LRA CRISIS TRACKER

Quarter 1 2014 Security Brief
January–March 2014
PRINT VERSION

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Note: The LRA Crisis Tracker Quarter 1 2014 Security Brief is designed to be viewed online in an interactive format at http://reports.lracrisistracker.com/en/q1-2014/. The design of this print version is more limited and is intended as a secondary copy for users with minimal internet access.

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L R A   C R I S I S   I N I T I A T I V E

LRA Crisis Tracker: Quarter 1 2014 Security Brief

Executive Summary: Seasonal spike in LRA attacks, more defections in CAR

The LRA abducted 133 civilians in 61 attacks between January and March 2014 (Quarter 1 2014), continuing a historical pattern in which the group increases attacks during the dry season. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (Congo), LRA forces targeted civilians near the towns of Niangara and Bangadi, largely undeterred by the presence of Congolese soldiers and UN peacekeeping (MONUSCO) bases there. However, LRA forces committed only two attacks near Garamba National Park, a level of security not seen in that area since mid-2008.

In the Central African Republic (CAR), LRA forces targeted civilians near Ugandan and US military bases in Haut Mbomou prefecture. Further north, in the CAR's Haut Kotto prefecture, LRA forces also reportedly committed several large raids in an area where LRA leader Joseph Kony frequently operates. Long-term LRA members continued to escape in eastern CAR, with five Ugandan fighters and 13 women and children escaping there in Quarter 1 2014.
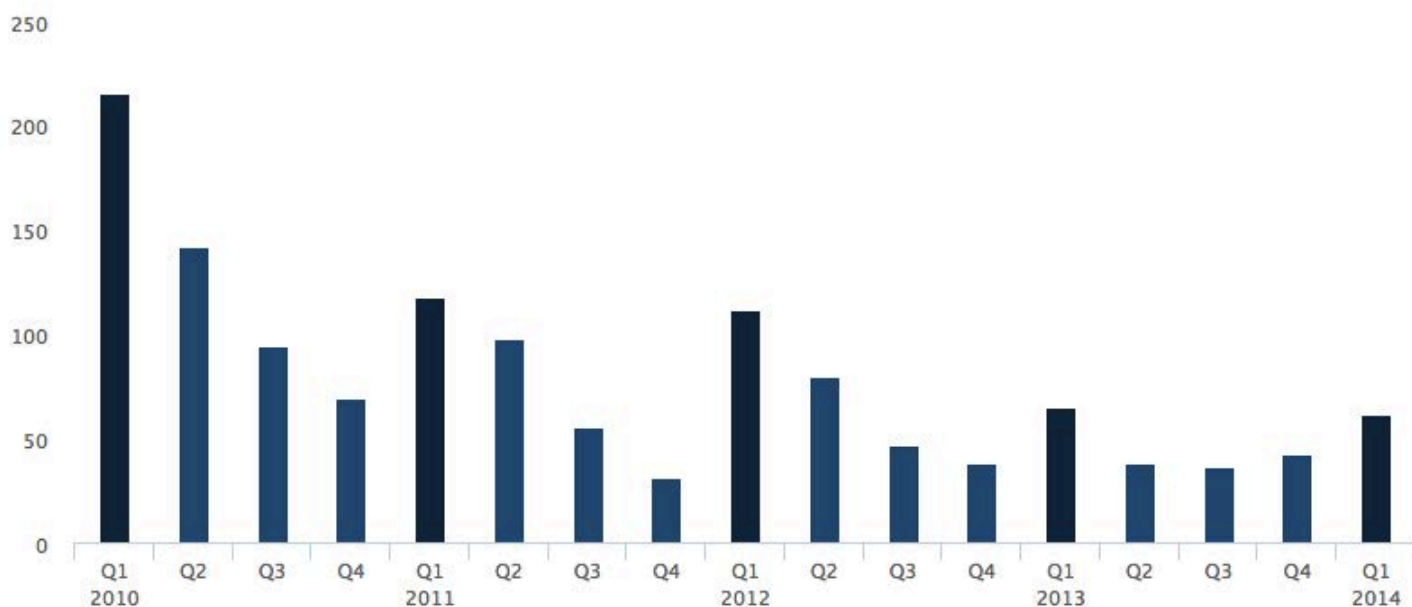
LRA attacks by quarter, 2010–2014

# I. Congo: LRA raids drop near Garamba National Park

SUMMARY *LRA attacks have dropped significantly in the past six months in communities near Congo's Garamba National Park, which were previously frequent targets of LRA attacks. The decrease in violence there follows operations in September 2013 by African Union troops to dislodge LRA groups from their bases in the park.*

The LRA first entered Garamba National Park in 2005, and nearly the entire LRA force lived there in established camps during the 2006–2008 Juba peace talks. Following the collapse of the peace talks and launch of Ugandan military operations in December 2008, most LRA groups left the park. However, Kony has entrusted a series of commanders with maintaining LRA bases there, from which they have poached elephants and launched raids on civilians. Between January 2012 and September 2013 alone, LRA forces abducted 158 people in 143 attacks on communities surrounding the park.

In mid-September 2013, South Sudanese troops with the African Union's counter-LRA force, utilizing US military intelligence and accompanied by US military advisers, destroyed several LRA bases in Garamba National Park. Over the next six months (October 2013–March 2014), LRA forces committed 11 attacks on communities west of the park, but none south or east of the park. It is difficult to determine whether all LRA groups have left Garamba National Park, and, if so, whether the operations were the most important factor in their exodus. However, the graph and map below demonstrate that communities surrounding the park have experienced a level of security unprecedented in recent years.
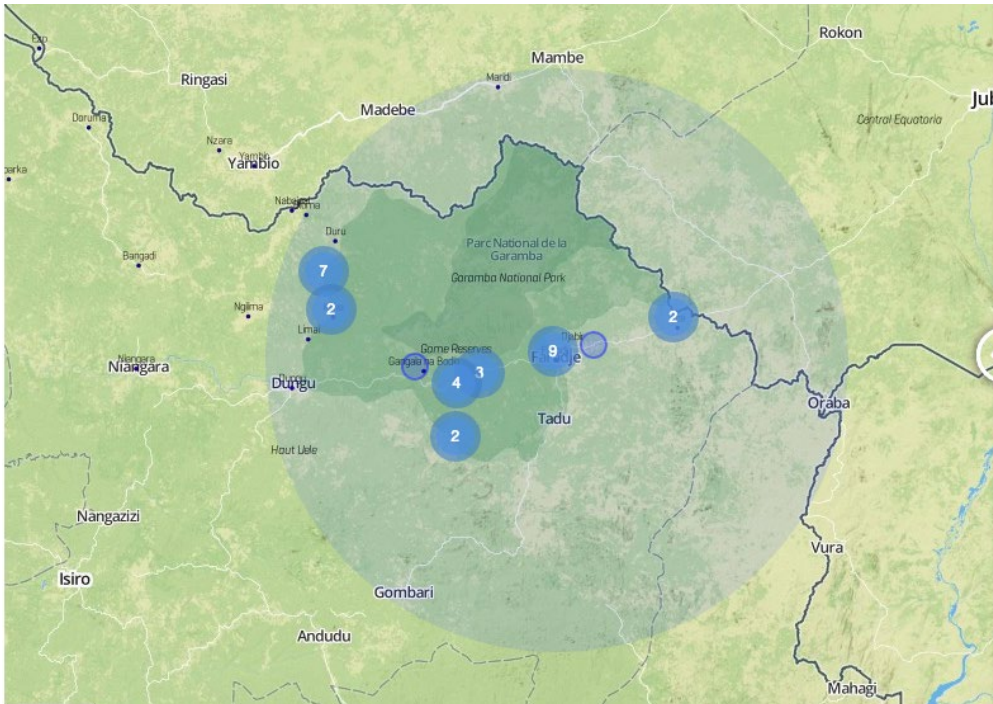
LRA attacks near Garamba National Park* | January 2010–March 2014

Defined as areas of Haut Uele district within a 140km radius of Faradje
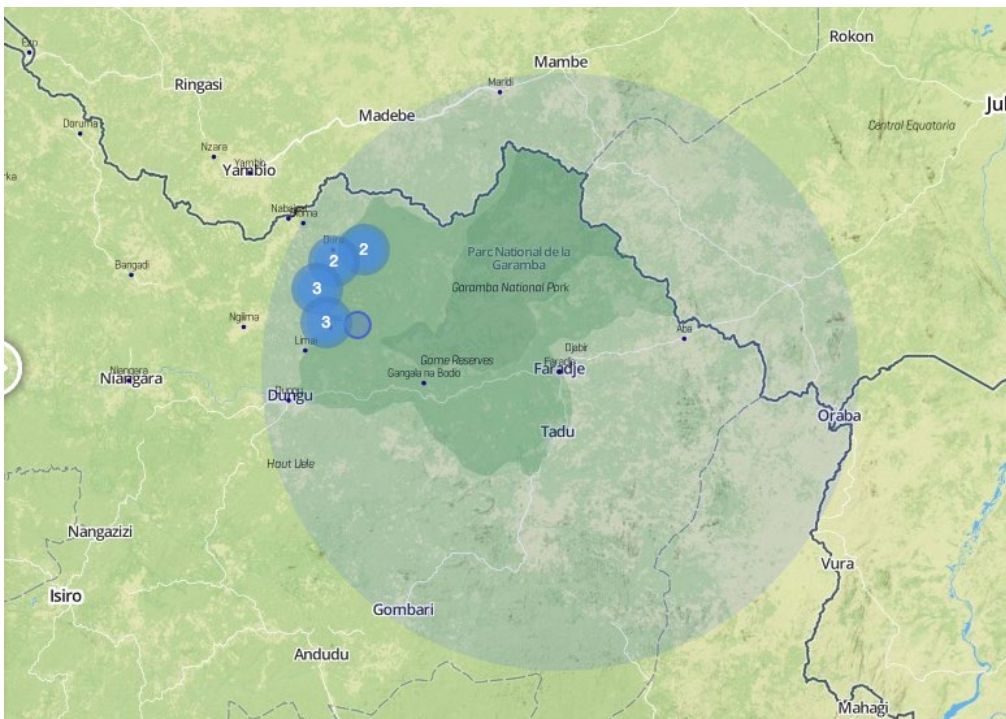

# of LRA attacks near Garamba National Park, Congo   # of LRA abductions near Garamba National Park, Congo
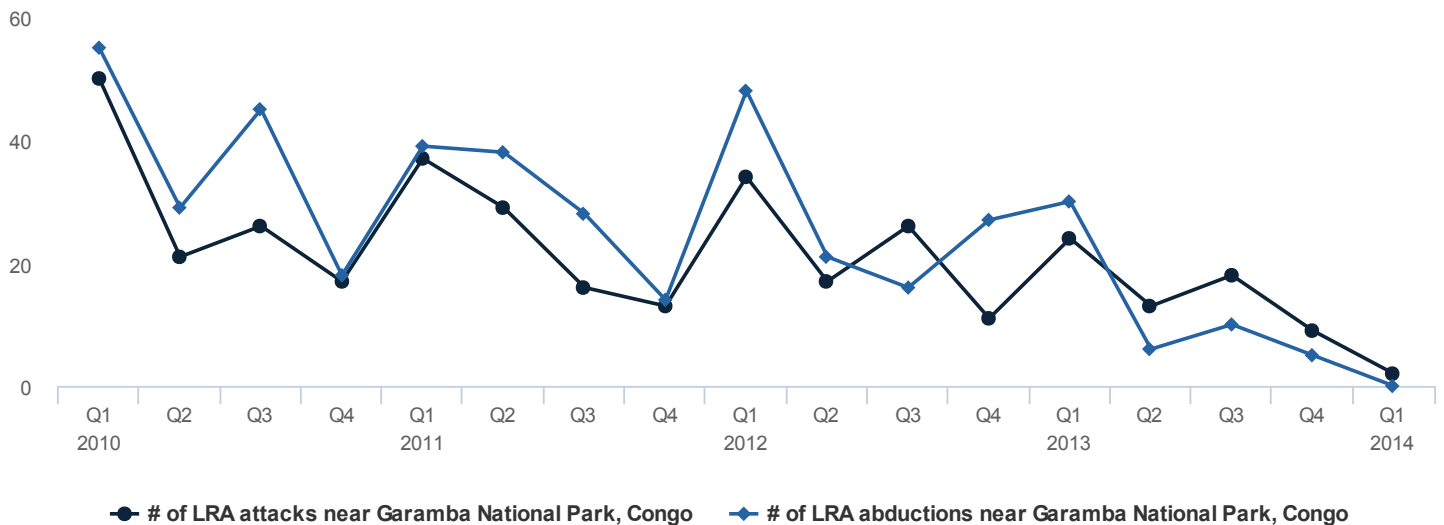
LRA attacks near Garamba National Park | April 2013–March 2014

April–September 2013


October 2013–March 2014

II. Congo: Attacks shift west towards Niangara–Bangadi area

SUMMARY *While LRA attacks have reduced dramatically near Garamba National Park, they have increased further west in Haut Uele district, indicating LRA groups formerly based in the park may have moved there. In February and March 2014, LRA groups particularly targeted communities near the towns of Niangara and Bangadi, abducting 36 people and looting 39 others in 23 attacks.*

The LRA attacks and abductions near Niangara and Bangadi in Quarter 1 2014 exceeded the totals for that area in all of 2013. The violence occurred in three distinct waves. From February 2–17, LRA forces committed ten attacks north of Niangara, near the village of Nambia, in which they abducted 12 people and looted property from at least seven others. Then, from February 22–25, LRA forces committed five attacks near Bangadi, 35km north of Nambia, abducting 22 people and looting 13 others. Finally, LRA forces committed eight additional attacks in the area from March 11–27. Most of the attacks were aimed at obtaining food and items such as machetes, boots, clothing, and ammunition.
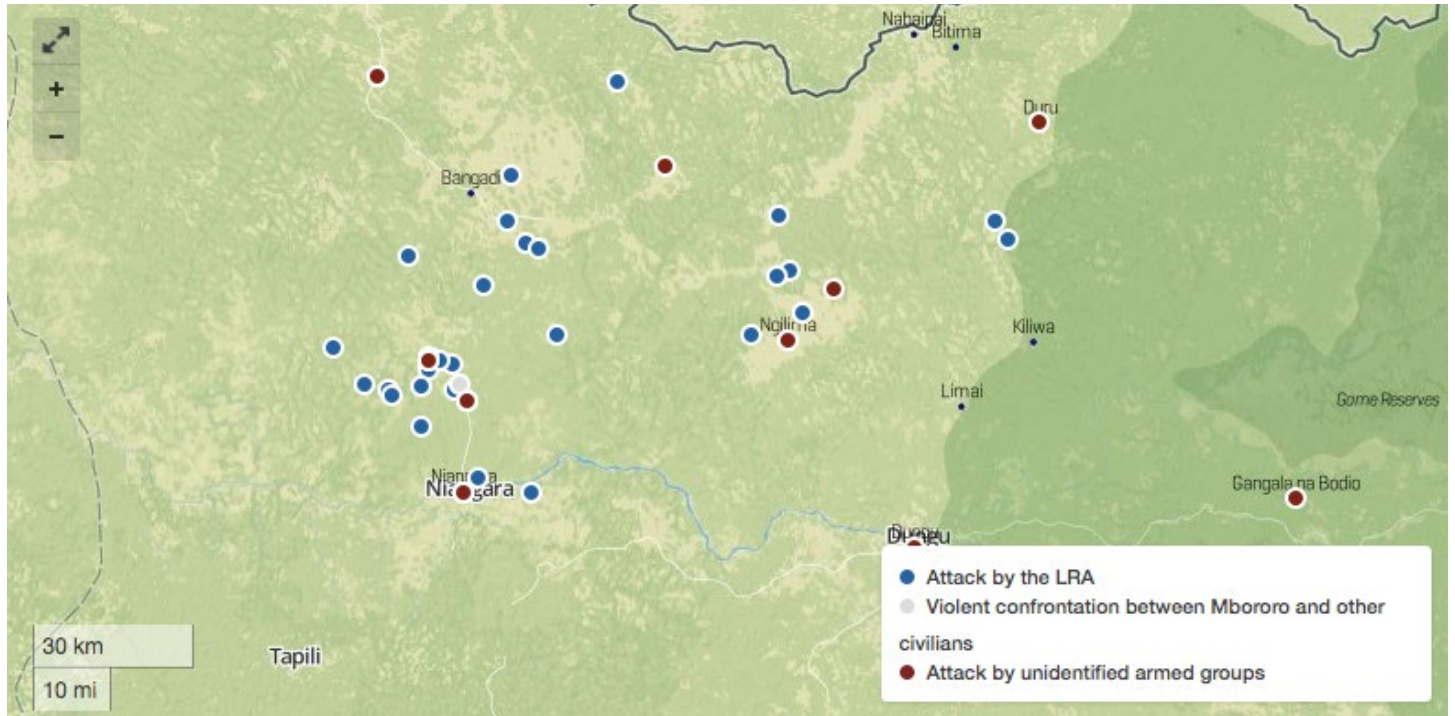
Other armed groups were also active in Haut Uele in Quarter 1 2014. In particular, tensions between Mbororo cattle herders and primarily Zande agricultural communities persisted, resulting in nine violent confrontations. Six of these incidents occurred in the vicinity of Niangara and Bangadi. In addition, there were 19 attacks in which the armed perpetrator was unidentified, including six in the Niangara–Bangadi area. Such attacks may have been perpetrated by bandits, the LRA, Mbororo, rogue Congolese soldiers, or poachers.

Attacks in the Niangara-Bangadi area**, January-March 2014

LRA **Unidentified armed group** **Mbororo**
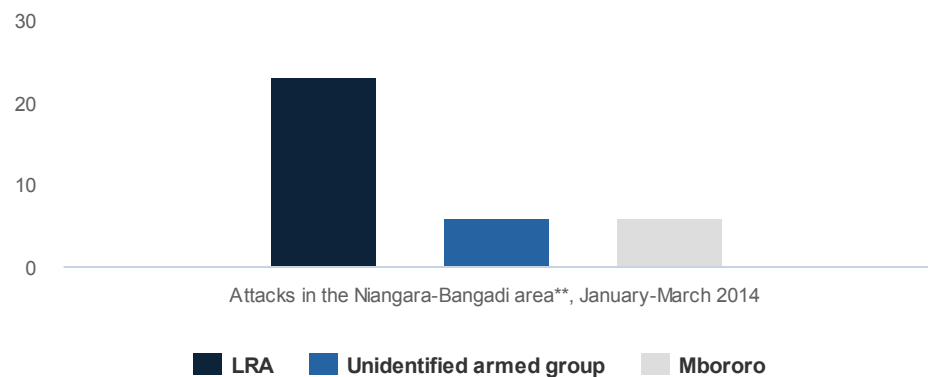
**Defined as areas of Haut Uele district within a 45km radius of Nambia, which lies between Niangara and Bangadi
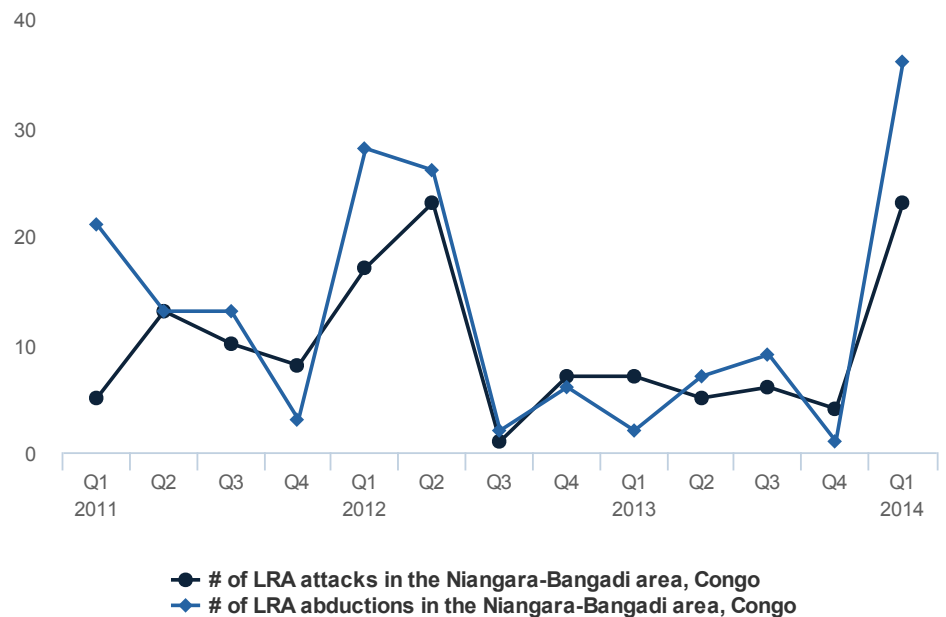
Despite the presence of other armed groups in Haut Uele, there is significant evidence that the LRA committed many of the attacks reported there in Quarter 1 2014, particularly those near Niangara and Bangadi. The perpetrators of the reported LRA attacks exhibited several classic indicators that often distinguish the LRA from other armed groups, such as communicating in Acholi or an "unknown" language, attacking in groups composed of women and children in addition to men, and abducting civilians. In several attacks, LRA forces interrogated abductees about military deployments and civilian travel patterns, another frequent LRA practice. In addition, two Congolese hunters reported seeing a large LRA camp near a stream 35km north of Niangara on February 22.

Armed group attacks in Haut Uele district | January–March 2014

Legend:
- Attack by the LRA
- Violent confrontation between Mbororo and other civilians
- Attack by unidentified armed groups

Congolese troops and MONUSCO peacekeepers are deployed in both Bangadi and Niangara, within 30km of all 23 LRA attacks reported in the area. MONUSCO troops also temporarily deployed to Nambia for several days beginning on February 15, after the LRA group had already committed eight attacks in the area and was beginning to shift north towards Bangadi.

As military forces reacted slowly, some civilians reportedly left Nambia temporarily to seek greater security in Niangara. It remains unclear what impact, if any, MONUSCO or Congolese troops have had in deterring LRA activity in the area.


- # of LRA attacks in the Niangara-Bangadi area, Congo
- # of LRA abductions in the Niangara-Bangadi area, Congo

III. CAR: LRA targets Obo–Mboki axis

SUMMARY *LRA violence rose sharply in the CAR's Haut Mbomou prefecture, where Ugandan and US troops are based. The LRA's 17 attacks and 35 abductions in the prefecture in Quarter 1 2014 approached or surpassed yearly totals there in both 2012 and 2013.*

LRA attacks in Haut Mbomou in Quarter 1 2014 were unusually bold, with 11 of the 17 attacks occurring within 15km of Ugandan military bases in the towns of Obo and Mboki. Nearly two-thirds of the people abducted in the LRA's attacks in Haut Mbomou were forced to porter looted goods into the bush before being released by their captors. During at least four such attacks, LRA forces asked abductees detailed questions about the location of military forces and nearby communities, as well as the movement of civilians along nearby roads.

Recent attack patterns in Haut Mbomou suggest LRA forces are taking advantage of the dry season to store up food and other supplies, but it remains unclear why they chose to target Haut Mbomou, where the presence of Ugandan and US troops has deterred LRA activity in recent years. Ugandan troops have limited capacity to protect civilians in Haut Mbomou from LRA attacks and pursue LRA leaders operating further west and north in the CAR, particularly since the redeployment of some troops from counter-LRA operations to the civil conflict in South Sudan.

— # of LRA attacks in Haut Mbomou   — # of LRA abductions in Haut Mbomou
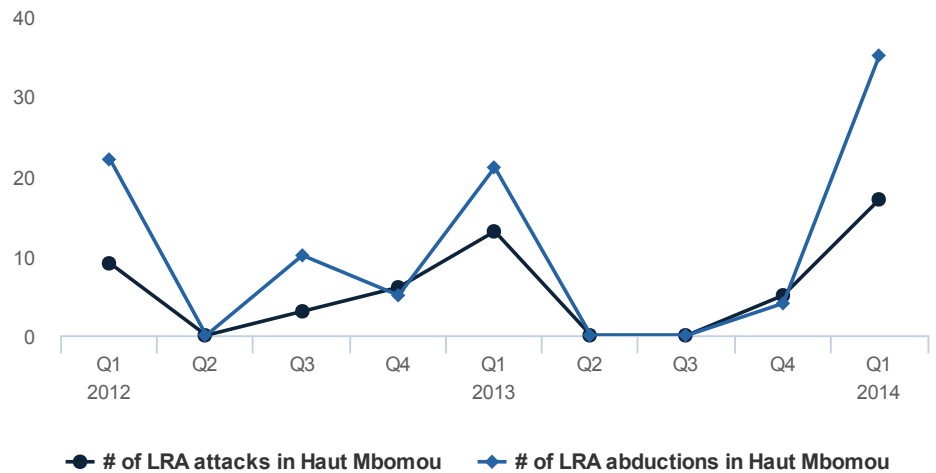
In March 2014 Congolese civilians reported several attacks and the presence of an LRA camp in Congo near the border with Haut Mbomou. This suggests LRA forces may be launching attacks into the CAR from Congo, where Ugandan troops do not have permission to operate. Of particular note, on March 7, LRA forces in Congo near the border with the CAR abducted two hunters and interrogated them on directions to Mboki. The following week, LRA forces committed three attacks near Mboki, after not attacking the area in the previous six weeks.

IV. Kafia Kingi: The LRA returns?

SUMMARY *Civilians reported a series of large-scale LRA attacks near the town of Sam Ouandja in the CAR's Haut Kotto prefecture, though lack of access to the area has limited efforts to verify the information. Separate reports indicated senior LRA commanders are once again operating in the neighboring Kafia Kingi enclave.*

LRA leader Joseph Kony has operated periodically in the Sudanese-controlled Kafia Kingi enclave, which borders CAR's Haut Kotto and Vakaga prefectures, since 2010. Kony has utilized Kafia Kingi in multiple ways: as a safe haven from pursuing Ugandan troops, as a marketplace to barter ivory poached in Congo, and as an outpost to rekindle the LRA's historic relationship with the Sudanese military. Not wanting to alienate Sudanese troops, LRA forces have rarely if ever attacked civilians in the enclave. Instead, they have periodically sent raiding parties into the CAR to loot civilians there, beginning with a series of eight attacks in Haut Kotto and Vakaga prefectures in late 2010.
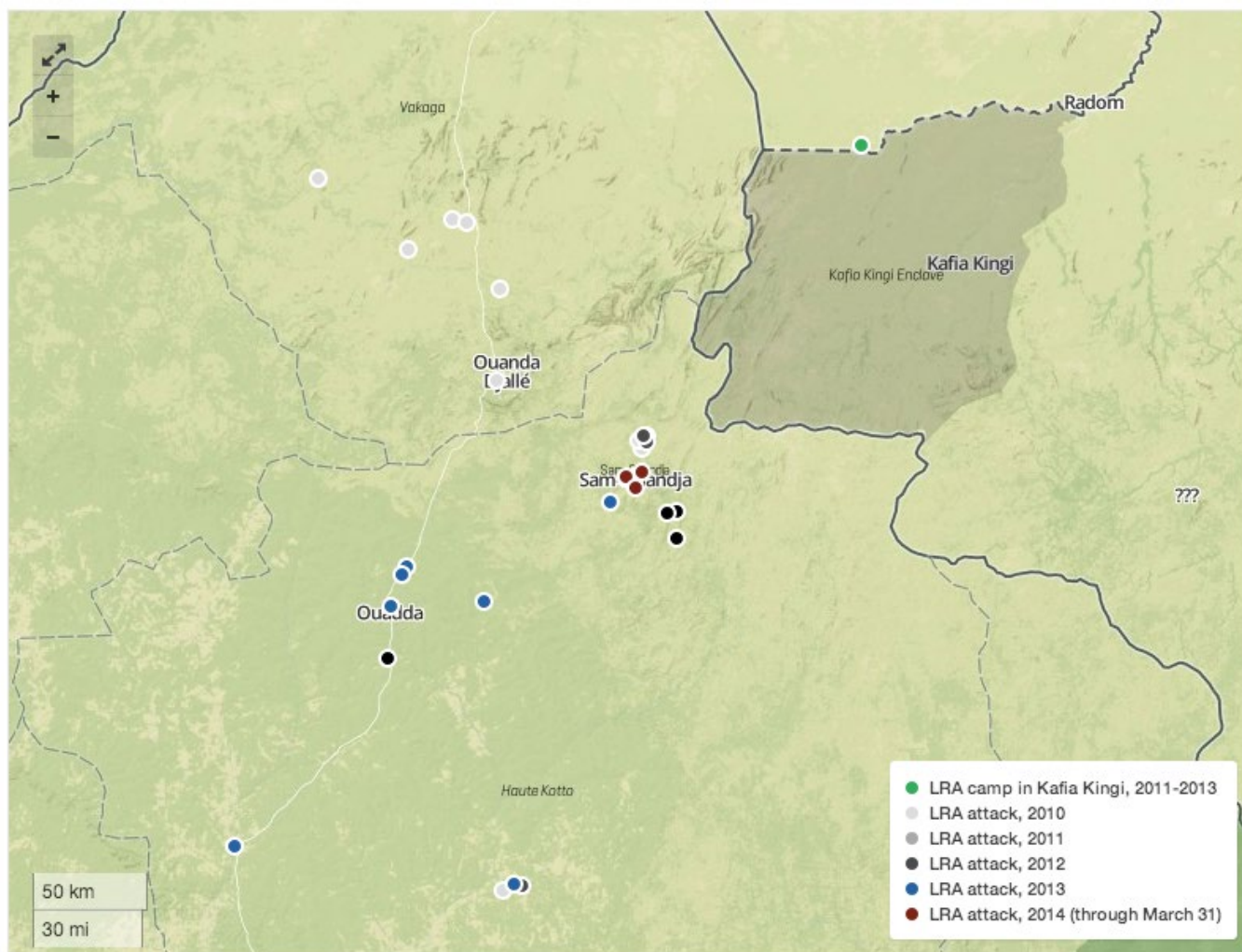
Kony was last confirmed to be in Kafia Kingi in March 2013, just before he fled to the CAR in advance of a Ugandan military attack on his camps in the enclave. After a series of large-scale raids on Central African towns in Haut Kotto in the aftermath of the Ugandan operations, LRA forces committed relatively few attacks there between July and November 2013.

In December 2013, reports of LRA activity in Haut Kotto began to increase. From December 2013–March 2014, civilians near Sam Ouandja, a diamond-mining town less than 50km from the Kafia Kingi border, reported seven LRA attacks in which the rebel group allegedly abducted 91 people. Sam Ouandja is not well connected to early warning networks in the CAR, and no international aid groups or UN agencies have bases there, making it very difficult to verify reports of attacks and who perpetrated them.

Despite this, there are several reasons to believe civilians are correct in identifying the LRA as the perpetrator of the seven reported attacks near Sam Ouandja. The perpetrators abducted people in all seven attacks, and abducted ten or more people in four of the attacks. Many of the abductees were forced to porter looted supplies into the bush before being released. These characteristics are very similar to LRA attacks patterns in recent years, particularly those in Vakaga prefecture in 2010, Mbomou prefecture in 2012, and Haut Kotto prefecture in mid-2013.

Other sources, including LRA defectors, have indicated LRA leaders such as Joseph Kony are again operating in Kafia Kingi, which borders Haut Kotto. If these reports are true, the Sam Ouandja area would be an ideal location for LRA forces operating in the enclave to loot supplies for their survival.
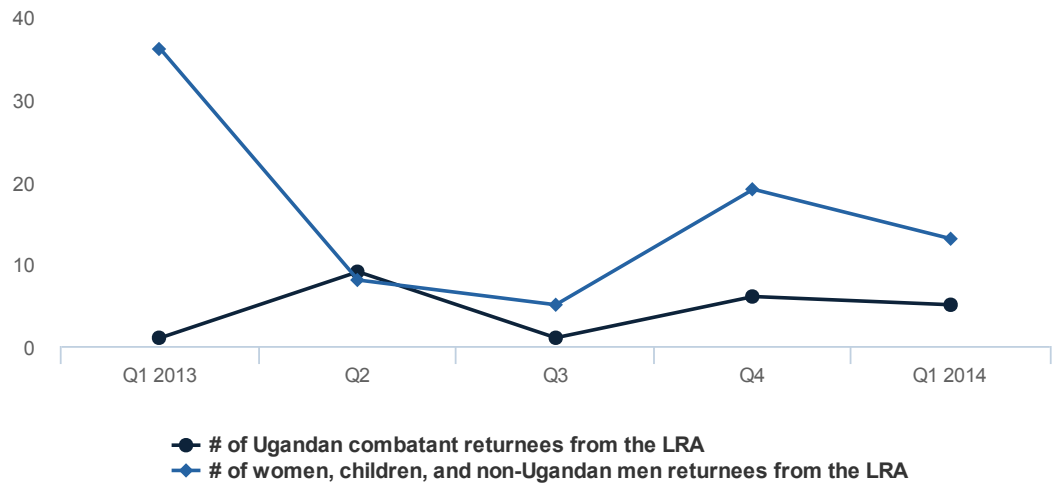
Legend:
- LRA camp in Kafia Kingi, 2011-2013
- LRA attack, 2010
- LRA attack, 2011
- LRA attack, 2012
- LRA attack, 2013
- LRA attack, 2014 (through March 31)

# V. CAR: Ugandan fighters defect from the LRA

SUMMARY *Eighteen LRA members who had been with the group for at least six months <u>escaped in Quarter 1 2014</u>, including five Ugandan male combatants, five women, and eight children.*

LRA Crisis Tracker data estimated there was <u>160–168 Ugandan male combatants</u> remaining within the LRA by the end of 2013, following the defection, capture, or killing of between 32–40 combatants that year. Since then, the five LRA combatant defections in Quarter 1 2014 represent an additional 3% reduction in the LRA's fighting capacity.

- ◆ # of Ugandan combatant returnees from the LRA
- ◆ # of women, children, and non-Ugandan men returnees from the LRA

All five Ugandan combatants who escaped the LRA in Quarter 1 2014 did so in eastern CAR. Since 2012, 87% of all Ugandan combatant defectors have escaped there, most commonly in the Vovodo-Chinko river basin and near towns with Ugandan military bases such as Mboki, Djemah, and Obo. The concentration of LRA combatant defections in this area is likely due to a number of factors, including the presence of Ugandan military bases, the concentration of LRA groups in the CAR, and the relative saturation of "Come Home" defection messaging there. Six of the ten adults who escaped the LRA in Quarter 1 2014 were influenced by Come Home defection messages delivered by fliers, helicopter speakers, or FM and shortwave radio.

Defections of Ugandan male combatants from the LRA | January 2012–March 2014

- ● Ugandan LRA combatant defection, 2012
- ● Ugandan LRA combatant defection, 2013
- ● Ugandan LRA combatant defection, 2014
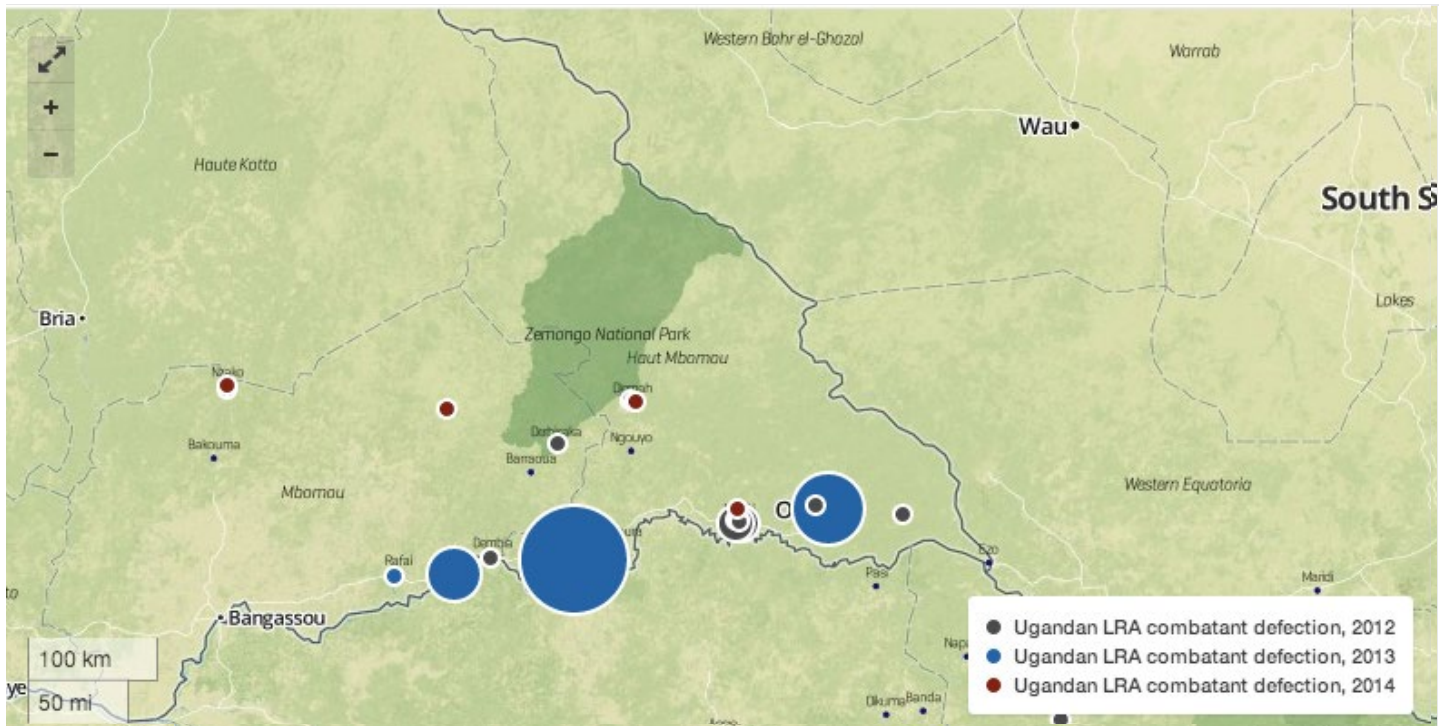
Note: Each circle represents one defection incident. The size of each circle is proportionate to the number of Ugandan LRA combatants who defected during that incident.

VI. Background

SUMMARY *This section contains more information about the LRA Crisis Tracker, including the methodology used to verify reports of LRA activity. It also includes information about The Resolve LRA Crisis Initiative and Invisible Children.*

About the LRA Crisis Tracker

Data reflected in this brief was collected as part of the Invisible Children + The Resolve LRA Crisis Initiative LRA Crisis Tracker, a geospatial database and reporting project which aims to track incidents of violent conflict in areas of Central Africa affected by the Lord's Resistance Army. Through publication of regular reports and open-source sharing of collected data, the LRA Crisis Tracker aims to help overcome the current deficit of relevant and timely information related to the LRA crisis and to support improved policy and humanitarian responses.

In the interest of continually strengthening the LRA Crisis Tracker dataset, The Resolve and Invisible Children welcome new sources of current or historical reports of LRA activity. To contribute information to the LRA Crisis Tracker project, please contact The Resolve at paul@theresolve.org.

Further resources

For a real-time, geospatial look at LRA activity, or to download the data found within this brief please visit the LRA Crisis Tracker Map at: LRACrisisTracker.com.

The Resolve LRA Crisis Initiative

The Resolve LRA Crisis Initiative is a Washington D.C.-based advocacy organization seeking to move US and international political leaders to take the actions needed to see a permanent end to the violence of the Lord's Resistance Army in central Africa and justice to LRA-affected communities.

Invisible Children

Invisible Children is an international NGO working to help permanently end LRA violence and assist affected communities in East and Central Africa by expanding community-based early warning systems, engaging potential LRA defectors and affected communities through FM radio, and supporting the rehabilitation of formerly-abducted persons.

LRA Crisis Tracker Methodology

1. Data Collection

Report sourcing:

- HF radio operators in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic
- Civilians report activity to HF radio tower operators
- Over 70 HF radio operators call the Dungu and Obo hubs twice daily to report armed group activity
- Activity is entered into a spreadsheet and then sent to data coders
- UN and NGO reports
- News and media outlets
- Civil society contacts in local communities

- Government sources
- Field research conducted by Resolve and Invisible Children staff

Sourcing coverage: LRA Crisis Tracker Database team members make every effort to obtain data from all LRA-affected regions. Due to the remote nature of LRA-affected areas, the sourcing infrastructure available to project administrators is uneven across the geographic area of concern, and data included in the Database is often of better quality in areas with higher NGO and news agency traffic. The LRA Crisis Tracker Database does not claim to be a comprehensive record of all LRA or related incidents in the region, but team members make every effort to fill in areas where the data may not be easily accessible.

Note: The majority of the information gathering systems are located in Congo, leading to a disproportional amount of LRA reports from DRC. In upcoming months both Invisible Children and CRS, funded by USAID, will expand information gathering systems in CAR, hoping to improve access to information in the region.

1. Data Entry

Database entry: Reports are divided between a team of coders from both Invisible Children and Resolve. Coders determine if the source is reliable or unreliable (See section 4.2.B of the Codebook, Determining the Reliability of a Source). Before an incident is reported, the coder reads through other incidents in the same time range and checks for duplicates.

Verification rating: After an incident is categorized, each incident is given a Verification Rating, which rates the team's confidence in the details of the reported data. Each incident is given a rating of "1" through "5," with "1" being the most unreliable and "5" being very reliable. The rating is based on the trustworthiness of the source, confidence in the identity of the actors involved in the incident, and the degree of detail given in the source report. A verification rating of "2" through "5" is considered adequately verified to be reported publicly, and therefore is included in statistics and analysis (Codebook section 4.2A).

LRA Actor Verification rating: To distinguish between LRA and other armed group attacks, the Crisis Tracker Codebook has a list of LRA Indicators and Non-LRA Indicators. If after reviewing the indicators and other available evidence the data coder determines that the perpetrator of an attack was likely the LRA, the incident is given an LRA Actor Verification rating, 'Low,' 'Medium,' or 'High,' to measure the likelihood of the perpetrator being LRA. (Codebook section 4.2C.) If after reviewing an incident the coder determines that the LRA was not the perpetrator and the perpetrator is unknown, Actor 1 is marked as 'Armed Group' and the incident is not mapped.

3. Data Review

Initial review: Each report is reviewed by a second data coder to catch human errors and duplicate reports. Coders look for incidents that are alike in detail, and have a relatively close time frame and location. These incidents are then investigated to ensure that they are not duplicate reports.

Expert review: IC and Resolve staff with field experience review sensitive incidents immediately and review all incidents every three months. Should this staff member feel an incident was misreported, the incident is corrected and potentially unmapped. External LRA and regional experts are consulted as necessary.

4. Data Mapping & Sharing

Data mapping: After an incident is entered and approved to be mapped, it appears on the LRA Crisis Tracker website. Only incidents involving the LRA or persons formerly abducted by the LRA and given a Verification rating of '2' or higher are mapped.

Data sensitivity: Sensitive information such as specific sources, names, information on security forces, and personal information about minors is not shared publicly.

Data sharing: Data is regularly sent to UN agencies and humanitarian practitioners for comparison and collaboration.

5. Data Revamp

As the database grows and policies are updated to reflect best practices, data coders revisit and "revamp" the data when needed.

With the establishment of the HF Radio Network and expanded reporting mechanisms in the region, incident reporting has become more detailed and the database has been adapted to reflect this. Fields including information on age and gender of victims, and goods looted have been added since the beginning of the database. Coders periodically revisit all incidents and reports to include the new details and fields.

6. Data Analysis & Reporting

Crisis Tracker staff analyze data for trends and patterns in LRA activity. For instance, coders look for trends in the age and gender of abducted persons, net recruitment (total abductions- total returnees), and increases in a certain type of attack. Coders also look for new traits and patterns in LRA activity.

Specific areas and provinces are also analyzed for increases or decreases in number and type of attack.

After analysis has been completed and reviewed, it is reported in various Crisis Tracker reports.

Definitions

Attack:

An incident is considered an "attack" in the Brief if LRA activity results in one of the following human rights violations: violence resulting in death or injury, sexual or gender based violence, abduction, looting, or displacement. For detailed definitions of these human rights abuses, please refer to section 4.5 of the LRA Crisis Tracker Map Methodology and Database Codebook v1.6.

Killing:

An incident is regarded as a "killing" if there is a violent act that results in the death of an individual who is not known to be associated with an armed group or security force. Civilian deaths resulting from injuries sustained from an attack are considered a "killing." Also, if a civilian is killed while in LRA captivity, it is considered a "killing" if it occurs within one week of the initial abduction. For a detailed explanation of incidents that are categorized as a "killing," please refer to section 4.5.1 of the LRA Crisis Tracker Map Methodology and Database Codebook v1.6.

Abduction:

An incident is regarded as an "abduction" if it involves one or more persons taken hostage against their will by the LRA for any period of time, including civilians who are abducted and released or escape in the same day. A short-term abduction is considered any abduction that is 72 hours or less in duration. This does not necessarily mean that abductions that are not short-term are long-term as there may not be a report of the abducted person's return. For a detailed explanation of incidents categorized as "abductions" or "short-term abductions," please refer to section 4.5.2 of the LRA Crisis Tracker Map Methodology and Database Codebook v1.6.

Returnees:

A "returnee" is considered anyone who escapes, is released, is rescued, or defects from LRA captivity. It also includes all LRA members who are captured. For a detailed explanation of data relating to returnees, please refer to section 4.5.2 of the LRA Crisis Tracker Map Methodology and Database Codebook v1.6.

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