JOINT EDITORIAL
Amin's Uganda: Troubled Land of Religious Persecution

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Although the third and fourth centuries A.D., the thirteenth century, and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have each been regarded by historians of Western civilization as "the age of persecution," today's world is by no means exempt from such a descriptive label. Despite the adoption of documents advocating the several rights of religious freedom by the United Nations, by various nations, and by several international religious organizations, the last quarter of the twentieth century continues to witness religious persecution in diverse forms and settings. Probably no nation has experienced a more tragic recent bloodbath than the East African nation of Uganda.

Situated on the equator and around numerous lakes, the largest of which is Lake Victoria, Uganda emerged as an independent nation, free from Great Britain's seven-decade-long protectorate, 9 October 1962. For eight years it was under the rule of Dr. Milton Obote until by the coup of 25 January 1971 General Idi Amin Dada came to power.

Certain factors in Uganda's pre-1971 history, although they do not explain the course of events in Uganda under General Amin, do serve to clarify or illuminate the Ugandan situation.

First, one needs to be aware of the unique and predominating role of the Baganda people and Buganda province in multiethnic Uganda. Present-day Uganda consists of more than twenty

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African ethnic groups and is in no sense a monolithic nation. Prior to the advent of Europeans in this area—explorers in the 1860s and missionaries in the 1870s—"most of these ethnic groups had existed as independent societies with their own kinds of political organizations,"[1] but the Baganda, although they neither had the wheel nor engaged in writing, had developed an advanced and unparalleled system of government.[2] The Baganda had both a king (*kabaka*) and a council (*Lukiiko*).

It was Mutesa I (d. 1884), the *kabaka* of Buganda, who on Henry M. Stanley's initiative invited Christian missionaries to his kingdom.[3] It was primarily with the Kingdom of Buganda that the Imperial British East Africa Company had dealings during 1890-1892, and it was originally over the Buganda that the British protectorate was peacefully declared in 1894.[4] Also, it was Buganda that expanded its territory at the expense of the Bunyoro Kingdom to the northwest, and it was the Buganda administration that Britain used to govern all Uganda, especially until the 1930s.[5]

The Baganda have been markedly different, for example, from the cattle-herding Karamojong or the decentralized Chiga people of Kigezi district.[6] At independence (1962), half the educated elite were Baganda, and three-fourths of all civil service jobs were held by Baganda. Buganda province had the capital, Kampala, the leading educational institutions, and the international airport at Entebbe. Today Buganda has one-third of Uganda's population and one-fourth of its land.[7]

The history of the relations of the Baganda people and the Buganda kingdom or province to the other ethnic groups comprising contemporary Uganda has been such that it is reasonable to expect these other ethnic groups would seek to decrease the power and influence of Buganda and to increase their own.

Second, Uganda had been on occasion the scene of religious

1. Peter M. Gukiina, *Uganda: A Case Study in African Political Development* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972), p. 14. "Uganda," a term now applied to the entire nation, is the Swahili form of "Buganda."
2. J. V. Wald, *The Story of the Uganda Agreement* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1957), pp. 2-3.
3. Ibid., p. 5.
4. Ibid., pp. 54-82.
5. Gukiina, *Uganda,* pp. 48, 51-54. Writing in the 1960s, David E. Apter, *The Political Kingdom in Uganda: A Study in Bureaucratic Nationalism,* 2d ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 4, 21, 475, described the Kingdom of Buganda as a *"modernizing autocracy."*
6. Gukiina, *Uganda,* pp. 24-40.
7. Ibid., pp. 63-64.

conflicts and of martyrdom prior to 1971. In the later 1870s[8] the earliest Christian missionaries entered the area presently occupied by the nation of Uganda. Representatives of Islam had preceded them by three decades. The Church Missionary Society (Anglican) came in response to Mutesa's request and was soon followed by the White Fathers (Roman Catholic) from France. Arab Muslims, Anglicans, and French Roman Catholics vied for the allegiance of Mutesa. By order of Mwanga, who succeeded his father Mutesa as *kabaka,* the newly arrived Anglican bishop, James Hannington, was killed by spears 29 October 1885 for having inadvertently entered Buganda via its "back door," the east. During 1885-1886 Mwanga ordered the deaths of scores of African Christians, both Anglican and Roman Catholic, with the result that "the blood of martyrs" became the "seed" of the Ugandan church.[9] Of such persecution C. P. Groves has written that it was "characterized by a courage and fidelity, under the merciless fires of persecution, second to none in the continent."[10] During the twentieth century Christianity has significantly increased in numbers of professed believers in Uganda but without comparable persecution until after 1971.

Third, although there was at the time of independence a widespread expectation that it would effect a return to the pattern of tribal or ethnic governments, independence instead resulted in a centralized and authoritarian regime. Political parties had not developed until the 1950s.[11] In Buganda, to which the *kabaka* returned in 1956 after a two-year "exile to become a constitutional monarch,"[12] participation in political parties was regarded as disloyalty to the *kabaka.*[13] Moreover, Buganda's persisting sense of uniqueness and separateness was evidenced by its proposal in 1960 of the unilateral termination of the British protectorate over Buganda and of Buganda's subsequent independence

8. Henry M. Stanley's efforts in 1875-76 to convert Kabaka Mutesa I to Christianity seemed to have resulted in a somewhat nominal conversion since Mutesa later reaffirmed his ancestral religion and then proclaimed himself a Muslim. Cf. C. P. Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa,* 4 vols. (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948-58) 2: 317-21, 327-28; 3: 89.

9. Ibid., 3: 88-94; John V. Taylor, *The Growth of the Church in Buganda: An Attempt at Understanding* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1958), pp. 56-58.

10. Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa,* 4: 202.

11. The Uganda National Congress, Obote's party, was formed in 1952. The Democratic Party was at first and in Buganda composed primarily of Roman Catholics. The *kabaka* organized his own party, Kabaka Yekka ("king only"), in 1961. See Gukiina, *Uganda,* pp. 81-85, 86-89.

12. Apter, *The Political Kingdom in Uganda,* p. ix.

13. Gukiina, *Africa,* pp. 88-89.

from the remainder of Uganda.[14] Hence on the eve of independence the "issue of self-determination," according to Peter M. Gukiina, "was not a strong basis upon which to cultivate dynamic nationalism" and "[i]ndependence with or without national unity was the fundamental basis for common action against British rule." Uganda could, indeed, on its independence day be described as a "paper nation,"[15] but expectations that freedom from Britain would mean reestablishment of traditional or ethnic rule[16] were destined not to be realized.

Independence, achieved by a coalition of the Ugandan National Congress (UNC) and the Kabaka Yekka (KY), led to the *kabaka's* becoming president and Obote the prime minister of Uganda. Aggravated then by the controversy over counties seized by Buganda during the 1880s, the UNC-KY alliance so deteriorated that by February 1966 Obote initiated a revolution[17] allegedly to prevent a coup or secession by Kabaka Mutesa II. Obote suspended the constitution and parliament, instituted his own constitution by which he became president, vice president, prime minister, and military chief, and, laying siege to the *kabaka's* palace, defeated the Buganda forces. Other ethnic groups interpreted the defeat as the fall of a traditional government.

Hence Uganda, with local governments abolished, had a dictatorship for the sake of the unpopular national unity that was so essential to modernization until, following various attempted coups and assassinations, the Obote regime was displaced by the military coup that brought to power General Amin.[18] The great jubilation and high expectancy which, according to Gukiina, prevailed in Uganda in January 1971[19] were soon to be followed by the tears, trauma, and tragedy of the era of Amin.

Despite the slaughter of nearly three hundred thousand of his fellow Ugandans, Amin, the ebullient killer of Kampala, is easily the most popular man among Africans today. His fellow Africans regard the illiterate Amin as a conquering hero for cleansing Uganda of the so-called last vestiges of Western imperialism.

In its place, Amin has substituted a Soviet and an increasingly

14. For the documents, see Apter, *The Political Kingdom in Uganda,* pp. 479-88.
15. *Africa,* pp. 89, 94, 109.
16. Ibid., pp. 4-6.
17. By ordering the arrest and imprisonment of four cabinet members, all UPC members, who were detained without trial until the coup of 25 January 1971.
18. Gukiina, *Uganda,* pp. 110-40, 164-74.
19. Ibid., pp. 174-76.

larger Cuban presence which manages Uganda's civil administration along with its military forces and threatens to turn that country into another Moscow satellite. Thus, the Soviets repeatedly lend their voices to Third World choruses proclaiming Amin to be Africa's leading statesman.

Instead of condemning the Muslim Amin at the annual meeting of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) during the summer of 1977 for his policy of genocide toward Uganda's Acholi and Langu tribes, both largely composed of Christians, the delegates broke into frenzied cheering whenever Amin appeared. Seldom does a day come that Amin fails to make headlines in the African press. In the process, he has changed his image for the continent's literate few from the rollicking, extroverted "Big Daddy" Amin into that of a feared and fearsome self-confessed cannibal—a member of the primitive Kakwa tribe, whose members eat the vital organs or flesh of their victims in the belief that they thus will acquire the power of those whom they killed. Amin's boast at the OAU meeting, "I have eaten my enemies before they could eat me," was not made in jest.

Following his recent defection, Henry Kyemba,[20] vice president of the World Health Organization and Uganda's former health minister, said that Amin told him several times "quite proudly, that he had eaten either the organs or the flesh of his human victims."[21] Dr. John Kibukamusoke, Amin's former personal physician, has discussed the dictator's tribal customs in describing an autopsy on murdered former Ugandan Foreign Minister Michael Ondoga which revealed that an incision had been made into the body and the liver removed. "So, when it became known that the liver of Amin's former minister had been removed, there was no doubt who ordered the brutal killing," said Dr. Kibukamusoke, a fellow of Britain's Royal College of Physicians and now professor of medicine at the University of Zambia.

Kibukamusoke has also attributed to tribal custom the kind of ritual murder that transpires in Amin's prisons, where prisoners are lined up, face to face, and the "captives are forced to batter one another's head with sledge-hammers . . . down the line, leaving only the last survivor to be shot." In answer to the question as to why the prisoners submit, Kibukamusoke has stated: "The victims are possibly so overwhelmed by the sense

20. Kyemba is also the author of a book which has just been published: *A State of Blood: The Inside Story of Idi Amin* (London: Paddington Press, Ltd., 1977).
21. Co-author Gould interviewed dozens of refugee Ugandans in Kenya during the summer of 1977. The overwhelming majority were promised anonymity.

of brutality that they are rendered helpless." The same was said of the victims of the Nazi Holocaust.

According to Kibukamusoke, some of the blame for Amin's conduct should be put on syphilis, for which Amin was treated by an Israeli physician, Dr. Marcel Assaed, who attended the dictator from 1969 until 1971 while serving as an adviser to the Ugandan Health Service. Syphilis explains Amin's extreme suspicion, which Kibukamusoke calls "hypomanic paranoia," and the resulting outbursts of brutality toward individuals and groups that the dictator suspects of opposing him. In addition, syphilis has induced a deterioration of the brain which can go on for years before it results in Amin's death. Meanwhile, Kibukamusoke has said, the "worst is still to come."

Other recent refugees from high government posts have said that Amin stores the severed heads of his personal enemies in a deep freeze in Kampala's presidential palace, where, when he suffers from insomnia, he opens the cooler and lectures the heads about their former owners' misdeeds.

Nevertheless, Soviet diplomats praised Amin after the unsuccessful assassination attempt against Amin during the summer of 1977 when he ordered the murder of all Ugandans wearing eyeglasses or having tin roofs on their homes. In a Radio Uganda broadcast, Amin reasoned that all such people had learned to read from Christian missionaries and thus either were capitalists or agents of Western imperialism. Shortly after the broadcast, Amin's security police were seen heaving truckloads of corpses to the crocodiles of the Nile. Others, people still alive, were doused with gasoline and set ablaze. Witnesses reported that the victims were exclusively from the predominantly Christian Acholi and Langi tribes, whose members outnumber Uganda's ruling seven hundred fifty thousand Muslims.

After each killing spree, Amin insists that he is inspired by God, that he knows exactly how and when he will die, and that he does not fear death. "The only being I fear is God," he stated after he had killed the Anglican bishop of Uganda, Janani Luwum, by shooting the prelate in the mouth as he prayed.

Amin has survived twelve assassination attempts and repulsed a 1972 invasion force of exiled Ugandans from neighboring Tanzania. He boasts that his immortality lies in the number of children he fathers, so far thirty-four in number. Amin insists that he will sire two hundred before he dies.

The broad-shouldered paratroop general, who began his military career in the British army as a private, stands six feet, four

inches tall and weighs nearly three hundred pounds. He was once heavyweight boxing champion of Uganda. Clad in his working uniform—the blue battledress of a paratroop general festooned with the Israeli paratroop wings which he won while training near Jerusalem in the early 1960s, Amin is happiest in the company of his troops, with whom he talks in a relaxed, homely style of barracksroom Swahili.

If he notices restlessness among his troops, he permits them to rape and murder high school girls attending Christian mission schools. In 1976 he urged them into an orgy of killing at Makerere University after students had poked fun at his son.

Amin was born 1 January 1928 of a peasant family belonging to the small, predominantly Muslim Kakwa tribe in Uganda's remote West Nile district. He did not seem destined to rule, but he has said that he had once dreamed of becoming president of his country. In his late teens, he joined the British-officered King's African Rifles, where his splendid physique made him an ideal recruit for the tough, highly-disciplined corps which fought with distinction in World War II.

During the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya, Amin was the Eichmann of the British army, torturing to death by choking Kikuyus suspected by British colonialists of being connected with the nationalists. Now and then, his British superiors expressed disapproval of his actions, but only when he raped and murdered pubescent Kikuyu girls. Generally pleased with him, they commissioned Amin, and he rose rapidly to the rank of captain.

Following his assumption of the presidency of Uganda in January 1971, Amin maintained excellent relations with the British until he expelled all Uganda's forty thousand Asians, originally from India and Pakistan, and had them flown in an airlift to London in 1972.[22] Although Britain, like the United States, no longer maintains diplomatic relations with Uganda, Amin refers fondly to Queen Elizabeth II as "my old commander-in-chief."

Also unique is Amin's style of ruling Ugandans. In broadcasts over Radio Uganda, he abruptly announces major policy decisions in Pidgin English to the consternation of his cabinet.

After striking an alliance with Libya's Muammar al-Qaddafi, he suddenly announced in a broadcast the expulsion of all five hundred Israeli nationals in Uganda and severed relations with Israel, which had been a major supplier of aid to Uganda and

22. See William G. Kuepper, G. Lynne Lackey, and E. Nelson Swinerton, *Ugandan Asians in Great Britain: Forced Migration and Social Absorption* (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1975).

had trained the army and air force. To please Qaddafi, who sends millions of petro-dollars to Amin to bolster the dictator's jihad, or holy war, against Christians and Jews, Amin has said that he would like to build a statue honoring Adolf Hitler. He sent a telegram to United Nations Secretary General Kurt Waldheim and to Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir in which he applauded Hitler's extermination of the Jews: "Germany is the right place where, when Hitler was the prime minister and supreme commander, he burned over six million Jews."

In July 1976, the Israelis decided that they had had enough of Hitler's African imitator when Amin gave sanctuary to a group of German and Arab members of the Palestinian Liberation Organization who had hijacked an Air France plane to Entebbe. In a raid on Entebbe, the Israelis freed the terrorized hostages and abruptly ended the myth of the invincibility of Uganda's Soviet-trained and -equipped armed forces, composed largely of soldiers from Amin's own tribe and of imported Nubian mercenaries, who are Muslims from Sudan.

In September 1977 Amin banned twenty-seven religious groups, including the Baha'i World Faith, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Salvation Army, and the Ugandan Baptist Mission. The ban left only four permitted religious bodies in Uganda: Islam, the Anglican Church of Uganda, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Ugandan Orthodox Church.

There are no indications when or if the slaughter ever will end in a country where President Jimmy Carter's concept of human rights is only whispered, if mentioned at all. The situation is not helped by American diplomats who, trying to explain the tragedy of Uganda, use terms like left wing, right wing, and other phrases from a parochial vocabulary. These diplomats, like so many liberal, enlightened people, fail to give religion a central place in their thinking and are reluctant to admit that others would do so. Such "modern" minds cannot accept the fact of killing for religion and fail to understand that "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things which are God's" is foreign to Islam.

Meanwhile, religious organizations, the United Nations, the OAU, and a host of other official and unofficial groups refuse to initiate any action against Amin such as that taken against South Africa in October 1977. Such action, it is said, would be outside interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign country. The ghastly religious genocide goes on.