



LRA Update

In early March 2015 the Ugandan army exhumed and returned to Uganda the remains of top LRA commander Okot Odhiambo. According to unofficial sources, DNA samples from the remains matched samples from known members of Odhiambo's family living in Uganda. Believed to have been killed in a battle with Ugandan soldiers in the Central African Republic (CAR) in late 2013, Odhiambo's remains were found after reliable testimony from former LRA combatants who recently defected. Odhiambo was a high-ranking LRA officer widely believed to have been a deputy to Joseph Kony, the founder and leader of the group. In that role, Odhiambo replaced Vincent Otti, who was executed for alleged treason, on Kony's orders, in October 2007.

Odhiambo and Otti were indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in July 2005 for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Another top commander indicted by the ICC, Raska Lukwiya, was killed by the Ugandan Army in August 2005, while a fourth indictee, Dominic Ongwen, surrendered to American and Ugandan troops in CAR in early 2015. The trial of Ongwen, who is now detained in The Hague, will likely commence in early 2016. Of the five LRA commanders indicted by the ICC, only Kony remains free.

On 27 March 2015, a spokesperson from the United Nations Refugee Organization (UNHCR) stated that there had been an increase in LRA attacks on the border between CAR and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) following Ongwen's defection. Referring to numbers provided by Catholic Relief Services, the spokesperson stated that there had been 25 LRA attacks in the vicinity of Zemio, a border town in CAR, in February 2015. Home to more than 3,000 Congolese refugees escaping LRA violence in neighboring DRC, the LRA has repeatedly targeted Zemio over the last six years.

The latest LRA attack near Zemio took place on 21 March 2015, targeting Congolese refugees returning to the refugee camp from tending to their lands on the DRC side of the border, in northern Ango territory. An LRA group reportedly abducted 15 Congolese refugees, later releasing 13 of them. At least one of the 13 was beaten severely and a young woman was raped, according to UNHCR.

There was reported LRA activity in and around Mboki, CAR, at the end of March and beginning of April 2015. Local sources reported sightings of LRA forces, likely coming from DRC and possibly involved in the abduction of Congolese refugees in nearby Zemio, on 31 March and 1 April. At least one person is believed to have been killed by the LRA on 30 March 2015 north of Mboki alongside river Kere. On 2 April, local sources reported that a member of the nomadic cattle herder groups, often known as Mbororo, was found severely beaten in the vicinity of Mboki. The man was believed to have been tortured by an LRA group intent of finding information regarding the security presence in Mboki.

A series of attacks against civilians in southeastern CAR were reported throughout March 2015 in and around Derbissaka and Djemah. On 15 March 2015, for instance, a group of men reportedly speaking



Arabic raped two women 20 kilometers south of Derbissaka. Initially believed to be LRA fighters, there are doubts among the community members that the assailants might be Sudanese poachers roaming southeastern CAR in search of animal hides and ivory.

LRA violence in DRC was also reported throughout March and early April 2015. As in the past, the attacks in DRC are carried out by small LRA groups of 10–12 fighters each, involving looting and targeting of food stores in small villages in Province Orientale's Ueles. LRA groups have frequently attacked many of these places in the past, including Kpaikpa, near Duru, which was attacked twice in March, as well as a few small villages near Diagbe and Bangadi, also attacked in mid-March and early April 2015.

Of particular concern has been recent LRA activity on the DRC and South Sudan border in the vicinity of Ezo and Source Yubu in Western Equatoria state. On 2 March 2014, a relatively large LRA group attacked the small hamlet of Doranzi on the DRC side of the border, abducting 10 people. The LRA group moved to attack Nabiapai in South Sudan and, on their return, attacked Doranzi again on 6 March, abducting four more people. It is unclear why the LRA has resumed activities in these locations, which had been relatively peaceful for the last three years. As in other attacks in DRC, the group attacking Doranzi was focused on looting food and other necessities. As a result of the LRA violence, the majority of the population of Ndoranzi, about 400 people, were displaced to Bitima.

The attacks of early March 2015 in Gangura payam, Yambio county, have brought back the fear of LRA for local residents who had lived free of LRA harassment since 2012. According to a local source, the LRA attacked on 3 March 2015 at 5 pm, looting food and abducting 11 people, four of whom were later released and returned home on 8 March. The returnees stated that the LRA group consisted of 11 armed men and two young women. A local group of self-defense fighters gave pursuit to the LRA group and in a subsequent fire exchange one of the Nabiapai locals was shot dead. A unit of the local national army based in Yambio arrived the next day. On 19 March 2015, two Ugandan men reportedly working in the timber sector in Gangura were found dead. It is unclear if they were attacked by the LRA or if they were revenge killings for the LRA attacks given that the majority of LRA fighters are of Ugandan origin.

Finally, US official sources revealed in early April 2015 that the US Special Forces deployed to Central Africa to assist the Ugandan army counter the LRA are using music as a way to encourage defections. A State Department official told ABC News that the US troops broadcast music by Ugandan pop star Joseph Mayanja, a.k.a. Jose Chameleone. Blasted from helicopter-mounted loudspeakers over areas thought to be frequented by the LRA, Chameleone's songs were recorded purposefully for LRA fighters who are believed to like his music. One of the songs titled 'Come Home' encourages fighters to leave the bush and return home where they will be safe as part of an amnesty deal applicable to most LRA fighters.



But a recent ruling from the Ugandan Supreme Court regarding the case of Thomas Kwoyelo may give potential defectors second thoughts. A former low level commander, Kwoyelo is the only LRA member prosecuted in the Ugandan courts. A special court of the Ugandan High Court ruled in late 2011 that Kwoyelo was eligible for amnesty and should have been released from custody.

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