

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The war in northern Uganda is now entering its eighteenth year. Initially rooted in a popular rebellion against President Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) government, the conflict has since been transformed by Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) into a brutally violent war in which civilians are the main victims. More than 1,4 million people have been displaced, and tens of thousands more have been killed, raped or abducted. At first glance, the persistence of the LRA over such a long period is incomprehensible: the majority of the force is made up of kidnapped children held against their will, the LRA is extremely unpopular among civilians because of its brutality and apparent lack of an overarching political agenda, and it operates in an environment without significant natural resources to sell for arms. Indeed, the conflict has not only continued for nearly 18 years, but in 2003 spread significantly east into the Teso and Lango regions.

Based on extensive interviews in Gulu, Kitgum, Lira and Soroti, with additional consultations in Kampala, Luwero, London and Washington, this monograph examines the structural causes that underpin the war, its current dynamics, the implications of the conflict spreading further east, and ideas for resolution. Our findings show that while people living in the north have deep-rooted grievances against the current government, Kony's LRA is a poor expression of these and enjoys no popular support amongst the civilian population. The war is thus two conflicts in one: a multi-faceted northern rebellion against the NRM government whose root causes have never been fully resolved, and a war with an LRA that does not fit conventional models of political insurgency and is motivated, in part, by an Old Testament-style apocalyptic spiritualism.

In addition, the protracted nature of the war has created new conflict dynamics, with many of the war's horrific consequences – such as mass displacement, a perceived war economy, and a military response that often fails to protect communities – having turned into reasons for its continuation. With the population blaming the conflicting parties for such suffering, the ensuing lack of trust has led to intense three-way tensions between the LRA, the

civilian population and the government that has both compromised intelligence gathering, and turned the rebels against civilians. The recent spread of the war has also raised several new issues. The government-sponsored Arrow and Rhino militias in Soroti and Lira, while appearing successful in protecting the populations in their regions in the short-term, are of long-term concern: the arming of over 20,000 civilians may potentially threaten the security of the country.

This monograph begins with an overview of the conflict in northern Uganda, followed by a discussion of the root causes of the war, which highlights crucial causes that must still be addressed today. Chapter 3 presents an in-depth analysis of Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army, and Chapter 4 highlights how the devastating consequences of the war have transformed into continuing causes of conflict. Chapter 5 considers the recent developments that have taken place since the LRA spread its attacks further east and the implications for the resolution of the conflict, while Chapter 6 analyses the attempts made to date to resolve the conflict. The monograph concludes with general recommendations for the way forward, addressing the three main strands of the conflict: root causes that continue to feed grievances in northern Uganda, the LRA conflict itself, and the consequences of the war that are interpreted as ongoing causes of the war.

Accordingly, the main recommendations of the authors are as follows:

- Priority must be given to ending the LRA conflict. Information from LRA ex-combatants suggests that Kony perceives the problem in northern Uganda in terms of collective failure, and an evil that must be eradicated by visiting horror on the people to cleanse them and affect change. Thus, within his worldview, violence is a legitimate means of enforcing that change. The military approach to combating the LRA has simply served to support Kony's agenda by supplying the very violence that his apocalyptic vision demands. Therefore it is recommended that the government alter its strategic focus from one of seeking to destroy Kony to one of defending communities and maximising the protection of civilians;
- Until now, negotiations have occurred within a political framework. It is recommended that a more open-ended approach be adopted, one that allows a better understanding of Kony's worldview to emerge. In particular, it is vital that he is approached with a desire to understanding him (which is not the same as endorsing his actions) rather than destroying him;

- From an analysis of the root causes of the conflict, it is clear that Uganda is a country deeply wounded by injustice, fear, war, prejudice, hatred, and deliberate falsification of its history by successive regimes. In order to begin to address these issues, it is recommended that allowance for some form of Truth and Reconciliation process be set up that will allow Ugandans to come and speak out objectively about what happened in the Luwero Triangle, northern Uganda, West Nile, western Uganda and other areas that have been plagued by conflict in the past;
- Communication difficulties have been paramount in blocking progress towards ending the conflict. Therefore, a new public relations strategy from the government is a crucial component of the peace process. A few conciliatory statements from the president and key government ministers would contribute substantially to building confidence to end the war.
- There is both anger and sympathy towards the UPDF in northern Uganda. First, corruption in the UPDF has greatly undermined its capacity to protect the people. It is recommended that: (a) the GoU genuinely purge the corrupt elements within the UPDF. The ongoing investigation of “ghost soldiers” is a step in the right direction but more needs to be done; (b) those found guilty should make full restitution for the monies and other resources they embezzled. Second, the government and the UPDF need to pay particular attention to reaching out to the communities to build confidence among civilians. Third, and related to the first two issues, morale is low among the foot soldiers in the north. Therefore, tighter controls need to be put on individuals who have been documented as abusing their authority, and concrete steps must be taken to ensure that all UPDF soldiers are adequately and consistently paid;
- The increasing number of armed militias poses long-term threats to the security of Uganda. Once there is adequate defence of the communities, it is recommended that the militias should be either disarmed or integrated into the national army. In the meantime, it is recommended that there be tighter control of all militia activities, that militias are properly trained, that all weapons are accounted for, that militias be used solely for defence of civilians rather than pursuit of the rebels, and that operations are closely grafted onto the UPDF hierarchy;
- The majority of interviewees caught up in the conflict perceive the war in the north as a deliberate ploy by the government to destroy the Acholi people, in particular. At the same time, some government officials have

accused the Acholi of supporting the LRA and preventing the conflict from ending. Given such mutual suspicion, it is recommended that confidence-building measures be taken, such as an end to the hostile and conflicting rhetoric of the national government towards the LRA, a genuine apology from the government on some of its failings, and ending the wholesale condemnation of the Acholi;

- While poverty is not identified as a root cause of the conflict, the effects of the conflict, in particular displacement, have had serious economic and social consequences throughout northern Uganda. Thus post-conflict reconstruction planning should be a priority and the process should be open to public debate and scrutiny;
- The conflict clearly has an international dimension involving neighbouring countries. The current Sudan peace talks provide a glimmer of hope, but they might not bring an end to the LRA conflict. Therefore it is recommended that the Ugandan government structure its foreign policy that ensures long-term economic and political security, rather than mutual suspicion;
- The Amnesty is popular with people living in the conflict zone, and is seen as a vital and positive element to ending the war. Thus it is recommended that the Act be extended for the duration of the present conflict. In addition, attempts at amending the Amnesty to exclude top LRA commanders are counterproductive to peaceful endeavours to end the conflict; and
- A lack of consistent and visionary leadership, both locally and at the national level, has been a primary factor exacerbating the conflict and working against building a lasting peace. The government must redouble its efforts for a genuine democratisation process that is transparent and honest, and moves away from the politics of blame, as this divides rather than unites people.