

The long road to the Lubiri attack

by Yoga Adhola.

While the Mengo establishment has been telling its story, there is another side of this story. It is the UPC story which I would like to tell.

As they used to teach us in secondary school, there is always the long term causes and the immediate causes of any historic event.

The long term cause of the attack lie way back in history. Professor Kiwanuka, himself a Muganda tells us Buganda became a dominant identity in the region from around 1600. He did this in an article, Kiwanuka, "The Emergence of Buganda as a dominant power in the interlacustrine region of East Africa, 1600-1900," he published Makerere Historical Journal Volume 1 No. 1975 pages 19-32.

Up to that point the Kingdom of Bunyoro-Kitara had been the most powerful nationality in the region. As a result of Bunyoro-Kitara's preoccupation with an attempted secession on her western borders, a situation, which rendered her eastern frontiers relatively undefended; and Buganda's recovery over a period of time, Buganda was able to accumulate adequate military strength with which to effectively launch an offensive against Bunyoro. (Kiwanuka, M.S.M. 1975: 19-30)

Being rather limited, these advantages only enabled Buganda to recover her previously lost territory. However, in due course, from the reign of Kabaka Mawanda (1674-1704), as a result of annexing the tributary of Kooki from Bunyoro, Buganda acquired immense advantage.

These territories Buganda had acquired had very important consequences: "until then Buganda had been very short of iron and weapons, and had to buy their iron from Bunyoro. Now, however, Bunyoro had lost not only the iron deposits but also the rich reservoir of technical knowledge of smiths of Buddu and Kooki."

Controlling these strategic factors, and given the fact that Bunyoro was involved in formidable domestic problems, Buganda went on to defeat Bunyoro battle after battle, and consequently eclipsed Bunyoro as a dominant power in the region. This dominance was to last unchallenged until the eve of the colonization of Uganda, when during the reign of Omukama (King) Kabalega, Bunyoro regained her military strength and began recovering her territory.

In the course of the two centuries that this dominance lasted, the Baganda embraced an ideology of a dominant power which has existed up to the present day. It is this ideology which underlies the words of the anthem: "The glory of Buganda which began long ago; Let us also uphold it....."

Kabalega

Eventually, an empire, however powerful, gets to be challenged. This happened to Buganda in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Bunyoro, under the able leadership of Kabalega, not only got reorganized but also acquired muskets from the Arabs. On account of these two factors, Bunyoro "succeeded in driving the Baganda back, only to find that their final victory was frustrated by the arrival of the British who protected the Baganda with rifles and Maxim guns."

The Baganda, who were being seriously pressurized by the Banyoro, had gone into alliance with the British who had come to colonize the Nile valley and were looking for an ally. In any colony, outside control by a few thousand colonizers is impossible without winning allies from among the colonized peoples.

A number of factors made the Baganda and not any other nationality the choice for this alliance: they had a fairly developed social and administrative system, a standing army of a sort, and a history of conquest and expansion stretching for three centuries. While the British consciously used the Baganda, to the Baganda their being used was mistaken for the continuation of their dominance and expansion. To

the British, on the other hand, once "established in Buganda, their preferred method of consolidating themselves on the Upper Nile was simply to enlarge Buganda."

The two forces thus made perfect common cause in imposing colonial rule in Uganda. With the imposition of colonialism over Uganda completed, further development in the colony - whether initiated by the British or by the colonized people, should have been national in character as it was in other colonies. This was not the case in Uganda; development tended to assume a dichotomy: Buganda, on the other hand, and the rest of the country on the other.

The initial cause of this trend is the fact that both the missionaries and the colonialist began their work in Buganda, thereby giving the kingdom a head start. Further, as we have already explained, the Baganda were not only used as soldiers in the imposition of colonial rule, but also as initial administrators in the rest of the colony. All these occurrences and factors combined to imbue the Baganda with an acute sense of chauvinism, which in the context of the 1900 Agreement that retained Buganda as a separate and distinct entity, easily translated itself into a sense of separatism.

As Professor Pratt was to observe, the Baganda continued to regard "themselves as a separate people and to view Buganda as an autonomous political unit. Buganda, not Uganda was their nation. They belonged to Uganda as part of British overrule. It touched neither their affections nor their sentiments. There was little sympathetic interest in being incorporated into a larger African nation and there was great sensitivity to any slight to tribal pride."

There is no doubt this kind of feeling was bound to clash with national development. The first time, Ganda separatism went against national development was in relation to the Legislative Council (Legico). When the Legico was initiated in 1921, the Kabaka of Buganda and his ministers rather than argue for greater African representation, as it was being done in other African colonies, sought to obtain assurances that Legico would not affect the 1900 Agreement.

"The safeguarding of native interests can best be done by maintaining inviolate the existing Agreement. The interests and welfare of Buganda will necessarily form a secondary consideration in view of the general interest and progress of the whole territory," they wrote. The same sentiments were to be expressed by Serwano Kulubya, the leading Buganda delegate to the Joint Select Committee on Closer Union in 1931.

The mere raising of these objections served to underscore the distinctiveness of the Kingdom of Buganda; and, the apparent success, such as in the case of Closer Union when it appeared Ganda pressure thwarted the move to East African federation, tended to fuel the fires of separatism. From then on, Baganda developed a tendency of resisting what in their opinion would result in interference in what they regarded as their internal affairs or would undermine Buganda's institutions or position as guaranteed by the practice of indirect rule and the 1900 Agreement.

By 1953, the decolonization process which had begun with India in 1947 was fast catching-up in Uganda. Yet much as the British desired Uganda to become independent as one country, as early as 1949 it had become clear that Buganda was set on a course of separating from the rest of Uganda. And so, to proceed with the decolonization of Uganda, the British found it necessary to reverse the separatist tendencies of Buganda.

Sir Andrew Cohen

To oversee this reversal, Sir Andrew Cohen was appointed Governor of Uganda. As head of the Africa Division in the Colonial Office, Sir Andrew had presided over the rapid political advance of the colonies in West Africa and was responsible for the relative democratization in other colonies. He arrived in Uganda as Governor in January 1952, and, after an intensive familiarization with the situation, took steps to weaken the forces leading Buganda on the path of separatism.

In March 1953, together with the Kabaka of Buganda, Mutesa II, Sir Andrew issued a joint memorandum

on constitutional development and reform in Buganda. Among other reforms, two political changes were announced: 60 of the 89 Lukiiko (Buganda Parliament) members were to be elected, and the Kabaka agreed to consult a Lukiiko Committee before selecting his ministers.

These two reforms were bound to dramatically democratize politics in Buganda, and therefore greatly weaken the entrenched position of the neo-traditionalists who were holding the reigns of power. The doors to office and responsibility were also being opened to those elements in Buganda who were opposed to both British colonial rule and the neo-traditional chiefs and ministers, in one word the Uganda nationalists from Buganda. The other intended effect - and perhaps the most significant - was to begin the process of facilitating the atrophy of the Kabaka and other tribal institutions.

The bait launched by Sir Andrew seemed well swallowed by both the Kabaka and the Lukiiko until everything was thrown overboard by a speech made in Nairobi by Oliver Lyttleton (later Lord Chandos), the Colonial Secretary on 30th June, 1953. The speech alluded to the possibility "as time goes on of still larger measures of unification and federation of the whole of East African territories."

Reacting to the speech, the Kabaka wrote to the Governor that "the statement of the Secretary of State for the Colonies is bound not only to shake the foundations of trust amongst our people but will badly damage the good relations which hitherto exists between Buganda and the British." To this, the colonial authorities responded with assurances that the Kabaka dismissed as far weaker than previous ones.

The Kabaka also made two new demands: (a) that the affairs of Buganda be transferred from the Colonial Office to the Foreign Office; and (b) that a timetable for Buganda's (not Uganda's) independence be prepared. Clearly these two demands were intended to begin the process of detaching Buganda from the rest of Uganda. As the Kabaka was to argue, "the policy of developing a unified system of government along parliamentary lines must inevitably result in Buganda becoming less and less important in the future."

There was no way the British were going to accept the dismemberment of the colony. After long and patient-wearing negotiations intended to persuade the Kabaka to drop the demands, the Governor presented the Kabaka three conditions upon which cooperation with the British was to be based. When the Kabaka rejected these conditions, the Governor withdrew British recognition from Mutesa as provided for in the 1900 Agreement and deported him to Britain.

The impasse went on for about a year and then the Governor blinked. Addressing the Lukiiko on 3rd March 1954, Governor Cohen put forward the view that "a representative group of Baganda, with such independent help as could be secured, should think through their own problems in preparation for some subsequent discussions which he was prepared to hold with them."

By independent help Cohen meant expert assistance in the form of an academic. This role fell upon Professor Keith Hancock, then Director of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies at the University of London. Hancock left London for Uganda on 21st June 1954, taking with him an assistant and a secretary. In Uganda he pitched camp at Namirembe Hill, the Anglican Church headquarters, rather than government premises.

The Buganda committee that was selected to do business with Hancock "was not typical of the membership of the Lukiiko; and the absence from it of Amos Sempa, the exceptionally adroit Secretary of the Lukiiko was an indication that it had been formed with a view to its being easily repudiated if necessary."

Under Hancock's guidance and after fairly lengthy deliberations, the Namirembe Conference drafted a new agreement to replace the 1900 Agreement. This was a pivotal accomplishment: it cleared the way for an accord to be reached in London early in 1955. By this accord, it was agreed the Kabaka would return, and the Lukiiko would accept the new Agreement.

Following this Mutesa returned on 17th October 1955, amid tumultuous rejoicing. To Mutesa and the

Baganda generally, whatever the contents of the 1955 Agreement (which was) signed on 18th October, the mere act of the return was viewed as triumph. Professor Low, then teaching History at Makerere observed: "The ability with which the Baganda won the return of the Kabaka heightened their separatist sentiments and chauvinism, leading them to assume they could "act and negotiate independently and without reference to the wishes and sentiments of other tribes of Uganda."

The return of the Kabaka in 1955 through a resolution which seemed to be a triumph for Buganda exacerbated the feeling among the Baganda chauvinists that they were destined to rule the rest of Ugandans after independence. In this frame of mind, the neo-traditionalist began to act like people who had been understudying the British, and who merely had to work out the appropriate mechanism for the transfer of power.

To this effect, at a meeting of the Lukiiko in 1957, the Omuwankia (Treasurer) of Buganda let slip a remark that Uganda ought to become "a Federal state under the Kabaka". Then in 1958 a committee of the Lukiiko announced that they had asked the colonial authorities to ensure that the Kabaka became "king" of the self-governing Uganda.

These acts of arrogance gave rise to a crescendo of hostility in the rest of the country. The Katikiros (Chancellors) of the Western Province kingdoms talked of forming the Western Provincial Council to resist Buganda. In the rest of the country, contrary to earlier expectations by Baganda, Legico members organized the District Councils to pass angry resolutions against the chauvinism of the Baganda.

As the resentment to Ganda arrogance mounted, rumors began to spread that "the old and widespread hostility against them (the Baganda chauvinists) would be channeled into a new-style political party."

As all this was going on amongst the political groupings of Ugandans, the British methodically continued preparing the country for independence. On October 10, 1957 the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, while in Uganda as part of an East African fact finding mission, gave his approval to the unanimous view in the colony that direct elections for the Legico be held in 1958.

By this time the Buganda Government's initially positive stance toward direct elections had eroded, as had its concomitant enthusiasm to be involved in the Legico. Not only did Buganda view an accelerated movement toward independence with foreboding, but the neo-traditionalist had come to realize that direct elections in Buganda, whether to the Legico or to the Lukiiko, represented a serious threat to their hold on power in Buganda.

To stem this development, the neo-traditionalists engaged the colonial authorities in a duel over the Legico in the early part of 1958. The rationalization for the contradiction was the appointment by the new Governor, Sir Fredrick Crawford of two new African backbench members to replace the Governor and the Buganda Resident (Provincial Commissioner), and the naming of a substantive Speaker to replace the Governor who previously played the role of presiding over the proceedings of the Legico.

This played right into the hands of the Baganda. These changes, the Baganda argued, were unconstitutional as they violated the 1955 Agreement by which the British had agreed to postpone all constitutional changes for a period of five years. Because of these changes, the Baganda further argued, the character of the Legico to which Buganda was required by law to appoint representatives had altered, and they were therefore not going to elect the five Baganda members of the Legico.

The rest of the country went through the electoral process and the new 62 members Legislative Council assembled in the terminal weeks of 1958. In the absence of the Ganda neo-traditionalists who were skeptical of all progress towards independence, the non-Baganda African representatives in the new Legico unanimously urged the colonial authorities to speed up the process to full independence.

They supported and participated in a Committee appointed by the Governor "to consider and to recommend to the Governor the form of direct elections on a common roll for representative members of the Legislative Council to be introduced in 1961". The Committee was also to inquire into "the size and

composition of the Legislative and also possibly the Government."

The fifteen member Committee consisted of the chairman, J. V. Wild, the Administrative Secretary, two other Europeans, two Asians and ten Africans, of whom six were directly elected representative members of the Legico. There was no Muganda in the Committee, as the Kabaka's government refused to put forward names for additional appointments to represent Baganda.

By this time the polarization of Uganda politics, with Baganda on one side, and the rest of the Ugandans on the other side was becoming obvious. The Baganda as identity which had been dominant for over three hundred years were apprehensive about their position after independence. The Baganda, therefore, desired, at the very least, constitutional guarantees before central authority passed into African hands. The non-Ganda, on the other hand, were pressing for rapid progress toward full independence.

Then in 1959 Milton Obote was elected president of UNC. With Obote's election as President of UNC, both the leadership of the UNC, the most significant political organization in the country, and the unofficial members of the Legico had dovetailed into one person. Furthermore, for the first time in about three centuries, the initiative was in the hands of the non-Baganda.

Professor Mutibwa, himself a Muganda tells us the Baganda went into panic. "As a reaction to the publication of the Wild Report, whose Committee Mengo had boycotted, Buganda authorities decided to demand once again separate independence for their kingdom. The Baganda appear to have been in a near panic. There were attempts to form a party of their own -the Uganda National Party (UNP) which, it was even suggested, could merge with the new UPC.

"It was all a gamble, especially as the Mengo Establishment was faced, apparently for the first time, with fears that Obote might become Uganda's first Prime Minister. Certainly the prospects of being governed by a non-Muganda filled the Baganda with dismay. It is against this background that the decision to renew the demand for separate independence by 1 January 1961 should be viewed." (Mutibwa, P.M. 2008: 32

The Baganda had not only lost the leadership of the forces then moving history at the time, but their opponents had the upper hand in the Wild Committee which was setting up the ground rules for independence. It was clear that the attempt to stem the tide by refusing to participate in the Committee had not affected anything. The rest of the country had warmly received the Committee, according to public meetings and submitting memoranda. Something had to be done to maintain the 'old glory'.

The Baganda elites of disparate political persuasion desperately closed ranks behind an all-Baganda protest movement, the Uganda National Movement (UNM). Ostensibly to protest the British insistence upon minority safeguards, the UNM was essentially to forge unity among the Baganda who were then scattered in numerous small and insignificant parties, so that they could preserve the dominant position of their identity and protect what they viewed as their vital interests.

The UNM leadership ingeniously chose the dominance by non-Africans of trade and business as the issue to rally around. Because of the widespread dislike of Asian traders throughout Uganda, a trade boycott was bound to enlist popular support; indeed, the boycott they called for was an immediate and total success in Buganda.

However, largely because of the deep mistrust of the Baganda by other nationalities, and also the opposition to the boycott from the influential non-Ganda leaders of the rest of the country in the Legico, the UNM failed to gain ground in areas outside Buganda. In any case the essence of UNM was resistance to the Wild Committee which, as has already been indicated, was warmly received by the rest of the country.

The UNM also lost a lot of support by hurling insults and attacks at the Legico, a body which the rest of the country recognized and was represented in. Finally, because some of the principal concerns of UNM were with the prestige and status of the Kabaka, the rest of the country was totally aloof, if not hostile in

some cases.

As though to deliberately rub in the alienation of the Baganda from the rest of the country, the UNM organized large meetings in Kampala. These meetings always culminated in the singing of the Buganda national anthem as the crowd faced towards the Kabaka's palace at Mengo. As a Ganda movement intended to rally all the Baganda, UNM was undoubtedly a tremendous success.

The unintended effect of all this success, however, was for the non-Baganda to realize the necessity of unified political effort, so that on March 9, 1960, the Obote wing of UNC and UPU amalgamated to form the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC). Professor Low, then teaching History at Makerere, making a contemporary observation, wrote that: the "UPC whose prime function - the opposition to the pretensions of the Baganda - fitted precisely the widespread anti-Baganda feeling in the rest of the country."

The other effect of the UNM was on the colonial authorities: they became very cautious when dealing with the Baganda, always making sure they told them the truth in as painless a manner as possible. In December 1959, for example, when releasing the findings of the Wild Commission, they refrained from endorsing the majority view for fear it would provoke similar reactions as the UNM. However, they endorsed the crucial recommendation that general elections should be held in 1961 prior to the resolution of the federal-unity constitutional deadlock.

All this caution did not stop the Baganda from engaging in a renewed round of issuing statements and passing resolutions threatening secession. They also threatened to boycott the elections unless prior constitutional arrangements guaranteeing Buganda's autonomy could be secured. Later in June 1960 both Buganda and Members of the Legico sent delegations to London to argue their respective positions: for Buganda, that a constitutional settlement precedes direct elections; for the non-Baganda, that the full recommendations of the Wild Commission be implemented.

Although the colonial authorities gave soothing and compromising responses to both delegations, they continued to prepare for elections. As a response to this firm position taken by the colonial authorities, the Lukiiko voted in December 1960 to secede from Uganda. Unaffected by this vote, the colonial authorities went ahead to organise the elections.

The next measure the Baganda adopted was to boycott the elections. Buganda with 24 electoral constituencies had 36,000 voters, a mere 4 to 5% of eligible voters registering. This was in stark contrast to the rest of the country that consisted of 58 electoral constituencies and where 1,300,433 out of the estimated 1,500,000 to 1,750,000 registered to vote, a figure which represented over 75% of those enfranchised.

There is no doubt that the boycott was effective; it clearly demonstrated the existence of a contradiction which could not be overlooked. As Obote was later to observe, no one could "disregard or ignore the serious political situation which the boycott had imposed on national unity and on the institution of parliament as well as on governance by ballot."

The source of this impasse was the fear of the Baganda that its dominant position in the affairs of Uganda would get eroded in an independent Uganda. To break the deadlock, it was necessary to create conditions which would assuage the fears of the Baganda. A formula to do just that was put forward by the Relationship Commission. In the opinion of the Commission, Buganda was to be granted a federal status, and the members of Parliament representing it should be elected indirectly, with the Lukiiko acting as an electoral college.

This formula was hinted to Mengo, and the opinion of UPC on it sought by the Commission. UPC accepted this formula and Obote persuaded the Mengo administration to accept it. UPC also persuaded Mengo to attend the Constitutional Conference which was scheduled for 18th September 1961.

At the conference, as expected, UPC supported Buganda's desires on the manner of selecting her 21 representatives to the National Assembly. The two parties also advanced their common position on the

timetable for the next elections. Against strong opposition from the DP, these two demands were endorsed by the conference, and a de facto alliance between UPC and the Buganda sealed. This is what eventually came to be known as UPC/KY alliance.

Kabaka Yekka was formed on Saturday, June 10, 1961 at a mammoth demonstration against the election the previous March of a DP government led by Benedicto Kiwanuka. The demonstrators made it clear they regarded Kiwanuka's government illegitimate. The movement to lead the resistance to DP was called Kabaka Yekka (KY). Its principal objectives were neo-traditionalist in character: "to see that political changes do not destroy the good customs and traditions" . . . of Buganda ; and, not to allow anybody to be above the Kabaka.

In the Lukiko elections KY won 69 out of 72 seats and proceeded to elect the 21 representatives from Buganda to the National Assembly. Then in April, after national elections in which UPC won 37 as against DPs 22 seats, the alliance between UPC and KY formed the government led by Obote as Prime Minister. Much as this is the best that could happen to Buganda, it still did not satisfy their desires.

Mutesa himself was to write: "My first twinge of foreboding had come at midnight on 9 October, 1962, as I watched Milton Obote raise the flag of independence. My anxiety had no precise form or cause. It was more the sensing of an unfamiliar shift of emphasis, a gap between what was fitting and what was not." To Mutesa and many other Baganda, it should have been Mutesa and not Obote to have the honour of raising the Uganda flag.

As per the UPC/KY agreement and against stiff opposition from UPCs Obote got Mutesa elected President of Uganda. Much as this was a mere sinecure, it satisfied Buganda's crave that nobody should be above the Kabaka.

We have already discussed how the Constitutional Conference had agreed that not less than two years after independence a referendum would be held to determine where the lost counties wanted to be administered from. To meet this requirement a referendum was organised in the lost counties and they voted overwhelmingly to be part of Bunyoro. This was very painful to the Baganda, particularly to Mutesa.

It around this time that Mutesa made up his mind that Obote must . Professor Mutibwa tells us Mutesa began looking for allies. Grace Ibingira in the UPC was looking for allies to overthrow Obote. The two made common cause and began working on the project to overthrow Obote.

Because of limited space, I will not go into the larger plot; I will restrict myself to Mutesa's activities in the events which led to the attack on Lubiri. In December 1965, Mutesa placed orders for heavy weapons with a Kampala firm. The arms were to come from Britain.

On this Obote was later to write: "We have letters from a British firm which show that the firm was not happy with the orders on the grounds that the weapons ordered were too heavy for an individual and that the firm had always dealt with Governments only. One of the letters from the Kampala firm states that President Mutesa had placed the orders on behalf of the Uganda Army and that, although the Kabaka's Government was to pay for the arms, that only meant that the President, in his capacity as the Kabaka, was to have the first trial of arms before handing them over to the army."

On 22nd February, 1966, the day a coup was to take place, Obote ordered the detention of the five ministers involved in the plot to overthrow the government. The detention of the five ministers completely upset the strategy of the anti-national-democratic forces, and set the stage for a confrontation which would result in a national-democratic revolution.

With Ibingira out of circulation, the leadership of the anti-national-democratic forces reverted to Kabaka Mutesa. However, lacking the political acumen of Ibingira, Mutesa was like a "rudderless ship moving from blunder to blunder" and playing right into Obote's hands. Viewing the situation unveiled by the detention of the ministers as requiring drastic measures, Mutesa took steps to arrange for a military

takeover. For this he enlisted the support and participation of Brigadier Opolot, and also sought military intervention by a foreign country, suspected to be Britain.

When none of these could materialize, Mutesa, as Kabaka of Buganda issued an ultimatum for the Central Government to vacate the soil of Buganda before May 30, 1966. Although he later said this was a mere bargaining chip, both his friends and foes interpreted the ultimatum to mean de facto secession of Buganda from the rest of Uganda. As a response to the ultimatum, Obote, as head of the Government of Uganda, declared a state of emergency throughout Uganda.

Subsequently, on the 1st of June, in a move which treated the ultimatum as act of rebellion, Obote ordered units of the Uganda Army to march on the Kabaka's palace at Mengo. It had been reported that the Kabaka had amassed arms in the palace in readiness for war, and the troops were to search the palace. A battle between the advancing Uganda Army and the palace "guards" ensued.

Professor Mutibwa tells us the battle was stiff: "Although Mutesa, assisted by his lieutenants equipped with Lee-Enfield rifles put up a stiff resistance and Amin forces were obliged to call in large contingent of reinforcements, it was not to be expected that Mengo could hold out for long against the Uganda army." (Mutibwa, P.M. 1992: 39) Eventually, after twelve hours of fierce fighting, the Uganda Army established control. The Kabaka had escaped from the palace, and the stage set for a new order in Uganda.