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Background Briefing No. 6, 1980

UGANDA : DEVELOPMENTS SINCE AMIN

Basic Information

Area: 236 860 sq.km.
Population: 11 556 000 (1975 est.)
GNP: \$2 820 million (1976 World Bank estimate; almost certainly considerably less today)
Independence: 9 October 1962

The advent of President Lule

Faced by the advancing troops of the Tanzanian People's Defence Forces (TPDF), and with his own armed forces in an advanced state of disintegration, General Idi Amin fled Uganda in April 1979. During the selfsame month, Yusufe Lule, a 67-year-old Professor, was appointed President of Uganda, Minister of Defence and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces.

It was reported at the time that his election, by the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF - a coalition of several different anti-Amin groups, including the Save Uganda Movement (SUM) and the Front for National Salvation (FRONASA) was due to the influence of President Nyerere of Tanzania, who was desperately seeking a stable government in Kampala. Lule had the immediate advantage of being widely respected both within and without Uganda - he had been a lecturer at Makerere University and, following his dismissal from that post by Dr. Milton Obote (then President), he took up a senior position in the Commonwealth Secretariat in London. Lule stated, in an interview, that his government's first priority would be to "rehabilitate, psychologically and emotionally, the people of Uganda so they can have something to live for". Furthermore, Lule - a conservative and a critic of ex-President Obote - was hopeful that conditions in Uganda would improve sufficiently rapidly so as to allow elections to be held within the two-year limit laid down in the UNLF draft constitution.

In addition to the appointment of Lule, a provisional parliament, the National Consultative Council (NCC) was appointed (not elected) by the UNLF. It soon became clear that the NCC wielded more power than the President. Within barely six weeks of assuming the office, Lule was in conflict with the Council. The conflict became focused on two Cabinet reshuffles carried out by the President (who seems to have been trying to neutralize left-wing elements in the Cabinet) without reference to the NCC, and climaxed in the announcement of Lule's resignation as President - only 69 days after his swearing in.

Lule's Overthrow

The NCC rapidly appointed Godfrey Binaisa to replace Lule.

This action provoked demonstrations and strikes in Kampala, resulting in a ban on all demonstrations. The confusion was heightened by Lule's refusal to leave office; he claimed he could be dismissed only by means of a referendum or general election. It became clear that a power struggle was taking place within the NCC, a struggle that continues to this day.

Meanwhile, Lule travelled - or was transferred - to Dar-es-Salaam, where he stayed - or was detained - in the State House. After two weeks in Tanzania, the Professor flew to London for medical treatment. Later, he was to fiercely attack Nyerere, an erstwhile friend, and his policy in Uganda: "I think Nyerere would like Uganda to go the same way as Tanzania...in other words to become a socialist state...he would like the economy of Uganda to be integrated with the economy of Tanzania". The Professor further stated he had been held in Tanzania against his will, and described the TPDF units in Uganda as "an army of occupation".

Binaisa: Insecure President

In the interim, the NCC had denounced Lule as "an enemy of the people" and President Binaisa set about trying to consolidate his power. Nyerere, for his part, described Lule's accusations as "nonsensical lies" and went on to say: "Tanzania has no wish to make Uganda its satellite nor its province. As our neighbour and a sister independent state, we desire only to see peace and progress prevailing in that country".

Meanwhile, the overthrow of President Lule had not only illuminated the power struggles and deep divisions within Uganda, but it had also heightened them.

Many African states suffer from ethnic, communal or religious tensions; however, the intensity of these tensions varies greatly from state to state. Uganda suffers from some of the most bitter on the continent. The largest group in Uganda is the Baganda, who number some 3 million. Ex-President Lule hails from this group, as does Godfrey Binaisa. But Binaisa was perceived as a traitor by the Baganda, who feared his elevation to the Presidency was intended to be the first stage of a strategy to return Obote to power (Obote is much hated by the Baganda; he collided with them repeatedly; destroyed their autonomy and exiled their Kabaka or King). But it soon emerged that the Baganda view of Binaisa's election was over simplified.

In fact, it was reported that powerful members of the NCC (including Edward Rugumayo, the NCC's Chairman, and Paulo Muwango, then Minister of the Interior) had opposed Binaisa's elevation to the Presidency. This seriously weakened the President's position, and led to several no-confidence motions being proposed against him. There was also tension - as there had been when Lule was President - over the powers exercised by the Presidency.

The NCC, for its part, sought close consultation by the President whenever the latter intended to dismiss or appoint a Minister or to reshuffle the Cabinet. The NCC's motivation appears to be a desire to restrict the power of the President, and so prevent him from setting up a dictatorship, as Obote and Amin had done.

Binaisa was able to win out in his first two major clashes with the NCC, which occurred during 1979, when he sacked Ateker Ejalu from his post as Minister for Regional Co-operation, and then (in November) demoted the powerful Defence Minister, Yoweri Museveni, to Ejalu's old post. However, it is reported that Binaisa only succeeded in his move against these two reputed left-wingers because he had the backing of President Nyerere. And

it was noteworthy that although Binaisa appointed Ejalu as Ambassador to France, the latter simply refused to go, instead remaining in the NCC (which had been expanded from 31 to 127 members).

The Fall of Binaisa

The train of events that led to Binaisa's downfall commenced with the President's demotion of the powerful Minister of Internal Affairs, Paulo Muwango, to the Ministry of Labour. Furthermore, the President was, by that time, also at loggerheads with the Chief-of-Staff of the Ugandan National Liberation Army (UNLA), Lt.-Col. (now Brig.) David Oyite Ojok (who also commands a "private army" of some 3 000 men; Yoweri Museveni has a force of 5 000 men). Additionally, Obote, then still in exile, became increasingly critical of Binaisa. And Muwanga and Ojok are leading Obote supporters - indeed, Muwanga was the most important pro-Obote man in the Cabinet.

Thereafter, the situation began to develop rapidly, with an upsurge in violence, in and around Kampala; coup rumours became rife, even being published in the pro-Binaisa papers *The Citizen* and *The Economy*; this, in turn, incensed the UNLA (which is dominated by Northerners - Lango, Acholi and Teso), which demanded that Binaisa take action against the papers. He refused, so the Army did so on its own authority. This led, on May 10, to Binaisa firing Ojok. On May 11 the UNLA occupied key positions in Kampala, effecting a coup.

The coup was only possible because of the acquiescence of the TPDF, which still had at least 10 000 men in Uganda at the time. Indeed, Tanzania's attitude may have been more than acquiescence, as the TPDF garrison of Kampala had been withdrawn in mid-April, leaving the city in the hands of pro-Ojok Ugandan soldiers; moreover, Tanzanian Police briefly reinforced the UNLA soldiers holding key points taken in the coup.

The coup was staged, not by the NCC, but by the UNLF's Military Commission, whose members are : Paulo Muwanga (Chairman), Brig. Ojok, Brig. 'Tito' Okello (UNLA Commander), Yoweri Museveni, a Col. Maluru and a Col. Omaria (at the time Deputy Minister for Finance). Indeed, NCC Chairman Edward Rugumayo, in Arusha, Tanzania, at the time of the coup, refused to return to Uganda and convene the NCC; he, apparently, was of the opinion the coup was not primarily directed against Binaisa at all, but against the NCC. Meanwhile, the only other credible potential political opposition to the takeover, the Democratic Party, collapsed into different factions.

As for Binaisa he, like Lule, initially refused to accept the coup and, like Lule, was detained against his will.

Prospects

It is still unclear what will result from the coup. What has become clear is that the elections has been postponed. No one had bothered to make any preparations for it; no voters rolls had been drawn up, no ballot boxes ordered and no ballot papers printed. In short, it was physically impossible to hold an election by the target date of 30 September, and so it was rescheduled for 10 December. It is, however, questionable whether there will be a fair election; four of the Military Commission's six members are reportedly pro-Obote, and some observers fear he will be either eased into power by the Army or 'win' rigged elections. Indeed, this seems a very likely outcome, following the dismissal by the Military Commission of a quarter of the government, leaving political power concentrated in the hands of Obote's supporters.

But whatever happens politically - whether elections are held or not; whether they are democratic or not; whether Obote wins or not - there remains the fact that tens of thousands of modern automatic weapons have been scattered across Uganda - and Ugandans have not been loath to use them. This danger has been further illustrated by the recent invasion of northern Uganda by former members of Amin's army and by the increased anarchy within Kampala including more fatal clashes between soldiers and civilians. The task of restoring law and order and disarming the people may very well be beyond the capabilities of any African state, let alone Uganda, without extra African support. In this regard, note must be taken of Muwanga's surprise visit to Cuba in October, which led to the signing of an aid agreement with that country. One of the results is expected to be the despatch of Cuban troops to Uganda to act as military advisers.

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