The Lord's Resistance Army in Sudan: A History and Overview

By Mareike Schomerus

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Acronyms and abbreviations

CAR	Central African Republic
CoH	Cessation of Hostilities
CHMT	Cessation of Hostilities Monitoring Team
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
DDR	disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EDF	Equatorian Defence Force
GPMG	General Purpose Machine Gun
GoS	Government of Sudan
GoSS	Government of South Sudan
ICC	International Criminal Court
LRA/M	Lord's Resistance Army/Movement
MONUC	United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
SAF	Sudan Armed Forces
SPLM/A	Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army
SSDF	South Sudan Defence Forces
SSIM	South Sudan Independence Movement
UN	United Nations
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Force

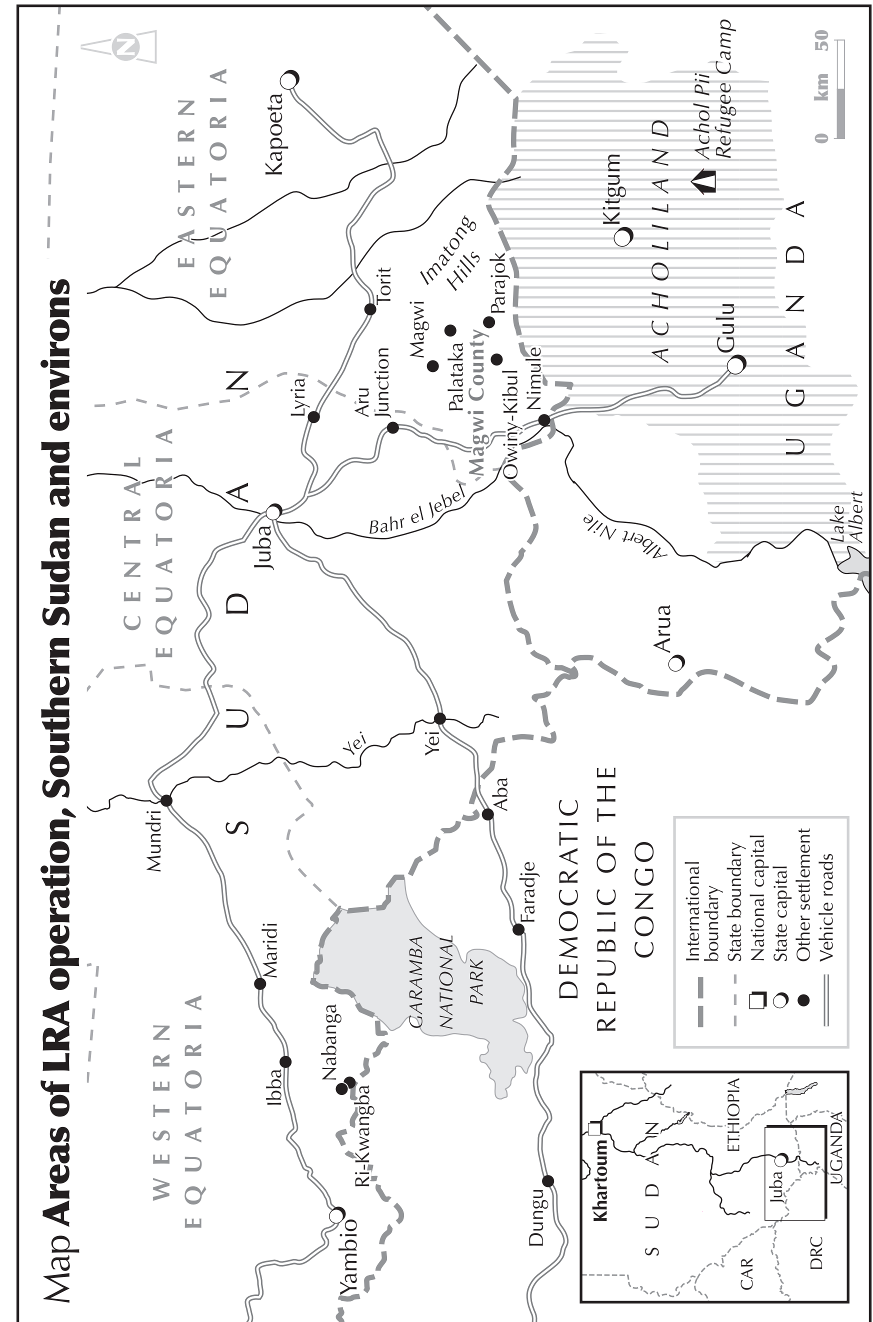
About the author

Mareike Schomerus is a doctoral candidate at the Development Studies Institute (DESTIN) at the London School of Economics. Her research on northern Uganda and southern Sudan has included reports for UNICEF, USAID, and the Minority Rights Group International. During the ongoing peace talks between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army, she is advising local peace building teams in Western and Eastern Equatoria under the auspices of Pact Sudan.

Having trained as a journalist at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, Schomerus spent 15 years working for major international broadcasters in Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom. She is a director and producer of documentaries screened on the French–German channel ARTE and the German channel ARD.

Abstract

The ongoing peace talks between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army/Movement (LRA/M) in Juba, the capital of South Sudan, have created renewed international interest in the conflict in northern Uganda. While the negotiations have proved extremely difficult, they have opened up new channels of communication with the LRA. The talks have also allowed the affected population of Eastern and Western Equatoria, South Sudan, to voice their grievances against the LRA and raise questions about the conduct of the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) in Sudan. This study examines the military history of the LRA in Sudan, the current prospects for ending the conflict, and the main challenges facing the peace talks.



I. Introduction

The arrival of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Sudan in 1993–94 marked the beginning of more than a decade of fighting involving Ugandans on Sudanese soil. This development had an impact on both the Sudanese civil war and the war in Uganda, isolating large parts of Sudan's Eastern Equatoria state from outside help and causing thousands to flee. The LRA had ventured into Sudan in the early 1990s to seek refuge from the fighting in Uganda. By 1993, the Sudanese government of Omar al-Bashir had turned the LRA into a significant actor in Khartoum's efforts to crush the southern rebellion. Moving into the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2005, the LRA became a genuine threat to regional security.

The LRA is one of the most notorious rebel armies in the world. Under the command of Joseph Kony and his second-in-command Vincent Otti, the group has been an armed opponent of the Government of Uganda and President Yoweri Museveni since 1987. Breathtaking brutality, political manoeuvring, and propaganda have marked the conflict on all sides. The LRA has fought this war with ruthless attacks and abductions, and the Government of Uganda has responded with structural violence on a grand scale against the people of northern Uganda.[1] Northern and parts of eastern Uganda have been systematically marginalized. Warfare tactics on the government side consisted of forcing the entire population in these areas into so-called protected villages, which are in reality displacement camps with inhumane conditions. This move has destroyed traditional structures and interrupted development (Finnstrom, 2003). Furthermore, there are numerous reports of violence by the Ugandan army against civilians in the region (Otunnu, 2006).

The conflict is also setting precedents in the international justice system. In 2005 the newly established International Criminal Court (ICC) issued its first warrants, selecting Kony, Otti, and three other LRA commanders.[2] This heightened international debate about the role of international criminal justice in peace building efforts. Opponents of the ICC see its intervention as the major obstacle to a peace process in Uganda. This is certainly the view taken by the LRA, which argues that the ICC is biased and politically motivated in its pursuit just of the LRA and not of both parties, when many, in fact, see the war as a planned intervention by the Museveni government (Otunnu, 2006). Currently, the question is whether the affected community's quest for accountability is served better through local justice procedures—both traditional and formal—or through an international justice system (Afako, 2006). Both options come with significant challenges. Local traditional justice procedures have not traditionally provided accountability for large-scale atrocities and their suitability for this purpose remains contested (Allen, 2006). At the same time, negotiating a peace deal under the threat of international arrest has proved problematic for the LRA leadership and has divided the international community in its support for a peaceful solution.

It is extremely difficult to obtain factual information about the LRA. Much of the existing voluminous research from northern Uganda is agenda-driven or fails to account for the overlap between LRA and civilian grievances and perspectives. Because research in northern Uganda and, to some extent, southern Sudan requires the cooperation of the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF), information is often coloured by the UPDF's own perspective.

This report is based on focused fieldwork in northern Uganda and southern Sudan in 2005–07. The author conducted face-to-face interviews with a range of Ugandan and Sudanese civilians and community leaders. The military was not present on these occasions and the interviewees were assured of anonymity. Members of the military from both countries, Sudanese politicians, and LRA representatives, including the LRA high command—specifically Joseph Kony and Vincent Otti—were also interviewed.

In describing the history of the LRA/M–UPDF conflict in Sudan and Uganda, this report seeks a balance that has been sorely absent in previous media and academic accounts. That the LRA/M can be seen as having arisen in pursuit of legitimate grievances—which at times have been shared by many communities in northern and eastern Uganda—should in no way be interpreted as a defence of the group's methods and tactics. Part of the story of the conflict, however, hinges on the use of propaganda and access to information; accordingly, this report attempts to separate fact from fiction.

II. The Lord's Resistance Army/Movement

The LRA has been something of an unknown entity for many years, attracting wild speculation about its motives and the strength of its fighting forces. Chairman Kony himself has been described in misleading terms either as insane or as a muddled messiah because of his spiritual teachings, spirit communication, and his supposed strong adherence to idiosyncratic biblical values. Certainly, Kony is a powerful spiritual and military figurehead who has managed to command the LRA and imbue it with an extremely strong, and at times violent, sense of community. But explaining the LRA solely in terms of its leader misses the underlying reasons for the war. Active LRA fighters have said that they do not fight the war for the chairman. They see themselves as fighters for their people, the Acholi, whom they believe to be marginalized, abused, and excluded from Uganda's development by an oppressive regime.[3]

Very little is known about the military history of the LRA–UPDF conflict. Most battles went unreported except for cases where the army celebrated a spectacular victory. Reports about fighting have been almost exclusively disseminated by the Ugandan government and its information policy has always been to play down the strength of the LRA. Estimates of LRA fighting forces at the height of military action vary widely. Even since the beginning of the Juba Peace Talks in July 2006, numbers given have ranged from a few hundred to at least 10,000, depending on the source.[4] Reliable estimates of LRA forces at other points during the war simply do not exist. Survey-driven estimates are flawed because at different times and in different contexts it has been either advantageous or disadvantageous for civilians to admit their affiliation. In addition, LRA membership has often been fluid, with people joining, leaving, and rejoining (Allen and Schomerus, 2006). Active combatants have been less than vocal about their political agenda and have shrouded themselves in spiritual mystery.

The Lord's Resistance Movement (LRM)—the political arm of the LRA, maintained as an intricate network in the diaspora community—was unable to raise the insurgent army's political profile because of the atrocities committed by its troops against civilians, and because of the widely-publicized forceful recruitment of children into the army. Political manifestos (see Box 1), although published at irregular intervals, were largely ignored because of the political climate in Uganda, which had successfully portrayed the LRA/M as a group of irrational maniacs, driven in its political agenda by an out-of-touch and disconnected diaspora. According to the official Ugandan assessment of LRA manifestos, many were written in the diaspora and were therefore inauthentic—despite the fact that the war had global connections and significance, and that the issues raised in the manifestos were clearly relevant to northern Uganda (Finnstrom, 2003). The LRA says that its own information dispatches were inevitably blocked by the UPDF. According to Kony, during Operation Iron First in 2002 (see Box 2), one journalist who tried to see what was happening in southern Sudan was stopped by Museveni in Paratanga.[5] Over the years, government propaganda and media coverage has effectively depoliticized the war. Its disregard for the existence of LRA political manifestos has largely obscured the underlying political causes of the insurgency,[6] which are

LRA Chairman Joseph Kony (L) with LRA Deputy Commander Okot Odhiambo, Ri-Kwangba, June 2006 © M. Schomerus

found to be widely supported by the affected population in northern Uganda, even though the accompanying violence is never condoned (Finnstrom, 2003).

The people of northern Uganda share a sense of marginalization with those in the east. After 20 years of war the statistics are appalling: in 2006, 60 per cent of schools in the north were non-functioning, leaving 250,000 children without any education; 95 per cent of people in the north were living in absolute poverty compared with the national average of 37 per cent (CSOPNU, 2006). Other parts of Uganda have benefited from significant economic growth during this period, but northern Uganda has only experienced growth in the (often inefficient) humanitarian and development industries. Perhaps paradoxically, the proliferation of aid is seen by many as one of the main drivers of continued warfare. Political representation of northern and eastern Uganda at the national level remains minimal.

The LRA/M manifestos, collected by Swedish researcher Sverker Finnstrom over several years, present the issues that are at the heart of the conflict in Acholiland: the lack of political representation from the region; repeated human rights violations at the hands of the military; nationwide socio-economic underdevelopment; and government corruption (see Box 1). Although these manifestos have been available to the public in northern Uganda and, once posted on the Internet, globally, their authenticity has always been questioned by the Ugandan authorities—making them politically ineffectual (Finnstrom, 2003). Those who publicly contradicted the official Ugandan line were often detained and, in some cases, died in custody. Joseph Kony explained in 2006 that, 'We have done our manifesto. . . Our political agenda, our manifesto is open. Even if we did not explain to the world, it is already there in Uganda.' Asked why the LRA/M had failed to publicize its political aims more widely, Kony replied, 'People are fighting with propaganda. But for me as a guerrilla, I have not yet reached. . . All thing [all information comes] from Museveni's side or from some other people, because I do not have proper propaganda machineries.'[7] The inability of the LRA/M to pursue a convincing information strategy, coupled with strong propaganda from the Ugandan government—benefiting from a good international reputation, and a plethora of aid agencies willing to accept the official line—has certainly contributed to the spiral of violence.

Box 1 **The LRA manifestos**

The LRA/M has published political manifestos at regular intervals over the course of the war. While this is well-known in northern Uganda, where frustration is often expressed over the successful silencing of the LRA/M as a political movement, the war has been continuously presented in the global media as having no political agenda. Much of the LRA/M's political energy has therefore been spent trying to counter the view that they are solely a religiously-motivated terrorist group. For example, a 1999 manifesto signed by Joseph Kony stated that while many members of the LRA are practising Christians, they did not intend to become fundamentalist Christians (Finnstrom, 2003).

In addition to countering the official discourse on the LRA, which represented the movement as driven by a desire for a rule of law based on the Ten Commandments, the manifestos over the years have called for the restoration of multi-party politics and the introduction of constitutional federalism. They have also called for support for human rights, and the need to develop a nationwide socio-economic balance while promoting peace and security and ending corruption. The manifestos routinely call for free and fair elections, the separation of the judiciary and executive from the military, and a reform of parliament to tackle those issues. Often, the political practices of Museveni are questioned and analysed in detail, especially the concentration of military, legislative, and executive power in his hands. Other manifestos have outlined LRA/M programmes on health, agriculture, education, infrastructure, and even defence (Finnstrom, 2003).

There is no doubt that the LRA has used horrific methods, both in Uganda and in Sudan, in pursuit of its aims. In July 2006, the leadership publicly acknowledged and even apologized for its tactics, at least to representatives of southern Sudanese communities.[8] Kony himself has stated that, 'I cannot say that we are fighting clean war [or that] Museveni is fighting dirty war, that one is difficult to say. Because a clean war is known by God only.'[9]

Misleading information, however, often based solely on government sources, has led to an oversimplified, one-sided view of the conflict and of the LRA itself. The media, too, has given a one-sided portrayal of the war. Government information policy has driven public opinion. As a result, it is commonly believed that the LRA is an army of child soldiers and the sole perpetrator of war crimes, even though the UPDF has also been found guilty by the International Court of Justice of training and sending children off to fight.[10] One international security expert, summing up the general government information policy on the LRA, confirmed that, 'Most people still think the LRA is a bunch of children and old guys due to 20 years of propaganda.'[11]

While the emphasis on child abductions accurately captures the brutality of the war, it glosses over the fact that the LRA is a well-trained armed group answering to a very strong, centralized command. Many members of the LRA are well beyond childhood and remain with the LRA out of conviction, a sense of adventure, or a belief in the cause (Allen and Schomerus, 2006). Studies have revealed an array of reasons for people joining and staying with the LRA: for many, life at home offers little while the group provides a sense of power and loyalty; for others, the fear of reprisal makes them afraid to leave. While thousands of children were abducted by the LRA, the fighting forces usually comprise men and women in their late teens or early twenties. A large number would have been with the LRA for many years, but only started fighting when they reached their teens and were no longer considered children in the Acholi community. Youth in Acholi society are generally defined as people of 13 to 30 years of age—or those who are not yet married (Annan and Blattmann, 2006). Thus the most active members of the LRA are more likely to be considered as youth than as children by the local community. Furthermore, patterns of abduction show that the LRA does not usually abduct very young children and that many abductees are released after having done duty as porters (Allen and Schomerus, 2006). Those who are forced to stay with the rebels are often teenagers or young men and women who are physically strong or well-educated: these are the ones capable of receiving military training and coping with the harsh living conditions of the bush. For these reasons, defining the LRA as an army of abducted children infantilizes the movement, suggesting a lack of accountability and making it appear a less than viable partner in peace negotiations. This has been a problem during the Juba peace talks.

With the start of the Juba negotiations in 2006, the LRA/M finally established a continuous information policy, denying responsibility for attacks in Uganda and Sudan and blaming government troops posing as LRA fighters for the horrific deeds committed against civilians. It is true that both the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the UPDF have attacked and looted civilians, and other actors have used the LRA to cover up their own attacks. But in many individual cases identifying the true perpetrators of attacks is very difficult.[12] One complication is the lack of law enforcement, transport, and communication infrastructure to prosecute effectively aggressors in Sudan. Explaining the general tendency to assign blame to only one group, a local leader in Juba stated, '[the] LRA has become the name for everybody who has done wrong. Bad people here, they say they are LRA.' It will be a lengthy process to investigate each incident and make an accurate accounting of responsibility, but the need for this was reiterated in the signed Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation, in which both parties acknowledged the necessity of 'truth-seeking and truth-telling processes' (Government of Uganda and Lord's Resistance Army/Movement, 2007d).

Inter-tribal clashes, small militias, and roving bandits add to a confusing environment. In Eastern Equatoria alone, civilians have been caught in conflicts between the forces of the LRA, the UPDF, the SPLA, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), the Equatorian Defence Force (EDF), and the South Sudan Independence Movement (SSIM). Armed groups supported by the Government of Sudan (GoS) are still generating instability in the region with the goal of disrupting the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and destabilizing the South. As one LRA fighter described the situation in 2006, 'The truth is, the war between the SPLA and Khartoum is far from over.'

III. The LRA in Eastern Equatoria

The earliest sightings of the LRA in Eastern Equatoria date from 1991 but it was not until 1994 that the group located its base of operations there and made its presence felt. Locals recall the first killings of civilians occurring the same year, along with the first abductions. One chief remembers that in the early days, people did not make the connection between the armed fighters who appeared in their region and the LRA: people started to recognize the LRA only when the fighters employed tactics familiar from Uganda and when they began abducting people.[13] The locals say that even after they had identified the group they still did not know why they were fighting in Sudan.

The LRA's arrival in Sudan was often explained by the Ugandan government as a reaction to UPDF military pressure, but the move over the border was in fact more politically driven. The LRA has stated that it was invited to become one of Sudan's pro-government armed groups. When the SPLA split in 1991, the faction led by Riek Machar (known as SPLM/A-United) moved into Eastern Equatoria. In 1992, SPLM/A-United signed a cooperative agreement with the GoS. Machar subsequently broke from SPLM/A-United to form the SSIM in 1994. The SSIM then aligned with the EDF and later with the LRA. The EDF included members from various backgrounds, including Acholi, Madi, Lokoya, Lolubo, Iyire, and Lotuko. Many members of the EDF had taken refuge in northern Uganda and hence spoke Acholi. The EDF and SPLA-United commander William Nyuon Bany, who was then working with Machar, facilitated the first contact between the LRA and the GoS (Johnson, 2003).

A partnership between Khartoum and the LRA was established that would benefit both: Khartoum ran a proxy war through the LRA against both the SPLA and the UPDF, while the LRA obtained supplies and assistance in its attempt to overthrow Museveni. Some claim the LRA actually signed an accord to that effect with Khartoum in 1994, but Second-in-Command Vincent Otti categorically denied that.[14] However, both Kony and Otti were regular visitors to Khartoum from the beginning of 1994 and the LRA quickly set up official residence in Juba, then a government stronghold. The LRA soldiers also received military training, which mirrored British tactics from the 1960s and early 1970s, with an emphasis on anti-ambush drills and jungle fighting.[15]

The LRA and civilians

In the muddled military environment of Sudan in the 1990s, the lines between armed groups and civilians were murky. The LRA, while much feared by the civilian population, also played host to local factions that had fallen out with Sudanese rebel groups. Since the early days of the second civil war in Sudan (1983–2005), many Sudanese Acholi and other Equatorians were opposed to the SPLA. They regarded the rebels as a Dinka movement with no regard for Equatorian concerns (Branch and Mampilly, 2005). While a few Equatorians joined the SPLA during the 1990s, others stayed with the EDF or the LRA. When there was fighting against the SPLA or the UPDF, even locals who were not ethnic Acholi, such as the Didinga, reportedly fought side by side with the LRA. This often happened out of disappointment with the SPLA: locals felt that it had failed to bring enough forces into the area to protect civilians and that it mistreated Equatorians. The Acholi in Eastern Equatoria may bear a grudge against the LRA because 'people had it very rough from [them]', but they also have an undeniable connection with the group, whom they regard as 'brothers'.[16] According to one UPDF officer in Eastern Equatoria, 'Locals have a certain level of contact with the LRA, the people here are very anti-SPLA.'[17] Eastern Equatorians report ongoing business relationships and intermarriage arrangements between themselves and LRA members.[18]

The SPLA accused the locals of failing to report the LRA when they appeared and thereby collaborating with them, but the locals argued that, 'it is hard to report [them] if somebody comes at gunpoint'.[19] To a certain degree, allying with the LRA has also been a protection mechanism. One security officer, commenting on the inability of NGOs to help civilians in Magwi County for the best part of the war, explained that the community was left to its own devices and thus chose to avoid confrontation. Because the area was declared off-limits by aid agencies for such a long time, the locals had to accommodate themselves with the soldiers. 'The community could not afford to be hostile to the LRA,' he said.[20]

Eastern Equatoria has a long history of hosting groups opposed to the Museveni government. In the 1980s, the forces of Museveni's predecessor and adversary, Tito Okello, and of Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Movement both stayed in the area. Alice Lakwena's movement is generally seen as the spiritual and military precursor of the LRA.[21] Involvement in Ugandan politics and the violence connected with it has thus been part of life for the people of Magwi County throughout the war.

Once the LRA moved into Eastern Equatoria, ambushes and attacks on villages there became an everyday reality. The LRA was an efficient fighting force. However, when asked for their assessment of the group's behaviour, people in Sudan viewed it very differently from those in Uganda. In Uganda, the grievances of the community are specifically directed towards the LRA and the UPDF, often down to the personal level of one particular commander. In Sudan, the LRA was just one of many faces of war. In the highly militarized environment created by the SPLA, the EDF, the SAF, the UPDF, and the LRA, all armed groups and their methods merged into one single threat to everyday stability—the soldier. As one man explained, 'With soldiers, you cannot trust them. They will always misbehave.'[22] In Uganda, it was the brutality of the attacks on civilians that angered the community most, whereas in Sudan such attacks blended into the high level of ongoing, widespread violence. Using atrocities or a show of ruthless force was effective in Uganda (Vinci, 2005). In Sudan, the LRA moved in a very different context with many other ruthless players. One Sudanese politician said that she felt the LRA changed its behaviour after moving to Sudan, partly because they were encouraged by Khartoum to commit atrocities, but also because the already brutal environment increased the spiral of violence. She said, 'They [the LRA] kill people and hang them up, so when local people come, they don't touch anything. I think the LRA learned these things from southern Sudan.'[23]

Areas of control

In the mid-1990s, Eastern Equatoria was at the frontline of the Sudanese civil war. The SAF controlled the areas of Magwi, Parajok, Torit, and Owiny-Kibul with the help of their aligned militias. The LRA became a constant threat to the SPLA in Eastern Equatoria because of the group's unpredictable movements. Sometimes fighters would not be seen for several months, only to then invade a village and remain in the vicinity for several days.[24] Road ambushes were frequent, especially along the Parajok–Palataka route. Even Eastern Equatorians who had fled the area did not always manage to escape: two attacks in the Sudanese Achol-Pii refugee camp in Uganda, one in 1996 and one in 2002, left hundreds of Sudanese Acholi dead.[25] To this day this remains a bitter memory for the people of Magwi.

LRA Second-in-Command Vincent Otti, Ri-Kwangba, September 2006 © M. Schomerus

The LRA established a presence in the Imatong hills and gained control over Magwi and parts of Eastern Equatoria, even renaming an area 'New Gulu'. It set up its main headquarters near Aru Junction, an area that the UPDF called 'Kony Village'. The camp at Aru Junction was sizable, usually hosting 3,000–4,000 fighters. It was the training centre and base for several battalions. Kony would stay there with his wives and Otti was also often based there. According to the SPLA, and not disputed by the LRA, the SPLA overran this stronghold in 1997. Kony and Otti reportedly fled to Juba, which then became the group's administrative headquarters. Sudanese forces provided visible protection for Kony's residence, and the LRA established a new camp near Juba in Rubangateka, which became the base for Otti's command force. The LRA also had camps in the areas of Gambera and Illyria.

LRA command structures

The internal hierarchy of the LRA puzzles its opponents. One SPLA officer based in Eastern Equatoria remembers, 'Nobody ever spoke to Kony. We did not know who they were. We did not know their commanders or their structures.'[26] It is known that there are four main brigades (named Gilva, Sinia, Stockree, and Trinkle) answering to the high command ('Control Altar'). Further structures are less clear.

A command structure in which the headquarters directs LRA forces undoubtedly does exist, but field commanders have operated with a certain degree of independence. With troops on the move and spread out in both Sudan and Uganda, tracking each group of fighters is a challenge. In mid-2007, the LRA high command also acknowledged for the first time that there might be former LRA groups that no longer answer to it.[27] When the LRA engaged the SPLA in combat, LRA fighters typically attacked first, followed by a second attack by SAF troops. Most battles fought between the SPLA and the LRA involved the SAF. If the SAF were involved, they often employed tanks and sometimes Antonov planes.

The locals in Magwi grew to recognize the more prominent LRA commanders (during the assembly of the LRA in Owiny-Kibul in late 2006, locals easily identified the major commanders), but the UPDF continued to find it difficult to understand the group. One said, 'We heard of Stockree [one of the LRA brigades], but to us, we don't know who is who.'[28] For UPDF officers, who are mostly not northern Ugandans, distinguishing the various Acholi militias who speak the same language was difficult. A UPDF officer explained that it took the UPDF many years to understand the dynamics in Sudan and to distinguish LRA members from EDF members. Not until 2002, when UPDF intelligence gathering grew stronger in Sudan, did it clearly establish that the EDF was more active around the Torit area, which is far from Aru Junction where the UPDF was engaged in fighting the LRA.[29]

Box 2 **Operation Iron Fist**

In 2002 Khartoum and Kampala signed an agreement that authorized the UPDF to pursue and attack Kony's forces in Aru Junction. The UPDF's foray into Sudan was dubbed Operation Iron Fist and it was one of the bloodiest periods of the war. The campaign was marked by regular helicopter gunship attacks on the LRA and by retaliatory LRA ground attacks. Many LRA and UPDF soldiers were killed and the civilian population in Eastern Equatoria suffered tremendously.

Despite the UPDF's efforts to rout the LRA from Eastern Equatoria, the group would remain there for four more years. From mid-2005, when the LRA began to prepare for the peace process that was to become the Juba talks, its fighters and high command moved towards the border of the DRC in Western Equatoria. On their way west, some of the fiercest fighting with the SPLA occurred in areas that had previously been untouched by the LRA, such as the road between Yei and Juba (BBC News, 2005). However, the LRA has denied that these attacks were carried out by their troops (Lord's Resistance Army/Movement, 2005).

IV. Allies and enemies

The Government of Sudan

In the years before the signing of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which ended the second Sudanese civil war, it was an obvious advantage for Khartoum to ally itself with the LRA. This was a perfect set-up for carrying out a proxy war (Prunier, 2004). Otti described the logistics of the mutual agreement by saying, 'We had a very good relationship with Khartoum and the chairman [Kony] went there. Even me, I went several times.'[30] A Ugandan official explained that 'Kony had an official residence in Juba town, he had an office, he was a respected military officer like any of the Sudanese military officers.'[31] Khartoum's divide and rule tactics worked to keep the war in the South alive without relying too heavily on its own troops (Martin, 2002). At the same time, Khartoum's support had a politicizing effect on the LRA that went largely unnoticed by the general public: by obtaining official sponsorship from another state, the group's plans to overthrow the Ugandan government were further legitimized.

Khartoum used the split in the SPLA and the subsequent founding of the SSIM by Riek Machar to destabilize Eastern Equatoria. Machar failed to convince the international community of his cause. After the massacre of Bor Dinka in Jonglei in August 1991, when Machar's troops killed an estimated 2,000 people and displaced hundreds more, he was left with no outside support. With nowhere to turn, he allied with Khartoum in his quest to gain southern independence, and turned against his former SPLA comrades. In return, the GoS agreed to allow a referendum on southern independence before 2009.[32]

The LRA was an obvious partner for the SSIM. It claims that it was invited to come to Sudan by the SSIM through representatives of the EDF. Although both Machar and Kony spent a considerable amount of time in their residence in Juba, they did not meet directly during day-to-day interactions between the two groups. They did, however, come face to face at least once in 1997.[33] Their subsequent meeting was not until the preparations of the peace talks in 2006, at which point Machar, then vice-president of the Government of South Sudan (GoSS), acted as mediator between the LRA and the Government of Uganda.

The LRA–Khartoum relationship peaked in 1996, around the time of the abduction of the Aboke girls, one of the most infamous incidents of the Sudan–Uganda cross-border war (de Temmermann, 2001).[34] By this time, according to a female former member of the LRA, 'The Arabs were bringing food and weapons by car and giving them to us at Aru Junction—sometimes ten carloads. They came every three or four months. The Arab soldiers always stay and chat.' Most deliveries were brought by land, though some former LRA members say that ammunition was usually airdropped. After 1996, the relationship slowly waned. 'The LRA had a bittersweet relationship with Arabs,' remembered a local from Eastern Equatoria, recalling that the LRA at times sent messages to the SPLA offering to take over Juba on their behalf.[35]

While civilian and military interviewees say that Khartoum supplied equipment to the Ugandan rebels well into 2006, the LRA says that such supplies ceased long before then.[36] Others have reported that supplies stopped in November 2005, when the LRA crossed into Garamba National Park in DRC. Khartoum apparently tried to re-establish contact in March 2006, but the general consensus is that the relationship was by then over—the LRA today is adamant that they no longer have any connection with the GoS. It is clear that Khartoum was still supplying weapons after the 1999 agreement (Human Rights Watch, 2006), but the exact end date of the relationship is hard to establish. It seems certain, though, that from the time the LRA made its first overtures to the GoSS in early 2006, the LRA was completely disengaged from the GoS.

Nevertheless, reports persist that airdrops continued in the region formerly controlled by the LRA long after the group had left. In June 2006, there were apparently airdrops along the Torit road. In October, locals reported airdrops and at least three low-flying Antonov planes, also near Torit. The area is an SAF stronghold and locals think that the supplies were either for the SAF or for the so-called EDF 2, a group of disgruntled former EDF fighters still supported by the GoS with the aim of sabotaging the CPA. Among southern Sudanese it is 'common knowledge' that the GoS continues to undermine the

CPA by supporting armed groups. In his speech on the second anniversary of the signing of the CPA, Salva Kiir Mayardit, GoSS president and first vice-president of Sudan, made it clear that continued military support from Khartoum for the LRA and other militias was one reason for the probable failure of the CPA (Kiir Mayardit, 2007). This claim has wide currency, although Kiir's statement also conveniently diverted attention from GoSS shortcomings.

There are various theories about why the relationship between the GoS and the LRA deteriorated. One of the most recurring stories, spread in both Uganda and Sudan, is that some LRA fighters were sent for training to Khartoum and never returned. It is strongly suspected that this group was integrated into the forces that became the *janjawid*—the largely Arab proxy force used by the GoS to terrorize Darfurians.[37] The UPDF spread the story that in 1997 about 300 LRA fighters were taken to fight in Darfur. When Kony requested their return, President Bashir declined. Other security sources estimated the number of fighters taken to Darfur to be only 37 as of late 2005.[38] When Otti was asked about rumours indicating that LRA members were fighting in Darfur, and whether this ended the relationship with Khartoum, he replied: 'That is a big no. No.'[39]

An element of distrust had, in any case, been introduced into the relationship in late 1999 when Sudan and Uganda signed the Nairobi Agreement. Brokered by the US-based Carter Center, the agreement established that neither party would support the other's rebels (Governments of Sudan and Uganda, 1999). Pressure on Sudan had increased when they were officially declared sponsors of terrorism by the US administration of Bill Clinton. The Nairobi Agreement was an attempt to bring peace to the region, but it excluded the LRA—thereby guaranteeing that it would fail to achieve either peace or stability. According to one LRA member, 'The Carter Center did not talk to the right people.'[40] While support for the LRA officially stopped, the validity of the agreement was doubted from the moment it was signed (Hasunira and Solomon, 1999).

Khartoum went one step further in 2002 and issued a military protocol to allow UPDF operations on Sudanese soil (see Box 2). Operation Iron Fist resulted in increased fighting on both sides of the border. Rather than ending the war it brought a whole new set of problems to Sudan. As a consequence, the newly established GoSS, now a semi-autonomous regional government under the terms of the CPA, did not authorize the renewal of the protocol when it expired in February 2006. The UPDF now has no legal right to stay in Sudan. Machar stated in June 2006 that he felt uncomfortable under a 'foreign invasion', but he has made only minimal efforts to force the UPDF out.[41] The reason may be that the GoSS must maintain a good relationship with the Ugandan government, which initially did not look favourably on Sudanese attempts to bring about peace talks.

The UPDF's ongoing presence in Sudan and its military actions against the LRA have been a major sticking point during the Juba talks. Representatives of the Ugandan government in Kampala have hinted that there are 'other reasons' besides the LRA presence for why the UPDF is staying in Sudan.[42] For example, according to some Eastern Equatorians, the GoSS is using the UPDF to protect the SPLA against GoS forces.[43] Meanwhile, there is suspicion that Khartoum is still behind the insecurity in southern Sudan, supporting whoever is carrying out attacks there. According to a politician from Nimule, 'We cannot rule out that some people, some militias on the ground, were not absorbed into the military. The area is littered with weapons. But it is the hope of people that this is not the LRA.'[44] Implementing the Juba Declaration, which formally merged militias such as the South Sudan Defence Forces (SSDF) with the SPLA, has been challenging (Young, 2006). Given the suspicions and evidence that Khartoum still supports various militias as proxy forces—just as it did at the height of the war—the only hope for bringing peace to the region is a comprehensive restructuring of the security sector.

In addition to attacks by militias on GoSS military targets, road ambushes have occurred with more economic objectives. Since the signing of the CPA, trade between Uganda and Juba has exploded, undercutting many traders with connections to Khartoum. Some road ambushes have been traced back to merchants attempting to cut off supply routes to Uganda in order to monopolize the markets in Juba with their Khartoum goods. A local politician explained, 'People in the South believe that the North has not come out sincerely in this peace. Especially northern traders. Having these roads [Juba–Nimule and Juba–Torit] operational makes it flooded with goods from East Africa. Khartoum goods remain on shelves because the market is not there.'[45]

The SPLM/A

The SPLA in Eastern Equatoria has always fought multiple enemies. While engaging in fierce battles with GoS forces, its various factions were also busy fighting between themselves, with one side bringing in the LRA to fight with the GoS. The SPLA faced fierce opposition from local Equatorians; on top of this, it recognized that it could not deal properly with the LRA.[46] Accounts of military engagement between the LRA and the SPLA differ and are often contradictory, depending on the source. The LRA generally says that the SPLA was a weak force and did not want to fight them; the SPLA in turn argues that the LRA never attacked military targets, only civilian ones, which meant that engaging with them involved too many civilian casualties.[47] Overall, military contact seems to have been limited to a few clashes and major battles, some as recently as 2005. The SPLA calls its battles against the LRA 'mostly victorious', although both sides claim to have had the upper hand. The LRA says that it managed to acquire many weapons as a result of these clashes. The conflict between the two armed groups was also fought using the civilian population as proxy fighters. The SPLA did not declare war on the LRA, but they gave arms to villagers to defend themselves.[48]

In late 2005 the newly established GoSS, in which the SPLM holds the majority, changed its approach to the LRA. After Otti announced on the radio in the autumn of 2005 that the LRA wanted peace, the GoSS attempted to establish contact. Peace delegates of the LRA had already made the link with Nairobi-based Acholi elders who consulted with local Sudanese politicians and consequently linked them to Machar. Machar, who had become vice-president of the GoSS after the death of John Garang, offered to negotiate. In February 2006, a viable contact was established. The first meeting between Otti and Machar took place in April 2006 and eventually led to the first meeting with Kony the following month. The Juba Peace Talks officially began on 14 July 2006.

The UPDF in Sudan

With the signing of the agreement to launch Operation Iron Fist, the UPDF was officially allowed to establish a presence in southern Sudan. Connections between the Governments of South Sudan and Uganda, however, go back further. One international observer said, 'It is an intricate relationship between GoSS and Uganda. It is hard to dismiss the UPDF in all of this.'[49] The UPDF has supported the SPLA in both war and peace, providing supplies and strategic advice. UPDF activity on Sudanese soil is hence not uncommon. While the UPDF only officially started fighting the LRA in Sudan in 2002, there is credible evidence that it has been in Eastern Equatoria since 1997. UPDF soldiers have confirmed that they had been in the area much earlier than officially sanctioned.[50] Local civilians and politicians say that the presence of a foreign army did much to exacerbate the Sudanese civil war and had a detrimental effect on the already war-stricken population. One local from Eastern Equatoria says that while the community members never dared to fight the LRA, they would keep weapons to be prepared for the UPDF. 'When they [the UPDF] meet you in the bush, they cannot identify if you are a rebel or a civilian. They kill you,' he said.[51]

A common saying among Eastern Equatorians, as quoted by an international security expert, is: 'Why is the UPDF in Sudan? To make sure the LRA is not destroyed.'[52] The LRA has made the UPDF powerful because military funding in Uganda has been based on government arguments that stronger defence is needed against the rebels. With the spread and continuation of the war, the army has also become a significant economic player through its plundering activities and corruption.[53] The crimes committed by government actors, however, is often overlooked (Galletti and Rone, 2005). 'The resentment of people is that these people [the UPDF] were never defending them,' said a local politician in Nimule. 'They did not have very effective encounters with the LRA although their mission was to fight them. . . they resorted to destruction of the area and cutting trees in our forest. People really resent them.' He also pointed out that the UPDF no longer has a mandate to patrol Magwi County, which includes Nimule.[54]

Local leaders from Eastern Equatorian counties presented their grievances about both the LRA and the UPDF to the LRA leadership in July 2006. While the accusations of killings and abuses against the UPDF do not match those of the LRA, the local leaders' statement reads: 'The UPDF did not fulfil their mission to South Sudan. For example, instead of following and attacking the LRA, they turned their guns on the civil population, shooting, looting, raping,

and burning their huts in pretext of chasing the LRA' (The People of Acholi Madi, Southern Bari, Lotuho, Lokoya, Lulubo, 2006). Uganda and its army have been found guilty of similar behaviour in the DRC by the International Court of Justice, including 'killing, torture and other forms of inhumane treatment' of the civilian population while inciting 'ethnic conflict' and failing 'to take measures to put an end to such conflict' (International Court of Justice, 2005). The court's assessment of the UPDF is often cited by both locals in Eastern Equatoria and the LRA/M, who draw attention to similar behaviour in South Sudan.

From an economic perspective, keeping the war alive has become part of a lucrative economy for the army. Locals regularly reported that the UPDF cuts down teak trees to take them into Uganda: 'The UPDF are business-minded soldiers, they are logging timber in the Acholi area. Who gives them permission?'[55] A UN panel of experts presented evidence of Uganda's similar exploitation of natural resources during their military exploits in the DRC in 1998. In this case, members of the UPDF were found guilty of exercising a monopoly over the area's principal natural resources, cross-border trade, and tax revenues, for the purpose of enriching high-ranking members of the military and other leaders. The UPDF established physical control over areas containing coltan (columbite-tantalite, a metallic ore), diamonds, timber, and gold (United Nations, 2002).

Even during the withdrawal of the UPDF from the areas around Owiny-Kibul under the terms of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoH) (see Chapter V), locals reported that the UPDF cut down around 200 trees just outside Palataka and carried them across the border before it could be reported to the authorities. In response, a UPDF officer argued, 'Our duties are to look for rebels in southern Sudan, to maintain law and order along the road. How can we look for timber?'[56]

The UN panel also found that, in the DRC, the UPDF was guilty of creating 'the conditions that require the presence of troops' and that 'UPDF military operations have contributed to the arming of large numbers' (United Nations, 2002). To local communities, fighting the actual enemy did not seem to be the main drive of either the LRA or the UPDF in Eastern Equatoria. As a local leader says, 'Since the UPDF came to Sudan, they never had a face-to-face confrontation with the LRA. It is like the LRA has been given safe passage. People wonder why the UPDF is here. If their presence in Sudan can still aggravate tension with the LRA, why can they not move behind fire lines? The UPDF should be asked politely to leave. Their presence is not very wise to reach a tangible peace with the LRA.'[57]

The animosity towards the UPDF in Eastern Equatoria is striking. Locals and international security observers alike accuse them of having orchestrated attacks made to look like LRA actions, an explanation that has also been used by the LRA to clear themselves of blame. Often, however, even the locals have trouble telling one armed group from another. Others point out that the UPDF started sponsoring EDF 2, a successor of the EDF, to maintain insecurity in Eastern Equatoria and to clear the LRA from the area. Witnesses describe how South Sudanese and former LRA fighters were recruited into the 105th battalion of the UPDF to enter Sudan and fight the LRA with its own people. The 105th is also said to be one of the more successful UPDF battalions in engaging the LRA militarily. Locals say that it was used to set up attacks made to look like LRA activity and that its soldiers were still very active in the area in the spring of 2007. While it remains almost impossible to substantiate such claims, they underline the murky and lawless environment. While there is little doubt that individual soldiers or units have abused their military power, it is hard to establish the institutional motivation.

All such accusations, both by locals and by the LRA, are dismissed by the UPDF. One UPDF official said, 'The LRA are looking for all reasons to justify what has happened.' According to the UPDF, the LRA never engaged in fighting the army but used cowardly tactics, engaging only the smallest groups of UPDF on patrol and usually choosing to attack civilians in trading centres.[58] Responding to accusations of choosing soft civilian targets, Joseph Kony countered that when the LRA fought the UPDF, the UPDF were supported and hence accompanied by civilians: 'So when we shoot, the close fire will kill civilians also.' He added that the UPDF always made a point of being close to civilians when they attacked the LRA: 'That is the tactic, which Museveni now have [sic] started in Uganda. They mix soldier with civilians so that when we fight them, we kill civilian.'[59]

As noted earlier, the continued UPDF presence became a major sticking point in the Juba talks. While some locals claim that a complete UPDF withdrawal

would leave them with no protection from armed groups, the majority of the people in Eastern Equatoria seem tired of its presence. An assembly in Eastern Equatoria proved unworkable in late 2006 amid accusations that the UPDF as well as the LRA continued to commit atrocities.

Other armed groups

The abundance of armed groups remains a problem in southern Sudan. The CPA laid the framework for ending the presence of Other Armed Groups (OAGs) through their integration into the SAF and the SPLA. This was followed by the Juba Declaration, which merged the SSDF with the SPLA (Sudan People's Liberation Army and South Sudan Defence Forces, 2006). Despite these developments, the LRA is one of many armed groups that persist. Some of the others are GoS proxy forces, others rogue SPLA units who, deprived of pay, have turned to wreaking havoc. Still others work with traders and bandits sabotaging transportation routes to control the price of market goods, or attack locals for their subsistence.

Assigning responsibility for each individual attack to a clearly identifiable group is often impossible. Alliances change quickly and so do methods of fighting. For a long time, people identified the LRA by their dreadlocks and *panga* (machete) attacks—in fact, the LRA is often referred to as '*tong-tong*' (chop-chop). But other groups also use *pangas*, and the LRA sometimes attacked with guns, complicating the identification of perpetrators.

Despite tensions, the LRA and the EDF have cooperated closely, often fighting side by side and sharing members and allegiances. In a famous siege in October 2002, Sudanese government forces recaptured Torit from the SPLA with what for years was believed to be LRA assistance. Only recently has it become clear that the assistance actually came from the EDF: the LRA was not involved in this particular operation.[60]

One commonly cited OAG is the so-called 'LRA Sudan' (Izama, 2006). This is most likely an Acholi militia recently supported by Khartoum and not under Kony's command. As one chief explains, 'LRA Sudan, they are there. They are those who speak the language of Kony. They start by the inception of the peace talks. They are being given money to fight. These are Acholi fighting

for Khartoum.'[61] Observers say that the group identified as LRA Sudan might actually be, or at least work closely with, EDF 2.

Despite attempts to integrate OAGs, the culture of militias in southern Sudan remains unbroken. 'A lot of individuals in militias are unscrupulous,' said one UN official. 'They have had many years of a sense of being paid for their service and that is hard to overcome.'[62]

V. The Juba Peace Talks

The first inklings of a promising and comprehensive attempt to end the war in Uganda and to solve the problem of the LRA presence in Sudan began in 2006. Both sides had made overtures. In 2005–06, the LRA made contact with international organizations to gather support for peace talks, expressing a willingness to cooperate with the GoSS. The GoSS, after repeated unsuccessful attempts to establish contact with the high command, offered the LRA three options: withdraw from Sudan, declare war on the SPLA, or engage in negotiations. This led to the first meeting between Kony and Machar near the Congolese border on 3 May 2006, which was facilitated by the Dutch organization Pax Christi.

The peace talks did not get off to a promising start. International support was weak. The parties showed little trust for Machar, whom they perceived as using his mediation role to tighten his own grip on power in the GoSS. The LRA had no credibility as a negotiating partner, and because the International Criminal Court (ICC) had issued warrants, states signatories of the Rome Statute[63] could not officially support a negotiated solution without trials in The Hague first. Most of the international attention on the talks was focused on questioning the legitimacy, capacity, and knowledge of the LRA/M peace delegation, which was composed mostly of diaspora members (International Crisis Group, 2006). It was often overlooked that the delegation had been officially selected and appointed by Joseph Kony.

While the LRA/M delegation has struggled with capacity issues and infighting, the international questioning of its legitimacy perpetuated the view that the LRA is not a political force, making an already difficult negotiating environment even worse. The LRA/M repeatedly stated that the peace process was unsafe and biased against it. Progress in the first six months of the peace talks was therefore very slow. The GoSS, as the facilitator, has struggled to create a neutral space for debate, not only because of the immense complexity of interests involved, but also because it is a young government operating in a precarious security environment. The Government of Uganda, while showing commitment to the talks, displayed little flexibility on any of the early LRA demands. On the other side, the LRA's poor organization and some unrealistic demands did not help its struggle for respect.

Before the talks even began, however, they were undermined by the deteriorating relationship between the mediator and the LRA. Machar was faced with immense international pressure because he had reached out to the LRA and committed to provide them with food to achieve a peaceful environment for the negotiations. After being filmed handing over a cash gift of USD 20,000 to Joseph Kony, he was subjected to massive international criticism. It was felt that the money would enable the LRA to purchase new weapons—despite the fact that the LRA was not in need of weapons and the amount of money would have purchased very few.[64] To gain both financial and political support, Machar had to prove that these peace talks were workable and that the LRA/M could be trusted as a negotiating partner. In July 2006, Machar put pressure on Otti to leave Garamba National Park and join his peace delegation in Juba. Otti declined because of his fear of arrest under his ICC warrant. Machar then abandoned the LRA/M peace delegation in the bush near the Congolese border, a move that all but destroyed the confidence that the LRA delegation had in him. The peace talks suffered from this lack of trust in their chief mediator from July through to December 2006.

After the Cessation of Hostilities (CoH) Agreement was finally signed on 26 August 2006, LRA fighters assembled for the first time at two designated meeting points in southern Sudan, having been assured safe passage (Government of Uganda and Lord's Resistance Army/Movement, 2006). The assembly, however, lasted only a short time and the LRA dispersed when they came under military threat from the UPDF—through its intimidating presence, fire exchanges, and later a helicopter gunship attack. In a renewed agreement, the UPDF committed to withdrawing from the areas of assembly, but the LRA and the UPDF continued to clash well into 2007. Before an addendum was signed in 2007 allowing it safe passage across the Nile, the LRA was seen moving in areas far from the assembly zones, a violation of the CoH. At the same time, the UPDF moved its troops and attacked the LRA with helicopter gunships on at least one occasion. This incident has been officially confirmed by the

Cessation of Hostilities Monitoring Team (CHMT), which is made up of members of the UPDF, the SPLA, and the LRA, as well as the UN. However, in official press statements UPDF spokespeople continued to deny the attacks.

Reports of LRA activity on Sudanese soil, specifically in Eastern Equatoria, in 2006–07 are contradictory. In late 2006, some locals were adamant that the LRA had stopped attacking and was no longer supplied by Khartoum. Others remain just as convinced that the LRA was still attacking and ambushing, even with the help of the SAF. The LRA repeatedly stated that it has not launched any attacks since it entered peace talks. Several of the attacks that the LRA was accused of in late 2006 and early 2007 have been investigated by SPLA and UN monitors, who established that they were not committed by the LRA. However, the stop-and-go nature of the Juba talks in early 2007 meant that the situation in Eastern Equatoria deteriorated significantly because of aggression on all sides, including confirmed military action by the LRA, the UPDF, and the SAF. In early 2007, locals from Eastern Equatoria also renewed their complaints about abusive behaviour—in particular harassment and looting—by SPLA forces stationed in the area. Tensions between ethnic groups are also running high and often result in violence.[65]

The LRA, unsure about the direction of the peace talks after its refusal to return to the negotiating table in January 2007 (see below), ended a period of relative calm when it carried out attacks on civilians. That month, a United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) peacekeeper was killed in an attack in Eastern Equatoria. The ambush was blamed on the LRA, who denied responsibility and claimed that GoS-aligned militias were responsible. Locals in Eastern Equatoria have expressed disappointment and anger with the LRA for turning on them once again, even after the local community had agreed to host them during the assembly. The deterioration in the security situation also stalled relief and development programmes that had been a side effect of the Juba talks, leaving the citizens of Magwi County in a desperate situation after a brief period of hope.

Because the situation was clearly unworkable, and an assembly of the LRA in Owiny-Kibul had become impossible, a new addendum to the CoH Agreement allowed all LRA fighters to cross the Nile to gather in Nabanga, Western Equatoria, within six weeks of the addendum's signing on 14 April 2007 (Government of Uganda and Lord's Resistance Army/Movement 2007b). The recommendation for a single assembly point was made by the CHMT in late January. But information about LRA attacks in Western Equatoria and the group's crossing into the Central African Republic (CAR) remained confusing and often contradictory. The unresolved issue of the location of the peace talks in early 2007 led the LRA high command to withdraw from its designated assembly area in Western Equatoria, while news reports stated that LRA fighters were moving towards the border of CAR. This has not been independently verified but became a persistent rumour. Either way, any further spread of the conflict would be a worrying development.

For international security personnel, the information situation underscores the need to reinvestigate any attacks that have been blamed on the LRA, since other groups appear to be taking advantage of the lack of monitoring. According to one international security expert, the LRA record is so bad that it will be difficult not to assume that they are always the perpetrators: 'The credibility of the LRA is based on the likelihood of the LRA attacking.'[66] While some attacks, especially since January 2007, can clearly be traced back to the LRA, others remain unsolved. They were either carried out by the LRA, who are still active despite their assurances, or by forces posing as LRA members, using the commonly known uniform and ambush methods.

The LRA/M refused to continue peace talks in Juba in January 2007, citing security concerns, heavy-handed mediation, and unfair treatment as their main concerns. In a detailed statement, the LRA/M also complained that their delegation's 'credibility, authenticity, and negotiation strength' was permanently contested by the mediator (Lord's Resistance Army/Movement, 2007). This position led to a stalemate from January to April. At first, the LRA/M's refusal to return to the table in Juba was seen as proof of their lack of commitment to the peace talks, but the LRA/M's subsequent detailed explanation has modified these views. While some of the LRA/M's concerns are still regarded as exaggerated, international observers agreed that certain claims needed to be taken seriously and that the dynamics of the mediation team have at times worked against the LRA.[67] All parties to the peace talks, however, have proven their ongoing commitment by continuing to attend meetings, by maintaining open communications, and by participating in extensive consultations with

stakeholders. While the talks were officially 'hibernating' in early 2007, the newly appointed UN special envoy on the LRA conflict, former President of Mozambique Joaquim Chissano, held several meetings with the LRA leadership in Garamba National Park. Efforts to reignite the talks in Juba proved successful when the two parties agreed to return there after a face-to-face meeting between the Ugandan government delegation and the LRA high command in Ri-Kwangba on 13–14 April 2007 (Government of Uganda and Lord's Resistance Army/Movement, 2007a). The LRA agreed to return only if certain conditions concerning their security and their position at the peace talks were met. They also called for observers from various African countries. Peace talks resumed on 26 April 2007 and led to the signing of the Agreement on Comprehensive Solutions (see below). Representatives of the governments of Tanzania, South Africa, Kenya, and Mozambique were among the signatories and, in addition, several AU monitors have since strengthened the CHMT. This was the first time that the LRA had been a contactable group engaging in ongoing dialogue with the Ugandan government, with international actors, and with representatives of the communities in Sudan and Uganda.

Since the negotiations first began in 2006, northern Ugandans have enjoyed de facto peace, which has enabled many to plan for their return home to their villages from government displacement camps. The peace process has allowed traditional leaders to voice their concerns and their grievances about the plight of the Acholi and other communities in northern and eastern Uganda. In Sudan's Eastern and Western Equatoria, the peace process has also enabled some development as aid agencies have moved in to support both the local community and the peace process. However, due to insecurities in early 2007, progress came to a halt, much to the disadvantage of the local people who have expressed bitter disappointment both with the LRA for its continued attacks and with agencies for not keeping their promises. The security situation for locals grew much worse in early 2007 (Gordon et al., 2007).

While a peaceful solution is being pursued, military options have also been explored by outside parties, supported by those who favour executing the ICC arrest warrants. The ICC strategy has aimed to separate the leadership of the LRA from the rank and file in order to drive a wedge between them and enable a military intervention to execute the warrants, possibly using international special forces. A military solution would mean a comprehensive attack on the LRA camp, and would cost the lives of many soldiers in order to arrest a few leaders. But despite existing tensions within the LRA/M delegation and between delegation members and the high command, the LRA/M has resisted external attempts to create division between the command, the rank and file, and the peace delegation.

It has become clear, however, that a comprehensive peace deal can only be signed if there is a solution to the problem of the ICC warrants—one that satisfies all parties to the peace talks as well as the ICC. In May 2007, following in-depth consultations, a framework was drawn up to deal with accountability issues and to address the outstanding warrants. A much fought-over Agreement on Comprehensive Solutions was signed on 2 May 2007, using an unaltered draft that had been presented to both parties in December 2006 (Government of Uganda and Lord's Resistance Army/Movement 2 May, 2007c). While the signing was hailed as major progress in a peace process that, in many eyes, had so far produced few tangible successes, the document in fact leaves many issues unaddressed. Specifically, it does not outline implementation modalities, leaving many of the agreed articles vague. It should be seen as an expression of goodwill on both sides, not as an actual protocol of the final peace agreement. It has already become clear that many points in the agreement will need to be revisited, and this will constitute the content of the peace talks in the coming months. As has been seen with the difficult CoH, signed agreements do not necessarily lead to a clarification of issues. The CoH was at various times treated as an expression of goodwill and as a ceasefire declaration that required monitoring. This led to a confusing situation which was exacerbated by severe logistical capacity problems in the CHMT.

The Juba talks also remain marred by a poor organizational framework, an often slow or ambiguous international response, and a general lack of trust in its validity—as well as the continuing propaganda war fought by the LRA and the Government of Uganda. Military threats have become part of the peace process. The governments of Uganda and the DRC, and both the GoS and the GoSS, have made unambiguous statements about their readiness to fight the LRA if peace talks fail. The LRA has also often emphasized its readiness to take up arms again.[68]

Peace in Uganda will depend on the ability of the parties and the mediators to draft agreements that give both sides tangible gains. It must also deal with the questions of justice and accountability in a way that is conducive to community building without disregarding the existence of the international justice system. To ensure widest participation, ongoing consultations on northern Uganda should include as many local leaders, civilians, and stakeholders as possible to ensure a wide acceptance of the eventual implementation modalities. Peace in southern Sudan depends first and foremost on successful implementation of the CPA. Yet comprehensive disarmament of OAGs and civilians, and a peace agreement between the two Ugandan parties, are urgently needed to stabilize the entire region.

VI. Access to weapons

Types, stockpiles, and command of arms

Southern Sudan is awash with small arms. Several factors contribute to this. Numerous insurgencies in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa have ensured a steady stream of weapons, and other anti-government insurgent groups in Uganda have supplied the LRA with arms. When Idi Amin and Tito Okello were overthrown (1979 and 1986, respectively), many of those involved in the fighting looted guns and ammunition and cached them in northern Uganda. Some of these stocks were very old. Vast numbers of civilians also own and use weapons. Assault rifles are the weapon of choice and the most readily traded.[69] The LRA has also fought with more sophisticated equipment, although Kalashnikov-pattern assault rifles remain ubiquitous. In addition, other armed groups have stocks in Sudan and soldiers switch sides between the various militias or armies, taking their weapons with them.

The LRA has weapons and ammunition cached all over northern Uganda and southern Sudan (Small Arms Survey, 2006). During the years in which supplies from Khartoum were constant, the UPDF often fell behind in the quality of their equipment. As one officer recalls, 'They [the LRA] had all the small arms that you can think of, but also other support weapons, given by Arabs. In fact they had the anti-aircraft weapons, the twin barrel, which they could easily carry, and they had the B10, which they used to hit at our armoured vehicles and tanks. They were well equipped and in fact before the UPDF acquired a grenade launcher, they were the first people to acquire them. I remember one time they attacked a very good group of UPDF fighters using grenade launchers and we were wondering what sort of gun they were using. When one of our people picked up the cartridge and we examined it, that is when we got to know that they were far more advanced than us.' The UPDF then asked other countries for help to equip themselves with similar weaponry.[70]

The LRA was never seriously involved in arms trafficking. In the early days, access to weapons was easy because many LRA fighters were either former

Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) fighters or had close connections to former members of the military who had been fighting Museveni, such as members of the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA). In fact, locals recount how, after the overthrow of Tito Okello in 1986, a wave of weapons was brought to northern Uganda and southern Sudan. When Khartoum pledged its support for the LRA ten years later, access to modern weapons greatly improved. One local leader said, 'If you wanted 500 tanks, as long as you promised that you would use them to kill their [Khartoum's] enemies, which to them meant any black-skinned person. . . and of course they were using blacks to kill blacks. To them arms is not a very big problem.'[71]

Some of the larger or more modern LRA weapons were acquired in battles, mostly with the UPDF or the SPLA, but also with UN forces. In January 2006, the LRA and forces of the UN Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) clashed in Garamba National Park after MONUC was given accurate information about the whereabouts of the LRA's high command. Eight Guatemalan MONUC peacekeepers were killed. Although the official version of events—from both the LRA and MONUC—is that the LRA was responsible for the deaths, international military officials interviewed confirm they were killed by 'friendly fire' in a 'botched operation' in which the LRA had the upper hand because of their knowledge of the territory. In addition, the officials argued that stories circulating about the mutilation of the bodies of the Guatemalan peacekeepers were untrue.[72] The LRA has said that many of its fighters were killed in the operation, but it was able to make off with some modern weapons including an M60 General Purpose Machine Gun (GPMG).

At various stages in the conflict, the LRA used assault rifles, machine guns, landmines—usually of Russian origin—and rocket-propelled grenades. They reportedly also used SA-7 man-portable air defence systems, although it is not clear whether this was actually the case. The main emphasis, however, has always been on small arms, enabling the highly mobile LRA to survive. In addition to 7.62 x 39 mm Kalashnikov-pattern assault rifles, 7.62 x 51 mm FN FAL and G3 rifles are in use, as well as 9 mm Browning pistols, and a small number of 5.56 x 45 mm M16 variants.

GPMGs—again, usually Russian-made—seem to be the most common machine gun in circulation, although the LRA also has Bren guns. The RPK, an AK-47 with a heavier barrel, bipod, different stock, and larger magazine, is the most common variation, along with the 7.62 x 54R mm PK, which fires a longer-rimmed cartridge. Shotguns are available, but are rare and mostly single-barrel US varieties. The LRA also displayed multi-shot grenade launchers. The more expensive varieties, such as the Dragunov SVD or the M60, are rarer because ammunition is expensive and difficult to obtain. The supply of ammunition in general, however, has always been good and when in fighting mode the LRA carries standard amounts—at least 200 rounds per man with an additional belt of 100 rounds on the gunner, 400 rounds on the loader, and 100 rounds on the rifleman.[73]

LRA communications rely on satellite phones and radio equipment acquired through looting or from supporters. Where possible, the LRA has also used standard mobile phones in addition to an efficient runner system between the various groups led by different commanders.

All the parties involved in the fighting agree on one thing: weapon supplies and stockpiles are enough to keep the conflict alive for a long time, even without any further outside support. The LRA entered the peace talks knowing that in terms of equipment, they remain a viable military threat. Stockpiles are kept in Eastern and Western Equatoria as well as in northern Uganda, although exact numbers are impossible to establish. In fact, the exact number of guns may well become an issue during negotiations over the terms of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR). The UPDF calls the LRA weapon stockpiles 'a sizeable amount', in terms of both weaponry and ammunition.[74]

LRA fighters are well-trained to keep their arms in good condition, cleaned and oiled regularly. Section commanders use range cards to give axis or arc cover. Gun stakes are still used, hinting at slightly outdated military training. Most LRA fighters wear at least part of a uniform and many are fully outfitted with proper military gear. Most fighters wear Wellington boots, which are now considered almost a trademark of the LRA.

Arms transfers

Guns and ammunition are common currency in southern Sudan: all armies involved in the LRA conflict have been known to trade arms for information.

The LRA has traded arms on a small scale, supplying locals with guns or ammunition in return for information on the whereabouts of the SPLA. When a UPDF soldier dies, his weapons are typically sold to locals in this way. Southern Sudan has for two decades been an area without rule of law, and armed groups have switched alliances easily—moving weapons back and forth between various rebel and government forces. Even the official military acted without a control mechanism and the wartime economy made weapons trading a viable source of income, including for government armies. The presence of a foreign army in Sudan, the UPDF, added to the climate of insecurity for civilians and provided them with an extra incentive to obtain and carry arms.

It is not only the military that has driven the arms flows in the region. Pastoralists along the Kenyan, Ugandan, and Sudanese borders have been well supplied with weapons. They have been disarmed at various stages but some of these weapons have trickled back into the fighting areas (Mkutu, 2003). The tradition of cattle raiding, exacerbated by increasing populations and diminishing access to natural resources, has provided a clear incentive for civilians or pastoralists to acquire small arms (Schomerus, forthcoming).[75]

In addition, there has been an established arms supply route between Somalia, Ethiopia, and Sudan for many years, supplying the SPLA and civilians. In Eastern Equatoria, both the LRA and other Khartoum-supported militias have most of their weapons supplied in the government-held Torit area. Nimule, although held by the SPLA, remains a major black market trading centre for weapons coming from Uganda, many of which seem to have been picked up by civilians. The supply routes taken are just east of Nimule, but they have become increasingly difficult to use because of the UPDF presence. More recently, there has been an increase in arms trafficking from Kenya and Somalia to Uganda—an indicator of the unstable situation in Somalia, but also of the increased sense of instability in the entire region, which is inevitably shared by the southern Sudanese living along those routes.

VII. Conclusion

The Ugandan conflict and the current peace process must be set in a broader bilateral and international context. Past attempts at achieving peace have failed because one party was not seen as credible, attacks continued to occur, or deadlines were too unrealistic and were followed by immediate military action. The Juba Peace Process, despite its shortcomings and obstacles, is an opportunity to negotiate a peace agreement that can address issues comprehensively. At the same time, it highlights problems within Sudan that must be addressed in order to ensure peace in that country and stability in the Great Lakes region in general.

By the first anniversary of the Juba talks in July 2007, the peace process had come a long way. Two of the most contested points of the five agenda items had been agreed to.[76] The talks have been faced with numerous obstacles, however, and each party has had its own difficulties to overcome. The LRA/M had to find its footing as a negotiating partner and prove that it was credible in its endeavour to achieve peace, despite the continuation of atrocities. The Government of Uganda had to take on a new role in negotiating with the LRA/M, something that it had previously said it would not be prepared to do. At the same time, military pressure from the UPDF continued, causing doubts about the government's commitment. The GoSS and the SPLM/A found themselves in the highly demanding role of facilitator while barely managing their own peace process. Fluctuating levels of international commitment, an often half-hearted aid agency response, and debates over the principles of engaging with armed groups have added to the problems.

The Juba talks remain a complicated process involving difficult negotiations that concern many years of grievances and suffering by civilians, the army, and rebels. The chasms run extremely deep and the process was never going to be a swift one. Many international bodies still find it difficult to accept the LRA/M as a viable negotiating partner. While it is important to recognize these difficulties and to communicate with the LRA/M about issues of dis-

trust and disorganization, it is equally important to ensure firm commitment and support for the talks by all parties and to realise the implementation of agreements.

The first priority must be to control the security situation in Sudan to make peace building and development possible. A comprehensive development approach that provides services beneficial to the LRA/M in a safe assembly area, as well as to host communities, is essential in a region that remains unstable because of the numerous sources of insecurity. It is vital that resources mobilized for development programmes do not dry up because of deteriorating security or the slow progress of the talks.

Because of the international implications of the conflict and the history of mistrust, it is unlikely that the LRA will fully demobilize so long as there is any threat of the international arrest of its leadership. While the Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation allows some room for manoeuvre through officially instituting traditional justice procedures, the issues of the warrants still needs to be resolved. The complex international situation will require an adaptable and non-linear approach to demobilization. It needs to allow implementation of a peace deal that has disarmament and demobilization as an accompaniment to peace, but not as a prerequisite.

At the same time, internal Sudanese disarmament programmes must be strengthened. An approach is necessary that combines work on peace building with the implementation of a disarmament strategy that people—both civilians and armed groups—can trust. There are many examples of disarmament in the region that have not led to stabilization because they were carried out either forcefully or ineffectually, such as the disarmament of the Karamojong. It is important to recognize the long-term timeframe that disarmament will need on both sides of the border.

Reintegration programmes must start before demobilization and they must be designed to allow for flexibility. On the Ugandan side, a facilitated return to village life should be supported to create a sense of normality conducive to reintegration. Previously, reintegration in Uganda has been a difficult task because the approach was centred on psychosocial interventions that often assumed that all returnees from the LRA were traumatized (Allen and Schomerus, 2006). If the LRA and the government sign a peace deal that leads to LRA demobilization, many of the demobilized soldiers will have a very different experience from those who escaped from the LRA earlier. Even escapees did not always see their time with the LRA only in negative terms (Annan and Blattmann, 2006), while many members of the LRA have chosen to remain in the group out of conviction. Programmes need to take into account the fact that many will feel they have fought a legitimate fight and have brought the war to a peaceful end.

Both urban centres and remote rural areas are in desperate need of a credible police authority. In most areas, policing has been undertaken by the military, often granting impunity to its members. Training of police officers is vital for establishing the rule of law and creating an environment conducive to development (Ehrhart and Schnabel, 2006). Spoilers of the Sudanese peace have to be identified beyond doubt and pursued accordingly.

Both international justice and civilian interests must be taken into account in the peace building process. While this is covered in the accountability agreement, implementation procedures are still very vague, or as Vincent Otti put it, 'Everybody now has to put some meat to the agreement.'[77] It is not clear who will administer traditional justice or what form a revised and appropriate traditional justice ceremony would take—or whether a traditional procedure can only follow after a different and more formal accountability procedure. Frameworks of accountability should be drawn up to avoid giving the impression that the LRA leaders 'got off lightly'. The ICC warrants were once a possible trigger for the peace process, but they have become an obstacle to its progress. In the current climate of negotiations, it seems more conducive to peace not to use the warrants just to fulfil a principle. It is more important to prove that the international justice system is responsive to realities and that peace and improvements in civilians' living conditions are the priority.

Endnotes

1 The term 'structural violence' was coined by Galtung (1969) and refers to any situation in which human development is hindered by economic and political structures. Unequal access to political representation, resources, education, or health care—all of which are found in northern Uganda—is considered structural violence.
2 The warrants have not yet been served and have become a major sticking point in the peace talks with the LRA. One of the commanders named in the warrants was killed in 2006.
3 Author interviews with various LRA combatants, 2005–06.
4 The UPDF has consistently portrayed the LRA as a group of a few hundred scattered fighters. The LRA says their strength exceeds 10,000, including fighters and non-combatants.
5 Author interview with LRA Chairman Joseph Kony, Ri-Kwangba, 12 June 2006.
6 For a more detailed discussion on 're-politicizing' war see Allen and Seaton (1999).
7 Author interview with Joseph Kony, Ri-Kwangba, 12 June 2006.
8 Author interviews with participants of an Acholi meeting in Nabanga, July 2006.
9 Author interview with Joseph Kony, Ri-Kwangba, 12 June 2006.
10 In 2005, the International Court of Justice presented its ruling on the case of the DRC vs Uganda. In Paragraph 210, the judgement states that 'the Court finds that there is convincing evidence of the training in UPDF training camps of child soldiers and of the UPDF's failure to prevent the recruitment of child soldiers in areas under its control' (International Court of Justice, 2005).
11 Author interview with an international security expert, Juba, October 2006.
12 This is a conclusion based on fieldwork in various locations in Sudan and on interviews with civilians as well as members of the military.
13 Author interview with a local chief in Magwi County, November 2006. This interview was held in English and has been transcribed verbatim.
14 Author interview with LRA Second-in-Command Vincent Otti, Ri-Kwangba, December 2006.
15 Various interviews with security officials in Juba, October 2006
16 Author interviews with community members in Magwi County, October–December 2006.
17 Author interview with a UPDF commander, Magwi County, October 2006.
18 Author interviews with community members in Magwi County, October–December 2006.
19 Author interview with locals in Magwi County, October 2006.
20 Author interview with an international security expert, Juba, September 2006.
21 Often this identification of Alice Lakwena as Kony's predecessor is based on the spirituality of both movements. There has also been much speculation about old and continued contacts between Joseph Kony and Alice Lakwena even after she went to live in exile in Kenya. Various family connections between them have been quoted. Lakwena, however, never played a public role in the LRA war and denied any connections to Kony shortly before her death in 2007. Her Holy Spirit Movement was formed in 1986, which is usually seen as the beginning of the LRA insurgency because that year Lakwena briefly teamed up with the rebel Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA). The Holy Spirit Movement managed to score some military victories over the National Resistance Army. After the Holy Spirit Movement was defeated, the LRA emerged as one of its splinter groups and successors.
22 Author interview with a local leader, Magwi County, November 2006.
23 Author interview with a government official in Juba, November 2006.
24 Author interview with locals in Magwi county, October 2006.
25 These massacres are well-known and have been widely reported.
26 Author interview with a high-ranking UPDF commander in 2006.
27 Author interview with security personnel, 2007.
28 Author interview with a high-ranking UPDF commander in 2006.
29 Author interview with a high-ranking UPDF commander in 2006.
30 Author interview with Vincent Otti, Ri-Kwangba, December 2006.
31 Author interview with a Ugandan government official, 2006.
32 Machar eventually realized that the GoS had no intention of letting the referendum through, and this precipitated his break with Khartoum and return to the SPLA in 2002.
33 Author interview with Vincent Otti, Ri-Kwangba, December 2006.
34 In October 1996, 139 students were abducted from St. Mary's College Boarding School in Aboke (Apac District) and taken across the border into Sudan. The headmistress of the school, Sister Rachele Fassera, followed the LRA to Sudan to negotiate the release of 109 of the girls.
35 Author interview with a local leader from Eastern Equatoria, Juba, November 2006.
36 Author interview with high-ranking LRA commanders and LRA combatants, Sudan, July–December 2006.
37 Author interview with a high-ranking UPDF officer, 2006.
38 Author interview with security personnel, Sudan 2006.
39 Author interview with Vincent Otti, Ri-Kwangba, December 2006.
40 Author interview with a LRA commander, July 2006.
41 Author interview with GoSS Vice-President Riek Machar, Maridi, June 2006.
42 Author interviews with international aid workers and local leaders, Sudan, September–December 2006.
43 Author interviews with local leaders, Eastern Equatoria, September–December 2006.
44 Author interview with a local government representative of Nimule, Juba, October 2006.
45 Author interview with a Nimule politician, October 2006.
46 Author interview with a former SPLA commander, Juba, October 2006.
47 Author interview with a SPLA commander in Eastern Equatoria, Magwi County, November 2006.
48 Author interview with a UPDF commander, Magwi County, October 2006.
49 Author interview with an international observer in Juba, November 2006.
50 Author interviews with UPDF soldiers in Sudan and locals in Eastern Equatoria, September–November 2006.
51 Author interview with a local chief in Magwi County, November 2006.
52 Author interview with an international security expert, Juba, September 2006.
53 This point is argued in more detail by Andrew Mwenda in his paper on the impact of international aid on the conflict in northern Uganda (Mwenda, forthcoming).
54 Author interview with a local politician from Nimule, Juba, October 2006.

55 Author interview with a local administrator, Parajok, November 2006.
56 Author interview with UPDF member, 2006.
57 Author interview with a local leader, Magwi County, October 2006.
58 Author interview with UPDF member, 2006.
59 Author interview with Joseph Kony, Ri-Kwangba, 12 June 2006.
60 Author interview with a SPLA general, Juba, November 2006.
61 Author interview with a local leader, Magwi County, November 2006.
62 Author interview with a UN official, Juba, September 2006.
63 The Rome Statute is the treaty that established the ICC; there are currently 104 states signed up to it.
64 The money later trickled back into the community, and the LRA was seen purchasing goods at markets in Western Equatoria.
65 A forthcoming publication by the same author addresses ethnic tensions in more detail.
66 Author interview with an international security expert, Juba, October 2006.
67 Author interview with international observers, Juba, September–December 2006.
68 Vincent Otti has stated this repeatedly during radio appearances.
69 Author interviews with military and civilians, July–December 2006.
70 Author interview with a high-ranking UPDF commander, 2006.
71 Author interview with a local leader, Magwi County, October 2006.
72 Author interviews with international military officials.
73 Author interviews with active LRA soldiers, Ri-Kwangba, December 2006; and with SPLA members, Juba, September–November 2006.
74 Author interviews with UPDF officials, 2006.
75 HSBA *Issue Brief* 8 will focus on responses to pastoralist violence in southern Sudan, northern Uganda, and north-western Kenya.
76 The five agenda items are: Cessation of Hostilities, Comprehensive Solutions, Accountability and Reconciliation, DDR, and Ceasefire.
77 Author interview with Vincent Otti, Ri-Kwangba, July 2007.

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