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**COLLAPSE, WAR AND  
RECONSTRUCTION IN UGANDA**

**AN ANALYTICAL NARRATIVE ON  
STATE-MAKING**

**Frederick Golooba-Mutebi**  
Makerere Institute of Social Research  
Makerere University

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## Collapse, war and reconstruction in Uganda

### An analytical narrative on state-making

Frederick Golooba-Mutebi\*  
Makerere Institute of Social Research

#### Abstract

*Since independence from British colonial rule, Uganda has had a turbulent political history characterised by putsches, dictatorship, contested electoral outcomes, civil wars and a military invasion. There were eight changes of government within a period of twenty-four years (from 1962-1986), five of which were violent and unconstitutional. This paper identifies factors that account for these recurrent episodes of political violence and state collapse. While colonialism bequeathed the country a negative legacy including a weak state apparatus, ethnic division, skewed development, elite polarisation and a narrow economic base, post-colonial leaders have on the whole exacerbated rather than reversed these trends. Factors such as ethnic rivalry, political exclusion, militarisation of politics, weak state institutions, and unequal access to opportunities for self-advancement help to account for the recurrent cycles of violence and state failure prior to 1986. External factors have also been important, particularly the country's politically turbulent neighbourhood, the outcome of political instability and civil conflict in surrounding countries. Neighbourhood turbulence stemming from such factors as civil wars in Congo and Sudan has had spill-over effects in that it has allowed insurgent groups geographical space within which to operate as well as provided opportunities for the acquisition of instruments of war with which to destabilise the country. Critical to these processes have been the porosity of post-colonial borders and the inability by the Ugandan state to exercise effective control over its entire territory. By demonstrating the interplay between internal and external factors in shaping Uganda's post-colonial experience, the paper makes an important shift away from conventional explanations that have focused disproportionately on internal processes. Lastly, the paper provides pointers to areas of further research such as the economic foundations of conflict that should ultimately strengthen our understanding of factors that combine to make state-making fail or succeed.*

#### Introduction

Since independence from British colonial rule, Uganda has had a turbulent political history characterised by putsches, dictatorship, contested electoral outcomes, civil wars and a military invasion. There is a great deal of debate to be had over the extent to which these crises weakened the state and the extent to which they were precipitated by a weak state. Uganda has witnessed a debilitating civil war, causing a near-total collapse of the state and leading to the eighth change of government within a period of twenty-four years (from 1962-1986); five

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of those eight changes of government were violent and unconstitutional. Since 1986, the country has been undergoing fast-paced reconstruction.

Several factors account for the recurrent episodes of political violence and state collapse in Uganda. Some have been internally generated, while others have been linked to external forces. Internally generated factors can be explained under the rubric 'legacy of colonialism'. Colonialism had far-reaching social, economic, and political impacts and bequeathed the country a negative legacy of ethnic division, skewed development, elite polarisation, a narrow economic base, and a weak state apparatus. Rather than reverse this negative legacy, post-colonial leaders have, for the most part, exacerbated it by fomenting further ethnic division and conflict; adopting an uncompromising approach to issues of national importance; marginalising or seeking to marginalise whole areas and ethnic groups; adopting disastrous economic policies, and further weakening an already weak state apparatus. The consequences of such moves have been recurrent violence, economic decline and stagnation, and perennial political instability. In addition to these damaging internal factors have been external ones linked firstly to the equally turbulent post-colonial evolution of some neighbouring countries and, secondly to Uganda's interaction with actors, both within its immediate neighbourhood and in the wider international community.

This paper examines these factors in detail and further explores the interplay between them in shaping the country's turbulent history. It also looks at factors that, in recent years, have facilitated the rapid and much-acclaimed post-war recovery and reconstruction.

## **The impact of colonial rule**

### *The roots of ethnic division and conflict*

Colonial rule in Uganda began in 1894 in the Kingdom of Buganda, expanded to other areas, and eventually lasted sixty-nine years. The manner in which colonial rule was introduced and exercised outside Buganda had a durable impact on inter-ethnic perceptions and relations within the protectorate and, subsequently on the nature and practice of politics after the country became independent. Buganda served not only as the launching pad, but also as a source of manpower (foot soldiers and agent-chiefs) to help British colonisers conquer and subdue other ethnic groups (Reid 2002; Twaddle 1993; Tosh 1978; Dunbar 1965).

Outside Buganda, Baganda<sup>1</sup> agents - sub-imperialists with no legitimate right to authority in the eyes of local peoples - presided over a hierarchical and structured form of local administration introduced by the British, which was not only foreign but also repugnantly authoritarian to hitherto segmentary and traditionally egalitarian societies. While authoritarianism and associated violence may have been necessary for the smooth-running of state affairs, (for example, the collection of taxes and enforcing by-laws), it fuelled anti-Baganda sentiments among other ethnic groups, which lasted into the post-colonial period. The resentment was further compounded and cemented by the colonial government's seemingly preferential treatment of Buganda. The kingdom enjoyed not only greater levels of autonomy than other regions and kingdoms, but also had the highest concentrations of economic activity, social amenities, and prosperity.

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<sup>1</sup> The people of Buganda (dubbed 'Ganda' by some writers).

### *Buganda's dominance and the birth of ethnic division*

The differential treatment of Buganda ensued primarily from colonial officers' view of Baganda as superior to other ethnic groups. At the time of their arrival in the kingdom, colonial agents found a highly organised hierarchical, semi-militarised political system with the makings of a police force, in which territorial chiefs appointed by the King enforced law and order, collected taxes, mobilised labour for public works and commanded obedience (Reid 2002). In addition, the earlier introduction of Christianity in the kingdom had given its people a greater advantage in western education and equipped them with literacy and numeracy skills unavailable in areas beyond its borders. While social and political organisation in other kingdoms was fairly similar to that in Buganda, it was not as advanced. It was for this reason that Baganda agents, along with Buganda's system of administration, were transferred to other parts of the country (Kasozi 1994; Kasfir 1976). During colonial rule, participation by the Baganda in the violence of colonial conquest led to resistance to colonial rule in various parts of the protectorate: Bunyoro (Dunbar, 1965), Kigezi (Edel, 1957), Teso (Twaddle 1993), Lango (Tosh 1978), and Acholi (Girling 1960) in the form of popular uprisings and rebellions.

Accompanying the violence in which the Baganda participated, was the importation of Luganda as the official language of state administration, education and religion, reinforcing the idea of the Baganda's cultural imperialism (Rutanga 1991; Kasozi 1994; Maxon 1986). In Bunyoro kingdom, Buganda's longstanding and bitter rival, this bred fear among the Banyoro<sup>2</sup> that their kingdom might be invaded by Buganda. The fears, exacerbated in no small measure by the rivalry of the two kingdoms, led to the Nyangire<sup>3</sup> (or Kyanyangire) rebellion of 1905-1907 (Kasozi 1994; Maxon 1986). With specific reference to Bunyoro, the British rewarded Buganda with part of the kingdom's territory covering two counties (Bugangaizi and Buyaga), which remained a bone of contention between the two kingdoms throughout the colonial era and, not long after independence, led to the controversy which caused Uganda's first coup d'état in 1966 (Kanyehamba 2002).

As colonialism became entrenched and consolidated, as a result of its advantages in being the epicentre of colonial administration and economic activity where all communication networks converged, Buganda gained more from the multiplier effects of development activities than the more remote and isolated parts of the protectorate. This inequality created a sense of relative deprivation and disadvantage among other ethnic groups and enhanced feelings of suspicion and mistrust against the kingdom and Baganda in general (Kasfir 1976; Kasozi 1994).

The earlier arrival of missionaries in the kingdom created an added advantage for Baganda through the introduction of social services, which took longer to get to other areas. For example, the first missionary schools and hospitals were built in Buganda (Tiberondwa 1978; Byabazaire 1979). Furthermore, up until independence, as illustrated by Kasfir (1976)<sup>4</sup> the Baganda filled a disproportionate number of secondary school places; by 1960 they had had slightly less than twice as many school places in comparison with the rest of the country's population<sup>5</sup>, and there were more secondary schools located in Buganda than elsewhere. This worked in favour of slightly less qualified Baganda for secondary-school entry as although

<sup>2</sup> People of Bunyoro (often dubbed 'nyoro' by some writers).

<sup>3</sup> Named after the slogan 'nyangire abaganda' ('I reject the Baganda') used by participants in the uprising.

<sup>4</sup> This is the most authoritative source and is therefore drawn on heavily by this paper.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Kasfir 1976: 110-111)

students were admitted primarily on academic merit, individual schools had some discretion and tended to choose pupils living within their vicinity.

At Makerere University College, the only university in East Africa during colonial rule, the Baganda were over-represented. As a university degree was the gateway to the most powerful positions and greatest economic opportunities, the fact that 40 percent of the 1,698 persons who entered Makerere before 1954 from all parts of East Africa were Baganda, explains much of their predominance at this time (ibid). In the following years this predominance declined somewhat, but the Baganda continued to constitute over 50 percent of the Ugandan entrants as late as 1950 to 1953; in 1959/60, the percentage of Baganda at the university was almost three times their percentage of the general population and amounted to almost half of the total Ugandan contingent in the college. All other ethnic groups, with the exception of the Bagwere, Banyole, Banyoro, Jonam, Kumam, and Samia were underrepresented. Of Ugandan students abroad in the last quarter of 1960, 143 were sponsored by the Buganda kingdom as compared to only 106 sponsored by the rest of the other areas (Kasfir 1976).

The Baganda were also ahead of other groups with regard to economic development and consumption patterns. They received cottonseeds in 1903/04, to encourage them to grow cash crops and generate cash to pay the required poll tax, while elsewhere cotton seeds were received much later. The Baganda started the first local co-operative union in 1923, and later were to receive control of the first ginnery to be handed over to Africans. In addition, the Baganda had disproportionate opportunities to increase their wealth due to the existence of freehold land in Buganda, which was almost non-existent in other areas (Kasozi 1994; Kasfir 1976).

When industrial development started around the capital city Kampala, which already offered many employment opportunities, the Baganda were readily available to take up wage employment, and gained more of the high-paying jobs because they were better educated. Also, being indigenous and not immigrants moving in and out of areas of fast development in Buganda, they tended to be more stable employees and advanced more rapidly into skilled positions. Further, the inequality in wage opportunities favouring the Buganda was pronounced; Baganda workers were better paid than those from other ethnic groups even in the private sector mainly due to their advanced education (Kasfir 1976; Kasozi 1994).

These advantages - which were perceived by other groups as emanating from favouritism by the colonialists towards Baganda - developed anti-Baganda sentiments which manifested themselves in the formation of political groupings such as the All Uganda People's Union in order to combat Buganda and Baganda influence (Kasfir 1976). These were the beginnings of demands by other groups for a share of the opportunities enjoyed by Buganda and an expression of discontent with the imbalance of development in favour of the kingdom; Buganda, other groups came to believe, was developing at their expense. In fact, other tribes who have suffered under British colonialists have continued to accuse the Baganda of collaboration (Twaddle 1993).<sup>6</sup>

Significantly, an important exception to the imbalance in favour of Buganda was recruitment into the military and the police force, as a result of the early 'compartmentalisation' of the

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<sup>6</sup> This has also been a common theme in the speeches of many non-Baganda politicians, as features prominently in the teaching of history as a subject in schools.

protectorate, with different areas designated for specific purposes. The central region, mostly Buganda and Busoga, had been designated for cash crop production; and the outlying areas of the North, West and East as sources of labour for plantation agriculture, public works, and the security forces. This further exacerbated regional economic and social inequality. Limited economic activities outside Buganda and the south of the Protectorate generally meant that people there had to look for employment outside their home areas. Limited levels of education partly the outcome of limited educational opportunities meant that the security forces offered the best opportunities for self-advancement (Thompson 2003).

Elsewhere it has been argued that the colonial administration consciously recruited people from groups seen as traditionally war-like, mostly from northern and eastern Uganda, for the armed forces (Kasozi 1994). By 1960 the Acholi a relatively small ethnic group, occupied a disproportionate share of non-gazetted ranks in the police force (15.5 percent – Thompson 2003). The Alur, Japadhola, Iteso, Jonam, Kakwa, Kumam, and Madi, all small groups, were also heavily overrepresented (Kasozi 1994; Kasfir 1976). This pattern continued after independence, thereby arming some tribes, and not others. This selective recruitment into the armed forces was to avail post-colonial leaders with the means to seize power and try to retain and impose their will using armed ethnic allies (Gingyera-Pinyehwa 1978; Mamdani 1976).

While Buganda's advantages fuelled frustration elsewhere, similar differential modernisation processes in other areas also created resentment, albeit on a smaller scale. In the kingdom of Tooro, for instance, the Bakonzo and Baamba people found themselves at a disadvantage compared to the majority Batooro in the number of school places, medical dispensaries, and positions in local administration available to them. In Sebei district, Bagisu enjoyed more advantages than the Sebei people. The post-colonial agitation for separate local administrations and ethnic autonomy in both areas, which in Tooro led to the birth of the insurgent Rwenzururu Movement<sup>7</sup>, was to a large extent fuelled by local-level inequalities (Kasfir 1976).

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<sup>7</sup> See Doornbos & Mwesigye 1995.

- Map of Uganda showing ethnic groups



Source: Wikipedia

Colonial rule therefore prepared the ground for ethnicity-inspired resentments and, during its dying years and after independence, ethnicity-focused politics.

### The post-colonial era

#### *Violence and conflict under Obote (1962-1971)*

It was against the background of sharp ethnic divisions that Uganda gained independence in 1962 and its first Prime Minister, Milton Obote, came to power. Obote led the Uganda People's Congress, a political party whose origins lay in a desire by other ethnic groups to fight and arrest the dominance of Buganda and the Baganda over other regions and peoples and a determination to redress the imbalance (Mazrui 1975; Apter 1997). Obote's desire to curb Buganda's dominance underlay his government's aggressive approach towards the kingdom and its institutions and apparatus, beginning with the referendum in 1964 to decide whether land captured from Bunyoro by the British during colonial expansion and handed to

Buganda should be returned. The referendum which saw Bunyoro regain its lost counties set the deeply royalist and somewhat parochial Baganda and the Buganda monarchy on a collision course with the national government (Kanyehamba 2002).

The conflict culminated in the Lukiiko (the kingdom's equivalent of a legislative council) calling upon the national government to vacate Buganda.<sup>8</sup> It was clear from that particular resolution, which had the support of ordinary Baganda, that in their minds Buganda under their king and the institution of the monarchy had greater legitimacy than the national government and its institutions. The new government was contending with the challenge of institutional multiplicity. The attempt to evict it from Buganda and other 'provocations'<sup>9</sup> supported by Obote's competitors for the leadership of the Uganda People's Congress, culminated in the first direct intervention in politics by the military.

Prime Minister Obote reacted by deploying the army to invade the palace of the King of Buganda, killing many Baganda partisans who had mobilised in its defence. The King, revered almost universally by his subjects, fled into exile. Obote subsequently banned all monarchies, declared himself president, and introduced a new constitution which was later approved by parliamentarians who had not read it, with the parliamentary buildings surrounded by the army (Karugire 2003). The dominance in the army of people from socially and economically marginal areas seeking to end the region's overwhelming dominance facilitated the government's actions. One consequence of these events was resentment among the Baganda for Obote's government. In addition, it led to a long-running insistence on the right to autonomy through federation, demands that all governments, including the current one have had to confront. This resentment became a decisive factor in subsequent episodes of political violence and the consequent cycles of state collapse.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to note that the colonial administration had attempted to resolve the issue of Bunyoro's lost counties and failed. Subsequently, a decision was made to leave the matter to a future Ugandan government to resolve through a referendum. Failure by the colonial administration to handle the matter to the satisfaction of both Bunyoro and Buganda had, for the most part, been the result of failure to compromise on both sides. Commenting on this and other contentious constitutional issues in the period leading up to independence, the Munster Commission<sup>11</sup>, which had been given the task of examining outstanding constitutional issues prior to independence, made a significant statement that in many ways has remained valid for most of the post-colonial period:

No one who examined Uganda's political and social life could fail to be disturbed by one prominent characteristic: the unwillingness to compromise ... Many people in Uganda still have to learn that all government, especially democratic governance depends upon compromise and willingness to see other points of view in matters large and small (Waliggo 1995: 18).

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<sup>8</sup> Kampala, the national capital where institutions of the state are located, is in Buganda.

<sup>9</sup> See Kanyehamba 2002.

<sup>10</sup> For example, Idi Amin's forcible seizure of power from Obote in 1971 had the support of Baganda elites, while Museveni's war to dislodge Obote's second regime during the early 1980s was actively supported by thousands of Baganda combatants (Kasozi 1996; Museveni 1997).

<sup>11</sup> For details about the Munster Commission see Karugire 1980.



Buganda's rejectionist (and arrogant) attitude towards the post-colonial state can best be understood by recalling its historical position. Not only had it been the most powerful and organised of the inter-lacustrine kingdoms, already with the trappings of a nascent state, it had also participated in what many Baganda would have understood as 'civilising' other tribes (Twaddle 1993; Tosh 1978). This, and the advantages it enjoyed as described above, bred a sense of ethnic superiority among ordinary Baganda, which in turn made them feel particularly resentful of being ruled by people from outside the region, and of their king being placed under the authority of a commoner.

With the exception of a few who saw the fate of Buganda as intimately tied to that of greater Uganda and therefore wanting to be part of national-level politics, most Baganda remained attached to their monarchy and their traditional institutions. Meanwhile other groups saw Buganda's self-importance as an obstacle to building a united country in which all groups would be equal with equal access to wealth and other opportunities. Obote's declared objective of uplifting other regions and narrowing the gap between them and Buganda endeared him to many who disapproved of and envied Buganda's advantages. It was partly as a result of his commitment to achieving that objective that he embarked on dismantling the kingdom, a decision that triggered events that eventually plunged the country into two decades of political violence and instability (Karugire 2003).

Ethnic tensions did not manifest only at the level of relations between Buganda and the national government or even within multi-ethnic areas such as Sebei and Tooro. In 1964, two years after independence, the ruling party, the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) was already being rocked by factionalism linked as much to ethnic division as it was to ideological differences. In terms of ideological differences there were two camps within the Party: the progressives and conservatives. The former were a left-leaning faction seeking to orient the party towards socialism, and the latter, comprising mostly members from the monarchical areas sought to ally with the capitalist world and allow the modern state to co-exist with traditional institutions (Gingyera-Pinychwa 1978), a view that would sustain and perpetuate institutional multiplicity.

The conflict was resolved, if the word 'resolve' can be applied here, by the arrest and incarceration, without trial, of leading members of the conservative camp and the expulsion from the party of the leftists who were accused of plotting to remove Obote from the party leadership. It was partly in a bid to secure his leadership of the UPC that Obote moved quickly to neutralise the Buganda monarchy, which he accused of plotting to overthrow the government in an alleged plot involving members of the party and the armed forces (Kanyehamba 2002; Karugire 2003). These actions had the effect of galvanising his opponents in a coalition that eventually played a key role in unseating him through unconstitutional means. The explanation for the choice of means Obote's opponents used to unseat him can be found in his handling of the military, and in the importance of ethnicity within it.

In 1964, as both the ruling party and the country were gripped by tensions, the military staged a mutiny seeking to force the government to improve their pay and working conditions. Obote's immediate reaction was to call in British paratroopers to quell the disturbance, followed by a decision to grant the army's demands and even promote some of the mutiny's ringleaders (Rwehuru 2002). At the same time as the mutiny in Uganda, another one occurred in Tanzania. Perhaps in anticipation of the role he wanted them to play in securing his regime, Obote succeeded at giving the army a sense of political significance. His

enlistment of the military in the political argument between his government and the Buganda kingdom further bolstered their feelings of political indispensability. Obote had demonstrated to the army that they were central to his ability to retain power, and in the process opened the way for the military to intervene in politics. The consequences were extremely destabilising as the army began to intervene directly either by staging coups d'état as in the case of Idi Amin, or by interfering in elections as was the case in 1980, and more recently under the Museveni regime (Uganda Parliament 2002; Golooba-Mutebi 2007).

Obote's decision to use the military to acquire and hold onto power was partly due to the kind of army the colonial government had bequeathed the country. There is a long-running debate about whether it was intentional, or simply an accident of history, or the outcome of a combination of historical circumstances (Mazrui 1975; Omara-Otunnu 1987; Thompson 2003) but the colonial government left a military dominated by northerners, among them Obote's ethnic allies, the Acholi, and his tribesmen, the Langi. Notwithstanding this state of affairs, however, the 1964 mutiny had somewhat shaken Obote's faith in the army as an institution. Therefore in order to guarantee its loyalty, his government embarked on a recruitment drive that sought to reduce the dominance of northerners generally and ensure the dominance of his own ethnic group (Rwehururu 2002; Karugire 2003).

This ethnicisation alarmed sections of the army originating from other areas, setting off a process of fractionalisation and weakening its ability to pursue and achieve common objectives, as well as destroying its professional ethos (Karugire 2003). Factionalism in the military, and the hostility Obote had created for himself among sections of the elite within and external to his own party, (Kasozi 1996) eventually created the conditions for General Idi Amin - his one-time protégé and the man who had led the military's first intervention in politics against the Buganda monarchy - to topple Obote's government in 1971 in a military coup. Henceforth, Uganda embarked on an eight-year period of economic ruin and state collapse (Mutibwa 1992).

### ***Temporary respite under Idi Amin (1971-1979)***

Amin acceded to the presidency amidst scenes of jubilation by a public formerly intimidated into fear and silence by Obote's despotism. He liberated all political prisoners, sought to forge a broad coalition by appointing the majority of his ministers from outside the army and across the country's diverse regions, and placated the Baganda by bringing back the body of the Kabaka (King) - by then deceased - for burial in Uganda. The respite, though, was not to last. Amin outlawed the parliament, banned political parties, dismantled local government councils and appointed military officers as provincial governors and weakened the judiciary, not least by murdering the Chief Justice. He then proceeded to expel members of the minority Asian community who comprised a large percentage of the country's professional class as well as the bulk of its commercial sector. In subsequent years this particular measure contributed significantly to the collapse and informalisation of the economy (Karugire 2003; Kyemba 1977; Jamal 1998; Maxwell 1998).

The change from Milton Obote to Idi Amin exacerbated Uganda's longstanding political problems; as in many instances Amin simply continued from where Obote had left off. Obote had undermined local government autonomy; Amin banned local councils altogether. Obote had banned political parties but retained parliament, albeit largely as a rubber stamp; Amin outlawed it altogether. Amin's answer to Obote's mass nationalisation of foreign-owned businesses was the expulsion of Asians, and the confiscation of their businesses. Obote had disregarded inconvenient judicial decisions or flouted them; Amin simply cowed the judiciary

into paralysis. Obote had detained political opponents without trial; Amin simply murdered them (see Kyemba 1977; Karugire 2003; Mamdani 1976; Gingyera-Pinyewa 1978).

Nor did Amin's rise to power arrest the military's evolution from a neutral institution subordinate to civilian authority as had been under colonial rule, to a politically partisan and ethnically factionalised one. In a move clearly intended to quickly consolidate and protect itself, one of the earliest changes Amin's regime carried out in the army was to purge it of Obote's tribesmen and ethnic allies and kill many of them. Hundreds of survivors sought refuge in Tanzania following Obote's exile there (Avirgan & Honey 1982). The mass murder of Acholi and Langi servicemen created two problematic situations: It instantly alienated the two communities from Amin's regime and created a pool of potential insurgents.

By driving hundreds of ex-servicemen into exile, the regime created a source of potential recruits for insurgent activities and set the stage for future political violence. Indeed, these exiles eventually became a source of destabilisation and participated in the Tanzania-led war that toppled the Amin regime in 1979. Before the war, however, the threat of insurgency from across the Tanzania border forced the Amin regime to devote much energy and resources to matters of security and the physical elimination of perceived enemies of the state. However, as repression intensified, more potential victims fled the country and joined the ranks of exiles preparing to topple the regime. The intensification of internal repression served only to energise the exiles into organising in order to remove the regime by force (Museveni 1997; Avirgan and Honey 1982).

After eliminating Obote's allies from the army, Amin - following in the footsteps of his predecessor - embarked on recruiting his Kakwa tribesmen and people from related tribes from within Uganda and across the Zairian and Sudanese borders (Rwehururu 2002).<sup>12</sup> It is doubtful that Amin would have targeted certain ethnic groups for elimination or even felt the need to resort to his tribesmen and ethnic allies for protection if Obote had not set a precedent (Gingyera-Pinyewa 1978; Mamdani 1976; Karugire 2003). Also doubtful is whether Amin would have sought to seize power if Obote had not opened the way for the military (and Amin himself<sup>13</sup>) to intervene in politics, depended on it himself to seize power, and divided it along ethnic lines in order to use it to impose his will as well as rule by force and intimidation.

Remarkably, after they seized power from Amin, the former exiles seemed to have learnt very little from Obote and Amin's experiences. The return of the exiles, many of them hostile to Amin's tribesmen and ethnic allies, led to renewed ethnically motivated killings. This time it was the turn of Amin's allies and tribesmen to die or flee the country (Allen 1992; Amaza 1998). The new exiles determined from the start that they too would seek to return, by force if necessary, and embarked on insurgent activities out of the Democratic Republic of Congo and southern Sudan. The stage was set once again for cross-border political destabilisation and violent conflict (Rwehururu 2002; Amaza 1998) alongside efforts to reconstruct state institutions devastated by eight years of neglect and economic collapse.

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<sup>12</sup> Note the influence of cross-border ethnic affinity and the porosity of national borders in the political destabilisation of Uganda and neighbouring countries, including Rwanda.

<sup>13</sup> Apparently, in contravention of the law barring serving officers from participating in politics, Amin was a card-carrying member of the ruling party under Obote's leadership (Karugire 2003: 75).

### *Elite Polarisation and the Post-Amin Coalition*

The post-Amin coalition in many ways vindicated the words of the Munster Commission, regarding unwillingness by Ugandans to compromise. The anti-Amin exiles that fought alongside Tanzanian troops to topple the Amin regime were organised in three military umbrella groups. One group, Kikosi Maalum (grand coalition), consisted mainly of ex-military officers who had served under Obote and been driven into exile by ethnically inspired persecution after Amin's coup. The second, Front for National Salvation (FRONASA), under the leadership of current President Yoweri Museveni, consisted mainly of left-leaning young intellectuals some of whom, like Museveni, had received their university education in Tanzania and subsequently worked for or supported Obote, but had fallen out with him prior to his overthrow. FRONASA and Kikosi Maalum had had their bases in Tanzania and been the beneficiaries of military and other assistance from the Tanzanian government. The Tanzanian government had also arranged for FRONASA to receive some military training, within Tanzania, from the then Tanzania-based Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) by fighting Portuguese colonial rule. The third group was the Save Uganda Movement (SUM) which, following Amin's seizure of power, had conducted a few unsuccessful and sometimes disastrous armed incursions into Uganda (Avirgan & Honey 1982).

Altogether, more than twenty exile groups were involved in one way or another in the campaign to overthrow the Amin regime (see Table 1). Their large number and failure to build a common front, even for those that operated from the same countries and cities, however, testify to the varied, sometimes irreconcilable, interests they represented. Besides seeking to topple Idi Amin, they had little else in common (Avirgan and Honey 1992).

**Table 1: Anti-Amin Exile Groups**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Base</b>	<b>Leadership</b>
Uganda Human Right Group	United Kingdom	Dr. George Kanyeihamba
Uganda Action Group	United Kingdom	Paulo Muwanga
Popular Front for the Liberation of Uganda	United States of America	John Odongkara
Uganda Freedom Union	United States of America	Godfrey Binaisa (?)
Relief Educational Training Uganda Refugees Now (RETURN)	United States of America	Festo Kivengere
Africa Study Group	United States of America	??
Uganda Study Group	United States of America	??
Obote's Group (Kikosi Maalum?)	Kenya, Zambia, United Kingdom	Milton Obote (?)
Save Uganda Movement	Tanzania	Ateker Ejalu (?)
Uganda National Unity and Reconciliation	Tanzania	Eric Otema Alimadi
Uganda Society	Kenya	Yusuf Lule & Martin Aliko
Uganda Discussion Group	Kenya	Tarsis Kabwegyere (?)
Uganda Nationalist Organisation	Kenya	Robert Serumaga (?)
Uganda Liberation Movement	Kenya	Dani Wadada Nabudere (?)
Uganda Liberation Group	Zambia	Immanuel Oteng
Uganda National Movement	Zambia	John Barigye (Ankole Crown

		Prince)
Nairobi Consultative Committee	Kenya	Tarsis Kabwegyere, D.W. Nabudere
Negotiating Committee for Democratic Unity	Tanzania	Dani Wadada Nabudere (?)
Moshi Discussion Group	Tanzania	??
Ad Hoc Committee for Promotion of Unity	Tanzania	Yash Tandon, Mahmood Mamdani (?)
Muthaiga Discussion Group	Kenya	Aliker (?)

It took Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere's personal intervention for these anti-Amin exile groups to put their differences aside and work together under a single, unified leadership. Nyerere's efforts had their origin both in his animosity towards Idi Amin from the time he seized power,<sup>14</sup> and in the latter's decision to order his troops to invade Tanzania in 1978. In reaction to the invasion and the destruction caused by Ugandan troops in the country's Northeast, the Tanzanian government decided not only to fight off the attack, but also to topple Idi Amin as well. It was against this background that Nyerere decided to rally the disparate Ugandan opposition groups in exile to join the war and liberate their country. Under the auspices of the Government of Tanzania, and after a fractious conference in the Tanzanian town of Moshi (The Moshi Conference) from which some groups were excluded, the exiles formed the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF), consisting of 'fighting' and 'non-fighting groups', the former already in action inside Uganda, alongside the Tanzanians. It was the UNLF that took over power after Amin had fled, and raised local and international expectations (Avirgan & Honey 1982).

From the beginning the UNLF, a creation of convenience by the fractious exiles, faced problems which it soon proved unable to resolve, due to in large measure to the absence of strong leadership with the ability to impose discipline and broadly unite all groups around a common agenda. Perhaps the biggest problem it had to confront was its failure, like Obote and Amin before it, to create a unified, professional, and politically neutral army able to submit to civilian authority. Furthermore, as already pointed out, the anti-Amin war had been fought directly by only three of the numerous groups making up the UNLF, and some other groups had only participated in the Moshi Conference and in the formation of the loose umbrella organisation. While on the surface all members of the UNLF were equal in status, the 'fighting groups', by virtue of having put men in the field, felt they had played a more important role than the non-fighters, and that this entitled them to a greater say in how post-Amin Uganda was to be governed (Avirgan and Honey 1992). Few in the UNLF were prepared to entertain this notion. Continued disagreements that saw the collapse of two short-lived post-Amin governments eventually tore the Front apart, culminating in the civil war that brought Yoweri Museveni to power in 1986. For each armed group, the importance of having large numbers of troops in order to bolster its ability to influence decisions led to irregular and sectarian recruitment into their ranks, and finally into the new national army, of people from particular regions of the country. In addition, perhaps in anticipation of future outbreak of hostilities, some armed groups opted not to integrate all their troops into the national army and instead allowed them to dissolve into the general population with their weapons.

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<sup>14</sup> After Obote sought refuge in Tanzania, for example, Nyerere declared that he still regarded him as the legal President of Uganda (see Karugire 2003: 77-78)

In addition, some of the groups under the UNLF contained core elements built around specific ethnic groups. For example, Obote's Kikosi Maalum was built around the Acholi and Langi cores, the same groups he had sought to use to support his regime before Amin ousted him. Museveni's FRONASA was built around a Banyankole and Banyarwanda core that, until today, makes up the bulk of the top echelons of the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF). As already mentioned, immediately after expelling Idi Amin and the bulk of his forces from the country, they embarked on strengthening their bargaining positions in the new dispensation by further recruitment, again mostly of people from the same core groups. Attempts to unify the separate groups into a single army were frustrated and blocked by those who sought to dominate the new government, well aware that with the military on their side, they could seize power, monopolise it, and also retain it. Therefore, despite having co-operated to topple Amin's dictatorship, the elites who took over the state failed to unite around a common agenda but instead engaged in internal fractions that would later lead to civil war.

The question of what kind of political system to put in place further divided the returned civilian and military elites. Two options were debated: an umbrella no-party system, at the time the embryonic idea of Museveni's now defunct Movement system that he instituted after he captured power, and; the multi-party system favoured by two of the three political parties that had contested the independence elections, been forced underground and were now on the resurgence: the Democratic Party (DP) and Obote's Uganda People's Congress (UPC). It is probable that those who favoured umbrella-type politics were those, such as Yoweri Museveni, who lacked the necessary resources and networks to contest for power within a multi-party system, as indeed the 1980 general elections demonstrated. It is also possible that those in favour of multi-party politics were emboldened by their possession of the necessary institutional and organisational capacities to participate effectively.

After protracted debate, the camp in favour of the restoration of multi-party politics, effectively banned by Milton Obote and the ban maintained by Idi Amin, won the argument. Thereafter, preparation for the 1980 general elections began in earnest. Up until this decision, Milton Obote had been prevented by the Tanzanian government from returning to Uganda to participate in politics. President Julius Nyerere had been apprehensive about his potential to divide rather than to unite the anti-Amin coalition and the country given his first record in office, the same reasons for which he had been banned from joining the Moshi Conference. With the 1980 elections looming on the horizon, however, and given his leadership of the UPC, which was prepared to contest the elections, Obote was allowed to return. While it delighted his supporters, among some of whom he enjoyed cult status, Obote's return to active politics caused consternation among his detractors, especially the Baganda whose king he had exiled and whose monarchy he had dismantled.

Fortunately for Obote, and unfortunately for his opponents, the Military Commission that controlled the government at the time, consisted mostly of his allies and supporters, and was to organise the elections and oversee their conduct. Unable to trust the Commission with these tasks, one of the contending political parties, the Uganda Patriotic Movement led by Yoweri Museveni, threatened to 'go to the bush' and wage war against the winners if the elections were rigged. The UPC went on to score a controversial victory that, although endorsed by foreign observers as reflecting the collective will of the people of Uganda, was contested by the other contenders as well as some analysts (Karugire 2003), and to this day remains the subject of debate. What is beyond dispute, however, is the gerrymandering by the Military Commission and the widespread violence against, and intimidation of, opposition

politicians and supporters by the army once again dominated by pro-Obote Acholi and Langi (Karugire 2003). Within weeks of the UPC's victory and formation of the second Obote government, the country was at war again: Museveni and his allies had kept their promise to 'go to the bush'.

Museveni's decision to fight the newly elected government followed that of former Amin soldiers who had already regrouped in the then Zaïre and southern Sudan and were executing a low-intensity insurgency involving sporadic incursions into the West Nile region. Following his decision, other fighting groups emerged, also seeking to topple the new government (see Table 2). Lack of organisational capacity for some, and for others failure to articulate a broad political agenda beyond simply toppling Obote, prevented them from developing into effective military threats to the government. However, owing in large part to experience gained from its predecessor FRONASA, Museveni's National Resistance Movement evolved into a broad-based movement able to galvanise a wide cross-section of society behind it. Several attempts at forming a broad united front failed (Bwengye 1985). Other groups eventually collapsed or could only stage occasional and isolated attacks on military, police, and civilian installations.

**Table 2: Anti-Obote Insurgent Groups**

Group	Leadership	History
National Resistance Army/Movement	Yoweri Museveni	FRONASA
Federal Democratic Movement (FEDEMO)	Dr. David Lwanga (?)	Anti-Amin coalition
Uganda Freedom Movement (UFM)	Dr. Andrew Lutakome Kayiira	Anti-Amin coalition
Former Uganda National Army (FUNA)	Brigadier Amin Onzi (?)	Amin army
Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF)	Brigadier Moses Ali	Amin army
Uganda National Liberation Front – Anti-Dictatorship (UNLF-AD)	??	Offshoot of Anti-Amin UNLF
WNBF	Juma Oris	Former Amin soldiers

Obote's second regime therefore began against the background of a determined multi-group insurgency spread over a large swathe of the countryside. However, it was the National Resistance Army which became the greatest threat and on which the government's attention and resources were focused. Within a year some of the most economically productive areas of the country were no longer under the control of the government (Kuteesa 2006), leading to a virtual stranglehold on the economy. The government's response did not provide for any kind of dialogue, as a former government Minister pointed out: "... we knew and understood that the insurgency had to be contained militarily" (Okwenje 2006: 42).

As had been the case during his first regime, Obote was unable to exercise effective control over the military. Consequently, the military proceeded to wreck havoc on the general population, especially in areas where the insurgents were active or suspected to be active. The government's failure to ensure security of property and person and its inability to manage the war is evident from a post-event assessment by a former member of the cabinet:

The problem in our case was that details of the execution (of the war) were either lacking or scanty, especially as regards the performance of the armed

forces. ... The management of information by government agencies was weak and inept. ... I believe that the overall policy on security could have been managed differently by our government. Unlike other policy areas where there was debate and collective responsibility in cabinet ... security somehow became the preserve of a small group of cabinet members, namely Minister of Defence ..., Minister of Internal Affairs,... Minister of State for Defence,... and Minister for Internal Security,... Repeated questions on security were glossed over. I do not know if the President himself was well briefed” (Okwenje 2006: 42).

The government’s inability to control the army and pay the soldiers adequately<sup>15</sup> allowed them to carry out arbitrary arrests and incarceration, torture, murder, rape and pillaging (Bwengye 1985). At the same time Museveni had decided to base his insurgency in Buganda and exploit the deep-seated hatred most Baganda felt for Obote for recruitment purposes (see Kasfir 2005). Longstanding anti-Obote sentiments and misconduct by the army facilitated recruitment of tens of thousands of Baganda peasants into the National Resistance Army (NRA), and was critical to enabling the National Resistance Movement eventually to seize power.

As the insurgency progressed the military came under greater pressure and it fractured into ethnic factions. The split advantaged Obote’s Langi tribesmen who dominated the officer corps against his erstwhile Acholi allies, who dominated the rank-and-file, bore the brunt of the fighting, and therefore, they claimed, were dying in larger numbers. The feuding broke out into open hostilities following the death of the then army Chief of Staff, Major General David Oyite Ojok, a Langi, and his subsequent replacement by a relatively junior Langi officer, Lieutenant Colonel Smith Opon Acak. Lieutenant Colonel Acak had been promoted over more senior Acholi officers. Acholi soldiers then staged a mutiny and toppled the Obote government, and in the process opened the way for the National Resistance Army to depose the military Junta that had seized power following the coup.

### **New beginnings: Influence of Elite Consensus**

When Museveni came to power, he pointed out during his swearing-in ceremony as President, that his seizure of government was not a mere change of guards, but a fundamental change. He undertook to make a clean break with the past:

“...according to the NRM philosophy, strategy and tactics in conflict resolution and management, we always believe that all conflicts must be followed by a principled and rational reconciliation in order to heal them completely. ... We should take it as a patriotic duty not to squander opportunities for reconciliation”.<sup>16</sup>

An early sign of departure from past practice was the decision by the National Resistance Movement to set up an inclusive, broad-based government in which even elements of the government and military Junta whose collapse they had brought about could, if they wished,

<sup>15</sup> This state of affairs prompted a senior army officer, Col. Bazilio Olara Okello, to urge the public: “if you have two shirts and a soldier asks for one, give it to him” (REF). In effect Col. Okello was encouraging soldiers to ask members of the public to give them things, including household property, under duress.

<sup>16</sup> Museveni’s address to the 7<sup>th</sup> Parliament of Uganda as Obote’s body lay in state in parliament in 2005.



participate. The new government suspended political parties and established a 'no-party system' bringing together people broadly reflective of the country's ethnic diversity and the various political and ideological tendencies therein. This was a major shift from the retributive and murderous politics of the past when changes in government were followed by massacres of political rivals and opponents.

The strategy of reaching out, even to potential opponents and rivals, had objectives beyond the immediate one of facilitating reconciliation. By 1986 when they seized power, Yoweri Museveni and much of the rest of the NRM/A's leadership were either young and/or novice politicians with their organisation lacking a firm political base. While Museveni had been a member of the post-Amin governments, he was largely unknown as a politician, as evidenced by the heavy defeat he had suffered in the 1980 election at the hands of a more known Democratic Party candidate in a contest that had seen him lose his deposit. He and his colleagues in the NRM and the organisation itself, therefore, were keenly aware of the imperative to establish legitimacy beyond the south of the country from where the majority of them hailed, and where the Obote government and military Junta had been widely unpopular.

In areas where Obote and the UPC had been popular and where the NRM was viewed with suspicion as southerner-dominated, such as in large parts of the East, Northeast and North, the formula for establishing legitimacy lay in co-opting local political and opinion leaders. In a sense then, even the suspension of political parties sought to advance this objective. The official explanation was that political parties, which the NRM leadership held responsible for the years of instability, should be held in abeyance while the country worked on building national unity and consensus around common objectives under a non-partisan Movement system. The suspension of political-party activity and the welcoming into the Movement of party-affiliated politicians had two consequences: It attracted a number of political-party leaders as well as senior members into the broad-based government and in the process helped the Movement to penetrate and win over areas that formerly had been party strongholds, and where, therefore, it would have encountered hostility.

The twin processes of establishing legitimacy and penetrating the countryside were bolstered by the introduction of a new decentralised system of local administration. The system consisted of a hierarchy of popularly elected councils called resistance councils (RC), at the apex of which was the National Executive Council (NEC), which at the time performed the role of parliament. This system, the earliest of efforts seeking to reconstruct and democratise a collapsed and hitherto autocratic state, was instituted in place of the centralised, autocratic and appointive system left behind by the Amin and Obote regimes.

The RC system had first been introduced and tested in areas occupied by the insurgents during the civil war. In addition to enabling the NRM to fill the void left by a collapsed local administration system, it allowed local people to play a direct role in decision-making in matters of collective interest within their neighbourhoods. It also served as a link between the NRM and members of the public for purposes of recruiting fighters into the National Resistance Army. In addition it facilitated intelligence gathering and disciplining of NRA fighters for acts of indiscipline. After the war the system absorbed people from different political and ideological backgrounds and gradually drew many of them into the National Resistance Movement as members (Golooba-Mutebi 1999). This is the basis of the strength the NRM has built up over the years as a political organisation and the source of the wide support it has enjoyed for the more than two decades it has been in power.

Nonetheless, notwithstanding early efforts at reconciliation, the violent change of government provoked a new exodus of political exiles and the emergence of insurgent groups seeking to topple the new government (see Table 3; Amaza 1998). Several groups, some with regional, others religious, and yet others ethnic, characters emerged and embarked on fighting the new government with the aim of overthrowing it.

**Table 3: Anti-Museveni Insurgents**

Group	Leadership	Support base / orientation
Holy Spriti Movement (HSM)	Alice Auma (Lakwena)	Ethnic Acholi / spiritualist
Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA)	Lt. Col. Angelo Okello	Former Obote (UNLA) soldiers, mainly Acholi & Langi
Uganda People's Army-Ninth October Movement (UPA-NOM)	Peter Otai (?)	Former Special forces (UNLA), mainly Iteso
Force Obote Back Again (FOBA)	??	Former Obote loyalists in Tororo, Eastern Uganda
National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (NALU)	Amon Bazira	Former Obote loyalists in Kasese, Western Uganda
West Nile Bank Front (WNBF)	Juma Oris	Former Idi Amin soldiers
FUNA	Amin Onzi (?)	Former Idi Amin soldiers
Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)	Jamil Mukulu	Islamists (Sudan-funded?), reportedly Baganda-led offshoot of NALU
Lords Resistance Army	Joseph Kony	Spiritualist, mostly Acholi
Uganda National Rescue Front	Moses Ali	Former Amin soldiers (mainly Kakwa)

In another departure from precedent, the Museveni regime opted to pursue a two-track strategy in confronting the threat of insurgency. One involved responding militarily, using conventional troops and irregular militias recruited from among local populations (Branch 2005). The other which often co-opted local political and opinion leaders in areas of insurgent activity, involved exploring avenues for negotiations and peaceful resolution of differences. A number of insurgent groups reached settlements with the government and had their leaders appointed to political office, and their troops integrated into the National Resistance Army, and then deployed to fight other insurgents (Amaza 1998). Others, such as the ADF and the LRA, opted to continue to fight and have for the last twenty years persisted in their pursuit of power through the use of arms, often alternating between insurgency and brigandage.

The negotiations strategy was not limited to insurgents fighting with government troops in Uganda; it was extended to political exiles perceived as constituting serious potential threats to the regime. Thus, emissaries were routinely quietly dispatched to reach out to political exiles and 'bring them' back home. This is how many prominent military and civilian exiles have returned over the years. Some retired and resettled in their villages with accompanying benefits. Some were re-absorbed into political, military or civil service posts; a strategy that has earned the government political dividends in their areas of origin. Indeed, when the country entered competitive politics, many of the returned exiles, including Idi Amin's former Vice-President, Mustapha Adrisi, and former President and Army Commander under Obote II, Tito Okello Lutwa,<sup>17</sup> became Museveni's election campaign agents.

<sup>17</sup> He also led the rebellion that toppled Obote in 1985 and presided over the junta that succeeded him and eventually fell to the National Resistance Army.

Those who have opted for exile in neighbouring countries and rebuffed advances inviting them to return have usually been relocated further a field due to pressure on their hosts by the Ugandan government, from where they are unable to wage war. Even then, clandestine efforts to lure them back continue. And for prominent politicians who refuse to return and eventually die in exile (such as former President Milton Obote who died in Zambia in 2005 and Alice Lakwena, former leader of the Holy Spirit Movement, who died in a refugee camp in Kenya in 2006) the government has played a visibly prominent role in funeral arrangements, a strategy calculated to reach out to their local bases of support as a gesture of reconciliation.

### **Echoes from the past**

While on the one hand the Museveni government has shown tolerance towards opponents associated with past regimes and those that have traditionally been members of political parties, it has, on the other, been ruthless towards its own members, or former army officers who have chosen to criticise or oppose it from within Uganda or as members of newly-founded opposition parties. The experience of Museveni's former physician, army officer, parliamentarian and minister, Colonel Kiiza Besigye who has been beaten up by army, police and security agency personnel, hounded into exile and when he returned was arrested, locked up and arraigned before court on dubious charges of treason and rape, best illustrates this ruthlessness (Golooba-Mutebi 2007). However even in cases of this kind, if strong-arm tactics will not persuade a former ally to change their mind, the regime switches to attempts to co-opt through offers of bribes or job opportunities or, if all else fails, sabotage.<sup>18</sup>

That the regime is able to act in this way with impunity or with minimal restraint points to how state organisations and institutions have fared under its watch. The army remains strongly allied to the regime and, through many of its senior officers, beholden to its commander-in-chief whose wishes are acted on as a matter of course. The security agencies and the police operate under the wing of the military, which means that, with the exception of the police in some instances, they act in line with the military's wishes or dictates.<sup>19</sup> The Human Rights Commission, which awards compensation to victims of torture and recommends prosecution of the perpetrators, complains about the government deliberately being slow to compensate, and showing hardly any interest in bringing torturers to book.<sup>20</sup> Parliament, which is under heavy NRM dominance is not always able to hold the executive to account and from time to time acts as a rubber stamp. This is due to the overly restrictive internal workings of the party such as the requirement that no MP should contradict the

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<sup>18</sup> Here again, Colonel Kiiza Besigye's case is instructive. Following his exit from the NRM, he helped found the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), currently the largest opposition party. There have been numerous reports in the press about jobs and other inducements being offered to members of his party who followed him out of the Movement or joined the FDC after retiring from the army. The tactic has, however, largely failed, upon which on many occasions the FDC has been prevented from holding public functions by the police on grounds of the events constituting a threat to public order and security. .

<sup>19</sup> Members of the security agencies are usually former mainstream military officers or serving ones. The police's lack of autonomy from the army can be seen from the way people arrested and tortured by the army and the security agencies are routinely dumped at police stations afterwards (see, for example, 'What it costs taxpayers to torture Ugandans'. Daily Monitor 21.07.07; also, 'Army leads in torturing' Daily Monitor, 21.07.07).

<sup>20</sup> These complaints are contained in the Commission's annual reports. .

official position of the party.<sup>21</sup> While the judiciary is noted for its independence, the government does not always respect the decisions of the courts. These and other recent developments pointing to deterioration in the government's record raise questions about whether the days of turmoil and instability are over.

### **External Influence: The cost of a turbulent neighbourhood**

Two external factors have been pivotal in the internal conflicts and destabilisation the country has experienced: political instability in neighbouring countries aided by porous borders, and hostility towards specific regimes by the country's neighbours. Uganda has been the victim of a historical accident in that it is surrounded by countries that have been continually rocked by internal strife, or have had weak governments without the ability to exercise effective control over their territories and porous borders. To the southwest is Rwanda and to the north Sudan, each with a history of ethnicity-inspired political violence. To the west is the Democratic Republic of Congo with a history of civil wars. To the East is Kenya, which, although generally politically stable since independence, was for a brief period threatened by civil war during the 1980s.

In all these cases, conflicts have spilled over into Uganda with a variety of consequences. In the case of Sudan and Rwanda, they have driven successive waves of political and war refugees into Uganda, which have in turn become security threats to their countries of origin and for Uganda. This was also the case when during the mid-1980s disaffection with the Moi regime in Kenya led some of his opponents, under the dissident group Mwakenya, to attempt launching an insurgency in which Uganda and Libya were implicated as sources of financial and logistical support. The role of political instability in neighbouring countries, the influence of porous borders, and that of refugees fleeing from the instability into Uganda as a factor in the country's destabilisation is most clearly demonstrated by looking at the NRM regime's relations with neighbouring governments.

The NRM seized power at a time when Sudan was in the grip of a three-year old civil war and Kenya was tittering on the brink of civil war. The success of the NRM, as the first guerrilla group to seize power in the region and on the continent, struck fear in the minds of the leaders of both countries who saw the new government in Uganda as a security threat. Also, after the NRM seized power, tens of thousands of troops loyal to the deposed government crossed the border into Sudan with their weapons and formed the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA). Already under pressure from the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), the Sudan government saw this turn of events as a welcome development and deployed the Ugandans against the SPLM/A in return for refuge and supplies. At the same time, the refugees were eager to return to Uganda and dislodge the new government, a plan for which they secured the support of the Sudanese government. After they attacked Uganda and the government discovered that the government of Sudan had colluded with them, it embarked on supporting the SPLM/A already recruiting Sudanese refugees in camps in Uganda, as a counter measure. This was the beginning of the Sudan-backed insurgency by the Lords Resistance Army, which has lasted for two decades. The success by the insurgents

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<sup>21</sup> For example, when members of the military laid siege to and subsequently stormed the High Court in 2006 to snatch and return to prison treason suspects who had been freed on bail, attempts by government MPs to debate the matter on the floor of parliament were scuttled by the party leadership invoking party discipline after it was decided that no debate should take place.

or the failure by the Uganda government to end the resistance is attributed partly to the porous Uganda/Sudan border that allows them to walk freely in and out of the country.

Also, the NRM's victory sent thousands of other refugees into western Kenya, which coincided with the stirrings of the aborted Mwakenya insurgency. Reacting to reports that Mwakenya recruits were passing through Uganda, which was apparently providing them with travel documents and other assistance, the Moi government reacted by arming and funding the Uganda People's Army (UPA) to attack the Museveni government, which it accused of seeking to assist revolution (Amaza 1998). Meanwhile the presence in the National Resistance Army of thousands of Rwandan refugees and Ugandans of Rwandan origin was a source of worry for the Habyarimana regime in Rwanda. In 1990 the Uganda-born Rwanda Patriotic Front/Army decided to invade Rwanda after years of preparation. Another potential threat to Uganda's security was caused by France, Belgium, Kenya, and Zaire, each with its own reasons to fear Uganda's influence in the region, rallying to the Habyarimana regime's support. To forestall any possibility of the RPF/A suffering defeat, which would have exposed Uganda to a possible counter-invasion, the NRM government placed troops, financial resources, and logistical support at its disposal.

Meanwhile at the time of the RPF/A's invasion of Rwanda, Zaire was already pursuing a policy of destabilisation against Uganda. It had begun with reports that an insurgent group seeking to overthrow Mobutu, *Partie de Liberation Congolaise* (PLC), operating from the Zaire-side of the Rwenzori Mountains, was doing so with the support of the Museveni government. Already, the latter was at war with the National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (NALU), which, due to the porous Zaire/Uganda border, was operating from bases inside Zaire. The Mobutu government had reacted by providing NALU with support and continued to do so when NALU metamorphosed into the Sudan-backed Allied Democratic Front (ADF).

Sudan, Kenya and Zaire are not the only countries to have pursued policies of destabilisation against Uganda. Tanzania, otherwise a paragon of stability in the region, was for many years supportive of insurgent groups seeking to overthrow the Idi Amin regime and eventually led the invasion that toppled him and installed the short-lived Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) government.

Besides tit-for-tat destabilisation policies, porous borders and weaknesses, which render states unable to exercise control over the length and breadths of their territories, have facilitated activities by exiled dissidents or refugees seeking to destabilise their home countries. In the early days of the Idi Amin regime, his predecessor Milton Obote set up guerrilla training camps in Owiny Ki-Bul, South Sudan, courtesy of the Anya Nya guerrillas who at the time were fighting the Sudan government and to whom he had rendered support while in power. The Sudan government's lack of effective control over its territory made it possible for the Anya Nya rebels to control large amounts of the country and therefore for them to host Obote's guerrilla forces. When Idi Amin was overthrown, three guerrilla groups – FUNA, WBNF, UNRF – were able to walk into both South Sudan and Eastern Zaire, organise themselves, acquire weapons, and launch attacks against successive governments in Uganda, as well as teaming up with Sudanese and Zairean dissidents to fight their home governments. It was the NRM government's strategy of negotiations that eventually brought an end to their insurgencies. The combined effect of these cycles of destabilisation has been to force governments in Uganda to concentrate more of their financial resources on counter-insurgency than on reconstruction efforts.

### **Taming the Military: The post-1986 army and political stability**

The post-1986 army is an amalgamation of Museveni's NRA and various fighting groups, including soldiers who served under the NRM's preceding regimes. Opportunities for career continuation and advancement have been significant in enticing former insurgents out of the bush. Despite the predominance of Museveni's tribesmen and ethnic allies in the most strategic and important command positions, the army enjoys the reputation of being the least ethnically divided and fractionalised in Uganda's post-colonial history. It is, also, the first national army to observe a relatively high level of discipline and unity of command.

The UPDF, however, is neither apolitical nor even politically neutral as an organ of the state. It is politically active and supports the NRM government openly enough for keen observers to notice. For example, its officers and men routinely interfere in political campaigns and elections on behalf of the ruling party and its supporters, and to the detriment of opposition parties and individuals. Due to its reputation for discipline under normal circumstances, however, incidents of violent conduct by individual officers against members and supporters of the opposition during the charged atmosphere of election campaigns are seen by many who remember the wanton brutality and lawlessness of past armies as temporary and forgivable lapses in discipline.

The UPDF's Members of Parliament have a history of voting in line with the wishes of the ruling party. Signs of deviating from the official, usually un-stated, position by individual officers invite heavy pressure and punishment, so that the army, even if partisan, is united in its partisanship, at least on the surface. Criticism of the opposition is tolerated or mildly rebuked, while any attempt at criticising the government invites heavy punishment, including imprisonment. The army is led by the president's loyalists – his son is a mid-level officer - most of them having served in the elite Presidential Guard Brigade (PGB), and tightly controlled by the President.

Security is one of the NRM regime's major preoccupations. Besides the army and the police, there are several interlocking formal and informal security agencies and arrangements, as well as local militias, all controlled by the military through its Chieftaincy of Military Intelligence (CMI). Tight control has had two important outcomes. First, it has ensured that, unlike in the past when members of the army could misbehave, including harassing and robbing members of the public with impunity, it is now no longer possible, except at election time when some members of the security forces engage in acts of indiscipline and criminality with virtual impunity.<sup>22</sup> This has ensured that the military does not alienate the public from the government. Indeed, a major reason for Museveni's continuing popular support, especially in rural areas, is because he 'brought peace', which allows people to sleep peacefully in their beds, something that, under previous regimes and their in-disciplined armies, could not be guaranteed. Second, it has insured the government against the possibility of mutinies and coups d'états, problems that were endemic to previous governments.

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<sup>22</sup> For example, in early 2006, Sergeant Ramathan Magara, a soldier attached to the office of one of the Resident District Commissioners in Kampala, the capital, shot and killed 3 opposition supporters in broad daylight at a political rally. Although he was subsequently arrested and tried, he was later released on what has since turned into permanent bail, pending completion of investigations. During the same period the then Commandant of the Military Police, Lt. Col. Dick Bugingo, assaulted a senior member of the Forum for Democratic Change, also in broad daylight. The incident was filmed and shown on television. He too, was tried and subsequently walked off with a light 'punishment' in the form of a warning..

## Conclusions and discussion

Uganda's post-independence history of conflict and war was profoundly shaped by its colonial experience. Four factors have underpinned patterns of violent conflict, war and state collapse in Uganda since independence.

First, the single most important fissure, which repeatedly inhibited elite unity, was that between the Baganda and other ethnic groups, and especially between Baganda elites and aspirant elites from other regional/ethnic backgrounds. No post-independence regime was able to secure peace and stability in the country without accommodating the interests of the Buganda monarchy, which Baganda generally saw as representing their own interests including control over some of the most productive lands as well as having privileged access to education and other resources underpinning their wealth as well as social dominance. The monarchy possessed a strong set of institutions, deeply rooted in society (appealing to both poor and rich Baganda), which acted as an alternative source of legitimacy to the institutions of the post-independence state. Republican coalitions under Obote during his first and second period of government saw efforts to consolidate power at the level of the state undermined by their attempts to isolate and tame Buganda. While the authoritarian regime of Idi Amin attempted to placate the Baganda, his misguided strategy to build popular support by expelling the Asian community led to economic disaster. Museveni's NRM government was the first to come to an accommodation with Buganda by restoring the monarchy and, within the context of 'no party rule', building an inclusive government across ethnic divides as it attempted to shape the post-1986 state and economy to provide developmental opportunities for the entire country.

The second factor underpinning patterns of conflict, violence and war, was the failure of successive regimes to build effective and disciplined armed forces within the state. Again, post-independence state builders were not able to break from dysfunctional patterns bequeathed by the colonial authorities whereby ethnic minorities were over-represented in the military and police. Indeed, Obote's reliance on the military to achieve his political objectives both reinforced the ethnic character of the military (diminishing its legitimacy) and politicised the military, eventually creating the conditions for Idi Amin's coup d'état and authoritarian regime. Amin's efforts to create a military loyal to himself, by restricted recruitment on an ethnic basis, not only perpetuated its dysfunction but also, by expelling many previous members of the armed forces, created the basis for future insurgent movements in rural areas and among exiles in neighbouring countries. The short-lived UNLF, which with Tanzanian backing overthrew the Amin regime, again failed to build a unified, disciplined and inclusive army across ethnic and regional divides, as did Obote during his second period of government. One important reason for Museveni's success in consolidating peace (except in much of the country's greater North) was due in no small part to the creation of a disciplined armed forces, which at least during the early period of the NRM government, broke from past patterns of ethnic recruitment and guaranteed the basic livelihoods for soldiers and their families.

Thirdly, the legacy of privileged access to both sources of wealth and means for social improvement for some ethnic communities over others, which underpinned the logic of colonial rule, was perpetuated by every regime until Museveni's NRM fought its way to power in 1986. Museveni presided over the establishment of an inclusive regime incorporating former allies and offering former opponents both positions in government as

well as access to resources and business opportunities. By preventing internecine and regionally based political party competition while also favouring decentralised government through elected 'resistance councils', the NRM regime laid the foundations for peace and state reconstruction. Intolerance to opposition and moves towards a more repressive stance and exclusionary posture towards opponents in recent years threaten to undermine the hard-won peace.

Finally, patterns of conflict and war in Uganda have been influenced fundamentally by the impact of 'conflicts next door' and cross border activities by states and insurgent movements. An important consequence of exclusionary policies of successive regimes in Uganda was their failure to extend the authority of the state throughout the country's territory. This allowed regional elites and insurgent movements the space to plan rebellion and deprive the state of important sources of revenue, while inhibiting possibilities for the consolidation of formal economic activities. It also left regional power brokers and insurgent movements with the opportunity to enter cross-border alliances in search of sources of support for their own efforts to capture state authority. As we have demonstrated, successive wars in Uganda have been fundamentally wrapped up in cross-border alliances and these patterns continue to underpin on-going warfare inside Uganda, pitting government forces against the Lords Resistance Army, as well as Uganda's involvement with military conflicts beyond its borders, especially in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

This account of efforts to consolidate state authority in post-independence Uganda is far from complete. Important theoretical and empirical questions remain. Much more needs to be understood about the economic foundations of conflict in the country – from the patterns of wealth and property ownership in the hands of Baganda elites to patterns of resource allocation since Museveni's NRM established power in 1986. The Museveni regime has presided over significant periods of economic growth and has complied with most of the exigencies of the international donor community in terms of macroeconomic management, but much more needs to be understood about emergent business communities and how the real economy has been structured over the past twenty years. One of the consequences of no-party rule during the past two decades was the construction of a political organisation, the NRM, inclusive of varying interests, but therefore also subject to profound factionalism. Little is known about the shape and character of factions within the NRM or about how they have been managed. The NRM government presided over the integration of former combatants into a unified UDF, but much more needs to be understood about how this was achieved. On the other hand, despite being able to extend state authority over significant parts of its territory, the Museveni government has still found it difficult to secure peace in the North and the reasons why need to be the subject for future research.



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Development Studies Institute (DESTIN)  
LSE, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7849 4631 Fax: +44 (0)20 7955 6844  
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