

COUNTER-LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY LOGISTICS IN CENTRAL AFRICA

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Introduction

The purpose of this article is to share the experiences and lessons gleaned from the first deployment of U.S. Army Special Forces advisers to Central Africa in support of the Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009. Having deployed as the initial advisory force in support of a newly established named operation, the advanced operating base and its subordinate Special Forces operational detachment alphas broke new ground and challenged existing doctrine in an austere and complex operating environment.

Of the key challenges that confronted the AOB upon initial entry, logistics posed one of the greatest obstacles in achieving operational success. Faced with this obstacle, Army special-operations forces and Special Forces detachment logisticians[1] demonstrated incredible ingenuity, perseverance and adaptability to overcome the inherent logistical challenges of the region. This article will capture the logistical lessons and pragmatic solutions applied during this deployment to Central Africa. To properly convey the context of the operation, this article will provide a condensed history of Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army conflict, frame the complex operating environment in Central Africa and provide critical recommendations and planning considerations to achieve future SOF logistical success in the region.

Background

Kony and the LRA have terrorized Central Africa through mass murder, mutilations, rape and the kidnapping of thousands of children for more than two decades. Originating as a rebel group in northern Uganda in the 1980s, Kony led the LRA in an intense and bloody insurgency against the Ugandan government until the mid-1990s. By 1994, the LRA had established bases across the northern Ugandan border in Sudan (now the Republic of South Sudan) and continued to launch attacks into Uganda until 2005. In February 2005, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Kony and 11 other senior LRA commanders for war crimes committed during their bloody insurgency against the Ugandan government and its people. By late 2005, the LRA had been forced to relocate to the Democratic Republic of Congo due to military pressure from the Ugandan People's Defense Force. The military pressure had forced the LRA to disperse into the densely vegetated area of the Garamba National Park in the DRC and the rural terrain of South Sudan. From these safe havens, the LRA launched new attacks in the DRC and South Sudan, killing soldiers, civilians and kidnapping and

forcibly recruiting hundreds of new Soldiers into their ranks. The LRA's brutal attacks on remote villages in the region ultimately increased diplomatic and military involvement by these countries.

On Dec. 14, 2008, the UPDF with the assistance of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan People's Liberation Army launched an offensive against the LRA in GNP named Operation Lightning Thunder. The operation led to the destruction of numerous LRA camps in GNP, including the main camp believed to have been occupied by Kony. The operation was deemed a success by the three partner nations, but the inability to capture or kill the LRA's illusive and charismatic leader allowed the LRA to regroup. After regrouping, the LRA conducted several reprisal attacks against villages in Northeastern DRC, resulting in an estimated 500 casualties.[2] As a result of the combined operation and continuing military pressure, the remnants of the LRA splintered into mobile groups across the vast expanse of the tri-border area of the Central African Republic, Republic of South Sudan and the DRC.

By March 2009, the UPDF had negotiated with the governments of CAR and South Sudan to establish rural base camps within their countries, which would allow them to project and resupply forces conducting operations against the remaining LRA forces in the region. From these rural, isolated base camps, the UPDF continued its efforts to track Kony and the remaining LRA as it attempted to evade UPDF military-tracking efforts by transitorily occupying mobile camp sites in the tri-border area.

On March 24, 2010, U.S. President Barack Obama signed the Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009. The act reaffirmed existing support by the U.S. Government to provide, "… political, economic, military and intelligence support for viable multilateral efforts to protect civilians from the LRA."[3] On Oct. 14, 2011, President Obama announced the deployment of 100 military advisers to Central Africa to provide assistance to the UPDF and regional forces involved in Counter-LRA operations.[4]

The stated mission for the deployed military advisers was to advise and assist Counter-LRA regional partners in removing Kony and his top LRA commanders from the battlefield.[5] As a matter of public policy and diplomacy, this operation required a force capable of establishing and sustaining a nominal yet scalable footprint, while also accomplishing or supporting a broad spectrum of tactical, operational and strategic objectives. As the mission statement suggests, the force was required to achieve its objectives indirectly through Counter-LRA regional partners. These objectives would also require direct engagement with four separate U.S. country teams and four partner-nation governments and militaries covering an area the size of California. Military advisers were also required to embed with partner-nation forces, and work closely with non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations in a complex, austere and resource constrained environment.

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Framing the complex operating environment

When U.S. Special Forces advisers arrived in Central Africa in October 2011, the stage had not yet been set for USSF advisers to forward-deploy in an advise-and-assist capacity with Counter-LRA regional forces. Without a robust enabling force[6] in place when advisers arrived, the AOB coordinated with the U.S. Africa Theater Special Operations Command to conduct planning and execution of reception, staging, onward-movement and integration of forces to rural base camps in the CAR and South Sudan. During the initial assessments of air and land lines of communication, the AOB identified significant shortfalls in adequate and dependable field-landing strips and road infrastructure to support infiltration and long-term sustainment operations.

Assessments and surveys of the field landing strips concluded that only short take-off and landing aircraft could be used to transport and resupply forces in proximity to Counter-LRA regional forces. Many of the airfields required reconditioning or improvement that limited the type of short take-off and landing aircraft that could be used. Ultimately, the employment of Pilatus PC-12 aircraft were limited to more improved airfields where personnel and supplies could be cross loaded onto Cessna 208 Caravans and transported to the most remote airfields. Additionally, airstrips were not equipped with runway lighting, which limited resupply operations to strictly daylight hours. Since only small STOL aircraft were available for resupply, cargo space was severely limited and required rigid synchronization of daily flights to maintain adequate supplies for forces isolated at forward operating sites. Furthermore, the limited availability of alternative aircraft restricted the AOB's ability to conduct container-delivery system bundle drops and sling-load operations to augment aerial resupply.

Assessments of the road infrastructure identified that paved road systems did not exist along the primary and secondary lines of communication and that the available dirt-road systems were often impassable during the rainy season (approximately April-October). Rainy season conditions limited line-haul resupply operations to only four to five months out of the year. These limitations required logistical planners to formulate a line-haul schedule to transport and stockpile adequate supplies during the dry season. As a result of the road conditions, a general planning factor required 7 to 10 days for line-haul supplies to arrive at their final destination. To promote efficiency, line-haul operations were primarily utilized to transport supplies and equipment that could not be transported aboard STOL aircraft due to cargo constraints.

Furthermore, the lack of all-weather day/night field-landing strips and degraded road infrastructure directly impacted the reliability and responsiveness of evacuation assets for the sick and wounded. Of note, the infrastructure and environmental challenges that impede the successful employment of

casualty-evacuation assets in Central Africa are systemic throughout the rural regions of the continent. Confronted with these challenges, the AOB mitigated risk to force by coordinating and contracting rotary-wing platforms and pilots through the TSOC. However, the risk could not be completely eliminated due to inadequate pilot training during hours of limited visibility and the tyranny of distance from point of injury to definitive medical care. Consequently, a special-operations resuscitation team was sourced to the operation to further mitigate these risks by extending resuscitative care for serious or critical patients during medical evacuation to the nearest Level II and III facilities. The SORT also served invaluably as advisers and trainers in advanced medical skills for Counter-LRA partner-nation force medics and physicians.

In order to embed AOB military advisers with Counter-LRA regional forces at isolated forward operating sites, it was critical to design a sustainment and life-support plan that was responsive, reliable and moderately self-sustaining. Although pre-deployment sustainment planning weighed heavily on the U.S. Army Logistics Civil Augmentation Program[7] to provide civilian contractors to support forward-operating sites, extensive contracting delays eliminated the viability of the program to meet the AOB's time sensitive requirements. To compensate for the absence of LOGCAP logistics and life-support services, AOB and SFODA logisticians leveraged operational contract support[8] to lease an intermediate staging base and procure indigenous materials and resources to establish rural base camps at four separate expeditionary locations. Through contingency contracting and operational funds, the AOB and SFODAs were able to establish a dependable and responsive resupply system. The system allowed the AOB to independently achieve initial and full operational capability despite the austere and resource-constrained environment. Finally, the employment of indigenous resources in the establishment of rural base camps allowed the AOB and SFODAs to more quickly integrate with Counter-LRA forces, while also demonstrating cultural competence and strengthening rapport with military and civil leadership.

Recommendations

Successfully overcoming logistics challenges in Central Africa requires an unconventional and multi-faceted approach that is not taught in the conventional Army classroom. The traditional logistics curriculum fails to train students to make use of non-standard assets available in the joint, interagency, intergovernmental and multinational environment. Furthermore, conventional logistics training does little to prepare logisticians for the complexity, scale, tyranny of distance and lack of infrastructure that confronts military operations on the continent of Africa. Despite the lack of training in non-standard logistics on the African continent, the ingenuity, perseverance and adaptability of ARSOF and SFODA logisticians could not have been more impressive during this operation. Drawing from years of experience conducting theater security cooperation events in Africa, the SF ODAs' experiential knowledge and determination was critical to their success. Although the recommendations and pragmatic solutions generated from this operation are by no means a paradigm shift, they should serve to inform SOF small-unit logistics planning for future deployments to rural Africa. The following are five recommendations and planning considerations for enhancing non-standard logistics in Central Africa:

Building Social Capital. No matter where you deploy or what type of operation you conduct, people and social networks matter. Building and leveraging social capital[9] is one of the most important tasks in achieving logistics success on the continent of Africa. As a logistician you must master the human domain[10] and expand your social network so that you are better positioned through formal and informal ties to influence the operational environment.

This process begins immediately when you arrive in country and start to meet drivers, cultural advisers, interpreters, realtors, vendors and embassy finance and contracting officers. Establishing and developing working relationships with embassy personnel and particularly embassy financial-management officers and contracting officers are tremendously valuable. The embassy is capable of facilitating contracts, receiving and exchanging currency and funding (MIPRs), and providing lists of vetted vendors for procurement, life-support services and transportation. Every new tie that is established provides additional information about markets and economic conditions that expand your access to resources. As you extend your social network and information resources, you reduce information asymmetry,[11] increase the chance of finding higher quality goods and decrease the likelihood of price gauging.

Time is Relative. Nothing happens quickly in Central Africa. Understanding the relative nature of time is the first step toward cultural competence on the continent. Whatever the underlying cultural implications, it is important to recognize that punctuality in a Western sense is not as strictly adhered to in Africa. Contracts or purchase arrangements that normally take several days to process in the United States may take up to a week in Africa. Don't be caught off guard by transportation or contracting delays that can adversely impact the unit's sustainment plan. Identify longer lead times than expected for the transport of goods in order to provide a buffer for critical resupply requirements at forward-operating sites.

Maximize Resources. Although maximizing resources tends to be common sense and prudent planning, nowhere else is this principle more relevant than in the resource constrained environment of Central Africa. Considering the impact that the rainy season and degraded infrastructure can have on timely resupply, it is important to maximize the dimensions, weight and cube calculations for supplies and other outsized equipment for both ground and air transport. This logistics process should be rigidly coordinated and synchronized with the transport of personnel so that all available cargo space is optimized. When feasible or necessary, devise creative ways to transport outsized items such as generators or all-terrain vehicles on small contracted airframes like the Cessna 208 aircraft. You will be surprised what the AOB and SFODAs can accomplish with ingenuity and perseverance. With that said, don't rely exclusively on-air transport, diversify with line-haul and recognize that railways are nearly non-existent in Central Africa.

Additionally, units should maximize each forward-operating site's capacity for self-sustainability. Although forward-operating sites tended to be heavily reliant on MREs and bottled water, they were able to supplement their Class I supply with local livestock and renewable food sources like chickens and eggs. Additionally, each forward-operating site was able to employ varying versions of MIL300, Portable Water Filtration Systems to supplement their potable water supply. By supplementing their meals and water, the forward-operating sites



OUTSIDE THE BOX An all-terrain vehicle is transported using a contracted aircraft. *U.S. Army photo*

were able to increase variety while also moderately decreasing their reliance on external requirements for Class I resupply.

LOGCAP Support. Although LOGCAP is a proven and reliable logistics platform for operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the nine-month bidding and implementation process for LOGCAP contracting proved too arduous and inflexible to rapidly support operations in Central Africa. In the absence of LOGCAP, AOBs and SFODAs are completely capable of establishing their own bare-base support systems in order to achieve initial- and full-operational capability. Additionally, the significant footprint of non-indigenous LOGCAP equipment and the influx of civilian contractors that are predisposed to hire foreign labor instead of local labor in the management of life-support systems are not conducive to building rapport with partner-nation forces and civil leadership. Whenever the operational environment dictates, it is recommended that AOBs and SFODAs maximize their organic sustainment and life-support capabilities utilizing contingency contracting and OPFUND procurement.

Special Operations Resuscitation Team. In the absence of a dedicated MEDEVAC capability in the austere rural environment of Central Africa, the resourcing of a SORT team provides a dedicated capacity of up to 72 hours of resuscitative care during evacuation of the sick and wounded from point-of-injury to more definitive medical care. With the inability to evacuate casualties during hours of limited visibility due to airframe and pilot constraints, the SORT served as a vital asset for forward operating sites that were nearly 500 miles away from the nearest Level III medical facility. Additionally, the SORT aided in augmenting the AOB in its mission to advise and assist Counter-LRA regional force's medics and physicians and provided the capacity to assist in medical civic-action program activities whenever available. As a health-service support-planning consideration, it is recommended that SORT teams augment operations in the absence of dedicated MEDEVAC capabilities and when there is significant distance between forward operating sites to definitive-care facilities on the African continent. ***SW***

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Notes

1. ARSOF Logistician with AOC 90A and ASI K9; SFODA logisticians defined as MOS 18C (Special Forces Engineer) or 18D (Special Forces Medic) that traditionally serve as SFODA logisticians.
2. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "UNHCR visits Congolese towns attacked by Lord's Resistance Army" UNCHR.org, Jan. 7, 2009. http://www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/496385334.html
3. "Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009". (P.L. 111–172), *United States Statutes at Large*. 111 Stat. 1067.
4. Barack Obama, Letter from the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate Regarding the Lord's Resistance Army, whitehouse.gov, Oct. 14, 2011. http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/10/14/letter-president-speaker-house-representatives-and-president-pro-tempore
5. Ibid
6. Joint Publication 1-02 (November 15, 2012) defines Enabling Force as, "Early deploying forces that establish critical capabilities to facilitate deployment and initial employment (including sustainment) of a force."
7. Army Regulation 700–137, Logistics Civil Augmentation Program (LOGCAP), 16 December 1985. www.apd.army.mil/pdffiles/r700_137.pdf
8. Joint Publication 1-02 (November 15, 2012) defines Operational Contract Support as the process of planning for and obtaining supplies, services, and construction from commercial sources in support of joint operations along with the associated contractor management functions."
9. In the World English Dictionary (Nov. 28, 2012) social capital is defined as, "the network of social connections that exist between people, and their shared values and norms of behavior, which enable and encourage mutually advantageous social cooperation."
10. In Army Magazine (June 2012), MG Bennet S. Sacolick, defines Human Domain as, "The human domain is the totality of the physical, cultural and social environments that influence human behavior to the extent that success of any military operation or campaign depends on the application of unique capabilities that are designed to fight and win population-centric conflicts. It is a critical and complementary concept to the recognized domains of land, air, maritime, space and cyberspace."
11. investopedia.com defines information asymmetry as, "a situation in which one party in a transaction has more or superior information compared to another. This often happens in transactions where the seller knows more than the buyer, although the reverse can happen as well. Potentially, this could be a harmful situation because one party can take advantage of the other party's lack of knowledge." http://www.investopedia.com/terms/a/asymmetricinformation.asp#ixzz2EFZasQ1j (accessed November 28, 2012)