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# Inside 5000 lost guns & Shs24bn Arrow Boys pay



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There have been several press reports about 5000 SMGs (sub machine guns) being illegally held in Lango sub region.

The 5000 reportedly missing ones are part of about 12000 that had been given out by the army to the Amuka civil militia group during the LRA insurgency.

The militia group was later disbanded and its members demobilised.

Quoting the army's 5th Division spokesman, Lt. George Musinguzi, who confirmed thus "much as some of the combatants were integrated into the UPDF and Police, many of them stayed behind and did not return the guns in their possession."

A former member of the Amuka militia, Joseph Onyango Okello, claims that "even powerful people aligned to the ruling party never returned their guns."

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The Resident District Commissioner (RDC) of Lira, George Odong, confirmed this fear thus “Disarmament and recovery of guns from Amuka militia was not done in a proper way.”



This development comes amidst reports of the region and in particular its capital Lira being hit by a wave of insecurity characterised by unresolved armed robberies and murder of prominent residents.

At the height of the LRA insurgency in northern Uganda, government decided to forcefully remove all people from their homes and horded them into camps that were termed Internally displaced People’s (IDP) camps. The move was aimed at isolating the insurgents from the population that was believed to be supporting the insurgency.

Because the army was thin on the ground, it decided to create local civil militias to provide security for the IDPs.

In Teso and Acholi sub regions the militias were called Arrow Boys and Home Guards respectively.

In Lango is came to be known as Amuka while in Karamoja it was the Anti-Stock Theft Unit (ASTU).

In the rest of the country similar local militias had all along been referred to as Local Defence Forces/Units (LDU/F).

In Lango Hon Felix Okot Ogong initiated the creation of the Amuka militias in 2003.

He convened a meeting at Uganda Technical College Lira where a resolution was unanimously agreed by the general populace of Lango.

The over 10000 volunteers underwent a crash training by the army at Aler farm located nine kms from Lira town.

In November 2003 Hon Okot Ojong was quoted by the BBC as appealing to government to release 10000 guns to cater for the 20 militias for each of the 2249 villages.

A total of 12,000 (including about 100 females) militias were trained alongside some district leaders like the then RDC Charles Engwau Egou, LC 5 boss Ojul and some councillors.

The training was conducted by the army's 403 Brigade and the officer directly in-charge was then Lt. Col Jim Byarugaba.

The Brigade Commander then Lt Col J.B Mulindwa oversaw the armament of the militias.

In December 2003, the then Minister of Health, Capt Mike Mukula, who was the patron of the Arrow Boys in Teso visited the Amuka boys at Aler farm and addressed them thus "When you finish Kony, the guns you have will remain in the region.....so that you can protect yourself."

The then Minister of State for Defence Ruth Nankabirwa on a tour of Lango region called on the trainees and assured them of salary and arms.

Due to harsh conditions, some of the militias deserted before completing training.

In January 2004, the then Army Commander, Gen Aronda Nyakairima, also visited the trainees at Aler farm where he apologised for the one



meal a day that was being given to the trainees claiming that he did not know.

Reports emerged that the militias' food supplies were being diverted and sold off.

At the time of passing out, the army spokesman made the famous pronouncement to the effect that the LRA had been decimated to less than one hundred who were even fleeing to Sudan.

To disprove him, on February 21, 2004 the LRA struck Barlonyo IDP camp that had a population of about 4000 people and was at the time guarded by only 35 Amuka militias.

The poorly trained and inadequately equipped militias simply fled leaving the LRA to kill over 200 people.

This incident was followed by violent protests by the Langi community who accused the Acholi community of being sympathetic to the LRA.

On February 24, 2004 President Yoweri Museveni presided over the burial of the massacred people where he pledged to honour the dead by building a health centre, technical college and a bridge in the area.

The aim of creating a militia to guard the camp had failed ab-initial because the militias had been diverted from their role to operations against the LRA alongside the army.

The IDPs had been advised into enlisting for the civil militia to guard their camp.



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These militias had been recruited against the background of political and economic pressure.

Was it a move to reduce the size of the NRA through demobilisation meant to cut down the defence expenditure?

Reports also indicated that unknown to the donors, the huge defence budget was not going to the foot soldiers but the pockets of their bosses.

The youth in the camps feared to be branded LRA collaborators, had no means of economic survival but more so there was no adequate protection for the camps by the army.

For fear of the donors and direct liability for the actions of these militias, the government claimed that the militias were under the Ministry of Internal Affairs but recruited, trained, commanded, armed, and supplied by the army.

The NRA commanders in charge of these militia units were accused of torturing, unfair dismissal, and diversion of salaries meant for these militias through the usual NRA practice of creating 'ghost' payments.

As if that was not enough, the militias were being deployed away from the camps to carry out military operations against the LRA away from their mother camps.

All these anomalies led to a big number of militias to desert because the commanders were more interested in continuing to draw the salaries meant for these militias, the deserters were not declared and their army were not being retrieved.



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Some militias were even deployed as far as DRC during the NRA Congo adventure.

The militias had been created without putting in place without any legal framework.

With time these militias became a source of insecurity as reports faulted them on harassment, robbery, torture, and killing of the very people they were supposed to protect.

The 1995 constitution Article 208 stipulated that “No person shall rise an armed force except in accordance with this constitution.”

Article 222 empowered parliament to make laws to regulate the possession and use of firearms and ammunition.

The NRA Statute had provided for but did not specify “persons who had been asked to come and work alongside the UPDF – such other officers and militants attached to the regular force under arrangement made by government.”

Despite repeated appeals by parliament and the general public, government was adamant to come up with a legal framework to define the status of militias.

As such these militias operated in an atmosphere of impunity.

In May 2006, five Amuka militias were sentenced by the 403 Brigade court martial to four years imprisonment for murdering 12 and injuring a dozen civilians.



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The African Center for the treatment and rehabilitation of torture victims had ranked the local defence personnel in country ahead of the Police and the army in human rights violations.

The criminal Case of David Kironde Vs Mukono District Administration and the Attorney General, it was ruled that “even if there is no statute, torturous acts by LDUs, even if there is no statute defining their status, they are servants of the government because they are trained and armed by government to maintain law and order.”

In 2005, the Armed Forces Act replaced the NRA Statute at a time government was considering to disband the militias.

At the time it was estimated that there were about 38000 militias throughout the country.

For the Amuka militias of Lango sub region, its only 5000 out of 12,000 reported to have been formally demobilised.

At the time government could not account for where about of the remaining number.

The officials concerned with the exercise were more preoccupied with payments of the outstanding salary areas than the security aspect.

A number of army officers were briefly suspended and accorded mock trials in connection with theft of militias' payments.

One example is of then Capt Kiwanuka Mohamed (the guy who had been used to infiltrate the rebel PRA) was detained for stealing payments meant for the ASTU in Karamoja.



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Then Lt Col Dick Olum was in charge of the Lira barracks where payments for ex-Amukas were being processed in 2007.

Media reported that a budget of Shs 24.56bn was approved under the Ministry of Defence for payment of salary arrears for the ex-militias.

At Abia in Alebtong district Museveni addressed the demobilised militias and promised them government facilitation of ox plough, a pair of oxen and 30 iron sheets to each member as a resettlement package.

In late 2005, 4000 of these militias had been conscripted into the army and the police to bolster the 2006 elections security.

Some of the former militias were conscripted and given extra-military training at Singo Training School around 2006.

Already some of these militias were allegedly being used to harass political opponents of the regime.

The case of Lt. Magara who shot into the Dr. Kizza Besigye campaign procession killing and maiming is a case in point.

In 2012, some of the ex-militias were later re-mobilised for the Somali mission.

A number of former Amuka militias whose pay was “stolen” by the army officers sued government but the case has dragged on and remains unresolved.

In 2013, the Army 5th Division Spokesman was quoted as saying: “those complaining of non-payment are part of the fighters who had deserted



at the time when they were being paid in 2007.”

Hon Okot Ogong attempted to mobilise the ex-militias into an association that would attract economically viable projects.



He even made efforts to mobilise the Lango parliamentary group to initiate a petition to government to look into the plight of the ex-militiamen.

The government remained adamant since it has used them to defeat the LRA and no longer needed them.

The government acknowledged its failures in protecting the property of the people of Lango by granting a Shs 2.9tn compensation for the livestock lost.

It is alleged that the livestock from Lango was stolen by the Karamojong because the later had guns but the former had been disarmed.

It looked like the Karimojong were being disarmed to arm Langis.

In 2012, the government initiated a voluntary handing in of arms by the former Amuka militias but the move did not bear any fruit.

Now with the surge of illegal arms, orchestrated insecurity has hit Lango sending the government panicking.

Leaders in the region says it is not easy to trace the ex-Amuka militias who did not hand in the guns because the whole arming had been done in a mischievous way right from day one.

The confusion had been deliberate so as to deny accountability.

In one incident in 2006, a one Martin Wacha, who died from Kapchorwa was ferried and buried Lira as Ambrose Adiga son of Martin Agweny but the real Ambrose Adiga appeared at his home in 2010.

Defence Minister Kiyonga is said to have delivered Shs 5m compensation to the aggrieved family before the unidentified body was retrieved and reburied in the Kapeka.

The phenomena of illegally issued out arms is not restricted to the insurgence regions of the north and north eastern.

Since its emergence, according to highly placed observers, the NRA has been issuing out arms to the so called cadres, political mobilisers, contacts, and other party faithful in the western region and parts of central and eastern region.

“Through mchaka mchaka programs (political indoctrination), the slogan was that Museveni was demystifying the gun that had been a monopoly of the northern region. Individual army officers and well-connected government officials have always armed their workers, relatives and friends,” explained an analyst.

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