

RESOLVE



INVISIBLE CHILDREN

Guide to President Obama's LRA Report Card

Breaking down what needs to be done to stop LRA violence

On November 24th, 2010, President Obama released his strategy to help stop LRA violence and assist communities affected by the conflict, as required by the *LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act*. Our periodic report cards will monitor President Obama's progress in implementing five key elements of the strategy: expanding US engagement of the crisis, protecting civilians from violence, stopping LRA commanders, supporting escape from the LRA and helping communities affected by the conflict survive and rebuild.

Though the specifics of what actions President Obama should take will change with each report card, this guide provides a framework for what we'll be expecting from his administration. Here's a more in-depth look at the criteria of these five elements that we'll be using to grade President Obama's LRA strategy:

1. Expand US engagement

Why it matters: LRA violence has stretched across four countries, targeting some of the most remote and marginalized communities in Africa. For too long, this has meant that the crisis slips between the cracks in the US government, not getting the attention or resources it deserves.

What President Obama's strategy should seek to do:

Dedicate significant new staff and resources: Without more people and significant new financial resources dedicated to addressing this crisis, President Obama will not be able to implement his LRA strategy effectively. In particular, President Obama needs to oversee the appointment of a Great Lakes envoy in the State Department, ensure that envoy has a dedicated staff, and task him or her with traveling regularly to central Africa in order to ensure the different US government agencies responsible for the LRA work together.

Keep the VIPs involved: Implementing an effective LRA strategy will require President Obama and his senior foreign policy officials to stay personally engaged in the process and periodically meet to review what can be done more effectively.

Work with regional and international partners: President Obama and his senior foreign policy team can play a critical role in ensuring that there is an international consensus and commitment to stopping LRA violence once and for all. Doing so will require the US to encourage international leaders from France, the UN Security Council, and the African Union to take action to live up to their commitments to bring LRA commanders to justice and protect civilians from violence.

Protect civilians

Why it matters: Since September 2008 the LRA has conducted a wave of violence across central Africa, killing more than 2,300 people and displacing 400,000 others. These attacks include the massacre of 865 people in the 2008 Christmas massacres in Congo and the abduction of hundreds of children from their schools and homes. In 2010 alone, LRA rebels conducted more than four deadly attacks on civilians every week.

What President Obama's strategy should seek to do:

Massively expand radio and mobile phone networks: Most areas affected by the LRA have very limited or no access to radio and cell phone networks, preventing people from warning each other when the LRA attacks or calling for help. US resources can help build these networks, especially in northern Congo and eastern CAR, which would save lives as well as boost local businesses and other economic activity.

Improve the effectiveness of national militaries and UN peacekeepers: President Obama should immediately seek to strengthen efforts by national military forces and UN peacekeepers to collaborate with each other and with local communities to provide better protection from LRA attacks. He should work with international leaders to ensure that UN peacekeepers have the ability to respond rapidly to reports of LRA attacks, and should deploy new forces to protect civilians from the LRA if the existing forces are unable to do the job. President Obama should also support measures to stop abuses by national militaries, who sometimes commit abuses against the very communities they are responsible for protecting.

Ensure local voices are heard: Local communities know best what needs to be done to protect people from the LRA. The president should seek ways to build the capacity of local civil society and local authorities to have an active role in efforts to protect their communities from LRA violence, warn each other of LRA threats, and shape the priorities of soldiers and peacekeepers sent to keep them safe.

3. Stop senior LRA commanders

Why it matters: Joseph Kony and top LRA commanders use the LRA as a tool for their own survival, and without them the rebel group would collapse. Kony and two other LRA commanders are wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC), which issued arrest warrants for them in 2005 for committing crimes against humanity and war crimes. In 2008 they refused to sign a peace agreement, instead abducting hundreds of children and adults in central Africa. Since then they have continued this campaign of terror with impunity, and show no signs of stopping.

What President Obama's strategy should seek to do:

Apprehend top LRA commanders: Apprehending commanders who refuse a negotiated solution is not a silver bullet solution to the crisis, but it is a crucial step in preventing future LRA attacks and achieving justice for the hundreds of thousands of victims and survivors of the conflict. Efforts by regional militaries to apprehend top LRA leaders have not succeeded, and President Obama must take greater responsibility to work with international and regional leaders to devise more viable alternatives to apprehend these commanders and protect civilians from further LRA attacks. In view of the massive reprisals against civilians which have followed past apprehension efforts, President Obama should make every effort to ensure that adequate safeguards to protect civilians are a central part of such measures.

Encourage LRA commanders to defect: The LRA has not promoted recent abductees to a high rank, so the core group of Ugandan commanders in the LRA is critical to its survival. Each one of these commanders who surrenders reduces the rebel group's fighting capacity and ability to abduct more children. Commanders

who surrender can also help convince other commanders to do the same. President Obama should support viable regional efforts to convince top LRA commanders to put down their weapons and leave the LRA, including through radio messages and direct outreach by civil society leaders.

Cut off external support to the LRA: In the past, the LRA has received significant support from the Sudanese government in Khartoum, which supplied it with safe havens and weapons until at least 2005. Though it is unclear if this support continues, LRA commanders have recently traveled to Sudan's Darfur region, reportedly to convince the Sudanese government to resume its support. President Obama should make clear to the Sudanese government that it will not tolerate any support to the LRA, including by refusing to remove Sudan from the State Sponsor of Terrorism List if it supplies or gives safe haven to the LRA. The US and the United Nations should also investigate other possible sources of external support for the LRA.

4. Facilitate escape from the LRA

Why it matters: LRA commanders are holding hundreds of abducted children and adults within LRA ranks who are seeking a chance to escape. Those who do escape need help returning home, healing from physical and mental trauma, and rebuilding their lives.

What President Obama's strategy should seek to do:

Help people escape from the LRA: Playing radio messages and dropping leaflets in areas where the LRA is active can give people abducted by the LRA critical information about how to escape. Setting up reception centers in communities affected by the rebels can help protect escapees and help them recover from physical and mental trauma. President Obama can provide critical funds and diplomatic support for these efforts.

Ensure people who escape can return home: Many people escape from the LRA hundreds of miles away, or even in a different country, from where they were abducted. President Obama's strategy should ensure that more is done to help escapees reunite with their families, heal from the physical and mental trauma, and get access to schools and jobs. Taking steps to help former LRA members reintegrate into society, especially in Uganda, can also encourage LRA commanders and others to defect from the LRA.

5. Help communities survive and rebuild

Why it matters: LRA attacks have displaced more than 400,000 people in central Africa since 2008, many of whom are living with neighboring communities who struggle to support them. The danger of LRA attacks, poor roads, and lack of funds means that humanitarian assistance only reaches a fraction of those who need it. In northern Uganda, communities still struggle to overcome the legacy of two decades of conflict there.

What President Obama's strategy should seek to do:

Find a way to reach people in need of emergency aid: The danger of LRA raids and the lack of roads and airstrips means that hundreds of thousands of people who have fled from LRA attacks aren't getting the food and medical supplies they need to survive. President Obama should support efforts by peacekeepers and military forces to protect more people and support the construction of better roads and airstrips so that humanitarian agencies get access to displaced persons and communities in need as a result of the threat from the LRA.

Increase aid to disrupted communities: President Obama and international leaders need to dedicate more money and emergency supplies to assist communities disrupted by LRA attacks, including those in areas where aid is not getting through, such as parts of eastern Central African Republic.

Address the conflict's root causes: President Obama should support efforts to build a lasting peace in northern Uganda by helping communities there rebuild from two decades of conflict. He should also support Ugandan efforts to heal political divisions within the country, as well as pressure the Ugandan government to improve its track record on democratic governance and human rights.