

## CHAPTER 3

# ANATOMY OF THE LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY

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### Background

It is against this background that Joseph Kony's LRA has waged a relentless war across northern Uganda for the past 17 years. It is estimated that between 20 000 and 25 000 children,<sup>52</sup> including girls used as both commanders' wives and fighters, have been kidnapped since the LRA began operations. Indeed, the group is one of the most brutal across the globe, forcing young children to kill and torture soon after capture, making them massacre their own communities to create a "clean break" with the past, and coercing abductees to walk for miles with their hands tied together with rope. The LRA, which originally consisted of 200 core fighters, currently comprises approximately 3 000 child combatants, most of whom are not allowed to carry a gun, and 150-200 armed commanders.<sup>53</sup> Although a peace deal was close to being reached between the Government of Uganda and the LRA in 1994, the LRA turned to Sudan for arms and military training that same year and has been substantially better equipped since that time – at times better equipped than the UPDF. There are few resources that can be sold for arms in northern Uganda, and thus the Sudanese strategic assistance has been a critical supply line. Indeed, the LRA's entire resource base rests on raiding farms, abducting children and getting a relatively small supply of small arms from Sudan.<sup>54</sup>

Kony himself is shrouded in a veil of secrecy: on the one hand he is presented as a disorganised criminal who can be quickly and easily crushed, and on the other he is portrayed as an invincible messenger of God whom no bullets can penetrate. A BBC reporter confirmed what RLP found in the field: "Little is known about the rebel leader ... and it is clear that this is exactly how he likes it. He has created an aura of fear and mysticism around himself which is an image difficult to dispel."<sup>55</sup> Given this confusion, numerous labels have been used to describe Kony and the LRA: "lunatic", "irrational", "inexplicable", "terrorist bandits", and "thugs". These caricatures have had important practical implications, making it hard to know what strategies would be most effective in ending the war.

In addition, there is an important spiritual dimension to the LRA, although the group is not a cult. Kony uses his spiritual and biblical revelations to manipulate people much like a cult leader, but does not appear to brainwash them heavily: most LRA members end up believing in his spiritual power, but they are not mesmerised by his presence. Kony has a multi-layered spiritual vision, but he also uses this spiritualism to maintain control, starting with his overall vision of liberation and destruction and continuing with individual spirits that “guide” specific military tactics. Thus the following section seeks to give a fuller explanation of why and how Kony’s LRA is fighting, based on interviews with ex-combatants and others who have had direct or indirect contact with Kony. It is important to note that the RLP was unable to interview Kony himself.

## What drives the LRA?

### *The spiritual dimension*

Born into a family of peasant farmers with “a reputation for mysticism”,<sup>56</sup> Kony has an important spiritual dimension that motivates him. The evidence suggests that Kony, at least some of the time, believes he is fulfilling a spiritual, not a political, vision as a messenger of God. As one intermediary who has made contact with top LRA commanders commented, “Kony believes he is the true man of God sent by God to save the Acholi.”<sup>57</sup> Seemingly strange at first, upon closer examination the vision appears to have a more coherent logic. According to sources familiar with him during his early days as a commander with the UPDA, Kony believed he was

sent by God to liberate humanity from disease and suffering. But, he added, he had discovered that healing was senseless as long as those who were healed were killed. He had resolved to fight to destroy all those who wanted to fight. The struggle would last until no one had the wish to fight any longer. He said he had not come to topple the government, but to destroy the evil forces in the world ... He wanted justice and righteousness to reign throughout the country.<sup>58</sup>

His early actions confirm such a belief. For example, Kony initially wanted to gain the support of the northern population and broke away from the UPDA in November 1987, allegedly to punish them for their unjust plundering and terrorising of the population.<sup>59</sup> According to one researcher, “He wanted to

build up a trans-ethnic movement, but failed” and tried to unite different northern rebellions into one group.<sup>60</sup>

The origins of Kony’s vision must be understood in the context of the Acholi socio-political crisis, as discussed above. Like Alice Lakwena before him, Kony believed he had spiritual powers and could lead the Acholi out of this difficult time. However, other Acholi leaders rejected his prophecy, a rejection that Kony took badly. After he asked Alice for support, for example, she mocked him and told him he should use his limited spiritual powers to become a doctor or a healer, but not to lead a rebellion. Kony reportedly left in silence following Lakwena’s monologue and later allegedly told his followers that he was deeply insulted by her rebuff.<sup>61</sup>

The LRA’s spiritual dimension is in part explained by traditional cultural beliefs. In many African communities, as well as elsewhere in the world, social and cultural problems are interpreted through spiritual media. In particular, calamities afflicting communities are seen as punishment for wrongs that the people themselves committed, and therefore there is a need for atonement and cleansing, or to repulse the evil spirit tormenting them. Kony believes that there is something wrong in “Acholiland” and thinks he can engage in spiritual cleansing to address that wrong. However, while he interprets the problem within this traditional spiritual worldview, he then perverts it to fit his own views rather than the accepted Acholi standard. His justification of violence comes because the people have refused to back him. This is where he departs from the Acholi tradition whereby life is held sacred, to his personal interpretation of the Bible where he can select certain verses to justify the use of violence on those who have refused to support him. Importantly, all the Acholi traditional leaders interviewed by RLP clearly reject Kony’s spiritual vision and denounce him as a false prophet. As an Acholi elder in Kitgum said, “Kony says he has spirits, but this should be traditionally investigated. We do not see it that way. The origin of this conflict is based on genuine grievances, but any misguided person can try and abuse it.”<sup>62</sup>

Despite Kony’s early dismissal by his potential allies, he continued to claim to have biblical revelations into the 1990s, visions that have allegedly become increasingly apocalyptic and destructive over time. During the late 1980s, the LRA concentrated its attacks mainly on government troops<sup>63</sup> but from 1992 began focusing on civilian targets. As several authors correctly point out, the change in strategy is explained by Kony’s desire to take revenge on a civilian population that, in 1991–1992, fought against the LRA in government-sponsored “Bow and Arrow” civil defence units instead of lending their support to

the LRA.<sup>64</sup> RLP interviews confirm this hypothesis. Kony reportedly told one abductee, “if the Acholi don’t support us, they must be finished”<sup>65</sup> and then justified his new approach by a different spiritual revelation. He is also alleged to have told LRA members in the bush, “God said in the Bible, ‘I will unleash my wrath upon you and you will suffer pain. And in the end you will be killed by the sword. Your children will be taken into captivity and will be burnt to death.’”<sup>66</sup>

This quote is disturbingly similar to what has taken place on the ground during LRA raids since 1992: the soldiers have burnt villages, abducted children and used pangas (machetes) to kill civilians. As one formerly abducted girl elaborated, “[Kony] said even in the Bible people died and if it is time for you to die, you must die. It’s not Kony who has killed you but God, because your time has come.”<sup>67</sup> As another ex-combatant added, “The rebels were indoctrinating us saying government wants to kill us and finish Acholis, Teso and Langis.”<sup>68</sup>

### ***A political agenda?***

In addition to the spiritual dimension outlined above, there is considerable debate within the discourse on the war as to whether or not the LRA has a political agenda. Having a political agenda is seen by many of those commenting on the war as a precondition for conducting negotiations with Kony, and his apparent lack of a clear political programme has generated considerable confusion. This lack of clarity was reflected on the ground: some respondents in the conflict zone expressed the belief that he has no political agenda, while others said that Kony may have an agenda but that it was not yet articulated.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, many interviewees were profoundly confused about the fact that Kony claimed to be fighting for them, yet was killing and abducting them at the same time.<sup>70</sup> As one northern politician said, “Now the LRA say that their agenda is democracy, multi-partyism, land, etc. They even claim they are upset by rigged elections! Ha! They are just jumping on the bandwagon – any bandwagon that comes.”<sup>71</sup>

Ex-combatants expressed a similar level of confusion. On the one hand, when asked what they were taught in the bush, some ex-LRA combatants talked of being brutally warned against escape and taught how to use a gun, not systematically indoctrinated in anti-government propaganda. One former abductee said, “First they tell you that if you escape, you will be killed. They tied up my friend and beat her in public. I don’t know why Kony is fighting,

we didn't see him."<sup>72</sup> Or, as an ex-rebel said, "I think Kony is just deceiving the children. He doesn't have the guns to defeat the government."<sup>73</sup> However, other ex-combatants reported that Kony told them that he is fighting to overthrow the government and mentioned issues such as land and the "overstayed rule of the Banyankole".<sup>74</sup> In particular, many interviews revealed the extent to which Kony showed clear distrust of the President. As one ex-combatant said, "What the rebels say is 'until we overthrow the government, we will keep on fighting.' He is not pleased with a foreigner ruling us. He says the president is punishing the people here in the north, by forcing people into camps, so much dying, no food."<sup>75</sup> Likewise, as a senior official elaborated, "Kony is emotionally charged, since Museveni was the one who overthrew them from power."<sup>76</sup> In an LRA press release, the group articulates its grievances against the president:

[The] oppressive rule and mismanagement of the country by Kaguta Museveni ... LRM/A believes that there [sic] grievance against Museveni can only be solved through dialogue if Museveni could be serious about [sic] ending the war ... the lack of seriousness and ill intention [illegible] agenda by Museveni and his loyalists ... .<sup>77</sup>

The LRA reportedly stopped its attacks and told the population to vote for the opposition during the 1996 presidential elections,<sup>78</sup> although this cease-fire was evidently orchestrated by exiles in London claiming to be leaders of the *Lord's Resistance Movement*.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, Kony fell out with these individuals in the diaspora soon afterwards, as he saw them as trying to hijack the LRA for their own ends. Few other politicians have tried to collaborate with Kony, since "his methods embarrass those who support him or those who would like to support him because they don't like Museveni."<sup>80</sup> Reform Agenda politician James Opoka, for example, was allegedly killed by the LRA in 2002 for trying to transform the group by giving it a more coherent and legitimate political programme.

The apparent confusion over the LRA's political agenda arises partly because the LRA does not fit conventional definitions of a political insurgency: it does not engage civilians in political mobilisation or indoctrination, and has rejected several attempts by people outside the LRA command structure to adopt a political agenda.<sup>81</sup> However, its failure to fit easily within accepted paradigms does not necessarily mean that it is devoid of political content, or that political issues relating to northern Uganda could not be part of its grievances. Indeed, two possibilities emerge from what is known of the LRA.

First, that Kony has a political agenda but is very poor at articulating it. Having dropped out of school at P-7 level, it is possible that he lacks a clear understanding of political processes and state power, and is therefore unable to translate his dissatisfaction with the government into a recognisable political insurgency or even an opposition political party. Kony's rejection of previous political agendas originating from UPDM mobiliser Otunu Lukonyomoi,<sup>82</sup> Ugandan exile leaders, and northern politicians does not necessarily mean that he has no political goals; he may have been rejecting ambitious leaders seeking to impose their own agendas on the LRA, or their ideas may simply not have accorded with his view of the world. Second, it is possible that Kony is motivated by both power and fear – the power he and his commanders derive from controlling an armed insurgency, spreading fear among the population in northern and eastern Uganda, and having numerous wives in the bush, and fear that if he emerges from the bush, he will be killed or tried for war crimes.

Despite extensive interviews with ex-combatants and people in contact with the rebel leader, RLP cannot say definitively which version, if either, is correct. Whether the LRA has a political agenda should not, however, become the pivotal point for understanding Kony or for resolving the conflict. Instead, a more flexible approach to understanding what motivates the LRA is needed: trying to impose rigid definitions onto this protracted conflict only generates confusion and prevents more complex understandings of Kony's worldview from emerging.

## Recent dynamics within the LRA

In addition to the spiritual and political dynamics already explored, three additional issues have played a significant role in further fuelling the LRA conflict. First, Kony's inner core of fighters currently fear for their physical survival if they surrender – an anxiety fed by three possible factors. In the past, Acholi military leaders were rounded up and killed by government forces after being recalled to the barracks to disarm in 1971 under Idi Amin. The memories of this event are reported still to haunt LRA commanders and make them sceptical of the government's Amnesty Act. As one ex-LRA fighter reported, "There is a man called [former UPDA commander Kenneth] Kilama. After peace talks, he changed and joined Museveni and gave Museveni his soldiers. Then they turned against him and killed him. So Kony fears that if he surrenders, the same will happen to him."<sup>83</sup> In addition, the LRA's vicious atrocities, such as Vincent Otti's massacre of between 170 and 220 civilians in his own village of Atiak, mean that the commanders "are haunted by their own curses."<sup>84</sup>

Furthermore, the government's persistent vitriolic rhetoric, about "annihilating" and "hunting down" the LRA, fuel this fear, making it difficult for the rebels to believe they will be safe if a peace deal is reached. As one ex-rebel said, "The rebels in the bush wondered, saying 'This amnesty law must be effective. Do you think the government will not kill us?'"<sup>85</sup> Another junior commander asked, "My query is, is the amnesty really true? Many people who try to come back are killed. What about me who grew up in the bush and fought for fifteen years. Will I be pardoned?"<sup>86</sup>

Second, after 17 years of conflict, many informants speculated that Kony continues fighting because it has become a way of life that both allows him easy access to resources, and gives him influence and authority he could never have achieved as a peasant labourer in northern Uganda. As one UPDF commander argued, "Peasants in the LRA have attained a life they can't sustain if they come out. They are used to freely getting what they want."<sup>87</sup> An ex-combatant confirmed this: "All the good food such as chicken, meat, goats, cows and groundnuts are given to rebel commanders. The recruit eats ... half-boiled cassava and potatoes."<sup>88</sup> Top-level privileges are not limited to food: "The commanders chose their wives first, and later gave us the ones they had had."<sup>89</sup> Photographs of the LRA viewed by RLP reveal commanders relaxing with many wives and children in new-looking army uniforms and sitting alongside highly sophisticated weaponry.<sup>90</sup> As one high-level source put it, "The LRA is better armed than most African armies. They have 'Anzas' [shoulder-fired missile launchers], 32 wives, and more. What can you offer them here that they don't have in the bush?"<sup>91</sup>

Third, Sudan's re-supply of the LRA has been another factor allowing for the group's durability since 1994. The LRA has been receiving weapons, ammunition, fuel, communications equipment and training from the Sudanese government since 1994, when the Bigombe peace talks failed. Such assistance, provided from Khartoum mainly through its southern militia, the Equatorial Defence Force (EDF), is a source of weapons that Kony would find it difficult to replace. As one senior Ugandan analyst put it, "Kony hasn't been shopping for arms. When his supply is cut off from Sudan, how can he sustain himself?"<sup>92</sup> Sudan began supplying the LRA in response to the Ugandan government's assistance to the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). Khartoum aided the LRA both to destabilise northern Uganda and hinder a free flow of arms to the SPLA. Uganda's support to the latter has now officially halted, although civilian rumours of the continued presence of the SPLA in northern Uganda persist. As a UPDF commander commented, "This conflict [with the LRA] is not new, but it continues because of its proximity to Sudan."<sup>93</sup>

Although Sudan has previously assisted the LRA out of national interest, however, this may be changing depending on the outcome of the current Sudanese peace process in Naivasha, Kenya. Khartoum has been under pressure from the US and UK to stop supporting Kony and his “terrorist group”. The Sudan government regime is seeking to restore diplomatic relations with the international community, in particular so it can begin exporting its newly found oil reserves. Furthermore, following the “Agreement on Security Arrangements” signed between Khartoum and the SPLA in September 2003, some EDF militia commanders have begun making deals with the more powerful SPLA (who will take over security for all of southern Sudan under the agreement) and have even been allegedly fighting the LRA near Juba.<sup>94</sup> Permission by the Sudan government to allow the UPDF to cross into its territory during Operation Iron Fist, as well as recent reports that the Government of Sudan is reducing support to the LRA, both augured a future reduction in the LRA’s access to ready weaponry. As a high-ranking former combatant observed, “By 2001, the relationship between Kony and Sudan was so bad ... Kony got so annoyed that he was shooting at Government of Sudan vehicles. He got really mad. They started fighting civilians in Sudan and collected all the property.”<sup>95</sup>

It is not clear whether Khartoum will abandon its long-time strategic partner entirely. After all, the LRA not only causes insecurity in Uganda, but has also worked together with the Sudanese army in attacking strategic locations such as Torit in 2002.<sup>96</sup> One Ugandan official noted, “The LRA is still getting arms from Sudan, having moved their supply lines beyond the Operation Iron Fist line [where the UPDF is allowed to operate]. They also have arms buried. But the key for me is if Kony doesn’t get resupplied.”<sup>97</sup> However, these combined developments make the LRA’s future look less promising than before, and it appears to be anticipating that its most critical supply line may be cut off.

At the same time, two factors indicate that the LRA can sustain itself for some time without Sudanese support. That it operated for eight years before Khartoum started assistance in 1994 is testimony to this. First, the group uses few high-tech weapons – most attacks are against civilians and are carried out using axes and *pangas* (machetes). Second, Kony has buried what seem to be sizeable arms caches from previous weapons transfers. As one analyst put it, “The LRA is very good at stockpiling. They were putting arms in the Imatong Hills well before Operation Iron Fist. They know how to plan for a rainy day. Besides, their supply needs are very low. They only fire something like a hundred bullets a day.”<sup>98</sup> One ex-junior commander appeared to confirm this suspicion: “We had weapons which we did not know how to use. These came

from outside countries. The ones we don't know how to use, Kony says he will wait for the angel to tell him when and how to use them."<sup>99</sup> Some were more sceptical of the critical nature of the caches: "They have many arms buried ... but if their supplies are cut off [from Sudan], they can survive only for a couple of months."<sup>100</sup>

## LRA tactics

Regardless of the motivation and capacity for Kony and the top LRA commanders to stay in the bush, the strategies the LRA uses to maintain discipline and total control are both effective and horrific. First, Kony's spiritual dimension is a key tool of manipulation, and many in the LRA apparently believe he possesses spiritual powers. As an NGO official who works with ex-combatant children observed, "Some think he is God ... They never question what he has said. They fear him very much."<sup>101</sup> Indeed, a typical response among returned fighters interviewed by the RLP is, "I heard that the evil spirit is in [Kony]. The spirit moves with him. In fact, I believe in this, because whenever he becomes weak, he has to make sacrifices on the mountain in Odek."<sup>102</sup> Some former LRA members, however, were more sceptical: "I cannot believe in the spirit. I think Kony is just deceiving the children. I had fear, because I didn't know the purpose [of the violence]."<sup>103</sup> Indeed, it is small coincidence that the spirits "guide" Kony to employ certain military strategies when they would be most effective. As one former LRA member said,

Kony only does things using the command of the spirits. At one time, Kony brought down an army helicopter near Adilang. He was using a certain gun. Also, when you are crossing a road, the commander goes first and sprinkles water and says prayers. That way, you can cross without getting caught. When you are abducted, you are spread with *shea* butter – they believe that if you escape, it will just bring you back to them.<sup>104</sup>

Other spiritual practices serve a similar purpose. For example, Kony allegedly has a spirit called "Sengsu", who "is the spirit for the commanders. He says when you begin firing your gun, run and don't be afraid."<sup>105</sup> Lack of fear is a well-known military factor that improves battlefield success against the enemy, and Kony clearly uses this spirit to increase his military effectiveness. One researcher further observed, "psychological pressure is maintained through the enforcement of arbitrary behavioural strictures imposed by Kony."<sup>106</sup> Rituals such as not eating for three days, brushing your teeth to be "clean"

before fighting, and smearing *shea* butter in the sign of the cross on your body all create an aura of mysticism that increases faith in Kony's power.

Kony's mysticism also appears to aid the LRA's military campaign against the UPDF by instilling fear into many of the people fighting the group. As one observer in the north noted,

People fear Kony a lot because he's being possessed by spirits. So even the government and the military believe that Kony has spirits. But what is the truth? They believe in witchcraft, and people fear. In the Mayi-Mayi rebellion in the Congo, the soldiers ran away from fear; children would wave twigs and the soldiers would scamper. But then the rebellion ended.<sup>107</sup>

As one senior government official admitted, "It is true that some UPDF troops believe that Kony may have spiritual powers. Some of their lack of vigour in pursuing the rebels can be ascribed to this, though this is far from the only reason why the war has not ended."<sup>108</sup>

### ***An army of children***

Reliance on abducted children has further enabled Kony to maintain his internal grip on the LRA for a number of reasons. First, as has been shown in other conflicts,<sup>109</sup> they are easily malleable to Kony's purposes and are very quick to obey his orders. As one former junior commander noted, "Children copy exactly what is taught during training. They don't pretend."<sup>110</sup> An NGO worker added that Kony "targets children because he can model them and they'll like you."<sup>111</sup> Former rebels from other insurgencies understand the power that children can bring to such a group: "Kony commands thousands of ... children whose allegiance is unquestioned. His power is very strong."<sup>112</sup> Although this impression is slightly exaggerated, in that hundreds of children escape from the LRA every year, the fact remains that Kony uses children as a vital resource.

Second, children, who are used as disposable porters by the LRA, walk quickly and tire slowly. This both increases LRA mobility and enhances its capacity to carry loads of looted goods over long distances – a critical source of the group's resupply line for food, gumboots and cash. As a youth who escaped after one month admitted, "I carried the injured and didn't use the gun. On raids, we would loot food, go into people's homes and ask where the food

was."<sup>113</sup> Another recalled how the slower children were killed: "They looted our home and neighbours, abducting ten boys and four girls. We carried the loot up to Ogili hills. On the way, a small boy of twelve years threw the luggage down because he was tired. He was shot dead immediately."<sup>114</sup> One abducted girl remembered that, "They beat my uncle, then made us carry bombs, grenades, bullets. We walked long distances, and our feet swelled."<sup>115</sup>

Third, forcing children to kill their friends or family members in front of other abductees instils fear and discourages them from escaping. As one ex-rebel who spent eight years in the bush said, "Sometimes they get the new people to kill. You never refuse to kill, otherwise they will kill you."<sup>116</sup> It also forces a clean break with the past, as they are less likely to return to a community where they have murdered and tortured. Finally, atrocities against soft-target civilians spread fear and chaos through the population, a guerrilla warfare tactic that denies intelligence to the government and leaves the rebels free to loot. A single vicious killing can force hundreds of people to flee from their homes in a particular sub-county, leaving behind their planted crops and numerous possessions for easy looting. Again, numerous testimonies bear out this three-pronged logic: "We killed people so that people would fear us,"<sup>117</sup> recollected one ex-combatant. A formerly abducted girl added, "They teach you 'don't fear', otherwise you will be killed. They test your fear; they tell the children to kill an escapee otherwise you are killed. This is not done to everyone, but they see you are weak, and then they test you. They know these things."<sup>118</sup> Kony's manipulative control is comprehensive.

### ***Military operations***

Although the LRA is often portrayed as a band of criminals, such a characterisation is clearly inadequate when applied to a group that has wreaked havoc in northern Uganda for the past 17 years. Not only are its tactics appallingly effective, but the LRA also has significant military ability. As one of the group's former fighters commented, "Kony has no plan, but he has lots of weapons and soldiers."<sup>119</sup> Unlike the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone or Angola, northern Uganda does not have rebellion inducing resources such as diamonds, oil or coltan; this makes the LRA's protracted existence remarkable. As a regional analyst noted, "The LRA have marvellous internal organisation and management. They keep records when they abduct children – who their parents are, etc. They have survived for 17 years on next to nothing."<sup>120</sup> In the absence of natural resources, the LRA uses guerrilla ambush attacks with extreme effectiveness, skills that were probably acquired from UPDA

splinter commander Odong Latek in mid-1988.<sup>121</sup> Fear of the LRA runs to all corners of the north, largely as a result of persistent surprise attacks on villages and roads undertaken by numerous highly mobile groups of 15 that then break up into smaller groups of three to six.<sup>122</sup> Such attacks are usually undertaken deliberately with machetes and axes to spread maximum panic. Thus while the number of casualties may be relatively low compared with other conflicts, the level of displacement is extremely high in northern and eastern Uganda – more than 1,4 million people, including some 80% of the population of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader.<sup>123</sup> One official described the LRA military strategy in more detail:

They go for soft targets and traumatise people. The ferocity of the attacks spreads fear into the population. When this happens, they deny the government intelligence, they drive people from their homes and loot, and then they take the goats, cassava, etc. from their land. The tools they use are terror, concealment and high mobility, tying the children together with ropes and moving very fast.<sup>124</sup>

Such tactics constitute a form of psychological warfare. As one analyst summarised: “The rebels attack civilians because they want publicity and when they strike civilian targets, it will show that the rebels are active. It will be turned around that the government is not protecting people.”<sup>125</sup> However, this strategy has failed in that the civilian population clearly does not support the LRA. It has been tried for years in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader without success, and the recent popular government-sponsored militias against the LRA in Teso and Lango testify further to its failure in these areas. While it is true that the population of almost all of these regions would support a multiparty system, the LRA has failed to translate this opposition to the Movement system into political support. As Gersony notes, “Given the anti-Museveni sentiment of most Acholis, the LRA’s inability to mobilize support – or at least avoid repudiation by its own ethnic base – is remarkable.”<sup>126</sup> Thus, while Kony is unable to convince people to support his ideas, his effective use of military tactics creates fear and maintains instability throughout the region.

Other LRA tactics also reflect well-coordinated military planning. For example, LRA commanders avoid government Mi-24 helicopter gunship attacks by passing uniforms over to child abductees and immediately dispersing into groups of two or three.<sup>127</sup> While children are disposable porters in the LRA’s overall strategy, and the LRA loses nothing militarily when they are gunned down by UPDF troops, the government risks a political backlash for killing children. As one ex-combatant claimed, “The UPDF cannot defeat them,

because it is even possible to evade the gunship. And the place where the weapons are hidden is so tricky – it is difficult to remember. So even if people are captured and told to take the soldiers there, they can't find it."<sup>128</sup>

In summary, this section has sought to show that simply dismissing Kony as a "criminal" or "terrorist" is not only inaccurate but dangerous, as it underestimates the level of military planning and effectiveness of the LRA. Although the authors were unable to meet with Kony himself, this section has sought to analyse a group that has held northern Uganda ransom for the past 17 years, and to explore ways in which its motives can be better grasped, as reaching such levels of understanding is vital in bringing resolution to the situation. However, factors other than the LRA's internal mechanisms have also played a key role in continuing the war, in particular the effect the war has had on the civilian population.