



In New Light: protection of civilians, the Lord's Resistance Army and the African Union Regional Task Force

May 2015

Table of contents

Executive summary and recommendations	3
1. Introduction: the protection lens	4
2. The AU Regional Task Force: a convenient fiction	5
3. The RTF's responsibility to protect civilians	7
4. Assessing the RTF's contribution to protection	8
5. Protection risks	15
6. Improving protection and mitigating risks	18
7. Countering long-term protection threats	20
8. Conclusion	21
Appendix A: Methodology	21
Appendix B: Background to the LRA conflict	22

Lead author: Ben Shepherd

Contributors: Dr. Laura Davis, Marco Jowell

Editors: Ned Dalby and Kennedy Tumutegyeize, East and Central Africa Programme, Stephanie Brigden, Africa Director, Conciliation Resources

Production support: Lucy Williams and Tamanna Kalhar, Conciliation Resources

This document has been produced with the financial assistance of UNICEF, the Norwegian Embassy in Kampala and the European Union under the Capacities for Peace project. The contents are the sole responsibility of Conciliation Resources and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of UNICEF, the Norwegian government or the European Union.

Conciliation Resources would also like to acknowledge the invaluable input and support provided by its partner organisations Solidarité et Assistance Intégrale aux Personnes Démunies (SAIPED) in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Inter-Church Committee (ICC) in South Sudan and Co-Amen in the Central African Republic.



Cover: A soldier in the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) among residents in Ezo, South Sudan, a town which has suffered LRA attacks. © Trevor Snapp/Corbis

Design: www.gloryhall.com

Executive summary and recommendations

The protection of civilians should be at the heart of attempts to tackle the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). It is enshrined in the African Union Regional Cooperation Initiative (RCI) for the elimination of the LRA, the region's principle strategy for addressing the crisis, and is a core institutional commitment of the African Union. The initiative's military component, the Regional Task Force (RTF), deployed since 2012 in the Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan, has contributed to the protection of civilians in multiple ways but has also exposed them to new risks. To maximise its protection outcomes and mitigate immediate and long-term risks, the RTF should adopt protection as an integral part of its mission. But the current military-centred approach is not enough to achieve a sustained solution to the protection crisis. Regional governments, the AU and donors need to understand and address the underlying drivers of instability.

The RTF's contributions to civilian protection are concrete but are largely byproducts of and secondary to its pursuit of military objectives. It has degraded LRA capacity, deterred attacks around its bases and undertaken some proactive protection deployments along roads and to sites of recent LRA attacks. 'Hearts and minds' activities undertaken by the Ugandan army, the largest contributing force, in southeast CAR such as providing medical care have alleviated some social and economic needs. Protection training by international agencies has contributed to improved practices, especially in the treatment of children escaping from the LRA. But multiple factors including the contingents' varying levels of competence and diverse command and control structures present challenges to consistent and effective adoption of protection training.

In the absence of state structures especially in southeast CAR, the RTF's presence is widely welcomed by civilians. But its contribution to protection has been limited and inconsistent as RTF commanders and American advisers do not prioritise protection in their operational planning as a central objective. They have concentrated resources on tracking Joseph Kony and senior LRA members and been slow to respond to civilian reports of LRA sightings, or have not responded at all. Some of the RTF's

protection activities fail to have lasting impact due to the lack of follow-up by state parties within the RCI framework. For example, though the RTF and its US advisers have encouraged the peaceful surrender of LRA combatants and dependents and facilitated their handover to civilian authorities, RCI participating states and donors do not provide support for long-term reintegration.

The RTF's counter-LRA strategy has also generated protection risks that are largely unmonitored. The location of RTF bases in towns and villages and prolonged contact between troops and civilians risk serious consequences, especially for women. There have been allegations of sexual abuse. A lack of transparency about the RTF's objectives and activities has caused significant mistrust of foreign forces, intensifying a pervasive climate of fear. The resulting displacement of people to urban centres has led to mounting social tensions and rising food prices while constraints on civilian freedom of movement aggravate social and economic conditions.

These risks persist partly because the RTF operates under minimal AU or external oversight. With weak or non-existent government structures in these areas and no civilian officers in the mission, there is no monitoring of the dangers that counter-LRA operations pose to local communities. The UN, its agencies and international NGOs are only sparsely present in RTF areas of operation. They are almost completely absent in southeast CAR.

The RCI aimed to provide a comprehensive solution to the LRA problem leading to a secure and stable environment in the affected countries. In practice it has served to legitimise a military mission focused narrowly on defeating the LRA by force. Such an approach is insufficient to guarantee the immediate protection of civilians. Nor can it address the underlying causes of insecurity and underdevelopment that generate these protection challenges, namely a chronic lack of governance and investment in these remote border areas. Indeed, worrying signs of acute conflict fragility – deepening poverty, rising violent crime, social fragmentation and ethno-political mobilisation – suggest that if the RTF were to leave abruptly it could leave greater suffering in its wake.

To ensure that the RTF maximises its contribution to protection and that risks to civilians created by its activities are monitored and mitigated, it

should adopt protection of civilians as an integral part of its mission and primary criteria for success. Grounded in this new perspective, troop-contributing states, the AU and international partners – in particular the UN, US and EU – should support the following measures.

1. A new civilian component: The AU should recruit and deploy civilian personnel, including child protection officers and gender specialists, alongside the RTF contingents, to listen to civilians, especially marginalised groups, conduct regular socio-economic impact assessments and guide RTF protection activities.

2. Improved communication: The RTF military contingents alongside new civilian officers and American advisers should enhance its communication with local communities, making clear its mission and protection efforts and listening to the different needs of girls, boys, women and men. International platforms to discuss the RTF's mission and role in protection should be regular, inclusive of local voices, and held, where possible, in the LRA-affected region.

3. Systematic protection training: The AU in collaboration with international protection agencies should institute regular training courses for all RTF troop rotations that explain the principles and practice of civilian protection and test their understanding. Special courses for officers should help them elaborate mechanisms to ensure their troops apply their knowledge in practice.

4. Enhanced AU oversight and external scrutiny: The AU and its donors should enhance their oversight of the RTF, including on adherence to protection guidelines and key mission tasks. The RTF should arrange regular monitoring visits to the field for civil society and parliamentary groups and publish assessments.

To realise the potential of the RCI to create a secure and stable environment in the LRA affected areas, participating governments, the AU and international partners – in particular the UN, US and EU – should look beyond the military mission and commit to understanding and tackling the underlying causes of insecurity and underdevelopment.

5. A wide-ranging needs assessment: As a first step, the AU in close consultation with Uganda, DRC, CAR and South Sudan and donors should undertake a wide-ranging needs assessment including an in-depth conflict risk analysis,

building on the work of the World Bank. The assessment should inform the RTF's draw-down strategy so that its departure does not expose civilians to still more suffering.

1. Introduction: the protection lens

This report assesses the impact of the African Union Regional Task Force (RTF) through the lens of civilian protection and identifies what the AU, troop-contributing states and donors can do to enhance protection outcomes in areas affected by the LRA.

Conciliation Resources recognises the complexity of the concept of 'protection', its evolution and that different institutions understand and apply it in different ways.¹ For the purposes of this report, we understand the term to encompass a broad spectrum of activities aimed at fostering conditions for sustainable peaceful civilian life and livelihoods, including but not limited to protection from physical violence.

We also recognise that different characteristics, including but not limited to gender and age can determine an individual or group's protection priorities. This was illustrated by a perceptions survey conducted in four communities affected by the LRA in Haut-Uele district, DRC.² When asked to name the biggest threat to their community as a whole, nearly all respondents said the LRA. But when asked to name the most significant problem for different groups within the community, responses varied. For women and children many respondents cited a lack of healthcare, but for men, restricted access to fields, fishing grounds and hunting zones was considered more important.³ We therefore endorse a gendered understanding of protection, and the report aims to underline that protection should take account of the different needs of girls, boys, men and women.

1. For a more detailed discussion of the diverse usages of 'protection of civilians' and Conciliation Resources' understanding see *A People Dispossessed: the plight of civilians in areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo affected by the Lord's Resistance Army*, Philip Lancaster for Conciliation Resources, July 2014, pp. 10-11.
2. Our survey canvassed the views of 160 people in Limay, Kiliwa, Kpaika and Duru in the LRA-affected area of DRC, including an equal number of men, women, boys and girls.
3. Forty-five per cent of respondents considered access to fields and hunting grounds to be the biggest problem for men, whereas 47 per cent said a lack of access to healthcare was the biggest problem for women, and 43 per cent said the same about children.



LRA members at Ri-Kwangba, South Sudan in 2006. Some combatants are also civilian victims. © Petterik Wiggers/Panos

Casual assumptions about protection can have harmful consequences. Many assume that men – soldiers, police, chiefs or fathers – are the providers of protection, and women and children the passive recipients. Such a starting point denies agency to women, girls and boys, overlooks their needs and reinforces social norms that discriminate against them. Protection actors should be alert to these risks and involve communities, marginalised groups in particular, in the design and delivery of protection strategies.

In the LRA-affected region, understanding and applying the civilian protection concept is further complicated by difficulties in defining the category of 'civilian'. The adjective is typically used to distinguish ordinary citizens from military actors or non-state armed groups. But men, women and children abducted by the LRA can be perceived as both civilian victims and in certain cases combatants, especially if they are carrying weapons.

2. The AU Regional Task Force: a convenient fiction

The AU's authorisation of a regional military force to defeat the LRA was a politically motivated exercise mainly intended to legitimise and facilitate the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) ongoing 'capture or kill' mission against the LRA. It gave the mission a legal basis and created regional command structures and reporting mechanisms. It gave the impression of setting in motion a comprehensive response to the presence and impact of the LRA on civilians.⁴ In reality, the initiative has remained a narrow military operation that has shirked responsibility for the protection of civilians.

Political beginnings

When the Ugandan-led air and ground assault on the LRA's camps in Garamba National Park failed to definitively end the LRA in December 2008,

4. The AU commission claimed that, "The AU initiative aims to articulate a comprehensive approach to the problem posed by the LRA criminal activities and atrocities." Communiqué of the 299th meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council, PSC/PR/(CCXCIX), 22 November 2011.



Francisco Madeira, former AU Special Envoy for LRA affairs (far right) and Abou Moussa, former UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNOCA (second from right), meet civilians in Dungu, DRC. © UN Photo/Norbert N Ouendji

Uganda was drawn into a prolonged campaign of attrition, pursuing scattered LRA groups across areas of DRC, South Sudan and Central African Republic (CAR).⁵ Its army's presence on foreign territory increasingly became a point of political friction with host states. Uganda, therefore, turned to the AU to enhance the legitimacy of its campaign and improve coordination. The other affected states played along, hoping the AU blessing would smooth the way for greater external support, especially from the US. François Bozizé, then president of CAR, in particular sought backing for his army, knowing it to be unable to tackle Kony's guerrillas.

A grand plan

In June 2011, the governments affected by the LRA agreed to join a Regional Cooperation Initiative (RCI) for the elimination of the LRA, a multilateral political framework to facilitate diplomacy and joint military action and oversee the long-term recovery of the LRA-

affected areas.⁶ It has three linked objectives: to strengthen the ability of regional military forces to tackle the LRA, facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance and create the conditions for the stabilisation of LRA-affected areas, free of LRA predation.⁷

Authorised by the AU Peace and Security Council in November 2011, the initiative has three components: a Joint Coordination Mechanism (JCM)⁸, a Regional Task Force (RTF) of up to 5,000 troops and the RTF headquarters. The AU also appointed a Special Envoy for LRA affairs. The JCM agreed key mission documents – a concept of operations, rules of engagement and a strategy. By early 2012, the RTF had been launched. It was a light touch, pragmatic and

5. For more on the origins and evolution of the LRA conflict see appendix B.

6. State parties to the RCI are Uganda, DRC, CAR and South Sudan. Sudan was initially involved, but passed its responsibilities to South Sudan at the latter's independence in November 2011.
7. For full details, see Communiqué of the 299th meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council, PSC/PR/(CCXCVIX), 22 November 2011.
8. The Joint Coordination Mechanism comprises Ministers of Defence of all four states and the AU Special Envoy for LRA affairs, and is chaired by the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security.

politically expedient response to a pressing regional problem.

The three militaries divided up operational zones; the Ugandan army (Uganda People's Defence Force, UPDF) would lead in CAR, the South Sudan army (Sudan People's Liberation Army, SPLA) on its territory and the Congolese military (*Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo*, FARDC) in DRC. Each contingent has a sectoral headquarters, which is supposed to report to the overall mission headquarters in Yambio, South Sudan.

A different reality

In reality, the launch of the RTF made little difference to the number of existing troops, 'rehatting' them rather than generating new deployments. For example, Uganda's contribution of 1,500 troops was already deployed on anti-LRA operations in CAR. Since the AU only authorised the RTF and did not mandate it, the AU does not pay the four country contingents and they do not consider themselves beholden to the AU.⁹ Each national military follows orders from their own hierarchies leaving the AU mission headquarters in Yambio virtually moribund. Field commanders showed little awareness of the AU RTF mission documents.¹⁰

The RTF is therefore no more than a loose arrangement of unilateral military operations in three countries, each seeking to defeat the LRA by force. As such it has continued a long historical pattern of purely military attempts to tackle the LRA and reflects the lack of political will across the region to meet civilians' protection needs.

Consequences for protection

From a protection perspective, the consequences have been grave. First, the RCI has failed to deliver a comprehensive response to address the multiple causes of insecurity and underdevelopment that create protection challenges in the LRA-affected region. At the same time the RTF's existence has allowed the region, the AU and the wider international

community to abdicate responsibility for finding sustainable solutions to these underlying problems, including state weakness and long-term conflict fragility. While the LRA is one important cause of instability in the region, there are others. Without analysing and developing strategies to tackle all drivers of conflict in the border area, the protection crisis will persist.

Second, the primary fruit of the RCI – the RTF – has not taken responsibility for protecting civilians in its area of operations. The AU's formal leadership has maintained the illusion of AU oversight, multilateral cooperation and effective action to meet multidimensional protection needs. But the AU has no control of the RTF and has not instituted or enforced a unified approach to protection. The Ugandan, Congolese and South Sudanese RTF contingents all describe their mission as defeating the LRA and place responsibility for protecting civilians on host governments. The latter lack the will and capacity to do so.

The result is a military mission that prioritises tracking down Joseph Kony and his senior leadership above meeting the protection needs of men, women and children including physical safety, basic social services and economic opportunity.

3. The RTF's responsibility to protect civilians

The RTF has, however, both an explicit and implicit responsibility to protect civilians. First, one of the formal tasks of the RCI is to "ensure the mainstreaming of civilian protection in all military and security initiatives aimed at resolving the LRA problem".¹¹

Second, as an AU mission, the RTF should reflect AU commitments to protecting civilians that have been at the heart of the AU from its inception¹², and are enshrined in guidelines for its missions.¹³ It continues to prioritise protection in high-profile statements. In 2012 the AU Peace and Security Council 'stressed that, in addition

9. Uganda considers the UPDF deployment a continuation of the mission that was founded on pre-existing bilateral agreements rather than peacekeeping. It was thus never approved by the Ugandan parliament.

10. Since these documents are classified they are unavailable to either researchers or civilians in the LRA-affected area seeking to understand the role of the RTF. Copies were not reported to be present at either the RTF headquarters or any of the three sector headquarters.

11. Communiqué of the 299th meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council, PSC/PR/ICCXCXIX, 22 November 2011.

12. The protection of civilians is enshrined in the AU Constitutive Act, as well as a number of human rights protocols and conventions. See, for instance, Lotze, Walter, 'The AU and the Protection of Civilians', in *Handbook of Africa's International Relations*, Murithi, Tim (ed.), Routledge, 2013.

13. Draft Guidelines for the Protection of Civilians in African Union Peace Support Operations, Addis Ababa, March 2010.

to mainstreaming the Protection of Civilians (PoC) in standard operating procedures of AU peace support operations, PoC must form part of the mandate of future AU missions'.¹⁴ The AU has also made a clear intention to mainstream gender and child protection.¹⁵

Furthermore, the UN and US, the two most important supporters of the RCI and RTF, are committed to the protection of civilians in LRA-affected areas. Two of the five strategic goals of the UN regional strategy on the LRA that endorses the RCI are explicitly centred on protection.¹⁶ While increasing protection of civilians is the first of four objectives enshrined in the US 'Strategy to Support the Disarmament of the Lord's Resistance Army'.¹⁷ Given their political and material backing for the RCI and the RTF, it is beholden to the US and UN to ensure the RTF maximises its protection impact.

4. Assessing the RTF's contribution to protection

Despite shirking responsibility for protecting civilians, the RTF contingents have contributed to it in various ways. They have increased civilian safety by weakening the LRA; their presence in the border area and pre-emptive and responsive deployments have deterred LRA attacks; they have facilitated the defection and return of LRA combatants and abductees; and implemented initiatives primarily aimed at winning 'hearts and minds' but which also respond to protection needs. However, these contributions have been limited, inconsistent and secondary to military objectives.

A. Weakening the LRA

The RTF has had real but limited success in degrading the LRA. As the LRA causes suffering, this is an important contribution to civilian protection. More than 99 per cent of civilians surveyed in the villages on the Dungu-Duru axis

in DRC cited the LRA as their most significant threat, and civil society representatives in CAR consistently stated that ending the LRA was the primary role they wanted the RTF to play.¹⁸

Over the period of the RTF's deployment the LRA's capacity to attack, its freedom of movement and impact on civilians has been significantly reduced. The LRA had an estimated 400 armed fighters when RTF operations began, a figure that is now thought to have reduced by about half.¹⁹ Of the five senior LRA leaders indicted by the International Criminal Court, only Joseph Kony remains at liberty. And the areas where the LRA is active have likewise receded.²⁰

At a strategic level, the 'rehatting' of UPDF troops as the RTF has played an enabling function allowing Uganda to continue operations against the LRA in CAR. Supported by the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Central Africa, the AU Special Envoy for LRA affairs played a vital role in ensuring that after the fall of former CAR President Bozizé the UPDF was allowed to continue operating in the country. The AU's authorisation has also been sufficient, to date, to elide the ambiguous legal status of the UPDF's continued presence in CAR²¹, and played an important role in ensuring the continuation of US support to counter-LRA operations.

However, the RTF's potential contribution to civilian protection through the weakening of the LRA has been undermined by weak coordination and communication between country contingents, insufficient logistics and shortcomings at the political level.

Operational coordination has been hampered by poor communication between English- and French-speaking officers and the fact that country contingents use incompatible secure technology. RTF officers have communicated largely via personal mobile phones – dependent

14. Statement of the 326th meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council, June 2012, PSC/PR/BR/1 (CCCXXVII).

15. See, for instance, Open Session of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union on "Children and Armed Conflicts in Africa", May 2014.

16. Strategic goal two reads "efforts to promote the protection of civilians are enhanced" and strategic goal four is "a coordinated humanitarian and child protection response is promoted in all LRA-affected areas". UN Regional strategy to address the threat and impact of the activities of the Lord's Resistance Army (S/2012/481), 25 June 2012.

17. See 'Strategy to Support the Disarmament of the Lord's Resistance Army', White House, 24 November 2011.

18. Interviews, Kampala and Obo, CAR, January-February 2015.

19. Interviews, Addis Ababa and Kampala, January-February 2015.

20. There have been very few LRA attacks in South Sudan since 2012, and LRA activity has reduced in southeast CAR, as LRA groups have been pushed north into more remote areas, or across the border into DRC.

21. The initial UPDF deployment was agreed between Kampala and the government of then President Bozizé, subsequently reaffirmed by his short-term successor President Djotodia under international pressure. However, it is not clear whether the present CAR government led by President Samba-Panza has likewise formally agreed to continue the arrangement, or what legal status prior agreements would have, given the status of the Djotodia administration.



Ugandan soldiers deployed as part of the AU Regional Task Force patrol outside Obo, CAR in May 2014. The Ugandan army has established a 5km safe zone around the town. © STRINGER/AFP/Getty Images

on the availability of a signal in remote locations – and US facilitation.²²

As noted, contingent commanders operate largely independently from the formal RTF headquarters in Yambio, South Sudan, which should ensure effective cross-border cooperation. The only functional intelligence sharing and coordination mechanism in place is the UN-led Joint Intelligence Operations Centre (JIOC) in Dungu, DRC.²³ However, it is not a formal part of the RTF, and has no ability to shape its decision-making.

Despite the provision of significant external assistance, including helicopters supplied and flown by the US²⁴, the RTF suffers from insufficient equipment and logistics, including

transport. Rotation of units deployed to the RTF, and the reduction of national contingents as a result of shifting political priorities, have also led to fluctuations in RTF operations and tempo.²⁵

The RCI framework has been unable to remove the political barriers to true regional action, one of its core objectives. The UPDF is still barred from operating in DRC, allowing LRA units to move across the CAR-DRC border and avoid contact with the UPDF. The passage of LRA groups between CAR and DRC, in part to poach ivory in Garamba Park and bring back tusks to Kony, has exposed civilians to attack. And Khartoum does not allow RTF units to enter the Kafia-Kingi enclave that it controls, despite widespread reports that Kony has found refuge there.

B. Protection through presence

The most direct way that the RTF protects civilians is through the simple fact of its

22. In late 2014 US advisers initiated video conferences between RTF sectors and the Yambio headquarters. If time and operations allow, they are held once a week. Interview, Dungu, DRC, February 2015.

23. The JIOC staff includes two UPDF intelligence officers. They share information with UPDF in CAR and South Sudan but are not part of the AU mission and report to the military hierarchy in Kampala. Interview, Dungu, DRC, February 2015.

24. The US announced in March 2014 that it was sending four helicopters to help the RTF.

25. In October 2014 the UPDF rotated experienced troops away from CAR, and replaced them with relatively untrained units. They therefore had fewer experienced units to man remote bases, and had to keep the bulk of their forces garrisoned for training.



*A group of Arrow Boys, a community self-defence force, in Western Equatoria State, South Sudan.
© Photo courtesy of Mareike Schomerus*

presence – a passive byproduct of its deployment rather than an active policy. This has been most evident in CAR, where the UPDF is the only operational security force, the de facto authority in the absence of the state. When the LRA arrived in southeast CAR, it was able to kill, steal and abduct in and around the largest towns with impunity. The arrival of the UPDF in 2008 was widely welcomed by communities. The Ugandans were able to secure major towns including Obo and Zemio, and push the LRA away from large concentrations of people.²⁶ One respondent said that the UPDF “saved Obo”.

The RTF’s presence has had the dual effect of keeping large-scale LRA activity away and keeping southeast CAR free from the inter-community violence that has engulfed much of the rest of the country.

In contrast with the UPDF contingent in CAR, the FARDC contingent in DRC is just one actor among several, and relatively small in number. Regular FARDC units, UN peacekeepers and Congolese police all have responsibility

26. The UPDF’s main bases are located in towns, including Obo, Dembia, Zemio and Djemah.

for protecting civilians from attack.²⁷ Those Congolese troops of the RTF contingent that have been trained by American military advisers – some 200 – devote most time and energy to reconnaissance missions in unpopulated areas of Garamba National Park and adjacent hunting reserves. They have, therefore, had little direct impact on civilian protection. Other units are however deployed in villages on the Dungu-Duru axis, where communities see them as important providers of security.²⁸

In South Sudan, UPDF and SPLA RTF troops have had little role in direct protection, despite some static defensive deployments, largely because of LRA inactivity in Western Equatoria State, and the swift and determined reactions of local self-defence groups, known as Home Guards or Arrow Boys. These groups are present across communities, acting as a deterrent to LRA activity, and have considerable local legitimacy.

27. Community frustration with and mistrust of the UN mission in DRC (MONUSCO) has been well documented. See ‘Healing MONUSCO’s Image: Community perceptions of the UN peacekeeping mission in LRA-affected areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo’, The Resolve LRA Crisis Initiative and SAIPED, July 2014.

28. See next section: ‘pre-emptive and response deployments’.

Since the Arrow Boys have no legal status that entitles them to use force, the RTF and American advisers have collaborated with them only informally and do not take responsibility for their actions. The RTF's tacit endorsement of the Arrow Boys may contribute to short-term protection gains but with no training and oversight they could become a protection risk in the future.

In each country, the positive protection outcomes associated with the presence of the RTF, most importantly in CAR, are largely a byproduct of deployment patterns determined by a military logic – of creating secure areas to launch long-range patrols, information or hunting operations – rather than protecting civilians. As such, protection gains from RTF presence, while real, are incidental to its activities rather than their central purpose. The result has been that the cumulative impact on civilian communities has been unmonitored.

This protection byproduct is further limited by the size of the RTF. The number of troops allocated to the RTF by its contingents has never come close to its authorised ceiling of 5,000, and at certain periods has had an effective operational strength of just a few hundred.²⁹

C. Pre-emptive and responsive deployments

RTF troops have in addition taken some proactive steps to protect civilians from attack by the LRA. In CAR, the UPDF has established secure zones of 5km radius from their largest bases³⁰ in which civilians can move in relative safety to farm, fish and hunt, protected by patrols and static sentry posts. In the first years of their deployment, the UPDF also conducted patrols along major road axes. This and the movement of UPDF vehicles for deployment and resupply allowed the population to move between towns without fear of attack.

29. At present, the UPDF contributes the overwhelming majority of RTF forces, approximately 1,200 in CAR and several hundred in South Sudan. Officially, 500 FARDC operate under the RTF from Dungu, but only about 200 – those who have been trained by American advisers – engage in counter-LRA operations. Several hundred SPLA troops have been re-allocated to the RTF in late 2014 and deployed to Western Equatoria State, though it is reportedly difficult to distinguish them from regular SPLA units in either conduct or operations. The FACA is not meaningfully present across any of the LRA-affected area.

30. Such zones have varied according to UPDF deployments, but have included Obo and Djemah, and have at different times been reported to have been as large as 25km radius.

Welcome strangers: the RTF on operation in DRC

In September 2014, a unit of the RTF Congolese contingent passed through Djabir village, Province Orientale, DRC in a vehicle and continued to Lema some 30km north on the eastern edge of Garamba National Park. There they left the vehicle and spent three days in the bush before returning, picking up the car and driving away. The soldiers, visibly better equipped than regular FARDC troops, said "We are commandos of the African Union from Dungu."

The people of Lema were pleased to see them, believing that their presence even if only temporary would help increase security not only from the LRA but also heavily armed poachers who habitually pass through Lema on their way to the park. They were particularly encouraged to see a white man with the Congolese soldiers, presumably an American military adviser. The incident illustrates that in places where state protection is negligible, locals welcome the presence of RTF troops even though they understand little about their identity or mission.

In December 2014, the UPDF pre-emptively deployed around churches to prevent the LRA from repeating its notorious 'Christmas massacres'.³¹ It has also proactively prevented Seleka militia groups from expanding into its area of operations³², and has made some attempts to respond to LRA movements or attacks reported by civilians.

31. Following the launch of Operation Lightning Thunder in late December 2008, the LRA committed a string of reprisals attacks killing more than 865 civilians and abducting at least 160 children in DRC. See 'The Christmas Massacres: LRA attacks on Civilians in Northern Congo', Human Rights Watch, February 2009.

32. The UPDF has largely prevented Seleka taking control in its area of operations through deployment of superior force. But in June 2014 the two groups clashed. The outcome underscored the balance of power between them. The UPDF reportedly killed 12 Seleka and lost only one of its own men. 'Uganda clashes with Central Africa Republic's Seleka rebels', Reuters, 1 July 2014.

However, these protection initiatives have declined over time. The UPDF have withdrawn some troops from more remote bases such as Djemah, and now resupply them by air rather than road, once again exposing civilians to attack while moving between towns. And since the UPDF has channelled scarce resources into hunting high-value, senior LRA targets, smaller groups of low level LRA fighters are reported to be able to move relatively freely through populated areas.³³

There are widespread allegations of the UPDF failing to respond after local people report attacks, abductions, or the presence of LRA groups, sometimes very close to RTF bases, or of arriving far too late to mitigate the threat.³⁴ In addition, RTF troops are reported often not to believe those reporting LRA activity, and in some cases have allegedly arrested those who report incidents, or have forced them to lead RTF groups to attack sites.

These experiences are to some extent mirrored in DRC. The FARDC contingent of the RTF has taken some steps to protect civilians by deploying in villages on the road that joins Dungu to Duru in Haut-Uele district, along the western edge of Garamba National Park.³⁵ Though there are no more than ten soldiers in each post with no means of transport, a large majority of survey respondents in these villages see them as the most important provider of security. When LRA groups are sighted, soldiers have pursued them into the forest; actions which over time may deter further attacks. However, as in CAR, the RTF in DRC has also faced criticism from local people over slow or inadequate responses to reported LRA movements or attacks in more remote regions away from their bases. One respondent described them as journalists, arriving in time to count the bodies.³⁶

In South Sudan, the RTF has been even less active, due, as noted, to the absence of LRA

activity since the RTF's inception, the presence of active local militias, and the redeployment of SPLA troops away from the RTF for a significant period of its existence. Though several hundred SPLA have reportedly been redeployed to the RTF in late 2014, they have yet to undertake meaningful operations.

“They [the RTF] are more like journalists than soldiers. They only arrive in time to count the bodies.”
Civil society activist, Dungu, DRC

The RTF's weak pre-emptive and reactive protection is explained by inadequate troop numbers and that commanders prioritise using scarce resources to hunt Kony and other key leaders, rather than respond to civilian reports. Shortfalls in transport mean that RTF units are not able to react quickly to reported LRA movements.³⁷ The informality of RTF structures has also blurred lines of responsibility between RTF contingents and regular FARDC and SPLA units so that often neither responds.

D. Facilitating defection and return

The RTF and its American advisers attempt to limit harm to LRA members and abductees by persuading them to surrender without armed confrontation. The RTF drops leaflets and broadcasts 'come home' messages on local and national radio stations and from helicopter-mounted loudspeakers.³⁸ It maintains Safe Reporting Sites where LRA members can surrender without risk.

The RTF's handling of returnees in the period immediately after their escape is mixed. The UPDF has improved its practices in relation to children and is reported to follow a standard operating procedure (SOP) it has agreed with UNICEF. According to this the UPDF must notify civilian agencies within 24 hours of the child coming into its custody and then transfer the child to a Child Transit Centre in Yambio, South

33. Inhabitants of Obo reported the presence in early 2014 of LRA fighters in the town itself, but the UPDF were too slow in responding to catch them. As one Ugandan officer said "We are going after king rat. Why waste time on the little rats?" Interview, Obo, CAR, January 2015.

34. An LRA group reportedly entered a neighbourhood of Obo in early 2014, just a few hundred meters from the UPDF base. Locals report that LRA groups pass within a few kilometres of the town on a regular basis.

35. The FARDC RTF contingent has its main base by the airstrip 7km outside Dungu and posts in a string of villages going north including Limay, Kiliwa, Kpaika, Nambia and Duru.

36. Interview, January 2015.

37. Respondents in South Sudan cited numerous examples of LRA movements along the CAR border that went unchallenged due to lack of airlift capacity.

38. The time and resources that the RTF has given to these activities has oscillated over its lifespan in line with the enthusiasm of the current commander of the US advisers, a position that changes every year.



A Ugandan soldier of the AU Regional Task Force displays the leaflets they drop in the forest to encourage LRA members to surrender. The initiative has had some success and avoids the risks to civilians that an armed confrontation entails. © Trevor Snapp/Corbis

Sudan, run by the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Development.³⁹

Training on child protection and especially on these SOPs has contributed to improved practices. International agencies including UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), UNHCHR⁴⁰ and NGOs – notably Save the Children – have provided ad hoc training focused on the needs of civilians. In 2013, Save the Children, in collaboration with UNICEF, developed a training schedule for the RTF with the aim of reaching at least 3,500 troops by the end of 2014.⁴¹ However, with troops rotating in and out of the RTF swiftly due to competing

military imperatives, sickness or leave, such ad hoc training cannot ensure the contingents maintain a consistent level of understanding and application of knowledge.

The impact of protection training on troop behaviours is in part determined by the different levels of experience and capacity of RTF contingents. While UPDF troops felt the training was a good refresher course, others from the SPLA and FARDC troops were encountering concepts and practices for the first time. The same training cannot therefore be relied on to have the same effect on troop behaviour in each case.

In the case of Ugandan male LRA escapees, the UPDF's practices on return are less well monitored. It has in the past given them the option of returning to CAR in a UPDF uniform, and using their knowledge of LRA tactics and deployments against it. This practice is damaging for both the escapees and local communities. Interviewees in Obo widely cited the presence of recent LRA combatants in UPDF ranks as a cause of unease and fear –

39. The UN developed a series of standard operating procedures on dealing with LRA escapees for its missions across the region (MONUSCO, UNMISS and MINUSCA), but it is not clear how closely these missions adhere to them in practice. In any case, they do not apply to the RTF.

40. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

41. UNICEF organized a training for RTF commanders at Yambio headquarters so that they in turn could train troops in the three country sectors, accompanied by civilian mentors. Telephone interview, UNICEF, March 2015.

particularly for those who have themselves been abducted. Local inhabitants report that these individuals, often themselves struggling with trauma, are the most common source of friction between the community and the UPDF.

E. “Winning hearts and minds”

Finally, the RTF has brought some protection benefits to local communities through the implementation of piecemeal ‘hearts and minds’ programmes, almost exclusively in CAR. The UPDF has long experience of running counter-insurgency operations, and has developed an operational model that demands a minimum level of investment in building and maintaining goodwill among the host population.

The Ugandan army’s location of its main bases in population centres has allowed it to act as a visible reassurance for civilians and facilitated swift responses to unrest. The ‘safe zones’ it has established allow civilians to access the forest for hunting, fishing and farming. Both facilitate a low level of economic and cultural life to continue.

The UPDF has graded a number of roads in southeast CAR, rebuilt bridges and buildings, and has carried traders in their empty supply trucks, enabling access to markets in South Sudan. It has opened its base hospital in Obo to civilians, including some HIV patients, and conducted medical outreach activities in remote communities. Further research would be needed, however, to establish whether healthcare was equally accessible to men, women, boys and girls.

It has also made some attempts to communicate with the local population, including through formal meetings to discuss the security situation.⁴² However, US advisers have played the most important role in maintaining communication between the UPDF and locals in Obo.

But the UPDF has taken these steps in an ad hoc manner, motivated by a military logic of ensuring a necessary level of stability in its operating environment rather than as part of a considered strategy to protect civilians, or any real assessment of its impact on livelihoods, social welfare and community cohesion. Any gains are likely to be unsustainable, lacking the support of the state, or any other external

42. In Obo, these meetings took place at the US base, and were not regularly attended by the UPDF.

Abandoned on return

The RTF, as a military mission, has no role to play in the return and reintegration of LRA escapees beyond providing immediate medical treatment for those leaving the bush and handing them over to the most appropriate agencies. Yet the wider framework of the RCI offers no alternative sources of assistance to returnees to help them get home, find their families, overcome trauma and reintegrate into civilian life. International and local NGOs provide transport and a minimal level of care and monitoring but the considerable shortfalls in support and the high chance of unsuccessful reintegration feed conflict risks across the border zone.¹

In particular, there is almost no support available for adult male abductees from DRC, South Sudan or CAR. Though the RTF and American advisers sometimes assist in the return of adult males to their home country, they then receive no professional help at all. Congolese and South Sudanese returnees are not eligible for national demobilisation programmes and no such programme exists in southeast CAR. Reports of the RTF placing an adult male escapee in the child transit centre in Yambio in early 2015 illustrate the risks posed by insufficient processes for this group.²

1. Conciliation Resources examined in detail the shortfalls in support for return and reintegration in *Back but not Home: Supporting the reintegration of former LRA abductees into civilian life in Congo and South Sudan*, Dr Emilie Medeiros for Conciliation Resources, August 2014.
2. Interview with UNICEF, Yambio, South Sudan, March 2015.

actor, implementing a long-term, well-funded stabilisation or development programme.

Furthermore, in blurring the boundary between military and civilian responsibilities, such ‘hearts and minds’ programmes can lead to reduced space for civil society, and the militarisation of humanitarian and development activities. As such, the short-term gains they may bring are outweighed by long-term risk.



A soldier of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) looks on as residents of Ezo village, South Sudan fetch water from a borehole. The village lies near the borders of CAR and DRC and has been subject to repeated LRA attacks.

© Trevor Snapp/Corbis

5. Protection risks

While the RTF has contributed to civilian protection, it has itself created additional risks for civilians, primarily through the militarisation of civilian spaces. As it operates without effective oversight, these risks are undocumented and their scale poorly understood.

A. Co-location with host communities

The UPDF's decision to co-locate its soldiers with civilians in main towns has created serious protection risks.⁴³ The resulting concentration of people from remote settlements into towns⁴⁴ has increased pressure on food supplies⁴⁵, as well as

generating tension between herders and farmers over access to increasingly scarce land. The 5km 'safe zones' have been swiftly emptied of game by hunters, and do not cover the majority of remote agricultural plots, hunting areas and rivers on which locals depend. Prices in local markets are reported to have risen two or three times⁴⁶, and many previous staples and simple manufactured goods are simply not available.⁴⁷

In addition, the presence of the UPDF, along with US advisers and their civilian contractors is very likely to have distorted the local economy. The UPDF brings all food supplies in by road from South Sudan, thus bringing no large-scale

43. The main UPDF base in Obo abuts civilian neighbourhoods, is essentially unfenced, and UPDF personnel move through the town at all hours.

44. Local sources reported that the populations of more than 20 villages in the vicinity of Obo had left them empty to find security elsewhere. Even larger towns such as Djemah were reported to have a far lower population today than in the past. Interviews, Obo, CAR, February 2015.

45. Local estimates of the population of Obo and the immediately surrounding area range from 17,000 to 25,000.

46. Interviews, Obo. Restrictions on food supply may not be evenly felt by all civilians, and may have a more severe impact on women and children, particularly for pregnant women and infants. Studies have revealed critical levels of malnutrition in areas of eastern CAR and documented impacts on the health of young children. See, for instance, 'Conflict Exacerbates Malnutrition in CAR', International Medical Corps, 15 October 2013. But malnutrition levels are not systematically recorded in the areas of RTF deployment.

47. Interlocutors reported that even simple goods such as soap and salt are impossible to find.



Ugandan soldiers deployed as part of the AU Regional Task Force offload supplies from a military helicopter in CAR. Helicopters facilitate logistics transport and long-range patrols but road travel offers civilians greater protection.
© STRINGER/Reuters/Corbis

economic benefits to local people or businesses. The UPDF vehicles that bring this food have reportedly damaged the Obo-South Sudan road to such an extent that it is impassable for any vehicles except their own military trucks. This has undermined trade and local business development, and restricted the availability of basic goods.

Soldiers and civilians have also been forced to mix on a daily basis.⁴⁸ Power imbalances between relatively wealthy, armed and exclusively male soldiers and a deeply impoverished community risk serious consequences. There has been repeated sexual contact between UPDF soldiers and local women and girls, including prostitution.

There have also been reports of extremely serious sexual violence. Though

undocumented⁴⁹, and denied by the UPDF, such allegations serve to demonstrate the risks of military personnel living alongside vulnerable civilians, free from effective external oversight. The social and economic stresses caused by long-term co-location with significant numbers of soldiers are unmonitored, beyond the purview of the RTF – a military mission lacking any civilian components – and out of sight of a collapsed government and a largely-absent international community.

B. Fear and its consequences

The activities of the RTF have generated confusion, fear and suspicion among civilians, across all its deployment areas. As the mission relies on stealth and surprise to catch the LRA unawares, neither the UPDF nor FARDC contingents inform the local population in advance of their attacks, patrols or movements. Local people therefore hear weapons being fired,

48. Tensions between the UPDF and local people are reported to have become more intense following the rotation of UPDF troops in October 2014, as more inexperienced and ill-disciplined troops were garrisoned in Obo for training.

49. There are almost no civil authorities present in southeast CAR. There are two Gendarmes based in Obo, and a Police Chief was sent from Bangui in late 2014 – a job that had been vacant for the four previous years.

helicopters flying overhead and troops moving through communities, sometimes at night, with no warning or explanation. The UPDF provokes even more intense suspicion, as they are a foreign force, and have been present for more than six years.⁵⁰

Civilian mistrust of foreign forces combines with the threat of the LRA to intensify the climate of uncertainty and fear across the LRA-affected zone. This both reduces freedom of movement and displaces more people into larger villages and towns. In turn, these impacts deepen the social and economic crisis affecting local people, and increases their protection needs.

Gunfire in the night

In early February 2015, the townspeople of Dungu, DRC were woken in the night by the sound of heavy gunfire. The noise came from the north where a string of small villages on the road to South Sudan have suffered repeated LRA attacks. The LRA has not approached Dungu town in years thanks to its size and the presence of FARDC troops and UN peacekeepers. But for the inhabitants of Dungu and especially those who had fled from more remote villages seeking safety there, the sound was alarming. The whole town was on the alert.

The Administrator of Dungu Territory, the most senior civilian authority, soon discovered that it was the AU RTF troops testing their weaponry. He hastened to make an announcement on a local radio station to calm the population. The RTF's failure to forewarn local civilian authorities of such an exercise had caused unnecessary fear. In Dungu, a relatively safe, densely populated place, the consequences were not great. But in more exposed areas the RTF's insufficient communication with civilians on military operations can cause significant displacement and disrupt social and economic activity essential to daily survival.

50. There is widespread suspicion among LRA-affected communities in CAR that the UPDF is more interested in exploiting the country's natural resources, including gold, diamonds and timber, than capturing Kony.

C. Insufficient oversight and external scrutiny

The lack of oversight and external scrutiny of the RTF by the AU – the authorising body – or other national or international observers creates significant protection risks as it makes it difficult to hold RTF contingents to minimal protection standards. The AU has no personnel on the ground with RTF forces and reporting to the AU in Addis Ababa is patchy, despite requirements built into the formal mission structure.⁵¹

The AU Special Envoy for LRA affairs has a formal role in monitoring and advising the RTF, but is hampered by the ambiguous and unbalanced relationship between the civilian RCI and military RTF, and minimal political backing. In practice, the Special Envoy is largely restricted to ad hoc dialogue in capitals and has no direct involvement in RTF operations.

Risks of unmonitored operations

The lack of operational monitoring means there is no way of knowing if or how the RTF safeguards non-combatants during clashes with the LRA, particularly during strikes on camps or large groups. Contacts are in remote areas, and are not monitored by the AU, RTF hierarchy, or external actors. The blurred line between combatant and non-combatant creates acutely difficult protection challenges, particularly for a mission whose success is predicated on the military defeat of the LRA.

Transparency deficit

The RTF's operational tasks and strategies have never been openly debated. Civilians living in the LRA-affected areas have never had the chance to have their voices heard in setting mission priorities. Since the AU has released no guidance on the RTF's formal tasks, rules of engagement, operational priorities or overall strategy, civilians and observers have no benchmarks against which to hold it to account.

The UN Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) and the AU organise one forum for discussion of the LRA

51. RTF headquarters in Yambio is supposed to send a daily information brief to the Peace Support Operations Division (PSOD) in Addis Ababa. In practice, it does so once a week at best. The fact that the RTF Force Commander and the assistant to the African Union Special Envoy for LRA affairs are both Ugandan has allowed some information to be sent from UPDF contingents to the AU, but it is incomplete, light on operational detail and irregular. Communication from other RTF contingents is reported to be even worse. Interviews, Addis Ababa and Kampala, January-February 2015.

crisis and the RTF's role, known as the LRA focal points meeting in Entebbe, Uganda, every six months. The meetings are intended to take stock of political, military and humanitarian efforts in the LRA-affected areas and foster greater cooperation and coordination between various actors across the region. They bring together the UPDF, relevant UN missions and agencies and international NGOs. Representatives of local civil society from LRA-affected areas only started to participate in September 2014 while the countries contributing troops to the RTF, with the exception of Uganda, are neither routinely invited nor represented.

Instead of effective oversight mechanisms, the AU has relied heavily on the discipline of the RTF's component militaries. The UPDF in CAR, in particular, has been operating in a vacuum of political or civilian scrutiny.

6. Improving protection and mitigating risks

To strengthen the RTF's contribution to the protection of civilians and mitigate the risks it creates, the AU, troop-contributing states and donors should implement the following concrete measures.

A. A new civilian component

For the RTF to actively meet the protection needs of men, women, boys and girls and avoid putting them at greater risk, it must understand them. The African Union should, therefore, recruit civilian specialists, including child protection officers and gender experts, and deploy them alongside military contingents initially at sector headquarters at Obo, Dungu and Nzara. The AU pledged that, "The RTF HQs shall have appropriate civilian expertise" but has never made good on that commitment.⁵²

Civilian experts should systematically listen to civilians at community level, particularly women and children, to gain insight into their perspectives including through formal needs assessments. They should then work with the RTF to adapt its deployment and operations to maximise positive protection outcomes. Reporting back to the AU, they should monitor the impact of both the LRA and RTF on civilians. Donors, in consultation with the African Union

and RTF contingents, should plan ways to fund, train and deploy such personnel.

B. Enhanced communication with civilians

The RTF, including through the new civilian component, should improve and intensify its communication with civilians. RTF personnel should enhance the coordination meetings in CAR and DRC by participating regularly, inviting civilian officers to co-chair and ensuring the meetings offer genuine two-way discussion between the RTF and communities.

In the LRA-affected areas a number of civil society organisations and structures present valuable mechanisms for engaging with community representatives. They include churches, local NGOs and associations (including for LRA victims), Local Protection Committees and women and youth groups. Many are dominated by church and traditional leaders, mostly older men, so the RTF should take care to ensure wide participation, including women and youth in particular. Elaborating these processes should be a key task for new civilian officers.

International fora for discussion of the RTF, currently restricted to bi-annual focal points' meetings in Uganda, need to include strong representation of civil society and governments of affected states, and be held in the LRA-affected area itself. The AU and its international partners should earmark funding for regular meetings to be held alternately in Obo, Dungu and Yambio, and ensure that civil society and representatives of affected states are invited and supported to attend.

C. Systematic protection training

As noted, training on the principles and practice of civilian protection has had positive outcomes, especially regarding the RTF's handling of children escapees. Indeed the discipline of most UPDF troops can be attributed in part to the Ugandan military's in-country training regime.

The AU and RTF should initiate systematic and regular protection training courses. All RTF troops currently receive pre-deployment training, which varies in length from two weeks to three months depending on the contingent's country of origin. But this is not systematically applied and includes only two days on protection

52. Communiqué of the 299th meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council, PSC/PR/(CCXCVIX), 22 November 2011.



AU and UN officials and civil society representatives from the LRA-affected area brief journalists on the impact of the LRA at UN headquarters in New York, 2012. Increased engagement between the AU and local civil society is needed to debate the RTF's role in civilian protection. © UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

issues, including protection of children, human rights and gender.

US advisers also deliver and oversee training for UPDF and FARDC contingents in the field. Though largely focussed on small-unit tactics, civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) and operational planning rather than protection issues specifically, it is likely to have improved protection outcomes by enhancing discipline.

However, the acquisition of knowledge by troops in the field is not enough to change their behaviours. Senior and mid-level commanders need to consistently enforce protection principles and good practices so that they become engrained in contingents' operating cultures.

International agencies (UNICEF, ICRC and Save the Children) should liaise with the AU and its donors to develop a systematic training regime. It should include initial training for all new troop rotations and regular sessions that seek to clarify and test troops' understanding. Courses should be pitched appropriately, taking into account recipients' current level of understanding and experience, and delivered

in the appropriate language - English, French, Lingala or Swahili.

The civilian child protection officers and gender specialists recommended above should play a key role in ensuring that troops apply what they have learnt. Special courses for high ranking and mid-level commanders should clearly outline their responsibilities for ensuring troops apply training and for disciplining them if they fall short.

D. Enhanced oversight

No military force should operate without effective day-to-day oversight, or scrutiny of long-term strategy and its impacts on civilians. This is particularly the case for a force operating in such a remote and marginalised area, among such vulnerable people. The AU and its external partners should take note of the risks involved in allowing such a situation to continue – to the relationship between the RTF and its host countries, to the reputation of the AU and, most importantly, to the civilians living with and among RTF personnel.

In addition to the deployment of a civilian component outlined above, the AU should

ensure that the ICRC is able to play a primary role in monitoring the RTF's impact on civilians. It should also ensure personnel from Peace Support Operations and Political Affairs Divisions make regular monitoring visits to RTF sectors to assess the contingents' day-to-day operations and impact on local communities. They should seek input from civil society representatives including women and youth groups, church leaders and local NGOs as well as international humanitarian and development organisations and the UN.

RTF contingents should conduct a quarterly economic and social impact assessment of their area of deployment, to be delivered to the AU and made publically accessible. The US should proactively arrange regular information-sharing visits to its bases for NGOs, journalists and Ugandan civil society. And the UPDF itself should take steps to open its operations up to scrutiny, particularly by Ugandan parliamentary delegations.

7. Countering long-term protection threats

In the LRA-affected areas civilians face many threats and challenges to their lives and livelihoods beyond the LRA. Conciliation Resources has previously analysed these threats and the insufficient responses by local, national and international actors.⁵³ They include predation by bandits and poachers across the border zone and ex-Seleka rebels in CAR, confrontation with Mbororo cattle herders, lack of basic necessities and educational and economic opportunities. The unsuccessful social and psychological reintegration of former LRA combatants and abductees into normal life also poses protection risks as these individuals can respond to psychosocial problems and social stigma with violence.

At the root of these problems lies the historical marginalisation of these remote border areas by central governments resulting in a dearth of governance structures and processes that could resolve conflict peacefully, establish the rule of law and respond to socio-economic needs.

53. See *A People Dispossessed: the plight of civilians in areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo affected by the Lord's Resistance Army*, Philip Lancaster for Conciliation Resources, July 2014 and *Back but not home: supporting the reintegration of former LRA abductees into civilian life in Congo and South Sudan*, Dr Emilie Medeiros for Conciliation Resources, August 2014.

While the RTF mission should take responsibility for maximising its contribution to protection and minimising the risks to which it exposes civilians, the AU and the states participating in the RCI have a wider responsibility for the recovery and stabilisation of the LRA-affected area. This is what it set out to achieve.⁵⁴

The AU and regional governments should be alive to the fact that the RTF could undermine progress towards this long-term objective. In particular, its abrupt withdrawal – which is likely if Kony were to be captured or killed – could expose civilian communities especially in southeast CAR to serious additional risks including remnant LRA groups, predation by ex-Seleka hitherto kept at bay and armed poachers. These security risks in addition to the erosion of social cohesion caused by seven years of LRA activity and counter-LRA operations could see the RTF leave behind a zone acutely prone to further violence.

The AU and RCI participating states with the support of the UN, US and EU should, therefore, develop clear drawdown criteria for the withdrawal of RTF forces that mitigate the potential risks posed by other armed groups.

In parallel, they should work to generate momentum behind a large-scale and well-financed recovery plan for the LRA-affected area, ready to step into the gap that will be left when the RTF departs. This should begin with a wide-ranging needs assessment, to continue and enhance work already done by the World Bank. This should be followed by a drive to attract donor funding for stabilisation activities, including rehabilitation of infrastructure, community-level conflict resolution and mediation activities, and the promotion of economic growth. Strong leadership by state authorities and civil society at the local level is key to the sustainability of all protection work.⁵⁵

54. The second objective of the RCI is to "create an environment conducive to the stabilization of the region free of LRA atrocities." Communiqué of the 299th meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council, PSC/PR/(CCXCVIX), 22 November 2011.

55. Conciliation Resources has previously made the case for strong local state and non-state leadership in all protection efforts. See *Safe paths home: protecting civilians and supporting reintegration in LRA-affected communities*, Conciliation Resources, July 2014.

8. Conclusion

The AU Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the LRA has not delivered the comprehensive strategy needed to counter the presence and impact of the LRA that it promised. Instead, it has perpetuated a military mission – the Regional Task Force – narrowly focused on defeating the LRA by force. The AU and international community must recognise that such a military approach is insufficient to address the security, political, social and economic problems fuelling conditions in the cross-border region that sustain the LRA.

The RTF's contributions to protection have been limited in scope and incidental to its offensive military operations. That it has exposed civilians to additional risks is of grave concern. Troop-contributing countries, the AU and donors must take the opportunity the RTF presents to maximise its protection outcomes for men, women and children during its deployment and ensure it kick starts the long-term stabilisation of this fragile area.

Regional governments, the AU, UN and wider international community can no longer afford to see a solution to the LRA through a purely military lens. The RCI must show leadership in shaping a new narrative that prioritises addressing the root causes of instability in the border zone. Only that will ensure protection for civilians in the long-term.

Appendix A: Methodology

To analyse the activity and achievements of the AU Regional Task Force through a protection lens, researchers first reviewed academic, UN and AU literature on protection of civilians and endorsed previous Conciliation Resources research that argued the need, in line with international norms, to adopt a broad understanding of protection that encompasses actions contributing to human security.⁵⁶

At an initial workshop in Kampala on 23-24 January 2015, civil society and community representatives from the LRA-affected areas (Djemah, Obo, Mboki and Zemio in CAR; Aru, Faradje and Dungu in DRC; Yambio, Ezo and Tambura in South Sudan) explained their experiences of the LRA threat and the AU Regional Task Force. Here focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews were employed to ensure male and female respondents were able to express themselves freely.

In the following weeks researchers conducted semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with over 70 key stakeholders in Kampala, Addis Ababa, Obo (CAR), Aru and Dungu (DRC) and Yambio and Nzara (South Sudan). Interviewees included civil society representatives of LRA-affected communities and Local Protection Committees, women's groups, religious leaders, local and national government officials, Ugandan, Congolese and South Sudanese military within the RTF, American military advisers and diplomats, African Union and United Nations officials in Addis Ababa and the field and international humanitarian workers.

In early March 2015, as part of the research Conciliation Resources' partner organisation, Solidarité et Assistance Intégrale aux Personnes Démunies (SAIPED), a Congolese NGO, conducted a perceptions survey with 160 boys and girls (younger than 18), men and women in Limay, Kiliwa, Kpaika and Duru villages on the western edge of Garamba National Park,

56. See *A People Dispossessed: the plight of civilians in areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo affected by the Lord's Resistance Army*, Philip Lancaster for Conciliation Resources, July 2014, pp. 10-11. See also Alkire, Sabina. *A conceptual framework for human security*, Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (CRISE), Working paper 2 (2003).

DRC where the RTF Congolese contingent was then deployed. 40 participants in each village responded in Lingala and local languages to multiple choice and open-ended questions on their perceived threats to security and livelihoods and perceived and preferred sources of protection.

Time and logistical constraints, the size of the LRA-affected area and the inaccessibility and insecurity of those areas where the RTF operates limited researchers' access to some communities affected by the LRA and RTF. Additional research of longer duration especially in CAR would provide valuable insights to complement and corroborate the findings in this report.

Appendix B: Background to the LRA conflict

The LRA was founded in 1987 by Joseph Kony, a hybrid product of earlier military rebellions and a millenarian sect called the Holy Spirit Movement.⁵⁷ For twenty years it fought a guerrilla campaign against the Ugandan government and systematically brutalised the civilian population, including through killings, theft, and the abduction of tens of thousands of children and adults, to act as fighters, porters and sex slaves.

It attracted significant support from Sudan from around 1994, as part of a long-running proxy conflict between Khartoum and Kampala, and had large-scale camps on Sudanese territory. But the LRA's composition remained predominantly Acholi⁵⁸, and it believed it was fighting on behalf of the people of northern Uganda – the very people, paradoxically, that it targeted for abduction and abuse.

Changing regional and international circumstances led to a reduction in Sudanese support from the late 1990s, and in 2002 the UPDF was granted permission to attack LRA camps in Sudan. The number of fighters in the LRA was reduced from an estimated 1,500 in 2004 to just 400 two years later, and the group's short-term objective became survival. The LRA had lost its major international backer, and its

brutality had alienated its support base among the Acholi. It moved into northeastern DRC in late 2005, searching for a rear-base free from Ugandan pursuit.

The LRA established a large camp in Garamba Park, and allowed itself to be drawn into peace talks with the Ugandan government, held at Juba in Southern Sudan between 2006 and 2008. The talks failed. The Garamba camp was attacked by the UPDF in late 2008. Despite significant US support, the attack failed.

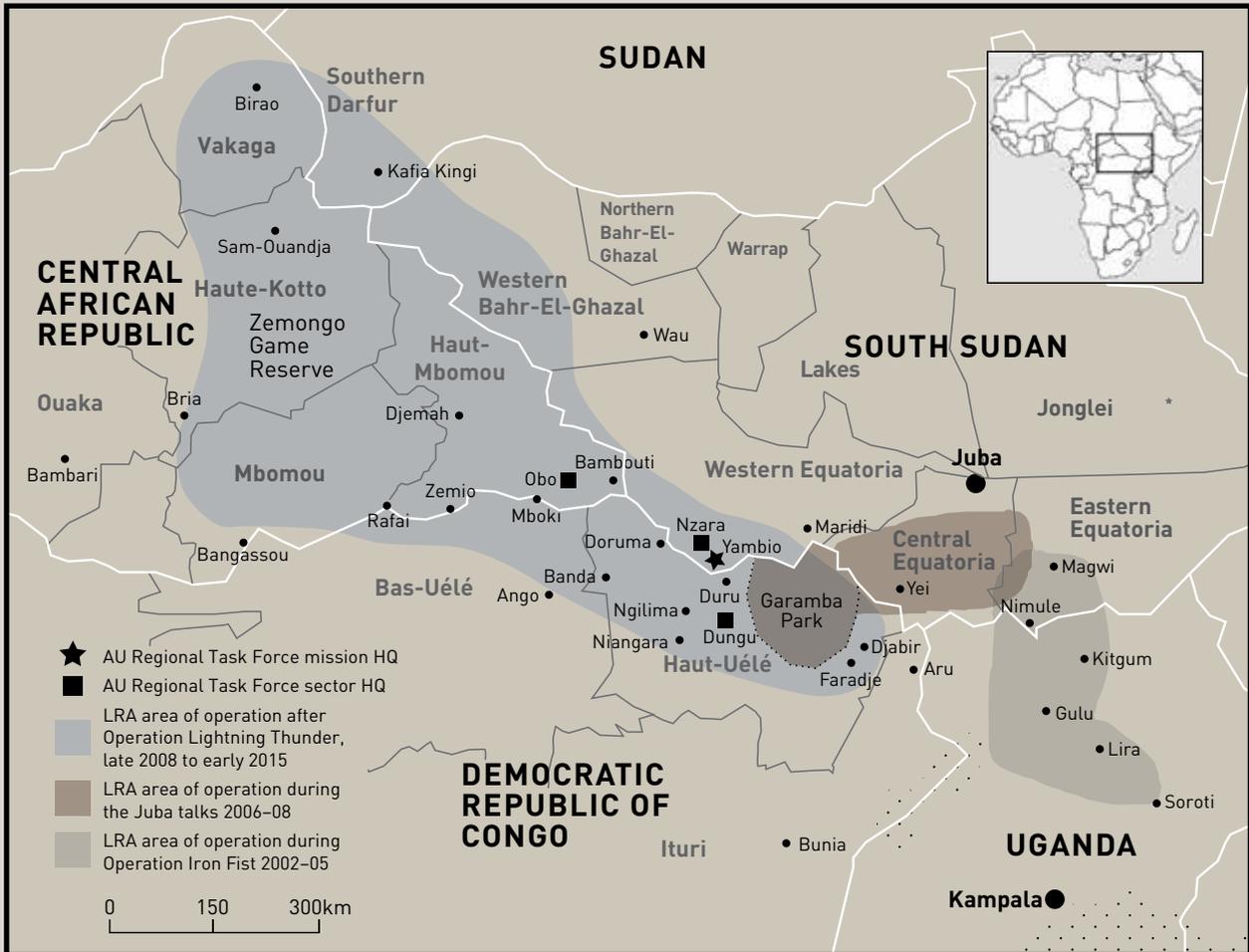
The LRA scattered into the thick forests of the region, moving freely into CAR and remote border regions of DRC. Over a period of two weeks, the LRA killed more than 865 people and abducted at least 160 children, as well as a number of adults. The Christmas Massacres, as they came to be known, signalled the beginning of a wave of terror attacks against the civilian population of northeastern DRC, South Sudan and southern CAR that have so far resulted in over 2,300 deaths and approximately 5,300 abductions.⁵⁹

The LRA has lost much of its senior leadership, suffered a significant reduction in its manpower, and has been forced into ever more remote areas. Kony is widely reported to be in the Kafia Kingi enclave of Sudan with a small group of loyal bodyguards. Other LRA combatants operate in small groups in northeast DRC, southeast CAR and the border regions of South Sudan.

57. The Holy Spirit Movement was a short-lived spiritual crusade born in Northern Uganda under the leadership of Alice Lakwena, Kony's aunt.

58. The Acholi are the largest ethno-linguistic group in Northern Uganda.

59. See LRA Crisis Tracker at www.lracrisistracker.com for up-to-date figures.



Map of LRA affected areas. This map is intended for illustrative purposes only. Borders, names and other features are presented according to common practice in the region. Conciliation Resources takes no position on whether this representation is legally or politically valid. © Conciliation Resources

Conciliation Resources is an independent organisation working with people in conflict to prevent violence and build peace. We provide advice, support and practical resources to help divided communities resolve their differences peacefully. In addition, we take what we learn to government decision-makers and others working to end conflict, to improve policies and peacebuilding practice worldwide.

Contact information

For further information please contact:
Kennedy Tumutegereize
East and Central Africa Programme Director
ktumutegereize@c-r.org

Conciliation Resources

Burghley Yard, 106 Burghley Road
London NW5 1AL
United Kingdom

Telephone +44 (0)20 7359 7728
Email cr@c-r.org
Website www.c-r.org

Facebook.com/ConciliationResources
Twitter.com/CRbuildpeace

Charity registered in England and Wales (1055436). Company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (03196482).