The LRA in the DRC and the problem of ungoverned spaces

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Why, what, how?

Why (rationale):

- The general link between terrorist networks, militias and rebel groups has been explored by several scholars and policy analysts.
- It has been argued that illicit transnational networks, particularly terrorist groups, have been very active in so-called failed states.
- The concept of failed states has come under criticism.
- The lexicon of the study of failed states has been extended by references to "ungoverned space(s)" – a term meant to connote a general condition of weak to non-existent state authority in a state or particular geographic area.

What (focus):

- The LRA has been in the news for several years for its brutal methods and horrific guerrilla-political campaigns.
- Thousands of people were killed or had to flee from attacks, firstly in the northern parts of Uganda, but later in the (former) Sudan and also the DRC.
- LRA units moved from Uganda into the so-called ungoverned spaces of a neighbouring country.

How:

- Examine through qualitative research how the LRA has extended its presence from Uganda into a neighbouring country, specifically the DRC, where the state is unable to control much of its territory.

- Explain how the absence of effective state institutions and especially state control in many parts of the DRC has resulted in ungoverned spaces and as such created an opportunity for rebels and militias – including the LRA – to operate as important and significant role-players.

A rebel quagmire for South African troops

Some of the dozens of rebel factions operating in North and South Kivu in the DRC

Area of conflict in eastern DRC

Democratic Republic of the Congo
Area of map

Countries bordering the DRC

Rebel groups and militias in eastern DRC

- **FRPI** *Force de résistance patriotique en Ituri*
Based in gold-rich region of Ituri

- **ADF-Nalu** *Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda*
Ugandan-led Islamists

- **Other armed groups**

- **UPCP** *Union des patriotes congolais pour la paix*
Loose coalition of nationalist groups

- **FDLR** *Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda*
Rwandan Hutu rebels

- **APCLS** *Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et souverain*
Mai Mai group

- **Sheka**
Mai Mai group

- **M23**
Tutsi, allegedly backed by Rwanda

- **Rai Mutomboki**
Anti-FDLR group

- **Mai Mai groups**
Local forces claiming to act in self-defence

Graphic: JOHN McCANN Map info: OXFAM

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Lord's Resistance Army

"DRC: Minor Rebels, Major Terror"

Background: Joseph Kony

- Kony is a former Catholic altar boy from northern Uganda who turned against his fellow believers for not sharing his particular interpretation of the religion.

- Kony, a self-professed spirit medium intent on governing Uganda, used a mix of biblical commandments and Acholi traditions in his pursuit towards a theocratic state in Uganda.

- He believes that he was destined to rule Uganda according to the biblical Ten Commandments after establishing a theocratic state.

- His followers believe in Kony as a messenger of God who follows the commandments of the Holy Spirit.

Background: Joseph Kony/LRA

- The LRA claimed that successive governments have ruled Uganda by misusing the military to achieve selfish aims.

- James Obita: the army has been "misused to suppress, intimidate, torture, eliminate or indiscriminately kill innocent Ugandans". Under Museveni "[w]ars and killings have been the order of the day since Museveni grabbed power in our country".

Background: LRA

- Rather than aiming at military targets in Uganda, the LRA launched attacks on the very citizens it claimed to be fighting for.

- It raided villages in northern Uganda and forced children to carry supplies into the bush.

- LRA fighters became notorious for turning on the Acholis they claimed to represent by hacking off lips, ears and noses, by killing and abducting thousands of their fellow citizens.

Background: LRA

- In 1991, President Museveni's government forces launched a huge military campaign against the LRA – with the intent of destroying the rebel group.

- The assault failed and with the assistance and support of the Sudanese government in Khartoum, the rebels managed to establish safe bases across the border in the southern parts of Sudan.

Background: LRA

- Naidoo: the ideological motivation of the conflict is unimportant to rebels groups in conflicts where control of a natural resource(s) is concerned. What matters is whether the rebels can sustain themselves financially ("war economies").

- This is certainly true of at least the most powerful armed movements in the DRC, the M23 and the (Rwandan-rooted) FDLR, who generated much of their funding from illegal mining activities.

- The LRA never seemed to have preyed on the DRC's natural resources, but rely on abductions and child labour for cultivating food.
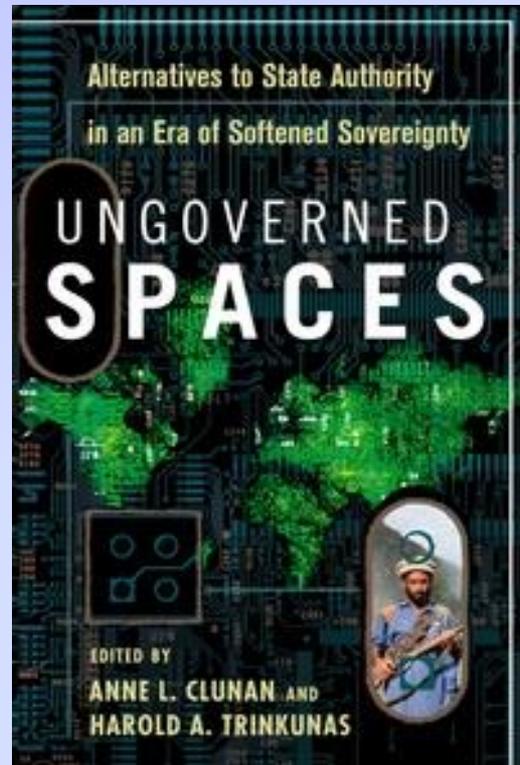
Background: LRA

- The DRC had no part in the conflict in Uganda until 2005, when the LRA sought sanctuary in the remote Garamba National Park after having been forced out of northern Uganda and south Sudan.

- Apart from beatings, pillaging and abductions, it is estimated that they killed more than 1 200 Congolese citizens in 2009.

- About 360 000 people fled from their homes. Raids have even spilled across Sudan and the CAR.

The LRA and the DRC state

- How was it possible for the LRA to settle into the north-eastern parts of the DRC and continue its acts of terror? After all, the DRC is a sovereign country.

- The answer to this question relates to the notion of ungoverned area(s) and concept of 'state' – and the understanding and application of these issues in the case of the DRC.

'Ungoverned areas/spaces'

Few places in the world are truly "ungoverned", because where formal governance breaks down, localised or informal governance structures tend to emerge.

The notion of 'ungoverned area(s)'

A place where the state or the central government is unable or unwilling to extend control, effectively govern, or influence the local population, and where a provincial, local, tribal, or autonomous government does not fully or effectively govern, due to inadequate governance capacity, insufficient political will, gaps in legitimacy, the presence of conflict, or restrictive norms of behaviour…

The term "ungoverned areas" encompasses under-governed, misgoverned, contested, and exploitable areas... In this sense, ungoverned areas are considered *potential* safe havens.

Statehood in the DRC

Mandrup: three dimensions or elements on the state in the DRC.

(1) the issue of the (partial) absence of effective state institutions and especially state control have created so-called ungoverned spaces into which other actors (rebels/militias) have moved.

(2) the dynamics and alliances between a myriad of different actors at different levels.

(3) the presence of public/state and private/non-state, sources of security: legitimate and illegitimate sources and users of violence.

The LRA and statehood in the DRC

The Economist: ...the focus on Mr Kony misses the larger question of what to do about the heart of Africa. Vast swathes of bush and jungle are ungoverned. Its inhabitants have among the lowest life expectancy on the continent. Mr Kony's presence highlights the lack of personal protection of any kind. A single track threads through the western part of South Sudan, passable by trucks only in the dry season. The same is true for bits of the Central African Republic and Congo.

The LRA and statehood in the DRC

Solomon: ...if the state is weakening in the developed world, it has always been a fragile affair on the African continent. This fragility is especially pronounced currently, where state sovereignty is challenged by the politics of identity – ethnicity, clan or religious fundamentalism.

Main thrust / finding(s)

- In countries such as the DRC, militias are filling power vacuums that have been caused by the inability and lack of military capacity of weak states to fight the militias effectively.

- This is true of the LRA – among others – since the DRC government had not been able to control large parts of the country since the early 1990s.

- A correlation between conflict and the accumulation of resources do not seem to apply to the activities of the LRA.

Pursuing a positive outcome in the DRC

One of the following (three) approaches could be followed:

- "state building school"
- "military solution school"
- "re-engagement school".

Pursuing a positive outcome in the DRC

- Anti-terrorism legislation forced down the throats of weak or dysfunctional criminal justice systems in African states is of limited or little value in situations where economic failure continues.

- No military operation can make states such as the DRC safe without a functioning, nationally recognised and legitimate central government.