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The Effects of American Involvement in Northern Uganda's Conflict with the Lord's Resistance Army

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Description

This project explores the impact of American governmental and non-governmental actors in the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) conflict in northern Uganda and southern Sudan, particularly the U.S. military, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It also examines the efficacy of these various forms of intervention, specifically the deployment of U.S. Special Forces tracking the LRA, and the initiation of various soldier reintegration, governance, and sustainability programs organized by USAID and NGOs such as Invisible Children. Additionally, this project seeks to uncover underlying geopolitical objectives, such as gaining alliances in the 'Global War on Terror' and protecting regional oil interests, that have motivated these U.S. government policies. Overall, this project has sought to critically examine the impact of American involvement in the northern Uganda conflict, both positive and negative, and evaluate the human impact of these international geopolitical influences on the people of northern Uganda, southern Sudan, and beyond.

Location

Breidenbaugh Hall 112

Disciplines

African Studies | Ethnic Studies | History | International and Area Studies | Military and Veterans Studies | Military History | Peace and Conflict Studies

**The Effects of American Involvement in Northern Uganda's Conflict with the Lord's
Resistance Army**

Karen Norris

Interdisciplinary Studies Capstone

Spring 2014

“When two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers.” - Acholi Proverb

“Charity sees the need, not the cause.” - German Proverb

I. Abstract

This project explores the impact of American governmental and non-governmental actors on the Lord's Resistance Army conflict in northern Uganda and southern Sudan, particularly the U.S. military, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The efficacy of these various forms of intervention, specifically the presence of U.S. Special Forces tracking the LRA, and various soldier reintegration, governance, and sustainability programs initiated by USAID and NGOs, such as Invisible Children, is also examined. Additionally, this project seeks to uncover underlying geopolitical objectives, such as gaining alliances in the 'Global War on Terror' and protecting regional oil interests, which have motivated the U.S. government to pursue these policies. Overall, this project has sought to critically examine the impact of American involvement in the northern Uganda conflict, both positive and negative, and evaluate the human cost of these international geopolitical influences on the people of northern Uganda, southern Sudan, and beyond.

II. Research Topic

In 1986 Joseph Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) began a guerrilla war in northern Uganda against the administration of President Yoweri Museveni that would last 20 years and devastate the Acholi region. However, the violence that originated in Acholiland, northern Uganda shifted for many years to southern Sudan, now an independent nation. This trans-national conflict compounded existing regional

tensions between the Sudanese and Ugandan governments, instigated a brutal proxy war between Presidents Museveni and al-Bashir, and has since progressed to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic, leaving civilian casualties in its wake.

The impact of American humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), especially Invisible Children, has significantly influenced northern Ugandan infrastructure and Acholi culture. Meanwhile, the political and economic influence of the US government originating in their post-September 11th, 2001 'War on Terror' campaign has noticeably affected Uganda's efforts against the LRA and the Acholi region as whole. Not only has it directly contributed to regional power struggles and trans-national political tensions between Uganda and Sudan, but President Museveni's support for the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in a proxy war with Sudanese President Bashir exacerbated the conflict with the LRA. Museveni's endorsement of the SPLA, despite its role in the increase of regional tensions has been consistently supported by Western nations, particularly the United States, due to Sudan's categorization as a state sponsor of terror by the American government.

US military advisers were sent to Uganda in the late stages of the 20 year war with the LRA due to increasing pressure from non-governmental organizations and the Ugandan government, an ally in the 'War on Terror'. They continue to assist Ugandan defense forces in the demobilization and reintegration efforts of remaining LRA personnel. However, US direct support for President Museveni has been widely criticized by both Ugandans and Western groups who argue that Museveni's clear regional biases

and reluctance to negotiate during peace talks are as responsible as LRA violence for prolonging the conflict and contributing to existing regional instability.

The United States government is also responsible for the funding of extensive United States Agency for International Development (USAID) missions in Uganda including humanitarian assistance and peace building projects. Critics, however, accuse USAID of blatantly promoting US interests in the region through political influence, economic dependency, and product monopoly. On the other hand, supporters, including Ugandans, believe that international groups such as USAID and Great Britain's Department for International Development are more effective in addressing northern Uganda's economic and humanitarian problems than local initiatives because of their experience, strong infrastructure, and reliable funding.

In contrast, NGOs, which are predominantly funded and administrated by Western governments and private donors, are effective even when national interests are not at stake. In many ways, their absent political allegiance assists them in aiding victims of the conflict and mediating between warring groups, though their capacity to stop ongoing violence is limited. Though uninhibited by clear international allegiances, NGOs also face criticism for promoting their own nations' interests and for interfering in local affairs without a complete understanding of fundamental social, political, and economic issues. Furthermore, NGOs tend to lack the ability and authority to affect political change, are reliant on funding from international donors, and are often only able to provide immediate relief rather than long-term political or economic solutions.

The purpose of this project is to examine and compare the various forms and efficacy of American involvement in the cross-border conflict between the SPLA, the

LRA, Ugandan, and Sudanese forces instigated by Kony's rebel movement. Specific topics include government sponsored and non-governmental American intervention, and the long-term impact these interventions have had on Acholiland and the region of east-central Africa as a whole.

III. Methodology

Primary sources include data from the official sites of the US State Department, the CIA World Factbook, and the Fund for Peace Failed States Index, as well as first-hand research done in Gulu District, Uganda. Secondary sources range from news articles to academic publications related to aid in Africa, US Foreign Policy in East Africa, and analyses of the Ugandan government, LRA conflict, and civil war in the Congo and South Sudan.

IV. Literature Review

Existing literature regarding US relations with the Ugandan government includes analyses and official statements regarding both economic and foreign policies. The US Department of State acknowledges structural challenges in the Ugandan government including "...corruption, underdeveloped democratic institutions, and human rights deficits," but insists Uganda is both an active member of the America's preferential trade program and a "key" regional security ally due to their efforts against Sudan, a nation on the State-Sponsored Terrorism list, and Somalia, a safe haven for terrorist groups.¹

Robert Anthony Waters' independent analysis, also published in 2009, traces US support of President Museveni to the 1990s when anti-AIDS programs and development efforts attracted American support and promises of aid, which, when combined with aid

¹ United States Department of State. "US Relations with Uganda."; *Country Reports on Terrorism 2009*. Washington: US Department of State, 2010., 193, 30

from other international donors eventually amounted to 40% of the national budget.² Jeffrey Herbst in his analysis of US Economic Policy in Africa also identifies financial aid based on “commitment to reform” as an important underlying factor in US-Uganda relations since the 1990s.³ However, Waters acknowledges cuts in American-provided aid due to Uganda’s support of Rwandan transgressions against the Congo, corruption and illicit trading allegations against the Museveni administration including human rights abuses and undemocratic adjustments to the constitution that allowed the President to run for an illegal third term. In his critique of Museveni’s dictatorial ‘presidency,’ Joshua B. Rubongoya suggests that the continuing aid to Uganda allowed his undemocratic practices to continue unchecked despite the aforementioned transgressions.⁴

In a more resource-oriented analysis of US-Uganda relations, Kofi Nsia-Pepira suggests that the recent militarization of US-Africa relations reflects American strategic interests in preventing the spread of terrorism and securing natural resources such as oil, gold, copper, and uranium.⁵ Nsia-Pepira is not the first to suggest American self-interest in limiting Sudanese and Somali terrorist group activity as a motivation for supporting Museveni or, as Waters suggests, overlooking the Museveni administration’s human rights abuses in favor of allying with him in the ‘War on Terror’.⁶ Nsia-Pepira does, however, take the rare step of implying that access to material resources is another underlying motive for US-Uganda relations, citing covert military activity in 2007 in a

² Waters, Robert Anthony. *Historical Dictionary of United States-Africa Relations*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2009., 300

³ Herbst, Jeffrey Ira. *U.S. Economic Policy Toward Africa*. New York : Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1992., 13, 36

⁴ *Ibid.*, 300, 188; Rubongoya, Joshua B. *Regime Hegemony in Museveni's Uganda*. Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

⁵ Nsia-Pepira, Kofi. "Militarization of U.S. Foreign Policy in Africa: Strategic Gain Or Backlash?" *Military Review* 94.1 (2014): 50-9., 55, 57

⁶ Waters, 188

gold and oil rich region of the Congo, presence in Darfur, home to the fourth largest copper and third largest uranium stores in the world, and alliances with states such as Uganda that are hostile to Sudan, China's fourth largest supplier of oil.⁷

Literature related specifically to northern Uganda and the LRA conflict is less widespread, but as a result, the existing publications have all been written and edited by regional experts with extensive field experience in Acholiland, lending credibility to their arguments. A compilation of essays edited by Tim Allen, a developmental anthropologist and Uganda expert, and Koen Vlassenroot, a political scientist, a series of opinions regarding the political and economic dynamics of the conflict. These essays are presented by, among others, Adam Branch, Andrew Mwemba, and Sverker Finnström.⁸

Branch, a political scientist with a focus on human rights and Western intervention in northern Uganda, writes that the confluence of Acholi marginalization in national politics, social crises exacerbated by the conflict, and the weakening of existing local structures by international donors and aid groups have prolonged the socioeconomic and political issues of Acholiland, preventing the development of a strong local government. As such, the lack of support from the Ugandan government and the loss of control to government-supported international aid groups have weakened the local authorities of Acholiland without ameliorating their ongoing struggles.⁹ Similarly, Sverker Finnström, an anthropologist who has done extensive fieldwork in Acholiland, argues that the underlying sources of the conflict, regional tensions, northern marginalization, and colonial legacy at the root of Kony's rebellion are inadequately

⁷ Nsia-Pepira, 54

⁸ Allen, Tim, and Koen Vlassenroot. *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myth and Reality*. London : Zed, 2010.

⁹ Branch, Adam. "Exploring the Roots of LRA Violence: Political Crisis and Ethnic Politics in Acholiland." *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myth and Reality*. Eds. Tim Allen and Koen Vlassenroot. London : Zed, 2010. 25-44.

addressed in analysis of the conflict and in international and national political discourses.¹⁰

Andrew Mwenda, a renowned Ugandan journalist, similarly criticizes the federal government and its role in the LRA conflict in Acholiland, though not in response to the national marginalization of Acholi political leaders. He argues instead that President Museveni and his party, the National Resistance Movement (NRM), have taken advantage of political and economic opportunities presented by the conflict, reducing their incentive to support conflict resolution strategies. Specifically, he cites steady international funding granted as a reward for economic liberalization, as relief in the ongoing conflict, and in support of an ally against Sudan and Somalia as an inducement for the government to side-track negotiations and long-term recovery efforts.¹¹

Other perspectives on the conflict between the Ugandan national government and the LRA are provided by Lawrence Cline, a counter-terrorism, civil-military relations, and LRA expert, and Matthew Green, a journalist with wide-spread experience in Africa. The basis of Cline's work is to explore the political and socio-economic factors and international security consequences of the LRA rebellion, while Green's memoir is a travel narrative describing his search for Joseph Kony and the on-the-ground impact of the conflict. Both express a similar view of the LRA and its representation in international discourse, arguing that the focus and exaggeration of Kony's image and the atrocities of the LRA distract from the underlying political grievances of the rebellion

¹⁰ Finnström, Sverker. "An African Hell of Colonial Imagination?: The Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, another Story." *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myth and Reality*. Eds. Tim Allen and Koen Vlassenroot. London : Zed, 2010. 74-89.

¹¹ Mwenda, Andrew M. "Uganda's Politics of Foreign Aid and Violent Conflict: The Political Uses of the LRA Rebellion." *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myth and Reality*. Eds. Tim Allen and Koen Vlassenroot. London : Zed, 2010. 45-58.

and provide an excuse for Western donors to ignore the culpability of the Ugandan government in the prolongation of violence.¹²

In a similar argument criticizing both Western-Uganda political relations and international aid in the North, Adam Branch writes in his quintessential critique of aid in the LRA conflict, *Displacing Human Rights*, that Museveni's alliance with the US and its supporters in the 'War on Terror' has allowed Museveni to commit various human rights abuses and exploit the rules of the International Monetary Fund restructuring program by increasing military spending and conducting illegal operations into neighboring countries. Despite Uganda's heavy economic reliance on foreign aid, the national government led by Museveni and the NRM has repeatedly violated the sovereignty of neighboring countries, particularly the Congo and Sudan, committed acts of political oppression, and broken various national election laws to maintain his leadership position without consequence.¹³ However, as Allen and Vlassenroot observe, the recent discovery of oil, Uganda's strategic location and political alliance in the international 'War on Terror,' and history of cooperation with its Western allies protects Museveni from economic abandonment and international prosecution.¹⁴

While international aid faces widespread criticism from a multitude of sources, the most commonly cited problems, particularly in scholarship regarding foreign aid in Africa, are the unintended consequences and harmful side effects of aid, the debilitating corruption that undermines it, and concerns that Western intervention in developing African nations is akin to modern-day imperialism or white paternalism. Firstly, multiple

¹² Cline, Lawrence E. *The Lord's Resistance Army*. Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2013.; Green, Matthew. "The Wizard of the Nile: The Hunt for Africa's Most Wanted." New York: Olive Branch, 2008.

¹³ Branch, "Exploring the Roots of LRA Violence: Political Crisis and Ethnic Politics in Acholiland."

¹⁴ Allen, Vlassenroot

scholars of foreign aid such as Jonathan Glennie and several African critics, attest that economic and developmental aid is often responsible for increased poverty in their areas of operation.¹⁵ Both Glennie and Christopher Coyne see indirect effects as a fundamental criticism of aid, identifying unintended consequences such as the focus on macro infrastructure projects regardless of local community impacts, the potential creation of a power vacuum when aid serves to empower a political leader responsible for the poverty and displacement in the first place, and the threat of unequal allocation of resources as an incentive for combat.¹⁶ Finally, according to Glennie and Robert Calderisi, the prevalence of aid groups and donors in every aspect of aid distribution from funding, to political support, to implementation of projects without the involvement of local governments or work forces, prevents the recipient countries from developing their own national or local infrastructures to generate resources or solutions, which instills dependency among the beneficiaries.¹⁷

In Calderisi's critique of international aid in Africa, his focus rests heavily on the culpability of the recipient countries themselves. He cites poor governance, specifically the prevalence of "thugs" in positions of national leadership, recurring regional violence, and consistently weak infrastructure among the obstacles facing developing countries that prevent the effective use of aid and national resources.¹⁸ This criticism is supplemented by other scholars including Glennie, Coyne, and Addison, who further stipulate that

¹⁵ Glennie, Jonathan. *The Trouble with Aid: Why Less Could Mean More for Africa*. London; New York: Zed Books in association with International African Institute, Royal African Society, Social Science Research Council; New York: distributed in the USA exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*; Coyne, Christopher J. *Doing Bad by Doing Good: Why Humanitarian Action Fails*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013.

¹⁷ Coyne; Calderisi, Robert. *The Trouble with Africa: Why Foreign Aid Isn't Working*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

¹⁸ Calderisi, 57

conflict recovery initiatives are more effective when locally or nationally led, assuming the necessary infrastructure and government processes are bolstered.¹⁹

Further concerns about aid distribution in a country suffering from a debilitated economic infrastructure or poor governance is the fear that funding and public projects do not adequately address the underlying political and economic issues that create poverty and instability. Coyne in particular is critical of the efficacy of development aid based in contributing inputs to a corrupt, unregulated, and weak economic system without first addressing structural concerns.²⁰ He further stipulates that foreign aid groups are ill equipped to address issues of national governance or economic systems. Addison's argument supports Coyne's critique, suggesting that post-conflict recovery and development efforts are only effective when supported by internal infrastructure bolstering political and economic reforms, though she does not undermine the role that international funding can play in impoverished states.²¹

Another prominent criticism of foreign aid, particularly that donated by Western powers to developing African nations, is the accusation that procurement of funding and resources is simply a tool to influence policy and economic decisions, akin to modern day imperialism. In his analysis, Glennie accuses foreign donors of imposing political ideologies or reforms as a condition for aid on countries that lack the infrastructure to institute them.²² Similarly, Shastry Njeru suggests that Western targets of international terrorism have, since the September 11th attacks, used aid as leverage over developing

¹⁹ Glennie; Coyne; Addison, Tony. *From Conflict to Recovery in Africa*. Oxford; New York : Oxford University Press, 2003.

²⁰ Coyne

²¹ Addison

²² Glennie

countries in order to secure their support in the War on Terror.²³ Coyne's critique supports this view, claiming that donor countries choose projects and beneficiaries based on the relative political or economic benefit rather than objective measurements of humanitarian or economic need.²⁴

The final and perhaps most controversial argument against international aid donations is the accusation that international initiatives in developing countries is paternalistic and elitist on the part of donor countries and volunteers. Though referring to Latin America rather than Africa, Ivan Illich's famous appeal to young humanitarian volunteers encourages the abandonment of the sense of superiority that compels them to travel to developing countries to assist people 'in need'. He argues instead that these countries provide opportunities for tourism, enculturation, and education, not an opportunity to satisfy a white savior complex.²⁵ Larry Krotz asserts a similar view in his analysis of aid administered in Africa by Westerners. He questions the morality of intervening in foreign countries and imposing ethnocentric conceptions of 'progress.' He further criticizes the underlying attitude of the researchers, scientists, students, and missionaries who travel to developing African nations, claiming it reduces the exposed population to research test subjects with no valid opinions or religious beliefs of their own.²⁶

These evaluations of the moral and practical shortcomings of international development and recovery aid work in tandem with Addison's argument that internal

²³ Njera, Shastry. "Post-9/11 Aid, Security Agenda and the African State." *Aid to Africa: Redeemer Or Coloniser?* Eds. Hakima Abbas and Yves Niyiragira. Chicago : Pambazuka Press, 2009. 93.

²⁴ Coyne

²⁵ Illich, Ivan. "To Hell with Good Intentions." 1968.

²⁶ Krotz, Larry. *The Uncertain Business of Doing Good: Outsiders in Africa*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2009.

reform and development efforts must be the initiative of local and national groups rather than misguided outsiders. Leon van Soest's suggestion follows a similar vein. In his documentary exposing the destructive consequences of large-scale aid projects in Kenya, he demonstrates that uninformed intervention can create as much poverty as it resolves.²⁷

V. Background to the Conflict

The marginalization of the Acholi that underlies the LRA conflict can be traced to Uganda's first coup d'état. Following independence, Milton Obote, Uganda's first prime minister from the northern region of Lango attempted to bridge ethnic political differences through tribally diverse government. However, Idi Amin, who felt that the prime minister's own Langi tribe and their northern Acholi allies were politically and economically favored, overthrew the government in 1971.²⁸ He proceeded to fill his cabinet and military with followers from his own region, the West Nile, while ordering the Langi and Acholi soldiers of Obote's administration to be killed *en masse*, deepening the North-South divide.²⁹ With support from the Tanzanian government, Obote regained power through violence in 1979, and ordered forceful reprisals in several communities in Amin's home region. However, widespread poverty as a result of Amin's despotism, the Tanzanian invasion, and IMF austerity measures effectively prevented economic favoritism from recurring among Northerners.³⁰ Following rigged elections in 1980, Yoweri Museveni, a southerner, led his National Resistance Army (NRA) against Obote, seizing power in 1986.³¹ Unfortunately for the northerners, the emerging government led

²⁷ Addison; *Good Fortune*. Dir. van Soest, Leon. Transient Pictures, 2009.

²⁸ Branch, Adam. *Displacing Human Rights: War and Intervention in Northern Uganda*. Oxford University Press, 2011., 56; Green, 73

²⁹ *Ibid.*; Cline 7

³⁰ Branch, *Displacing Human Rights*, 58

³¹ Waters, 299; Branch, *Displacing Human Rights*, 59

by the NRM, “saw the Acholi as its ethnic enemy” and proceeded to restructure the country’s government without including northern Acholi leaders, and even perpetrated violence against Acholi civilians.³²

A rebel group known as the Ugandan People’s Democratic Army briefly gained the support of the Acholi population but never gained enough ground to mount a rebellion.³³ Soon thereafter, the Holy Spirit Movement led by an Acholi woman, Alice Lakwena, attempted to retake Kampala and end regional violence. She was killed, however, and the movement failed within a year of its founding in 1987. Joseph Kony, also an Acholi claiming to be a cousin of Lakwena, continued the rebellion with his Lord’s Resistance Army.³⁴ Unlike Alice Lakwena, however, Kony resorted to violence against his own people, including looting, child abductions, and dismemberment to ensure loyalty of the Acholi population. The Ugandan government, led by Museveni, left Acholiland undefended.³⁵

Eventually, President Museveni, a former schoolmate of Sudanese rebel John Garang, pledged the support of his national defense force to the Sudan People’s Liberation Army independence movement, prompting Sudanese President al-Bashir to supply and harbor the LRA in retaliation, prolonging the conflict for an additional 12 years.³⁶ After the failure of the 1994 peace talks, focus shifted from the Uganda-LRA dynamics to the role of the Sudanese government, which had already begun financially supporting the LRA.³⁷ By 1994, the US government had also begun funding the SPLA

³² *Ibid.*, 61, 65

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 70

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ LeRiche, Matthew, and Matthew Arnold. *South Sudan: From Revolution to Independence*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

³⁷ Branch, *Displacing Human Rights*, 74-75

through Kampala as part of its opposition to the spread of Islamic extremism and Osama bin Laden's influence in Sudan, though Uganda itself only has a 12% minority population of Muslims.³⁸

VI. Invisible Children and American NGOs

International NGOs have distinct advantages and disadvantages in comparison to governmental and multi-national groups in conflict resolution and post-conflict recovery, especially their political impartiality. Lacking affiliation with a specific national agenda, NGOs are able to focus on humanitarian issues without interference from geopolitical posturing or competition for resources. In Uganda, non-governmental groups were integral in assisting with food distribution in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), efforts to ameliorate corruption and improve governance, reintegrate former child-soldiers and sex slaves, and implement livelihood and recovery projects. Furthermore, they coordinated their projects and peacemaking initiatives with traditional cultural and religious leaders to improve their efficacy.³⁹ In response to the violence, foreign aid groups, to their credit, initiated a "humanitarian scramble" in the affected areas of Uganda. As a result NGOs became primary "stakeholders" in initiating negotiations, addressing human rights violations, and supporting national recovery efforts, and have acted as a "catalyst" for the improvement of administrative networks between the Ugandan government, international aid groups, and actors within the conflict.⁴⁰

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Allen, Tim. *Trial Justice : The International Criminal Court and the Lord's Resistance Army*. London; New York: Zed; London: In Association with International African Institute; Claremont, South Africa: David Philip; New York: Distributed in the USA exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan, 2006., 137

⁴⁰ Branch, *Displacing Human Rights*, 196

Conversely, NGOs in Uganda face sufficient criticism for undermining local recovery efforts and infrastructures, addressing the windfall of the conflict rather than its underlying causes, allegations of corruption, and contributing to the humanitarian crises caused by crowding civilians into IDP camps during the height of the violence. Despite the extensive efforts of multi-national, international, and non-governmental groups, Green observed in his tour of Uganda during the nation-wide hunt for Kony that “nobody was tackling the war’s underlying causes.”⁴¹ In a similar critique, Branch concludes that the underlying issue with foreign aid is that, “given that the massive financial aid inflow into an area with minimal agricultural production, no industry, and total displacement led to the development of an economy almost entirely determined by foreign funding” rather than local initiatives or infrastructures.⁴² Locally, NGOs in northern Uganda are also resented due to the perception that they are “corrupt and partial,” and as a result of the obvious disparities between foreign aid workers and unemployed residents.⁴³

The best known and perhaps the most influential of the American NGOs addressing the LRA conflict is Invisible Children, founded in 2006 and nationally recognized for the release of their video *Kony 2012* in March of 2012. As a result of the attention garnered from one of the most viral online videos in history, Invisible Children impacted American public opinion overnight and earned significant political influence that enabled them to pressure the US Congress into passing a LRA Disarmament Bill.⁴⁴ However, despite their relative success in influencing both public opinion and actual legislation, Invisible Children and its video campaign have been criticized for

⁴¹ Green, 86

⁴² Branch, *Displacing Human Rights*, 143

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 145

⁴⁴ Cline, 133; Branch, *Displacing Human Rights*, 238

encouraging the depiction of Africans as helpless, and promoting action without first understanding political and cultural complexities or policy implications.

Critics of the *Kony 2012* video believe it promotes the ‘White Savior complex,’ encouraging privileged white Americans to bring change to Africa, despite lacking knowledge of the political, cultural, and social complexities of the violence. Specifically, they find the video campaign “self-aggrandizing, sensationalist,” and argue that it serves only as “activism for privileged young Americans that is unlikely to lead to sustainable social change in Africa...”⁴⁵ Furthermore, they believe that both the video and the organization, “[sponsor] a narrative in which Africa remains an object to be manipulated by outsiders instead of a dynamic context with talented and knowledgeable actors, compelling ideas, and potential resources,” “invokes the ideology of the innocent child victim in need of white Americans for... redemption,” and presents Uganda as an “obscure, distant locale” rather than an autonomous, sovereign nation.⁴⁶ In other words, the fear that the stereotypical presentation of Uganda, and Africa in general, will encourage inefficient and ethnocentric intervention by young, privileged Americans more focused on “[feeling] good than they are with contributing to social change in Africa.” These faults, Amy Finnegan argues, have undermined the efficacy of Invisible Children’s projects.⁴⁷

The danger of blindly supporting aid efforts, they argue, is that the lack of understanding regarding the nuanced history of Uganda and US involvement reinforces militarization and “blinds young Americans to thoughtful analysis of the genuine needs

⁴⁵ Edmondson, Laura. "Uganda is Too Sexy: Reflections on Kony 2012." *TDR: The Drama Review*.3 (2012): 10., 11; Finnegan, Amy C. "Beneath Kony 2012: Americans Aligning with Arms and Aiding Others." *Africa Today* 59.3 (2013): 137-62., 138.

⁴⁶ Branch, *Displacing Human Rights*, 237; Finnegan, 138 151

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 159

on the ground, the already ongoing indigenous efforts to address those needs, and the potential impact of outsiders' efforts."⁴⁸ As with any foreign NGO, certain shortcomings can significantly undermine progress achieved by those organizations. Faults include overlooking the negative impact that their projects have on local initiatives and the affected civilian populace, the tendency toward cultural imperialism, and a failure to address the underlying issues in favor of treating the symptoms of the conflict for the purpose of feeling accomplished and benevolent.

VII. US Government Intervention

Before September 2001, US-Uganda relations were relatively unremarkable.⁴⁹ The US maintained an antagonistic relationship with Idi Amin due to his "anti-Western rhetoric" and the government-mandated expulsion of East Asians from the country.⁵⁰ Following the installation of Milton Obote in 1979 and his subsequent overthrow by Yoweri Museveni in 1986, the US government became one of many international donors who provided nearly half of Uganda's national budget. They contributed to the new government's social and economic reforms as a provision of the 1988 program that provided monetary assistance to countries demonstrating reform, including structural readjustment programs mandated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).⁵¹ Aid flow from industrialized countries and international groups continued due to Museveni's success in "[restoring] stability, human rights, and economic prosperity..." to the nation, and as a reward for his compliance with structural reform and anti-AIDS efforts.⁵²

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 139, 155; Branch, *Displacing Human Rights*, 237

⁴⁹ Allen; Central Intelligence Agency. "The CIA World Factbook Uganda." *The CIA World Factbook*. Web. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ug.html>>.

⁵⁰ Waters, 299

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 299-300; Herbst, 13

⁵² *Ibid.*, 300

International political dynamics shifted following the end of the Cold War in 1990 from anti-communism to anti-Islamic extremism. The antagonistic relationship between Museveni and Sudanese President al-Bashir earned US support for Uganda, as Osama bin Laden had identified Sudan as the “center of his expansive global ambitions...” for Islamic fundamentalism.⁵³ Suddenly, Uganda’s strategic location, political sympathies, and dependency on international aid made it a desirable and attainable regional ally. Bordering both Kenya and Tanzania, the sites of the Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam US Embassy bombings of 1998, which were organized by a Bin Laden’s Sudanese based al-Qaeda network with governmental compliance, Uganda proved to be a geographically strategic location with politically useful affiliations.⁵⁴

Uganda’s political value was further bolstered by the terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001, after which the American government pursued a strong anti-terror foreign policy. Not only was Sudan added to the list of States Sponsoring Terror, but its affiliate, the LRA, was identified by the US as a terrorist organization.⁵⁵ Furthermore, counterinsurgencies and infrastructure support operations became an important political and military strategy to prevent the cultivation of extremism in developing nations. Located on the border of the Congo and South Sudan, and in the region of Sudan and Somalia, the four most failed states in the world as of 2013, Uganda is a uniquely situated ally in America’s initiative to promote

⁵³ US Council on Foreign Relations. *More than Humanitarianism: A Strategic U.S. Approach Toward Africa*. Lake, Anthony; Todd Whitman, Christine; Lyman, Princeton N.; Morrison, J. Stephen ed. 56 Vol. New York: Council on Foreign Relations, Inc., 2006., 56

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 57, 56; Waters, 281

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 270; Allen 51; Cline, 132

[e]conomic growth, improvements in education and health, and more accountable government... to mobilize Africa's deep and abiding religious and cultural traditions in resisting the siren song of extremism.⁵⁶

To reward Uganda's support in the international 'War on Terror,' both for undermining the government in Khartoum through SPLA endorsement and for contributing troops to the Somalian operations against al Qaeda affiliate al-Shabab, the US has consistently provided the Museveni administration with financial and military support.⁵⁷

However, American foreign aid policies, both military and developmental, face significant criticism. The federal government is accused of the diversion of aid money, largely influenced by the Department of Defense, towards military, law enforcement, and political support for governments and military actors friendly to US interests rather than towards poverty alleviation, healthcare and education reforms, infrastructure strengthening, and governance improvement.⁵⁸ Accusations of US military, political, and economic imperialism via aid programs have unfortunately become a "trademark of US international relations..." since the September 11 attacks.⁵⁹ In 2000, for example, Israel and Egypt, key military and political allies of the US in the Middle East and North Africa, received twice as much aid money as all of sub-Saharan Africa combined though it is the location of the highest concentration of impoverished countries in the world.⁶⁰

Even food assistance programs, part of counter-insurgency and infrastructure

⁵⁶ Fund for Peace. "Failed States Index 2013." *Fund For Peace*. 2013. Web. <<http://ffp.statesindex.org/rankings-2013-sortable>>; US Council on Foreign Relations, 128

⁵⁷ Cline, 132

⁵⁸ Hudson, Michael. *Super Imperialism: The Origin and Fundamentals of U.S. World Dominance*. N.p.: Pluto Press, 2003., 75

⁵⁹ Scraton, Phil, and Naomi Klein. "Signs of the Times." *Beyond September 11th : An Anthology of Dissent*. London: Pluto Press, 2002., 148

⁶⁰ Cooper, Mary H. *Foreign Aid After Sept. 11*. 12 Vol. Washington, D.C., United States: CQ PressPrint.

strengthening policies, are often more reflective of American domestic agriculture surpluses than humanitarian objectives.⁶¹

In Uganda specifically, economic aid has been directed not only towards humanitarian aid and infrastructure stabilization but military logistical support. In fact, following Museveni's alliance with the US against Khartoum and the 2007 operations against al-Shabab in Somalia, Uganda rose to become one of America's top ten recipients of foreign aid, receiving \$457 million in 2010.⁶² According to Cline, between 2002 and 2011 \$50 million of US peacekeeping funds were directed towards logistical support of the Ugandan military under the condition that they cooperate with neighboring governments and refrain from committing atrocities, though Uganda's key strategic importance has allowed numerous human rights abuses and violations of other nations' sovereignty to go unpunished.⁶³

Economic support has been primarily distributed through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which has "provided emergency assistance with food and shelter" during the conflict, and "assisted war-affected children and unemployed youth with tools and access to training to gain better access to income generating activities" as part of the conflict recovery effort.⁶⁴ Total monetary contributions from the State Department amount to \$560 million in conflict-related humanitarian assistance between 2002 and 2011, \$750 million for post-conflict recovery efforts, and an additional \$10 million dollars per year between 2011 and 2013 as a provision of the Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery

⁶¹ Hudson, 217

⁶² Waters, 260; Bristol, Nellie. "Foreign Aid and National Security." *CQ Researcher* 21.23.

⁶³ Cline, 132

⁶⁴ United States Agency for International Development. "USAID Uganda." *U.S. Agency for International Development*. 2014. Web. <<http://www.usaid.gov/uganda>>.

Act of 2009, passed by the US Congress.⁶⁵ In congruence with other international donations, aid comprises nearly half of Uganda's national budget. This figure was exceeded it in 2008, 2 years after the conclusion of the war, when foreign assistance encompassed 64% of the budget.⁶⁶

The results of USAID's programs and American economic policies overall are commendable. Genuine progress has been made in the field of education reform with the help of international donors' debt forgiveness initiatives, which have allowed the Ugandan government to provide free primary schooling for four children in every family.⁶⁷ Waiving fees and cumulative debt has also allowed great advances in health care, including anti-AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis programs, due to significant increases in health clinic attendance and a doubled rate of immunizations.⁶⁸ USAID also claims to have made progress in long-term sustainability and agriculture programs that have assisted both the conflict recovery efforts and long-term poverty alleviation.⁶⁹ Furthermore, as an institution it has been commended for its efforts to initiate negotiations between the LRA and the government of Uganda, though they ultimately failed.⁷⁰

Despite their success, USAID has also been criticized for imposing ideological beliefs on their recipients, impeding programs with extensive bureaucracy, and complicity with instigating a humanitarian crisis. Specifically, USAID's approach to AIDS prevention has been panned due to the "wrong headed nature" of the conditions

⁶⁵ Cline, 133

⁶⁶ Glennie, 99

⁶⁷ United States Agency for International Development; Glennie, 29, 44

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 29

⁶⁹ United States Agency for International Development

⁷⁰ Allen, Vlassenroot, 191

attached to AIDS programs, specifically ideological concerns about abstinence and prostitution.⁷¹ Further critiques include the accusation of slowing or altogether halting ongoing programs through extensive bureaucracy that affect not only USAID programs, but independent initiatives that are organized or overseen by larger organizations including USAID, the IMF, and World Bank.⁷²

However, the greatest accusation facing all international aid groups in the northern Uganda conflict, including USAID and cooperating NGOs, is the internment of thousands of people in protected camps that resulted in the creation rather than the alleviation of a major humanitarian crisis. Under the guise of protecting civilians from LRA attacks, the Ugandan government mandated the concentration of the population of the Acholi region in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), resulting in the widespread dependence of at least a million people on food aid from NGOs and government aid programs, coordinated by the UN's World Food Program (WFP).⁷³ Within these camps, mortality rates soared, and by 2005, as many as 1,000 people died every week within them from AIDS, malaria, and continued LRA raids.⁷⁴

As Branch explains in his exposé of the harmful effects of aid in northern Uganda, “agencies found it convenient to cooperate openly with the government’s counterinsurgency to the point of enabling its policy of mass forced displacement and internment, which itself *resulted in* the humanitarian crisis.”⁷⁵ Similarly, John Perkins cites a hard-hitting critique of the aid programs during the LRA conflict to support his

⁷¹ Glennie, 120

⁷² Coyne, 109, 118

⁷³ Branch, *Displacing Human Rights*, 80

⁷⁴ Integrated Regional Information Networks. "UGANDA: 1,000 displaced die every week in war-torn north - report." *IRIN Africa*. 2005. Web. <<http://www.irinnews.org/report/56063/uganda-1-000-displaced-die-every-week-in-war-torn-north-report>>

⁷⁵ Branch, *Displacing Human Rights*, 81

thesis that the maintenance of poverty in Africa ultimately benefits aid organizations. This critique, written by an aid worker, claims that aid organizations “[prolong] the conflict simply by being there. As long as the situation is considered an emergency, donors will continue funding activities...[though] the situation is worse after decades of Western involvement and billions of dollars of aid money.”⁷⁶

United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), established in 2007 by the State Department, was created to “deter and defeat transnational threats, prevent future conflicts, support humanitarian and disaster relief, and protect U.S. security interests” in Africa, which include countering terrorist threats, protecting oil reserves and other non-renewable resources, and countering Chinese influence on the continent.⁷⁷ Abundant resources, for which China, the United States, and other developed nations compete, include timber, diamonds, copper, cobalt, gold, uranium, coltan, and oil.⁷⁸ Further justification for military presence comes from data suggesting that between 1991 and 2007, the majority of terrorist attacks were committed by actors from failing states including Algeria, Somalia, and Sudan; as of 2014, a quarter of jihadists have been recruited from African nations.⁷⁹

AFRICOM’s mission statement, in a departure from other military oriented organizations, is the “unprecedented embrace” of peace-building operations, civic participation, inter-governmental partnership, development of democratic institutions,

⁷⁶ Perkins, John. *The Secret History of the American Empire: Economic Hit Men, Jackals, and the Truth about Global Corruption*. New York: Dutton, 2007., 254-255

⁷⁷ United States Africa Command. "About the Command." *United States Africa Command*. 2014. Web. <<http://www.africom.mil/about-the-command>>. ; Nsia-Pepira, Kofi, 51

⁷⁸ Matti, Stephanie A. "In Pursuit of the Lord's Resistance Army: How to Deter Illegal Resource Extraction by Ugandan Forces." *Africa Today*. 2012.: 27-30., 29

⁷⁹ Nsia-Pepira, 51, 58

and the redress of human rights violations.⁸⁰ Among the traditionally non-military responsibilities of AFRICOM in Uganda, a “key U.S. strategic partner,” are addressing population growth, weak infrastructures, corruption, developing democratic institutions, and protecting human rights. Troops are also specifically tasked with “weakening the LRA and reducing its threat to central Africa” and encouraging inter-governmental cooperation and synchronization of the governments of Uganda, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Central African Republic in their efforts against Kony and his men.⁸¹

Despite this relatively humanitarian approach, which Branch refers to as “militarizing peace,” several critics worry that AFRICOM is merely a new form of exploitation of African countries for the benefit of US interests, but with the capacity to initiate violent action.⁸² A.C. LeVan concludes that support for the presence of AFRICOM troops is correlated to the reception of American financial aid, suggesting that, with regard to US military involvement, “politics remain embedded within broader economic relationships,” specifically aid dependence, rather than efficacy.⁸³ Similarly, Kofi Nsia-Peptra argues that the militarization of financial and humanitarian aid has “backfired due to the inherent contradiction of the use of realist means to achieve liberal ends.”⁸⁴ In other words, the nature of military intervention, generally criticized as imperialism aimed solely at controlling resources, is thought to violate the sovereignty of other nations and undermine the welfare of the affected populations.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Branch, *Displacing Human Rights*, 217

⁸¹ United States Africa Command

⁸² Branch, *Displacing Human Rights*, 216

⁸³ LeVan, A. C. "The Political Economy of African Responses to the U.S. Africa Command." *Africa Today* 57.1. 2010.: 2-23., 17, 3

⁸⁴ Nsia-Peptra, 51

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 58

In Branch's evaluation of AFRICOM in pursuit of the LRA, he argues that American activism falls prey to the same "political pathologies" of other forms of intervention despite their humanitarian objectives, and even concludes that "the lack of accountability to so-called beneficiaries" is "intensified" due to AFRICOM's military capabilities.⁸⁶ In summary, the fundamental criticisms of the presence of American troops in Africa are that military intervention is the "antithesis of genuine solidarity," and has been enacted solely so that "self-righteous American youth can feel that they are saving helpless victims," when in reality they are protecting American interests through military force and economic and political exploitation.⁸⁷

While the use of armed forces to achieve humanitarian ends seems counterintuitive to some critics, numerous military personnel and analysts suggest that the combination of military enforcement and combat capabilities with humanitarian aims is the future of conflict prevention and infrastructure strengthening essential to combatting terrorism and repressing insurgencies. The US military defines counterinsurgency as "military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat an insurgency," which requires civil-military relations between intergovernmental organizations, multinational groups, non-governmental organizations, foreign militaries, and especially host-nation civil authorities.⁸⁸ Units within the US military pursuing these objectives are responsible for administering basic medical care, overseeing WFP shipments, providing supplies for

⁸⁶ Branch, *Displacing Human Rights*, 216

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 239

⁸⁸ *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency Handbook* 2007. Skyhorse Publishing., 1

vital public services, and improving relations with the host community.⁸⁹ Several veterans with backgrounds in aid work as well as journalists embedded with US troops have encouraged the development of “diplomatic and influencing efforts” on the part of US armed forces, supporting the belief that in international conflict, “the real foes are poverty, disorder and inchoate violence... igniting in dysfunctional failed nation-states and anarchic No-Man’s Lands...”⁹⁰ As Eric Greitens, a Rhodes scholar, former aid worker, and retired Navy Seal writes, “without courage, compassion falters, and without compassion, courage has no direction;” this idealistic attitude encompasses modern thought regarding the capacity of Western militaries to engage in preventative warfare via infrastructure strengthening, civil development, and diplomacy.⁹¹ Despite growing support for these methods, mixed results in Iraq and Afghanistan and, as seen in Uganda, suspicion of the underlying motives of the US government have also raised skepticism and criticism regarding the combination of military force and humanitarian missions.

While the efficacy and motives behind direct US intervention can be debated, the indirect effects on the affected civilian populations due to the intergovernmental dynamics must also be considered. Specifically in Uganda, retaining President Museveni as a regional ally in the ‘War on Terror’ has allowed numerous instances of government oppression and military resource exploitation, human rights abuses, and violations of other nations’ sovereignties to go unpunished by the US or its international supporters.

⁸⁹ Schultheis, Rob. *Waging Peace*. New York: Gotham 37, 60-61. 2005., 125; King, R. Alan. *Twice Armed: An American Soldier’s Battle for Hearts and Minds in Iraq* St Paul: Zenith Press. 2006., 125-126.

⁹⁰ Kaiser, Steve. *Doorstep Diplomacy*. Acacia Publishing, Inc., 2009., ix; Schultheis, 19; Barcott, Rye. *It Happened on the Way to War: A Marine’s Path to Peace*. New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2011.; King; Greitens, Eric. *The Heart and the Fist: The Education of a Humanitarian, the Making of a Navy SEAL*. Boston : Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011.

⁹¹ Greitens, ix

Despite early praise for his efforts at combatting AIDS and reforming the political and economic infrastructure of Uganda, Museveni's record of improving transparency and encouraging good governance has faltered since the LRA insurgency due to his increasingly authoritarian regime based on corruption rather than democracy. According to Fund for Peace's 2013 Failed States Index, Uganda is ranked as the 22nd most failed state in the world between Syria and North Korea.⁹² In terms of government legitimacy it is ranked in the bottom 40 worldwide, with a score of 8.1 out of 10, with 10 representing the lowest level of legitimacy.⁹³ This ranking is the result of Museveni's undemocratic and unconstitutional efforts to retain power, including extending term limits in the Ugandan constitution a year before the 2006 elections allowing him to run again.⁹⁴ Though northern Ugandans, especially the Acholi victimized by both the LRA and the national military in the ongoing conflict, did not support Museveni, he carried the 2006 elections in a controversial win that is widely believed to have been "stolen."⁹⁵ In addition to his "growing dictatorial practices," Museveni has been accused of cultivating a "web of corrupt patronage networks" to retain the loyalty of the Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF) and governmental officials.⁹⁶ The use of the UPDF as a *de facto* personal army, corruption to maintain favor and power, and increasingly undemocratic practices has ultimately "tainted" Museveni's governance record and international reputation, yet has not had any lasting impact on his alliance with the United States.⁹⁷

⁹² Fund for Peace

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Waters, 300

⁹⁵ Green, 55; Waters, 300

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, Matti, 30

⁹⁷ Tangri, Roger, and Andrew M. Mwenda. "President Museveni and the Politics of Presidential Tenure in Uganda." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 28.1: 31-49. 2010., 31

In addition to serving as the “bedrock” of Museveni’s political power, the UPDF has been accused of corruption and human rights abuses within Uganda during their deployment in the north against the LRA.⁹⁸ As early as 1986, the NRM founded and led by Museveni and their armed forces, now the UPDF, were accused of atrocities, and even suspected of genocide against the Acholi.⁹⁹ Most prevalent among these accusations was the complicity and occasional participation of the UPDF in Karamajong cattle raids, launched from the failed region in northeastern Uganda, as far west as Gulu, situated halfway across the country.¹⁰⁰ While completing missions in the North, especially in Acholiland, national defense officers were caught in the infamous ‘ghost soldier scandal,’ pocketing the salaries of dead, missing, and deserted soldiers whom they failed to report.¹⁰¹ More recently, while combatting Kony’s insurgency, the Ugandan military has been accused of atrocities “strikingly similar” to those prosecuted by the International Criminal Court against the LRA, including conscripting child soldiers, forcibly displacing civilians in the North, and committing crimes against humanity.¹⁰² In response to these allegations, the UPDF has instituted “internal measures” to investigate potential crimes committed by their forces, though these reforms were not initiated until after the LRA had fled the country.¹⁰³

Not only does the UPDF face allegations of abuses within Uganda, it has been convicted of plundering Congolese resources and committing human rights abuses during their deployment in the eastern edge of DRC. Among the resources found in this region

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 44

⁹⁹ Branch, *Displacing Human Rights*, 65

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Cline, 77

¹⁰² Green, 117; Allen, 100

¹⁰³ Cline, 71

are copper, cobalt, diamonds, gold, coltan (found in many electronics including mobile phones), timber, tin, and uranium.¹⁰⁴ Between 1998 and 2003, UPDF troops occupied eastern Congo and plundered millions of dollars of local resources. Perhaps the most telling evidence is the national exportation of \$60 million of gold, though Uganda's domestic production of gold yields only \$24,817.¹⁰⁵ In addition to looting in a "flagrant violation of Congolese sovereignty," the UPDF has been accused of exacerbating the existing conflict in northeastern Congo by contributing military support for rebel groups and "acting like warlords in uniform... fueling more slaughter, rape, and robbery" in an already conflicted region.¹⁰⁶ In 2010, a UN commission found evidence of both war crimes and crimes against humanity during the deployment of Ugandan troops in DRC.¹⁰⁷

Outside of the Congo, the ongoing conflict with the LRA was also proving to be profitable to the government of Uganda. In the name of defense, the UPDF continued expanding north into Acholiland, where the population was largely contained in overcrowded IDP camps, and war profiteering was an increasingly prevalent problem.¹⁰⁸ In addition to conflict profiteering, the national government was enjoying economic, political, and military support from the United States and its allies due to their efforts against the War on Terror. At the same time, a series of negotiation attempts were being orchestrated between the Ugandan government and the LRA, with help from the governments of South Sudan and the United States, though a series of setbacks including

¹⁰⁴ Stearns, Jason K. *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: The Collapse of the Congo and the Great War of Africa*. United States of America: PublicAffairs, 2011., 296; Matti, 29

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Adebajo, Adekeye. *UN Peacekeeping in Africa : From the Suez Crisis to the Sudan Conflicts*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2011., 80, 68; Green, 117

¹⁰⁷ Branch, *Displacing Human Rights*, 86

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 79

Kony's refusal to appear and the announcement of total war against the LRA in 1996 led to the escalation of violence against civilians by Kony's forces.¹⁰⁹ The failure of the peace talks was aggravated by Museveni's hardline approach and frustration with the Sudanese government, which he blamed for breakdown of negotiations. Portraying Kony as the "arch villain" of the violence enabled the allied governments of Uganda and the US to overlook both Museveni's own culpability in failing to bring an end to the conflict, and American complicity in its continuation.¹¹⁰

Despite Museveni's shortcomings and mounting evidence of governmental and military abuses, including "election theft," human rights abuses, violations of the Congo's sovereignty, and obstruction the negotiation process, the US continues to support Uganda politically, militarily, and financially. As Branch concludes in his own critique, Museveni and the government of Uganda have

managed to divert a significant portion of its budget to defense over donor protests, invade and occupy eastern DRC with devastating consequences, come to the brink of war with Rwanda, viciously shut down political opposition, rig elections, amend the constitution so as to allow Museveni to be president for life, engage in massive and systemic corruption, and fail to make a serious effort to end the war in northern Uganda either militarily or through negotiations.¹¹¹

However, strategic interests prevent the US government from punishing or even acknowledging these significant abuses and international controversies.

VIII. Underlying Political Objectives of US-Uganda Alliance and Regional Impact

In addition to the oversight of the abuses of Museveni's regime, its failure to adequately address the civil war, and the unintended consequences of American aid in Acholiland, the violence of the LRA conflict and the subsequent US alliance with

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 76

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 74; Green, 310

¹¹¹ Tangir, Mwenda, 45; Branch, *Displacing Human Rights*, 80

Uganda has impacted the region beyond Uganda's borders both positively and negatively. The US has manipulated geopolitical relations in efforts to secure access to lucrative oil reserves and to stunt the growth of transnational terrorist organizations both before 9/11 and after the declaration of the 'War on Terror.' Furthermore, continued support for the SPLA throughout the independence movement and participation in the negotiation process of South Sudanese independence has cemented American influence in the conflict, the portrayal of which, several scholars suggest, was manipulated to justify American intervention.

As previously mentioned, the US strengthened their geopolitical relationship with Uganda, among other reasons, to combat the spread of terrorist organizations, particularly in Sudan and Somalia. Khartoum before 9/11 had been loosely allied with revolutionary Iran and was accused of providing military aid and assistance to Egyptian terrorist groups.¹¹² An alliance was also established between prominent Sudanese official Hassan al-Turabi and Osama Bin Laden that allowed Bin Laden freedom of movement in Sudan in exchange for funding for al-Turabi's political party, the National Islamic Front, securing Sudan's placement on the US State Department's list of states sponsoring terror.¹¹³ Following the 1998 attacks by Islamic terrorists on the American embassies in Tanzania and Kenya and growing concerns about the Islamic terror "triangle" between the failing, predominantly Muslim states of Sudan, Somalia, and Yemen, the US strengthened their alliance with Uganda in an effort to prevent Islamic extremist violence in the region.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Shay, Shaul. *The Red Sea Terror Triangle: Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, and Islamic Terror*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2005., 40, 27

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 35, 46; United States Department of State

¹¹⁴ Shay, 51, 197

After the September 11th attacks, US influence in the region and a desire to avoid an Afghanistan-style invasion encouraged the Sudanese government to distance itself from al-Qaeda.¹¹⁵ Eventually supporting the US in the global ‘War on Terror,’ Sudan allowed for the arrest of 30 Afghans on Sudanese soil, at which point the US rescinded previously imposed sanctions.¹¹⁶ As such, Khartoum joined Uganda in a regional alliance with the US against the spread of Islamic extremism and trans-national terrorism. However despite Sudan’s newfound support for the US, some critics believe that the outbreak of violence in Darfur was framed by the “managers of the ‘War on Terror,’” including America, as a genocidal conflict perpetrated by the Sudanese government, though UN and ICC reports that found no evidence of intent to commit genocide.¹¹⁷ It has also been suggested that, in addition to framing al-Bashir’s administration in an antagonistic light as a strategy in the ‘War on Terror,’ mineral wealth and oil deposits motivated increased US presence in Darfur.¹¹⁸

Uganda’s proximity to Sudan, a nation with an overwhelming Sunni population, and Museveni’s longstanding rivalry with President al-Bashir and subsequent proxy war made it a strategic ally in American efforts to curb Islamic extremism in the region.¹¹⁹ After 9/11, this geopolitical alliance was further strengthened by Uganda’s participation in both African Union (AU) and UN efforts against al-Qaeda affiliate al-Shabab in Somalia. Providing 4500 out of 8000 UN troops, and 3400 out of 6000 AU troops, the

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 55

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Mamdani, Mahmood. *Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War on Terror*. New York : Pantheon Books, 1st ed, 2009., 4

¹¹⁸ Nsia-Pepira, 54

¹¹⁹ Central Intelligence Agency. "The CIA World Factbook Sudan." 2014. Web. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/su.html>>.

UPDF comprises a significant portion of forces serving in Somalia.¹²⁰ In addition to benefitting from significant aid contributions and development programs provided by the US government, Uganda profits from its participation in anti-al-Shabab missions through a *quid pro quo* system in which the US supports the UPDF's pursuit of the LRA in exchange for continued membership in the UN and AU forces.¹²¹

In addition to combatting terrorism, US interests in oil found in the region have also encouraged improved relations with Uganda, South Sudan, and Sudan. As noted by some scholars, there is a correlation between American foreign involvement in conflicted, developing nations and resource acquisition. Though the conflicts in the Angola, the Congo, and for that matter, Uganda, endured years without significant international attention, the outbreak of violence in Darfur garnered an immediate global outcry, perhaps because the 8% of oil revenue obtained by America from Angola was uninterrupted by the violence and protected by Cuban forces from damage.¹²² In contrast, in Darfur there was a "global publicity boom [regarding] the carnage in Darfur," despite the lack of evidence of genocidal government policies, possibly due to the manipulation of Sudan's image in the 'War on Terror,' or because of the extensive oil wealth potential of Sudan and South Sudan, for which the US desired an excuse for regional intervention.¹²³

Continuing their involvement with the proxy war between Uganda and Sudan, the US became an actor in the South Sudanese independence movement and the negotiations in Juba in 2011. In 2002, an official alliance forged between al-Bashir and Museveni

¹²⁰ Cline, 80, 132

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Mamdani, 21; LeRiche 208

¹²³ Mamdani, 21

resulted in Operation IRON FIST, in which the anywhere from 10,000 to 15,000 UPDF troops were authorized to enter southern Sudan in search of the LRA and Joseph Kony. However, their efforts were unsuccessful and resulted only in increased reprisals by the LRA against Sudanese civilians.¹²⁴ In an effort to prevent a repetition of the 2002 mission, the US provided advisors and intelligence analysts to support Operation LIGHTNING THUNDER, a 2008 invasion into the Congo also in pursuit of Kony and his followers.¹²⁵ Though moderately more successful, only 150 LRA members were killed, 5 commanders captured, and 300 abductees freed.¹²⁶ Yet, despite this cooperative effort against the LRA between America, Sudan, and Uganda, the US still consistently accused the Sudanese government of genocide in Darfur while the SPLA was given “special attention” as the US government “sought to transform the guerilla force into a more professional, modern army” during the independence movement.¹²⁷

As a result, when negotiations commenced between Khartoum and Juba, the US became a key participant.¹²⁸ The long-standing alliance between America and the South Sudanese rebels, from its inception as part of the Ugandan-Sudanese proxy war to participation in anti-LRA efforts with the SPLA, reflects the consistency of the US-Ugandan alliance as a regional ally in the ‘War on Terror,’ but may also be indicative of American interests in South Sudanese oil, which made up 98% of the country’s revenue as of 2011.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Cline 81-82

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 85

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ LeRiche, 208

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Natsios, Andrew S. *Sudan, South Sudan, and Darfur: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford; New York : Oxford University Press, 2012.

IX. Conclusion

Since the outbreak of violence between the Lord's Resistance Army and the government of Uganda, international efforts to provide aid and ameliorate the conflict have been implemented with varying degrees of success. American governmental efforts through the US military, USAID, and diplomatic efforts have yielded progress, as have the projects instituted by NGOs such as Invisible Children. However the unintended consequences have in many cases undermined these advancements. The most notable consequence of America's alliance with Uganda, which has yielded a relatively stable regional partner in the 'War on Terror,' is the lack of accountability facing President Museveni in response to his increasingly dictatorial regime, invasion and plunder of the Congo, and accusations of crimes against humanity made against the Ugandan military. US focus on the maintenance of relations with Uganda in an effort to combat terrorism has allowed Museveni to go unpunished, has prevented the critical examination of the efficacy of projects implemented by Invisible Children and USAID, justified military presence in the region, and distracted international audiences from the role of Western nations in the destabilization of East Africa, rather than improving the situations of the victims of the LRA conflict.

While further research should be conducted on the local impacts of USAID programs, AFRICOM's operations collecting intelligence on the LRA and reintegrating child-soldiers, and efforts by the US governments and American NGOs to improve governance and infrastructure in Northern Uganda, the overarching effects of US presence in Northern Uganda and regional geopolitics must also be considered in future policy in the East African Community. However, the failure of current US policies to

address or even acknowledge the underlying internal divisions, governmental abuses, and regional influences that serve as the fundamental causes of the LRA conflict, has inhibited recovery efforts in the region and diverted resources into short-term relief aid rather than long-term solutions. Furthermore, the focus on geopolitical maneuvering of the governments of Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda as part of the ‘War on Terror’ or as an effort to secure oil, has given Museveni protection against prosecution for invading the Congo and more recently South Sudan, as well as engaging in subversive proxy wars that have impacted both Sudan and Rwanda. The current administration, dominated by Museveni and the NRM, has consistently committed human rights abuses and undermined national governance, while failing to make a serious effort to protect the people of Acholiland or end the violence with the LRA, instead exacerbating it with inflammatory ultimatums.

The human impact of this trans-national violence among rebel groups as a result of these proxy wars, operations against the LRA, and the consequences of geopolitical maneuvering, poor governance, poverty, and regional instability is extensive. The Acholi people’s long-term suffering as a result of both LRA and UPDF violence, poverty induced by IDP camps, infrastructural destruction, regional development disparities, and evolving dependency on foreign aid has been sufficiently devastating to the region. However, civilian populations in the Congo, South Sudan, and more recently Central African Republic have also been afflicted by LRA atrocities and retaliatory military operations. Regional instability, including the recent coup and outbreak of violence in South Sudan, the concentration of the most failed states in the world, and human insecurity caused by mass displacement, poverty, and infrastructural destruction, is only

exacerbated by geopolitical manipulation by the governments of Uganda and the US. As part of America's efforts to procure oil in a resource-rich region and combat terrorism, specifically against al-Shabab and al-Qaeda in East Africa, the unintended effects of American aid and the allowance of governmental and human rights abuses by the Museveni administration have ultimately caused more harm than good. Exacerbation of trans-national conflict, rebel violence, and the oversight of governmental abuses of strategic US allies have caused immeasurable damage to both the affected civilian populations and the overall stability of the region, outweighing the benefits brought by aid programs.

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