

## The Humanitarian Hypocrisy of US Counterterrorism Policies in Uganda

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One week after the controversial 2021 elections in Uganda, the country's African Union military mission in Somalia reported killing 189 Al-Shabaab fighters, making it the most lethal attack to occur against the terrorist group in the country since the military mission began. However, such an attack never occurred.<sup>1</sup> Despite this inaccuracy, this purposeful fallacy employed by Uganda exemplifies its government's positioning in a more than two-decades-long counterterrorism partnership with the United States. The constant reminder of the threat posed by terrorism, especially at times when Uganda is committing domestic transgressions, serves to both attract military assistance and deflect criticism of human rights abuses.

A month later, in a briefing room at the US Department of State, Ned Price, the spokesperson for the Department stated, "Uganda's January 14th elections were marred by election irregularities and abuses by the government's security services against opposition candidates and members of civil society" before reminding reporters that "when it comes to President Museveni, Uganda, of course, does continue to play a regional role and does have an important role when it comes to some of our interests in the region. It is a troop-contributing country to AMISOM in Somalia, in its international efforts to defeat al-Shabaab."<sup>2</sup> Seconds later, Price confidently argued "this goes to the point that we've now made even more times throughout this briefing, that we can pursue our interests and pursue our values at the same time."<sup>3</sup> While this approach to Uganda would certainly be welcomed, such does not reflect the reality of the US-Uganda counterterrorism partnership constructed in its fullest form on the heels of 9/11, in which America has either directly trampled upon or ignored its supposed values of human rights and humanitarian aims in subordination to counterterrorism concerns.

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<sup>1</sup> Kristof Titeca and Anna Reuss, "Analysis | After a Violent Election, Uganda's Government Faces Three Big Challenges," The Washington Post (WP Company, February 16, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Ned Price, "Department Press Briefing – February 23, 2021," U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State, February 23, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Bobi Wine, singer-turned-opposition darling and the most prominent challenger to incumbent President Museveni in the 2021 elections, further highlights the hypocrisy and inaccuracy of US policy statements vis-à-vis Uganda. According to the “U.S. Relations with Uganda” page on the State Department Website in 2016, “U.S. assistance includes promoting good governance, human rights, multiparty democracy, and free and fair elections; professionalizing police and military institutions for better service delivery and adherence to human rights,” yet Wine asserts that US military aid to Uganda is used for the repression, torture, and murder of the Ugandan people, as well as the disrespect of democracy.<sup>4 5</sup> In the New York Times, Wine succinctly states, “We regret to say that we might not have suffered for so long had Washington not chosen to ignore Mr. Museveni’s abuses,” arguing that the US not only directly supports human rights abuses, but also ignores their perpetration.<sup>6</sup>

At the core, this paper strives to illustrate how post-9/11 US counterterrorism policies and the related partnership with Uganda are antithetical to humanitarianism when conceptualizing humanitarianism as upholding the human rights agenda, defined by Joost Herman and Dennis Dijkzeul as the “rights-based approach” to humanitarianism.<sup>7</sup> According to the United Nations, “Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, by contributing to human rights abuses through a variety of mechanisms, America’s post-9/11 counterterrorism partnership with Uganda violates supposed values of humanitarianism.

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<sup>4</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, “U.S. Relations With Uganda,” U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State, June 2, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Luke Melchiorre, “‘Our Liberation Is a Matter of Now’: An Interview with Bobi Wine,” African Arguments (Royal African Society, May 19, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Bobi Wine, “My Torture at the Hands of America’s Favorite African Strongman,” The New York Times (The New York Times, July 29, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Joost Herman and Dennis Dijkzeul, “A Matter of Principles: Humanitarian Challenges,” The Broker (The Broker, February 9, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> United Nations, “Human Rights,” United Nations (United Nations).

In order to make such an argument, the paper will proceed as follows. First, a brief overview of the pre-9/11 US-Uganda military partnership will be provided to demonstrate how the Bashir regime in then-neighboring Sudan grounded the partnership in counterterrorism. The next section elaborates on how and why 9/11 and the consequent Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) declared by the United States strengthened the counterterrorism-focused military partnership between US and Uganda, resulting in increased military assistance to the East African country. The subsequent literature review section will summarize arguments, concepts, and realities which constitute aspects of this paper's thesis, in addition to demonstrating the added value of this paper and the applicability of its core concepts to other regions in Africa. Next, the two mechanisms of the US-Uganda counterterrorism partnership that contribute to human rights abuses are overviewed, describing how counterterrorism maintains a bidirectional role that both attracts the military aid that directly contributes to human rights abuses and mitigates criticism of their perpetration.

The main analysis section of this paper provides examples of two humanitarian crises, the War in Northern Uganda and the abuse of the political opposition, and illustrates how the US is responsible for such humanitarian violations via two mechanisms: contributing directly to the abuses by supporting the Ugandan military which carries/allows them to be carried out, and accepting such abuses either as a result of the Ugandan government's use of anti-terrorism rhetoric to justify them or simply in order to maintain the counterterrorism partnership, thereby allowing such abuses to continue. Within this main analysis section, quotes from US officials and agencies are provided to highlight the hypocrisy of US humanitarian goals given its counterterrorism policies, with the exemplified crises and mechanisms evoking America's culpability. Following the main analysis section, the latest US actions to address human rights

issues are considered, raising the possibility that the two-decades long hypocritical policies might come to an end under the newly inaugurated Biden administration. However, the final section concludes that while progress is possible, the past twenty years of the US-Uganda counterterrorism partnership have not only undermined human rights and the humanitarian agenda purportedly championed by the US government, but that the counterterrorism partnership has ended up supporting state-sponsored domestic terrorism as well.

Although Uganda began to attract Western aid in the late 1980s due to its economic success with neoliberal reforms, the military partnership between the US and Uganda began under the Clinton administration.<sup>9 10</sup> In the mid-1990s, the Bashir regime in Sudan was sponsoring fundamentalist Islamist terrorist organizations and individuals, some of which participated in the two bombings of US embassies in East Africa in 1998.<sup>11</sup> At the time, Uganda possessed suspicions of Sudan's apparent desire to spread Arab and Islamic influence southward, and thus Kampala was already backing the Southern People's Liberation Army (SPLA), anti-Bashir rebels based in southern Sudan.<sup>12</sup> Uganda viewed America's desire to undermine Bashir as a mutual interest, thereby offering itself as a bulwark against militant Islamism and consequently receiving military aid as a conduit for support of the anti-Bashir rebels.<sup>13</sup> During this time period, Uganda's framing of its military relationship with the US as one of supporting counterterrorism against the purported terrorist regime in Khartoum was certainly effective in garnering assistance given the recent memory of terror at the embassies in Nairobi and Dar es

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<sup>9</sup> Helen Epstein, *Another Fine Mess: America, Uganda, and the War on Terror* (New York, NY: Columbia Global Reports, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Ty McCormick, "Is the U.S. Military Propping Up Uganda's 'Elected' Autocrat?," *Foreign Policy* (Foreign Policy, February 18, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Fisher, "Managing Donor Perceptions: Contextualizing Uganda's 2007 Intervention in Somalia," *African Affairs* 111, no. 444 (May 9, 2012): pp. 404-423.

<sup>12</sup> Magnus Taylor and Casie Copeland, "From Conflict to Cooperation? Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda," International Crisis Group (International Crisis Group, June 20, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Ty McCormick, "Is the U.S. Military Propping Up Uganda's 'Elected' Autocrat?," *Foreign Policy* (Foreign Policy, February 18, 2016).

Salaam. A few years later, on September 11, 2001, the terrorist attacks so violently shocked the United States that the ‘recent memory of terror,’ now within America’s borders, became the primary lens through which the country viewed the world, as exemplified by the US-initiated Global War on Terrorism. With respect to the military partnership between the US and Uganda, the effect of 9/11 and the GWOT is paramount.<sup>14</sup>

When asked about the US-Uganda military partnership, Uganda People’s Defence Force (UPDF) Brigadier General Matthew Gureme stated, “This partnership really grew post-9/11. We were identified as one of the partners who had common interest in combatting this terrorism,” evidencing how the post-9/11 period exhibits the tight-knit counterterrorism partnership between the US and Uganda.<sup>15</sup> It is important to note that such a partnership was not solely strengthened by the US as a result of its post-9/11 GWOT strategy, but rather that Museveni actively portrayed himself as an ally against Islamist extremism and terrorism in East Africa.<sup>16 17</sup> Museveni readily and boisterously supported the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, becoming one of the few African members of the rather unpopular coalition involved in the latter.<sup>18</sup> In addition, Museveni has linked local rebel groups such as the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) to the terrorism narrative, as well as actively supported AMISOM, the US-backed and African Union-facilitated counterterrorism mission in Somalia debuting in 2007.<sup>19</sup> As a result, the US significantly internalized the ‘ally in the GWOT’ narrative and has consequently viewed its relations with

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<sup>14</sup> David M. Anderson and Jonathan Fisher, “Authoritarianism and the Securitization of Development in Uganda,” in *Aid and Authoritarianism in Africa: Development without Democracy*, ed. Tobias Hagmann and Filip Reyntjens (London, UK: Zed Books, 2016), pp. 67-90.

<sup>15</sup> Ty McCormick, “Is the U.S. Military Propping Up Uganda’s ‘Elected’ Autocrat?,” *Foreign Policy* (Foreign Policy, February 18, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> David M. Anderson and Jonathan Fisher, “Authoritarianism and the Securitization of Development in Uganda,” in *Aid and Authoritarianism in Africa: Development without Democracy*, ed. Tobias Hagmann and Filip Reyntjens (London, UK: Zed Books, 2016), pp. 67-90.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Wilkerson, “Uganda’s War on Terror Comes Home,” *Foreign Policy* (Foreign Policy, July 12, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Beth Elise Whitaker, “Compliance Among Weak States: Africa and the Counter-Terror Regime,” *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 3 (July 2010): pp. 639-662.

<sup>19</sup> Ty McCormick, “Is the U.S. Military Propping Up Uganda’s ‘Elected’ Autocrat?,” *Foreign Policy* (Foreign Policy, February 18, 2016).

Uganda largely through this lens.<sup>20</sup>

Over the past two decades, Uganda has become a major recipient of US foreign aid (especially military aid) and stands as one of America's closest military allies on the continent.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Between 2001 and 2005, US aid to Uganda tripled, compared to a 94% increase in US assistance globally during the same period.<sup>23</sup> With respect to military assistance specifically, Anderson and Fisher write, "Since 9/11 ... the US has made a range of weaponry and training opportunities available to the UPDF under several funding streams and regional assistance programmes and has publicly opposed efforts by some other donors to pressure the Museveni regime into decreasing its defence expenditure."<sup>24</sup> While such military assistance is difficult to quantify for a number of reasons, including the classified nature of certain programs, Ugandan officials in 2016 estimated that the US provided \$170 million per year in military cooperation and assistance.<sup>25</sup> <sup>26</sup> While some of this assistance comes in the form of direct provision of equipment (e.g., night-vision goggles and drones) and training, there is also an element of direct transfer of funds to the UPDF, which becomes problematic in sustaining the forces that commit human rights abuses.<sup>27</sup> <sup>28</sup> Before providing an overview of the mechanisms that demonstrate how

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<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Fisher, "Managing Donor Perceptions: Contextualizing Uganda's 2007 Intervention in Somalia," *African Affairs* 111, no. 444 (May 9, 2012): pp. 404-423.

<sup>21</sup> Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Uganda," Congressional Research Service (Congressional Research Service, August 6, 2019).

<sup>22</sup> Helen C. Epstein, "The US Turns a Blind Eye to Uganda's Assault on Democracy," *The Nation* (The Nation, July 20, 2018).

<sup>23</sup> Beth Elise Whitaker, "Compliance Among Weak States: Africa and the Counter-Terror Regime," *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 3 (July 2010): pp. 639-662.

<sup>24</sup> David M. Anderson and Jonathan Fisher, "Authoritarianism and the Securitization of Development in Uganda," in *Aid and Authoritarianism in Africa: Development without Democracy*, ed. Tobias Hagmann and Filip Reyntjens (London, UK: Zed Books, 2016), pp. 67-90, 72.

<sup>25</sup> Helen Epstein, *Another Fine Mess: America, Uganda, and the War on Terror* (New York, NY: Columbia Global Reports, 2017).

<sup>26</sup> Ty McCormick, "Is the U.S. Military Propping Up Uganda's 'Elected' Autocrat?," *Foreign Policy* (Foreign Policy, February 18, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Abdullahi Boru Halakhe, "Museveni and the Americans," *Africa Is a Country* (Africa Is a Country, January 14, 2021), <https://africasacountry.com/2021/01/museveni-and-the-americans>.

this counterterrorism partnership engenders human rights abuses, it is crucial to review the existing literature on the topic.

Currently there is no single piece of literature that streamlines the mechanisms describing how the US counterterrorism partnership with Uganda both directly contributes to and allows human rights abuses in the country to continue, in addition to juxtaposing such realities with stated US humanitarian aims. However, there are notable pieces of literature that provide evidence of constitutive aspects of the argument. Thus, this paper provides significant added value by bringing together evidence from a variety of sources and eliciting mechanisms that streamline the core argument that the US counterterrorism partnership with Uganda undermines humanitarian aims by engendering and allowing human rights abuses.

In *Another Fine Mess: America, Uganda, and the War on Terror*, Helen Epstein thoroughly outlines the US-Uganda military relationship, mainly concluding that Washington's prioritization of the counterterrorism partnership has caused it to turn a blind eye to the human rights abuses committed under Museveni, focusing more on the blunted criticism performed by the US in order to maintain the relationship rather than the anti-terrorism rhetoric employed by Museveni that assisted the US in accepting the abuses.<sup>29</sup> While Epstein briefly touches on how the US directly contributes to such abuses, for example by describing how US-funded, -equipped, and -trained soldiers torture dissidents and repress the opposition, she does not significantly elaborate on how such direct support is mechanized and realized (e.g., politicization of the UPDF).<sup>30</sup> Therefore, while Epstein's book provides the best overview of the US-Uganda counterterrorism partnership and outlines some of the human rights abuses allowed and

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<sup>29</sup> Helen Epstein, *Another Fine Mess: America, Uganda, and the War on Terror* (New York, NY: Columbia Global Reports, 2017).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



engendered by such a relationship, other literature must be consulted to add detail as to how such mechanisms function, especially within Ugandan apparatuses.

In their book chapter entitled “Authoritarianism and the Securitization of Development in Uganda,” David Anderson and Jonathan Fisher provide details to explain how US support to the UPDF directly contributes to human rights abuses.<sup>31</sup> The authors describe how the UPDF has become a highly politicized and personalized (i.e., subservient to Museveni himself) instrument of state repression that abuses dissidents of the regime. By emphasizing that the Ugandan military is functionally tied to Museveni and the National Resistance Movement (NRM)<sup>32</sup> themselves, the authors denote how US support for the UPDF directly contributes to human rights abuses of the political opposition.<sup>33</sup>

Jude Kagoro’s elaborate study, *Militarization in Post-1986 Uganda: Politics, Military, and Society Interpretation*, details the politico-military strategies employed by the NRM to maintain power.<sup>34</sup> The book adds further explanation of the politicization of the UPDF and examples of the UPDF committing human rights abuses against the opposition, such as by murdering demonstrators. Although this study does not mention the United States once, it contributes to this paper by further informing the details of the mechanism regarding how the US ends up directly contributing to human rights abuses of the political opposition by supporting a military force that acts at the whim of Museveni.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> David M. Anderson and Jonathan Fisher, “Authoritarianism and the Securitization of Development in Uganda,” in *Aid and Authoritarianism in Africa: Development without Democracy*, ed. Tobias Hagmann and Filip Reyntjens (London, UK: Zed Books, 2016), pp. 67-90.

<sup>32</sup> The NRM is the ruling party in Uganda, founded and led by President Museveni.

<sup>33</sup> David M. Anderson and Jonathan Fisher, “Authoritarianism and the Securitization of Development in Uganda,” in *Aid and Authoritarianism in Africa: Development without Democracy*, ed. Tobias Hagmann and Filip Reyntjens (London, UK: Zed Books, 2016), pp. 67-90.

<sup>34</sup> Jude Kagoro, *Militarization in Post-1986 Uganda: Politics, Military and Society Interpretation* (Berlin, Germany: LIT Verlag, 2015).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Aili Mari Tripp's book, *Museveni's Uganda: Paradoxes of Power in a Hybrid Regime*, describes how the continuation of the war and terror threat in Northern Uganda allowed the Museveni regime to justify adoption of repressive methods against the opposition, which the US has evidently accepted since military aid continues to flow.<sup>36</sup> In addition, Tripp's work provides a detailed account of the ghost soldier scheme in the LRA conflict, revealing how US military funding for the war encouraged its continuation due to UPDF officers profiting. Providing the profit incentive constitutes a direct contribution to human rights abuses since it allowed the war and its related humanitarian crisis to linger on for years, when ending it was certainly possible.<sup>37</sup> A number of other works offer bits of information regarding the War in Northern Uganda, abuse of the political opposition, and the US-Uganda counterterrorism partnership that once synthesized and streamlined in this paper, searingly implicate the United States in contributing to human rights abuses in the East African country.

In addition to adding value by drawing together arguments and streamlining mechanisms specific to the US-Uganda counterterrorism partnership's negative impact on human rights and humanitarian aims, the mechanisms invoked in this paper can also be applied to other governments in Africa in which the United States maintains a military relationship. For example, such a study could build on Robert Tynes' paper, which suggests current US counterterrorism policies in Africa are counter-productive since they facilitate and maintain autocratic styles of government, by investigating whether US counterterrorism policies in other African countries contribute to human rights abuses as well.<sup>38</sup> In the context of North Africa and the Sahel, Alexander Thurston writes, "There has ... been wide-ranging Western complicity in enabling

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<sup>36</sup> Aili Mari Tripp, *Museveni's Uganda: Paradoxes of Power in a Hybrid Regime* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Tynes, "US Counter-Terrorism Policies in Africa Are Counter to Development," *African Security Review* 15, no. 3 (2006): pp. 109-113.

governments and government-aligned militias to perpetrate collective punishment against their own citizens or the citizens of nearby countries. Western policymakers' feeble objections to other governments' human rights violations notwithstanding, it is clear that from the wars in the Sahel to the Saudi-Emirati venture in Yemen, Western governments largely and in some cases actively abet collective punishment," further indicating that such dynamics are not unique to Uganda.<sup>39</sup> Similar claims are made with respect to the counterterrorism partnership that the United States—as well as France—maintains with Chad.<sup>40</sup> Thus, while the details in this paper are specific to Uganda and America's counterterrorism partnership with the country, it is evident that the mechanisms elucidated in this paper serve to illustrate how other counterterrorism partnerships contribute to human rights abuses and contradict humanitarian aims as well.

Before turning to detailed accounts of the two humanitarian crises at the core of this paper—the War in Northern Uganda and abuse of the political opposition—and explaining how such crises illustrate the mechanisms that lead to an undermining of human rights and humanitarian aims, it would be beneficial to outline the mechanisms together. While brief examples are presented to help contextualize the mechanisms, more detailed descriptions pertaining to the two humanitarian crises are given in the following section.

As noted earlier, there are two mechanisms involved in the US-Uganda counterterrorism partnership that contribute to human rights abuses: the US contributing directly to the abuses by supporting the Ugandan military which carries/allows them to be carried out, and accepting such abuses either as a result of the Ugandan government's use of anti-terrorism rhetoric to justify them or simply in order to maintain the counterterrorism partnership, thereby allowing such

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<sup>39</sup> Alexander Thurston, *Jihadists of North Africa and the Sahel: Local Politics and Rebel Groups* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 316.

<sup>40</sup> Robbie Gramer, "Biden Defaults to 'War on Terror Approach' to Chad," *Foreign Policy* (Foreign Policy, May 13, 2021).

abuses to continue. These direct mechanisms involve a bidirectional role of counterterrorism: human rights abuse-contributing assistance to the UPDF is procured as a result of counterterrorism goals, while human rights abuses are accepted due to anti-terrorism justification and in order to sustain the counterterrorism relationship. In the case of the LRA conflict, Uganda's characterization of the LRA as a terrorist group attracted US military support, which prolonged the war by allowing UPDF officers to profit from the ghost soldier corruption scheme, thereby contributing to human rights abuses by allowing the humanitarian crisis in Northern Uganda to continue.<sup>41 42</sup> In the case of the political opposition, direct abuse is mechanized by the US funding, equipping, and training the politicized military that represses and tortures dissidents.<sup>43 44</sup>

The other mechanism elucidates that the counterterrorism lens also contributes to human rights abuses by effectively forcing their acceptance by the US, at least to the level at which the US does not halt military and other foreign aid. In the case of the LRA conflict, the US ignored the humanitarian crisis created by the war due to wanting to maintain the counterterrorism relationship more broadly, and it accepted the Museveni regime's claim that repression elsewhere in the country was justified in the name of counterterrorism due to the LRA threat.<sup>45 46</sup> The same mechanism applies to abuse of the political opposition: the US tacitly accepts Museveni's use of anti-terrorism laws and units to justify torturing and murdering 'terrorists' who in reality are

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<sup>41</sup> Beth Elise Whitaker, "Compliance Among Weak States: Africa and the Counter-Terror Regime," *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 3 (July 2010): pp. 639-662.

<sup>42</sup> Ogenga Otunnu, *Crisis of Legitimacy and Political Violence in Uganda, 1979 to 2016* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

<sup>43</sup> David M. Anderson and Jonathan Fisher, "Authoritarianism and the Securitization of Development in Uganda," in *Aid and Authoritarianism in Africa: Development without Democracy*, ed. Tobias Hagmann and Filip Reyntjens (London, UK: Zed Books, 2016), pp. 67-90.

<sup>44</sup> Joel Barkan, "Uganda: Assessing Risks to Stability" (Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 2011).

<sup>45</sup> Ogenga Otunnu, *Crisis of Legitimacy and Political Violence in Uganda, 1979 to 2016* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

<sup>46</sup> Aili Mari Tripp, *Museveni's Uganda: Paradoxes of Power in a Hybrid Regime* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010).

simply members of the opposition, while also accepting the reported human rights abuses of the opposition (meaning not cutting aid even if publicly opposing the actions) out of fear of sacrificing the counterterrorism relationship with Uganda.<sup>47 48 49</sup>

In 2016, the State Department webpage for Uganda read, “U.S. assistance enhances social and economic well-being throughout the country, and U.S. support improves the lives of hundreds of thousands of Ugandans.”<sup>50</sup> While many US humanitarian and development programs in Uganda likely save and improve lives, the following section will demonstrate in detail that when examining the US-Uganda counterterrorism relationship, such a declaration stands detached from reality.

By the mid-2000s, the War in Northern Uganda had “produced a humanitarian catastrophe of dreadful proportions” with over 1.5 million people displaced and 20,000 children abducted.<sup>51 52</sup> In 2006, more than 3,500 people were dying every month from preventable diseases, violence, and torture.<sup>53</sup> Whether civilians were dying in the squalid IDPs camps or being raped, mutilated, or burned alive by the LRA, the continuation of the war constituted a humanitarian nightmare.<sup>54 55</sup> In a 2006 Congressional testimony, a State Department official said, “The U.S. is a leading source of humanitarian and other aid for the people of northern Uganda

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<sup>47</sup> Helen C. Epstein, “The US Turns a Blind Eye to Uganda's Assault on Democracy,” *The Nation* (The Nation, July 20, 2018).

<sup>48</sup> David M. Anderson and Jonathan Fisher, “Authoritarianism and the Securitization of Development in Uganda,” in *Aid and Authoritarianism in Africa: Development without Democracy*, ed. Tobias Hagmann and Filip Reyntjens (London, UK: Zed Books, 2016), pp. 67-90.

<sup>49</sup> Aili Mari Tripp, *Museveni's Uganda: Paradoxes of Power in a Hybrid Regime* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010).

<sup>50</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, “U.S. Relations With Uganda,” U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State, June 2, 2016).

<sup>51</sup> CSOPNU, “Counting the Cost: Twenty Years of War in Northern Uganda” (Civil Society Organisations for Peace in Northern Uganda, March 2006), 2.

<sup>52</sup> Ted Dagne, “Uganda: Current Conditions and the Crisis in Northern Uganda,” Federation of American Scientists (Congressional Research Service, June 8, 2011).

<sup>53</sup> CSOPNU, “Counting the Cost: Twenty Years of War in Northern Uganda” (Civil Society Organisations for Peace in Northern Uganda, March 2006).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Jude Kagoro, *Militarization in Post-1986 Uganda: Politics, Military and Society Interpretation* (Berlin, Germany: LIT Verlag, 2015).

and we provided \$78 million in bilateral assistance in fiscal year 2005. The U.S. was the source of more than 50% of the total World Food Program assistance in Uganda in 2005. The U.S. also funds critical programs that address the deep psychological wounds of former child soldiers and child abductees, by providing these children with psycho-social counseling, medical care, vocational training, and opportunities to reintegrate themselves into the local community.”<sup>56</sup>

While such efforts are laudable, there is no mention of the role the United States played in allowing the conflict and related humanitarian crisis to continue.

Before elucidating how the US counterterrorism partnership with Uganda prolonged the LRA conflict and thus allowed for the humanitarian crisis to continue, it is important to first highlight the proximate causes of the war’s continuation. Above all, the Ugandan government simply did not apply sufficient military force to end the war militarily and reneged on any possible peace negotiations.<sup>57</sup> At some points the Ugandan government did not send enough UPDF troops to fight the LRA, while at others such operations were simply ineffective.<sup>58</sup> However, “If the Museveni regime had wanted to end the war before hundreds of thousands people had perished in the camps, it would have done so because it had the resources to deploy to that effect.”<sup>59</sup> Combined with the “apparent lack of will by the government to end the conflict through a negotiated settlement,” it is evident that the Ugandan government possessed motives to allow the War in Northern Uganda to continue.<sup>60</sup> The proximate motive was to gain increased support for the military, meaning that Museveni prolonged the conflict to invoke increased

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<sup>56</sup> Jeffrey Krilla, “The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda,” U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State, April 26, 2006).

<sup>57</sup> Ted Dagne, “Uganda: Current Conditions and the Crisis in Northern Uganda,” Federation of American Scientists (Congressional Research Service, June 8, 2011).

<sup>58</sup> Ogenga Otunnu, *Crisis of Legitimacy and Political Violence in Uganda, 1979 to 2016* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 264.

<sup>60</sup> Ted Dagne, “Uganda: Current Conditions and the Crisis in Northern Uganda,” Federation of American Scientists (Congressional Research Service, June 8, 2011), 10.

military aid from the US.<sup>61</sup> Following 9/11, Museveni characterized the LRA as a terrorist group rather than a rebel/criminal group, thereby attracting significant military aid for the War in Northern Uganda as a result of its counterterrorism partnership with the United States.<sup>62 63</sup> Such posturing exemplifies how counterterrorism goals—admittedly prodded by Museveni framing the conflict as terrorism—led to direct support of the Ugandan military from the US that ended up contributing to human rights abuses. However, given that the majority of human rights abuses during this conflict occurred due to a lack of action by the UPDF rather than their direct committing of abuses, US military support for the UPDF led to human rights abuses through a different channel: the ghost soldier scheme.

A ghost soldier scheme is when many soldiers on the payroll do not actually exist, with military officers pocketing the salaries. An internal investigation in the early 2000s found that two-thirds of soldiers on the UPDF payroll did not exist, highlighting how UPDF officers had a profit incentive to prolong the LRA conflict.<sup>64 65</sup> Because the ghost soldier scheme allowed military officers to turn the LRA conflict into a business, the Museveni regime had no reason to end the conflict and cut off an important source of patronage.<sup>66</sup> The US-Uganda military partnership is implicated since US funds allocated to the UPDF for counterterrorism operations were used to fund the scheme.<sup>67</sup> Thus, counterterrorism goals prodded by the framing of a

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<sup>61</sup> Bobi Wine, “The West Helped Cripple Uganda's Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs* (Council on Foreign Relations, January 26, 2021).

<sup>62</sup> David M. Anderson and Jonathan Fisher, “Authoritarianism and the Securitization of Development in Uganda,” in *Aid and Authoritarianism in Africa: Development without Democracy*, ed. Tobias Hagmann and Filip Reyntjens (London, UK: Zed Books, 2016), pp. 67-90.

<sup>63</sup> Jonathan Fisher, “Managing Donor Perceptions: Contextualizing Uganda’s 2007 Intervention in Somalia,” *African Affairs* 111, no. 444 (May 9, 2012): pp. 404-423.

<sup>64</sup> Helen Epstein, *Another Fine Mess: America, Uganda, and the War on Terror* (New York, NY: Columbia Global Reports, 2017).

<sup>65</sup> Ogenga Otunnu, *Crisis of Legitimacy and Political Violence in Uganda, 1979 to 2016* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

<sup>66</sup> Aili Mari Tripp, *Museveni's Uganda: Paradoxes of Power in a Hybrid Regime* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010).

<sup>67</sup> Sophia Boehm, “The Politics of American Aid and Conflict in Northern Uganda,” *Insights* 5, no. 1 (2011): pp. 3-33.

terrorist conflict led to the US directly contributing to human rights abuses via supporting a scheme that prolonged a war and related humanitarian crisis.<sup>68</sup>

Beyond contributing to the continuation of the crisis via assistance to the UPDF, the US ignored—and thus essentially accepted—the violation of human rights and the destitute humanitarian situation in Northern Uganda given Uganda’s role in the GWOT and the desired maintenance of that counterterrorism partnership; America’s neglect allowed such abuses to continue for years.<sup>69</sup> Although Uganda did utilize a counterterrorism framework as a means of attracting military aid for the conflict (first mechanism of the bidirectional role), there is less evidence as to how Uganda employed anti-terrorist rhetoric to justify the humanitarian crisis in the region. However, continuation of the LRA conflict “allowed the government to justify its adoption of unacceptable methods of repression [elsewhere in the country] under the guise of increasing security in the face of a heightened terrorism threat” meaning that the government “could more easily silence political dissent in this environment of counterterrorism.”<sup>70</sup> The repression and abuse of the political opposition constitutes the second humanitarian crisis in which the US-Uganda counterterrorism partnership is culpable.

In a 2007 press conference with Ugandan journalists, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State James Swan confidently declared, “We follow very closely developments with respect to treatment of the opposition, with respect to human rights. Overall in regard to relations between the government and various opposition groups, we think it is important that all the actors and the parties here in Uganda work through the institutions of the Constitution.”<sup>71</sup> Yet 18 months earlier,

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<sup>68</sup> Sophia Boehm, “The Politics of American Aid and Conflict in Northern Uganda,” *Insights* 5, no. 1 (2011): pp. 3-33.

<sup>69</sup> Ogena Otunnu, *Crisis of Legitimacy and Political Violence in Uganda, 1979 to 2016* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

<sup>70</sup> Aili Mari Tripp, *Museveni's Uganda: Paradoxes of Power in a Hybrid Regime* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010), 170-171.

<sup>71</sup> James Swan, “Deputy Assistant Secretary Swan Discusses U.S. Policies in Africa with Uganda Journalists,” U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State, May 8, 2007).



when opposition candidate Kizza Besigye returned from exile to run for president again, the Museveni regime deployed the military to detain and torture his supporters.<sup>72</sup>

Since that dubious press conference, abuses against the opposition have only skyrocketed, with no sign of abetting. In 2011, during opposition demonstrations dubbed the ‘Walk to Work’ campaign, tens of people were shot dead and hundreds injured by a joint military-police operation.<sup>73</sup> When student demonstrators protested the lifting of the age amendment that would allow Museveni to run for president again in 2021, military forces shot them; when opposition MPs opposed the same proposal, Museveni sent plainclothes special forces to beat them on the floor of parliament.<sup>74</sup> <sup>75</sup> More recently, as singer-turned-activist politician Bobi Wine has become the face of the opposition, his supporters and staff have been tortured and beaten to death, including fellow musician Michael Kalinda, who died after being dropped off at the hospital with an eye plucked out, two fingers cut off, and burns on his torso.<sup>76</sup> While the responsible individuals remain unidentified, similar occurrences were proven as having been carried out at the discretion of Museveni and his regime.<sup>77</sup> In fact, Ugandan officials and Museveni himself admitted that security forces killed at least 54 civilians at a November 2020 opposition protest that was sparked by another perennial arrest and detainment of Bobi Wine.<sup>78</sup> While official State Department reports acknowledge these atrocities, for example

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<sup>72</sup> Ogenga Otunnu, *Crisis of Legitimacy and Political Violence in Uganda, 1979 to 2016* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

<sup>73</sup> Jude Kagoro, *Militarization in Post-1986 Uganda: Politics, Military and Society Interpretation* (Berlin, Germany: LIT Verlag, 2015).

<sup>74</sup> Helen C. Epstein, “The US Turns a Blind Eye to Uganda's Assault on Democracy,” *The Nation* (The Nation, July 20, 2018).

<sup>75</sup> Bobi Wine, “The West Helped Cripple Uganda's Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs* (Council on Foreign Relations, January 26, 2021).

<sup>76</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, “2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Uganda,” U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State, March 11, 2020).

<sup>77</sup> Andrew Arinaitwe and Eric Mwene-Mugaju, “Uganda's Return to the Dark Days of Idi Amin,” *The Mail & Guardian* (The Mail & Guardian, March 28, 2021).

<sup>78</sup> Tabu Butagira, “US Demands Audit of Uganda's Election Result,” *Daily Monitor* (Daily Monitor, February 25, 2021).

writing, “Opposition activists, local media, and human rights activists reported that security forces killed individuals the government identified as dissidents and those who participated in protests against the government,” there is no mention of how the US directly contributes to and tacitly allows such abuses to continue as a result of its counterterrorism partnership with Uganda.<sup>79</sup>

Because the UPDF is effectively fused with the NRM and Museveni himself, US support for the Ugandan military stemming from the counterterrorism partnership directly contributes to the human rights abuses committed by the Ugandan security forces against the political opposition. As a result of US assistance, the UPDF has become a more technically proficient, but no less political fighting force, with the NRM and Museveni himself calling upon the UPDF to resolve political qualms in their favor.<sup>80 81</sup> As such a highly politicized and personalized instrument of state repression, the UPDF and paramilitary structures that benefit from the same (or superior) funding, equipment, and training have tortured and killed perceived opponents of the Museveni regime.<sup>82</sup> Thus, by funding, equipping, and training the same military units that brutalize members of the political opposition, the United States, by way of its counterterrorism partnership with Uganda, contributes to egregious human rights abuses of the country’s political opposition. While such direct support—which is attracted by the desire to pursue effective counterterrorism operations in the region—is not intended to contribute to human rights abuses, the other side of the bidirectional relationship reveals that the US accepts the abuses (at least to

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<sup>79</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, “2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Uganda,” U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State, March 30, 2021).

<sup>80</sup> Joel Barkan, “Uganda: Assessing Risks to Stability” (Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 2011).

<sup>81</sup> VOA, “US Military Involvement in Uganda Yields Mixed Results,” Voice of America (Voice of America, August 2, 2012).

<sup>82</sup> David M. Anderson and Jonathan Fisher, “Authoritarianism and the Securitization of Development in Uganda,” in *Aid and Authoritarianism in Africa: Development without Democracy*, ed. Tobias Hagmann and Filip Reyntjens (London, UK: Zed Books, 2016), pp. 67-90.

the level at which it does not halt military and other foreign aid) due to Museveni's use of anti-terrorist rhetoric and in order to maintain the counterterrorism partnership with Uganda.

The Anti-Terrorism Act and the Joint Anti-Terrorism Task Force, both of which were propositioned by the United States, constitute the law and the unit most often utilized by Museveni to justify abuse of the political opposition in the name of opposing terrorism.<sup>83</sup> The Anti-Terrorism Act, passed by the Ugandan parliament in 2002, conferred sweeping powers on the Ugandan security agencies to arrest "a wide range of 'putative terrorists' ... who in fact have more often been legitimate protestors against government policies."<sup>84</sup> When using the Anti-Terrorism Act to detain opposition members, the Museveni regime employs the Joint Anti-Terrorism Task Force, making it especially clear that the purpose of the extreme methods of torture, such as tying victims' hands and feet behind them, suspending victims from ceilings, tearing off victims' nails, waterboarding, severe beatings, burning with metal, electrocution, and genital mutilation are explicitly conducted for the purpose of opposing terrorism.<sup>85</sup> However, such justifications are simply a facade: the Joint Anti-Terrorism Task Force has been incessantly criticized for the use of excessive force, abuse of human rights, and being used as an excuse to persecute the political opposition.<sup>86</sup>

While the US might be able to palate such abuses by pointing to Museveni's anti-terrorism rhetoric, it is evident that the blunted criticism of the human rights abuses significantly stem from not wanting to strain the counterterrorism relationship with Uganda, and

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<sup>83</sup> Beth Elise Whitaker, "Compliance Among Weak States: Africa and the Counter-Terror Regime," *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 3 (July 2010): pp. 639-662.

<sup>84</sup> David M. Anderson and Jonathan Fisher, "Authoritarianism and the Securitization of Development in Uganda," in *Aid and Authoritarianism in Africa: Development without Democracy*, ed. Tobias Hagmann and Filip Reyntjens (London, UK: Zed Books, 2016), pp. 67-90, 79

<sup>85</sup> Aili Mari Tripp, *Museveni's Uganda: Paradoxes of Power in a Hybrid Regime* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010).

<sup>86</sup> Jude Kagoro, *Militarization in Post-1986 Uganda: Politics, Military and Society Interpretation* (Berlin, Germany: LIT Verlag, 2015).

not from any form of deceit. Even a US Congressional Research Service report makes the claim that “President Yoweri Museveni has been a vocal supporter of counterterrorism efforts in the region, but the State Department has documented serious human rights abuses and electoral irregularities in Uganda, and some observers have expressed concern that Museveni’s cooperation on counterterrorism constrains Western criticism for alleged political abuses.”<sup>87</sup> Further, a spokesman for the UPDF stated that he ‘could not recall any case’ in which US military assistance was terminated due to human rights violations, even as the State Department’s annual “Report on Human Rights” for Uganda is ripe with them.<sup>88 89</sup>

As demonstrated in the aforementioned examples of the War in Northern Uganda and abuse of the political opposition, the United States, through its counterterrorism partnership with Uganda, enables a bidirectional relationship of mechanisms that contribute to human rights abuses and a neglect of humanitarian aims in Uganda. A desire to pursue counterterrorism aims through the US-Uganda military partnership engenders the US military assistance that directly contributes to human rights abuses, while Museveni’s use of anti-terrorism rhetoric and America’s desire to maintain the relationship in the name of counterterrorism allows such abuses to continue, despite the prescribed policy statements that the State Department publishes on human rights. Although lately the US has gone further in its condemnation of human rights abuses—such as by imposing visa restrictions on Ugandan officials in April 2021 in response to the lack of respect for human rights during the 2021 election season—compared to its past use of empty statements on websites and in press conferences, there is no indication that the US counterterrorism partnership with Uganda and related US military assistance—the true culprit on

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<sup>87</sup> Lauren Ploch, “Countering Terrorism in East Africa: The U.S. Response,” Federation of American Scientists (Congressional Research Service, November 3, 2010), 59.

<sup>88</sup> Ty McCormick, “Is the U.S. Military Propping Up Uganda’s ‘Elected’ Autocrat?,” Foreign Policy (Foreign Policy, February 18, 2016).

<sup>89</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, “Uganda 2015 Human Rights Report,” U.S. Department of Justice (U.S. Department of State, April 22, 2016).

the part of the US for human rights abuses and humanitarian violations in the East African country—will see any significant change or reduction.<sup>90</sup>

In a speech given to US military personnel at Fort Leavenworth in 2008, President Museveni confidently stated, “I am a revolutionary; I have never been a terrorist. And terrorism is not about the cause, it is about the methods. When you target noncombatants, you are a terrorist. When you use violence indiscriminately—a terrorist is the one who uses violence indiscriminately—that is a terrorist. And we do not support that.”<sup>91</sup> While Museveni’s assessment of terrorism is accurate, his negation of identification with the label misses the mark. As it was in 2008 as it is today, on any given day in the streets of Kampala, Museveni orders his henchmen to *specifically* target noncombatants, fearing that any lack of repression of such nonviolent protesters may spell the end of his regime. While such actions have been promptly identified in this paper as human rights abuses, it seems as though they also fall under a separate label: terrorism. If such is the case, as it appears so using Museveni’s own preached definition of the word, the United States has not only been contributing to human rights abuses in Uganda as a result of its counterterrorism partnership with the country’s government, but also contributing to state-sanctioned terrorism. Though the hypocrisy pertaining to how US counterterrorism policies in Uganda undermine its humanitarian aims is vibrantly clear, it is worth considering whether the same counterterrorism policies undermine America’s counterterrorism aims as well.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Halima Athumani, “Uganda Says US Travel Limits Imposed Without Basis,” Voice of America (Voice of America, April 17, 2021).

<sup>91</sup> Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, “The Strategy of Protracted People’s War: Uganda,” Military Review (Army University Press, December 31, 2008), 13.

<sup>92</sup> While policy suggestions fall outside the scope of this paper, it is my hope that the hypocrisy noted with respect to current US counterterrorism policies in Uganda will spark additional research that attempts to promote policies that allow the United States to pursue its interests and values at the same time.

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