

Eastern Congo: The ADF-Nalu's Lost Rebellion

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OVERVIEW

The Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (Forces démocratiques alliées-Armée nationale de libération de l'Ouganda, ADF-Nalu) is one of the oldest but least known armed groups in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the only one in the area to be considered an east African Islamist terrorist organisation. Although it does not represent the same destabilising threat as the 23 March Movement (M23), it has managed to fend off the Congolese army since 2010. Created in the DRC in 1995 and located in the mountainous DRC-Uganda border area, this Congolese-Ugandan armed group has shown remarkable resilience because of its geostrategic position, its successful integration into the cross-border economy and corruption in the security forces. Before countenancing any further military intervention against the ADF-Nalu, it would be wise to separate legend from fact and weaken its socio-economic means of support while at the same time offering a demobilisation and reintegration program to its combatants.

An alliance of several armed groups supported by external actors (Mobutu Sese Seko's Zaire and Hassan al-Turabi's Sudan), the ADF-Nalu fought the Ugandan government led by Yoweri Museveni, but never managed to gain a foothold in that country. A Ugandan movement in origin, it put down roots in eastern Congo, especially in the remote mountainous border areas. It became integrated into local communities, participated in cross-border trade and established relations with various armed groups in eastern Congo and with Congolese and Ugandan civilian and military authorities. The way the ADF-Nalu blended into this grey area allowed the group to survive without winning a battle for more than fifteen years and to resist several attempts to neutralise it.

The efforts of its leader, Jamil Mukulu, a Christian converted to Islam, have turned the ADF-Nalu from a purely Congolese-Ugandan problem into a regional problem, because of the links it has formed with radical east African Islamist groups. However, little is known about these links and allegations of the groups' allegiance to Islamism seem rather superficial.

The fight against armed groups in eastern Congo continues to be viewed through a military lens, but it would be wise to avoid another ineffective military operation. The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), the UN, the DRC and Uganda should adopt a different approach that seeks to:

- Formulate an intelligence-based strategy to neutralise the ADF-Nalu's cross-border economic and logistical networks. The officers of the Joint Verification Mechanism deployed by the ICGLR in 2012 should work with the UN group of experts to produce a detailed study of these networks and use it to define an appropriate strategy for undermining the armed group's economic and logistical base.
- Include the leaders of ADF-Nalu's support networks, inside and outside the DRC, on the list

of individuals subject to UN sanctions for their support of armed groups. Congolese and Ugandan military personnel colluding with these networks should be punished by the authorities of their country.

- Rotate on a regular basis Congolese and Ugandan officers deployed in this region.
- Introduce a disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) program for Congolese and Ugandan combatants who after investigation are found not to be responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity. MONUSCO should appeal to donors to fund the program for Congolese ADF-Nalu combatants.
- Authorise villagers in the Erengeti and Oicha areas to resume work on their farms, which was suspended by the military authorities.

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