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Weekly Politics

2026 Cabinet: Does it put brakes on Muhoozi ascension momentum?



First Son and Chief of Defence Forces, Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba, is the leader of the Patriotic League of Uganda (PLU) pressure group. PHOTO/FILE

PLU generational leader. While some of Gen Muhoozi Muhoozi's top lieutenants, such as Mr Balaam Barugahara and Lilian Aber were retained in President Museveni's Cabinet, others said to be close to the army commander weren't left out.

BY DERRICK KIYONGA

One of the litmus tests of the narrative that President Museveni is slowly but surely handing over governance to his son, Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba, was going to be the shape that the Cabinet would take.

Gen Muhoozi has already shown that he has significant sway over how this country is run when he appeared to initiate a move that led to the ouster of former Speaker Anita Among – who is being investigated over alleged corruption and illicit enrichment – and also backed West Budama Central legislator Jacob Oboth-Oboth, who had been the minister of Defence, to replace Among as Speaker.

With Muhoozi's top lieutenant, David Kabanda, leading the way in ensuring all the ruling Members of Parliament (MPs) of the National Re-

sistance Movement (NRM) rally around Oboth-Oboth's speakership bid, many members of the public made the conclusion that Uganda was witnessing power changing hands from father to son.

"Thus, for me, I think as a country, it is about time we opened the discussion on Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba – not just the possibility of becoming president, but one who has already assumed co-presidency," Yusuf Serunkuma, a political commentator, says.

"I will say one more time, unless something magical happens – like a revolution from nowhere – no one is prepared enough to stop his accession, except, of course, his father, who, despite subjecting him to a gruelling long wait, has no choice but to succumb to the vicissitudes of time."

When President Museveni released his Cabinet on Tuesday evening, the message was sent that Muhoozi would have to wait a little bit longer for him to fully take over the reins of this country.

While some of Muhoozi's top lieutenants such as Mr Balaam Barugahara (minister for Local Government) and Lilian Aber (State minister for Relief, Disaster Preparedness and Refugees), were retained in Cabinet, many of the people close to him weren't appointed.

Key among them is Kabanda, the Kasambya County MP, who has positioned himself as Muhoozi's attack dog.

"When you attack General Muhoozi, I come for you. There is no doubt about that," Kabanda, who is the secretary general of the Patriotic League of Uganda (PLU), Muhoozi's pressure group, told this writer earlier this week.

Museveni also showed in his appointments that he is still relying on old loyal lieutenants such as Sam Mayanja (Attorney General), Rebecca Kadaga (First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of East African Affairs), Jim Muhwezi (minister for Security), Ephraim Kamuntu (minister for Internal Affairs), among others.

Yet one of the indicators of a full Muhoozi takeover from his father was the retention of Chris Baryomunsi, who has been in Cabinet since 2006, but this term he is going to serve as the minister of Health.

Though Muhoozi's political influence is there for everyone to see, Baryomunsi, who served the last term as minister for ICT and National Guidance, had made it clear earlier this year that he isn't about to kneel for Muhoozi.

The clash between the two stemmed from Muhoozi's posts on X, formerly Twitter, in which he ac-

cused the United States government of helping his father's rival, Robert Kyagulanyi, popularly known as Bobi Wine, to escape from Uganda.

While Muhoozi later apologised and deleted that specific post in which he had announced that he had stopped security collaboration between the army and the Americans, Baryomunsi made it clear that the Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) was making his job as official government spokesperson hard.

"The CDF doesn't speak for the Government of Uganda. But he likes X communications. He tweets, he deletes them, and I'm sure Ugandans have an informed opinion on those tweets. Other than purposes of politicking, I don't think you should take them as the official position of the government," Baryomunsi said, but Muhoozi took offence at the statements, promptly telling him that he won't make it in the coming Cabinet since, according to him, he is a traitor.

Not known for going down easily, Baryomunsi informed Muhoozi that he wasn't dying to be in Cabinet since he is "self-made".

"My father trained me to believe in myself. He refrained from taking alcohol. I'm sober 24/7 and focused. He left me free, and I don't suffer from Peter Pan Syndrome. Those attacking me on Twitter/ X don't know the material we have. We, the original Bakiga," Baryomunsi fired back at the army chief, who is widely seen as Museveni's heir apparent.

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What Cabinet list means for PLU



Left to right: Deputy Speaker of Parliament Thomas Tayebwa, Speaker Jacob Oboto and PLU secretary general David Kabanda. The Gen Muhoozi-led pressure group endorsed both candidates. PHOTO/FILE

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Baryomunsi's verbal artillery wasn't restricted to Muhoozi only, but also to his supporters.

Yet it's not the first time Baryomunsi is going bare-knuckled with a person who is seen to be Museveni's replacement within the ruling establishment. Baryomunsi rose to the political scene after clashing with John Patrick Amama Mbabazi, who had been portrayed as Museveni's heir apparent, and also had direct say on who made it in Museveni's Cabinet.

For instance, the 2011 Cabinet, it's said, was largely influenced by Mbabazi with his supporters such as Saleh Kamba appointed minister of State for Bunyoro Affairs, but his appointment was rejected by the parliamentary Appointments Committee on grounds that he had no academic papers.

Another person who is said to have made it to the 2011 Cabinet as a result of Mbabazi's influence was Peter Nyambi, who was appointed Attorney General. Despite Mbabazi's influence, Baryomunsi had made it clear he wasn't about to worship him.

Baryomunsi's fallout with Mbabazi stemmed from the 2011 elections, where he accused Mbabazi and the Kigezi NRM leadership of backing a rival, Anglican Reverend Kenneth Kanyankole, against him.

Baryomunsi claimed they used religion to divide voters and employed military personnel to intimidate his supporters. Baryomunsi's claims of Mbabazi's using the army to win elections were plausible because in 2001, High Court judge Frederick Egonda-Ntende had annulled his Kikinzi West victory after his rival James Garuga Musinguzi, who has since passed on, proved that Museveni's right-hand man had used the military to influence the elections.

"There was heavy deployment of UPDF soldiers in the range of 2,000 on most routes leading to the polling stations, and with the aid of candidate Amama Mbabazi's agents, my known and suspected supporters were either harassed and chased away. These troops were under the command of Lt Col Goa Kasita, who came on the eve of the election day specifically to disorganise the election," Garuga-Musinguzi told Justice Egonda-Ntende, who went ahead to cancel Mbabazi's victory though the by-election, which Mbabazi won, was also punctuated with violence, which later forced Garuga-Musinguzi to quit elective politics.

For Baryomunsi, Mbabazi wasn't successful as he kept on winning elections, and it seems he had the last laugh in the sense that

Museveni first appointed him State minister of Health for General Duties on March 1, 2015, at the time his sworn enemy Mbabazi had fallen out with the President over his presidential ambitions.

Baryomunsi would have more good news because when Mbabazi, under the banner of his Go Forward movement, performed abysmally in the 2016 presidential race by garnering only 1.3 percent of the final vote, approximately 132,574 votes. Museveni rewarded Baryomunsi, who had defended his Kinkizi East slot by appointing him State minister for Housing on June 6, 2016, and later as the minister for ICT and National Guidance in 2021.

Therefore, given Muhoozi's recent threats, some had expected, however, that Baryomunsi wouldn't be dropped entirely from Cabinet, but given an insignificant ministry.

"I don't see Museveni dropping Baryomunsi; that's not how Museveni operates. He might put him in ministries that Museveni thinks are insignificant... because he doesn't want to annoy the Bakiga (Baryomunsi's ethnic group)," outgoing Kira Municipality legislator Ibrahim Ssemujju Nganda had predicted.

But with Museveni appointing Baryomunsi to a critical ministry such as Health, it means he hasn't only had the last laugh but also put question marks on the Muhoozi takeover in the near future.

Yet in terms of military or security issues, it has become apparent how much influence Muhoozi has come to wield as his father's. The army spokesperson, Chris Magezi, who is also the personal assistant of Muhoozi, has defended the First Son's influence on military

matters, citing the UPDF Act that allows the Commander-in-Chief, in this case Museveni, to appoint a military officer of the army to be known as the army commander, in this case Muhoozi, who might assist him in the administration of the army.

But there is no denial that of the nine army commanders – Elly Tumwine, Salim Saleh, Mugisha Muntu, Jeje Odongo, Aronda Nyakairima, Katumba Wamala, David Muhoozi and Wilson Mbadi – that Museveni has appointed ever since his guerrilla outfit, the National Resistance Army (NRA) shot its way to power in 1986, none has had as much power as Muhoozi, who he appointed Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) in March of 2024, has had.

No CDF in the current regime has been given leeway to promote officers to the extent Muhoozi has. Muhoozi, for instance, elevated senior officers such as Maj Gen Francis Okello to Lt Gen, alongside Brigadiers and other senior staff.

Muhoozi also promoted Joseph Musoke Ssemwanga from the rank of Major General and subsequently appointed him as the replacement of the dead Maj Gen Francis Takirwa, as the Deputy Commander of the Land Forces.

Also, a day after the death of Maj Gen Deus Sande, the commander of the army's Armoured Division in the central district of Masaka, Muhoozi replaced him with Brig Jackson Pande Kajuba. Muhoozi also went on to promote Wilson Bagonza Rwakana, who was part of the Special Forces Command (SFC), from Colonel to Brigadier, and he immediately appointed him the Deputy Commander of the Armoured Division, replacing Kajuba.

Muhoozi's influence hasn't just been in terms of the military but also the politics because he was among the first regime officials to tell people not to linger around polling stations during the recently concluded elections in which the army played a weighty role.

"We appeal to citizens to cast their votes peacefully and go home. Don't hang around polling stations. The vote counting and tallying process will be transparent, and it's done in the open," Muhoozi said last December, a month before the elections.

Though the electoral laws allow Ugandans to stay at least 20 metres away from the polling station after voting, the Electoral Commission (EC) chairperson, Justice Simon Byabakama, who is still listed as a Court of Appeal judge, would soon parrot Muhoozi's position.

"I know the law allows voters to stay around, but I know it's not practical on the ground because many of the polling stations are in crowded places," Byabakama said.

PLU DISSATISFIED WITH 17 MINISTERIAL POSTS

PLU this week expressed dissatisfaction with the positions they secured in the new Cabinet, saying said their members and allies got at least 17 ministerial posts in the 83-member Cabinet, an increase from the eight they held in the previous government. PLU secretary general David Kabanda said although the number of posts had risen, their key figures were dispatched to ministries where they would be "dead in the water." "We are unhappy as PLU. Our members were largely demoted or literally put on Katebe," he said.