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Bending the Spear: The Campaign Against the Lord's Resistance Army

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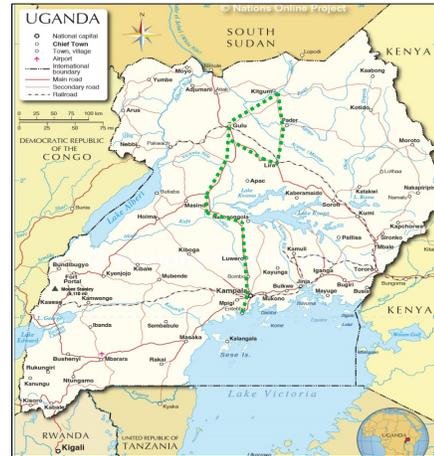
Bending the Spear: the Campaign Against the Lord's Resistance Army



Naval
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Background, Question, Argument

- U.S. Operation OBSERVANT COMPASS, launched in 2011, supported Ugandan efforts against the LRA that began in 1986. The combined effort has been widely lauded for its humanitarian approach to a rebel force largely composed of abducted child soldiers. The Ugandans isolated the LRA from popular support and forced them to flee to neighboring states in 2008. Due to the effectiveness of this approach and the recent withdrawal of U.S. and Ugandan forces, the authors developed a case study of the conflict to identify lessons learned before the opportunity was lost.
- *How did the Uganda People's Defense Force, with assistance from the United States and other partners, conduct its campaign against the Lord's Resistance Army?*
- Our argument is that the implementation of a carefully-designed amnesty policy and isolation of popular support (all based on a thorough understanding of the enemy) enabled Uganda to defeat the LRA as an insurgency and strengthen Uganda's legitimacy in the north (the LRA's home territory).



Route traveled by the student researchers while conducting interviews with veterans of the Northern Uganda War from both sides (approx. 700 miles).

Research design

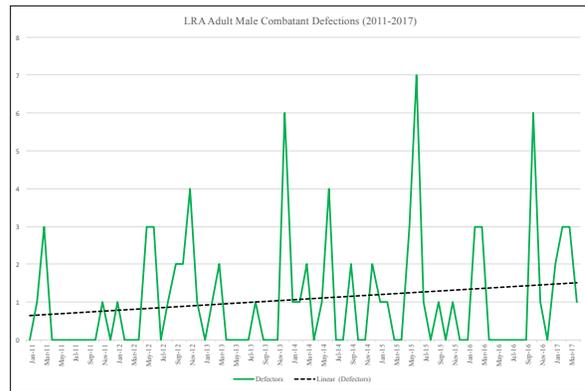
- Main hypothesis: the campaign against the LRA was deliberately planned and carefully synchronized.
- Approach: historical and statistical analysis from interviews with Ugandan and U.S. military participants, former LRA, NGOs, and local government officials.
- Data sources: professional experience, interviews, official records, academic journals, NGO and news media reports, and scholarly books.



A sample U.S. leaflet disseminated during OOC to promote defections. The leaflet features multiple former LRA fighters together as proof of life. The reverse side of the leaflet featured a map of locations where fighters could safely defect.

Results

- Understanding of the cultures of northern Uganda enabled the development of an effective campaign.
- The Ugandan amnesty policy was the driving force in LRA defections and contributed to the surrender of two previous rebel groups in the 1980s (DDR).
- COIN campaign had three lines of effort: military force, civil development, and amnesty (PSYOP).
- The U.S. used the same types of appeals that had been effective for the Ugandans, but amplified them.



Graph of monthly LRA combatant defections. For the thesis, the definition of 'defector' is limited to males of at least 18 years of age and at least six months with the LRA.

The "So What"

- Amnesty for insurgents is an effective "third option".
- Understanding the target audience is the critical prerequisite in the success of PSYOP.
- NGOs filled the seams in U.S. support to partners.
- What aspects of this campaign are transferrable?
- Are there other conflicts where a similar amnesty policy can dissolve insurgents' will to fight, such as Somalia?
- Is COIN more effective in a state's own "backyard"?

Next Steps



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