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Lord's Resistance Army Update

On 12 May, the Ugandan army said it had captured Caesar Achellam, a senior commander in the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Achellam, who held the rank of general in the LRA, is believed to have been the group's third-in-command. The army reportedly captured him near the Mbomou River, which forms the border between the Central African Republic (CAR) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Achellam is the most senior LRA commander to be captured or killed since a Ugandan army offensive started in December 2008. Another commander, Brigadier Bok Abudema, was killed by Ugandan troops on 31 December 2009 in Djemah, CAR.

Achellam's capture is likely to lower morale within LRA ranks. As a key liaison with Sudan Armed Forces over the last 15 years, he may also be able to shed light on the LRA's relationship with Khartoum and possible Sudanese government support to LRA leader Joseph Kony. But Achellam's capture does not represent a serious blow to the LRA because the organization has evolved into a dispersed, non-hierarchical structure, particularly since the beginning of the Ugandan offensive, which scattered LRA groups throughout central Africa. Elderly commanders such as Achellam have acted primarily as advisers to younger commanders who, with Kony's approval, have led LRA groups since December 2008.

On 23 April, President Barack Obama reaffirmed his country's commitment to the fight against the LRA, indicating that his administration would continue to deploy military advisers (Special Forces soldiers) to support the Ugandan army. The decision to extend the deployment came after the National Security Council produced a progress report on the first 150 days of the advisers' activities.

There are at least 100 US military advisers deployed throughout east and central Africa. Only 30 soldiers are based in CAR, where a large LRA group, that may include Kony, is based. US advisers are in Obo and Djemah in southeastern CAR, alongside close to 800 Ugandan soldiers. Other US forces are based in Entebbe, Uganda and Nzara in South Sudan, where the Ugandan army headquarters for LRA operations is based. Officially, there are no Ugandan troops chasing LRA fighters in the DRC because Congolese authorities prohibit their presence.

It is unclear what the US troops are really adding to the campaign. The advisers are not allowed to engage LRA groups nor are they supposed to go on patrols. They collect and analyze intelligence, which they then pass on to the Ugandan soldiers. Most of the intelligence is gathered through local sources and satellite imagery. Ugandan officers privately say the US troops are not providing anything the Ugandans cannot get themselves. They would prefer the United States to provide military hardware such as helicopters and other rapid response vehicles.

The involvement of US troops has not ended LRA attacks in CAR or DRC. While reports from the field remain unconfirmed, between 13 and 18 local gold miners may have been killed by LRA fighters around 20 March near the Cawa Safari Park at the intersection of the Chinko and Vovodo Rivers in Mbomou district. The CAR-born Swedish safari park owner and a British pilot working in the park claim to have

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discovered the remains of the miners, who were all killed with machetes, and reported them to the local police. But the park owner and pilot were arrested and now face charges of murder.

Attacks in DRC have also continued, likely carried out by an LRA group of about 50 fighters who operate in and around Ngilima, Bangadi, and Dungu. There were 13 reported LRA attacks in DRC between 20 April and 15 May. At least six people were abducted and one civilian killed. A spokesperson for the UN mission in DRC, Lieutenant-Colonel Felix Prosper Basse, said on 24 April that the UN is aware of the activities of LRA combatants in DRC, directly contradicting Congolese authorities, who say the LRA is no longer present in the country. Basse said a UN and African Union (AU) delegation was in Kinshasa to discuss the violence with Congolese authorities.

The UN spokesperson was referring to a series of meetings between Congolese authorities, the AU Special Envoy on the LRA Francisco Madeira, and the UN official in charge of the LRA dossier, Abou Moussa. On 24 April, Madeira and Moussa met Chadian President Idriss Déby in the capital N'djaména to warn him of the possibility of an LRA move from CAR to Chad.

Madeira's diplomatic tour was followed by a meeting of the security chiefs of CAR, DRC, Uganda, and South Sudan in Addis Ababa on May 8. The meeting was the latest in a series of discussions over the nature and mandate of an expected AU mission to LRA areas. Despite many months of talks over a possible deployment of troops from all four countries under AU auspices, little has been achieved on the ground. The force is supposed to number 5,000 and the commander, Ugandan Colonel Dick Prit Olum, has already been dispatched to Yambio, in South Sudan's Western Equatoria. No other troops have been deployed, however, and Prit Olum borrows office space from the local detachment of the UN mission to South Sudan.

There were no reported LRA attacks in South Sudan between 20 April and 15 May but the rebels continue to be a hot topic because South Sudanese officials say the Sudanese government supports the LRA militarily. On 6 May, South Sudan's military spokesman, Colonel Philip Aguer, again said Khartoum was supporting various militias, particularly the LRA, to attack South Sudanese soldiers on the North-South border. Khartoum officials have denied the claims.

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