

Testimony for House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing:

“The Deployment of U.S. Forces in Central Africa and Implementation of the Lord’s Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act”

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Madam Chairman, Congressman Berman, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to discuss with you today our efforts to assist Central African militaries in countering the Lord’s Resistance Army.

As my distinguished colleague from the Department of State mentioned, there are four pillars to the Administration’s comprehensive strategy to help our regional partners end the threat posed by the LRA. The second of these pillars is the apprehension or removal of Joseph Kony and other top LRA commanders from the battlefield.

The Ugandan military, in cooperation with other regional militaries, has been pursuing the LRA and has reduced the LRA’s strength significantly. The LRA has moved out of northern Uganda completely and is now operating in small groups across the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Central African Republic (CAR), and South Sudan. While weakened, the LRA leader Joseph Kony and the other top LRA commanders remain at large and continue to direct the group’s members to commit atrocities.

Consistent with the LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act and with the consent of the regional governments, we have deployed a small number of U.S. military personnel to the LRA-affected area to advise and assist the regional forces pursuing the LRA.

The U.S. personnel deploying as part of this mission will travel out to field locations with the regional forces, where they will work in advisor and liaison roles. These U.S. military personnel, which are primarily U.S. Army Special Forces, will collaborate with the regional militaries engaged in the counter-LRA effort to strengthen information-sharing, operational cooperation, and overall effectiveness.

While DoD is not in the lead with regard to the other pillars in the President's strategy, the DoD advisors working alongside the regional forces will be sensitive to the challenges of civilian protection and will work to ensure that protection considerations are incorporated into operational planning. They will also seek to encourage defections and to strengthen the relationships and sharing of information between regional militaries and local populations, officials, and humanitarian actors.

This approach reflects lessons learned from prior regional operations in pursuit of the LRA and is designed to fill key capabilities gaps by enhancing regional forces' ability to fuse intelligence with operational planning. This approach will deliver maximum operational impact while exposing U.S. forces to minimum risk. Although approximately 100 personnel will ultimately deploy for this mission, we expect that only a portion of those personnel will directly advise and assist the forces in the field pursuing the LRA. Most of the U.S. personnel will carry out logistical and other functions to support the advisors.

To be clear, the U.S. forces deploying for this mission will not themselves engage LRA forces unless necessary for self-defense. However, given the potential need to defend themselves, these forces will be equipped for combat. Therefore, consistent with the War Powers Resolution, the Administration provided a formal report to Congress on their deployment.

DoD appreciates the strong Congressional interest in, and support for, this effort to end the threat to civilians and to Central African regional stability posed by the LRA, and we are committed to continuing to engage with Congress and keeping you informed about the progress of this effort as it moves forward.

Despite the strong bipartisan support for this effort, as reflected by the LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act, DoD understands that there may still be questions about this deployment. I anticipate that these questions may relate to one or more of the following issues:

- The purpose and timing of this deployment;
- The professional capabilities and human rights records of the regional forces we are partnering with;
- Our exit strategy or how we will judge the success of this mission; and

- The national security interest that underpins this deployment.

These are all valid topics for discussion, so let me address them in turn.

The United States is providing advisors to the regional forces pursuing the LRA because Joseph Kony and other senior leaders have proven unwilling to end the conflict peacefully and have continued to commit atrocities against innocent civilians. The LRA had an opportunity to negotiate a peace agreement with the Government of Uganda during the Juba peace talks from 2006-2008. However, these talks ended in 2008 when Kony refused to sign the final peace agreement and conducted new attacks and abductions. As a result, the regional governments have been pursuing a military approach to ending the LRA threat.

The United States has provided significant assistance to the region's militaries in recent years, training the 391st Battalion of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, assisting in the professionalization of the Sudan People's Liberation Army, providing equipment to the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic, and supporting the Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF) so it can both counter the LRA and maintain its critical presence in Somalia.

Despite this assistance, the Ugandan and other regional militaries would benefit from increased capacity to acquire and process actionable information on the locations of LRA leaders and to convert that information quickly into operational plans. The U.S. advisors deploying for this operation have the right skill sets to help address these capability shortfalls, and the specific timing of this deployment was predicated in part upon the availability of the appropriate U.S. forces. This deployment marks a natural progression in our efforts to strengthen regional stability through increased cooperation with Central African militaries.

Today's hearing is focused on the military support that the United States is providing to the regional military effort, but I should emphasize that our broader efforts also include encouraging LRA fighters to peacefully disarm and working with regional governments to ensure that rank and file fighters and abductees who escape from the LRA have the support they need to be reunited with their families and reintegrated into society.

With regard to the professional capabilities and human rights records of the regional forces, I would emphasize that all units that our personnel train are subject to Leahy vetting. When we engage with foreign militaries, we promote a culture where commanders and soldiers are held accountable for their actions, and this effort is no different.

With regard to our exit strategy or how we will judge the success of this operation, let me reiterate the clear purpose of this advisory mission: to enhance the capacity of regional forces to protect their civilians and conduct effective military operations against the LRA. Although our advisors will be forward-deployed and providing operational advice during this operation, the purpose of this deployment is not fundamentally different from other training and advising missions that AFRICOM has executed in its area of operations, where U.S. personnel have likewise built the capacity of African forces to address security threats and more effectively protect their civilians. We will judge the degree to which our advisors have helped develop the necessary capability based on whether the regional forces have successfully apprehended or removed top LRA commanders from the battlefield, facilitated large numbers of defections from the group, reduced the number of LRA attacks, and professionalized the troops engaged in this effort such that they can conduct effective military operations against the LRA and better protect their citizens.

There are no doubt significant long-term challenges associated with building partner capacity in Africa, but this is a short-term deployment with specific goals and objectives. As part of the interagency decision to deploy these advisors, we agreed to closely monitor and assess whether the regional militaries that our forces are partnering with are sustaining their commitment and making sufficient progress toward our shared objectives. If we think adjustments to the mission are warranted over time, we will consider them. If we do not believe our collective efforts are resulting in significant progress, we will not continue this deployment.

Finally and most importantly, there is the question of the U.S. national interest in Central Africa, a region that remains bedeviled by a mix of non-state armed groups, underdevelopment, and ungoverned space. The LRA has exploited this environment for far too long, exacerbating the region's instability and causing unimaginable suffering among innocent civilians. As discussed in the U.S. National Security Strategy, it is in the interest of the United States to lend our support

to partners in Africa so they can address threats to their citizens and help achieve the conditions necessary for regional security and broad-based development.

Achieving this objective will not be easy. The LRA has been reduced to approximately 200 core fighters, but they are spread across a vast area of dense jungle terrain. However, my hope is that, with the advice and assistance of U.S. forces, our regional partners will soon succeed in finally freeing the long-suffering people of Central Africa from the terror of Joseph Kony and the LRA.

Thank you Madam Chairwoman. I welcome your questions.