

Section IV - Military Context

Geography

The current LRA area of operations covers territory roughly the size of the southern half of France. It is intersected by borders separating the DRC, CAR, South Sudan and Uganda and includes open savannah, open canopy forest and close canopy jungle. It is believed that the LRA preferred administrative area is centered in Garamba Park, in north eastern DRC. Roads are poor or impassable in much of the area though there are several main routes that have been recently improved or under rehabilitation. The region is drained by a number of tributary rivers that impede passage during the rainy season, including the Garamba, Dungu and Kibali. The region is inhabited by the Azande as well as other smaller ethnic groups practicing farming, fishing and hunting and gathering. Mbororo cattle herders follow traditional patterns of migration following seasonal availability of pasturage. Most settled inhabitants live in scattered small villages or on homesteads.

Communications are poor with cell phone coverage only in major centers like Dungu, Yambio and Faradje. There are several HF radio communications facilities operated by religious missions or NGOs scattered through the region. Rainfall patterns have become slightly unpredictable but the seasons are generally separated according to rainfall (rains from September through December and February through April). Terrain in the southern part of the region is very heavily forested with thinning cover and longer dry seasons going north.

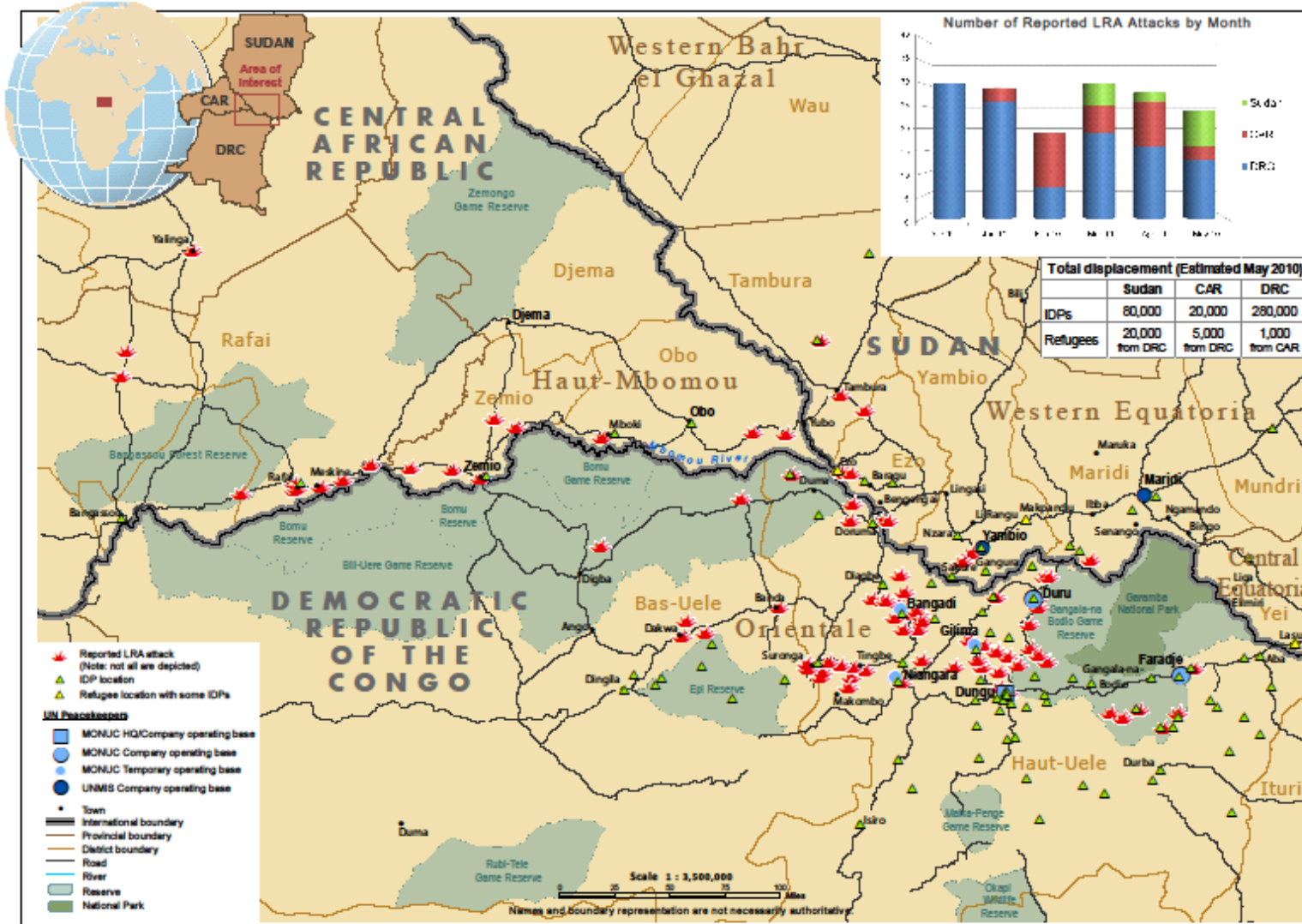
Though the research team attempted to find a correlation between rainfall, harvest cycles or other natural recurring phenomena and LRA operations, no observable pattern was discernable during the past several years. However, there is a curious paradox in Kony's need to live off the land in the very areas where the egregious effect of his operations is to empty the land of the host population. The LRA are parasitic to the extent that they produce nothing of their own and depend on the production of others for all their logistical requirements.¹³¹

The LRA have devoted considerable effort to ensuring that they know their chosen areas of operation well. As mentioned in Section II, there is at least one documented case in which they have captured a park ranger for the specific purpose of collecting detailed geographical information. From reports of former abductees it is clear that many captives abducted over the years have been used for the same purpose. In addition, the LRA strategy of multiple abductions across their areas of operation ensures them a ready supply of guides and interpreters.

The map below depicts the LRA area of operations and provides some data on displacement and LRA incidents.

¹³¹ The LRA have been known to plant crops in areas in Garamba Park, DRC and near Juba, Sudan during periods of relative peace.

Lord's Resistance Army
 Reported Attacks (Dec 2009 - May 2010), Displacement, and Peacekeepers



LRA characteristics and capacities

The structure and organization of the LRA have been described above. To review, significant characteristics and capacities that affect military operations include:

- A unified command structure with a capacity for central control of small group independent (or semi-independent) operations through a system that combines strategic guidelines with tactical freedom.
- Charismatic leadership based on skillful use of fear, discipline, demonstrated survival skills and cultural and religious beliefs.
- A demonstrated capacity for analysis and development of attack plans designed for specific purposes such as incapacitating local defenses, terrorizing local populations or exploiting boundaries between opposing forces.
- A demonstrated preference for extreme physical violence as well as deliberate psychological operations against civilian targets.
- High off-road mobility on foot. The LRA has been reported as able to cover up to 50 kilometers per day cross country.
- The ability to understand the pros and cons of appropriate technologies such as GPS, satellite and cell phones.¹³²
- The capacity to understand the vulnerabilities of the above and to adapt accordingly.
- The ability to recruit and train new fighters by a combination of force, psychological conditioning and effective training.
- The capacity to conduct well-coordinated attacks, sometimes very close to government or UN military installations, and to escape.¹³³
- The capacity to operate at night.
- Excellent battlefield and operational discipline.
- The proven capacity to thrive in hostile environments and among people who both hate and fear them.
- A capacity to live off the land indefinitely.

Taking into account the long period of alleged Sudanese support, one must also assume a certain level of advanced training shared among the senior officers of the LRA. In addition, the way in which the LRA conducted large-scale atrocities in response to the actual or reporting of military operations against them suggests a fine understanding of the role of the international media. Finally, the pattern of small-scale killings and abductions over the past 16 months suggests some uncertainty among LRA leaders about the possibility of a more serious international response, particularly by the USA. This in itself is cause for concern that the LRA leadership may have understood the importance of Information Operations and may be intentionally keeping the level of violence below the international radar.

Successful guerilla forces of the 20th century largely followed Mao Tse Tung's dictum that they should "swim among the people like fish in the sea." Doing so offers two major benefits: (1) direct operational (particularly intelligence) and logistics support during the operational phase of a revolution, and (2)

¹³² Interview with Opiyo Makas, former LRA Operations Officer working directly under Vincent Otti, Ndjili Airport, December, 2007. Makas turned over his GPS along with a detailed explanation of how the LRA used waypoints for prearranged meetings. He also explained how they used Sat phones and solar chargers within their overall communications standard operation procedures.

¹³³ The attack on Faradje on the night of 8 February 2011 took place within a kilometer of a MONUSCO company operating base – UN Security Meeting, Dungu, 11 Feb 2011.

increased political support for a victorious guerilla force once the revolution succeeded. To build off this imagery, the LRA swims among the people like hungry sharks, making no effort to win their support. One consequence of this is that an indeterminate portion of their fighting force consists of forced recruits, many of whom are children. The LRA simply takes what it needs by force and deliberately alienates itself from popular support in the process. One intentional effect of this strategy is that it ensures a hostile reception for any would be escapee. Of course, it should be noted that the LRA are not the only guerilla force to use these sorts of strategies.¹³⁴

This is one way in which the LRA leadership applies an idea familiar to students of Sun Tzu in which one of the arts of a skillful commander is to maneuver his own troops into dangerous positions so that they have no option but to fight. It is important when trying to understand Kony's tactics to see that much of what he does is intended to ensure the cohesiveness of his command. This may include deliberate orders to commit atrocities so that the senior commanders who lead particular operations believe themselves trapped by fear of ICC indictment. However, in adapting a deliberate strategy of terror, Kony prejudices any hope of political legitimacy in the eyes of the communities he has targeted and undermines the credibility of negotiations precisely because of the consistent pattern of his past behavior.

The LRA strategy of terror and forced recruitment creates both opportunities and challenges for opposing forces. In the first place, there is likely to be a significant number of hostages on the LRA side of any confrontation. These may include active combatants at various stages of "conversion" and/or recently captured prisoners. It would be contradictory to conduct military operations in the name of protection that resulted in consistently high casualty rates among the population of LRA hostages. However, in cases where hostages are in fact forced recruits and are being used in an attack against civilians, it will be very difficult to avoid treating them as combatants. At the same time, the presence of new abductees slows down the LRA if they are in flight (particularly when fleeing from the sight of an attack). Hostages force the LRA to devote military resources to guard or control them (dependent of course on the level of confidence in their loyalty) and forces LRA leaders to choose between losing recruits and their own safety.

The LRA has been successful in adapting its tactics and strategies to the risks posed by advanced reconnaissance and surveillance techniques. These adaptations include skillful use of dispersion, camouflage, excellent use of natural cover and operating over long periods and distances without the use of radios or phones. It has not been possible to intercept communications traffic for nearly two years and yet the LRA continues to operate and may even occasionally unite for command meetings and specific operations.¹³⁵

In addition to normal humanitarian and law-of-war considerations in these situations, LRA commanders must take into account the likely presence in the area of numbers of international NGOs and UN agencies with access to international media. Operational successes and failures will be observed and reported, which might influence political decisions affecting the campaign.

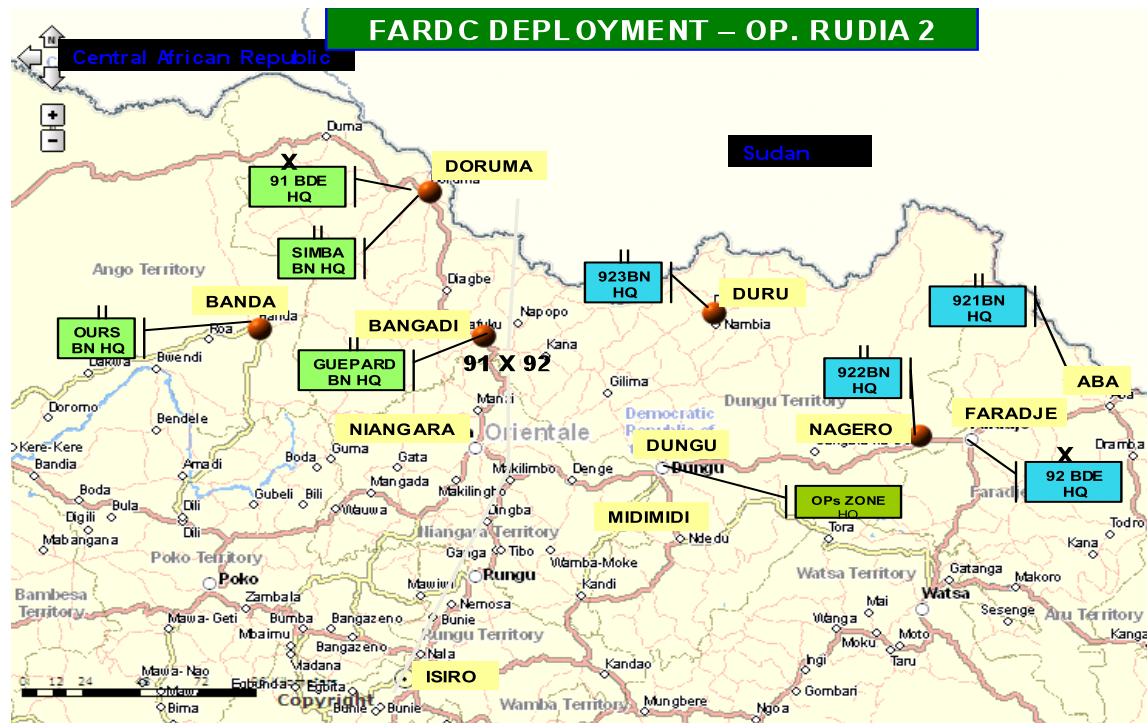
¹³⁴ A broader study of this subject would generate a number of comparable cases but is beyond the scope of this paper. Comments here are intended solely for the purpose of indicating particular characteristics that should be kept in mind during operational planning.

¹³⁵ Confidential interview with knowledgeable military source, Kampala, March 2011.

Available forces

There is no single military force structure incorporating all the forces engaged in operations against the LRA. There is, however, a loose coalition comprised of the following forces:

- **DRC**
 - FARDC – two brigades of lightly armed infantry deployed as per the map below



Source: MONUSCO briefing dated 16 Feb 2011

- MONUSCO: a small Joint Intelligence and Operations Centre, one battalion of Moroccan infantry and one company of Uruguayan special forces both equipped on UN Peacekeeping scales, 6 transport helicopters, deployed in Dungu, Faradje and Niangara.
- UPDF: a pursuit force of approximately 1,500 men including tracking units and some rented civilian light transport helicopters. Their headquarters is in Nzara, near Yambio, in South Sudan, and deployment of forces is considered confidential.
- SPLA: A brigade-sized force of light infantry headquartered near Yambio.
- FACA: Approximately 150 light infantry headquartered in Obo.

Unfortunately, the information above is of little use without an accompanying detailed analysis of forces deployed and their operational capabilities, equipment, intentions, deployment, mobility, leadership, morale, logistics, medical and other technical military factors beyond the capacity of the Diagnostic Study Research Team. However, the following passing observations are included in hopes of helping orient future research:

- FARDC military leadership in Dungu denies the presence of the LRA in DRC and believes that all recent attacks can be attributed to bandits or undisciplined elements of other armies.¹³⁶
- FARDC units are mistrusted by local communities in DRC and accused of harassing their own civilians instead of protecting them.¹³⁷ They have had little success against the LRA and a very poor record of operational reliability and respect for human rights.
- MONUSCO troops operate from fixed administrative positions, in daylight, and do not patrol off road or pursue LRA units. Their reactions to attack are limited to securing the scene after the fact. They have neither the mandate nor the equipment to conduct more aggressive operations but can, and do, provide limited logistical support to the FARDC.
- UPDF troops have been essentially inactive since mid-2010 and have reported few recent successes. Their forces are not well coordinated with other forces in the region and are not directly linked to protection operations. Moreover, there seems to be an increasing priority to use reliable troops to handle domestic security issues in Uganda so one may expect a further reduction in numbers, as already noted, substantially down from 2009 levels.
- FACA is operationally and logistically ineffective against a force as dispersed and as mobile as the LRA.
- The only indirect fire support available to any of the forces deployed is helicopter gunships; which do not fly at night and have weather limitations well known to the LRA.

¹³⁶ Interview Col Bruno, Commander, FARDC LRA operations, Dungu, Feb 2011.

¹³⁷ Interview, civil society leader, Dungu, Feb 2011.