

## Section II - Political Context

### Legacy of two successive failures

In late December 2008, the Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF) launched Operation Lightning Thunder against the LRA in Haut Uélé, in the Congolese Orientale Province, marking the de facto end of any lingering hope of success for the Juba Talks. These had begun with much optimism in 2006.<sup>10</sup> During OLT, US-backed aerial strikes missed their main target, Joseph Kony, and the poorly coordinated deployment of 1,200 Ugandan and 3,500 Congolese ground forces allowed for massive retribution against civilians by the LRA. Hoping to diffuse the pressure of the UPDF military offensive, the rebels dispersed into small mobile groups over large areas in the DRC, in neighboring Sudan, and the CAR.<sup>11</sup>

The double failure of the Juba Process and the military strike had a profound impact on the approaches adopted by regional and international stakeholders to deal with the LRA. Of great consequence was the loss of influence of the main civilian figures who had participated in the Juba process and who had worked under the premise that the LRA problem was closely linked to the political situation in Northern Uganda. The influence of these individuals was quickly supplanted by another group of specialists – who championed a more militarized, DDRRR<sup>12</sup>-focused approach. According to these specialists, the Juba Peace talks had revealed Kony's unequivocal rejection of a peaceful settlement, and thus the necessity for a strategic paradigm centered on neutralizing Kony and his top lieutenants while reducing the LRA's strength through military attrition and defections.<sup>13</sup>

The authorization to deploy UPDF forces into three LRA-affected countries demonstrated the regional reach of the LRA, while paradoxically marking the declining threat of Kony's group in Uganda. Negotiated at the highest level, the conditions set for this authorization were never explicitly revealed. Three months after the launch of OLT in Congo, the Ugandan and Congolese Ministers of Defense announced a transfer of responsibility to the FARDC and attended a withdrawing ceremony of UPDF troops in the town of Dungu on 15 March 2009.<sup>14</sup> In reality, Ugandan forces remained in the region to continue chasing the commanders of the LRA. Renewed horrendous mass crimes triggered a lasting deterioration of humanitarian conditions in the region. This negative development helped human rights

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<sup>10</sup> For a critical analysis of the Juba process, see in particular "Part Three: Peace and Justice", in Tim Allen and Koen Vlassenroot (eds.), *The Lord's Resistance Army – Myth and Reality* (Zed Books, London, New York, 2010), pp. 187-278, and "Part One: The Juba Peace Talks", in Pal Wrange and Onyango John Francis (eds.), *The International Criminal Court and the Juba Peace Process or Global Governance and Local Friction*, (forthcoming).

<sup>11</sup> See *Twenty-seventh report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, S/2009/160, 27 March 2009, pts. 19-21. In pt.21: "Reports indicate that more than 700 people have been killed and many hundreds of others, primarily children, have been abducted since the start of the joint operations. As a result of those attacks, 180,000 people have fled their homes and more than 16,000 Congolese have sought refuge in Southern Sudan."

<sup>12</sup> DDRRR – program approaches innovated in the Great Lakes region aimed at disarming and repatriating foreign armed groups to their country of origin.

<sup>13</sup> Interviews for the Diagnostic Study, Europe, United States, Africa, February to March 2011.

<sup>14</sup> "Dungu: le retrait des troupes ougandaises a démarré", Radio Okapi, 16 March 2009.

organizations in Washington to mobilize US policy-makers behind the need for a new comprehensive approach to solve the LRA issue.<sup>15</sup>

Simultaneously, the leadership of the UN peacekeeping mission in DRC (MONUC, now MONUSCO) was undermined by widespread criticisms from the humanitarian community, which complained about the inability of the blue helmets to protect civilians despite assisting FARDC troops in military operations in Orientale Province as well as in the Kivu region.<sup>16</sup> Its authority was further reduced by political tensions with Kinshasa, to the point that in November 2009, Congolese President Kabila called for the first time for the UN peacekeepers to start withdrawing. The UN Security Council resisted this call and negotiated benchmarks for a future drawdown. The issue of closing down the peacekeeping mission had however been raised by the host country and thus such a demand could be reiterated.

Meanwhile, the UN Mission in the CAR and Chad (MINURCAT), although appreciated by local authorities in eastern Chad and Northern CAR, was ordered by N'Djamena to complete the withdrawal of its 1,500 uniformed personnel by end 2010, ahead of presidential elections eventually held in April 2011. In Sudan in 2009 and 2010, the 10,500-strong UN Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS) focused on supporting the referendum on the future status of South Sudan and managing tensions between Khartoum and Juba. As Southern independence is scheduled for early July 2011<sup>17</sup>, tensions have been rising, culminating on 21 May 2011 with the northern army forces moving into Abyei, the capital of the disputed border region.

Following a spike in LRA attrition rates in 2009, military pressure on the LRA dramatically reduced through 2010. In the face of limited intelligence and mobility challenges, the UPDF decreased the pace of their initial aggressive operations. Small groups of LRA combatants learnt how to cross boundaries to benefit from poor coordination between UN missions and national armies. The chase after the top rebel commanders slowed progressively to a stop as tensions between Ugandan military and the other national forces revealed the lack of cohesion of the anti-LRA coalition. In the absence of formal security provided by the regular armed forces in South Sudan, paramount chiefs from the Azande community in Western Equatoria formed groups of militias known as "Arrow Boys."

After some allegedly unsuccessful attempt to secure support from Khartoum in 2009 and 2010,<sup>18</sup> Kony and the LRA have been profiting from this lull in UPDF operations and from the inconsistent international attention to regroup in Orientale Province, DRC.<sup>19</sup> Despite optimistic statements from Kinshasa and from the military spokesperson for MONUSCO that the group has been dramatically

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<sup>15</sup> Human Right Watch was the first organization to reveal the extensive scale of retribution from the LRA after the OLT in "The Christmas Massacres, LRA attacks on Civilians in Northern Congo", Human Right Watch, February 2009. This report, followed quickly by other publications from many non-governmental organizations, called the attention of the US Congress on the negative consequences of the US-backed OLT.

<sup>16</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Eastern DR Congo: Surge in Army Atrocities - UN Peacekeeping Force Knowingly Supports Abusive Military Operations", November 2, 2009

<sup>17</sup> South Sudan celebrated its independence on July 9, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Analysts suspect that two attempts were undertaken, one in October 2009, and a second in September 2010.

<sup>19</sup> This subject will be developed in the next section below.

weakened,<sup>20</sup> the LRA continues to operate in three countries (DRC, CAR and South Sudan), as recently established by the UN Office of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).<sup>21</sup>

## No consensus on the LRA issue

Since the launch of OLT in December 2008, the LRA has operated in “survival mode,” focused on deflecting military pressure while attempting to re-establish support networks in Sudan. While the analysis of LRA history that this study presents below demonstrates that the LRA has endured similar phases in the past and adapted accordingly, this assessment of the LRA’s current operational mode represents one of the very few points of agreement widely shared among the fifty academics and analysts, humanitarians and human rights advocates/activists, UN officials, diplomats, and military officers who have been interviewed for the political section of this study. Indeed, the consultations conducted for this project revealed a striking lack of consensus on the scale, scope, nature and severity of the LRA issue. Broadly, three distinct “schools of thought” emerged from these interviews, each presenting a different narrative of the LRA and suggesting a different approach for addressing the issue.

### The “state-building” school

This school is mostly made of European diplomats and senior officials in the UN and in African governments. According to this school of thought, the UPDF’s offensive campaigns of recent years have been overwhelmingly positive, resulting in the increased attrition of LRA members. Scattered over a large area, the LRA faces difficulties in cohesion, external support and communication. Basically agreeing on an estimated strength of approximately 250 core Ugandan fighters in the LRA, proponents of this school assert that the LRA is now a law-and-order issue that could soon be reduced to irrelevance in a corner of Central Africa that has traditionally suffered from small-scale banditry.

Within the context of this perspective, neither of the regimes in Uganda or Congo perceives Kony as a major threat to their security and political interests. Understood as a law-and-order issue, the challenge posed by the LRA calls for the establishment and strengthening of the authority of the various states in the region. Those who advocate this ‘state-building’ approach contend that international policies developed to address what they perceive as the artificial political significance of the LRA are counterproductive and could potentially provide indirect legitimacy to the LRA’s agenda. Instead, dismantling the LRA is defined as a cross-border responsibility, dependent on regional security cooperation and necessitating increased levels of support for capacity building.

The best course of action, according to this view, is for the international community to support initiatives announced by the AU to maintain the isolation of the LRA, as there is a pragmatic recognition that the UN’s role cannot be extended beyond stepping up DDRRR activities to encourage defections and humanitarian assistance. While continuing to pay close attention to the risk of renewed external support to the rebels, the “state-building” school urges other international partners to develop a coherent approach for improving local governance, promote regional ownership and treat the politically divisive issue of the International Criminal Court (ICC) involvement with caution.

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<sup>20</sup> See “*La LRA perd ses capacités opérationnelles selon Mamadou Gaye*”, Radio Okapi, 30 March 2011.

<sup>21</sup> OCHA demonstrated that the first quarter of 2011 had witnessed a significant increase in the number of LRA incidents. In three months 107 attacks had been reported in the three countries. See LRA Regional Update: DRC, CAR and south Sudan – January – March 2011, OCHA, April 7, 2011

### **The “military solution” school**

Proponents of this school are mostly found among Ugandan officials as well as in the USA and in NGOs focused on human rights. Advocates of a “military solution” argue that Kony was given a chance to settle the LRA issue peacefully but failed to take the Juba process to its positive conclusion. According to this view, Kony’s current agenda is (if it ever was) no longer politically motivated, but based instead on the pathological rewards provided by being a warlord. The horrendous nature of the crimes committed by the LRA justifies the use of force to remove Kony and his top lieutenants from the battlefield. Deprived of its original leaders, the “military solution” school argues that the threat posed by the LRA would be significantly reduced.

The challenge with this approach, however, lies in combining the right military resources and strategy, while at the same time ensuring the protection of civilians from likely retaliation by the remaining fighters. Methodical cordon-and-search operations over the LRA-affected area would require a number of effective troops that the UPDF, FARDC, FACA, and Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) combined still cannot realistically commit.

Two different approaches are being promoted. The first approach consists of international partners providing extra support for selected units of military forces already deployed in the region. With consistent regional cooperation and joint planning, the supported units should be able, it is posited, to localize and neutralize the top leadership of the LRA. The second proposal, labeled the “apprehension strategy,” consists of using highly capable foreign military assets, including airmobile military special forces and field-deployed intelligence capabilities, to supplement the existing security presence in narrowly targeted operations. The argument motivating this strategy is that 25 years of unsuccessful efforts by the UPDF to chase Kony demonstrate the need for direct foreign involvement. The ICC arrest warrants against Kony and two other LRA figures provide a valid legal framework for international intervention. In both of these approaches, a combination of better cross-border coordination and more assertive actions from UN peacekeepers is assumed to provide protection of the population during military operations.

### **The “re-engagement” school**

This school is comprised mostly of academics and diplomats with a strong background in Uganda, and program officers in humanitarian NGOs. Part of them promotes attempting to negotiate with Kony while another part promotes a more modest approach in encouraging community leaders to open dialogue with local LRA commanders. According to the “re-engagement” school, past military actions against the LRA – designed to be decisive – have systematically triggered further violence against local populations and have failed to achieve their objectives. Former abductees returning to their communities have faced ostracism. The strategy of engagement implemented in the Juba process succeeded in providing a large amount of information about the LRA, exposed sympathizers from the diaspora, and temporarily reduced the level of insecurity.<sup>22</sup> Juba failed largely because the international parties partaking in the talks had conflicting approaches and were unable to express a coherent message. Moreover, in their view, the antagonistic stance of President Museveni and the lack of clarity regarding the scope of the ICC process further undermined the negotiations. Many of the former international mediators in Juba, including UN officials, have lost credibility as facilitators of a peaceful settlement.

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<sup>22</sup> There are opposite views regarding improvement in the LRA-affected areas during the Juba talks. Some observers assess positively the impact of the negotiation rounds on immediate security while others analyze that Kony used this period of lesser military pressure to regain strength and reorganize.

Over the last few years, the link between the LRA and Northern Uganda has admittedly been further weakened. Still, proponents of the “re-engagement” school emphasize the historical dimension of the group, arguing that the connection between the Acholi and the LRA could be stronger than is now widely assumed. As the interests of Kony, the LRA commanders, mid-level officers and the ranks are likely to differ, members of this school argue that the focus of new initiatives should not be limited to only a handful of LRA members. They stress the importance of understanding the group’s cohesion and the exact structure of the leadership.

This school criticizes what it perceives as the “quick fix” approach adopted by international partners, favoring instead an increased role for local intermediaries, including religious leaders, who they argue should be encouraged to re-engage LRA members on behalf of communities.<sup>23</sup> Over the long-term, progress is not linear. Positive opportunities would arise from consistent efforts at the ground level.

### Lost momentum at the regional and international levels

OCHA counts 350,000 LRA-induced IDPs across the region and reports that the first quarter of 2011 has witnessed a significant increase in the number of LRA incidents, which will likely lead to even greater displacement.<sup>24</sup> However, governments in Kinshasa, Kampala, Bangui and Juba are facing other political and security challenges. The LRA poses no direct threat against the regimes in place and it has no known link with local secessionist movements. Since it is not a priority, other than in the context of protection of civilians, national authorities invest only few resources in dismantling the LRA. With such a humanitarian crisis impossible to ignore, the UN, the AU and the US are still looking to formulate their own new coherent strategies.

UN troops in the three LRA-affected countries have been unable to protect the population. With MONUSCO in the lead, the different peacekeeping missions in the region are slowly adopting new DDRRR plans. The successful implementation of these plans is, however, circumscribed by limited resources and personnel, and higher priorities for other mandated tasks. The anti-LRA strategy developed by the US Administration remains modest in terms of the detail it provides, the political support it has garnered within the Administration and the funding it has received.<sup>25</sup> The AU authorized a symbolically important meeting dedicated to the LRA in October 2010, but real consensus on how to deal with the situation has yet to emerge in the capitals of LRA-affected countries. Europe has been attentive, but waiting for the US and/or the AU to show leadership. In such circumstances, local civilian authorities and community leaders struggle to coordinate field initiatives and to define their role in the current military-led approach. Local, regional and international responses to the threat of the LRA remain fragmented and inadequate.

### Regional mobilization without adequate resources

At present, UPDF units are authorized to operate in the three countries where the LRA is present.<sup>26</sup> These units receive a limited amount of technical and intelligence assistance from the United States. In

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<sup>23</sup> For a deeper understanding of this school of thought, see in particular Mareike Schomerus and Kennedy Tumutegyeize, “After Operation Lightning Thunder: Protecting Communities and Building Peace”, Conciliation Resources, April 2009.

<sup>24</sup> OCHA registered 348,490 IDPs in the three LRA affected countries in April 2011 as a direct consequence of LRA activities. LRA Regional Update, OCHA, op. cit.

<sup>25</sup> *Strategy to Support the Disarmament of the Lord’s Resistance Army*, Government of the United States of America, Washington D.C., 24 November 2010.

<sup>26</sup> This may be about to change. Reports of a withdrawal from DRC had begun to circulate at the time of writing.

theory, the UPDF pursue the rebels while other national troops are tasked with the responsibility of protecting civilians, with the support of UN peacekeepers deployed within the region. Statements made by the Ugandan authorities, and directed at foreign audiences, present the LRA not only as a regional problem but also as an international one. However, rather than prompting a mobilization of more resources to address the issue, such statements seem to dilute responsibilities. Inside Uganda, the LRA question has slipped from the list of national priorities. Specialists interviewed for this study remarked that the LRA was seldom mentioned during the last presidential campaign. Incumbent Ugandan authorities addressed the struggle in Northern Uganda as a settled issue and referred to the LRA as a defeated group presenting no direct threat to the country's population. Between 2009 and 2011, the number of UPDF dedicated to finding Kony and his top lieutenants was reduced by two-thirds, as resources were directed to other priority issues in Karamoja and Somalia.<sup>27</sup>

In the DRC, the Minister of Defense has repeatedly and publicly minimized the significance of the LRA.<sup>28</sup> Until very recently, Kinshasa has resisted calls to deploy its best troops to Orientale Province, including battalions that have been trained by foreign partners.<sup>29</sup> With presidential elections scheduled for late 2011, the DRC could face increasing political tensions and greater insecurity in other corners of its territory. In contrast to Kinshasa's disinterest in the LRA and unwillingness to deploy resources, the government of CAR has denounced the LRA presence on its soil. It has called for greater international military assistance so that its own forces can substitute for the UPDF and carry out operations within the country. Still, the FACA have an effective front-line strength of only 1,500-2,000 soldiers, the rest of the troops being made of personnel with poor military skills. The decision taken by Bangui in 2007 to encourage local armed groups to provide security against the LRA in North eastern CAR has had limited impact on the LRA but has been largely detrimental to efforts aimed at enforcing law and order in this area.<sup>30</sup>

Observers also express doubt as to whether South Sudan can mobilize sufficient capacities to contain the LRA in Western Equatoria, although "Arrow Boys" from the Azande community have organized themselves towards this end. In October 2010, on the sidelines of an AU summit in Bangui, a set of political and military decisions was proposed to enhance regional cooperation against the LRA.<sup>31</sup> A team

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<sup>27</sup> Ledio Cakaj, "Too Far from Home: Demobilizing the Lord Resistance Army", The Enough Project, February 2011. UPDF troops were also heavily deployed during the Ugandan elections and, more recently, during "walk-to-work" protests of high food and fuel prices (discussed further below).

<sup>28</sup> E.g., "Menaces de la LRA à Dungen: controverse entre gouvernement et société civile locale", Radio Okapi, 19 March 2011.

<sup>29</sup> In April 2011, Congolese authorities granted authorization to deploy a light infantry battalion trained by the US from Kisangani to the LRA's area of operations. The US, Belgium, UK and China all provided bilateral training to individual battalions in the year 2010. Angola and South Africa were also involved in military assistance of Congolese troops in the past, but their respective bilateral relationship with Kinshasa has turned sour over the last few years.

<sup>30</sup> In particular, the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (UFDR), a group led by Zacharia Damane and mainly made of ex-combatants from Northern Uganda, has received governmental support since April 2007 to counter the LRA in North eastern CAR. It has provided justification for the group to refuse joining DDR programs and has exacerbated disputes along ethnic lines in its area of operation. Also see HRW, "CAR/DR Congo: LRA Conducts Massive Abduction Campaign: New Regional Strategy Needed to Protect Civilians and Rescue Children", 11 August 2010.

<sup>31</sup> See "Communiqué de Presse sur la Réunion Régionale Ministérielle sur la LRA tenue à Bangui, en RCA les 13 et 14 Octobre 2010", African Union, 14 October 2010. During a meeting of the International Working Groups (IWG) on Foreign armed groups in Brussels on 13 January 2011, the AU reported on the outcomes of its LRA meeting. They included organizing a Joint Brigade, setting a Joint Operation Cell and designating a AU Special Envoy.

of technical experts from AU member-states was mandated to look into the conditions for the implementation of these decisions. The team presented its first set of findings at the next AU meeting in early June 2011. While this initiative is currently underway and might deliver positive results, diplomats interviewed for this study caution that the AU's resources are already stretched with other priority issues, including Somalia, Darfur and South Sudan.

Against this backdrop, interviewees expected future discussions to focus on reorienting US military assistance currently provided to the UPDF towards a new AU initiative. In addition, measures aimed at improving the coordination of existing national forces are likely to be announced, instead of measures to address the key requirement of enlarging the spectrum of strategic capabilities.

Without the UPDF's military pressure, the LRA will likely reorganize and consolidate its command and control apparatus. With no new major resources available, international partners would likely welcome a strong statement authorizing the UPDF to continue operating across borders.

It remains to be seen how the AU intends to engage the regime in Khartoum on this issue. The regional organization could secure a long-term commitment from the authorities of Northern Sudan to declare its non-allegiance with the LRA. Following up on the diplomatic dialogue that led to the peaceful referendum in South Sudan, creative ways could be explored for Khartoum to provide further assistance in addressing the LRA threat. In case the Sudan peace process falters, the LRA is likely to re-emerge as a further destabilizing element.

### **UN efforts to do “more of the same, but better”**

Following the publication of the Human Rights Watch report on the 2009 Christmas massacre,<sup>32</sup> several international NGOs have carried out LRA-specific advocacy campaigns in New York. Not all NGOs advocate for the same set of policy decisions. Some human rights NGOs promote increasing foreign involvement in a military solution while other humanitarian NGOs focus on exploring new ways of protecting civilians.<sup>33</sup> They agree, however, that the UN is insufficiently involved on the issue. The UN Security Council has resisted their joint calls to put the LRA on its agenda and advocacy groups have expressed disappointment over the absence of US leadership in New York. Instead, several members of the Council have argued that the AU is the proper forum for multilateral decision-making related to the LRA.

The Security Council's disengagement on this issue came at the same time as it increasingly insisted on the protection of civilians in mandates authorized for the various UN peacekeeping missions deployed in the Central Africa region. UN officials, however, have argued that peacekeeping missions such as MONUSCO, UNMIS and MICOPAX<sup>34</sup> do not have sufficient capabilities to carry out this task effectively at a time when host governments are regularly calling for these missions to withdraw. Given these resource constraints, the focus is instead on improving peacekeeping performance at “constant means.” In theory, this would be achieved through increased coordination among missions, UN humanitarian,

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<sup>32</sup> Op Cit, HRW, 16 February 2009.

<sup>33</sup>For instance, through their respective office in New York, HRW is strongly promoting the “apprehension strategy” while Oxfam focuses its lobbying effort at the UN on implementing best practices related to the protection of civilian norms (PoC).

<sup>34</sup> MICOPAX is the Peace Consolidation Force of the Economic Community of Central Africa (CEEAC). It comprises 500 military peacekeepers. The priority in the mandate of the mission was to support the general elections in CAR held in January 2011 and to conduct the DDR of former rebels.

development, civilian protection, and DRRR initiatives supported by foreign donors,<sup>35</sup> and clarifying the line of command at the strategic level.

To date there has been a lack of clarity on who is the UN focal point on the LRA; either UN DPKO or the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) have taken the lead, the latter in favor of political coordination from its office in Libreville. In that context, the UN seems only to be considering a containment strategy coupled with a reinforced political dialogue with the LRA-affected countries. Such an approach does not address the critical concern on the ground that the deployment of UN troops has had little deterrent effect on the LRA.

### **The US strategy and international partners**

In 2009, a group of American and international NGOs created significant momentum in the US Congress behind the issue of the LRA.<sup>36</sup> As requested in the LRA Disarmament and Uganda Recovery Act, the US administration outlined in November 2010 a strategy to support the disarmament of the LRA.<sup>37</sup> Africa specialists who have observed this policy process from Capitol Hill assess that interagency deliberation was hampered by two interrelated problems from the start. First, the absence of a budget line specifically dedicated to the LRA strategy in the legislation limited its scope. Most of the funds in the Peacekeeping Operations appropriation account of the US State Department are allocated for programs in South Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire and Somalia. Second, the initial congressional champions for the LRA issue left office after the last mid-term elections, creating a vacuum and weakening the political support on Capitol Hill.<sup>38</sup>

In the short-term, the US Strategy calls for incremental improvements of the current military approach rather than the adoption of a game-changing approach. In addition to formal political support for the AU, humanitarian assistance, and some funds for mobile phone and radio towers in Northern DRC, the US Strategy focuses in practice on removing the senior leadership of the LRA by stepping up assistance to the UPDF and, potentially, to the FARDC. The intent is to integrate the protection of local populations and the pursuit of Kony into a single operational mechanism designed by the US military.

Despite the uncertainty of the past months created by the debate over the US budget for the fiscal year 2011, the US administration has been able to dedicate roughly the same amount of money for support to the UPDF as it did in 2009 and 2010.<sup>39</sup> The Africa Command of the US military (AFRICOM) was planning to deploy US advisors with African battalions during the summer of 2011 in order to be able to report progress for a review in Congress in November 2011<sup>40</sup>. The US Department of Defense has not yet

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<sup>35</sup> Current projects include building mobile phone and radio towers in Northern DRC to set an alert network for civilian protection.

<sup>36</sup> Oxfam, HRW, The Enough Project, Invisible Children and Resolve were particularly active in lobbying US Congressmen and Administration officials.

<sup>37</sup> *Strategy to Support the Disarmament of the LRA*, Government of the United-States of America, op. cit.

<sup>38</sup> Senators Russ Feingold (D-WI) and Sam Brownback (R-KS), who introduced the legislation on the LRA in May 2009, were either defeated in the last mid-term elections in the USA (Feingold), or retired (Brownback).

<sup>39</sup> This financial effort is hardly sustainable without a dedicated budget. NGOs active on Capitol Hill in Washington assessed that the US administration committed \$14 million to support the UPDF in LRA operations for 2011, including \$12 million transferred from the Peacekeeping Operations funds initially allocated for SSR programs in Sudan.

<sup>40</sup> On October 14, 2011, the US announced it was sending 100 military advisors to Uganda to support the regional forces pursuing the rebel group. See the State Department release : <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/10/175523.htm>



authorized the deployment. Even if granted, this initiative remains entirely contingent on the continuing willingness of the Ugandan and Congolese authorities to cooperate. Jealousy and suspicion regarding UPDF activities have led the three neighboring countries currently affected by the LRA to question the long-term presence of the Ugandan troops on their territories. While many analysts fear that this UPDF-centric strategy is not sustainable, the different government agencies involved agreed during the summer of 2010 that it was the only realistic course of action. Still, the US administration has singled out the LRA issue as an important one. It specifically mentioned the armed group for the first time in its FY2012 budget request.<sup>41</sup> Advocacy organizations are now pushing to ensure that this specific mention exists in the budget that the Congress is due to pass in the last months of 2011. More importantly for the long-term scope of US actions, this pressure aims at ensuring that funds are directly tagged for the implementation of the strategy – tentatively at a level close to \$50 million.

US officials approached their European counterparts to assist in implementing the strategy in July 2010. In particular, the Americans envisaged an important role for France in CAR. France contributes largely to the MICOPAX budget while her troops are used to operating in francophone Africa, and support the SSR program of the FACA. Before the crisis in Libya, France was preparing the drawdown of *Operation Epervier* in Chad. A redeployment of the 950 French military from the Army and the Air Force in Chad could have created opportunities for temporary reinforcement of the 240 French troops in CAR.

French officials had expected that the US and the EU would discuss the principle of a multilateral – not bilateral – initiative in the fall 2010. From interviews conducted in Washington, Paris and Kampala, it seems that no concrete steps have been made to establish coordination between the US and French military on the issue of the LRA. Independent observers in Paris report that France would have no appetite for opening a new front – even though limited in size and (supposedly) duration – since it already plays a leading role in operations in Libya and Cote d’Ivoire, and to a lesser extent in Afghanistan and in Lebanon.

Diplomats from other European countries have not signaled a willingness to go beyond supporting future AU initiatives, MONUSCO DRRR projects, and expanding radio or cell phone coverage.

### **Local community leaders committed to keeping the door open for dialogue with the LRA**

Since the end of 2008, the prominent public figures who led the negotiations with Kony have disengaged from the issue of the LRA. Several European activists and academics who witnessed the Juba process indicate that—if a possibility would arise—resorting to less-known individuals to conduct discreet mediations would be more effective in re-establishing contact with Kony than using high-profile personalities.<sup>42</sup> The same sources report that the priority given to forced disarmament since OLT also temporarily marginalized local community leaders involved in the Juba talks. Indeed, a coalition of local leaders from the four LRA-affected countries still intends to play a larger role.

Almost three years into the military operations, community leaders denounce the lack of commitment from their respective governments, militaries and from the international community to make the

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<sup>41</sup> The US State Department released a budget request of \$292 million for the Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) appropriation account for FY2012 that include support to the SPLA and the FARDC. One of the smaller highlights titled “Africa Conflict Stabilization and Border Security” has a proposed funding level of \$7.6 million. “Countering the Lord’s Resistance Army in Central and East Africa” is listed as one of several priorities under this highlight.

<sup>42</sup> Interviews for the Diagnostic Study, Paris, London, The Hague, Antwerp and Stockholm, February 2011.

protection of the population a priority.<sup>43</sup> Some religious authorities and traditional chiefs are skeptical of the prospects of eventually neutralizing the LRA through military means, and have begun looking into ways to reengage the LRA at an individual level. The core message for rebel fighters and abductees is that it is still possible to return to their community of origin. Incentives and sensitization are directed to LRA members as well as to the receiving communities.

Reflecting demands articulated by these community leaders, a coalition of NGOs, EurAc, has reintroduced the concept of dialogue with the LRA to European audiences. Since October 2009, IKV/Pax Christi coordinates a regional network involving religious authorities from all the LRA-affected countries. Several national initiatives are also underway: one with the Justice and Peace Commission in Yambio supported by Cordaid, one with religious leaders in Dungu supported by IKV/Pax Christi, and one with the Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative (ARLPI) in Northern Uganda supported by Conciliation Resources. In one case, collaboration was developed with MONUSCO DDRR to refine the content of radio broadcasts aimed at facilitating voluntary surrenders. Most local leaders remain reluctant to broaden such collaboration, as they fear being drawn into UN politics.

## **No credible collective response to the threat of the LRA has yet been articulated**

In the first quarter of 2011, OCHA confirmed the killing of 68 civilians and the abductions of 178 others by the LRA. Attacks have caused 33,300 new IDPs in the DRC, 2,000 in CAR and 2,800 in South Sudan.<sup>44</sup> During the same period MONUSCO DDRR demobilized and repatriated to Uganda only four LRA ex-combatants.<sup>45</sup>

The regrouping of the LRA in Orientale Province very near the South Sudan border is likely to generate new crises, including in South Sudan where local tensions involving Mbororo and Azande groups organized into civilian defense forces could trigger ethnic clashes.

Disconnected from a major new initiative, the extension of DDRR activities in Orientale Province, the deployment of MONUSCO units in Bas Uélé—where the UN mission is currently not present—and new measures such as amnesty legislation for DRC similar to the one existing in Uganda, funding of new justice and reconciliation programs supported by local NGOs, or revalorization of reintegration packages would likely encourage slightly more demobilization of LRA combatants but are unlikely to be enough to reverse the negative trends of the last months.

Stronger military action might change the current dynamic, but any positive impacts will be durable only if protection of civilians, DDRR and conditions for a peaceful return of former combatants are integrated into the planning process. A military strategy focusing on neutralizing Kony should account for the possibility that the LRA can replace its leadership or become a coalition of semi-autonomous groups.<sup>46</sup> A new strike, whether successful or not, will trigger a wave of retribution against the population that the current defensive forces on the ground cannot prevent. The likelihood of success for any military approach still remains uncertain even with the deployment of high-end military capabilities

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<sup>43</sup> In a letter read in all the churches of the territory of Dungu on 20 March 2011, the Bishop of Dungu criticized the government for minimizing the threat posed by the LRA. See "L'évêque de Dungu appelle le gouvernement à agir contre la LRA", Radio Okapi, March 21, 2011.

<sup>44</sup> LRA Regional Update, OCHA, op. cit.

<sup>45</sup> MONUSCO DDRR statistics, updated on 7 April 2011.

<sup>46</sup> See International Crisis Group, "A Regional Strategy beyond Killing Kony", Africa Report N°157, 28 April 2010.

that only a limited number of developed countries possess. No international stakeholder is yet ready to supply key-enabling military assets.

Western diplomats appear to be reluctant to reconsider a return to establishing any kind of dialogue with the LRA. The US strategy released in November 2010 does not mention initiating new talks with the LRA as an option. Foreign countries are not ready to publicly support reengagement initiatives that have not been tacitly approved by Kampala. They fear that it would be perceived as interfering with the political sovereignty of Uganda and Congo at a time when the goodwill of their respective Heads of State is required both for an upcoming general election in the DRC and the importance of Uganda in Somalia. For many policy-makers, an agreement is unlikely to be reached since OLT made Kony even less likely than before to trust a negotiation process. They assess that he is a pragmatic paranoid who would only use new negotiations to reaffirm his control and authority over his followers.

With very few exceptions, all of the 50-plus specialists interviewed for the political section of the diagnostic study expressed great doubts over whether current international responses to the LRA threat would in fact end the issue once and for all. All the individuals consulted expressed deep frustration over the lack of credible options to deal with the LRA and the absence of political momentum in the region to develop such options. Many among them pointed to the difficult challenge for the international community to re-open a high-level dialogue on the LRA issue, including the strong objections of Presidents Museveni and Kabila. The fact that neither the US nor the EU has appointed new Special Envoys to the Great Lakes Region is of great concern for many of the interviewees who believe that a regional approach is essential.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> In the second half of 2010, Howard Wolpe stepped down as American special adviser to the Great Lakes region, and former European Union special envoy to the Great Lakes region, Roland Van der Geer, took a new post as EU head of delegation to South Africa.