

## Why the US needs to stay out of Uganda

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In his 30-minute [Kony 2012 video](#), activist filmmaker Jason Russell boldly calls on Congress to become actively involved in capturing Joseph Kony, the founder and leader of the Lord's Resistance Army. Russell's clips of frightened Ugandan children tugged at the heartstrings of over 100 million viewers, setting the news buzzing for days, and urging Congress to action in Uganda. Before we hop on the Kony 2012 bandwagon, we must get our facts straight. What is depicted in Russell's five-year-old footage is not indicative of what is happening in Uganda today.

The costs of intervening in Uganda would far exceed the benefits. Military intervention is neither easy nor cheap. Russell's video falsely suggests that Kony can be found within Uganda's borders; the truth is, Kony left Uganda six years ago, and since the 2006 peace talks, LRA soldiers have been scattered across Southern Sudan, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In order to track down Kony, the United States would need to intervene in four countries and embark on [a costly manhunt across miles of forested terrain](#). It would be a déjà vu of the search for Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, but without vital U.S. security interests at stake.

It is crucial to understand the nature of the beast the U.S. would tackle. [The LRA is small](#), with roughly 200 active soldiers — a far cry from Russell's 30,000 figure, which represents the total number of abductions since the 1980s. Kony's army is comprised mostly of gullible children who genuinely view Kony as a spiritual leader. The children are victims, but they are also combatants whose loyalties lie with their "Lord." In order to save the children, American troops would need to fight the children themselves. As Yale Professor Chris Blattman [points out](#), "getting Kony probably means going through a wall of children, guns a-blazing."

Russell depicts the military intervention as strictly humanitarian, which is inherently oxymoronic. Obama himself justified sending troops to Uganda last October in the name of ["U.S. national security interests and foreign policy."](#) Obama's questionable rationale — neither Uganda nor the LRA pose any threat to U.S. security — does not take away from the fact that another intervention would likely be military and bellicose. [Even Amnesty International is advising the U.S. against intervention in Uganda, out of respect for human rights](#). However benign the initial intentions, a peaceful intervention could easily spiral out of control if troops are met by armed opposition, as we witnessed in Afghanistan and Iraq. [Operations Iron Fist and Lightning Thunder](#), recent military efforts to end the LRA, both received heavy support from the U.S. [Almost 1,000 lives were lost during Operation Lightning Thunder](#). Military intervention could potentially result in a greater loss of human lives, both American and African, with numbers far exceeding the current rate of casualties caused by the LRA.

Perhaps most importantly, the U.S. risks [damaging its relationships](#) with the countries of Central Africa. The area in question has a complicated history of ethnic conflict and civil unrest. In recent years, [pockets of al-Shabaab terrorist groups have sprung up](#), which makes the region a less-than-ideal place to try to export democracy. [Experts speculate that Obama's rationale for intervention was grounded in American payback for Uganda's assistance to stateless Somalia, a country fighting against the U.S. in the war on terror.](#) Kony 2012 depicts the fall deployment as a recent congressional change of heart; in reality, the U.S. had led military efforts into Uganda before, and American soldiers were already there to greet the new troops in October. The U.S. Africa Command deploys American troops in Uganda, and as late as 2008, AFRICOM was involved in an active effort to bring down the LRA. Five years ago, the Acholi people urged the granting of amnesty to Kony and his returned LRA combatants. University of Texas Professor [Alan Kuperman](#) points out that Kony was willing to accept this amnesty, but the International Criminal Court, the same court that Russell portrays as a savior in the Kony 2012 video, halted the effort.

Kony 2012 suggests that Uganda needs rescuing and the U.S. should be the savior. Yet by intervening, the U.S. could unintentionally inflict even greater costs on Ugandans. In fact, Ugandans feel that the Ugandan army (the same army that collaborates with the American troops) poses a greater threat to their security than the LRA. When asked, Ugandans consider [land and the recent "Walk to Work" protests as more pressing issues](#) than the LRA. Northern Ugandans are currently living in the [longest period of peace since the start of the Ugandan civil war](#). Intervention could rock the region back into unrest. Congress is already spending [\\$986.1 billion on the military budget](#), and the federal deficit keeps growing. Can we afford to risk American lives and America's reputation on another indefinite manhunt in yet another forbidding continent?

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