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Lord's Resistance Army update

On 14 October 2011 US president Barack Obama stated in a letter to Congress: 'I authorized a small number of combat-equipped U.S. forces to deploy to central Africa to provide assistance to regional forces that are working toward the removal of Joseph Kony from the battlefield. I believe that deploying these US Armed Forces furthers US national security interests and foreign policy and will be a significant contribution toward counter-LRA efforts in central Africa.' The deployment of US troops, estimated at about 100, is part of a larger US strategy against the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) made possible by the [Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009](#), which the president signed into law on 24 May 2010.

According to US officials, the US Special Forces—some of which are already deployed—are to be sent to Uganda, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and will advise and assist national armed forces in charge of combating LRA splinter groups. US sources said that they will embed with Ugandan and DRC troops. Deployed in small teams, these 'advisers' will provide real-time information on LRA movements and assess the current Ugandan army offensive.

Obama administration officials have been adamant that US forces will not engage LRA combatants and will not take active part in combat. The advisers will, however, respond in kind if attacked or fired upon by the LRA. Their deployment is expected to last for 'months', according to a US government spokesperson, and their mission is to help regional forces remove Kony from the battlefield, which could mean capturing or killing him.

Reactions to the US troop deployment in the region have varied significantly. In Kampala, Ugandan officials praised US involvement, while the mood in northern Uganda was sombre, with some worrying about retaliatory LRA attacks. DRC president Joseph Kabila claimed he had not been informed in advance of the arrival of US troops, a surprising statement given that some US forces are to work so closely with DRC army units.

Officials from the Central African Republic (CAR) have made several public appeals for help in dealing with the LRA. Addressing the UN General Assembly at the end of September 2011, CAR foreign minister Antoine Gambi lamented the withdrawal of the UN Mission to CAR and Chad, stating that the LRA was causing major security concerns by continuing to attack civilians in the south-east of the country.

To date, CAR has received military aid from France—which has a base in Bangui—in its quest to combat the group. According to a press release from the French Foreign Ministry dated 13 October 2011, France has supported the deployment of 300 CAR soldiers to the east of the country since November 2010 as part of an 'important and permanent' support package to improve the army's capacity to combat the LRA. Material support has included fuel for vehicles and air transport, as well as telecommunications and other equipment.



Reports from former LRA combatants who defected this summer stated that Kony and a substantial number of LRA forces were based in the Zemongo forest in south-eastern CAR. They are believed to have been based there for most of 2011, after a brief foray into the DRC at the end of 2010 and beginning of 2011. By the end of October 2011 unconfirmed UN field reports from the DRC suggested they had been heading towards the DRC again, possibly near northern Haut Uélé province. LRA attacks in October followed the same pattern as in previous months, when most activity was reported in Haut Uélé, particularly around Ngilima, Dungu, and Bangadi.

South Sudanese officials have continued to accuse the Sudanese government of supporting the group. On 1 October 2011 South Sudanese interior minister Alison Magaya said that LRA fighters were being trained by the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) in 'remote villages in South Darfur' in order to destabilize South Sudan. He stated that his government would reinforce security with police entry points alongside the border in disputed areas between Western Bahr al Ghazal and South Darfur to stop possible LRA incursions from Sudan. South Sudanese information minister Barnaba Marial Benjamin said in the same meeting: 'The LRA are being trained by Khartoum to hit two birds with one stone; they come and attack us in Western Equatoria and Western Bhar al Ghazal and then go and cause havoc in DRC.'

Such allegations are not new and remain to be confirmed by independent sources. Ugandan army intelligence service sources claim that a small group of 15 LRA fighters spent 'some time last year hiding in Southern Darfur close to Kafia Kingi', a disputed area adjacent to CAR. Kony's presence in nearby Zemongo is cause for concern that LRA efforts to re-establish relations with SAF in 2009 and 2010 might have borne fruit, but no tangible evidence exists of cooperation between the two sides.

In Uganda, former LRA combatant Thomas Kwoyelo was still in prison at the end of October 2011 despite a decision from the Ugandan Constitutional Court in September 2011 that he is eligible for amnesty. On 11 November 2011, Judge Dan Akiki of the International Criminal Division of the Ugandan High Court ordered the release of Kwoyelo following a decision of the Constitutional Court. Kwoyelo remained behind bars on 17 November 2011, however, with no clear explanation from the Ugandan prison authorities. It is possible that he will be held until he receives an official amnesty certificate from the Ugandan Amnesty Commission.

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