

Assessing the Wildlife Conservation & Terrorism Nexus: Profiling Documented Attacks

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ABSTRACT

- As our understanding of the crime-terror nexus broadens, many organizations have begun to cite a potentially strong link between wildlife crimes and terrorist financing as a threat to both wildlife conservation efforts and national security. Although this claim has gained momentum in recent years, there is little literature to substantiate significant overlap between the two nefarious activities, illustrating the controversial nature of the subject. In this study, the extent of the wildlife crime and terrorism nexus will be investigated in order to determine whether the current level of concern for this issue is warranted. Following the high-profile killing of conservationist Rory Young, this project focuses on the nexus between terrorism and wildlife conservation on the African continent. Thirteen countries were selected based on rates of biodiversity and terrorist activity for inclusion in this analysis. A comprehensive database was developed, compiling recorded attacks on wildlife conservation entities in connection to terrorist groups within a twenty-year span. Thus far, approximately fifteen attacks related to terrorism and wildlife conservation have been logged. This figure suggests the issue is prevalent enough that it should not be overlooked, while also supporting the notion that the media has arguably overstated the magnitude or severity of the issue and its threat to national security.

BACKGROUND

Key Information Surrounding this Controversial Subject

- The wildlife crime and terrorism nexus is often cited by various organizations as a threat to national security, despite limited evidence to substantiate the claim
- The topic of a possible intersection between wildlife conservation and terrorist activity or financing is hotly contested within academia
- The killing of the widely known Irish conservationist Rory Young has caused this topic to attract more attention and discussion, especially by media
- This potential connection between terrorism, wildlife crimes and conservation efforts has been used to highlight the conservation crisis our wildlife faces globally

OBJECTIVES

- To determine whether a nexus exists between terrorism and wildlife conservation, and to what extent
- To assess the extent to which this intersection (or lack thereof) threatens national security
- To profile documented events of attacks against wildlife conservation entities by known terrorist groups or armed militias and analyze media reporting

METHODS

- A comprehensive database was developed to categorize attacks against wildlife conservation entities in association with terrorist organizations versus non-attacks
- Countries for data inclusion were based on high rates of terrorism and biodiversity according to the Terrorism Index and Environmental Performance Index respectively, for a total of thirteen countries on the African continent
- Data selection was based on the following five criteria: time frame, location, result, perpetrators and target



- Map of country inclusion and exclusion in Africa for the purposes of this research project

FINDINGS – ATTACKS

A	B	C	
News Source	Date	Language	Country
JSTOR	1-Nov-19	English	RDC
Le monde	4/11/2018	French	RDC
Google/ The Washington	9/13/2020	English	Burkina Faso
John Jay Library	6/22/2019	English	Nigeria
Google	10/25/2013	English	Kenya/ Somalia

E	
Target (ex. Person, Organization, Tourist)	Terrorist Group
Civilian / Elephant	Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)
Park gardien / Montain gorillas	Maï-Maï
Elephants / Lions/ Rangers	Al-Qaeda
Wildlife/ Rangers/ Soldiers	Cameroonian-armed poachers
Elephants/ Rhino	LRA/ Al-shabaab/ Darfur's Janjaweed

- Between thirteen and fifteen qualifying sources have been identified
- Twelve sources have been identified in the attacks section as potentially qualifying if more information is found to help make that determination

FINDINGS – NON-ATTACKS

CITES		English	Africa/ Asia
John Jay Library	8/18/2014	English	Cameroon
John Jay Library	Sep-15	English	Africa
John Jay Library	2020, April	English	DRC
GEO.FR	29/08/2016	French	Cameroon
Elephants	Ivory trafficker	Africa/ Asia	
Rhinos/ Elephant	Al Shabaab	Meru National Par	
Elephants/ people	LRA	National Parks	
Elephants/ Rhino	Ranger/ Poach	Garamba National	
Pangolin/ Rhino/ Elephant	Pochers	Bouandjida Natio	

CONCLUSIONS

- Based on our current findings and progress in this research project, we have determined there does exist a nexus between wildlife conservation and terrorist activity
- While the evidence collected thus far does support some degree of a wildlife conservation and terrorism nexus, we do believe some organizations and media outlets have overstated the magnitude of the issue
- The degree to which terrorist activity is funded by wildlife crimes may warrant further investigation, but we hypothesize our data will not suggest this potential source of funding poses a significant threat to national security