



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

Ridding Central Africa of Joseph Kony: Continuing U.S. Support

*U.S. Rep. Chris Smith, Chairman
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health,
Global Human Rights and Int'l Organizations
September 30, 2015*

Since 1987, the Lord's Resistance Army, or LRA, has killed, raped, kidnapped, enslaved or robbed thousands of people in the Great Lakes region of Africa and beyond. In October 2011, the Obama Administration deployed about 100 military advisers to help Ugandan and other military forces in the region to seek out and capture or kill the members of a terrorist force that has now dwindled from thousands of fighters in the late 1990s and early 2000s to fewer than 200 today, but remains a very real danger to people in the east and central regions of Africa. This hearing will look at why the effort to end the LRA is so critical for the international community and how the U.S. counter-LRA program has worked thus far.

Today's hearing is being held even in the absence of the Department of Defense or the State Department (whose relevant officials are unavailable for a few weeks) because it will serve as acknowledgement of the importance of countering the LRA prior to the Administration's decision on whether to continue the program. The decision on renewing the American deployment will come in the next few weeks. We trust the Administration will decide to continue this worthy effort. We hope to cover U.S. counter-LRA policy with Administration witnesses in a future hearing on Africa's Great Lakes region.

One can use a number of metaphors to describe the LRA today. It is like a wounded animal, less capable but still very dangerous. It is like a vulture, feeding off the existing misery it finds in countries otherwise troubled by conflict. The LRA is like a fire that is tamped down but not extinguished and can re-ignite at any time. However, the danger posed by the LRA is not metaphorical; it is very real to those who still live in fear in eastern and central Africa.

The LRA is a vivid example of how ethnic strife can provide a cover for wanton viciousness. In the name of protecting the rights of northern Uganda's Acholi tribe, LRA founder Joseph Kony has brought only wretchedness to his people and their neighbors, as well as to people living in surrounding countries. Efforts to come to a negotiated settlement have all

come to naught because Kony apparently has no coherent demands. His terrorist group seems to want nothing more than chaos and destruction.

The international community has been much too quick to abandon humanitarian activities, largely because the number of victims has been reduced significantly. In confirmation hearing testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee last year, General David Rodriguez referred to the counter-LRA effort as “a good success story,” citing the groups decline and American determination to support African efforts to finish off the LRA.

Unfortunately, this is where the metaphors about the group must be kept in mind. Whenever the LRA has had a setback due to international efforts to eliminate it, the group’s retaliation has been ruthless. Ongoing conflict in Central African Republic, South Sudan and eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo has provided a welcoming environment in which the LRA can hide and resume its deadly activities with less fear of regional government action against it. When we take our eyes off the LRA, they have enhanced maneuverability and opportunity to regroup.

Thanks to the #Kony2012 campaign by the advocacy group Invisible Children, the LRA became notorious worldwide and garnered international support, especially among the young, on behalf of a robust counter-LRA effort. Yet the staying power of social media is fleeting. There are always new causes, also legitimate, to draw attention away. Remember #BringBackOurGirls on behalf of the Chibok schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram?

Our caring has to extend to the victims of LRA and other such groups, which not only include those whom they attack, but also those whom they cruelly use in their destructive campaigns. We have one such victim with us today, who can describe the ongoing desolation the LRA brings to so many young lives. We also have witnesses familiar with the LRA and its terrorist activities who will describe the ongoing threat this group poses, however diminished their ranks may be.

Countering terrorist groups cannot depend on Twitter campaigns. The United States and other members of the international community must retain our resolve to capture or remove the leaders of the LRA and any terrorist group that threaten the lives and well-being of innocent people worldwide. Whether such groups pose a direct, confirmable threat to the homeland or not, by terrorizing those whom we help, they oppose U.S. interests and must be dealt with.