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The project to end genocide and crimes against humanity

Ending the LRA

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Current efforts to end the Lord's Resistance Army, including the U.S. military advisors currently deployed in East and Central Africa, are unlikely to succeed if they are not accompanied by the proper diplomatic, military, logistical, and intelligence support. This series of LRA Issue Briefs describes the main obstacles to success and explains what steps the U.S. and its partners should take in order to end the LRA as soon as possible.

Issue Brief 1: Access

The Problem

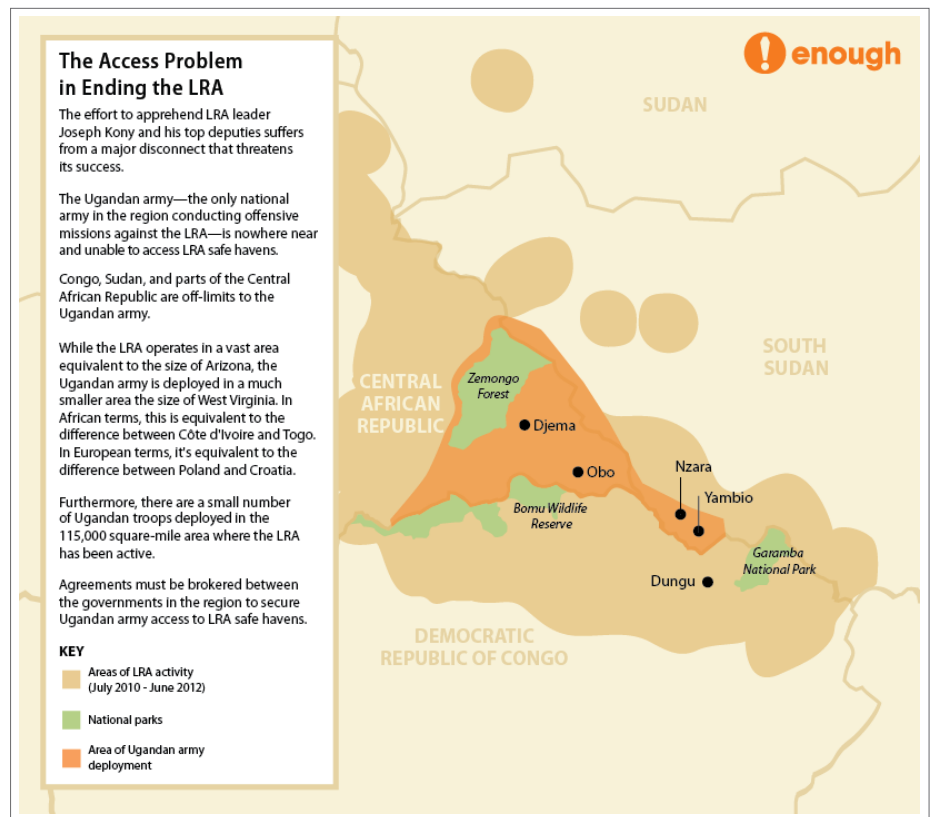
Safe havens: One of the top obstacles to successful military operations against the LRA is that the Ugandan army – the only force conducting offensive operations against the LRA – has been prohibited from operating in key areas where the group is located. As a result, safe havens for the LRA have developed. If this problem is not solved, the current operations, including the U.S. military advisor mission, will be unable to succeed in apprehending the LRA's top leaders and protecting civilians.

The issue of safe havens emerged in previous counter-LRA operations from 2001 to 2003 in Sudan. This matter inspired an agreement between Uganda and Sudan, which allowed Ugandan troops into certain areas of Sudan to pursue the LRA. A similar agreement is needed today, and the U.S. can play a part in facilitating such an arrangement.

Congo: The LRA has free rein in Congo, due to several reasons. Since September 2011, the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo has prevented the Ugandan People's Defense Force, or UPDF, from pursuing the LRA in Congo. The Congolese government justified this in light of the November 2011 elections, but the situation has continued. While previously deployed in Congo, the UPDF exploited natural resources and committed human rights abuses there. Additionally, in July 2012, the Congolese army transferred its U.S.-trained 391st battalion from LRA-affected areas to Goma to fight the recent M23 rebellion. Previously, the battalion carried out LRA-focused patrols in some areas, but it did not conduct the offensive and protection operations necessary to significantly hinder the group's activities. Moreover, the number of Congolese troops deployed was insufficient given the vast area in Congo where the LRA is present. Facing little to no military pressure in Congo, the LRA continues to attack communities.

The Central African Republic:

The Ugandan army has also been restricted from operating in parts of the Central African Republic, or CAR. In the summer of 2010, CAR President François Bozizé ordered the Ugandan army to withdraw from the Sam Ouandja area in the northeast amid concerns that the UPDF was looting resources there. According to our latest field research in CAR, the Ugandan army is still unable to deploy there and has been ordered by local authorities to leave Zemio, a key town in south-eastern CAR where the LRA has been active. The CAR army has only approximately 100 troops deployed in LRA-affected areas.



Sudan: Reports recently surfaced that LRA groups, led personally by Joseph Kony, are in or near the Darfur region of Sudan, and might be receiving support again from the Sudanese government. If this is or becomes the case, the Ugandan army will most likely be unable to pursue the LRA in this region, due to the tense relationship between Khartoum and Kampala.

The Solution

Without enhanced collaboration between national governments in the region, ending the LRA will be nearly impossible and the U.S. military advisors could fail in achieving their objectives. Senior Obama administration officials should urgently:

1. Broker agreements between Uganda and Congo, CAR, Sudan, and South Sudan, respectively, to secure full access for the Ugandan army to all areas where the LRA currently is or could move to, in collaboration with the African Union, or A.U., and the United Nations, or U.N.;
2. Ensure accountability for any natural resource exploitation and human rights violations committed by the Ugandan forces; and
3. Urge the U.N. and A.U. to convene a side meeting at the U.N. General Assembly in September with the heads of state of the four LRA-affected countries and donor and partner nations to resolve the access problem and address other obstacles that hamstringing current efforts to end the LRA.