Uganda

I. Fast Facts:

**Dates:**
- Independence: 1962 (From Great Britain)
- Idi Amin: 1971-1979
- Yoweri Kaguta Museveni: 1986-Current

**Situation (Simplified):**
A civil war is currently being waged by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) against the government (run by President Museveni). The war has raged on for a long time and many children are now being abducted in Uganda’s northern cities to provide troops to the LRA so they can continue the war against the government.

**Countries Involved:**
Uganda (and to a lesser degree the Congo, Rwanda, and Sudan)

**Outcome/Current:**
Currently the LRA’s numbers have been dramatically reduced due to the government’s offensive but Joseph Kony (the leader of the LRA) is still on the offensive.

II. Introduction:

Great Britain controlled Uganda (under colonialism) until it gained independence in 1962. While many African countries experienced a power vacuum when the colonial powers left, this did not happen in Uganda. When Great Britain left, there was a stable democracy. Even though there was a stable democracy in Uganda when Great Britain left, many tribal leaders saw this as an opportunity to seize power. Soon after Great Britain leaves, the country fell into chaos as one leader replaced another, who replaced another, and so on. This began in 1966 (four years after independence), when Milton Obote first overthrew the Ugandan government. There were a series of coups and countercoups, but Obote kept returning to power. This was during the Cold War and Obote was supported by the Soviet Union so they kept helping him return to power (Remember: the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. kept trying to get “their people” to be in charge in the country). The Soviets kept helping Obote until they changed course and began to help Idi Amin.

III. The Rise of Idi Amin:

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1 Coup: Often phrased as a “military coup,” this comes from the phrase Coup d’état, meaning the sudden, illegal deposition of a government, usually by a small group within the government or state (country), typically the military, to replace the deposed (removed) government with another body (group); either civil or military.
In 1971, the government was again overthrown. There was a military coup and Obote was kicked out. This time a powerful calculating man, Idi Amin, controlled the country. Amin was different than other people who were trying to overthrow the government because he was backed by several powerful countries that all had close ties with the Soviet Union. For instance, Amin was originally helped to power by Muammar Gaddafi of Libya. Gaddafi helped Amin because he wanted a fellow Muslim to be in power in Uganda. Amin also started to receive help from the Soviet Union. With the aid of foreign powers, Amin was almost unstoppable and he launched a campaign to put down any future rebellions.

Idi Amin started a campaign to remove anybody that opposed his military rule. Many of these people were from the northern tribe known as the Acholi (remember this tribe because they will be in the film Invisible Children) and immigrants from India. Amin then took control of 85 British companies, kicked all foreigners out of the country, and strengthened his military (who put him in power). Amin was a brutal dictator and under Amin’s eight year rule (1971-1979) it is estimated that up to 400,000 people died.

While Amin was brutal in many ways, he was also very crafty, and he knew how to play the political game. Amin kept switching sides (with whoever gave him the most money) to stay in power. Israel helped him for awhile until Saudi Arabia and Libya (Muammar Gaddafi) offered more money. Eventually Amin “found” his Islamic heritage and began to build mosques in Uganda. This caused religious strife because only 12% of the population was Muslim (84% were Christian) and tensions began to rise.

There were many attempts to remove Amin from his position (especially from the former president [Obote] which Amin had kicked out of the country). These revolts were unsuccessful because his army was well funded and well armed (from Russia, Libya, and Saudi Arabia). After a strange border war with Tanzania, the Ugandan people had enough and Amin was removed (1979). Amin fled to Libya and then on to Saudi Arabia where he spent the rest of his life and was never put on trial. Amin was an extremely destructive leader. If you are interested in knowing more, there was an excellent movie called The Last King of Scotland that covers this period of Amin’s life. After Amin was removed, Obote came back once again, only to be removed (once again), and finally replaced with the current President (Yoweri Kaguta Museveni).
IV. A New Leader: A New Way Forward?

After constant change in leadership, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni came to power in 1986 and remains in power to this day. Museveni was not a new comer to the conflict in Uganda. For years, he had helped to overthrow Amin and several other leaders that he considered to be corrupt. For over twenty years Museveni has worked to strengthen Uganda and the surrounding countries.

In the early nineties, for example, the RPF was stationed in southern Uganda. When the genocide began in Rwanda, it was from Uganda (with the help of Ugandan troops) that the RPF launched its attack against the Hutu government. Museveni is a Tutsi, and he was very supportive of the Tutsi movement. He continues to have close ties with Rwanda (and Kagame) to this day. The bond between them is so close that Museveni actually went against his people (the Ugandans) and joined Kagame (from Rwanda) in invading the Congo to oust a leader that they did not like (during the Second Congo War).

While Museveni is very popular in parts of Uganda, there have been several rebellion movements against him (and the Ugandan government). The country is divided into three tribal sections. Museveni is from the South and has earned great respect there, but in the North, he has met with much resistance. There have been many rebellious groups from the North but for the most part, they have not been successful.

During the conflict in Darfur (Sudan), Museveni supported the SLA (the Sudanese Liberation Army which is fighting to overthrow the Sudanese government). This decision obviously upset the government of Sudan. In response, the government of Sudan started to support the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) from northern Uganda. The LRA is a rebel group from the north that is attempting to overthrow the Uganda government. The Sudanese government would allow the LRA to attack the Ugandan military and then run across the border to Sudan where they would be protected. This made it difficult for Museveni to respond to the attacks and allowed the LRA to grow in strength.
V. A Civil War & the LRA:

As the rebel groups became more powerful so did the Ugandan government’s response. While the government of Uganda attempted to “just maintain peace” in the beginning of the conflict, the military eventually began a system of moving people by burning their home and land to try to crush the rebellion. The people in the northern part of the country, called the Acholi, began to form groups to resist the government’s control. The most powerful (and last remaining) of these groups is the LRA (Lords Resistance Army). The LRA was founded by a man named Joseph Kony, and he wanted more than just overthrow the government.

Joseph Kony is a man who claims to be possessed by a holy spirit. It is his belief that he needs to turn Uganda into (what he believes to be) a perfect Christian country. Ideally he believes that the country should follow the Ten Commandments (literally) as part of the law. The issue comes from the methods he uses to achieve his ideal society, and his interpretation of what the perfect Christian country is.

The LRA originally began as a movement to fight (what the people in northern Uganda considered to be) Museveni’s corrupt, destructive, government. Kony argued that the Ugandan government has continually sent in the military to brutally put down rebellions and has killed innocent civilians, which is true. Kony explains that he originally created the LRA to be the protector and savior of the Acholi people (the tribe from northern Uganda). However, when Museveni recruited some of the Acholi to help him put down the LRA led rebellion, Kony turned on the people of northern Uganda. Kony said that he couldn’t trust the Acholi people any longer and instead of continuing to “protect them,” he began putting together an army to launch a civil war against all of Ugandan (including the government). In 1994, when Museveni launched a full scale military response, Kony and the LRA moved across the border into Sudan and were protected by al-Bashir (if you remember, al-Bashir did this because Museveni had supported the SLA earlier).

The LRA began to use guerilla warfare against the Ugandan military. The Ugandan military didn’t know how to respond and were often confused. The Ugandan military tried to create “safe haven cities” (like Dallaire did) but they were never sure who needed to be saved or

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2 Guerrilla warfare is the irregular warfare and combat in which a small group of combatants use mobile military tactics in the form of ambushes and raids to combat a larger and less mobile formal army.
who was a member of the LRA, so they often killed or injured civilians (which only caused additional problems as people became more and more upset).

In September 2001, the United States was attacked (9/11) and the world began to view “terrorist” activities differently. During this time, Sudan started to question its hard stance against Uganda. Eventually an agreement was made between Khartoum (capital of Sudan) and Kampala (capital of Uganda) that allowed the Ugandan military to enter southern Sudan to hunt down the LRA. In 2002, the Ugandan military launched “Operation Iron Fist.” Kony obviously felt threatened and began to increase the raids into northern Uganda. The raids became increasingly more and more brutal. Between the war that the Ugandan government was fighting in the Congo and this conflict, they lost many soldiers. This loss of soldiers “forced” both the government and the LRA to “recruit” child soldiers. While the government recruited them, the LRA would actually abduct them. At night, the LRA would sneak into people’s homes and steal the children. They would take them to “the Bush” (the forest) and mentally and physically brutalize them. They would force the children to kill one another to train them to become fearless, crazed, and merciless fighters.

By 2005, with pressure increasing on the LRA, many of them fled to the Congo. Museveni told the Congolese government that if they did not take care of the problem he would invade the country to find them. This obviously caused tensions between the two countries again. The president of the Congo was so frustrated that he requested that the Security Council place sanctions on Uganda (it did not). The LRA knew that the Ugandan troops were closing in on them and requested peace talks with the government of Uganda. The government in Uganda was tired of war and they desperately wanted peace. They decided to accept the offer to sit-down and discuss a peace proposal. From 2006-2008 the talks took place and many people were very optimistic that the war might end, but by 2008, the LRA was buying new weapons and again was abducting children (about another 1,000). At this time, the Sudanese, Congolese, and Ugandan governments had enough and they all agreed to stomp out the LRA. Together they launched a massive offensive. The offensive was believed to have wiped out about 70% of the LRA but the LRA survived and attacks continue to this day.
VI. THE FILM: INVISIBLE CHILDREN:

You will watch a film about the LRA, Joseph Kony, and the children impacted by this horrible conflict. The film is called *Invisible Children* and it takes place in northern Uganda. The Acholi live in northern Uganda and many of the people there call it “Acholiland.” The two cities in the film are Gulu and Kitgum (see map below):

Can one person make a difference? Three college students made a film that started a movement. You be the judge…