

THE LUWEERO WAR: ITS ORIGINS AND CONSEQUENCES

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I want to propose that in the first place there was no Luweero war for the simple reason that the people of Luweero never took up arms to fight any other district or region of Uganda.

Secondly, the people of Luweero never started any war. The tag Luweero war is a loose description for a civil war in Uganda where the National Resistance Army (NRA) rebels used Luweero as a base but the conflict spread to almost all over Uganda and in some cases it can be proposed that it is still shouldering in Acholiland.

Luweero is a district in Buganda, which has contiguous, advantages to Kampala and so the NRA rebels used it as a base to launch an attack on the government of President Dr. Apollo Milton Obote in Kampala.

I wish to propose that what became known, as the Luweero war was a continuation of an unfinished struggle for power between the people from the West of Uganda and those from the North. It can reasonably be added to the above premise that one must also take into account Yoweri Museveni's long held ambition to rule Uganda at all cost and for this he had prepared for a "Liberation/peoples war" like Mew Tse Tung, Fider Castro and Samora Marchel.

The genesis of this struggle:

Soon after our independence, Dr. Obote moved a motion to make the Kabaka of Buganda the President of Uganda and in the Parliament adopting that motion, they forgot to read an important proviso that said in the event the President was not able to sign a Bill into an Act, the Prime Minister would do it in his behalf and such an act would be regarded as an act of the President.

In the Independence talks in London, the colonial government in Uganda. Britain, offloaded a dynamite of a problem onto the new incoming Uganda administration i.e. the issue of the lost counties.

The Constitution provided that there would be a referendum on the lost counties, within two years of our independence. When the Bill for the referendum was passed by Parliament, the President, then the Kabaka of Buganda, Sir Edward Muteesa, popularly known as King Freddie, refused to assent to the Bill and so Dr. Obote signed in his behalf.

The result of the referendum was such that Buganda lost the two counties of Buyaga and Bugangayizi to Bunyoro and the love affair between the Kabaka's government and Dr. Obote's central government turned sour, with the Kabaka's wanting to avenge the loss of the counties. Thus Dr. Obote earned himself the first implacable enemy.

Second, there was struggle for power in the governing Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC) After the Gulu conference of 1965. Grace Ibingira, a graduate of Aberystaith

University in Wales and a reputed lawyer became the party Secretary General of the UPC.

Soon thereafter, the feeling that a non-graduate northerner was the party leader was irksome to them and factions were formed to try and oust Dr. Obote from the leadership of the party. Thus the Ibingira group found a willing ally in the Kabaka's government.

They also got the then army commander, Shaban Opolot to side with them and there were attempts to arrest/shoot Dr.Obote in Moyo in 1966. "The plot was hatched and according to the arrangement, the then deputy head of Uganda Prisons, Fabain Luke Okware; the deputy head of Police Enyalio were to partner with Shaban Opolot, the head of the army all of them Itestots.

The understanding was that with the armed forces under people who would obey Opolot, the alliance of Opolot, Ibingira and Sir Edward III Muteesa would be able to oust Dr.Obote. However, in the event Dr. Obote turned tables on them: arrested the five ministers that included George Magezi, Mathias Ngobi, Dr Lumu, Balak Kirya plus Grace Ibingira at a cabinet meeting in Entebbe. They were subsequently incarcerated in Luzira prison.

I want to propose further that at the time, if Sir Edward Muteesa II had been a bright person, he would have realized that the game was up and left the country. But because he had cache of arms in the Lubiri and because he loved guns and hunting, he thought he could take the Uganda government on.

Thus the unfortunate decision to try and expel the Uganda government from the soil of Buganda, which led to the battle of the Lubiri and the subsequent fleeing and death in exile of the Kabaka.

In 1971 Dr. Obote was over thrown and went into exile in Tanzania. Then a young man, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, a great admirer of Ibingira was also in exile in Tanzania. These two people had differing liberation organizations and both fought for the attention and trust of Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere (RIP), the then President of Tanzania.

Thus Museveni's Front for National Salvation (FRONASA) and Dr. Obote's Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) were at odds with each other. It is not surprising therefore that when the Moshi Conference was organized by Prof. Tarsis Kabwegyere with the technical support of people like Dani Nabudere, who had his own quarrel with Dr. Obote; they tried as much as possible to exclude the UPC from that Conference.

I believe that Yoweri Kaguta Museveni took over from where Grace Ibingira left off, and then decided that he must rule Uganda at all costs. A source who for his own safety cannot be identified, remembers Museveni telling them in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania in the mid 70's, "I am going to rule Uganda for as long as I want because they are docile."

It is with this background that the liberation struggle for Uganda, which succeeded in 1979 happened and in the National Consultative Council (NCC), there were interesting happenings e.g. when Prof. Lule was ousted.

According to the Moshi accord arrangement, the next in line to succeed him was supposed to be Akena p Ojok but the NCC argued that Uganda was ready for a Northern president and that is how Sir Godfrey Lukwonga Binaisa was drafted into becoming the President of Uganda.

Sir Godfrey Binaisa was a very acceptable person because he had no political base and so could be pushed at anytime. Thus Binaisa tried to form his own umbrella, while Museveni's were pushing for a third force, which means any other political organization except UPC or the Democratic Party (DP). So the fight in the NCC was instructive.

First Yoweri Museveni's claim to an army of 5000 in Mbarara was disclaimed. Secondly, his attempt to send people only sympathetic to his cause, were interdicted by Brig. Oyite Ojok (RIP) and eventually the NCC transferred Museveni from being Minister of Defence to that of Regional Cooperation.

When it was clear that the newly formed UPM of Yoweri Museveni could not win elections, it was decided that Binaisa should be entrenched to rig the elections while Museveni bided his time to over throw him later. These were the jockeyings for positions of advantage.

Thus when Binaisa was overthrown and Paulo Mwanga (RIP) became the effective leader of Uganda the chips were drawn.

Long before the elections were held under the Uganda Military Commission, of which, Museveni was Vice Chairman, he started saying that he would go to the bush if the elections were rigged.

In the debate in the NCC it was instructive that the following people were anti Museveni; Tewungwa (RIP) John Luwuliza Kirunda MM, Osindek Wangor, James Obua Otoa and Steven Ariko while on Museveni's side was a team led by Francis Butagira, Kintu Musoke, Bindadi Ssali and Tarsis Kabwegyere.

The elections were eventually held in October 1980 and Yoweri Kaguta's NRA made the first attack on Kabamba on February 6, 1981.

The choice of Luweero as a base was well articulated by Lt. Gen David Tinnyefuza on a UTV programme to celebrate Tarehe Sita 2004. He argued that Luweero was within striking distance of Kampala, it had a population which was opposed to UPC and thirdly, the rebels would easily meld into the population.

Of course that conflict spread into most parts of Uganda and eventually when the NRA marched into Kampala, they had come from Kasese through Mbarara and Masaka.

In short, in my submission, the cause of the Luweero war was Yoweri Museveni's ambition to rule Uganda at all costs and to remove the northerners from power.

Consequences:

To fully appreciate the consequences of the civil war, it is necessary to understand the emotions, which were generated.

(a) Any northerners, and indeed in Luweero district, any member of the UPC was an Anyanya who must be exterminated. It was a very brutal war.

(b) On the side of the UNLA, the government forces who were fighting the NRA, the majority of the soldiers were Acholi's and they died in large numbers. That partly explains, I believe the apathy of everybody, including the neighbours, leaving the conflict in Acholi to be a purely local issue.

(c) The issue of mistrust took root in Uganda because this conflict was ostensibly concluded by the Nairobi peace talks, which the NRA used as a time to regroup. The Acholi who had Gen. Tito Okello Lutwa (RIP) who concluded the Nairobi peace talks, believe that Museveni shortchanged them.

(d) Another consequence is that the leadership of the army has continued to remain in the hands of people from Western Uganda, because I believe they trust one another.

(e) Having come from the bush, the fighters need jobs, so a large number of northerners were dismissed from government service, and indeed from some factories to pave way for people from west. This has led to a continuous accusation of Banyankole hegemony.

(f) Some Ugandans have been forced into exile and it will not be surprising if they want to come back by the force of arms.

(g) In the scenarios I am envisaging the gun as the route to power and therefore a consequence for Uganda, which portends a long period of instability.

(h) Needless to say countless lives were lost, development stagnated and hindered and property destroyed, hence the burden of the Luweero war debt claimants on the economy.

(i) Those who were the rebels have used the argument that they sacrificed their lives to justify their monopoly for power and to claim that they are more nationalistic and patriotic than other Ugandans in other political organizations.

G) When the rebels were prosecuting this war all decisions were referred to Museveni and as a consequence that behavior has continued in his disregard for government structures and regulation and he has personalized Uganda government as his fife.

(k) The last consequence is that with the coming into power of the NRM, the old boys of Ntare and Dar es Salaam University took over, maintained and dominated positions of power in the current government.

(l) The deep polarization of Uganda into the civilized and privileged south as against the backward north as against the backward and fringe people of northern Uganda.

(m) The invention/discovery and introduction of the movement system in Uganda.

(n) The deposing of Dr. A. M. Obote by his army and the formation of the Military Council under General Tito Okello Lutwa comprising forces of UNLA, FEDEMU, UFM and FUNA.

(o) The Nairobi Peace talks.

(p) The marching into Kampala of NRA and formation of a new government.

(q) The pursuit of unfinished business in Acholi

References:

1. Hansards from 1960s and those of NCC
2. Newspaper clippings
3. Interviews with people who were intimately involved

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