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Uganda

UGANDA

The colonialist should



d never have come
 Or once he came, he should never have
 left
 When he did, the way he did.
 He taught us how to chew
 Before we learnt how to suckle,
 To walk before we learnt how to crawl
 To sing before we learnt how to talk.
 -Zinunula Samuel Iga
 From an anthology of Ugandan poetry

Contents:

- I. Introduction and History
- II. Politics
- III. Regional Relations
- IV. Education
- V. Health
- VI. Development

Figure 1: From CIA World Factbook

I. Introduction and History

Ethnic divisions characterize the history and indeed the future of Uganda. To oversimplify, Uganda can be divided in two overarching regions: the southern region, which contains ethnically Bantu descendants of the Kingdom of Buganda and the Nilotic peoples of the north.

To explore Uganda's current situation, it would first be helpful to establish its historical base. After mass migrations before the 4th century B.C., kingdoms began to form in the region now known as Uganda. Though countless kingdoms rose and fell during almost two millennia of history, two are vital in understanding Uganda's history. Bunyoro-Kitara formed in west-central Uganda and thrived for almost a millennium before declining in the 15th to 17th centuries. The second, more influential, kingdom was Buganda. Comprised primarily of agriculturalists, Buganda eventually served as the jumping-off point for British colonization of the region.

European exploration of Uganda was spurred by the search for the source of the Nile, which was later discovered and named Lake Victoria. The first European group to reach Uganda was the Royal Geographical Society of Britain. Later, the Society sent Henry Morton Stanley to Lake Victoria. Though the British were the first foreigners to explore the region, Egypt was the first to attempt to colonize it, believing that controlling the source of the Nile was an important security objective. Ismail, the Khedive of Egypt sent Samuel Baker, who succeeded in annexing the kingdom of Bunyoro to Egypt in 1872. However, Egypt lost its influence in the revolt of Masindi. Emin Pasha, also sent by the Khedive of Egypt, also failed to gain control over the region, and thus ended Egypt's attempts to control Uganda

The first European groups to attempt to gain influence in Uganda were Catholic and Protestant missionaries in 1877. Soon after, more politically-motivated groups began to exert their influence over Uganda. When the British took control of Egypt in 1882, they revived the Egyptian desire for Uganda for the protection of the Nile. German colonization of Africa posed Britain's most important competition. The 1886 Anglo-German agreement divided large swaths of Africa, but left the issue of Uganda without agreement. Finally in 1890, an agreement was signed securing Uganda in the British sphere of influence. Fortunately for the British, the kingdom of Buganda was destabilized by religious conflict brought about by the missionaries, making conquest easier. On June 18, 1894, the British declared a protectorate over Uganda, yet numerous challenges remained. An agreement signed in 1900 formally declared peace between the Kingdom of Buganda and the British, giving the Bugandans special treatment in the eyes of the British which began a Bugandan feeling of superiority which continues to this day. The Bugandans served as significant collaborators; they were instrumental in defeating the Kingdom of Bunyoro-Kitana. Through the clever use of divide-and-conquer tactics, by the eve of the First World War, the British had fully consolidated their rule over Uganda. The First World War introduced most Ugandans to the outside world.

An important aspect of Ugandan history is the Indian community, which was instrumental in developing Uganda as one of the most successful African countries on its independence from colonial rule. The community began to grow when the British

imported labor from India to build the Uganda Railway which linked Uganda to the port in Mombasa. Thereafter, Indians poured into Uganda, and for the most part did not assimilate into the African communities, producing a great deal of ethnic tension.

The economy during this time period was a fairly typical colonial arrangement. The British strongly encouraged the development of cash crops: cotton and coffee. Moreover, ivory was harvested in abundance and sent to Britain and other European destinations by way of the Uganda Railroad. Much of this early economy was controlled by the Indian community.

On the political spectrum, after World War II, independence became an important topic. The first mentions of independence came with a Bugandan desire to disintegrate Uganda, which proved very alarming for the British and the rest of Uganda. Bugandans were very reluctant to support a British plan to politically unify Kenya with Uganda, for fear of Kenyan domination. Most political organizations, like the Bugandans, remained local in scope, and thus no party was able to appeal to many ethnic groups at the same time. Milton Obote, leader of the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) was the most successful in gaining broad support. They gained influence on their "unity-justice-independence" platform and lobbied for a strong post-independence central government. Through these political proceedings, Ugandans came to realize the importance of Buganda in any kind of political agreement.

Finally, in 1961, the British government sponsored elections in Uganda, in which the UPC defeated the Democratic Party (DP) and began to establish a strong central government with a federal relationship with Buganda. The first government was a coalition agreement between the UPC led by PM Obote with the KY party, which represented Bugandan interests. A ceremonial position of President who would be Bugandan was established. However, the beginning of the independent state of Uganda was not without conflict. In 1964, Grace Ibingira, a high ranking government official attempted a coup against Obote, which ended in failure. After the incident, Obote, fearing many of his close advisers appointed Idi Amin as chief of state, seeing him as a supporter. With most of Obote's opponents eliminated, he was able to consolidate his control. In 1967, he abolished all kingdoms and began a "move to the left" to promote socialist-oriented society. Meanwhile Idi Amin consolidated his own power in the army and staged a successful coup to remove Obote from office.

The rule of Idi Amin marks the darkest period in Uganda's history. Coming from a Nilotic ethnic group from northern Uganda, he ruled with an iron fist, using extremely brutal methods. Between 1971 and 1977, he doubled the size of the army, thus securing his rule over Uganda. Arguably, his most destructive action was the expulsion of 70,000 Indians living in Uganda. In doing so, he dealt a very large blow to the Ugandan economy, which Ugandans still feel today. The Indians had controlled almost every productive Ugandan industry, and in their absence, shortages of even the most simple goods became commonplace. Furthermore, Amin shifted Uganda's traditional allies, Britain and the US, to Libya and the USSR.

In 1972, Obote's army-in-exile invaded Amin from Tanzania; this attack was repelled with the help of Libya and Russian arms. Six years later, President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania approved a plan to oust Amin from power, which succeeded in removing Amin from office. Yusuf Lule, a pro-Buganda politician took power. After only 68 days of rule, parliament replaced him with Godfrey Binaisa, who banned all political parties in an effort to unify the country. This proved extremely unpopular, and after less than two years of rule, he was overthrown by the military commission of the parliament. In the subsequent elections, Obote once again took control over Uganda. Using brutal tactics similar to those of Amin, Obote oversaw a good deal of economic growth and normalization of many institutions. However, during this time, many guerilla groups were formed, most importantly Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA), which by 1983 controlled a large portion of Buganda. This time period was marked by a series of skirmishes between the government and non-government military groups. Obote began to lose control over the country when tension escalated between two of his supporting ethnic groups.

In July 1985, Tito Okello, a military leader under Obote finally removed Obote from power with an ambitious plan to reunite Uganda. He dissolved all institutions and encouraged political parties to form into one. The peace accord between Museveni and the government paved the way for peacekeeping troops to enter Uganda and attempt to re-stabilize the country, however, the peace accord was never implemented and Okello's plans were never realized.

Museveni's NRA gradually took control of Kampala and then the rest of Uganda. He took control with ambitious plans similar to Okello's: reunite Uganda. He promised to establish democracy, promote unity and end human rights violations. Moreover, a coalition government was formed attempting to unite all the disparate groups that formed under Obote's second regime. An extremely elaborate regional bureaucracy was implemented in an effort to unify the country. In 1992, a no-party constitution was drafted, in which political parties would be outlawed and all would be forced to join Museveni's "movement". Though heavily criticized, Museveni managed to pass this constitution as a temporary measure.

Currently, Uganda is still ruled by Museveni's no-party constitutional system, and many of the same issues still face Uganda.

II. Politics: Multipartyism

Until very recently Museveni supported a no-party democracy, where political parties exist but cannot do the things they normally do, such as electing leaders and opening offices. The rationale behind this policy is that many of Uganda's problems arose from a divisive political party system. However, as of February 2003, Museveni seems to be having a change of heart. Besigye, a Ugandan politician in exile claims that political change is impossible using a no-party system and is using the no-party policy as grounds to attempt to topple Museveni. Changing the no-party policy would make this rationale

invalid and protect Museveni's government. Moreover, Museveni may be pushing for a new constitution as the current one does not allow him to run for another term.

III. Regional Relations

Uganda is a member of the African Union, which is modeled after the European Union. It has a very ambitious plan to unify Africa's economic and political policies, much as the Europeans have been striving to do. However, the African Union lags far behind the European Union in unifying basic institutions.

Uganda is also a member of COMESA, which is a common market for eastern and southern Africa. Empirical tests have shown a good deal of trade resulting from this agreement.

EAC, or the East African Community is perhaps the most controversial agreement Uganda has entered into. Its member states are Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. The goal is harmonization of economic policy. However, many Ugandans feel that competing with Kenya would be impossible, thus opposing this agreement.

Relations between Sudan and Uganda have been shaky at best. In Sudan's civil war from 1962 to 1969, Uganda supported the black southerners fighting the Arab northerners. Currently Sudan backs the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which is one of Uganda's notorious rebel groups. In a Kenyan-sponsored peace treaty, Ugandan troops are allowed to pursue the LRA into Sudan, further destabilizing conditions between the two countries.

The Tutsis of Rwanda are ethnically related to the Banyarwanda, who inhabit southwestern Uganda, forming a natural link between the two countries. However, relations between the two countries are often strained. Uganda is accused of helping the Rwandan Popular Front attempt to overthrow the Rwandan government. Furthermore, conflict arose when Uganda and Rwanda jointly intervened in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1998. Rwanda's objective was to punish the Interahamwe forces responsible for the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Uganda wanted to gain security from cross-border attacks. Their differing goals came to a head in a conflict in a clash over the city of Kisangani. This recent dispute between the two countries is exacerbated by a personal dispute between Museveni and Kagame - the ruler of Rwanda.

Uganda's most positive relationship is with Kenya and Tanzania. Under Obote, formerly close relationships between the three countries were strained, but following Museveni's rise to power, new initiatives for co-operation were implemented. Relations between Museveni and the leaders of the two countries remain good.

Relations between Uganda and DR Congo have improved substantially over the past decade. In 1996, Uganda and Rwanda attempted to topple Kabila; but once he was assassinated, DRC and Uganda established full relations.

Israel, surprisingly, remains an important Ugandan ally. Upon independence, Israel was a strong supporter of the new Ugandan government. However, when Israel refused to supply arms to Idi Amin, ties between Uganda and Israel were severed. Amin allowed a hijacked Israeli plane to land in Uganda and demanded the release of Palestinian prisoners. However, once Idi Amin was toppled and Museveni became president, relations with Israel became normalized once again.

Similarly, relations with the US were positive under Obote and Museveni, but extremely strained under Amin. The US still has some problems with the extent to which Uganda has attempted to stop human rights violations.

IV: Education

Makere University, before Idi Amin single handedly destroyed Uganda, had an international reputation as one of the best universities in Africa. Now the government of Uganda is attempting to rebuild the university to its former prominent position. Overall, Uganda used to have one of Africa's best educational systems. Now, though education is still highly valued, access is very limited. Museveni established a National Council for Higher Education, under which salaries were raised and new national universities were founded. However, many problems still remain. Foreign investment is sorely needed, as the government cannot fully fund a comprehensive educational system. Moreover, many regions of Uganda remain isolated as a result of military conflict and lack educational facilities.

V: Health

Similar to Uganda's educational system, upon independence, Uganda had one of Africa's best healthcare systems. However, Idi Amin destroyed this infrastructure. The flight of Europeans and Indians under his regime caused a severe medical personnel shortage. In 1991, Museveni attempted to restore the health care system. Rehabilitation of this system remains one of the government's top priorities.

The Ugandan effort to battle AIDS has been hailed as one of Africa's most successful. In 1993, one in four Ugandans had AIDS. Uganda used its educational legacy to spread the message about prevention. Moreover, many churches took up the cause of AIDS prevention education. Today, the rate of new infections in Uganda is among the lowest in Africa. Most attribute this success to changes in sexual behavior brought about by the educational campaign.

VI: Development

A top priority remains the development of a railway to Kenya, in order for Uganda to be able to trade much more cheaply. Moreover, the government recognizes a great need to fight poverty to increasing the ability of the poor to raise their quality of life. The IMF has been instrumental in these attempts. Several things are needed for the economic growth of Uganda. First of all, the Lords Resistance Army in the north must be

eliminated. The northern portion of Uganda has been in constant warfare; most civilians live in camps and are kept alive solely by the efforts of international organizations such as the Red Cross and UNICEF. This situation causes a great deal of instability and keeps the economy from growing. Furthermore, it scares away tourists, for whom Uganda could be a top destination as a result of its natural beauty. Mining could also be a potential source of income for Ugandans.

In closing, Uganda still has a long way to go to recover from Idi Amin's destructive regime. However, there is surely hope; many Ugandans remember the pre-Amin days when healthcare and education were good, and rebel groups did not threaten to abduct their children. Ugandans have very valid reasons to be optimistic about their future.