

# ISSUE BRIEF

No. 4192 | APRIL 04, 2014

## Lord's Resistance Army: Questions on Increasing Troops to Fight Joseph Kony's LRA

*Charlotte Florance and Brett D. Schaefer*

The Obama Administration announced on March 23 that additional U.S. forces and assets will be deployed to reinforce the joint U.S. and African Union Regional Task Force (AU-RTF) tracking Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

There is no question that Kony and the LRA have committed terrible atrocities and that purging Africa of Kony and the LRA is a worthwhile endeavor. However, the President also has a duty to inform Congress and the American people about why these additional forces are required, their objective, their responsibilities, and how long he expects them to be deployed in the region.

**Kony and the LRA.** Kony's LRA is a violent gang of murderers, rapists, and kidnapers. For nearly three decades, the LRA has terrorized central Africa, killing and enslaving tens of thousands of people from multiple nations and forcing millions more to flee their homes. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, over 326,000 people remain displaced from their homes in areas that are still threatened by the LRA in the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and South Sudan.<sup>1</sup>

The LRA operates primarily in the ungoverned spaces spanning Uganda, the CAR, the DRC, and South Sudan. Regional instability has been severe enough to require recent or ongoing U.N. peacekeeping operations and observer missions in the DRC, the CAR, Chad, Sudan, and South Sudan. LRA activities complicate these operations and have led the Security Council to instruct missions to cooperate with efforts to protect civilians from the LRA.

The territory where the LRA operates is some of the most challenging terrain in Africa, which—combined with political instability and the limited military capacity of regional governments—helps to the LRA move covertly, establish temporary bases, and cache materiel.

According to an LRA crisis tracker, since the coup in the CAR in 2013, LRA fighters have abducted more than 200 people in a “quiet surge of violence” in isolated areas of the country.<sup>2</sup> This activity is a reversal of more recent trends that have seen LRA leaders killed and LRA forces diminished, and it is a worrying sign that sectarian and militia violence in the CAR, ongoing instability in the eastern DRC, and internal conflict in South Sudan may allow the LRA an opportunity to rebound.

**A Worthwhile Effort.** While the LRA does not present a direct threat to the U.S., America has an interest in supporting the efforts of African countries to end the LRA threat. This was acknowledged by the Bush Administration as early as 2001, when the LRA was included in the State Department's “Terrorist Exclusion List.”<sup>3</sup> In 2008, Kony was added to the Treasury Department's list of “Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons.” The Bush Administration also supported other measures to

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/ib4192>

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign and National Security Policy

**The Heritage Foundation**  
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE  
Washington, DC 20002  
(202) 546-4400 | [heritage.org](http://heritage.org)

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

increase regional coordination to eliminate the LRA, such as planning and logistical support to Ugandan Defense Forces.

The Obama Administration has maintained this commitment to ending the LRA atrocities in central Africa. In May 2010, President Obama signed into law the Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009. In 2013, the Administration announced that Kony would be added to the "Rewards for Justice" program.

Congress has broadly supported Bush Administration and Obama Administration efforts to end the LRA threat. It has held numerous hearings, issued statements, and written letters to the President expressing support for U.S. efforts or advocating additional action. Congress passed the Department of State Rewards Program Update and Technical Corrections Act of 2012.

**Military Efforts.** To bring more pressure on the LRA, in October 2011, President Obama announced the deployment of 100 U.S. special operations forces to Uganda. U.S. forces were directed to work closely with local African troops, help to gather intelligence through a radio communication network and satellite imagery, and train tracking dogs to accompany the African troops on their raids.<sup>4</sup> They also coordinated with nongovernmental organizations and philanthropists helping to support the capture of Kony.

American assistance seems to have had a positive impact. Since 2010, abductions attributed to the LRA have dropped by 50 percent, and the number of LRA killings has dropped by 75 percent.<sup>5</sup> There has also been a significant increase in the

number of LRA defections since the deployment of U.S. troops to the region. However, the U.S.-supported AU-RTF has yet to capture Kony and his remaining LRA core of about 250 fighters.

President Obama announced on March 23 that the U.S. would increase its support for an AU-RTF counter-LRA mission by adding at least four CV-22 Osprey aircraft, refueling aircraft, and about 150 special operations forces and other airmen to fly and maintain the aircraft. As detailed in the War Powers Act notification, this would increase the total number of U.S. forces in Uganda from 100 to approximately 300 troops.<sup>6</sup>

The Department of Defense (DOD) has said the Ospreys will be used for troop transport. The rules of engagement for the new additional troops will remain the same as for the first 100 deployed in 2011: They will be combat ready but prohibited from engaging with the LRA unless it is for purposes of self-defense. The U.S. forces are authorized to provide information, advice, and assistance to partner nations.

**Congress Should Exercise Oversight.** There is no question that ridding Africa of Kony and the LRA is a worthwhile endeavor. However, Congress should exercise its oversight role to expand public information of the mission by:

- Seeking a detailed account of U.S. and AU-RTF actions since deployment and a current assessment of the strengths and capabilities of Kony and his remaining LRA forces;
- Clarifying why, given the success of existing U.S. forces in combating the LRA through increased

---

1. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "LRA Regional Update: Central African Republic, DR Congo, and South Sudan," December 2013, [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/LRA\\_Regional\\_Update\\_Q4-2013-22Jan2014\\_0.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/LRA_Regional_Update_Q4-2013-22Jan2014_0.pdf) (accessed March 28, 2014).

2. Paul Ronan, "Central Africa Republic: Ignore Kony at Your Peril," Think Africa Press, March 4, 2014, <http://thinkafricapress.com/central-african-republic/ignore-kony-your-peril-lra> (accessed March 28, 2014).

3. U.S. Department of State, "Statement on the Designation of 39 Organizations on the USA PATRIOT Act's 'Terrorist Exclusion List,'" December 6, 2001, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2001/6695.htm> (accessed March 28, 2014).

4. President Barack Obama, "Letter from the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate Regarding the Lord's Resistance Army," the White House, October 14, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/10/14/letter-president-speaker-house-representatives-and-president-pro-tempore> (accessed March 31, 2014).

5. U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Support to Regional Efforts to Counter the Lord's Resistance Army," March 24, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/03/223844.htm> (accessed March 28, 2014).

6. Press release, "Letter from the President—IDLs—War Powers Resolution," the White House, March 25, 2014, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/03/25/letter-president-idls-war-powers-resolution> (accessed March 31, 2014).

regional coordination and the fact that the Administration has stressed that this is an AU-led operation, additional troops and equipment are necessary;

- Requiring the Administration to state explicitly the specific objectives of the new deployment, particularly clarifying whether the new deployment signals a shift to a more aggressive mission and when it believes that those objectives will be achieved;
- Ascertaining how the U.S. deployment will coordinate with ongoing humanitarian initiatives and programs;
- Identifying the types of military enhancement and capacity-building efforts that are being used to ensure that regional forces can complete the mission without direct U.S. military engagement;
- Establishing the Administration's broader strategy to address the regional instability that has allowed Kony and the LRA to operate so long with relative freedom;
- Assuring the American people that U.S. troops will not be drawn into a wider conflict, given the LRA's history as a militia for hire and the increasing number of internal conflicts in the region; and

- Ascertaining how the Administration plans to conduct operations in the CAR—where Kony is reported to be hiding out—which is experiencing internal conflict and political turmoil.

**Clarification Needed.** The effort to eliminate the LRA threat is a worthy one. However, Americans deserve a solid explanation as to why the anti-LRA mission is being expanded and how the mission's objectives will be achieved within a realistic time frame. Congress should also press the Administration for a broader regional strategy. U.S. troops and military assets will go only so far to build up a region that has been ravaged by war for decades. A comprehensive approach to addressing the governance vacuum that has allowed Kony to operate with relative impunity for nearly three decades is necessary.

—*Charlotte Florance is a Research Associate for Economic Freedom in Africa and the Middle East in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign and National Security Policy and Brett D. Schaefer is Jay Kingham Fellow in International Regulatory Affairs in the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom, both divisions of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation.*