



# A MISSION OF ATTRITION

The 7th Psychological Operations Battalion's PSYOP Campaign against the Lord's Resistance Army.

BY MAJOR JONATHAN EASTER

The U.S. Army Psychological Operations community, particularly 4th Psychological Operations Group (A), has received considerable acclaim for its role in the campaign against the Lord's Resistance Army in central Africa as part of Operation Observant Compass from 2012-2017. This effort was an effective, yet humanitarian, approach to a complex conflict by pursuing the objective of depleting the rebels' strength through surrender rather than solely by killing them. This emphasis on defection was largely due to the LRA's use of abducted child soldiers to fill its ranks, along with the recognition that these same child soldiers were trapped within the organization by the brutal indoctrination methods of the LRA's leader, Joseph Kony. These defection efforts contributed to reducing the LRA's strength from roughly 400 fighters in 2011, to fewer than 80 in 2017 when U.S. forces withdrew.<sup>01</sup> The overall result was highly successful from the Ugandan perspective. The LRA was effectively isolated from the local population and forced to flee far from Uganda; former insurgent activity has vanished. Uganda's amnesty policy toward the former LRA rebels also continues, and thousands of

former rebels now live peacefully among the very people they once abused. All of this was completed by executing a mixed approach of lethal military operations with non-lethal appeals for defection, blended with a political strategy of local reconciliation. Praise of the U.S. mission's success has included articles from national publications, public recognition by U.S. Africa Command's commanders, and invitations to speak on the subject at the annual Association of the United States Army conference.<sup>02</sup> But what made PSYOP so effective in this instance?<sup>03</sup>

## ORIGINS OF THE CONFLICT

The war that became known as the "LRA Conflict" in the western world began as a series of insurgencies against the current government of Uganda. The state of Uganda, a former British colony, was divided for decades by regional and ethnic rivalries.<sup>04</sup> Since its independence in 1962, all of the former presidents of Uganda, from Milton Obote to the infamous Idi Amin, were from Uganda's north. The northern ethnic groups were genetically, culturally and linguistically distinct from Ugandans of other regions. Northerners dominated not only the administrative government, but also the military and police ranks. Among these ethnic groups (or tribes, as they are known in Uganda), is the Acholi, who formed the core of the LRA. When current president, and western Ugandan, Yoweri Museveni and his National Resistance Army, composed primarily of westerners and southerners, seized power in 1986 he upended the status quo. The economy of underdeveloped northern Uganda depended heavily on revenues from the government bureaucracy, and many northern Ugandans feared retribution from Museveni's NRA.<sup>05</sup> During the Bush War that preceded Museveni's rise to power, the previous regime had been responsible for the killing of an estimated 300,000 civilians in the Luwero Triangle of southwestern Uganda.<sup>06</sup>

In response to these fears, the Uganda People's Defense Army was formed in August 1986 by former Uganda National Liberation Army officers. The UPDF launched a guerrilla war against Museveni's new regime that was soon joined by other groups, including Joseph Kony's followers in 1987. In 1988, the government of Uganda offered amnesty to any rebel who would lay down arms. The NRA conducted talks with the UPDA leadership and signed the Gulu Peace Accord on June 3, 1988.<sup>07</sup> During the peace talks, government representatives brought the northerners to the capital of Kampala to see the development taking place. They showed them new hotel buildings and the airport at Entebbe, in an effort to persuade them that the north could be similarly developed if the rebels would stop fighting.<sup>08</sup> Kony and his LRA rejected amnesty and the results of the peace talks, taking refuge across the border in Sudan where they received material support and training from the Sudanese government.

Uganda's forces launched a deliberate counterinsurgency campaign against the LRA in 1991. Initially, many local Acholi were arrested under suspicion of aiding the LRA and there were many allegations of abuse. Despite this, the local population began to side more and more with the government. Northern leaders encouraged participation in local defense units to assist the NRA against the rebels and there was a high rate of participation.<sup>09</sup> Local Acholi were placed in positions of authority in the government and in the NRA units assigned there. The NRA made deliberate efforts to improve its relationship with the Acholi, including civic action projects such as drilling wells.<sup>10</sup> The LRA's support from the Acholi began to wane. According to one former LRA commander:

*"In the early days, the population was very supportive of the LRA and leaked information until the UPDF [NRA at the time] began apologizing and showing that it wanted peace with the north, to rebuild, and then the population started changing its mind. Then the population's information to the LRA was cut and turned against the LRA due to the approach the government used. Then they joined hands with the UPDF to bring peace to northern Uganda. The civilian population turned against Kony and he took revenge. The UPDF provided real information to the population and the people tired of the war and realized that the UPDF could end it."<sup>11</sup>*

One UPDF veteran of this period, who was a platoon commander in Gulu from 1989 until 1995, described the discipline of the NRA troops as a major factor in winning the support of the population:

*"The most important weapon is the discipline of the forces formed by political education. The soldiers are taught the history of Uganda, of the kingdoms, of the tribal structures, and even the LRA were using it. So you cannot only use the tribal thing; you will fail. You cannot punish one who is opposed [insurgent] and the entire tribe with him. You must punish individually. So these tactics and strategies were applied, but the important one is the discipline. They [soldiers] must be considerate of the victims. Our conduct turned the people against Kony. Kony wanted to start an Acholi war. He wanted a Luo republic, wanted it to go to the Nile. People turned against him. When they said 'no', he punished them. He said, 'these ones are contaminated. Now they are no longer Acholi'.<sup>12</sup>*

Following its loss of popular support, the LRA began to rely on a new form of recruitment: the abduction of children. Kony had never been comfortable with LRA troops who had previous military experience. According to one former LRA commander, "Former military men were not easy for him to control because they knew more than him about the military

and some were escaping. So, in [the] 1990s he started abducting young people that he could train in his own way."<sup>13</sup> Thousands of children were abducted in northern Uganda; the LRA rousted them from their homes during hours of darkness. The abductions of Acholi alone occurred at such high rates that, by 2008, 48.8 percent of the residents of Acholi communities surveyed by Pham, Vinck and Stover reported having been abducted by the LRA, including at least 25,000 children.<sup>14</sup>

The Acholi people, having lost so many children to the LRA, had a strong interest in seeing them safely returned. This, combined with Acholi cultural practices of reconciliation, motivated a grassroots political appeal to the Government of Uganda to grant amnesty to the LRA. The residents of other parts of Uganda sympathized with the Acholi for the loss of their children and use of their youth as child soldiers, which made gaining political support from their fellow Ugandans a feasible goal.<sup>15</sup>

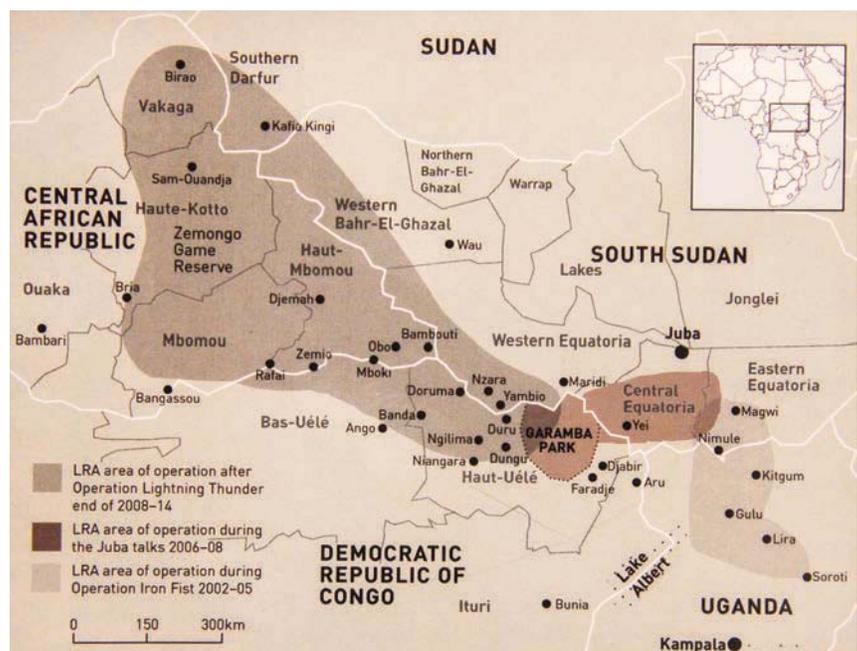
The concept of granting amnesty to the LRA rebels was rooted in traditional Acholi customs. The ritual of *mato oput* provided for complete forgiveness for an offender and reconciliation with the community, regardless of the severity of the crimes committed.<sup>16</sup> Children, in Acholi tradition, are not held fully responsible for their deeds. Children are only considered *odoko dano* ('morally and socially mature persons') when they are old enough to contribute to society and have children of their own.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the availability of rites of reconciliation, along with general condemnation of the LRA's use of child soldiers, combined to make amnesty an attractive option for Acholi Ugandans.

Perhaps due to a long history of warfare between neighboring villages, the Acholi had elaborate systems of conflict resolution to contain violence and prevent costly acts of retribution. They had many customs of reconciliation, of which the most widely known is *mato oput*. This was a ritual performed by an elder with spiritual authority in which two parties, with a mediator, met together and shared a bitter drink made from the bark of the *oput* tree. During the ritual, both parties agreed to forgive one another. This ritual culminated in an oath called *gomo tong*, or 'bending the spear', in which both parties agreed never to turn weapons on each other again. These rituals, along with the underlying acceptance of reconciliation, played a significant role in the conflict between the LRA and the Ugandan government forces and was further exploited by RPTs to promote defections.

The NRA/UPDF disseminated amnesty leaflets and pamphlets beginning in the year 2000. Many viewed them as effective, since some rebels reported to the NRA with the amnesty literature in hand.<sup>18</sup> The prominent Acholi radio personality John Baptist "Lacambel" Oryema reported that

01 A U.S. Army Psychological Operations Soldier drops leaflets over the Lord's Resistance Army's area of operations. The leaflets announced amnesty would be granted to any rebel who would lay down arms. U.S. ARMY PHOTO

02 The Lord's Resistance Army's primary areas of operation from 2002-2014 in central Africa.



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he prepared leaflets to advertise the Amnesty Statute and the subsequent Amnesty Act and carried them to rallies in northern Uganda. He also accompanied NRA military convoys into the bush to personally disseminate the leaflets. He took other initiatives as well:

*"I had a small office of information and it would also assist the army. I encouraged them to approach the rebels in a spirit of forgiveness. I opened a small place with some of my colleagues close to the barracks [NRA 4th Division] to take in the defectors. We would train those boys on what amnesty was all about. There were no NGOs in those days so we did this our own way. I would go to the market and say, 'how many of you have met your children in the bush? I want to see you, one by one.' So, I would give them this small piece of paper called 'Amnesty' and told them 'this is something very important and do not share it with anyone you do not trust.' They would give these leaflets to the youth in the bush. I started talking to wives of those UPDF fighters and started drilling them on what to say to their husbands to tactfully sensitize them. They reported back to me and then I reported back to the government."<sup>19</sup>*

One former senior LRA commander describes the effects of amnesty this way:

*"What the Ugandan Government did was very effective. It almost coincides with what was said in the Bible 'feed your enemy.' Those that left the bush and those that remained, their minds were changed to support the government. Those that left, they forgot the LRA with all their hearts."<sup>20</sup>*

In 1996, Lacambel approached UPDF spokesman Colonel Bantariza and asked him for access to the government radio station. Bantariza gave Lacambel one hour of airtime per day. Lacambel used a cassette player to transmit pre-recorded messages designed for the LRA rebels and their family members. "That hour was like gold. We were limited by the Ministry of Information to the time they gave us. They [local people] used to call it Radio Lacambel. Then we asked for two hours." The program began airing interviews with former rebels, as well as family members of the abducted. Lacambel named it "Amnesty" around the time that the Amnesty Statute was passed to promote awareness. He noticed that LRA defections increased in response to the program. Lacambel also interviewed UPDF officers so that they could tell their story to the local population and the rebels, confronting Kony's propaganda directly. "So the truth came out," one source said.<sup>21</sup> The UPDF also began leaving small radios in places for the LRA to find so that they could tune into the programming.

Lacambel's radio program, later called *Dwog Paco* ('come home'), began broadcasting messages to individual LRA fighters by name. These messages made use of family members or former rebel comrades to increase credibility and arouse a sense of nostalgia. One former LRA commander responded to these messages directly, stating:

*"These [messages] shook the foundation of the LRA and these commanders started to wonder if they should come out. The minds of many people, even the troops, started to change. We started hearing of many escapes. Those that came before me were calling my name. I called and did the same thing when I came out [in 2004] and called Sam Kolo<sup>22</sup> and told him, he was a brigadier at the time, and he came out. That is the thing, the friend calls you and you believe him."<sup>23</sup>*

By the middle of 2004, more than 5,000 former LRA fighters had defected and applied for amnesty.<sup>24</sup> The Ugandans' three-pronged approach to the insurgency was yielding results: political appeals and reconstruction for northern Uganda, amnesty for rebels willing to surrender, and "military pressure" to pursue the rebels and deny them safe haven.<sup>25</sup>

## U.S. INTERVENTION

International awareness of the situation in northern Uganda built slowly in the 1990s and early 2000s and increased greatly after the advent of advocacy campaigns launched by NGOs such as Resolve Uganda (later called the Resolve), the Enough Project, and Invisible Children in 2007. These groups initially focused on the suffering of northern Ugandans as a result of the conflict



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and the difficulties of life in displaced persons camps. However, after 2009, they advocated for U.S. military intervention as the only realistic means of stopping Kony and the LRA.<sup>26</sup> These advocacy campaigns included the viral "Kony 2012" social media campaign, and ultimately resulted in Operation Observant Compass. The objectives of the operation were simple:

1. Increase the protection of civilians.
2. Apprehend, or remove from the battlefield, Joseph Kony and his senior commanders.
3. Promote the defection, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of remaining LRA fighters.
4. Increase humanitarian access and provide continued relief to affected communities.<sup>27</sup>

The advantage of these objectives was that they could be validated; they were clearly measurable and attainable through quantifiable means, not as qualitative abstractions. Their progress was tracked throughout the life of the mission, especially on promoting defections and removing senior leaders from the battlefield, and demonstrable results encouraged continued support from AFRICOM, even though the ultimate objective of removing Kony from the battlefield was never realized.

SOCAFRICA established a joint special operations task force (later called SOCFWD-CA) in Entebbe, Uganda to command and control the operation that stretched from Uganda, through the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, into the Central African Republic, and across South Sudan. SFODAs served as advisors to African Union Regional Task Force partners at locations throughout the area, approximately



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Former Lord's Resistance Army fighters provide feedback on PSYOP products in Gulu, Uganda, in order to help create effective products to encourage more fighters to seek amnesty. U.S. ARMY PHOTO

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A community bulletin board promotes acceptance of defectors in Nabanga, South Sudan. U.S. ARMY PHOTO



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the size of California. The Regional PSYOP Teams deployed to the mission designed products, advised partner forces, liaised with IGOs and NGOs, planned operations and augmented the ODAs.

U.S. forces routinely had problems understanding the environment in central Africa in contrast to more familiar, recent operational settings such as Iraq or Afghanistan. The densely-forested terrain, biological threats, distances between resupply points, obscure languages and cultures and lack of a common information infrastructure (such as cellular phone towers) challenged the tried-and-true model of find, fix, and finish. The LRA did not routinely use conventional communications systems such as cell phones or satellite phones. When they did, they used them sparingly and observed strict discipline to avoid detection of their radio signals; their communications were conducted in short bursts of coded language within prescribed windows defined by cryptic SOPs. The rainforest also provided two or three canopies of cover that made aerial surveillance difficult. Inhabitants of the region were sparse and those who lived there often spoke languages unknown to the SOF linguists. To reach these villages after LRA attacks took as long as nine hours based on the distances and aircraft available. Finding the LRA was difficult. Fixing them was unlikely. Finishing them appeared nigh impossible.

## THE INDIGENOUS APPROACH

Once killing or capturing Joseph Kony proved a more difficult task than initially expected, OOC's objective of promoting defections of LRA combatants

became the mission's primary measure of success. The role of PSYOP (also called MISO) in the operation grew more involved as time went on. As successes mounted, the Ugandan and U.S. field commanders grew more confident in employing PSYOP against the LRA in innovative ways. This led them, the U.S. Embassy - Kampala, and even the partner NGOs to develop a steady stream of activities based on an understanding of the indigenous populations. These activities can be synthesized into five general lines of effort:

1. Broad messaging to LRA fighters to promote defection.
2. Broad messaging to surrounding civilian populations to promote the peaceful acceptance of LRA defectors.
3. Tailored messaging to promote internal divisions within the LRA.
4. Targeted messaging to promote the defection or surrender of specific members of the LRA.
5. The development of improved dissemination channels and methods appropriate for the target audiences and the operational environment.

The first line of effort was already being conducted through several media, but required reinforcement. The UPDF had conducted operations to promote defection as early as 1988 to reduce the strength of Kony's forces and weaken the morale of those fighters who remained. These efforts were largely supported by regional FM radio stations which still broadcasted testimonials by former abductees and fighters, as well as appeals by family members of those who were still assumed to be fighting for the LRA. In 2012, the same original radio stations, Mega FM and UBC, were still involved in broadcasting defection messages, but the broadcasts were made over shortwave frequencies so that they could be received by LRA members hundreds of miles from Uganda. To refine these efforts, the RPT worked with the most recent defectors to develop radio messages and interviews with their voices used as proof of life to detractors still within the LRA. The team developed print products from these same defectors using their names and recent photographs on small, laminated leaflets and disseminated them by air over known LRA trails. Whenever a new defector reported to the AU-RTF or UN, the team repeated this process to demonstrate that the defector had reached safety and that the opportunity remained for oth-

ers to follow. The teams even went so far as to disseminate pictures of the defectors feasting or enjoying simple treats they could not get in the bush, such as traditional foods and soda. The LRA by this time was such a small organization that any Ugandan LRA member was well-known to the others, and news of a successful defection spread rapidly.<sup>29</sup>

This effort wasn't only conducted by the U.S. military, but also by the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Invisible Children. Both organizations conducted independent leaflet drops from their own aircraft and made efforts to synchronize their targeting and messages with USSOF. The RPT and Invisible Children, in particular, shared photographs of defectors and concepts for messages, to include the leaflets themselves, with Invisible Children often providing assistance with graphic design and translation. Throughout the course of OOC, the U.S. disseminated more than one million leaflets.<sup>29</sup> One U.S. veteran of the operation described this as a "massive littering campaign," but qualified that statement further:

*"The goal wasn't just to litter, it was to send a signal to the LRA. Where the leaflets dropped, and we started using crossing points, watering holes, traditional rat lines, etcetera, either the foraging [LRA] group commanders had to avoid the area or risk their troops learning of the [defection] program... and if they avoided the traditional places, their soldiers knew something [was different] just by that avoidance. [LRA] commanders had to decide whether to inform Kony and company [that] there were flyers [leaflets] in the area and risk him having them killed for exposure to those things. [LRA] commanders had to decide what to tell their people, and even when they didn't tell their people [about the leaflets], info leaked... and [LRA] commanders had to decide for themselves*

**WE HEARD MANY MESSAGES ... WE HEARD VOICES OF DIFFERENT PEOPLE WHO WERE WITH US BEFORE, WE EVEN SAW PICTURES WHICH WERE DROPPED USING THE HELICOPTER. ALL OF THEM WERE TELLING US TO COME HOME. OTHERS ASKED US TO PUT OUR WEAPONS DOWN. FOR ME, I HEARD MY MOTHER'S VOICE AND SAW HER PICTURE, TOO.**

*what to do with the information they had about the defection from these leaflets... to take advantage of it or risk losing more than they already had."*<sup>30</sup>

Another technique the U.S. employed was the use of aerial loudspeaker systems. These loudspeakers were mounted on helicopters and flown over the bush to broadcast messages over a range of approximately one mile on either side of the aircraft. These systems were used to broadcast pre-recorded messages as well as live broadcasts from well-known communicators such as Lacambel and former LRA commander Caesar Acelam. One former LRA fighter recalls:

*"We heard many messages. Since we were in Garamba [National Park, DRC] we could listen to radios and Dwog Cen Paco ['Come Home'] program. Then on helicopter we heard voices of different people who were with us before, we even saw pictures which were dropped using the helicopter. All of them were telling us to come home. Others asked us to put our weapons down. For me, I heard my mother's voice and saw her picture, too."*<sup>31</sup>

This second line of effort was perhaps more challenging. To get a formerly victimized village to the point of willingly, and peacefully, accepting former LRA defectors was a complex task and required a series of preparatory measures. The first step in sensitizing populations to the idea of receiving LRA defectors was to identify which villages were the most supportive of the idea and also identifiable by the LRA as landmarks. It is no small thing to ask a population to receive a former fighter with open arms when those same fighters likely maimed, raped and killed members of that village in the very recent past.

Several of the partner NGOs were involved in sensitization efforts, to try to help the communities to understand the value of receiving defectors. This was especially true of Invisible Children, which sought to convey that by receiving defectors, villages would encourage further defections, which would weaken the LRA and reduce its ability to fight and sustain itself through pillaging. The coalition of military forces and NGOs called the villages that joined this initiative "safe reporting sites" or SRS, and they were usually co-located with AU-RTF contingents or the COFCs. The RPT advertised the location of these SRS through leaflets, radio and loudspeaker messages broadcast from helicopters. The AU-RTF provided security details to prevent the SRS from being attacked in reprisals. Invisible Children provided a network of high-frequency radio transmitters to the SRS villages and neighboring settlements to both provide early warning of attacks and to alert the community when LRA defectors arrived.

Once defectors arrived at the SRS, the local volunteers (civilian villagers) would contact AU-RTF and U.S. Special Operations security forces, who would debrief them. NGOs would provide medical aid and counseling, as well as help to locate the

defectors' places of origin and families. The entire process was decentralized and ran delicately; it was dependent on the goodwill and shared objectives of all parties involved. If a group of villagers attacked defectors in retaliation for their past acts, the attack would have the potential to stifle further defections for months. The system was admittedly fragile, but functioned very effectively.

Promoting internal divisions within the LRA served two purposes. The first is that it weakened the effectiveness of the LRA as an organization by undermining the morale of its leadership. The second is that it created additional internal pressures on its members that could lead to additional defections or the loss of manpower to internal conflict.<sup>32</sup> The RPT worked toward these ends by disseminating certain types of information to the LRA. The most prominent was the advertisement of cash rewards programs. Because Kony and his most notorious officers had been indicted by the International Criminal Court, the Department of State's War Crimes Rewards Program offered a reward of up to \$5 million for information leading to their capture. The U.S. Department of Defense also had



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01  
A solar-powered FM radio station constructed in the Central African Republic. Radio stations like this were established in remote villages to extend the range of clear signals that could reach the Lord's Resistance Army.



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02  
A United Nations mobile radio team in Bangadi, Democratic Republic of Congo, promotes defection through broadcasts aimed at armed rebels.



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03  
A Soldier from the 7th Psychological Operations Battalion drops leaflets into the dense jungles where the LRA operated.

U.S. ARMY PHOTOS

a rewards program in place. By advertising these rewards for the capture of an LRA member or information on their whereabouts, the AU-RTF could effectively motivate thousands of people in the area of operations who were familiar with the territory. This was intended to convey a sense of area denial to Kony. It was also a potential means to motivate individuals within Sudan who had access to Kony to give him up.

With the aid of local partners, the RPT translated messages advertising these programs into seven languages (Acholi, Arabic, French, Lingala, Pazande, Songo and Swahili) and used leaflets, radio and loudspeakers for dissemination throughout the LRA's range.<sup>33</sup> These messages were intended to increase the psychological pressure on Kony and his commanders, to convey the sense that he was being hunted and make him feel that he could trust no one; for instance, even the Sudanese might give him up for a handsome reward. Interviews with one former LRA commander indicated that Kony was aware of these rewards as early as 2005, and that they caused him to be increasingly concerned over his security and diminished his trust in subordinates.<sup>34</sup>

These efforts were very successful in many respects. Reports from defectors indicated that the LRA were concerned by "bounties" for Kony, and residents of surrounding areas sought additional details from the US-SOF advisers. In October 2013, a rural hunter in the DRC, motivated by rumors of these cash rewards, shot and killed an LRA commander whom he caught at a river crossing. The RPT subsequently broadcast the death of this commander over partner radio stations and over Voice of America's Africa shortwave network, which led to yet another defection from the deceased LRA commander's group.<sup>35</sup>

The fourth line of effort, which employed precision targeting for defection of specific members of the LRA, was perhaps the most complex. Crafting effective messages for individuals with whom the outside world has had no contact for 5-15 years took a great deal of time and consideration. The RPT conducted basic character studies of these targets based on known family members or childhood histories and make an inventory of all available media to which the target would be susceptible. For instance, did the target have a wife or mother left behind or who had already returned to Uganda? Was there someone in Uganda whom he trusted? Did he have a favorite musician or teacher? Did he join the LRA for political reasons or had he been abducted? Essentially, the driving question was, what vulnerabilities did the target have that could be exploited to leverage his defection?

These improved, targeted messages resulted in several successful defections, including that of Michael Omona, Kony's signaler,<sup>36</sup> who defected in response to a series of messages crafted specifically for him in 2016.<sup>37</sup> Omona may have defected in part thanks to his privileged access to radio broadcasts given his proximity to Kony, but, according to interviews, Omona credits the content of the messages with influencing his defection.<sup>38</sup>

The fifth line of effort was the expansion of media infrastructure and access. In the parts of central Africa where the LRA operated, there is very little in the way of civilian technological infrastructure and most villages in the area did not even have cellular phone service. The RPT identified which media the LRA were most susceptible to, and found through interviews with former LRA members that radio remained a highly effective medium. However, Kony feared his rank-and-file troops hearing radio messages, and only allowed his officers to listen to radio programs.<sup>39</sup> Despite LRA leaders' overall wariness of messages from the Ugandan government, they would still listen to the radio for information about the outside world and for the occasional bit of music once they had camped for the night or before they began moving early in the morning. Many of them still listened to Lacambel's program, *Dwog Paco*, despite Kony's prohibitions.<sup>40</sup>

With this in mind, the RPT sought to improve broadcast radio network coverage to reach LRA-occupied areas and increase access to shortwave frequencies that could penetrate the entire continent of Africa. Thanks to the assistance of U.S. Embassy - Kampala, Voice of America granted access to the programming editors for its Africa division. The RPT then began providing VOA with scripts that conveyed messages meant for Kony, the LRA and surrounding populations in the DRC, CAR, and South Sudan. VOA broadcasted these messages over its four shortwave frequencies in English, French, Arabic and Swahili.

The SOCFWD also built new FM radio stations in the Central African Republic to extend the range of clear, FM radio signals that could reach the LRA. These stations were established in remote villages and all of the materials were flown in by air for assembly. Local operators in these villages were identified and trained by NGO partners on how to run a solar-powered radio station, including developing content in the recording studio and how to manage and implement the defec-tion messaging effectively on the stations' computerized scheduling systems. Existing FM radio stations in CAR, previously established by NGOs, were repaired or enhanced. The UN managed two radio stations in the DRC, supported by the NGO the Voice Project. The Voice Project provided FM stations with programming content and training for the stations' operators.<sup>41</sup> The RPT coordinated directly with these NGOs, and with MONUSCO, in the effort to synchronize program-ming and share supporting programming content across the AO.

## CONCLUSION

The effectiveness of U.S. PSYOP efforts in OOC were due to deliberate, and dedicated efforts to understand the operational environment and apply influence through an indigenous approach. The techniques employed by the RPTs were not necessarily new to the conflict, but many had been forgotten by the operational UPDF of the day or were out of their reach. By reincorporating and amplifying the kinds of appeals that the Ugandans had effectively employed in the previous 20 years of the conflict, U.S. Army Special Operations Forces, assisted by local partners and a dedicated group of civilian volunteers, improved the overall effectiveness of the combined counter-LRA effort and effectively neutralized Kony's forces. 

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**NOTES** **01.** Ledio Cakaj, "800 Million Later, Joseph Kony is Still a Threat," *Foreign Policy*, June 28, 2017: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/06/28/800-million-later-joseph-kony-is-still-a-threat/> **02.** Michael M. Phillips, "U.S. to Rebels: Listen to Mom - Commandos Wage Psychological Battle to Draw Last of Joseph Kony's Troops out of African Bush," *Wall Street Journal*, March 11, 2017; Patrick Tucker, "How US Special Operators Helped Take Down Joseph Kony's Army with Tailored Messages," *Defense One*, October 17, 2017: <https://www.defenseone.com/technology/2017/10/how-4-green-berets-took-down-joseph-konys-army-tailored-messages/141851/>; USAFRICOM posture statements 2014-2017. **03.** Much of this research was conducted as part of the author's master's thesis at Naval Postgraduate School with Major Benon Hatangimana of the Uganda People's Defense Force. It includes interviews with veterans of the conflict from both sides, interviews with other witnesses and experts on the LRA, and the author's own experience as a participant in the campaign. The identity of the majority of these interviewees, with few exceptions, remains confidential by mutual agreement. **04.** Fredrick Odoi-Tanga, "Politics, Ethnicity, and Conflict in Post-Independence Acholiland, Uganda 1962-2006," Ph.D. Dissertation (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 2010), 11. **05.** Caroline Lamwaka, *The Raging Storm: A Reporter's Inside Account of the Northern Uganda War 1986-2005*, Kampala, Uganda: Fountain Publishers, 2016: 50-51. **06.** Ruddy Doom and Koen Vlassenroot, "Kony's Message: A New Koine? The Lord's Resistance Army in Northern Uganda," *African Affairs* 98 (1999): 9, 13. **07.** Doom and Vlassenroot, 15. **08.** Author Interview with John Baptist "Lacambel" Oryema, Gulu, Uganda, July 13, 2017. **09.** Doom and Vlassenroot, 23. **10.** Lamwaka, 104. **11.** Author Interview with a former LRA commander, Gulu, Uganda, July 11, 2017. **12.** Author Interview with an UPDF Officer, Gulu, Uganda, July 10, 2017. **13.** Author Interview with a former LRA commander, Gulu, Uganda, July 11, 2017. **14.** Phuong Pham, Patrick Vinck, and Eric Stover, "The Lord's Resistance Army and Forced Conscription in Northern Uganda," *Human Rights Quarterly* 30 (2008): 404. **15.** Author Interview with the Uganda Amnesty Commission, Gulu, Uganda, July 12, 2017. **16.** Ibid. **17.** Sverker Finstrom, *Living with Bad Surroundings*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008: 225. **18.** Author Interview with an UPDF Officer, Gulu, Uganda, July 10, 2017. **19.** Author Interview with Lacambel. Lacambel also served as a mediator in the talks between the UPDA and the NRA according to Lamwaka, 146. **20.** Author interview with a former LRA commander, Gulu, Uganda, July 11, 2017. **21.** Author Interview with an UPDF Officer, Pader, Uganda, July 11, 2017. **22.** Sam Kolo was formerly the LRA's spokesman. **23.** Author interview with a former LRA commander, Gulu, Uganda, July 11, 2017. **24.** Janine Clark, "The ICC, Uganda, and the LRA: Re-Framing the Debate," *African Studies*, 2010: 145. **25.** Author Interviews with an UPDF Officer, Gulu, Uganda, July 10, 2017. **26.** Jonathan Fisher, "Framing Kony: Uganda's War, Obama's Advisers, and the Nature of 'Influence' in Western Foreign Policy Making," *Third World Quarterly*, 2014: 692-3. **27.** White House Office of the Press Secretary, "Fact Sheet: Mitigating and Eliminating the Threat to Civilians Posed by the Lord's Resistance Army, April 23, 2012. **28.** David Ocitti, interview with group of former LRA combatants, Gulu, Uganda, transcript provided by correspondence, October 11, 2017. **29.** Author Interview with AFRICOM Staff, Stuttgart, Germany, October 19, 2017. **30.** Author Interview with USSOF Operator, Monterey, CA, September 12, 2017. **31.** David Ocitti, Interview with Group of Former LRA, Gulu, Uganda, Provided by Correspondence, October 11, 2017. **32.** Initial defections provided what psychologists call "social proof" that encouraged later defections. **33.** For more information see Scott Ross, "Encouraging Rebel Demobilization by Radio in Uganda and the DR Congo: the Case of 'Come Home' Messaging," *African Studies Review*, 2016:38. **34.** Author Interview with a Former LRA Commander, Gulu, Uganda, July 11, 2017. **35.** See Voice of America, "Aiding Those Who Defect from the LRA," September 3, 2013: <https://editorials.voa.gov/a/aiding-those-who-defect-from-the-lra/1742782.html>. **36.** A signaler in the LRA is the equivalent of a radio-telephone operator (RTO) communications specialist in the U.S. Army. **37.** Author Interview with USSOF Operator, Fort Bragg, NC, June 14, 2017. **38.** David Ocitti, Interview with former LRA members, transcript provided by personal correspondence, October 11, 2017. **39.** Ledio Cakaj, *When the Walking Defeats You: One Man's Journey as Joseph Kony's Bodyguard*, London: Zed Books, 2016: 355. **40.** Ibid. **41.** Author interview with Staff of the Voice Project, September 15, 2017.