Klemen Kocjančič

ANALIZA OBOROŽENEGA KONFLIKTA: ŠTUDIJA PRIMERA GOSPODOVE ODPORNIŠKE VOJSKE

ANALYSIS OF THE ARMED CONFLICT: A CASE STUDY OF LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY

Povzetek
Med najdlje delujočimi terorističnimi skupinami na afriški celini je Gospodova odporniška vojska (Lord's Resistance Army), ki izvira iz Ugande in je za osnovo svoje ideologije uporabila krščanstvo v kombinaciji z lokalnim animizmom in islamom ter se najprej osredotočila na zaščito ljudstva Aholi, nato pa iz boja proti sovražniku prešla v zatiranje lastnega ljudstva. Sprva notranji konflikt so aktivnosti skupine s posredniško vojno med sosednjimi državami razširile po vsej regiji, dokler na koncu ni prišlo celo do mednarodnega posredovanja. Na podlagi okvira za ocenjevanje konfliktov v kombinaciji z drugimi metodami je analiziran oboroženi konflikt prek napredka skozi čas.

Ključne besede
Analiza konflikta, Gospodova odporniška vojska, terorizem, gverila, protigverilsko bojevanje.

Abstract
One of the longest-running terrorist groups on the African continent is the Lord's Resistance Army, originating from Uganda. Using the Christianity combined with local animism and Islam as the basis of their ideology and focusing at first on the protection of the Acholi people, this group evolved from fighting their enemies to oppressing their own people. Initially an internal conflict, the activities of the Lord's Resistance Army spread throughout the region through a proxy war between neighbouring countries, until eventually international intervention was called for. Based on the Conflict Assessment Framework, combined with other methods, this armed conflict is analysed, showing the progress of the conflict through the time.

Key words
Analysis of the conflict, Lord's Resistance Army, terrorism, insurgency, counterinsurgency.

Introduction As noted by Leonard (2010), the second half of the 20th century witnessed a significant transformation of the African continent, characterized by the profound reconfiguration of nation-states as part of the protracted decolonization process. This historical phase gave rise to diverse resistance movements, each animated by distinct aspirations and objectives. While a subset of these movements successfully achieved the establishment of independent sovereign entities, others embarked on protracted guerrilla warfare campaigns against the newly emergent nation-states. After their emergence, many of these newly formed states found themselves confronted with severe challenges, notably the incapacity to uphold security and institute effective governance. This predicament, in turn, precipitated a substantial proliferation of internal and international armed conflicts, with various resistance entities bearing the brunt of being branded as terrorist organizations. Regrettably, the repercussions of these conflicts endure to this day.

One of the most intractable, violent, and infamous among these African terrorist organizations is the Lord's Resistance Army, hereinafter referred to as the LRA. The LRA's inception can be traced to its formation in the northern region of Uganda; nevertheless, the organization's trajectory has compelled it to disperse from its initial stronghold. Currently, the LRA's operations are primarily concentrated in an expanse that spans across South Sudan, the Central African Republic (referred to as CAR), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (referred to as DRC).

The conflict associated with the LRA serves as an instructive paradigm illustrating how initially non-violent disputes can evolve into protracted, low-intensity warfare, ultimately undergoing a transition from internal strife to an international conflagration. Various international organizations were drawn into the futile endeavour of conflict prevention in this context.

For the purposes of this study, a Conflict Assessment Framework, originally devised by the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom, was utilized (Goodhand, Vaux, Walker, 2002).

The "Conducting Conflict Assessments: Guidance Notes" (hence forth CCA) divides the assessment in three key stages: 1) analysis of the conflict; 2) analysis of international responses to the conflict; and 3) development of strategies and options. Each of these stages is then further divided into sections. This article will primarily focus on the first stage of the comprehensive conflict assessment (analysis of the conflict), which is composed of analysis of involved structures and actors, and dynamics of the conflict. Two other parts, which are excluded, are the analysis of responses, which is divided into mapping external responses, mapping development policies and programmes and then assessing impacts on conflict and peace. The last stage regarding strategies and options involves an analysis of influences of other responses to conflict (Goodhand, Vaux, Walker, 2002, p 6).

The CCA will be complemented by a comprehensive analysis of both primary and secondary sources, incorporating historical and descriptive approaches. By harmonizing these methodologies, the present paper aims to elucidate the dynamics of this armed conflict while also endeavouring to prognosticate its future trajectories.

1   OVERVIEW OF THE CONFLICT

To comprehend the armed conflict in question, an examination of the histories of the countries and ethnic groups involved is essential. This will shed light on the origins of the conflict and the circumstances under which it emerged.

1.1   From colony to dictatorship

As per Allen (2006, p 26), the commencement of Uganda's modern history can be dated to the year 1900 when the Uganda Protectorate, governed by the British, was established. Furthermore, the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium in Sudan extended British influence and control throughout the region. It was during this period that a form of social engineering emerged, characterized by the utilization of various ethnic groups within the framework of British governance. Ehrenreich (1998, p 87) wrote, that the British administration perceived the northern tribes, predominantly the Acholi and Lango, as valiant, and consequently employed them in military, police, and prison services. Conversely, the southern tribes were predominantly engaged in agricultural and public service roles. Doom and Vlassenroot (1999, p 8) wrote, that this dynamic eventually evolved into what has been termed a "military ethnocracy," marked by a discernible economic division between the southern region, including western Uganda, and the northern territories.

While Sudan declared independence in 1956, accompanied by a conflict that had begun a year earlier, Uganda declared its independence from the United Kingdom in 1962. Uganda's journey towards independence and nation-building was notably considered a success story (Allen, 2006, p 27).

As noted by Doom and Vlassenroot (1999, p 9), the inaugural president of Uganda, Milton Obote, a Lwo-speaking Langi, initially relied on the armed forces to consolidate his power. However, over time, his regime took on increasingly dictatorial characteristics. In 1971, his rule came to an end when Idi Amin seized power through a military coup. Amin not only purged the army of Lwo-speaking individuals, including the Acholi, but also engaged in massacres. Some survivors of this brutal purge escaped to Tanzania, where they organized the Acholi-controlled Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA).

In 1979, a grand coalition involving Tanzania and various anti-Amin groups successfully overthrew Amin, paving the way for Obote's return to power following a disputed (some claim rigged) election (Allen, 2006, pp 28–29).

1.2   Rise of insurgency

Subsequently, as per Finnström (2006, 20), erstwhile anti-Amin allies, dissatisfied with the electoral outcomes, initiated a new guerrilla force, the National Resistance Army (NRA), under the leadership of Yoweri Museveni in 1981.

This intrastate conflict persisted until July 1985 when two generals, Basilio Olara-Okello and Tito Okello Lutwa, staged a coup against Obote. Tito briefly assumed the presidency, but his tenure was short-lived, as Yoweri Museveni seized power on January 25, 1986 (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999, p 9; Prunier, 2004, p 364).

Dissatisfaction among soldiers from the Acholi tribe with the new regime led to another mutiny in which they declared Tito Okello as president. Despite the signing of a peace treaty between UNLA and NRA, the latter faction reneged on the agreement and advanced on the capital, Kampala. However, their march was unsuccessful, and Acholi soldiers eventually retreated to their tribal homelands in northern Uganda (Allen, 2006, pp 29–30).

While some of the ex-soldiers joined the ranks of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) or Equatoria Defence Force (EDF; another Sudanese-sponsored militia), some formed a new group – Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA) (Allen, 2006, p 30).

This new group came under spiritual (and then also military) leadership of different spirit mediums. Among them was most notorious Alice Auma (also known as Lakwema – the messenger/prophet), who claimed that she was possessed by various spirits (Prunier, 2004).

She offered spiritual guidance for ex-UNLA soldiers, and they started to follow her; this evolved into Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) or the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces (HSMF). By the end of 1986, Alice claimed to have around 18,000 members under her control and the next year she staged a "crusade" – in October 1987 around 10,000 soldiers advanced toward country's capital, but were defeated some 130 km from Kampala. Alice escaped and has lived in Kenya ever since (Allen, 2006, pp 30–36).

Survivors again retreated to north: majority joined government's side, but die-hards formed or joined existing groups, based on Alice's ideology (and theology). Two most important post-HSM groups were based around Sevarino Lukoya and Joseph Kony. Lukoya was Alice's father and also claiming spiritual powers. He formed so called Lord's Army, which was defeated in 1989 and Lukoya himself was imprisoned for several years (Allen, 2006, pp 36–37).

1.3   Creation of the LRA

Joseph Kony, who also claimed to be a spirit medium, further claimed kinship connection with Alice (as his cousin, nephew or as having a shared grandfather. His

small group, known as Lord's Salvation Army (LSA), was active even before HSM demise in 1987, but Alice wouldn't accept Kony into her movement (Prunier, 2004, p 366).

After her defeat and 1988 peace agreement between UPDA and Museveni, a lot of disgruntle members of UPDA, that accepted the peace treaty, swelled the ranks of Kony's group. Among them was also Odong Latek, one of the most experienced UPDA commanders. The group became known as Uganda People's Democratic Liberation Army and also United Democratic Christian Force (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999, p 22).

Lateck organized group in military fashion, while Kony became spiritual leader. Lateck was killed quite early, but by the 1990 Kony became most significant anti-government leader in Acholiland, the area populated by the Acholi tribes in Uganda (Finnström, 2006, p 200). Kony renamed his organization, this time to Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) (Allen, 2006, pp 38–39).

In 1991, Uganda started anti-insurgency operation, named Operation North, which even further alienated Acholi people from government through the use of arrests and torture. But when these tactics ended and government started forming local defense groups against LRA, LRA experienced a gradual loss of support (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999, p 23).

But the creation of so called »arrow brigades« by the government, caused the shift of LRA focus from governmental forces to their own people, that they considered as collaborators (Allen, 2006, p 47).

In early 1992 and again in late 1993 LRA staged two successful offensives against government. With these LRA came in focus of Sudanese government, who was looking for anti-Museveni opposition. Sudan started to support LRA with military aid and training facilities in Sudan; with this LRA started to expand. As Kony received support from Muslim Sudan, he started to implement several Muslim theological doctrines; from banning pig farming (and even killing pig farmers) to amputation of hands for people caught working on Friday (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999, p 25).

From mid-1993, the LRA grew from 300 fighters to over 2,000 well-equipped soldiers in less-than a year (Global Security, 2023a, Prunier, 2004, pp 366–367; Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999, p 28).

This marks also a start of involvement of LRA in proxy war between Uganda and Sudan. Uganda was sponsoring the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), which operated in southern Sudan, thus becoming also LRA's target (Dunn, 2004, p 140).

1994 is marked as a year, when Ugandan government started to hold secret meetings with LRA's highest leadership regarding ceasefire, but the negotiations were

successful (they agreed to a ceasefire) and were finished in February 1994, when Museveni proclaimed an ultimatum (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999, p 24).

1.4 Counterinsurgency

Beginning in late 1996, the Ugandan approach to countering insurgency introduced a pivotal strategy of internal displacement, forcibly relocating rural populations closer to urban centers and military garrisons, which became a central component of their anti-insurgency tactics (Allen, 2006, p 53).

The repercussions of this conflict were painfully evident in August 1997 when over 200,000 people within the region were internally displaced (Ehrenreich, 1998, p 81).

This complex proxy war persisted until 1999 when 1.6 both Uganda and Sudan entered into the Nairobi Agreement, stipulating the cessation of support for militias. In the same year, Uganda implemented a blanket amnesty for all rebels, albeit with limited success (Finnström, 2006, p 200).

However, these measures failed to deter the LRA, which maintained its presence in northern Uganda and southern Sudan. In March 2002, both countries inked a protocol enabling Ugandan forces to operate in southern Sudan under the aegis of Operation Iron Fist, specifically targeting the LRA. Over 20,000 Ugandan soldiers effectively dismantled the LRA's infrastructure and compelled the group to withdraw from the capital. However, the UPDF (Uganda People's Defense Force) was unable to eradicate the LRA entirely. Consequently, the LRA relocated its operational base further north in Uganda, while intensifying its recruitment, or rather abduction, of even younger children than before. Furthermore, use of sexual violence and forced marriages, became a prevalent symbol of LRA's activities. Nonetheless, evidence uncovered by the UPDF revealed that certain elements of the Sudan People's Armed Forces (SPAF) continued to support the LRA with military provisions (Baines, 2014; Dunn, 2004, p 141).

It was during this period that the United States began to provide logistical support to Ugandan forces (Allen, 2006, p 51).

The sustained offensive compelled the LRA to abandon its Ugandan bases, relocating the majority of its activities to southern Sudan (NCTC, 2023). In December 2003, Uganda, as the first time a country invoked the articles of the Rome Statute, referred the LRA's activities to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) (Akhavan, 2005, p 403).

March 2004 marked the commencement of the second Operation Iron Fist, which proved more efficacious than its predecessor, inducing the defection of more LRA fighters (Allen, 2006, p 52).

In October 2005, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for the LRA leadership. This development escalated violence to include international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and foreign nationals within Uganda (Finnström, 2006, p 200).

By this juncture, more than 90% of the Acholi population found themselves internally displaced, contributing to a total figure exceeding 1.5 million internal refugees (Finnström, 2006, p 203).

In 2001, the LRA was added to the United States' list of terrorist organizations, primarily due to its connection with Sudan (Allen, 2006, p 51).

1.5 Relocation of the LRA

Between 2005 and 2006, the LRA was nearly entirely expelled from Uganda and began to operate in the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and South Sudan (NCTC, 2023).

In the DRC, the LRA utilized Garamba National Park as its new base starting in 2005, though it did not engage the Congolese army until September 2008 (Enough, 2014).

Nevertheless, as early as January 2006, the LRA had claimed the lives of eight UN peacekeepers within the same national park (Global Security, 2023b).

In 2005, the LRA intensified its attacks in southern Sudan and northern Uganda (Global Security, 2023b).

In 2006, the LRA extended its operations to the CAR, remaining relatively passive until February 2009, when it targeted the small border town of Obo (Enough, 2014).

In the same year, President Museveni first issued an ultimatum for surrender and later announced amnesty for the LRA leadership. Both parties agreed to a truce formalized in August of the same year with the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. The Juba peace talks, which commenced in July 2006, progressed positively until March 2008 when Joseph Kony departed from his base in the DRC for the CAR. In the following month, Kony refused to sign the permanent truce agreement and ordered an escalation of abductions in all three countries - the DRC, CAR, and Sudan. In September 2008, fighting between the LRA and anti-LRA forces resumed. As Kony once again rejected a truce at the end of November 2008, the combined forces of Uganda, the DRC, and Sudan initiated Operation Lightning Thunder in December. This campaign, also known as the Garamba offensive, aimed at the LRA's base in eastern DRC and included the presence of 17 U.S. soldiers providing logistical and intelligence support. While the operation resulted in the destruction of LRA infrastructure and a weakening of its forces, it did not achieve the elimination of the LRA's leadership, which subsequently relocated to the CAR

and Sudan. In retaliation, the LRA launched a series of attacks in the DRC, resulting in nearly 2,000 casualties between September 2008 and December 2010 (Enough, 2014; Matti, 2012).

Already in November 2007, the Ugandan government started a process of reconciliation with the (former) combatants, members of the LRA, through the process of "forgiveness tour" (Jeffery, 2011).

1.6 International involvement and decline of the LRA

In March 2009, the LRA announced a ceasefire and proposed peace talks, but anti-LRA forces continued their operations. In September 2009, the LRA once again proposed a ceasefire and peace talks (Global Security, 2023b, 2023c).

However, in December of the same year, the LRA committed a series of massacres, which continued on a lesser scale until May 2010. In 2010, UN personnel in the CAR, initially under the auspices of MINURCAT and later BINUCA, became targets for the LRA (Enough, 2014).

November 2010 witnessed heightened international attention on the conflict with the introduction of Barack Obama's plan, the "Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act," designed to combat the LRA. This plan was enacted in October 2011, prompting the United States to dispatch troops to central Africa to assist in training local anti-LRA forces (Global Security, 2023d).

American involvement in the anti-LRA effort was named Operation Observant Compass (Arieff and Ploch, 2012; Global Security, 2023e; NCTC, 2023).

A significant development occurred in July 2011 with the independence of South Sudan, which physically severed the LRA from its supporters in Sudan. In November 2011, the African Union (AU) designated the LRA as a terrorist organization and initiated the Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the LRA (RCILRA). This endeavour evolved into an international (regional) military force known as the Regional Task Force (of brigade size), operating under Ugandan command with contributions from regional nations (DRC, CAR and South Sudan), and became operational in March 2012 (NCTC, 2023).

One year later, in March 2013, a coup in the CAR disrupted anti-LRA operations in the region and allowed the LRA to recuperate (NCTC, 2023).

But this recuperation was temporary, as soon the individual countries (CAR, DRC and South Sudan) resumed their operations against the LRA. In January 2015, one of the last remaining commanders of the LRA, Dominic Ongwen, a former child soldier, surrendered to the CAR, and was later turned over to US forces. Until then, the LRA was responsible for more than 100,000 dead people and further kidnapping of more than 60,000 children, which were used as child soldiers and sexual slaves

(Gustavsson, Oruut, and Rubenson, 2017; Smith, 2015). International Criminal Court (ICC CPI, 2021) found Ongwen guilty in 2021.

By 2017, the LRA shrunk down to only 100 people, which resulted that in April of that year, both the US and Ugandan governments declared that LRA is effectively destroyed terrorist group and thus no longer presents a security threat to Uganda and the region. This also resulted in ending of counter-insurgency activities against the LRA (Baddorf, 2017).

Currently, Kony is believed to be hiding in Sudanese region of Darfur, under the protection of his long-time supporters (Cascais and Koena, 2022).

2 ANALYSES OF THE CONFLICT

As part of its analysis of involved structures, the CCA (Goodhand, Vaux, Walker, 2002, p 10) places a specific emphasis on long-term factors within the domains of security, politics, economics, and social aspects that exert influence over the ongoing conflict.

2.1 Overview of Uganda

In the realm of security, both Uganda's and its neighbouring countries' (Sudan, then South Sudan, CAR, and DRC) security and military apparatus demonstrated an inability to establish the rule of law across their respective territories. This shortcoming created a conducive environment for the formation, perpetuation, and operations of non-state armed groups in opposition to the government. Furthermore, the porous nature of national borders allowed entities like the LRA and other armed groups to move freely between different countries, thus evading governmental counter-insurgency efforts. Concurrently, the security situation across the region exhibited similarities to Uganda's, with neighbouring countries experiencing various degrees of instability. This instability had historical roots in military coups and changes of government. Moreover, interstate conflicts contributed to the phenomenon of proxy warfare, with countries supporting non-state armed groups in hostilities against their adversary (Feldman, 2008; Jackson, 2002, p 30).

From a political standpoint, Uganda was governed by an undemocratic regime characterized by a weak judiciary system and an underdeveloped civil society. The lack of democratic representation, including the absence of democratic elections, led to strained relations with numerous neighbouring countries and, consequently, hindered international cooperation, especially in the realm of security (Apuuli, 2005, pp 38–41).

The economy of Uganda primarily relied on limited agricultural production and livestock grazing. This economic model resulted in economic disparities among different social groups, largely stemming from ethnic and regional divisions. The

overall instability in the region further restricted opportunities for international trade (Jackson, 2002, pp 29–33).

Social inclusion and exclusion within Ugandan society were predominantly determined by the existing ethnic system, a legacy that predated the establishment of an independent Uganda and remained unresolved. This social dynamic perpetuated divisions within the country, exacerbating tensions and contributing to the ongoing conflict (Apuuli, 2005, p 37; Jackson, 2002, pp 35–37).

2.2 Analysis of conflict actors

The involved actors can be categorized into three distinct groups:

1. LRA and its allies: Within this category, the LRA itself stands as the primary entity. Initially conceived as a national liberation movement with roots in regional, ethnic, and religious distinctions, the LRA underwent a transformation during the conflict, which led to the oppression of its own base, particularly the Acholi people. Notably, from 1993 until at least 1999, the LRA received official support from Sudan. This support was instrumental in Sudan's efforts to destabilize Uganda, as both countries were embroiled in an interstate conflict during that period (Allen, 2006, p 49).

2. Anti-LRA actors: Initially, the Ugandan government served as the sole anti-LRA actor, with a singular objective of gaining control over the territory while eliminating organized armed opposition. This was pursued through a combination of anti-guerrilla operations, the forceful displacement of the Acholi population, and cattle rustling. A second anti-LRA force emerged in the form of the SPLA, a pro-Uganda militia engaged in the proxy warfare between Uganda and Sudan (Allen, 2006, p 49). On a regional level, the LRA found itself in conflict with the Democratic Republic of Congo (from September 2008), Sudan (from December 2008), and the Central African Republic (from February 2009). Beyond regional actors, international non-regional entities involved in the conflict include the ICC (since 2005), the UN (from 2010), the US (since 2011), and the AU (since 2012). While UN troops became embroiled in the conflict by circumstance, participating in missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the US and AU adopted more direct roles. The US is engaged in training and providing logistical support to the anti-LRA coalition, while the AU's involvement centred on regional coordination and cooperation (Feldman, 2008).

3. Non-Combatants: The third group encompasses the civilian populations of all involved regional countries (Uganda, (South) Sudan, CAR, DRC) and, in these four countries, there present personnel of international NGOs, diplomats, and other official representatives, and even some tourists. This diverse group represents the most vulnerable segment of the population and bears the brunt of attacks from the LRA and other armed actors embroiled in the conflict (Apuuli, 2005, p 35).

2.3 Analysis of conflict dynamics

The limited availability of reliable data, essential for an in-depth analysis of conflict dynamics, poses a significant research challenge, primarily due to the absence of basic civil services and a robust civic society in the affected regions. For this analysis, the primary source utilized is the UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset version 23.1 (Davies, Pettersson and Öberg, 2023). While this dataset is confined to battle-related deaths (as depicted in Figure 1), excluding other conflict-related fatalities, it remains a valuable resource for assessing conflict dynamics. To enrich our understanding of these dynamics, a historical method is also employed.

For a more comprehensive analysis of the conflict and a deeper grasp of its dynamics, the following crucial information would be invaluable: the tally of civilian deaths within the region linked to the conflict, encompassing both direct and indirect consequences, the number of internally displaced persons and refugees, the size of the LRA personnel, and the military expenditures of all the involved actors.

Drawing upon the conflict curve, developed through data pertaining to battle-related deaths, four distinctive phases of the conflict can be identified:[1]

a) 1989 – 1994: This initial phase marks the early history of the LRA, during which it transitioned from one of several opposition groups to become the singular significant armed opposition to the Ugandan government. The zenith, with 816 battle-related deaths, was reached in 1991, coinciding with Uganda's launch of Operation North. This was followed by two sizable LRA offensives in retaliation. The wane in conflict, evidenced by 149 deaths in 1994, can be attributed to clandestine peace talks between the LRA and the Ugandan government.

b) 1994 – 2001: The second phase signifies a resurgence of violence, which can be attributed to the initiation of cooperation between Sudan and the LRA, facilitating the LRA's expansion. This phase also saw a change in Ugandan strategy, with an observable correlation between increased internal displacement and heightened fatalities. The reduction in violence leading up to 2001 (110 deaths) can be credited to the Nairobi peace agreement between Sudan and Uganda. This phase witnessed two notable peaks in 1996 (659 deaths) and 1998 (549 deaths). It also marks a shift from a primarily Uganda-Sudan-based conflict to one spanning Sudanese and Ugandan territory.

c) 2001 – 2008: The third phase of the conflict was the most violent of all four and also represents the second phase of geographically-based violence, as the

---

[1] *The UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset version 23.1 is missing data regarding number of battle-related deaths for following years: 1988, 1992, 1993, 1999, 2007. For the missing years (1992–2007) we could only speculate, that they are following the pattern of neighbouring years. Also, a historical overview can help us to confirm this speculation, as in this period aren't recorded any major escalations of conflict. On the other hand, missing data for the years 1993 and 1994, when LRA conducted a major offensive, could show higher number of battle-related deaths.*

conflict shifted from Uganda/Sudan to DRC/CAR/Sudan. This surge in violence, marked by the first peak in 2002 (1010 deaths) and a second peak, with 1610 battle-related deaths in 2004, is closely linked with two Ugandan offensives, Operation Iron Fist I and II, and retaliatory LRA attacks (695 deaths in 2005). The de-escalation of the conflict to February 2008 (53 deaths in 2008) followed Uganda and the LRA signing an agreement on accountability and reconciliation.

d) 2008 onwards: The final phase is characterized by a series of LRA attacks, primarily targeting border-area villages. The peak, with 238 deaths, occurred in 2009, a clear result of Operation Lightning Thunder, initiated on December 14, 2008, and retaliatory violence by the LRA. The substantial reduction in the level of violence can be attributed to increased international (regional) cooperation among all involved countries. As the UCDP does not provide data beyond 2012-13, we can only speculate about the current level of violence. However, according to the Crisis Tracker, the level of violence has remained "stable." In 2013, they recorded 75 civilian deaths, 458 abductions, and 344 returnees. By 2021, the LRA was responsible for 8 attacks and 41 abductions, while no civilians were killed (Crisis Tracker, 2023).

Assessing these figures, it becomes evident that the increased involvement of the United States and the African Union (AU)11 did not yield a significant impact on the conflict. However, an examination of the presented data, coupled with a historical overview of the conflict, allows for several noteworthy observations:

– The number of deaths exhibits a strong correlation with anti-LRA offensives, often followed by retaliatory actions by the LRA, suggesting a clear cause-and-effect relationship.
– The overall decline in violence can be primarily attributed to the augmented regional cooperation in anti-LRA operations, and the loss of support for the LRA inside their ethnical group.
– International actors outside the region, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC), United Nations (UN), United States, and the AU, had a limited impact on the conflict dynamics through foreign-based actions like issuing arrest warrants or designating the LRA as a terrorist organization. In contrast, on-site involvement, exemplified by the AU's RCI-LRA mission, displayed a positive effect, at the very least in reducing the number of deaths if not completely resolving the conflict.
– The reduction in violence can also be linked to the discontinuation of support from official Sudan, which consequently impacted unofficial support channels, that provided military support for LRA.

It is particularly noteworthy that the LRA persists in its armed struggle despite losing its "homeland" and experiencing a decline in significant support. This circumstance has compelled the group, particularly its leader Kony, to adapt its ideological stance. The original opposition to the Ugandan government has become less relevant, given that the LRA's main bases are now located outside of Uganda, and its major

operations are conducted in foreign territories. According to one researcher, the current motivation for the continued conflict is of an existential nature (Vinci, 2007, p 337).

Day (2017, p 14) also points out, that LRA is a good example "the necessary conditions for rebel resilience", as LRA survived for several decades "by virtue of its organizational cohesion, resource use, and the ability to read its political terrain in order to exploit regions without state structures".

Conclusion   Drawing from the historical context of the LRA-based conflict, it is evident that even when an actor loses its primary operating base, it can sustain its fighting capacity by becoming more mobile, shifting bases as required. This mobility often results in the loss of their initial motivation, typically tied to a "homeland," compelling the actor to perpetuate violence. Surrender becomes an undesirable option due to the prospect of long-term imprisonment or even death for those involved in the conflict.

The LRA's adaptability includes its ability to mobilize and recruit new fighters through the kidnapping of children. Furthermore, as the LRA diminished in size, it became less reliant on conventional supply routes and instead resorted to "foraging" supplies from anti-LRA forces or procuring them from the black market.

The recent trend of declining violence underscores the importance of preventing the escalation of such conflicts, which hinges on robust regional cooperation and the coordination of military actions. If all involved countries cease to supply the actor and prohibit the use of their territories as operational bases, it will significantly undermine the actor's combat effectiveness. While international (non-regional) support is valuable, it is not indispensable for countering the root of the violence. Nonetheless, this international support, particularly involving advanced weaponry, could be instrumental in targeting and eliminating the leadership of the actor. This is especially relevant in the case of the LRA, where a single individual, Joseph Kony, serves as the primary source of ideology for the entire group.

Even though, Kony wasn't eliminated, and it's still believed to be alive, it is clear, that LRA has been effectively destroyed, even if there hasn't been an official disbandment of the group. Since late 2013, the LRA ceased to be a significant security threat to the region. The continued provision of regional and international support, coupled with effective control measures and reconciliation measures (including demobilization, reintegration, and the social reconstruction), resulted in effectively neutralising the activities of the LRA. This approach is vital in preventing the emergence of any charismatic successor to Kony.

The story of the Lord's Resistance Army is significant in two perspectives. Firstly, it shows how a terrorist group can survive and be active for several decades, while fighting different state and non-state armed actors and even losing their original area of influence. Survivability of the group depended on being flexible on ever-changing

conditions in the regions, brought upon different implemented counter-insurgency measures. Secondly, it also established how different counter-insurgency measures became effective, finally resulting in de-facto destruction of a terrorist group, that was active for three decades.

References

1. Akhavan, P., 2005. The Lord's Resistance Army Case: Uganda's Submission of the First State Referral to the International Criminal Court. The American Journal of International Law, 99(2), pp 403-421.

2. Allen, T., 2006. Trial Justice: The International Criminal Court and the Lord's Resistance Army. London: Zed Books.

3. Apuuli, K. P., 2005. Amnesty and International Law: The case of the Lord's Resistance Army insurgents in Northern Uganda. African Journal on Conflict Resolution, 5(2), pp 33-62. DOI: 10.4314/ajcr.v5i2.39391.

4. Arieff, A., and Ploch, L., 2012. The Lord's Resistance Army: The U.S. Response. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service.

5. Baddorf, Z., 2017. Uganda Ends Its Hunt for Joseph Kony Empty-Handed. The New York Times. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/20/world/africa/uganda-joseph--kony-lra.html (Accessed: 20 September 2023).

6. Baines, E., 2014. Forced marriage as a political project: Sexual rules and relations in the Lord's Resistance Army. Journal of Peace Research, 51(3), pp 405-417. DOI: 10.1177/0022343313519666.

7. Cascais, A., and Koena, J. F., 2022. Is Joseph Kony hiding in Darfur? DW.com. Available at: https://www.dw.com/en/is-lra-rebel-leader-joseph-kony-hiding-in-darfur/a-61478125 (Accessed: 20 September 2023).

8. Crisis Tracker, 2023. Main page. Available at: http://www.crisistracker.com/ (Accessed: 19 October 2023).

9. Davies, S., Pettersson, T., and Öberg, M., 2023. Organized violence 1989-2022 and the return of conflicts between states? Journal of Peace Research, 60(4). DOI: 10.1177/00223433231185169.

10. Day, C. R., 2017. "Survival Mode": Rebel Resilience and the Lord's Resistance Army. Terrorism and Political Violence. DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2017.1300580.

11. Doom, R., and Vlassenroot, K., 1999. Kony's Message: A New Koine? The Lord's Resistance Army in Northern Uganda. African Affairs, 98(390), pp 5-36.

12. Dunn, K. C., 2004. Uganda: The Lord's Resistance Army. Review of African Political Economy, 31(99), pp 139-142.

13. Ehrenreich, R., 1998. The Stories We Must Tell: Ugandan Children and the Atrocities of the Lord's Resistance Army. Africa Today, 45(1), pp 79-102.

14. Enough., 2014. The LRA in Congo, CAR and South Sudan. Available at: http://www.enoughproject.org/conflicts/lra/congo-car-south-sudan (Accessed: 10 January 2014).

15. Feldman, R. L., 2008. Why Uganda Has Failed to Defeat the Lord's Resistance Army. Defense & Security Analysis, 24(1), pp 45-52, DOI: 10.1080/14751790801903210.

16. Finnström, S., 2006. Wars of the Past in the Present: The Lord's Resistance Movement/Army in Uganda. Africa: Journal of the International African Institute, 76(2), pp 200-220.

17. Global Security, 2023a. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Available at: http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/lra.htm (Accessed: 10 October 2023).

18. Global Security, 2023b. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA): 1987-2007. Available at: http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/lra-1.htm (Accessed: 10 October 2023).

19. Global Security, 2023c. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA): 2008-2009. Available at: http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/lra-2.htm (Accessed: 10 October 2023).

20. *Global Security, 2023d. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA): 2010-. Available at: http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/lra-3.htm (Accessed: 10 October 2023).*

21. *Global Security, 2023e. Operation Observant Compass. Available at: http://www.global-security.org/military/ops/observant-compass.htm (Accessed: 10 October 2023).*

22. *Goodhand, J., Vaux, T., and Walker, R., 2002. Conducting Conflict Assessments: Guidance Notes. London: Department for International Development. Available at: https://gsdrc.org/document-library/conducting-conflict-assessments-guidance-notes/ (Accessed: 10 October 2023).*

23. *Gustavsson, M., Oruut, J., and Rubenson, B., 2017. Girl soldiers with Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda fighting for survival: experiences of young women abducted by LRA. Children's Geographies, DOI: 10.1080/14733285.2017.1300233.*

24. *ICC CPI, 2021. Dominic Ongwen declared guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Uganda. International Criminal Court – Court Penale Internationale. Available at: https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/dominic-ongwen-declared-guilty-war-crimes--and-crimes-against-humanity-committed-uganda (Accessed: 20 September 2023).*

25. *Jackson, P., 2002. The March of the Lord's Resistance Army: Greed or Grievance in Northern Uganda? Small Wars & Insurgencies, 13(3), pp 29-52, DOI: 10.1080/09592310208559196.*

26. *Jeffery, R., 2011. Forgiveness, amnesty and justice: The case of the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda. Cooperation and Conflict, 46(1): pp 78-95. DOI: 10.1177/0010836710396853.*

27. *Leonard, E., 2010. The Lord's Resistance Army: an African Terrorist Group? Perspectives on Terrorism. 4(6), pp 20-30.*

28. *Matti, S., 2012. In Pursuit of the Lord's Resistance Army: How to Deter Illegal Resource Extraction by Ugandan Forces. Africa Today, 59(1), pp 27-41. DOI 10.2979/africatoday.59.1.27.*

29. *NCTC, 2023. Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Available at: https://www.dni.gov/nctc/groups/lra.html (Accessed: 10 October 2023).*

30. *Prunier, G., 2004. Rebel Movements and Proxy Warfare: Uganda, Sudan and the Congo (1986-99). African Affairs, 103(412), pp 359-383.*

31. *Smith, D., 2015. Surrender of senior aide to Joseph Kony is major blow to Lord's Resistance Army. The Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jan/07/surrender-aide-joseph-kony-blow-lords-resistance-army (Accessed: 20 September 2023).*

32. *Vinci, A., 2007. Existential Motivations in the Lord's Resistance Army's Continuing Conflict. Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 30, pp 337-252.*

email: klemen.kocjancic@mors.si

ORCID: 0000-0001-5206-6405

e-mail: **klemen.kocjancic@mors.si**

Dr. Klemen Kocjančič je po izobrazbi univerzitetni diplomirani teolog, magister obramboslovja in doktor zgodovine. Zaposlen je kot podsekretar za vojaško tehnologijo, raziskave in razvoj na Ministrstvu za obrambo RS in je habilitiran kot znanstveni sodelavec na Obramboslovnem raziskovalnem centru (Fakulteta za družbene vede, Univerza v Ljubljani). Njegovi raziskovalni interesi so s področij vojaške zgodovine, ekstremizma in terorizma, vojaške sociologije in kritične infrastrukture.

Klemen Kocjančič, PhD, holds a bachelor's degree in theology, MA in defence studies, and a PhD in history. He works as undersecretary for military technology, research and development at the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Slovenia and is habilitated as a research fellow at the Defence Research Centre (Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana). His research interests are in the fields of military history, extremism and terrorism, military sociology, and critical infrastructure.

ORCID: 0000-0001-5206-6405