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**Lord's Resistance Army Update**

As part of the 2013 defense appropriations bill, the United States Senate voted on 17 May to allocate USD 50 million to 'enhance and expand' intelligence and surveillance support for US Special Forces and Ugandan troops tracking Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) fighters in central Africa. There are approximately 100 US Special Forces deployed to assist the Ugandan army apprehend LRA leader Joseph Kony and his commanders. About 30 US troops are based in the Central African Republic (CAR), in the southeastern towns of Obo and Djemah. The funding measure will extend the deployment until the end of next year.

Less than a week after the funding measure was passed, Senator Chris Coons, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs, met Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni and US military officials in charge of the LRA offensive. 'I was encouraged to hear from commanders on the ground in Uganda about progress that's being made in the U.S. mission to advise and assist regional militaries in the hunt for Joseph Kony,' Coons said on 28 May. He also echoed General Carter Ham, head of the US African Command, who told Uganda's *The New Vision* on 22 May, 'I am confident Joseph Kony will be brought to justice. The capture of (senior LRA commander Caesar) Achellam is a good step.'

The Ugandan army said it captured Achellam at the beginning of May in CAR, but it is not clear whether Achellam was captured or surrendered. The Ugandan government has been desperate to show results in its four-year offensive against the LRA. Achellam is the only senior commander captured or killed since December 2009, when Brigadier Bok Abudema was killed in CAR.

Despite claims of progress against the LRA, attacks by the group, particularly in CAR, have become increasingly frequent and violent. CAR saw no major attacks prior to the deployment of US troops, even though Kony and top commanders were based in the southeast, adjacent to the South Sudanese state of Western Bahr al Ghazal. The LRA's main focus of attacks during much of 2011 and early 2012 was the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), despite having a relatively small number of fighters there.

LRA attacks shifted to CAR in 2012, focusing on the areas around Nzako, Bakouma, and Rafai in Haut-Mbomou prefecture, southwest of Obo and Djemah where Ugandan troops and US Special Forces are based. This area was also targeted by the LRA from early 2011 until the summer of last year, but relatively few people were killed. A particularly violent attack took place around 20 March this year, when a suspected LRA group killed 13 artisanal gold miners in Ngouingouza, 160 km northeast of Bakouma. An LRA attack in Bembia, close to Rafai, was reported on 21 March.

There were at least three more attacks in the same area in June. On 16 June, an LRA group clashed with a Ugandan army company in Karmadar near Rafai, while on June 23, LRA fighters attacked Lengo near Bakouma and killed two people. On June 24 and 25, the same group reportedly attacked the town of Bakouma, which is home to a uranium mine owned by French nuclear group Areva. Initial reports said the town was looted and three people were killed.

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LRA attacks take place almost weekly in DRC. The attacks occur mostly in Haut-Uélé, particularly around the towns of Bangadi, Ngilima, and Dungu. There were at least four LRA attacks in Bangadi in the first two weeks of June, resulting in three abductions, one death, and looting and destruction. On 6 June, some 30-50 LRA fighters clashed with Congolese park rangers near Nagero, south of Garamba National Park. There were no reports of casualties but several LRA fighters were apparently injured. This is the first time a major LRA attack has taken place in Nagero since January 2009, when an LRA group looted the rangers' headquarters, killing 10 people, including four rangers.

The African Union (AU) initiative to tackle the LRA has made slow progress. On 8 May, the defence ministers from member countries of the Joint Coordinating Mechanism (JCM) met in Addis Ababa to discuss future steps for the mission. While some of the auxiliary offices are being established, the troops required to launch anti-LRA operations have not yet deployed. The JCM meeting concluded that more funds were needed. On 15 June, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appealed to UN member states to support the AU mission, which is in dire need of financial aid.

The UN chief made a similar appeal in a May 25 report on children and armed conflict. Covering the period between January and December 2011, the report says the LRA is responsible for the abduction of almost 600 children in CAR, DRC, and Sudan. 'The LRA continues to cast a long shadow across central Africa, causing enormous suffering for children,' said Radhika Coomaraswamy, the secretary-general's special representative for children and armed conflict.

In Uganda, the core part of the 2000 Amnesty Act was allowed to expire on 25 May. Renewable yearly, the act had granted amnesty to over 13,000 former LRA combatants. Ugandan Minister of Internal Affairs Hilary Onok said the ministry extended only the part of the act that deals with settling and integration. The part that deals with granting amnesty, according to Onok, was not extended. Onok said the approved extension was only valid for one year to allow the Amnesty Commission to process the backlog. The minister said a comprehensive new law would be drafted over the next year to deal with all aspects covered in the Amnesty Act.

5 July 2012