



enough

The project to end genocide and crimes against humanity

Issue Brief 2

Intelligence Needs in the Hunt for the LRA

Ashley Benner February 2013

Current efforts to end the Lord's Resistance Army, or LRA, including the deployment of U.S. military advisors to East and Central Africa, are unlikely to succeed if they are not accompanied by substantial diplomatic, military, logistical, and intelligence support. This series of LRA issue briefs describes the main obstacles to success and explains what steps the United States and its partners should take in their efforts to end the LRA threat.

The problem

Inadequate intelligence about the LRA: Efforts to apprehend the LRA's senior leaders and protect civilians from attack lack real-time intelligence about the locations and activity of the LRA.

There are a number of reasons why real-time intelligence about the LRA is very difficult to collect.

- **The LRA's vast operating area.** The LRA operates in an area that spans more than 115,000 square miles and stretches across several countries.¹ This area is approximately equivalent in square miles to Arizona or Côte d'Ivoire.
- **Too few troops actively pursuing the LRA.** The governments of the LRA-affected countries have provided 2,860 troops to the embryonic African Union Regional Task Force that has been tasked with tracking and ending the LRA.² The number of troops actively pursuing the group's senior commanders, engaging with communities about LRA sightings and activity, and protecting civilians is much lower. Gathering of human intelligence—information provided by communities, park rangers, nomadic groups, and others in the region—is especially critical, but is hampered by the small number of active troops in LRA-affected areas.
- **Access.**³ The troops are not able to operate in all of the areas where the LRA is present—a problem that severely limits their ability to track the group. The LRA

has found safe haven in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Kafia Kingi area that straddles the contested Sudan-South Sudan border. These areas are off-limits to the Ugandan army—the only force consistently tracking and conducting offensive missions against the LRA. Recently, the Congolese government committed troops to work in conjunction with the A.U. Regional Task Force, giving the effort access to portions of Congo.⁴ However, the effectiveness of this new arrangement remains to be seen. Kafia Kingi remains outside of the Task Force’s operating area, thus, little is known about the LRA groups hiding there.

- **The dense forest canopy.** Most of the area in which the LRA is present is densely forested. The thick forest canopy makes it practically impossible for satellites and unmanned aerial vehicles to locate LRA groups. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton noted this obstacle during an August 2012 trip to Uganda and remarked on the need for the United States to provide additional equipment to the governments of LRA-affected countries.⁵

Two other challenges are important to note. The LRA is generally divided into small groups of five to thirty fighters. Locating these groups—and distinguishing them from other nomadic groups—is challenging, through aerial surveillance or ground operations. Additionally, LRA groups have been operating in the area for many years and know the terrain and are able to move quickly over long distances. As a result, the national armies of the LRA-affected countries are unable to track the LRA.

The solution

Despite the significant challenges facing troops, a few practical steps could improve intelligence gathering. To that end, the Obama administration should take the following steps immediately:

1. Urge the governments of LRA-affected countries to deploy more troops, to pursue the LRA in the entire area where the group is present, and to enhance civilian protection. To prevent the predation of communities, the United States and its international partners should also ensure that soldiers are well paid, have appropriate provisions, and are held accountable for abuses.
2. To enhance the collection of human intelligence, task the U.S. advisors to increasingly engage with communities, park rangers, herders, and other local information sources with knowledge about the LRA’s movements. The United States should provide additional support to expand community radio networks and cell phone coverage in affected areas and to furnish communities with satellite phones.

3. Ensure that civilian protection is prioritized and communities are protected from retaliatory attacks by the LRA in response to sharing information with the advisors and the national armies.
4. Increase awareness in LRA-affected areas of the U.S. Rewards for Justice program—which has recently been expanded to include LRA leader Joseph Kony and his top commanders Okot Odhiambo and Dominic Ongwen—through leaflets, posters, and broadcasts via radio and helicopters. Through the Rewards for Justice program, the U.S. State Department can provide financial payments to individuals who provide information that leads to the arrest or conviction of fugitives sought by international criminal tribunals on charges of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. The program can bolster efforts to apprehend the LRA’s senior leaders and promote defections by providing an incentive to LRA commanders and fighters, herders, and others who transit through the region to share information about the locations and movements of the LRA’s top leadership.
5. Provide more sophisticated intelligence-gathering capabilities by furnishing satellite imagery and properly equipped unmanned aerial vehicles capable of seeing through the dense forest canopy.
6. Given the LRA’s use of satellite phones, ensure that U.S. military advisors and the Ugandan army regularly endeavor to obtain signals intelligence.

Endnotes

- 1 Mollie Zapata, “Enough 101: The Lord’s Resistance Army in the Congo,” *Enough Said*, available at <http://www.enough-project.org/blogs/enough-101-lords-resistance-army-congo>
- 2 United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, Regional Strategy to Fight Against the LRA, available at <http://unoca.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=3760&ctl=Details&mid=6487&ItemID=984257&language=en-US>
- 3 Ashley Benner, “Ending the LRA” (Washington: Enough Project, 2012), available at <http://www.enoughproject.org/publications/ending-lra>.
- 4 “Traque contre la LRA: le bataillon congolais de la force régionale présenté à Dungu,” *Radio Okapi* February 14, 2013, available at <http://radiookapi.net/actualite/2013/02/14/traque-contre-la-lra-le-bataillon-congolais-de-la-force-regionale-presente-dungu-2/> (Enough Project translation)
- 5 Human Security Baseline Assessment for Sudan and South Sudan, “Lord’s Resistance Army Update,” October 8, 2012, available at <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/facts-figures/south-sudan/armed-groups/lra.html>.