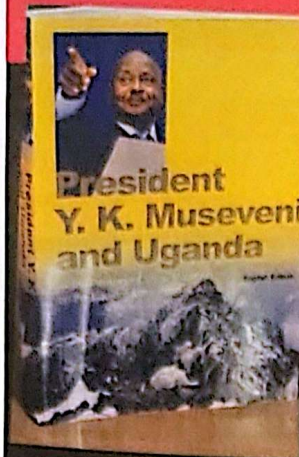


## PART 1 of series on the book



Back in 1971, when Idi Amin took power, Yoweri Museveni was unknown. But the coup gave him the opportunity to rise and fight Amin and got him in the limelight. The first of a four-part series from *President Y.K. Museveni and Uganda* by Chinese editors, Mu Tao and Yu Bin show how the military coup brought Museveni onto the political scene

# Exile in Tanzania

**F**rom the night of January 24, 1971 to the next morning, an outburst of gunfire in the Ugandan capital Kampala awakened violently the sleeping citizens who were totally at a loss for what had happened.

On the second day, also a Monday, at 7:00 in the morning someone heard the news through the BBC that there was a fierce exchange of gunfire in Kampala. However, the Ugandan broadcast and radio reported not a bit of the war and even skipped the regular morning news programme, leaving unremitting waves of thunderous military music claiming a long-lasting presence on the air.

At 5:45 in the afternoon, the music came to a sudden arrest and an anonymous soldier started a long speech in the radio claiming that the army had already taken over the Uganda government.

"We, men of the armed forces, have this day — January 25, 1971 — have decided to take over power from Dr. Milton Obote and hand it to our fellow soldier, Major General Idi Amin Dada. We hereby entrust him to lead this, our beloved country of Uganda, to peace and goodwill among all.

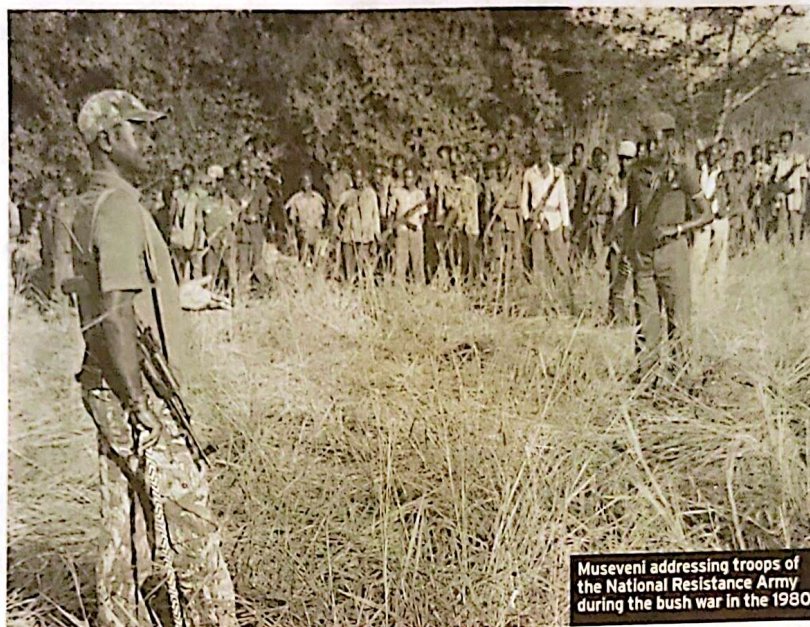
Then the whole country seethed with excitement. In the capital Kampala, hundreds of thousands of citizens took to the streets shouting "Long Live General Idi Amin! Long live the army! Long live Uganda!" The orgiastic crowd stopped in front of military vehicles dancing and throwing beers, cigarettes, bread and biscuits to soldiers.

Living at the suburb of Kampala at that time, President Yoweri Museveni did not get the news from the radio of the coup of Amin until afternoon.

Aware that Idi Amin had a murky history as a soldier, he thought that people's excitement was actually more for the fall of Obote than for the rise of Amin. Although he had pitied the Democratic Party for long, he thought it was too lacking in leverage and vigour to be worth co-operation.

Likewise, he despised the Uganda People's Congress (UPC), led by Obote, with the reason that most of the members were capitalist villains and Obote was not a virtuous politician, but still he joined it hoping that he would gradually reshape it and inject into it "a progressive spirit" in the future. The coup of Amin, however, made his bubble burst.

Amin's coup marked a tipping point



Museveni addressing troops of the National Resistance Army during the bush war in the 1980s

for Museveni's personal political career and also the lives of many Ugandan people.

Soon Amin showed his barbarous and cruel nature and chilled the heated expectations Ugandan people had for him. People paid for their mistakes. Also and apparently bearing the brunt of Amin's assuming power was nobody else but Obote's followers and tribesmen. Thousands of people from Acholi and Langi including officers, soldiers and the innocent civilians were cruelly scourged and killed for their cause.

**I**n the day of learning of Amin's coup, Museveni gathered several friends and analysed the then situation for new judgments. His idea was that under Amin's regime, there was no longer much room for political activities like under Obote's regime. Thus people should unite as one to fight against Amin.

He also told his friends that he would leave Uganda immediately to establish connections with the outer world and be proactive.

With money borrowed from his friends, Museveni left Kampala that very night and reached the capital of the southwestern Ugandan area of

Ankole, Mbarara.

After meeting several comrades, he went to Tanzania and then Bukoba where local officers received them, contacted Dar es Salaam immediately and sent some guards to lead them there.

There in the state department of Tanzania he saw Obote depressed and discouraged. After a while President Nyerere arrived. A brief conversation concluded, the president listened to Museveni's analysis of the situation in Uganda. He still kept a deep impression of the university student Museveni and USARF. He promised Museveni that the Tanzanian government would never acknowledge Amin's regime and instead, it would stand firmly behind the Ugandan people and help them recover their government.

He also expressed hope that Museveni could work with Obote for this.

Later Museveni et al., also conducted a series of diplomatic activities in Dar es Salaam and successfully gained the support of African countries like Somalia, Sudan, Egypt and Guinea.

Afterwards, he and his comrades returned to Bukoba, where he met Colonel David Oyite Ojok who had just been exiled from his country.

Colonel Oyite Ojok, once the general quartermaster of Ugandan army, also came from the tribe of Langi as Obote.

After Obote and Amin turned against each other, Obote was planning to have Oyite Ojok trusted as his own. During Amin's coup, Oyite Ojok was surrounded in the state department but managed to break free and exiled into Tanzania. Museveni exchanged views with him briefly, only to find that they held starkly divergent strategies regarding overthrowing Amin. Afterwards Ojok went to Dar es Salaam to support Obote all the same while Museveni returned to Uganda in secret.

At that time Museveni was already wanted by the Amin government.

In minor disguise, he managed to pass the border inspection and went into Uganda successfully. Upon arrival in Kampala, he summoned several colleagues and friends including Martin Mwesiga for discussion on the then situation and coping strategies.

In the discussion there were two ideas; one idea was that there should be an armed fight against Amin's regime accompanied by underground activities in which spies would be sent to penetrate into the government for intelligence; the other idea was that their work should start within the

government, which meant they could join the general election promised by Amin.

The first idea was agreed by Museveni, Mwesiga and Mwesigawa Black and so on.

After two days in Kampala, Museveni returned to Mbarara and contacted related people to inform them that a fight against Amin had started and they should thus get prepared for help at any time. Then he went out of his way to return to Bukoba in Tanzania.

Ever since then and until September of 1972, this small northwestern city of Bukoba in Tanzania had served as a base camp, where the group of Museveni conducted anti-Amin political activities. From there, they could penetrate into the southwestern Ugandan cities of Mbarara and Masaka, and then into the central area of Uganda like Kampala; from there, they could also travel to the Tanzanian capital of Dar es Salaam for diplomatic activities or appointments with political heavyweights, etc.

## Front for National Salvation

After a stay in Bukoba, Museveni grew anxious for lack of obvious progress in the anti-Amin political fight.

After some thoughts, he handed a memorandum to President Nyerere in which he proposed two alternatives for political activities; one was that anti-Amin countries around, including Tanzania, Somalia and Sudan, should send armed forces to overthrow Amin's regime and reinstate Obote with the precondition that Obote must get rid of his old administrative methods and policies; the other was that an intensive united front force consisting of all Ugandan political parties, led by Obote or other authoritarian figures, should be organised to lodge an armed fight against Amin.

Both suggested a view of Museveni that UPC, led by Obote, could never shoulder the whole responsibility for a fight against Amin. Although in his mind this memorandum was relatively mild, still in Tanzania, it sent shock waves within the government.

Some even speculated from this that Museveni and his fellows had their own designs on the "Ugandan government" which in these speculators' mind meant actually Obote and his supporters. Some

# President Yoweri Museveni and Uganda

even doubted Museveni, thinking he was a spy appointed by Amin.

Such doubts and personal comments bordered on slanders, but Museveni turned a blind eye to them.

He went again to Dar es Salaam for a discussion with Obote's subordinate over the strategies for fighting against Amin.

During the discussion, divergence emerged such that it actually amounted to a fierce debate. Alone, Museveni challenged all the others and won the support of a bunch of Ugandan students. The divergence was double.

Firstly, when it came to the choice of fighting for an organisation or for someone alone, Museveni held the idea that to the whole organisation and to his principles, he would devote his life, but to personal gains, he would devote nothing.

He also noted especially that the 'organisation' he mentioned should be a joint front composed of all progressive political parties in Uganda.

Secondly, there was the problem of fighting tactics. Should there be a normal war or a guerrilla war?

The pack of Obote chose a normal war, namely, a face-to-face conflict with enemies with the explanation that Amin's soldiers would run away at a hearing of guns and were not worth a fight. They also explained that a long-lasting guerrilla war would drag countless innocent civilians into victimhood of Amin.

In contrast, Museveni believed that now seizing the state apparatus as his own, Amin would be a tough enemy for a long period. As the underdog in this fight at present, our choice of staging the final war against Amin could border on stupidity.

Thus the neat manoeuvre should include, firstly, a disturbing guerrilla war which would wear out the enemies gradually and create a respite for self-expansion and secondly, a normal war aimed at ending Amin's regime after there were sufficient fighters, resources and fighting experience.

**A**part from these problems, there were still several more. For instance, should the fight rely on domestic forces or foreign assistance? Museveni's idea was that domestic fights should be the focus and the people should be relied on for the armed fight in the meanwhile, there must also be action abroad, which could assist and support domestic fights. Fraught with a fight staged by the public, Obote hoped to use foreign support for a quick checkmate on Amin.

Another problem was whether armies should be politicised. For Obote, political education in the army should be stopped since differences among political sects could invite dispute and disagreement.

Differently Museveni explained that the political education here was not aimed at teaching the concept of "political sects", but at raising the "political awareness". His idea was that every soldier should understand Uganda's politics and the world's politics and be exempted from



Idi Amin greeting soldiers after taking power in 1971

ignorance, insularity, backwardness and stupidity. They must also be told the reason to fight and whom to fight for.

Disagreement also lay in the way to start the fight. Museveni believed that the preparatory stage of the war allowed overseas activities but never an attack launched abroad, which would create the convulsion of "an external invasion of Uganda" plus the illusion that "opposition against Amin never came from its own people, but from the abetting and plotting Tanzanian people".

Both the convulsion and the illusion would cast shadow upon the cause of their struggle for liberation. Thus the fight against Amin should be started at home but not abroad.

Such disagreement underlined the context in which Museveni established the Front for National Salvation (FRONASA).

At the new birth of the organisation, Museveni did all the taxing work by himself. In just the one year of 1971, Museveni's footsteps covered intensely Uganda and Tanzania, between which there were an underground round trip every two months. In every round trip, there was nearly a week spent in

**MUSEVENI BELIEVED THAT NOW SEIZING THE STATE APPARATUS AS HIS OWN, AMIN WOULD BE A TOUGH ENEMY FOR A LONG PERIOD**

Uganda, mainly Kampala, but the exact places of stay were constantly changed for safety consideration. The major task then was discussing organisation development planning for the organisation, recruiting new members for overseas training and smuggling weaponry to Uganda. Nearly all assistance they could get from other countries, though quite limited, was used for military training and weapon purchasing. In August

1971, the first plan of Museveni, which was practically important, was commenced. Secretly, they took all the newly recruited young soldiers into Uganda for an underground stay in Mt. Elgon. These soldiers, unarmed there, would be granted weapons afterwards. Unfortunately, these ill-disciplined fighters were soon noticed by enemies.

A soldier named Wafula, while making purchases unapproved in a market, was arrested and then confessed. Amin's soldiers then arrested all the others and imprisoned them in Kampala.

Unaware of this, Museveni went to the camp of soldiers with two other men, only to be stopped by the security office half way and to whom they lied that they had been students visiting the hills for research and studies. Convinced by this lie, the security office told them of the arrest of several suspects there a few days ago. It was only then that Museveni realised the trouble. But he feigned composure and managed to escape.

**T**he greatest shortage, of course, was of weapons. Museveni had done everything he could, including even purchasing guns in the revolt area of Uganda's neighbour, Zaire.

Once after trudging a long journey to the revolt camp with his fellows, Museveni failed to purchase the weapon he wanted. On the way back, their ship nearly capsized in Lake Tanganyika. Afterwards in April, 1972, they finally obtained meagre weaponry from the Mozambique Liberation Front and the Tanzanian people, the former of which even undertook the job of training a small number of soldiers for Museveni.

Museveni knew that military skills were open for learning in every camp, while for a revolutionary fighter, there were no ready-made army to be guided. The real competence of a revolutionary lay in the fact that he could start from scratch.

It also must be learnt to build an army in war and create armed forces

through warfare. This philosophy those officials under Obote like Oyite Ojok and Okello would never understand.

For free fighters believing in guerrilla wars, to live is to succeed and to retreat is no cowardice. Act when your action was unexpected; attack when your attack was unknown; to retreat is to make room for moving and to save your energy. All these were principles in a guerrilla war.

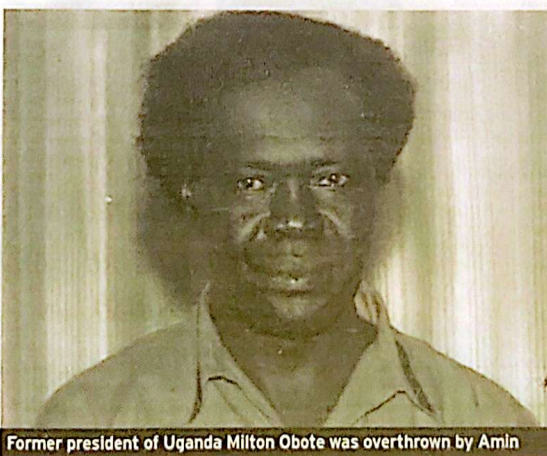
**H**owever, to launch a guerrilla war, there should first be an underground organisation and camp, which should be operated like this; firstly at least one local follower should be selected to cover up and co-ordinate the party's activities somewhere; then a cadre, who had been politically and militarily trained, must be sent to hide there as a legitimate figure with a common role; what's more, this cadre then must prudently study the situation and develop supporters so that an underground team could be set; after this the team would serve as a leading platform through which the public could be mobilised for work and for setting up secret camps which were located either in wild hills or jungles in some place or in places where there were already organisations to be penetrated into; inside the secret camps were weaponry, ammunition, shelters and guerrilla fighters who rested and hid there; also the camps could be used to provide military trainings to involved people with the final goal of establishing and maintaining an armed force, one that would be constantly expanded and strengthened.

In May 1972, the activities were in full swing. In Kabale, Atiak and Kampala, small teams and camps were built with weapons transported in. In other places, teams were also built, which finally expanded to Toro, Mbarara, Mbale and Jinja. Among these teams, the one in Kampala was the most important one.

There, with the support of Muslims, activities against Amin were launched and Museveni's safety in Kampala was ensured. Museveni often disguised himself as a Muslim with a turban and an Islamic name such as Kassim from Nairobi, Abdalla and Musa from Dar es Salaam. Considering that Amin was a Muslim, disguising as a Muslim undoubtedly gave him an edge. This way, Museveni's FRONASA expanded within a short time into a network covering the vital areas of the whole country.

**In tomorrow's issue Museveni's disastrous first war experience**

© President Y.K. Museveni and Uganda is researched and written by a team of Chinese writers headed by two chief editors: Mu Tao, Professor of History Department at East China Normal University; and Yu Bin, Doctor of Ancient Chinese Philosophy at Fudan University.



Former president of Uganda Milton Obote was overthrown by Amin

**DON'T MISS PART 2 TOMORROW in New Vision**