



Lord's Resistance Army Update

From mid-February to the end of March 2012, there was an increase in the number of attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a re-emergence of LRA activity in the Central African Republic (CAR) and an escalation of diplomatic and advocacy efforts to bring an end to the LRA conflict.

Areas in north-eastern DRC that have traditionally been targeted by LRA groups have again been hit. LRA fighters have attacked villages near Dungu, Ngilima, Bangadi, and Faradje in Haut-Uélé on a weekly basis since the beginning of 2012. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the LRA has been responsible for 20 attacks in 2012, displacing 3,000 people in north-eastern DRC. Many of those fleeing LRA attacks had already been displaced by previous LRA violence over the past few years.

A spokesperson for the United Nations Mission in the DRC, Mounoubai Madnodje, told reporters in early March that the attacks were the desperate acts of a dying organization. However, there is no evidence that LRA groups in the DRC have been weakened or are expiring. On the contrary, LRA attacks this year have been more ferocious and frequent than in the last few months of 2011.

There were two reported attacks in CAR at the end of February and beginning of March 2012. Five people were reportedly abducted in Agoumar in Mbomou préfecture on 27 February, while three more were taken by the LRA on 2 March. These attacks come after at least five months of relative calm but in an area that was targeted by LRA groups for most of 2010 and the first half of 2011. The recent violence caused humanitarian NGOs to evacuate their staff from the nearby town of Rafai, disrupting humanitarian and medical aid to thousands of people. LRA groups have also targeted Rafai in the past.

LRA attacks in CAR come amid reports from United States officials that the recent deployment of US personnel in CAR and the region has helped weaken the LRA. There is no evidence to support these claims. The attacks in Agoumar, south of areas where LRA groups and leader Joseph Kony are located, took place closer to Obo where Ugandan and US army bases are located. This indicates that LRA fighters are not necessarily trying to escape the combined forces but rather continue to move easily between CAR and the DRC, with Agoumar located in the middle of that route.

The much-anticipated deployment of an African Union (AU) mission to LRA areas is still stalled. AU officials have concluded yet another set of meetings aimed at moving the process forward. The most recent gathering took place on 29 February in Addis Ababa, where the AU and the UN held a joint meeting with interested stakeholders. The participants noted the need for more regional cooperation and additional meetings, particularly a gathering of military experts to

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figure out the modalities of the mission. On March 24, AU Special Envoy Francisco Madeira called for international support to the AU mission in the form of military hardware.

It is expected that the commander of the AU mission's Regional Intervention Force (RIF), Ugandan Colonel Dick Prit Olum will deploy to Yambio in South Sudan's Western Equatoria state by the end of March. He will be joined by three officers from the South Sudanese, Congolese, and Central African armies who will be part of a joint intelligence-sharing centre, another component of the AU mission. It is unclear when the bulk of the RIF forces, expected to number between 2,000 and 5,000, will deploy.

In a meeting in Khartoum on 1 March, security chiefs from Sudan, Chad, and CAR agreed to the formation of joint operating forces to defend common borders from rebel intrusion. In the assessment conference of joint troops, initially agreed between the defence ministries of Chad and Sudan to coordinate border patrols, the CAR military was also included. CAR General Yagoub Victor said his country had joined to put an end to LRA activities in the country.

Finally, it appears that the 30 or so US soldiers sent to advise the Ugandan army on how to capture Kony and other top LRA commanders are having difficulties, partly because of alleged resistance from Ugandan troops. According to some reports from Kampala, top Ugandan army officers do not see any value in deploying a few American soldiers to the field, but instead want the US to supply the Ugandan army with helicopters and other craft to help pinpoint and rapidly mobilize against LRA groups. Furthermore, there were fears, at least initially, in government circles in Kampala that the US forces were preparing the ground for a Libya-style assault against the administration of President Yoweri Museveni, who has been criticised for his heavy-handed approach to dealing with the political opposition.

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