue to determine the relationship that these two nations have with each other. Even within the confines of the work of the RTF, the DRC remains uneasy about Uganda's army crossing and operating freely within her territory.[51]

Post-war DRC governments have found themselves increasingly influenced by foreign governments which stationed their soldiers in the country. This has in many ways further complicated the conflict in the DRC. Currently, the LRA is understood to be mainly based in the CAR. The country is unstable, with many militia and rebel groups operating within its borders. The influx of a multinational force, based on the experiences in the DRC, may turn the already volatile situation in the CAR into a complex one in which the conflict becomes intractable. Although this could be a simplistic comparison, it is possible that the increasing number of actors, each representing their own alliances and interests, could further complicate the situation in the CAR.

The nature of LRA recruitment

In a bid to shore up its numbers, the LRA has tended to recruit, coerce and indoctrinate children as members. There is a school of thought that postulates that some people fight because they are forced to – either through physical abduction, processes of indoctrination and socialisation into violence or because of a lack of other alternatives for survival.[52] The latter consideration has proved to be true for the majority of returnees/former LRA fighters who have been known to seek to remain in the armed forces at all costs.[53] Child abductions and recruitments are often brutal. Children are abducted from villages and forced by LRA commanders to commit heinous atrocities. Escaped children have told how they were forced to kill not only the enemy in battle but also other children, fellow members of the LRA who had tried to escape or had not obeyed the rules. Through killing their own families, most child soldiers become socially cut off from their communities, while their bond with the LRA is simultaneously strengthened.[54]

Abducted girls who bore children of LRA rebels are open to experiencing substantial stigma in their communities on their return. Reintegration of LRA combatants is and will continue to be a very challenging task, given the age at which most of the combatants are abducted and the level of indoctrination that they are put through during the years they are with the movement. The respective communities that these combatants belonged to are also highly unlikely to accept their reintegration, given the atrocious nature of the crimes they committed. The RCI-LRA initiative cannot ignore this dynamic in their efforts to counter the LRA. The troubling reality of this rebel force is that most LRA combatants are themselves victims who are also deserving of freedom and rescue.

Unclear intentions and political will

A critical challenge for this initiative is how to ascertain that every player comes to the table with noble intentions. When analysing the destruction caused by the LRA it is evident that the group is not currently in a peak phase, its members have committed worse and larger-scale atrocities in the past. The question then arises as to why there is now such interest in mounting an international response to the movement. Why, for example, is the US interested in the war against the LRA? Why was this initiative not envisioned earlier on? While the initiative is commendable, it cannot be regarded at face value. Over the years, a constantly repeated question has been – why is no one able to catch the LRA? Concerns have been raised regarding the Government of Uganda's commitment to dealing with the movement. It is these questions of intention and willingness to engage in the destruction of the rebel group that could easily undermine the work and results envisioned of the RCI-LRA. The question of intention has to some extent also affected the commitment of different states to the activities of the RTF. For instance, the provisions of the AU Peace and Security Council communiqué of 22 November 2011 that authorised the contribution of a total of 5,000 troops for the RTF-LRA by countries are still unmet, due in large part to human and financial challenges. By early September 2012, the CAR had only contributed 350 soldiers, Uganda 2,000 and South Sudan 500. Discussions with the DRC government on their contribution to the RTF were still ongoing. The divergence in interests and unclear intentions will play a key role in the success, or failure, of the RCI-LRA.[55] With such complexities, it becomes imperative to engage in multifaceted approaches to the war with the LRA.

UN Group of Experts' reports on the situation in eastern DRC

The Ugandan government has expressed disappointment with an October 2012 UN Group of Experts report which outlined that Rwanda and Uganda were both supplying weapons to the M23 rebels in the DRC. Uganda responded

by threatening to withdraw its forces from UN-backed international missions, including the RTF, which could lead to a massive crippling of the RCI-LRA.[56] On 28 November 2012, a UNSC resolution renewed DRC sanctions and the mandate of the Group of Experts supporting the sanctions committee until 1 February 2014. There was no mention of Uganda's involvement.[57] There was however the mention of the October 2012 Group of Experts report. The renewal of the group's mandate and its projected subsequent reports is still bound to bring up the question of Uganda's role.

When analysing the destruction caused by the LRA it is evident that the group is not currently in a peak phase, its members have committed worse and larger-scale atrocities in the past. The question then arises as to why there is now such interest in mounting an international response to the movement

Recommendations on strengthening the RCI-LRA

Prioritise and effectively finance the collective pursuit of the LRA

Given the pressing human security challenges that continue to characterise the countries affected by the activities of the LRA, there is concern that the pursuit of the rebels is not ranked as high priority by the concerned governments. For this initiative to work, it is imperative that all four states give it their utmost attention, so as to achieve uniform and meaningful engagement to ensure the capture and eradication of the movement. Although this is a military approach, there are strong indications that it will only be successful if backed up by strong political will and commitment. The continued trend of failed military approaches must be taken into consideration. Apart from having a strong pursuit force, there is also need to strengthen the military in all aspects to protect civilians. Failure to do so will only see the LRA shifting bases and a pervasive challenge growing in a different geographical space.

While there is a preference for force, it is imperative that dialogue be consistently considered as an alternative to resolving this crisis. Engagement should ideally attempt to bring key actors in the conflict together, with the aim of providing a safe space in which to ventilate the issues that could lead to warring parties opting for further violence as a solution. Dialogue should be encouraged at policy level as it provides opportunities for actors in a conflict to participate in forming and strengthening local governance structures, among them local councils. Stakeholder engagement at grassroots level should also be encouraged. The LRA conflict has left affected community members traumatised, suspicious and bearing great animosity towards the government, which they believe should have offered more protection. It is important for the government to prioritise programmes aimed at building the confidence of grassroots actors and community members in northern Uganda. These would be implemented concurrently with the execution of the RTF's mandate. Dialogue in this sense is complimentary and more transformative than the use of violence alone to end the conflict.

Assess past interventions against the LRA

Given that the pursuit of the LRA has been going on for over two decades, both within Uganda by the government, and regionally through engagements led by neighbouring countries, there is a wealth of information and lessons learnt. The RCI-LRA needs to conduct a comprehensive assessment of past interventions, with a view to building on successes, while making efforts to avoid pitfalls. Focus should be placed on military operations carried out against the LRA, with the aim of understanding why these failed. There have also been parallel processes which aimed to mitigate the impact of LRA attacks. These include interventions by community-based organisations and national as well as international humanitarian and development agencies. The RCI-LRA must also conduct assessments of these interventions, with the aim of drawing important lessons that could be useful in implementation of the non-military components of the initiative. It is important to note that the RCI-LRA initiative must reflect on the reasons why the previous efforts to counter the LRA have failed, so as to strengthen and sharpen their engagement.

Apart from having a strong pursuit force, there is also need to strengthen the military in all aspects to protect civilians. Failure to do so will only see the LRA shifting bases and a pervasive challenge growing in a different geographical space

Engage civil society organisations

The RCI-LRA, given its largely Track I approach to conflict resolution, is mainly led by inter-governmental partnerships. There is a need for Track II approaches (led by non-governmental and professional bodies), particularly those where CSOs are in the forefront of implementation. This initiative should engage grassroots, national and regional CSOs to develop and implement comprehensive intra-country and inter-country intervention plans that will complement Track I approaches which will predominantly be hinged on military offensives by the RTF. The reality, however, is that in the four countries, there is modest presence of CSOs in areas that are affected by LRA attacks. For those where civil society is active, their technical, administrative and financial

capacities are often limited. Given the critical role of civil society, it is imperative that international organisations and funding agencies enrich their engagement towards practicing preventive action and protecting communities, and also their future role in the reintegration of affected communities. A complimentary approach could be embedded in research and practical efforts to reduce violence.

Strengthen the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) component of the RCI-LRA initiative

In most communities affected by LRA, activity disarmament has remained incomplete, while reintegration represents more unfinished business. Given the nature of the LRA's recruitment, both LRA perpetrators and survivors alike need to be catered for in a holistic reintegration and reconciliation process. In light of the level of indoctrination, rebels who were abducted as children struggle with a sense of right and wrong, and they too are victims who need specific interventions to help them to transcend their victimhood. It is important that any DDR initiatives are cognisant of this fact and should incorporate psycho-social support into their implementation. Survivors of the LRA continue to live in a state of fear, which leads to experiences of psychological trauma, even after the threat has left the area. It is imperative that the RCI-LRA forms strategic partnerships to ensure the holistic restoration and integration of both perpetrators and victimised community members. A successful post-LRA transition in the affected societies will be almost wholly dependent on full restoration and effective reintegration.

Advocate for dialogue

Historically, negotiations and dialogues have yielded the most success in resolving LRA disputes. The overwhelming view of civil society has been that the conflict in northern Uganda should be brought to an end through peaceful means; that is through dialogue.[58] Negotiations have the potential to bring hostilities to an end and to achieve some kind of understanding and agreement. However, based on past incidences of collapsed peace talks with the LRA, it becomes imperative to derive lessons learnt and apply them to future interventions in order to effectively manage the dynamics of negotiations.

Conclusion

The quest to capture the LRA has been a difficult one for all actors involved as the movement remains elusive. While the intentions behind implementation of the RCI-LRA are noble ones, the methods, if not rigorously interrogated, could yield negative or poor results. It is imperative that at the heart of this initiative there is continuous engagement with past interventions, so as to avoid unnecessary repetition of previously failed methodology. Engagement of different actors in the planning and execution of the RCI-LRA strategy is important if the results of this initiative are to remain relevant to local populations in the affected areas within the region. It is evident in the discussion presented in this brief that any success will be founded on rigorous interrogation of the intentions of all parties, the mode of engagement and the capacity and ability to engage. Failure in any of these respects could result in the further re-grouping and strengthening of the LRA's capacity as the movement seeks to ensure its survival. All of these must be avoided at all cost.

Endnotes

1 The authors wish to thank members of the Knowledge Production Department at ACCORD whose expressed curiosity about the cause and activities of the LRA resulted in the authors' interest in developing this brief. The authors also acknowledge the contributions and insights of the reviewers which led to the improvement of this brief.

2 Alexis, A. and Lauren, P. 2012.The Lord's Resistance Army: The U.S. response. CSR report for the Congress, November 2011. *Congressional Research Service*. Available from: <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/178226.pdf> [Accessed 30 October 2012].

3 Mareike, S., Tim, A. and Koen, V. 2011. Obama takes on the LRA: Why Washington sent troops to Central Africa. *Foreign Affairs*, 15 November. Available from: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/136673/mareike-schomerus-tim-allen-and-koen-vlassenroot/obama-takes-on-the-lra> [Accessed 30 October 2012].

4 Titus, K. and Joel, O. 2012. Tito Okello: The president who was kept on his toes. *New Vision*. Available from: <http://www.newvision.co.ug/mobile/Detail.aspx?NewsID=628581&CatID=417> [Accessed 30 October 2012].

5 Kasaija, P. 2006. The ICC arrest warrants for the Lord's Resistance Army leaders and the peace prospects for northern Uganda. *Journal of International Criminal Justice*, 4(1), pp. 179–187.

6 Project Ploughshares. 2011. Uganda: 1987-2010. *Project Ploughshares*, November. Available from: <http://www.ploughshares.ca/content/uganda-1987-2010> [Accessed 22 October 2012].

7 Government of Uganda. 2007. Peace recovery and development plan for northern Uganda 2007-2010. *Government of Uganda*. Available from: <http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/%28httpDocuments%29/F9933A32534907A8C12573B700779C11/$file/PRDP+Sep+2007.pdf> [Accessed 18 November 2012].

8 Van Acker, F. 2004. Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army: The new order no one ordered. *African Affairs*, 103(412), pp. 335–357.

9 Lubega, H. 2002. Serve God or be beheaded: An LRA rebel's story. *The East African*, 15 July. Available from: <http://allafrica.com/stories/200207160061.html> [Accessed 30 October 2012].

10 Gersony, R. 1997. *The anguish of northern Uganda: Results of a field-based assessment of the civil conflicts in northern Uganda*. Kampala, USAID. Available from: <http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNACC245.pdf> [Accessed 15 November 2012].

11 Prunier, G. 2004. Rebel movements and proxy warfare: Uganda, Sudan and the Congo. *African Affairs*, 103(412), pp. 359–383.

12 Branch, A. 2005. Neither peace nor justice: Political violence and the peasantry in northern Uganda, 1986-1998. *Africa Studies Quarterly*, 8(2), pp. 1–31.

13 Doom, R. and Vlassenroot, K. 1999. Kony's message: A new Koine? The Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda. *African Affairs*, 98(390), pp. 5–36.

14 Ibid.

15 Refugee Law Project. 2004. Behind the violence: *Causes, consequences, and the search for solutions to the war in northern Uganda*. Kampala, Makerere University.

16 Puijenbroek, J. and Plooijer, N. 2009. *How enlightning is the thunder: A study on the Lord's Resistance Army in the border region of DR Congo, Sudan and Uganda*. Utrecht, IKV Pax Christi.

17 International Crisis Group. 2004. Northern Uganda: Understanding and solving the conflict. *Africa Report 77*, April. Nairobi/Brussels, *International Crisis Group*. Available from: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/horn-of-africa/uganda/077-northern-uganda-understanding-and-solving-the-conflict.aspx> [Accessed 20 October 2012].

18 British Broadcasting Corporation. 2012. Ugandan army says Sudan is backing Joseph Kony's LRA. *British Broadcasting Corporation*, 30 April. Available from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17890432> [Accessed 22 October 2012].

19 Ibid.

20 Mukasa, H. 2012. LRA abducts 55 in Central Africa. *New Vision*, 4 September. Available from: <http://www.newvision.co.ug/news/634904-LRA-rebels-abduct-55-in-Central-Africa.html> [Accessed 30 October 2012].

21 This was later renamed the Uganda People's Defence Force after the change in the Constitution of Uganda in 1995.

22 IRIN News. 2012. Uganda: Some key names. *IRIN News*. Available from: <http://www.irinnews.org/printreport.aspx?reportid=52078> [Accessed 30 October 2012].

23 Peter, E. 2006. Ugandan militia fights off LRA. *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, 24 January. Available from: <http://iwpr.net/report-news/ugandan-militia-fights-lra> [Accessed 30 October 2012].

24 Branch, A. 2005. Neither peace nor justice: Political violence and the peasantry in northern Uganda, 1986-1998. *Africa Studies Quarterly*, 8(2), pp. 1-31.

25 Human Rights Watch. 2003. Abducted and abused: *Renewed conflict in northern Uganda*, 15 July, A1512. New York, *Human Rights Watch*. Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/45dac8872.html> [Accessed 12 November 2012].

26 Kasaija, P. 2006. op. cit.

27 Puijenbroek, J. and Plooijer, N. 2009. *How enlightning is the thunder: A study on the Lord's Resistance Army in the border region of DR Congo, Sudan and Uganda*. Utrecht, IKV Pax Christi.

28 Beth, T. and John, F. 2009. AFRICOM's Ugandan blunder. *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 20 April. Available from: <http://www.fpif.org/articles/africoms_ugandan_blunder> [Accessed 30 October 2012].

29 Dylan, H. and Kennedy, T. 2012. *Dealing with complexity in peace negotiations: Reflections on the Lord's Resistance Army and the Juba talks*. London, Conciliation Resources.

30 Afako, B. 2002. Reconciliation and justice: 'Mato oput' and the Amnesty Act. Available from: <http://www.c-r.org/sites/c-r.org/files/Accord%2011_13Reconciliation%20and%20justice_2002_ENG.pdf> [Accessed 24 October 2012].

31 Refugee Law Project. 2005. Peace first, justice later: Traditional justice in northern Uganda. *Refugee Law Project Working Paper 17*. Available from: <http://www.refugeelawproject.org/working_papers/RLP.WP17.pdf> [Accessed 24 October 2012].

32 Paul. 2012. Uganda's amnesty allowed to expire. *The Resolve*, 7 June. Available from: <http://www.theresolve.org/blog/archives/3071033046> [Accessed 30 October 2012].

33 Harman, D. 2002. Terror tag shifts Uganda's war. *The Christian Science Monitor*, 26 August. Available from: <http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0826/p06s01-woaf.html> [Accessed 24 October 2012].

34 International Crisis Group. 2004. op. cit.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Whitmore, T.D. 2010. 'Genocide or just another casualty of war?' - Part II – the authenticity of the document: Policy shifts, land, language and names. *Practical Matters*, 3 (2010). Available from: <http://practicalmattersjournal.org/issue/3/centerpieces/genocide-or-just-another-casualty-of-war-1> [Accessed 22 October 2012].

38 Craig, W. 2012. Joseph Kony hunt is proving difficult for US troops. *The Washington Post*, 29 April. Available from: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/joseph-kony-hunt-is-proving-difficult-for-us-troops/2012/04/29/gIQAasM6pT_story.html> [Accessed 30 October 2012].

39 Polly, C. 2012. Hunt for Joseph Kony will kill more innocent people, charities warn. *The Guardian*, 19 April. Available from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/apr/19/hunt-joseph-kony-kill-innocents> [Accessed 30 October 2012].

40 Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. 2012. Central Africa (Lord's Resistance Army). *Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect*. Available from: <http://globalr2p.org/countrywork/country.php?country=87> [Accessed 4 October 2012].

41 South African Foreign Policy Initiative. 2012. UN-African Union cooperation vital for today's challenges. *South African Foreign Policy Initiative*, 16 July. Available from: <http://www.safpi.org/news/article/2012/un-african-union-cooperation-vital-todays-challenges-says-eliasson> [Accessed 5 October 2012].

42 Security Council Report. 2012. June 2012 monthly forecast. Available from: <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2012-06/lookup_c_glKWLeMTIsG_b_8102695.php?print=true> [Accessed 4 October 2012].

43 South African Foreign Policy Initiative. 2012. A quick reaction force moulded by Africa's circumstances. *South African Foreign Policy Initiative*, 10 May. Available from: <http://www.safpi.org/news/article/2012/quick-reaction-force-moulded-africas-circumstances> [Accessed 5 October 2012].

44 Shanker, T. and Gladstone, R. 2011. Armed U.S. advisers to help fight African renegade group. *The New York Times*, 14 October. Available from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/15/world/africa/barack-obama-sending-100-armed-advisers-to-africa-to-help-fight-lords-resistance-army.html?_r=0> [Accessed 5 October 2012].

45 RESOLVE. 2012. Moment of truth: The potential and limits of the US military's counter-LRA deployment. *RESOLVE*, June. Available from: <https://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/2241/images/RESOLVE%20-%20Moment%20of%20Truth%20June%202012.pdf> [Accessed 5 October 2012].

46 Ibid.

47 UN Department of Political Affairs. 2012. UN and partners build momentum in the fight against the LRA. *UN Department of Political Affairs E-News*, July. Available from: <http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/undpa/lang/en/main/enewsletter/news0612_lra> [Accessed 5 October 2012].

48 Roncolato, G.D. 1994. Military theory and peace enforcement. In: Petrie, J.N. ed. *Essays on strategy XII*. Washington, D.C., National Defense University Press. pp. 325–370.

49 Bratton, M. 2005. Building democracy in Africa's weak states. *Democracy at Large*, 1 (3), pp. 12–15.

50 The countries that participated in the war include Angola, Burundi, Chad, the DRC, Namibia, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

51 Reliefweb. 2012. African Union welcomes progress made towards eliminating the Lord's Resistance Army. *Reliefweb*, 12 September. Available from: <http://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/african-union-welcomes-progress-made-towards-eliminating-lord%E2%80%99s-resistance-army> [Accessed 31 October 2012].

52 Hilker, L.M. and Fraser, E. 2009. Youth exclusion, violence, conflict and fragile states. *Social Development Direct.* Available from: <http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/CON66.pdf > [Accessed 8 October 2012].

53 Maina, G. 2009. An analytical evaluation of the reintegration process of formerly abducted children in northern Uganda and the role of the various actors. *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development*, 14(14), pp. 1–13.

54 Behrend, H. 1999. *Alice Lakwena & the holy spirits: War in northern Uganda, 1985-97*. Oxford, James Currey.

55 Reliefweb. op. cit.

56 BBC News. no date. Uganda to withdraw troops from Somalia, says Mukasa. *BBC News*. Available from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-20187369> [Accessed 18 November 2012].

57 United Nations Security Council. 2012. Letter dated 12 November 2012 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo addressed to the President of the Security Council. *United Nations Security Council*. Available from: <http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2012/843> [Accessed 12 January 2013].

58 Kasaija, A.P. 2006. Civil society and conflict resolution: The role of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) in the northern Uganda conflict. Available from: <http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.istr.org/resource/resmgr/working_papers_bangkok/kasaija.apuuliphillip.pdf> [Accessed 6 October 2012].

The Authors John Ahere is Senior Programme Officer in the Peacemaking Unit at the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD). His research interests include grassroots and cross-border peacebuilding in Africa as well as international politics. Ahere has a Master of Arts (MA) degree in International Studies from the University of Nairobi in Kenya. He holds a postgraduate diploma in Project Management from the Kenya Institute of Management as well as a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in Political Science and Sociology from the University of Nairobi in Kenya. His publication titled 'Kenya Elections, 2013: Can the Precipice Be Avoided?' was recently published by the *Africa Peace and Conflict Journal* 5 (2), 2012.

Dr Grace Maina is an independent researcher and former manager of the Knowledge Production Department at ACCORD. Dr Maina's research interests include post-conflict peacebuilding in Africa, human security, preventative action, and youth. She holds a doctorate degree from the University of Bradford, UK, an MA in Development Studies from the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in South Africa, a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree majoring in Political Science and Sociology from the University of Nairobi, Kenya as well as a Bachelor of Law (LL.B) degree from the University of Nairobi.

ACCORD is a non-governmental, non-aligned conflict resolution institution based in Durban, South Africa. Produced by ACCORD, the Policy & Practice Briefs are managed and coordinated by ACCORD's Knowledge Production Department (KPD). The role of KPD is to establish ACCORD as a positive and constructive learning organisation that enhances theory, policy and practice in the field of conflict management. The department's activities and outputs are aimed at promoting effective and sustainable peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding in Africa and beyond. All ACCORD publications, including research reports, the *Conflict Trends* magazine and the *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* can be downloaded at no charge from our website.

Policy & Practice Briefs aim to provide succinct, rigorous and accessible recommendations to policy makers and practitioners and to stimulate informed and relevant debate to promote dialogue as a way to peacefully resolve conflict. Each issue draws on field research or the outcomes of thematic events, with analysis underpinned by rigorous research, academic theory and methods.

Subscribe to receive email alerts or copies of any ACCORD publications by sending an email to publications@accord.org.za

20 YEARS 1992–2012

Private Bag X018 Umhlanga Rocks 4320 South Africa, Tel: +27 (0)31 502 3908, Fax: +27 (0)31 502 4160
Email: info@accord.org.za
www.accord.org.za