

Activists: US Needs Africa Partners in Hunt for LRA

Written by Joe DeCapua

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Activists say African nations must come forward and take advantage of U.S. military advisers sent to Central African to help eliminate the LRA rebel threat. President Obama recently approved the use of military advisers to help search for LRA leader Joseph Kony and his fighters.

Photo: N. Colombant - VOA John Prendergast signs copies of his new book 'The Enough Moment' after his call to action

A recent Wall Street Journal featured an op-ed piece in support of U.S. involvement in Central Africa written by John Prendergast, co-founder of the ENOUGH Project and actress and activist Mia Farrow.



I think if it's only the advisers deployed and absent any other external variable then it will not work. What we need (is) for this military advisory deployment to be the leverage to now get the appropriately trained special forces from qualified African states on the ground in the theater of operation so that the chances for targeting and apprehending, or otherwise taking Joseph Kony

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out of the battlefield, have a better chance at success,” said Prendergast.

But who?

“Uganda,” he said, “has redeployed a substantial amount of its forces, a vast majority of the forces that they had in the LRA fight, either for Somalia or for domestic security issues.... So we have a real serious imbalance between the intention of the U.S. forces and the reality of the lack of a partner on the ground that has the capacity to really undertake the hunt for Kony,”

Kenya is now heavily involved in an offensive in Somalia against the al-Shabab militant group, which has been linked to al Qaida.

Prendergast said the U.S. has ties with various African militaries and should assess what Special Forces are needed.

“Now that the U.S. has boots on the ground, as they say, we can, I think, have much greater credibility in leveraging those African states to say let’s get the right troops on the ground,” he said.

Prendergast would like to see Ugandan re-involvement, but said other countries, such as Nigeria, South Africa and Rwanda are also possibilities.

“It requires a real look at who has that experience in conducting counter insurgency operations and the training and the troops to be able to deploy. And really we’re not talking about thousands and thousands of troops. We need most importantly Special Forces units that can undertake specialized operations,” he said.

Strategy

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Some estimates say the Lord's Resistance Army has broken up into a dozen small groups that are terrorizing parts of eastern DRC, the CAR and South Sudan. But Prendergast said there are indications the number may be much higher. He opposes hunting down each group one at a time in a "war of attrition." He compared to situation to Angola and the fight against Jonas Savimbi and his UNITA rebels and Foday Sankoh and the RUF rebels in Sierra Leone.

"Once they were taken out of the game," he said, "their organizations crumbled. And I think the same is true of Kony. And I think that there needs to be a real focused effort. I mean the news headlines every month reveal another either terrorist or war criminal being apprehended or otherwise taken out of the game. And I think Joseph Kony should be on that list and we need to go after the leadership and not be fighting child soldiers all over central Africa."

Post LRA

If the planned operation is eventually a success and Joseph Kony is either apprehended or killed, Prendergast said a threat may still exist for a time from LRA members acting as "gangs." But overall, he believes the threat would be much less, especially for children.

In their op-ed article, Prendergast and Farrow write, "During its 24 year existence, the LRA has abducted some 70,000 civilians, mostly children. The group has killed tens of thousands and displaced two and a half million people in four countries. Countless villagers have been mutilated – their lips, ears and noses cut off." {jcomments on}