

The Lord's Resistance Army: End Game? International Crisis Group 17 November 2011
Insufficient political will has thwarted regional efforts to stop the murderous Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) but vigorous diplomacy led by the African Union (AU), an immediate military push and complementary civilian initiatives could end the misery of thousands.

The Lord's Resistance Army: End Game

, the latest report from the International Crisis Group, explains why Uganda's half-hearted three-year offensive has failed to eliminate Joseph Kony's guerrilla band and why there is now a new window of opportunity. Since peace talks with the erstwhile northern Ugandan insurgency collapsed and a first assault on Kony's camps was botched in late 2008, the Ugandan army has been trying to catch scattered groups of fighters along the borders of DR Congo (DRC), the Central African Republic (CAR) and South Sudan. In that period, the LRA, now only a small but deadly criminal and terror band, has killed some 2,400 civilians, abducted some 3,400 and caused 440,000 to flee homes.

"The reasons for the military failure are at root political; Ugandan President Museveni scaled down the anti-LRA mission to pursue other ventures that would win him greater political capital at home and abroad", says Ned Dalby, Crisis Group's Central Africa Analyst. "Since the LRA no longer poses a threat to northern Uganda, few opposition politicians or community leaders there demand Museveni finish it off".

Uganda's efforts to pursue combatants in DRC have been dogged by the host army's refusal to cooperate and grant access to LRA-affected areas. Uganda invaded DRC in the late 1990s, plundered its natural resources and earned President Joseph Kabila's lasting mistrust. CAR President François Bozizé, equally suspicious, has insisted the Ugandans leave diamond mining areas in his country.

At the request of some members, the AU stepped forward and said it would authorise a counter-LRA mission. It plans to appoint a special envoy to smooth relations between Kinshasa and Kampala and create new military structures to improve coordination between the armies. However, planning has foundered due to political constraints and the African body's limited capacity.

The Ugandan army, with its record of abuse and failure to protect civilians is an imperfect vehicle, distrusted in the area. Kampala's commitment now that the LRA no longer directly endangers its interests is reason for scepticism it has the will to see the job through. But a military operation combined with civilian efforts to entice surrenders remains the most feasible solution, and the Ugandans are the only troops at hand for this. The U.S. is strengthening its political and military engagement, including by sending several score advisers to help them in the field on a short-term basis. Kony is believed to be in the CAR. Before he crosses back into DRC and while U.S. support is strong, the Ugandan army should make an urgent military push,

prioritising civilian protection, humanitarian access, better coordination and strict accountability.

To ensure dividends, the AU must live up to its responsibilities as guarantor of continental security and oversee a multi-dimensional regional initiative, continuing after Kony's death or capture. It should appoint quickly a special envoy to rally the political commitment of Uganda and the three affected states and introduce a common operational and legal framework for the military operation, keyed to civilian protection, thus giving continent-wide legitimacy. Uganda and the U.S. should fold their efforts into the initiative.

"The LRA issue illustrates the desperate need for African and international actors to fulfil their **responsibility to protect**

", says Thierry Vircoulon, Crisis Group's Central Africa Project Director. "Ensuring complementarity between the political and military actions of all stakeholders is key to their success and to ending a 24-year-long history of violence".

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