

LRA could better coordinate attacks. Though Kony and his senior commanders may not choose to talk on phones themselves they are certainly capable of having others speak for them to avoid monitoring. This is not to suggest that development is not an essential part of the long term solution to security in the LRA affected region but only to argue that development must be part of a larger process that takes into account the ways in which various achievements, such as the establishment of better cell phone networks, may be used by the LRA.

Finally, few discussions of alternatives take adequate account of the factor of time. As argued above, there is a strong possibility that time will play to the advantage of the LRA as it will use it to recruit and train enough new troops to pose a more serious threat to the region. The length of time needed for this is incalculable but it remains the case that there is a need for urgency and consequently for realistic consideration of the amount of time necessary to implement any alternative strategy.

Conclusions

This study has attempted to draw a picture situating the LRA within a particular political, historical and military context. Though the analytical description that results is far from complete at this stage, a number of conclusions emerge.

One of the key problems affecting all possible solutions to the LRA phenomenon is the collective inability to agree on the scale, scope and relative importance of the problem. Politicians and human rights and humanitarian actors have different interests and responsibilities and do not necessarily agree on either evidence or analysis concerning the LRA. Soldiers generally see military factors clearly but in this case seem to have fallen in line with the positions of their various governments to the extent that the military dimensions of the problem are nowhere clearly articulated or described. As a consequence, raw intelligence is scarce, analysis is even scarcer and agreement on the relative significance of factors is virtually nonexistent.

To add further to the confusion, intelligence gathered over the years by the UPDF has not been formalized in documents that might be shared with other armies for whom the LRA are a new problem. Finally, those who believe a negotiated solution is still worth pursuing will have to overcome the strong conviction of others that such a solution is impossible because of Kony's total disinterest or unreliability on this issue.

For reasons which are not yet clear, most discussions about military options begin with an unexpressed assumption that only those forces now in place can be included in any plan. While this may reflect political realities of the moment, it obscures the actual scale of the military problem posed by the LRA when considered from a purely technical perspective. This approach is unlikely to generate a favorable result for the simple reason that the resources needed to achieve it are insufficient and ineffective, and whose inadequacy has yet be considered in relation to actual needs.

In any case, it is clear from even a cursory analysis offered here, that the proposed solutions to the LRA problem have not been grounded on a professional military technical assessment (what used to be

known as Command Estimate), and that such solutions as have been proposed fall far short of what is needed to deal with the LRA threat to civilians.

It is, however, quite clear that a passive or purely defensive interpretation of the requirements of civilian protection will simply not work. The motivating idea behind the strategy in use today is that the combined forces of the three host countries plus the two UNDPKO missions can provide protection bubbles while the UPDF conducts search-and-destroy operations among them. However, the UPDF has only been partially successful and is not tied into the protection activities of other armies. Each UPDF operation, even if it creates LRA losses, provokes new LRA attacks. As long as the ensuing attacks are conducted against civilians who are not within various protective bubbles, which are very small indeed, then the LRA can simply walk away with loot and new captives, demonstrating in the process that the armies arrayed against it are powerless to protect civilians. Military presence is not, in itself, sufficient. The troops present have to be effective and this entails a much higher level of active engagement than is currently visible. This is partly a question of numbers of troops available – but it is also a question of their employment.

When considering the various political positions taken by state leaders in the region and the political factors analyzed in the first section of this report, it is clear that there will be little real protection provided by the UPDF, FARDC, FACA or SPLA – no matter what the needs are on the ground. In fairness, this is not just a matter of will but also an issue of capacity, and whether the armies in question have the requisite expertise or logistical capacity needed. If there truly is a “responsibility to protect” civilians then there truly is a need to identify to whom it applies. If the solution were simply a matter of political will then it might be possible to find a diplomatic compromise to generate the necessary agreement to act.

The current state of humanitarian and human rights engagement with the LRA problem has generated considerable political attention and some very useful information. However, there is as yet no system for tracking abductees or for conducting systematic investigations of incidents that might help restrain some of the more misleading rhetoric coming out of the region. These would appear to be relatively easy problems to solve. At the very least, it would seem obvious that a system to track abductions and returns, by name, is needed.¹⁴⁸ Secondly, a reliable system to investigate and report LRA incidents is also needed.¹⁴⁹

Finally, in the highly politicized operational environment that constitutes the zone of LRA operations today, it is clear that the civilian population of the region will continue to bear the burden of host government incapacity unless some other credible and substantial protection presence can be deployed. At present, the best hope for a timely and reliable protection presence throughout the LRA-affected zone is through the agency of UNDPKO. But this is unlikely to happen unless the UN Security Council takes more interest than it has so far shown, and unless Member States provide the military and civilian resources needed to generate a protection system that actually works.

¹⁴⁸ Such a system was developed and maintained in Uganda by UNICEF in 2000, but appears to have lapsed.

¹⁴⁹ MONUSCO has already deployed such a system in DRC but nothing yet exists for CAR or South Sudan.