

Ugandans to the rescue



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UGANDANS IN THE DIASPORA HERE IS THE PROOF YOU NEED TO LOBY YOUR GOVERNMENTS AGAINST MUSEVEN

Posted by Musa

Last month the U.S. Senate responded to decades of violence in northern Uganda by passing a bill to help disarm and defeat the Lord's Resistance Army, the rebel group responsible for the ongoing atrocities. The legislation, authored by Sen. Russ Feingold, pledges military and intelligence support for operations against the LRA, and up to \$40 million in humanitarian aid. But critics say the assistance might help prolong the very conflict it seeks to end.

The suggestion that American military aid actually discourages an end to the conflict is troubling but not far-fetched. The Ugandan People's Defense Force has long been accused of corruption, with military commanders pocketing funds meant for supplies and even creating lists of "ghost soldiers" whose pay they appropriate for themselves. For these corrupt officials, ending the conflict could mean losing a paycheck. **WE THEREFORE URGE ALL UGANDANS TO CALL UPON THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION TO SUSPEND ALL FINANCIAL AND MILITARY AID TO DICTATOR MUSEVN**

"It does create a disincentive," said Dr. Mark Davidheiser, a professor of conflict resolution at Nova Southeastern University. "The bizarre nature of the LRA and some of the atrocities that are perpetrated...serve the Ugandan military in a way that has opened up the flow of funds and military resources."

Especially now that the LRA has moved on to tormenting civilians in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Southern Sudan and the Central African Republic, the urgency of its eradication may not weigh as heavily on Ugandan leaders, who continue to receive fuel, night vision goggles, satellite phones, trucks, and air support from foreign donors.

The conflict is a "marginal inconvenience" for the Ugandan government, said Andrew Mwenda, a postgraduate fellow in African Studies at Yale University. "The people who are affected are not in power."

The United States has sent military assistance to Uganda since the early 1990s, and provided for counterinsurgency and anti-terrorism programs after 9/11. In 2008,

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the U.S. helped plan and supply Operation Lightning Thunder, a failed attempt by Ugandan-led joint forces to capture or kill LRA leader Joseph Kony. Last year, the U.S. gave nearly \$4 million to Uganda for peace and security initiatives. Now the State Department is requesting a 71 percent increase for the same purpose in 2011. That doesn't include additional money earmarked for regional programs like African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance, which trains and equips militaries as peacekeepers.

Military aid from the U.S. is also in the political interests of President Yoweri Museveni. "An alliance with the U.S. is important to his legitimacy," said Mwenda. "The conflict (with the LRA) is central to the relationship. If the conflict continues, the government has little to lose and a lot to gain."

By sending assistance to the Ugandan military, the Ugandan People's Defense Force, the U.S. is tacitly endorsing the regime, and the activities of its fighters. That's fine when Uganda is carrying out missions responsibly. But it means the Obama Administration is stuck supporting the UPDF's human rights violations and corruption as well.

"They (the UPDF) are another set of predators for the northern population," said Davidheiser. "There have been many, many reports of all kinds of atrocities, rapes and thefts and forcible appropriations of goods and labor."

US aid might encourage these regimes to rely on military solutions, rather than seek broader political and social solutions, said Daniel Volman, a board member of the Association of Concerned Africa Scholars. Volman pointed out that there was little violence during the years when the LRA and the government were negotiating a peace settlement. When that process was dropped in favor of a military approach, bloodshed increased as the LRA scattered into the Democratic Republic of Congo and retaliated against civilians. More than 865 people were killed in this retribution, according to Human Rights Watch.

Many aid workers and legal scholars argue that the population of Northern Uganda wants to end the fighting after so much brutality, and that it is willing to settle for traditional justice and reconciliation. Plus, a military solution does not address the root causes of the conflict: political and economic marginalization of the northern Acholi people. *The primary beneficiary of the war in Northern Uganda is museveni and his immediate family.*

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This policy began under British colonial rule, when Uganda's southerners were favored over the Acholi. Viewed as a tool of the colonial power and an ongoing coup threat, Uganda's post-Independence presidents Idi Amin and Milton Obote made sure to continue this marginalization, and Museveni has been accused of similar. Kony, who is Acholi, started the LRA purportedly as an anti-government Christian movement, though he strayed from these principles immediately.

"There is no underlying LRA ideology that has any currency anywhere," said Dr. Peter Pham, Director of the Africa Project at the National Committee on American Foreign Policy "It was created by a madman."

Although the Senate's legislation stipulates that military action should only be used "if there continue to be no viable efforts to achieve a genuine negotiated solution," it doesn't explain what 'viable' or 'genuine' mean, or who gets to decide.

Not everyone agrees that Uganda is inclined to prolong the conflict with the LRA for financial and diplomatic gain. Rick Orth, who previously served as the Army's defense attaché to Uganda, argued the UPDF is one of Africa's most professional militaries.

"The UPDF is not about extending this thing for their own benefit," he said.

With Kampala carrying out missions important to American national interest, military and government experts say American military assistance is linked to Uganda's role in Somalia and Darfur.

"We're clearly using Uganda as our proxy in Somalia," said Pham. "There's no reason for Uganda to be in Somalia. They've sent 5,000 troops because of our pressures and incentives."

As long as the United States has a stake in what happens to the African Union's mission to bolster authorities in Somalia and the United Nation's efforts to stabilize Darfur and the Democratic Republic of Congo, it will keep swapping favors with Museveni. American military assistance will continue to flow into Uganda no matter what happens to Kony and his fighters, experts say.

"Even if the LRA disappeared tomorrow, we'd still be in there substantially," said Pham.

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