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HISTORY OF MILITARY INTERVENTION IN UGANDAN POLITICS

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Abstract

The belief, a generation ago, at the time of political independence, was that a new era of prosperity and stability would prevail in Africa. The prerequisite for this state of affairs was premised on the western democracy that the European colonial powers had bequeathed to the new states of Africa. However, it did not take long before military coups set in, proving the failure of western democracy in Africa. The soldiers had started regarding themselves as the better alternatives to civilian rule - whether based on multi-party, or one-party politics. The paper, therefore, aims at analyzing the root-causes of military intervention in African politics. This is done both at the continental level and from a case-study point of view, at the Ugandan level. The conclusion is that the case of Uganda demonstrates that military intervention occurs when there are internal contradictions between political parties as well as within the ruling party. These then led to an alliance with the army. This alliance has both internal and external components.

The African Scene

When African countries eventually got flag independence, there was expectation that a new era of peace and stability would dawn on Africa. It was hoped that the new institution of governance in the name of Western democracy which the ex-colonial powers had hurriedly built would be the harbinger of peace and stability in post colonial Africa.

Unfortunately, for Africa, such expectation was lost immediately after independence when the barrel of the gun took the place of the ballot box as an arbiter in the way the Africans had to be ruled.¹ In 1952, the first coup in post independence Africa took place in Egypt. In 1960, there was an attempted coup in Ethiopia. In East Africa, it took less than three years after independence before the military could flex their muscles as political heavy weights in the governance of the East African peoples.

Military intervention in African politics has been so remarkable that today, over three quarters of African countries are ruled by men from the barracks. Even where

there appears to be a civilian government, such as in Zambia and Zimbabwe, these appear to be merely cosmetic civilian governments which ultimately rely on the barrel of the gun for their survival.

With a large part of Africa under the iron hand of the military, with others increasingly depending on the military, it becomes imperative to examine why the army has all of a sudden decided to interfere in the normal process of government. The subject of this study, is therefore, to throw more light on why the military has left its traditional function of defending government and civilians to, in most cases, destroying governments and civilians alike.

There is no consensus as to why the military intervenes in African politics. Generalizations about the army have proved unsatisfactory as military coups continue to rock Africa.² Although there can be no definite cause of military intervention in African politics, there are generally definite trends that tend to be common in either all, or most of the African coups.

Coups have taken place in Africa because most post independent African governments had become autocratic and unyielding to popular democratic processes. Post independence civilian governments have resorted to massive rigging of elections and coercion to maintain themselves in power.³ As such, parliament has become filled with people who had bulldozed their way into the house and people who appeared not to be responsible to the nation.⁴

Once in power, African leaders have adopted magnificent titles. These titles seem to suggest to the army and the nation that they intend to stay in power for life. For instance, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana became labelled with such high sounding titles as "show boy", "His Messianic dedication", "Osagyefo", "fount of honour", etc.⁵ Although such ridiculous titles are normally given by colleagues and advisors, the impact such titles have on African leaders is immense. It makes them see themselves as destined by God to rule their subjects. The impact of such obsession is three fold. First, the African governments became a one man-show. Second, there is excessive resort to preventative detention orders and numerous spy-networks on their people. For instance, Nkrumah detained Dr. Danquah who eventually died in a detention cell to the dismay of the Ghanaians.⁶ In Uganda, Obote's vision that he was the only one destined by God to rule Uganda made him detain five of his ministers in 1966.⁷ Third, the rigging of elections and the determination of the African leaders to cling to power means that all peaceful ways of changing government are blocked. This makes the military the sole defender of democracy against the tyranny of civilian dictatorship.

Whereas the military have sometimes rescued the African masses from leaders who want to cling to power, what can be questioned is whether the motives of the soldiers are genuinely for democracy or whether the soldiers themselves merely want to overthrow the civilian governments to impose their own brand of despotism. The

African experience has shown that soldiers are not democratic. They merely want to impose dictatorship on their own terms. For instance, one of the reasons for the 1971 coup in Uganda was that the political authorities had failed to organize elections.⁸ One would have expected the military government to organize one. But within a couple of years, Amin declared himself life president and the talk of elections was a dead matter. After ruling for nearly ten years in Nigeria, General Yakubu Gowon was again busy postponing elections in 1975. The elucidations so far cited show that soldiers in Africa are not champions of democracy. Their professed intervention to defend democracy is merely an excuse and not the actual reason.

Corruption has been cited as one of the causes for military intervention in Africa. In Nigeria, corruption appeared to have reached its highest peak during the Shagari administration. Whereas Nigeria was begging for loans worth two billion pounds, as much as sixteen billion pounds were owned by some Nigerian citizens in overseas banks.⁹ During the coup against Shagari, there were twenty two ministers who had private jets.¹⁰ Uba Ahmed, the powerful UPN Secretary was busy buying a private jet during the Christmas holidays at the time of the coup. As Akena Adoko observed, there appeared no limit to corruption in Nigeria as Shagari's men were too greedy to know when to stop acquisition for the sake of acquisition.¹²

It would, therefore, appear that the Buhari coup which overthrew the Shagari government was a panacea to the corrupt tendencies of the civilian government. But the question still remains whether the Nigerian army stepped in to stop corruption or whether they overthrew the government so that they could also be corrupted. There appeared, to some extent, to be some sincerity on the part of the Buhari government to purge Nigeria of corrupt elements. Overnight, some 10,000 civil servants were dismissed. The Buhari administration also established three Kangaroo courts in Nigeria. These were the Recovery of Public Property Tribunal, Exchange Control (anti-sabotage) Tribunal and Public Officers Tribunal.

In the end, however, the Kangaroo Courts turned out to be a cosmetic show by which the Buhari government merely wanted to hide their own corruption. The sincerity of these courts was put to a test as their trials were not open to public. It appeared that the so called "purge" of corrupt elements was only a means by which the military regime wanted to create jobs for the coup-makers and sympathizers.

That it was none other than Buhari who toppled the Shagari government on the accusation of corruption, is ridiculous. Buhari himself had embezzled 2.8 billion Naira when he was Minister for Petroleum. At the time of the coup, this was a subject of a judicial probe.¹³

The extravagance of African politicians have sometimes provoked the military to intervene in African politics. For instance, from 1960 onwards, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana acquired more and more mistresses and girl-friends to whom he gave

fantastic presents in money, cars and buildings. By the time of the coup in 1966, Nkrumah's wealth had increased to a total of Great Britain Pounds (GBP) 2,322,000 whereas his lawful earnings from 1951 to 1966 amounted to only GBP 134,000.¹⁴

In Nigeria, Shehu Shagari engaged in pompous extravagance which cost him the fidelity of the Nigerians. For instance, he obtained from the legislature a contingency fund of US\$210 million for which he was not accountable.¹⁵ Many Nigerians saw this as putting the scarce public funds into the pockets of Shagari. By the time of the coup, Shagari had acquired a US\$37 million dollar luxury jet to add to the fleet of presidential aircraft.¹⁶

The problem of the African leaders is that they engage in such kind of extravagance at a difficult time when their economies are in shambles. For instance, shortly before Shagari was overthrown, Nigeria had a debt of US\$20 billion. They (Shagari and his men) had just to be stopped from killing "the goose that laid the golden egg".¹⁷

In some cases, economic hardships have made military intervention in African politics inevitable. In most cases, the economic crisis reaches an extent where everyone, including the army, is discontented. Unemployment, rising costs of living and scarcity of commodities, have become part and parcel of everyday life in Africa. The inability of African leaders to find avenues for raising money has affected not only the conditions of the civil servants, but also that of the army. By 1965 a soldier in Ghana was dressed in something next to rags.¹⁸ In this case, military coups became a means by which the ordinary soldier can improve his economic status.

The desire of the soldiers to save their own skins has, in some cases, forced the military to intervene in African politics. In this case, coups occur as a reaction to either a general threat to the army, or as a threat to certain officers in the army. To parallel the army, President Kwame Nkrumah created the Presidential Company in 1960. By 1965, the Presidential Company had expanded to become Nkrumah's private army which was well dressed, well equipped and well paid, while the regular army walked in tatters.¹⁹

The creation of a para-military force was not only found in Ghana; it existed in different parts of Africa with different names such as Special Force, General Service Unit, Presidential Crack Units, etc. The existence of such special units usually makes the regular army to feel that the government intends to extinguish them.²⁰

The constant use of the army to quell internal disorder makes the army to think that it is indispensable. It also makes them ambitious enough to take a bid in political stake. The Nigerian army took over power in 1966 shortly after there were rumours that the army would be used to quell internal disorder. In Uganda, the army had played a prominent role in both the spread and maintenance of colonialism. They played a big role in defeating Kabalega and pacifying other parts of Uganda. During the post colonial period, the army was extensively used whenever there were

political disputes to be settled. What makes the army irritated is that despite the fact that they are umpires in the division of the "national cake", they only get the crumbs when opposition is eventually silenced.

Some authors²¹ have stressed the importance of external factors in explaining why the army intervenes in African politics. In most cases, the planning of the coups is done by imperialists who see African civilian governments as a threat to them. Nkrumah's strong stand against imperialism and his connection with the Eastern bloc made the Americans to regard him as a danger to their political, economic and strategic interests in the region. No wonder, the coup which ousted Nkrumah occurred when he was on an official visit to China. In Uganda, Obote's move to the left policy and his aggressive attitude towards the British and Israelis made them to encourage Amin to take over his government.

Lack of education among the soldiers has also been advanced as a cause for military intervention in African politics. Although African soldiers may carry out orders obediently, they are usually lacking in military ethos and professionalism.²²

Recently Amii Omara Otunu has argued that "familiarity syndrome" can explain why the military intervene in African politics. In this case, a subordinate who is already familiar with a person newly placed in authority over him would have less respect for him. On the other hand, a superordinate himself may feel insecure, knowing or suspecting that his subordinate knows him too well to respect him fully.²³

From the above observation, it becomes clear that the causes of military intervention in African politics are diverse. However, the case of Uganda shows that nearly all the reasons cited above are instrumental in provoking military intervention.

The Army in Precolonial Uganda

The existence of numerous inter-state, inter-clan and sometimes intra-clan wars made the army play a pivotal role in precolonial Uganda. This means that in precolonial Uganda, there was some sort of army, whether the state was segmentary or centralized. The only difference was in terms of military organization, reflecting the form of organization in the wider society.²⁴

Before 1860, all societies in Uganda had no standing army. Every adult male was eligible for military service. An important step in the development of the precolonial military occurred in Bunyoro where King Kabalegā transformed his personal body guards into a regular army between 1870-1899. A remarkable feature of this army was its inter-nationality composition. The army comprised Egyptian deserters, runaway slaves, Baganda, Bari, Acholi, Madi, Langi as well as Banyoro. This compares unfavourably with the colonial and post colonial army with its remarkable northern dominance.²⁵

Buganda was also reorganizing its army into a standing one between 1854 and

1880. During this time, King Mutesa instituted a standing army with a permanent General and war Captains.²⁶ Recruitment in the armies of these states was based essentially on patron-client basis rather than on criteria of kinship. This was because military service was one of the obligations owed by the subjects to their kings who in turn afforded economic help to their subjects.

Although the segmentary states of Uganda had strong military traditions, their military organization was not as elaborate as those in the kingdom areas. Among the Iteso and Karamajong nationalists, military organization was based on age-sets and age grades. The age system was not too rigid. Although the fighters were mostly recruited from the junior age group, the members of the senior classes could be allowed to join if they wished.²⁷

Among the Acholi nationality of Northern Uganda, men from the age of fifteen years and above formed the fighting force. People were grouped according to lineage or clans. Mobilization for military service was undertaken by the head of the local clan called *Rwor*, whose function was almost entirely military. He was often elected to the position because of his success in warfare.²⁸

Political organization in pre-colonial Lango was essentially military. The traditional system of relations between groups beyond immediate neighbours among the Lugbara nationality in West Nile District was in terms of fighting. War fare in the form of cattle raids was a constant pre-occupation in pre-colonial Ankole. The history of Nkore as preserved in oral traditions is an account of campaigns, offensive and defensive, which the Abagabe and their chiefs waged against their neighbours.²⁹ The narrative so far cited shows that the army actually played a central role in the lives of Ugandans before the colonial rule.

In spite of the important role which the army played in the lives of the people in pre-colonial Uganda, the army never attempted to bid for power on their own terms. The highest position to which a successful General could rise to was that of a territorial chief. Even this was subject to the good will of the *Kabaka*, *Omugabe* or the *Omukama*. It is true that the contribution of the army greatly decided who should be the new king in pre-colonial Uganda. But what is truer is that the military themselves never became the paramount rulers. One important explanation may be that constitutional sanctions limited the ground where successful Generals could tread.

It would, therefore, appear that the pre-colonial army in Uganda was a peoples' army composed of able-bodied males within a particular area, basically for defending and acquiring wealth for the people through raids. The pre-colonial army never attempted to impose their leaders as rulers of the people. Even in places where the military leaders were also political leaders as in the segmentary states of Northern and Eastern Uganda, these leaders were elected rather than imposed.

The question then emerges as to why the army which in pre-colonial Uganda was

an instrument of peace, stability and economic progress (through raiding and looting neighbours) has become an instrument of chaos, instability and economic stagnation. The answer to this can be found in the nature of the colonial army, colonial policies and the policies of post-colonial governments of Uganda.

The Colonial Army

In Uganda, a standing army in the modern sense began with the establishment of colonial rule. This army was neither national nor nationalist.³⁰ The first colonial army in Uganda was formed under the aegis of the Imperial British East Africa Company. This initially consisted of Swahili troops and was later augmented by the incorporation of the Sudanese troops.³¹ In the years 1893 and 1894, some Baganda were recruited on a temporary basis to back up the Sudanese and Swahili troops against Kabalega. When the war was over, the Baganda elements were disbanded.

The Uganda rifles was formed in 1895. This was not even a national army. Except for the name Uganda, the Uganda Rifles consisted principally of Sudanese troops commanded by the British. The Uganda Rifles Ordinance included specific provision which required it to take military actions even against local groups within Uganda. This means that the first organized army in Uganda was meant to be an instrument for liquidating civilians, a position which it has retained even in modern times.

To show that this provision was not meant for mere formalities, the Uganda Rifles was effectively used to put down the Mwanga rebellion of 1897. It was also used against Kabalega. The two leaders were deposed. Mwanga was replaced by his son Daudi Chwa who was only one year old. Under normal circumstances, this would have been out of question in the Kiganda system, but because of the gun, the baby had to "rule". Here was the beginning of what was to become a fact in Ugandan politics, namely, that the gun could be used to decide major political questions.³²

The deposition of Mwanga and Kabalega set a new precedent in which the army could be used with impunity to undercut the centers of authority. If the army could intervene and overthrow traditional leaders whose claims to office were unquestionable, they could be expected to do worse to the future civilian politicians whose claims to office merely depended on the constitution.

In 1897, the Sudanese troops mutinied because of constant marching, poor conditions and bad pay. This was suppressed with the help of troops enlisted from India, Kenya, Somaliland and elsewhere.³³ The mutiny had two important bearings on the position of the military and politics in Uganda. First, it made the British to lose trust in the Sudanese whom they imagined were "martial tribes". This made them later on to look for other recruiting grounds for the so-called 'martial tribes' whom they thought were abundant in Northern Uganda. Second, the Sudanese mutiny made the British to adopt a new principle in the deployment of the

protectorate troops. By this new principle, troops were to be deployed to a distant area away from their origin, both in terms of race and religion. The underlying principle was that the army would be more effective if the troops did not feel a sense of identity with the local population.³⁴ This feature of military deployment remained a prominent feature of the post-colonial army. The post-colonial army thus became distanced from the people as in the past, being only visible as an alien means of suppression.

The recruitment of Ugandans in the Uganda Rifles began in 1903. Major recruitment took place in 1913 when the remaining Indian troops were disbanded. The most important recruiting ground was in Acholiland in Northern Uganda.³⁵ Although the criteria seemed to have been that the Acholis were a "martial tribe", evidence suggests that the Acholi were not considered warlike. The major reason appeared to have been that the Acholi offered least resistance. This reason is less convincing because among the nationalities of Northern Uganda, it was the Acholi who offered the most fierce resistance called the Lamogi rebellion. One source has it that the Acholi and the other Northern Ugandan nationalities were remote from the centre of the country; that they lacked the trappings of Western civilization and that they had rather simple political and military organization.³⁶ This claim can, however, be debated.

The recruitment of the people from Northern Uganda and other Ugandans generally was accelerated with the outbreak of World War I. Part of the reason why Ugandans joined the army was attractive pay and the decorations which the recruits expected to get. The 1942 poll tax ordinance by which men serving in the military were exempted from paying taxes must have acted as a powerful incentive. For the first time, therefore, Ugandans began to look at the army not as a profession, but as a lucrative job where they could amass wealth. This was bound to affect the attitude of the army toward the civilian authorities when difficult economic problems engulfed the army and the country alike.

An important step in the development of the military in Uganda took place during the outbreak of World War II. When the colonial regime received the order to mobilize, they introduced a new requirement whereby the recruits had to be at least five feet eight inches tall. This effectively eliminated the Bantu nationalities of Southern Uganda who could not qualify on the basis of height. It also meant that more recruits would come from Northern and Eastern Uganda where the majority of the people are tall. By emphasizing height and down playing education, the new regulation set a bad precedent in Uganda. It made some of the worst illiterates to be recruited in the army. This meant that the army was now filled with people whose lack of intelligence could easily make them be manipulated. Such illiterates who joined the army under the criteria of five feet eight inches included former president Amin, former president Tito Okello Lutwa, Okuni Opolot, David Livingstone Ogwang and others.

With the post-colonial political leadership falling in the hands of a northern politician and with the army predominantly northern and illiterate, there was the possibility that the political leadership and the military would fraternize whenever and wherever there were political battles to be contested. This is what happened in the 1966 crisis.

In March 1962, the responsibility for the army was transferred from the Minister of Security and External Affairs under the foreign office to the Ministry of Home Affairs under an African. Placing the army in the sphere of internal affairs indicates that the army in post-colonial Uganda was envisaged not as a defense force against external attack, but as a bulwark of the central government against internal dissent.³⁷ This provision made the army more vulnerable to manipulations by the post-colonial politicians.

It can therefore, be said that the colonial army was largely constituted as an instrument of coercion. Unfortunately, for Uganda the colonial political and social infrastructure left such a legacy of disunity, distrust and indifference which made the possibility of calling the army to restore order likely.

Colonial Administrative Policies in Uganda

The colonial administrative policies which the British pursued in Uganda were divisive. They employed a system of "indirect rule" and extensively used the Baganda to extend their rule to the rest of the country. This made the Baganda to be hated by the rest of Ugandans.³⁸

During the imposition of colonial rule, the British signed the 1900 agreement with Buganda. Besides giving Buganda a special status in Uganda, the agreement confirmed Buganda's ownership of several counties detached from Bunyoro. This led to two serious post-colonial problems. First, it made Buganda feel that it should emerge from independent Uganda with this status or else secede. Second, the issue of the "lost counties" made the Banyoro annoyed with Buganda. With this Buganda arrogance, force was bound to be used at one time to decide the fate of Uganda's political question. However, such force did not come until 1966. The basis of colonial administration in Uganda was local government. Even when the Legislative Assembly was introduced in 1921, it remained an alien institution for the articulation of European and Asian interests. The first African representatives took their seats in the Legislative Assembly in 1945. This means that by the time of independence, Ugandans had no experience in parliamentary democracy. Because of this, the Legislative Assembly turned out to be a centre for nationality quarrels and intrigues, thus making the intervention of the army imminent.

The British education policies in Uganda were equally divisive. Northern and Eastern Ugandans were denied educational facilities. So far as the colonial regime was concerned, Northern and Eastern Uganda were to remain a rural reservoir of

urban unskilled labour.³⁹ This denial of educational facilities to a large part of Uganda made peaceful integration in the post-colonial period rather difficult.

The introduction of Christianity in Uganda became a source of instability. During the colonial period, the British administrators openly favoured the protestant establishment. This generated conflict between the protestants and the catholics, hence, complicating the problem of nationhood for Uganda.

The political parties which were formed in Uganda were not equal to the task of maintaining peace. They were formed around sectional and not national interests. The first political party in the modern sense was the Uganda National Congress (UNC). apart from the name "National", the Uganda National Congress was not national. Its leadership was entirely protestant and it was composed mainly of the old boys of Budo. In the initial stages, the leadership of the UNC was mainly Baganda. The Baganda dominance made the co-operation of other districts difficult.

The Progressive Party formed by Eridadi Mulira became notorious for its being conservative and parochial. Its adoption of a Luganda motto made it to be distrusted outside Kampala. By 1958, the Progressive Party had ceased to exist.

The Democratic Party was formed as a counter to the dominant position that the protestants had amassed.⁴⁰ Its major aim was the articulation of catholic interests which the protectorate government had denied the catholics for many years. This interest was, therefore, not national and it was bound to clash with the interests of other Ugandans with a certain show of force.

The Uganda People's Union formed in 1959 did not have any national party objective. In the first place it was not a national party since its existence was not known beyond the walls of the Legislative Assembly. It was formed on a negative motivation - largely to oppose the concession which Buganda was demanding.⁴¹

In January 1959, the UNC split into two. One wing remained under Musazi and the other wing was led by Obote. Obote's wing merged with the Uganda People's Union in 1960 to form the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC). The UPC was specifically an anti-Buganda party right from its inception and it remained in this position throughout Uganda's history.⁴² This made permanent co-operation with Buganda difficult as the UPC turned out to be a dominant party.

The formation of the Kabaka Yekka Party shortly after the constitutional conference of 1961 added a new dimension to the nature of political quarrels in Uganda. The slogan *Kabaka Yekka* itself means "the Kabaka alone". By this proclamation Buganda meant that Uganda was to be ruled by no one else except the Kabaka. This was eventually bound to brew conflict and lead to the intervention of the army especially when Uganda came to be ruled by an executive Prime Minister who was a non-Muganda. In this case, the pre-independence politics in Uganda left much room for maneuvering the ultimate use of the army. Perhaps what made the use of force most likely was the unholy alliance between the Kabaka Yekka which

stood for the Kabaka alone and the UPC which was anti-Buganda and anti-Kabaka. With this alliance, an aggregation of divergent interests had assumed control over the new nation without the colonial administration to act as umpire.⁴³ But as it turned out, the new umpire was the army.

Like other leaders of newly created artificial countries, Obote inherited power from the colonial governor but did not inherit the authority that goes with that power. For instance, the Kabaka and some of the traditional rulers in other parts of Uganda did not need any laws to enforce their subjects' respect for them because this was automatic. But being a "commoner" and worst of all occupying an artificial position, Obote found himself more and more compelled to resort to stringent legislations and ultimately the military itself.⁴⁴

Post-Colonial Ugandan Politics

Uganda's problems were compounded with the attainment of flag independence which left much room for quarreling. The elections of 1952 left the DP leadership and the Catholic Church generally embittered.⁴⁵ In 1894, Buganda was given Bunyoro's territory and in 1962, the Kabaka, to the dismay of the Banyoro, was in no mood to hand these areas back.

Perhaps what made the post independence politics to be more turbulent was the fact that the UPC and KY coalition only came together to acquire power. It is difficult to imagine that the Kabaka who had been powerful in the past and who wanted supreme power in post independent Uganda would remain subservient to Obote, a "commoner". Certainly the alliance was for convenience and the Kabaka was bound to think about reasserting his authority at one point or another as it later became in 1966. This had to eventually call in the military as an arbiter in Uganda's political questions.

The UPC as a major member of the coalition was even much more disorganized. Obote was merely a leader of party leaders. The UPC consisted of leaders such as Nadiope, Obwangor and Kirya who were also leaders in their own districts. This reduced Obote, the party leader to an equal among equals and made discipline in the party difficult.⁴⁶ By 1965, the UPC had split into the pro-Obote and the pro-Ibingira factions. At this stage, only military intervention could decide which faction was to be eliminated. But before the quarrel could lead to an open confrontation, a development which had an important bearing on military intervention in Uganda took place. This was the Uganda Mutiny of 1964.

On 23rd January 1964, disturbance broke out in Jinja barracks. The Uganda army had mutinied. The causes of this mutiny have been long-standing but one of the most important ones was the Africanization of the army. Unlike the civil service, the Uganda army remained expatriate officered at the time of independence. Apart from lieutenants Opolot, Amin, Hussein and Okello who were promoted to the rank of

captain, those who received promotion after independence were expatriates.⁴⁷ It was hoped that with an African (Kabaka) replacing the governor as the titular head of Uganda and the commander of the army, Africanization in the army would be accelerated. But this did not take place. Kabaka Mutesa, the new commander of the army himself had his own misgiving for the army.

In the first place, Mutesa had more allegiance to the British army than the Ugandan army. This was because he had undergone military training in Britain and had been made an Honorary Captain. This made it difficult for him to risk offending the British officers.⁴⁸ Second, Mutesa had his first allegiance to Buganda and not Uganda. Since the bulk of the army was recruited from Northern Uganda, Mutesa feared that Africanization of the army would make the officer class to be dominated by Northerners. Because of the two reasons cited above, Africanization in the army was neglected.

There were expectations among the soldiers that independence would bring abundant prosperity to them. Quite unexpectedly, however, the conditions deteriorated badly. This made the soldiers ready for revolt any time. What they were waiting for was simply an opportunity to use the guns as a means of making their life better. This opportunity came with the January Mutiny in Zanzibar and the eventual mutinies in Tanganyika and Kenya.

The Uganda Mutiny of 1964 is not so much important for its causes as it is for its impact in Uganda. After the mutiny, there was meteoric promotion of African officers. In January 1964, there were only 18 African officers but by February in the same year, there were 55 African officers out of 95 officers.⁴⁹ The condition of the soldiers was considerably improved. For instance, the salary of soldiers was increased by well over 120%.⁵⁰

The rapid promotions and improved conditions demonstrated that 'might is right'. Henceforth, the Ugandan soldiers learnt the lesson that some show of force could make them more than achieve their ambitions. Second, the soldiers began to see themselves not as those whom politicians could order to do this and that, but also as a pressure group that could dictate their own wishes on the civilian government. This confidence became even stronger when soldiers began to be courted not as partners but as umpires in the power struggle which raged in Uganda between 1964 and 1966.⁵¹ With the army taking the place of the British administrators as arbiters in Uganda's political quarrels, it was only a matter of time before they could eliminate all the quarreling factions and take power in their own hands.

While the 1964 mutiny made the army confident of its role for its members, it on the other hand, made the politicians suspicious of the army. This forced the army to create the General Service Unit in 1964 under a close associate of Prime Minister Obote called Akena Adoko. It was an elite military force whose major role was counter-insurgency.⁵² In the end, this turned out to be an army to check on the regular

army. The creation of the General Service Unit greatly instilled fears in the regular army that the government was attempting to eliminate it. No wonder the General Service Unit featured most prominently among the 18 points given by Amin in the 1971 coup.⁵³ To control the army, the government decided to transfer the army headquarters from Jinja to Kampala. This meant two things. First, it meant that there would, henceforth, be greater co-ordination between the army and the political establishment. Second, and perhaps more importantly, transferring the army headquarters to the seat of government exposed the soldiers to the palace intrigues and how vulnerable the political establishment could be without them. It also made the senior army officers like Amin to experience first hand the luxury and pomp associated with the State House. It also influenced some of the most ambitious among them also to begin making calculations about how to reach State House. The opportunities for calculations were not few as from 1964 to 1966 rival political factions were competing to use the army to foster their own ends. The army found itself being courted to solve political disputes because the coalition which came to power in post-colonial Uganda was unnatural. This climaxed into the 1966 crisis.

The Road to the 1966 Crisis

The alliance between the Uganda Peoples Congress and the Kabaka Yekka in 1962 arose out of the desire to reap maximum advantages.⁵⁴ This meant that each party did not want to compromise its interests whatsoever. This was bound to bring about conflict involving the use of the armed forces. Obote had earlier on characterized this coalition as a negation of national unity and a serious source of instability.⁵⁵

Trouble started over the question of the 'lost counties' of Bunyoro. In August 1964, the Minister of Justice introduced a bill in Parliament for holding a referendum in the lost countries. Kabaka Mutesa refused to sign the bill but the government went ahead and held the referendum where an overwhelming number voted in favour of being returned to Bunyoro. This was a blow to the people of Buganda and a personal humiliation for the Kabaka. The Kabaka, hence, started thinking about using the army and thus, turning the army into a focus of political struggle between the Kabaka and the Prime Minister. For instance, Mutesa ordered the army band to play at his palace during his birthday in November 1965 but the army refused at Obote's request. Behind this seemingly trivial incidence was the emergent struggle for the command of the army.⁵⁶

The post-colonial political struggle in Uganda was not merely a struggle between Prime Minister Obote and President Mutesa. It turned out to be a struggle between UPC and KY on the one hand, and between the UPC factions on the other hand.

In January 1966, a bill to curb the KY was introduced in Parliament and passed. Henceforth, KY which had helped Obote to rise to power was curbed. But the Kabaka could not accept this change of face without resistance.

By 1965, UPC had become polarized into two factions, namely, the pro-Obote faction and the pro-Ibingira faction. Each of these factions was wooing the army. For instance, Obote sided with Amin, the Deputy Army Commander, while Ibingira sided with Opolot, the Army Commander.⁵⁷ During 1965, it had become clear that the future of civilian authority in Uganda heavily depended upon who succeeded in winning the confidence of the security forces.⁵⁸ Perhaps what should be added is that although the civilian authority could use the army to strengthen its position, this could only be a temporary measure.

The crisis reached a new height in February 1966 when David Ochieng moved a motion to suspend Colonel Idi Amin from duty and investigate his bank account. In the course of the debate, Milton Obote and three of his ministers were implicated. The vote was passed overwhelmingly. This would have amounted to a vote of no confidence in Obote and his government. Besides, it was meant to weaken his army and facilitate a coup against him.⁵⁹

Actual military preparation against Obote was in progress outside Parliament. Troops loyal to Obote were transferred to the periphery on the orders of Brigadier Opolot without the authority of the defense council.⁶⁰ Obote decided to act extra-constitutionally now that his political survival was at stake. On the 22nd February 1966, Obote called a cabinet meeting at which he arrested and detained five cabinet ministers.⁶¹ Colonel Idi Amin was appointed Army and Airforce Chief of Staff. Opolot's position became only advisory to the Minister of Defense. Officers connected with Opolot were demoted or transferred to less important units of the army. On the other hand, Obote's loyalists were promoted and transferred to more strategic units. For instance, Major David Oyite Ojok who had been transferred by Brigadier Opolot from 1st to 4th battalion was transferred to the headquarters to become Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General.⁶² With Obote lieutenants in strategic positions, there could be no doubt that the gun had begun to be the arbiter in Uganda's politics. Obote went ahead to abrogate the 1962 constitution. This removed from Mutesa the only constitutional means by which he could assert his authority against Obote's army.⁶³ Bold steps were then taken by Obote to fraternize the army. He presided over passing out parades and addressed the troops. He impressed upon the troops that their duty was to serve the whole nation of which he was the elected Prime Minister.⁶⁴ This was a move by Obote to lure the army to help him in the power struggle between him and Mutesa.

With the army on his side, Obote introduced an interim constitution in 1966. This abolished the post of President and Vice President and invested executive powers in the hands of the president who was Obote himself. Members of Parliament were only given a day's notice and they voted for a new constitution which they were to find in their pigeon holes after voting.⁶⁵

The circumstances under which the interim constitution was adopted had a

dangerous precedent for military-civilian relationship in Uganda. The Parliament Building itself was surrounded by heavily armed troops, tanks and Armoured Personnel Carriers. Uganda airforce planes were cruising over the capital to demonstrate where power lay.⁶⁶ It is true that the 1966 interim constitution was a constitutional coup but there can be no secret that behind this constitutional coup, there was the heavy weight of the military.

Outside Parliament, the symbolic presence of the troops took a more physical posture. The pretext was given by Sir Edward Mutesa's equally dictatorial reaction to Obote's constitution. Mutesa coerced the Lukiko to pass a resolution that they did not recognize the central government whose Headquarters to be removed from Buganda's soil. This resolution was passed after a show of strength by hooligans who were carrying molotov bombs.⁶⁷

A deadlock was reached when Mutesa personally shot an army unit sent to his palace to investigate the alleged presence of arms.⁶⁸ It was now clear that Mutesa was not keen to restrain the use of force which the central government had in plenty. The Central government decided to bombard Mutesa's palace under the personal command of Idi amin. The Kabaka eventually fled to England.

President Obote was thus theoretically left with the option to rule Uganda as he wanted. But practically this was difficult. The Baganda revolted against the way their king was treated. Obote reacted by declaring a state of emergency and this meant that he had to bring in more troops from the barracks to maintain the emergency regulations.

Although on the surface the 1966 crisis appeared to have strengthened Obote's position, in the actual sense his position and the survival of civilian democracy became more precarious. The role the army had played in coercing the parliamentarians, in driving out Mutesa and quelling down the hatred of the Baganda populace, made the army to assume such a public posture that the soldiers began to imagine that they were indispensable.

Second, the 1966 crisis made some of the more intelligent members of the armed forces aware of Obote as a trickster. In 1962, they had seen Obote merge with the KY, an alliance that led to his becoming Prime Minister. In 1966, they saw and helped Obote fight the same person who made him rise. The creation of a more well favoured para military force made this threat more real.⁶⁹ Third, Obote's overdependence on the army to knock out his opponents only succeeded in replacing it with an opponent more difficult to manipulate - the army. Thus, after 1966, only two centres of authority remained in Uganda, namely, Obote and the army. The struggle which ensued was that between Obote and the army.

Obote and the Army after 1966

From 1966 onwards, both Obote and Amin knew that they could not use each other

indefinitely. Amin began to recruit a number of people from his West Nile homeland in the army. Obote thus came to realize how dangerous Amin was. Although he promoted Amin to the rank of Major General in 1968, he also promoted Hussein and Okoya to the rank of Brigadier. By this action Amin suspected that his replacement was being planned. Amin began to particularly recruit soldiers from his own language cluster, namely, the Sudanic speakers. Between 1968 and 1969, the Sudanese speakers in the army were increased by 74% which was more than twice the rate of Lwo speakers. This alerted Obote who realized that Amin was a serious danger that had to be curtailed. Under the cover of the defense council, Obote passed a resolution that recruitment was to be vested in the defense council.⁷⁰ To remove power from Amin, Obote appointed Brigadier Hussein to become the Chief of Staff, while Colonel Juma Musa assumed responsibility for the airforce. Amin was only left as chief of defence staff.⁷¹

There could be no doubt that the struggle between Obote and Amin had reached a life and death struggle and Amin had reasons to believe so. Amin was alleged to have been involved in the murder of Brigadier Okoya and the trial of those implicated was to take place in January 1971. Second, Amin was said to have colluded with Israel in giving unauthorized support for Anyanya fighters. Third, it was alleged that Amin had misappropriated large sums of money from the military and President Obote was getting hard with him. Fourth, before he went to Singapore, Obote had authorized that Amin should be arrested.⁷² From all these, it is clear that Amin had to either fight or die. Thus, Amin's coup of 1971 was to save his skin.

Against the background of power struggle between the President and his Chief of Defense Staff was the difficult economic circumstances. By 1970, Uganda was in an economic crisis. Government was facing serious foreign currency shortage. Commodities became scarce, prices rose and life became generally difficult.⁷³ This meant that there was a general disillusionment which could easily make people side with the forces of change in the army.

What made the army intervention easy was Obote's attack on imperialism itself.⁷⁴ In 1969, Obote came out with the "Common Man's Charter". One of the proclamations of this charter was that the state should acquire 60% shares in selected multinational companies. This was a serious concern to Britain which owned the majority of foreign companies in Uganda at that time.⁷⁵ Obote's outspoken stand against the British arms sale to South Africa made the British to regard him as an obstacle to be removed.⁷⁶

Obote's pro-Arab policy greatly worried Israel. His insistence that the Palestinian question should also be linked to the suffering of the South African people was particularly worrying. Israel and Amin got more concerned when Obote handed a German mercenary called Steiner who was fighting for the Anyanya to the Sudanese government. Amin and Israel felt that the trial of Steiner would expose their

involvement in the Sudanese civil war.⁷⁷

By 1971, both Amin, the British and Israelis had begun to view Obote as an impediment to their interests in the region. They planned to remove him by staging a coup when he was attending the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference at Singapore in 1971. In the coup which was staged on 25th January 1971, the Israeli military team furnished Amin with logistical information. Their team was also involved in the capture of Lubiri barracks in the early hours of the morning.⁷⁸

Amin gave 18 reasons why they eventually ousted the civilian government.⁷⁹ This included detention without trial, lack of freedom, failure to organize elections, corruption, unemployment, recruiting only people from Lango and Acholi, to mention but a few.

The 18 points only turned out to be public relations gestures rather than any seriousness on Amin's part. Within a few years, Amin had posted his soldiers as Governors, District Commissioners, County Chiefs, Sub-county chiefs and sometimes even Parish priests.⁸⁰ The effect of this was terror and murder leading to general, political and economic crisis.

The 1979 War of Liberation and the Post Liberation Government

Amin's greatest mistake was to attack the Kagera Salient in late 1978. Not only did this release the entire force of the Tanzanian army against him; it also gave chance to the Ugandan exiles to fight and remove him. By April 1979, Kampala had fallen and Amin's forces were on the run. The fall of Amin once again demonstrated the central role that the army can play in political stakes.⁸¹

The UNLF administration saw political leaders again struggling to win the loyalty of the army for their political purposes. The army become labelled as Obote's, Museveni's or Muwanga's.⁸² In the end, it was Obote's faction of the army which triumphed. The army played a central role in making Obote win the general elections of 1980. It became the routine of the army to disperse the rallies of other parties.⁸³ The army even played a greater role in defending the UPC government. This was because Yoweri Museveni who himself had lost elections in his constituency to a DP candidate decided to wage a guerilla war against the UPC government. This guerilla war engaged Obote's army for five years until the army itself decided to stage a coup against Obote.⁸⁴ The reason given for the July coup of 1985 was to stop bloodshed and create conditions for peace. Behind this, however, was who should replace Major General Oyite Ojok whose death had robbed the army of the only centre which could hold it together.⁸⁵ Obote's decision to replace him with Opon Achak was fatal. This annoyed the senior Acholi officers who saw that besides being a Lango, Opon was too young for the post. The Acholi soldiers were also annoyed that while they were being sent to the front, the Langi were not.⁸⁶ These grievances led to the July 1985 coup by Bazilio Okello and Tito Okello.

Military Intervention in Ugandan Politics

The Okello administration was short lived. On January 25th 1986, they were driven away from the seat of power by Museveni's National Resistance Army. A new government called the National Resistance Movement (NRM) was formed. Although the claim is that the NRM is broad-based, it is actually being kept in power by the gun.

In conclusion, the Uganda case demonstrates that military intervention takes place when there are internal contradictions between political parties as well as within the ruling party. This leads to an alliance with the army which has both internal and external components.

About the Author

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