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Security Assistance in Africa: The Case for Less

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ABSTRACT: US strategic approaches in the African Great Lakes region are primarily based on security assistance for training and equipping African forces for operations in East, North, and West Africa. This assistance risks causing more incidents of violence. A new strategy, based on a comprehensive approach to the security challenges in the region, as well as the deployment of international “boots on the ground” – American or others – is needed to reduce violence and to minimize the risk of new terrorist safe havens appearing in central Africa.

One of the main security interests of the United States in Africa is to counter the violent extremism perpetrated by organizations such as the al-Shabaab in Somalia, Boko Haram in Nigeria and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).¹ In order to do so, current US military strategy aims at training and equipping African forces for peacekeeping and counterterrorist operations.² Violent extremism in the Great Lakes region in central Africa (here understood as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda) is rare; nonetheless, over the past seven years, the United States has trained tens of thousands of troops in the region for deployment to other parts of Africa. Burundi and Uganda, for example, have almost 12,000 troops currently deployed as part of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and Rwanda has more than 3,500 troops deployed in Sudan as part of the African Union/United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID).

The Great Lakes region is highly unstable and characterized by a long history of violence, weak governments, a great number of armed groups, and regional power struggles. The most violent and unstable state is the DRC, where 7 million people currently require humanitarian assistance and nearly 2.8 million are internally displaced.³ After three decades of authoritarian rule and widespread human rights violations by the government of President Mobutu Sese Seko (1965-1997), two regional wars (1996-1997 and 1998-2003), several insurgencies, and

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1 Senate Armed Services Committee, “Statement of General David M. Rodriguez, USA, Commander, United States Africa Command Before the Senate Armed Services Committee Posture Hearing,” Senate Armed Services Committee, March 6, 2014.

2 This article is only discussing the military efforts and strategies of the United States in Africa. The United States has, however, a much broader national security strategy. See The White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, February 2015).

3 United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, S/2015/172* (New York: United Nations Security Council, March 10, 2015), 5.

perpetual local conflicts, the DRC is currently one of the world's five most fragile states.⁴ The ungoverned territory in the eastern part of the country is utilized as a safe haven by a variety of domestic and foreign armed groups, including several from neighboring Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda. Over time, conflicts have been fueled across borders, creating an intricate web of violence within the region.

This article argues improving the capacity of the armed forces in this unstable region to conduct peacekeeping and counter-terrorism operations against violent extremists, current US military strategy actually risks escalating violent conflict in the Great Lakes. Not only would such an escalation be devastating for the populations living in the region, it would also be counterproductive for the United States, increasing the risk that terrorist safe havens will increase in central Africa.

There are two major problems with the current strategic approach. First, states in the region are fragile, making security cooperation perilous. Second, bilateral approaches in this region, which is characterized by intricate entanglements, risks disturbing the balance of power and increasing the risk of violent conflict.

By changing the current US strategy of bilateral security assistance and small-footprint interventions to one of putting international "boots on the ground" – American or others – the same amount of US resources might have more success in countering violent extremists in Africa. The United States should therefore support a regional intervention, either by the United Nations or the African Union.

United States in the Great Lakes Region

The United States military strategy in Africa rests on the principle that "efforts to meet security challenges in Africa is best led and conducted by African partners."⁵ The United States thus relies on providing security assistance and small-footprint interventions. Although the United States has been militarily engaged in Africa for a long time, the establishment of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) in 2007 represents a reorganization of US efforts in Africa.⁶ AFRICOM is the main vehicle for coordinating all US security activities in Africa. US interests are served by building defense capabilities, responding to crisis, and deterring and defeating transnational threats through military operations, exercises, and security cooperation programs. In 2013, for example, AFRICOM conducted 481 security cooperation activities, 55 operations, and 10 exercises.⁷

Although AFRICOM is engaged throughout Africa, its immediate priorities are to counter violent extremism and to enhance stability in East, North, and West Africa respectively.⁸ Subsequently, US mili-

4 Kendall Lawrence, "The World's Ten Most Fragile States in 2014," *Fragile States Index*, June 24, 2014, <http://library.fundforpeace.org/fsi14-fragile10>.

5 Senate Armed Services Committee, "Statement of General David M. Rodriguez," 5. For an overview of US security assistance in general, see Andrew J. Shapiro, "A New Era for US Security Assistance," *The Washington Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (Fall 2012).

6 For an overview of the development of AFRICOM, see J. Peter Pham, "The Development of the United States Africa Command and its Role in America's Africa Policy under George W. Bush and Barack Obama," *Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 5, no. 3 (2014).

7 Senate Armed Services Committee, "Statement of General David M. Rodriguez," 3.

8 *Ibid.*, 8-12.

tary assistance for the countries in the Great Lakes region is primarily focused on training and equipping African forces for peacekeeping and counter-terrorism in other parts of Africa. The DRC has received the largest amount of US military assistance in the region. Since 2007, the DRC has received almost 120 million dollars.⁹ The main aim of this assistance has been to support the reform of the Congolese armed forces as well as to provide assistance to increase the capacity of the Congolese army for regional stabilization operations. Funds from Foreign Military Financing (FMF), International Military Education and Training (IMET), and the Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) accounts, for example, have been used to support military advisors to the Congolese Armed Forces, the deployment of mobile training teams who have provided basic soldier and officer training, and the development of military strategy and doctrines.¹⁰

The US military assistance for Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda has been more explicitly focused on increasing the armed forces' ability to participate in peacekeeping and counter-terrorism operations in other parts of Africa. Rwandan armed forces have received almost 15 million dollars since 2007, primarily used for pre-deployment training for the deployment in the African Union/United Nations Hybrid operation in Darfur, UNAMID.¹¹ Burundian and Ugandan forces have received almost 25 million and 28 million dollars, respectively, for pre-deployment training for the African Union Mission in Somalia, as well as almost 70 million dollars for counter-terrorism training.¹² In addition to the bilateral arrangements with the countries in the Great Lakes region, the United States has assisted the African Union in operations against the Ugandan armed group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), in DRC, Central African Republic and South Sudan since 2011. Around 100 US military personnel have assisted in strengthening cooperation among the national militaries of Uganda, CAR, DRC and South Sudan as well as enhancing their capacity for operational planning.¹³

In total, the United States has provided training for almost 28,000 Burundian troops, 27,000 Ugandan troops, and 14,000 Rwandan troops,

9 The amount is calculated from the US Department of Defense and US Department of State's *Foreign Military Training: Joint Report to Congress*, for the Fiscal Years of 2007-2013. I have also included the Peacekeeping Operations account from the US Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justification: Foreign Operations*, for the Fiscal Years of 2009-2015, in which the 'actual' numbers for year 2007-2013 is presented.

10 See US Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justification*, for the Fiscal Years of 2007-2015; US Department of Defense and US Department of State, *Foreign Military Training*, for the Fiscal Years of 2007-2014.

11 For a list over all the courses, see US Department of Defense and US Department of State, *Foreign Military Training*, for the Fiscal Years of 2007-2014.

12 US Department of Defense and US Department of State, *Foreign Military Training*, for the Fiscal Years of 2007-2014; US Department of Defense, *Section 1209 and Section 1203(b): Report to Congress on Foreign-Assistance Related Program for Fiscal Year 2011* (Washington, DC: US Department of Defense, October 2012); US Department of Defense, *Section 1209 of the NDAA for FY 2008 (Public Law 110-181): Report to Congress on Foreign-Assistance Related Programs for Fiscal Year 2012* (Washington, DC: US Department of Defense, May 2013). Note, according to the US Department of Defense and US Department of State's joint report, *Foreign Military Training*, Uganda received 152 million dollars for counter-terrorism training in 2012, while according to the US Department of Defense report, *Section 1209*, it was only around 19 million dollars, for both Uganda and Burundi that year.

13 See for example, US Department of Defense, *Section 1209 of the NDAA for FY2008*; United Nations Security Council, *Letter Dated 22 January 2014 from the Coordinator of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, S/2014/42 (New York: United Nations Security Council, January 23, 2014), 28-29.

increasing the capacity of their respective armed forces.¹⁴ Uganda is currently the largest contributor to AMISOM, with more than 6,000 troops; Burundi is the second largest contributor to AMISOM, with almost 5,500 troops; and Rwanda has more than 3,500 troops in UNAMID.¹⁵ These are important steps towards achieving US aim of denying terrorist safe havens in East, North, and West Africa.

The Great Lakes region is, however, a problem in and of itself, and despite several years of US security assistance, it is still highly unstable. One example is the latest developments in Burundi. In anticipation of upcoming elections, the country has experienced a failed military coup, repressed political opposition, and increased violence, which has resulted in almost 100 killed, 500 wounded, and more than 100,000 refugees.¹⁶ Bilateral policies based on security assistance for fragile states to supply African troops for military operations in other parts of Africa risk destabilizing the Great Lakes region. The escalation of conflict could spark another regional war, with devastating effects for countries in the region as well as for US interests in Africa.

Security Assistance for Fragile States

Security assistance and small-footprint interventions are considered to have many advantages. Most importantly, they increase the political and military reach of the supported governments as well as reduce political and financial costs compared to a full-scale military intervention.¹⁷ Security cooperation with fragile states is, however, notoriously problematic. In some cases, supported armies have overthrown democratically elected governments. In March 2012, for instance, US-trained Malian officers undertook a coup which toppled the democratically elected government. Military coups in Egypt in June 2013, and in Thailand in May 2014, are two further examples. In other cases, such as, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya and Mauretania, US-assisted armies have committed extensive human rights violations. Research suggests security assistance is especially unsuccessful in achieving desired results if states are fragile.¹⁸

Instead of stabilizing the receiving state, military assistance risks being used by forces supporting insurgents that are committing human rights violations or restricting democratic processes. First, if the discipline and loyalty of security forces in a supported state is weak, security assistance risks being channeled to armed groups. Although all states in the Great Lakes region are more or less fragile, the Congolese armed forces are especially problematic and are known to support foreign

14 The numbers of trained troops for respective country is taken from the US Department of Defense and US Department of State's, *Foreign Military Training: Joint Report to Congress*, for the Fiscal Years of 2007-2014, including the proposed numbers for 2014.

15 AMISOM, "Burundi," February 4, 2015, <http://amisom-au.org/burundi/>; AMISOM, "Uganda – UPDF," February 4, 2015, <http://amisom-au.org/uganda-updf/>; Permanent Mission of Rwanda to the United Nations, "UN Peacekeeping," February 4, 2015, <http://rwandaun.org/un-peacekeeping>.

16 BBC, "Burundi Vice-President Gervais Ruffyiki Flee," *BBC*, June 25, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-33267428>.

17 See for example, Shapiro, "A New Era for US Security Assistance."

18 Oeindrila Dube and Suresh Naidu, "Bases, Bullets, and Ballots: The Effect of US Military Aid on Political Conflict in Colombia," *The Journal of Politics* 77, no. 1 (January 2015); Michael J. McNeerney, et al., *Assessing Security Cooperation as a Preventive Tool* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2014); Stephen Watts, et al., *Countering Others' Insurgencies: Understanding US Small-Footprint Interventions in Local Context* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2014).

armed groups on their territory. They were extensively collaborating with Rwandan and Burundian insurgents during both regional wars in 1996-1997 and 1998-2003, even incorporating Rwandan insurgents into their ranks. Despite the establishment of a new military organization in 2003 – the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) – and continuing military reforms, some commanders have sustained their support for Rwandan insurgents, selling weapons and supplies, as well as conducting operations together against Congolese armed groups.¹⁹

Other Congolese commanders support Congolese armed groups. The integration of former insurgents into the army, as part of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs and security-sector reform, has created whole battalions with stronger ties to Congolese armed groups than to the government, facilitating defection and collaboration between the army and the insurgents.²⁰ In 2012, for instance, several commanders defected from FARDC and established a new Congolese armed group, the M23. Assistance for the Congolese armed forces could end up supporting one or more of the insurgent groups currently residing on Congolese territory, increasing rather than decreasing the instability in the region.

Second, security forces in fragile states often have poor human rights records, and assistance for such forces risks benefiting troops who commit atrocities. Once again, the Congolese armed forces stand out, having been highly criticized for their lack of discipline, and for their ruthlessness against civilians, including rape and mass atrocities.²¹ One of the main US military efforts in DRC so far, the establishment and training of the 391st Commando Battalion, clearly illustrates this challenge. In 2010, US Special Forces trained a light infantry battalion of about 750 troops who were to become part of the Congolese army's new rapid reaction force. The battalion was also intended to be a model for future reforms within the FARDC.²² However, in November 2012, during military operations against the Congolese armed group M23, the battalion took part in raping around 130 women and girls.²³ Burundian and Ugandan troops are also known for human rights violations, although on a smaller scale. Recently, both Burundian and Ugandan AMISOM troops have been accused of raping women in Somalia.²⁴

19 See for example, United Nations Security Council, *Letter Dated 22 January 2014*, 24.

20 For an overview of the development of Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC), see Colin Robinson, "Army Reconstruction in the Democratic Republic of the Congo 2003-2009," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23, no. 3 (July 2012); and Maria Eriksson Baaz and Judith Verweijen, "The Volatility of a Half-Cooked Bouillabaisse: Rebel-Military Integration and Conflict Dynamics in the Eastern DRC," *African Affairs* 112, no. 449 (October 2013).

21 See for example, United Nations, *Progress and Obstacles in the Fight against Impunity for Sexual Violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo* (New York: United Nations, April 2014); and United Nations, *Report of the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office on Human Rights Violations Perpetrated by Soldiers of the Congolese Armed Forces and Combatants of the M23 in Goma and Sake, North Kivu Province, and in and around Minova, South Kivu Province, from 15 November to 2 December 2012* (New York: United Nations, May, 2013).

22 US Africa Command, "750 Congolese Soldiers Graduate from US-Led Military Training, Form Light Infantry Battalion," September 20, 2010, <http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Article/7727/750-congolese-soldiers-graduate-from-us-led-milita>.

23 Craig Whitlock, "US-Trained Congolese Troops Committed Rapes and Other Atrocities, UN Says," *The Washington Post*, May 13, 2013; and United Nations, *Report of the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office on Human Rights Violations*.

24 Human Rights Watch, *The Power these Men Have Over Us: Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by African Union Forces in Somalia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, September 2014).

Last, governments of fragile states are often repressive against their political opposition in order to stay in power, and the increased capacity of security forces assisted by a third party could be utilized in this regard. All governments in the region have been more or less repressive. According to several sources, Rwanda is well known for “being run by a dictatorship with little respect for human rights.”²⁵ Furthermore, repression by both the Congolese and Burundian governments is currently increasing in anticipation of upcoming elections in 2015. During demonstrations against the Congolese government’s plan to revise the electoral law in January this year, around 500 individuals, many from the opposition, were arrested, and more than 20 people were killed by security forces.²⁶ The Burundian government has recently opted to change the constitution in order to stay in power, and has imposed restrictions on freedom of speech; it has also distributed weapons to its youth wing (the Imbonerakure), and intimidated, imprisoned and killed candidates of the opposition.²⁷ The repressive use of security forces by these governments against their own populations, contributes to insecurity in the region.

Bilateral Arrangements for Regional Dynamics

US military strategy in the Great Lakes relies on multiple bilateral agreements, which is highly problematic in a region defined by profound regional entanglements. The Burundian, Rwandan, and Ugandan governments have, for example, all supported Congolese armed groups. During the two regional wars, all three governments fought on the side of the Congolese insurgents against the Congolese government. Rwanda and Uganda also occupied large parts of eastern and northern DRC during the second war. Furthermore, contemporary Burundian, Rwandan, and Ugandan armed groups have been utilizing Congolese territory since the 1990s, provoking relations between the governments, and each of the corresponding governments have used the armed groups as an excuse to intervene militarily in the DRC, with or without the Congolese government’s approval.²⁸

Tensions between the Congolese government on the one side, and the Rwandan and Ugandan governments on the other are still pronounced. The continuing presence of both Rwandan and Ugandan armed groups on Congolese territory is at the heart of the problem. Although the number of insurgents is much smaller than previously (between 1,500 and 2,000 Rwandan insurgents and no more than 2,000 Ugandan insurgents) they are still causing cross-border incidents.²⁹ Congo has recently accused Rwanda and Uganda of supporting the Congolese armed group M23, and according to the UN Group of Experts final report in 2014, Rwanda has been especially active. Among

25 Filip Reyntjens, “Constructing the Truth, Dealing with Dissent, Domesticating the World: Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda,” *African Affairs* 110, no. 438 (January 2011).

26 United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, S/2015/172* (New York: United Nations Security Council, March 10, 2015), 2.

27 United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Office in Burundi, S/2014/550* (New York: United Nations Security Council, July 31, 2014), 8-9.

28 For an overview of the region between 1996 and 2006, see Filip Reyntjens, *The Great African War: Congo and Regional Politics, 1996-2006* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

29 Interview, MONUSCO official, Goma, DRC, October 12-17, 2014; and United Nations Security Council, *Letter Dated 22 January 2014*, 19, 28.

other things, it has been recruiting fighters and providing arms and ammunition for the Congolese insurgents. During periods of heavy fighting in 2013, Rwandan armed forces were reinforcing the M23 with troops as well as tanks on Congolese territory. In June 2014, new accusations of cross-border fighting occurred between Rwanda and DRC.³⁰ Since the beginning of 2015, when a deadline for the disarmament of the Rwandan armed group the FDLR in DRC was ignored by the group, the Rwandan President Paul Kagame also voiced his increasing dissatisfaction with the inaction of the Congolese armed forces and the international community in pursuing the FDLR.³¹

Since the main party of the current Burundian government – the CNDD-FDD – was a Burundian armed group fighting together with the Congolese government during the second regional war, and the number of Burundian insurgents on Congolese territory is small, the relations between the two governments are much more favorable. The mounting tensions and increasing turmoil in anticipation of upcoming elections in Burundi have, however, contributed to the increased number of Burundian actors on Congolese territory. Both the opposition and the youth wing of the ruling party (the Imbonerakure) are using ungoverned territory in eastern DRC to prepare for war if the outcome of the election is not favorable.³² This development could jeopardize current relations between the Congolese and Burundian governments. If it follows previous patterns, the increased presence of Burundian insurgents and armed forces on Congolese territory could also contribute to intensified hostility between groups at the local level, increasing the risk of violence in eastern DRC.

Although the support for Burundian, Rwandan, and Ugandan armed forces is small from a US perspective (only around 150 million dollars since 2007) it is important for countries in the region. According to the Department of Defense and Department of State's Joint Report to Congress on Foreign Military Training, almost 28,000 Burundian troops, 27,000 Ugandan troops and 14,000 Rwandan troops have been trained by the United States over the last ten years. This is a significant contribution considering the number of active forces in each country: 20,000 in Burundi, 45,000 in Uganda and 33,000 in Rwanda.³³ Although the number of forces is stable, their ability to use force has been enhanced: some forces have attended courses in peacekeeping logistics or basic fighting skills, while others have been trained in counter-terrorism and urban warfare by the US Marines. Considering the uneasy relation between the states in the region, this contribution could easily tip the delicate balance between the states, and if there is a disagreement

30 United Nations Security Council, *Letter Dated 22 January 2014*, 10-12; and France24, "Second Day of Fighting on Border between Rwanda and DRC," June 12, 2014, <http://www.france24.com/en/20140612-second-day-fighting-rwanda-democratic-republic-congo-border/>.

31 Edmund Kagire, "Paul Kagame Complains of Inaction on Rwandan Rebels in DRC... Again," *The East African*, April 7, 2015, <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/Rwanda-cites-double-standards-in-failure-to-deal-with-FDLR/-/2558/2678444/-/blu9dvz/-/index.html>.

32 Interviews, NGO staff and MUNUSCO official, Bukavu, DRC, October 1-12, 2014.

33 The numbers of trained troops for respective country is taken from the US Department of Defense and US Department of State's *Foreign Military Training: Joint Report to Congress*, for the Fiscal Years of 2007-2014, including the proposed numbers for 2014. The numbers of active force for respective country is taken from International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance: The Annual Assessment of Global Military Capabilities and Defense Economics 2015* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, Routledge, 2015).

between the states, they are all better equipped to pursue their own agendas with military means.

Rethinking US Strategy in the Region

If current US strategy risks conflict escalation in the Great Lakes region, thereby decreasing the prospects for countering violent extremism in Africa, is there a better approach? More importantly, could another strategy increase prospects for achieving US goals in Africa, without increasing costs?

The core problem for stability in the Great Lakes region is undoubtedly eastern DRC with its ungoverned territory utilized as a safe haven by a multitude of domestic and foreign armed groups. The porous borders between the countries further add to suspicion between governments. According to several researchers, large-scale military interventions decrease the security dilemma between belligerents, and increases the chances of peace.³⁴ Previous research also indicates that international forces are highly important for preventing conflicts from spreading across borders.³⁵ International forces can decrease suspicion between governments concerning cross-border support for each other's armed groups and prevent government forces from intervening in neighboring states. Furthermore, international troops could also decrease the risk that military assistance will be used by indigenous forces to support insurgents, commit human rights violations, and restrict democratic processes.

If a large-scale military intervention could increase the trust between the states in the region, the United States would certainly be more successful in achieving its military objectives in Africa. There are mainly three ways this could be achieved, each with its own costs and benefits. First, the United States could launch a large-scale unilateral or coalition military intervention. The United States already has a small military presence in the region. In addition, AFRICOM's Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa has established its operational headquarters in Djibouti, not too far from the Great Lakes region. Close cooperation with the armed forces in the region would be important in establishing good relations with host nations, and increasing prospects for success. However, a US military intervention in central Africa could be costly; indeed, much more costly than current efforts. Since US security interests in the region do not enjoy a high priority, this solution would not be politically viable.

Second, the United States could increase its support for UN operations in the Great Lakes region by supporting a large-scale intervention. The only UN operation currently deployed in the region is the UN mission in DRC (MONUSCO) with about 22,000 troops, including the so-called Force Intervention Brigade. The Force Intervention Brigade is a recent addition of about 3,000 troops and has a more forceful mandate

34 See for example, Hultman, et al., "United Nations Peacekeeping and Civilian Protection in Civil War," *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no. 4 (October 2013); Andrea Ruggeri, et al., "Managing Mistrust: An Analysis of Cooperation with UN Peacekeeping in Africa," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 57, no. 3 (June 2013); and Barbara Walter, *Committing to Peace: The Successful Settlement of Civil Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

35 Kyle Beardsley, "Peacekeeping and the Contagion of Armed Conflict," *The Journal of Politics* 73, no. 4 (October 2011).

than the rest of MONUSCO. It has recently been quite successful. In 2013, it helped the Congolese armed forces defeat the rebel group M23. It has also targeted Burundian, Rwandan, and Ugandan armed groups located in the DRC.³⁶ The UN mission has, however, been deployed since 1997 without achieving its goals. Increased support from the United States for the UN mission, both in terms of materiel and personnel, as well as knowledge, could greatly increase its effectiveness. The current US military assistance for the region is about 55 million dollars per year. This amount equals almost 10 percent of the total budget for MONUSCO's military and police personnel costs in 2014, making a change in US strategy highly desirable for the UN mission.³⁷ Acceptance for the United Nations in the region is, however, decreasing. In 2014, the UN political mission in Burundi was withdrawn at the request of the Burundian government, and in 2015, the government of DRC requested a withdrawal of the UN mission in DRC. Furthermore, there are no current UN operations in Burundi, Rwanda, or Uganda, making the regional aspects of the power dynamics difficult to address with a UN mission.

Last, the United States could also support an increased presence of African Union forces in the Great Lakes. The AU is currently conducting one operation in the region, with support from the United States. It is a regional operation deployed in DRC, Central African Republic, and South Sudan against a Ugandan armed group, the LRA. Although the effectiveness of regional organizations for peacekeeping and peacemaking is still debated, regional organizations are indeed taking more responsibility for peace operations.³⁸ An increased presence of AU troops in the region would follow the current US approach of African solutions for African problems.³⁹ It would also be a cheaper option than deploying American troops on the ground while being politically more viable than increasing the UN presence in the region. If building on the current AU approach of cross-border operations against the Ugandan armed group, an increased responsibility for the AU in the Great Lakes region might also increase prospects for the deployment of forces across borders.

The African Union is, however, still developing its peacekeeping and counterinsurgency capabilities, and it is criticized for having ill-trained and ill-equipped armies, as well as underfunded operations.⁴⁰ Its troops are also repeatedly accused of committing human rights violations.⁴¹ Furthermore, the deployment of a large AU military intervention in the

36 For the latest developments, see United Nation Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, S/2015/172 (New York: United Nation Security Council, 2015).

37 The amount of US military assistance is calculated between the years of 2009 and 2013, and taken from the US Department of Defense and IS Department of State's *Foreign Military Training: Joint Report to Congress*, for the Fiscal Years of 2009-2014. The cost of MONUSCO personnel is taken from United Nations General Assembly, *Approved Resources for Peacekeeping Operations for the Period from 1 July 2013 to 30 June 2014*, A/C.5/68/21 (New York: United Nations, January 23, 2014).

38 See, for example, Laurie Nathan, *The Peacemaking Effectiveness of Regional Organisations*, (London, UK: Crisis States Research Center, 2010).

39 The United States is providing military assistance for developing the AUs peacekeeping capacity. Most of the support is, however, for deploying troops in operations in northern Africa.

40 Robert L. Feldman, "Problems Plaguing the African Union Peacekeeping Forces," *Defense & Security Analysis* 24, no. 3 (September 2008).

41 For example, Ugandan and Burundian troops in Somalia. Human Rights Watch, *The Power these Men Have Over Us*.

Great Lakes region risks increasing regional tensions instead of decreasing them, depending on which countries provide troops for the mission. The African Union Regional Task Force (RTF) is one example of the risks of deploying an AU mission. It was established in 2012 in order to pursue the LRA. The main troop contributor to the RTF is Uganda, with additional forces from DRC, South Sudan and CAR. On the one hand, the cooperation between different states across borders contributes greatly to stabilization in the region and to the elimination of the LRA. On the other hand, cross-border movements of the RTF's armed forces in pursuit of the LRA have caused intense accusations between neighbors, and since the establishment of the RTF, the Congolese government has accused Ugandan armed forces of repeated unauthorized incursions.

Conclusion

Currently, US policy in Africa is focused on preventing safe havens for terrorist organizations in the northern parts of Africa. Security assistance for the states in the Great Lakes region is primarily intended to train and equip forces for peacekeeping and counter-terrorism operations elsewhere. However, the Great Lakes region is unstable, with fragile states, active armed groups, and a precarious regional power balance. Furthermore, in anticipation of upcoming elections in 2015, both the Congolese and Burundian governments have increased repressive measures against their political opposition, escalating tensions in the region.

Considering the complexity of state relations within the Great Lakes region, it is clear the current US strategic approach risks contributing to the escalation of the conflicts and tensions rather than decreasing them, and that another strategy is desirable. Although a full-scale US military intervention would be costly, and nearly impossible because of political realities, increased US support for UN or AU operations in the region could be a solution. By converting current bilateral security assistance programs into a comprehensive regional effort for providing either UN or AU "boots on the ground," the regional power balance could be more easily managed, decreasing the risk of destabilization. By supporting a regional solution, with a substantial number of international forces on the ground, instead of bilateral small-footprint interventions and security assistance programs, the history of security assistance for countries in the Great Lakes region—such as France's support for the former Rwandan government—can avoid being repeated, and the likelihood of genocide and regional wars reduced.