

MILITARISATION OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION:

A THREAT TO DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

ISSUES
PAPER

Authors
Andrew Karamagi
Chris Nkwatsibwe

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Overview

Understanding the place and role of the military in Uganda's public life is an exercise that must be conducted with a broad view of the country's history from the pre-colonial period to the present day. This paper examines how violence has shaped state-civilian relations in Uganda, from political participation to economic interactions and social life.

As will be seen in later sections, it matters little whether one is discussing the King's African Rifles, the Uganda Army, the Uganda National Liberation Army,

or the Uganda People's Defence Forces. The military has been an active (and often partisan) participant in the country's public administration. Positions like 'colonial governor', 'head-of-state', and 'president' have proved to be a case of the same script, different cast. Inevitably, public administration is and has been overhung by militarism and its attendant influences. This assertion holds true, whether viewed from the perspective of colonial-era collaboration or post-independence rulers who have not shed the imperial (military-driven) origins of their public administration portfolios.

From the outset, it is critical to note that the concept of raising and maintaining a military is not alien to Africa, or Uganda for that matter. The Continent's precolonial nations and empires maintained standing armies that were responsible for conquest, war-making, territorial defence, and the maintenance of public order. These various iterations of the military survived colonial rule but were significantly altered to mirror the Western model. Public administration, which was organised along the legislative, executive, and judicial branches was altered from its native and settler orientation, to reflect the prevailing heavily Western-oriented model—whose tentacles extend into the shape or form of the military. The administration of these armies was the preserve of the King's (or Emperor's) courts.

This outlook is buttressed by the fact that the shape and form of Uganda as a polity bears the hallmarks of inter-state warfare between and amongst settler

nations like Buganda, Bunyoro, the Luo, and native nations like the Ik, Tepeth, Twa; Arab, Portuguese contact; imperial subjugation at the hands of British colonial rule; and the far-reaching tentacles of multilateralism at the regional and continental levels.

This interplay underlines the country's precolonial, postcolonial, and contemporary experience, in which civic ideals and aspirations often clashed (if they weren't altogether sacrificed) at the altar of military imperatives. This crosscutting fact is an important thread throughout this discourse. Worth noting is that this state of affairs persists even though Uganda is a constitutional democracy (at least in theory) with legislative, executive and judicial branches of government, and has embraced a free market economy for more than three decades, the military's shadow looms large.

Although this paper is an original work, it does not tackle a novel subject. Not least because violence has been an enduring influence on Uganda's public affairs. It is a topic that has engaged the minds of political actors, scholars, activists, media organisations, the diplomatic corps, the greater fraternity of civil society, and those who control or possess working knowledge of the means of violence.

While existing research on the subject has focused on the sociological, political economy, foreign policy, and constitutional aspects of the military's role, this paper seeks to delve deeper. It examines the complex web of historical and present-day realities that shape the military's involvement in Uganda's public life. Its exposition blends the sociological treatise by ABK Kasozi¹ on the social origins of violence; the historical notions of war-making and state-building as argued by Charles Tilly², and; the modern outlook on state-civil relations in Samuel P Huntington's treatise, *Soldier and State*³. Also enlisted are Charles Amone's⁴, Busingye Kabumba's⁵ and Daniel Kalinaki's⁶ contributions to this question.

1 KASOZI, A.B.K. *Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-1985*. McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994.

2 Charles Tilly, *War-making and State-making as Organised Crime, Bringing the State Back In* edited by Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 169-191

3 Samuel P. Huntington. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 1957.

4 Amone Charles (2020) *Ethnicised Politics and the Changing Lwo Identity in Eastern Africa: A Case of the Acholi of Uganda*. *Mawazo Journal* Vol. 14, No. 2: 1-20.

5 Busingye Kabumba, *The Illusion of the Ugandan Constitution*, 27 September, 2012, *AfricLaw* blog <https://africlaw.com/2012/09/27/the-illusion-of-the-ugandan-constitution/> accessed 20 November, 2023

6 Daniel Kalinaki, *How many isolated incidents did it take before Amin's army went rogue*, January 28, 2021, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/oped/columnists/daniel-kalinaki/how-many-isolated-incidents-did-it-take-before-amin-s-army-went-rogue--1785664> accessed on November 5, 2023

As a means of buttressing the above theoretical framework, the paper will take stock of the military's historical role in Uganda's public space and the contemporary role of the UPDF in the management of public affairs and administration. In this endeavour, the paper begins with an exploration of the country's public administration architecture (as defined by the 1995 Constitution and relevant subsidiary legislation).

After that, it enumerates the evolution of the country's military and interrogates the political economy of violence. Towards the end, the paper attempts to project scenarios on what the fate or future of public administration in Uganda will be, relative to the force structure and place of the military.

Readers of this paper can rely on it for advocacy and lobbying efforts directed at addressing historical design flaws in Uganda's governance architecture. The ultimate success of this publication would lie in its contribution to the forging of a more progressive governance architecture that places the military at a safe distance from public affairs, as a crucial ingredient for the realization of a demonstrably open, free, and democratic society.



CHAPTER 02



CONCEIVED AND BRED IN VIOLENCE

“The military has been the most dominant institution in the colonial and post-colonial history of Uganda. During the colonial period, the military was used to extend spheres of administration, silence dissenting views and safeguard British interests.”

Charles Amone



As a geographical expression, Uganda has always been a melting pot, breadbasket, and ultimate settler destination for many cultures. Initially inhabited by small communities like the Ik, Tepeth, and the Twa, its social landscape was fundamentally changed by the migration of Bantu and Luo peoples into the Great Lakes region.

These migrations culminated in the formation of polities with diverse sociopolitical and economic structures. In northern and eastern Uganda, the vast web of Luo settlements, bound together through a loose confederation of clan-states, were fundamentally different from the centralized Bantu kingdoms of central and western Uganda. Each of these polities had unique forms of managing domestic, public, and foreign relations, including; commerce, war-making, exploration, agriculture, public health, science and education.

This political and socioeconomic organisation is the canvas upon which imperial powers, explorers, and itinerant merchants imposed their cultural, political, and economic relations on the territory. For centuries, these groups often engaged in military contests for dominance. Some, like the kingdoms of Nkore, Buganda, and Bunyoro, developed standing armies to achieve their political aims and bolster expansionist ambitions. Others, like the Acholi, Lango, Itesot, and Karimojong, developed martial cultures where whole communities could be mobilized into a military force on demand.

From the fifteenth century through to the latter 1800s when Uganda was declared a protectorate of Britain in 1894, contact with Arabs, Portuguese, and later the British laid the foundation for what would later become the Republic of Uganda. This designation did not happen peacefully. It was established under the barrel of the gun, its rough edges smoothed by foreign religions and cultures. Through Section 58 of the Uganda Rifles Ordinance (1895), the colonial administration used and empowered the Ugandan Rifles to take action against any local group(s) in the Protectorate which engaged in active opposition to their administration⁷.

This period of Uganda's history gave rise to a drawn-out, often bloody, liberation effort by social movements, political parties, student movements, agricultural cooperatives, religious institutions, and cultural bodies. The default response of the colonial regime was often coercion or violence. The ensuing push for self-determination bore fruit in 1962 when the Union Jack was lowered, and in its place the Cranes and Stripes hoisted.

In hindsight, the attainment of independence in 1962 did not necessarily translate into an abandonment of the old ways. The nearly indelible effect of colonial rule was manifested in the continued entrenchment of militarism in the conduct of public affairs.

In present-day Uganda where the inherently exclusionary, foreign capital-dominated structure of the economy requires the use of force to keep Ugandan labour in check, the entrenchment of militarism in the conduct of public affairs is still tangible. Incidents where military and paramilitary forces have been used to quell opposition to the abuse of power by owners of the means of production are numerous.

The absence of a credible elections management mechanism only serves to provide even more leeway for reliance on force as a means of resolving political questions. Consequently, bloody episodes like the protracted war in Northern Uganda, the Buganda Riots of 2009, the Kasese massacres of 2015, the November killings of 2020, and the ongoing disquiet over the spate of abductions, torture, disappearances, and killings are just a few examples of how the military is used to quell civil participation in Uganda's public life.

The restitution of a multiparty dispensation, decades after the country had oscillated between juntas and undeclared single-party rule, has done little to cure Uganda's penchant for militarism. Matter of fact, it is the immediate period following the restoration of multiparty politics that saw the expansion of repressive measures through the enactment of repressive policies and legislation⁸, the heightened use of state security to suppress civil liberties and rights, and the overall militarisation of public services.

Over the last three decades, the military has gradually crept into just about every sector of public administration – from agricultural support programmes, law enforcement, and public works, to humanitarian response.

As the country's historical record confirms, the failure of elections only serves to encourage recourse to violence as a means of expressing and protecting interests. With this knowledge in mind, the prevailing political gridlock, economic stagnation, and rampant social discord have a bearing on the ubiquitous presence of the military in affairs that should otherwise be the preserve of the relevant civic institutions and mechanisms.

8 *Ibid.*, 7



CHAPTER 03

Evolution of the Military through Different Epochs

“Every institution touched by the hand of the colonial state was given a pronounced regional or nationality character. It became a truism that a soldier must be a northerner, a civil servant a southerner, and a merchant an Asian.”

Mahmood Mamdani

The military in Uganda has undergone various stages of evolution from the standing armies of precolonial nation-states to the hodgepodge of fighters assembled by the colonial administration, through to the first iterations of the post-independence armed forces, and finally the present-day structure.

In the pre-colonial period, the kingdoms of Buganda, Bunyoro, and Nkore grew their commercial, cultural, and military capabilities through trade ties, expeditions, conquests, inter-state conflicts, and wars of annexation. This force projection was as much a tool of alliance building, control, and domination, as it was an apparatus of foreign policy. Following the advent of colonial rule in 1894, these different militaries were subsumed into one force under the territorial administration of Uganda.

The Kings African Rifles (1902-1962)

Under Britain's divide-and-rule policy, Governor Goeffrey Archer (1922–1925) divided Uganda into productive and non-productive zones in which the latter would provide labour for the former. This dichotomy was based on assumed dispositions of the people of Northern Uganda, considered a warring, martial, and industrious people predisposed to hard work and war-mongering, and those of the South, who were labelled as sedentary but intellectually stronger and fit for public office.

True to form, the colonial establishment invested in public capital projects (e.g. healthcare facilities, schools, and roads) in the South, effectively laying the foundation for inequality, insurgency, and sentiments in favour of secession.

In his instructive essay⁹, Dani Nabudere notes that the British did not want their colonial armies to be dominated by societies that lived near the centre of administration. The task of the colonial government was to establish a coercive force to rely on, not only to keep the country united but also to fulfil Britain's imperial interests. This was the reason why they discouraged the Kikuyu in Kenya, the Ndebele in Southern Rhodesia, and the Ashante in Ghana from joining the army. Instead, these societies were dominant in the civil service.

Since the Bantu communities in Uganda (especially the Baganda and Banyoro) were well organized under highly centralized societies, the British did not want to arm them. The British feared that they could easily mount a large-scale military resistance. This is why the Acholi were preferred. They were disunited under several chiefdoms and too small in population to wage a strong military resistance.

Having zeroed in on the Acholi and other northern communities as the most suitable for the military, the British then began to build an army that could serve their interests. This army, called the East African Corps, served alongside the British army and was later renamed the King's African Rifles (KAR). The Ugandan section of this force (officially named the 4th Battalion) was based in Jinja. It was also known as the Ugandan Rifles. In the run-up to Uganda's independence from British rule, the Ugandan Rifles was renamed Uganda Army on August 1, 1962.

The Uganda Army (1962-1979)

After Uganda gained independence on 9th October 1962, Kabaka Edward Mutesa II, the King of Buganda and Uganda's first president, expressed reservations about the army's domination by northern ethnic groups. At this point, British officers recommended one of the few native officers, Major Augustine Karugaba, as the new army chief. Fearing disloyalty, Prime Minister Obote dismissed Major Karugaba in favour of less educated officers from the North¹⁰, placing the two men on a course to collision.

Following the 1964 mutiny, the government remained fearful of internal opposition and moved the army headquarters from Jinja to Kampala. The dreaded General Service Unit was also created, ostensibly to improve security. In *Coups and Army Rule in Africa*, Samuel Decalo notes that using classic 'divide and rule' tactics, Obote appointed different foreign military missions to each battalion, scrambled operational chains of command, played the police against the army, encouraged personal infighting between his principal military 'proteges', and removed officers who appeared unreliable or too authoritative from operational command of troops.

10 Dinwiddy, Hugh (January 1983). "The Ugandan Army and Makerere under Obote, 1962-71". *African Affairs*. 82 (326): 43-59

Predictably, the tensions between Mutesa and Obote got to fever-pitch, culminating in the 1966 crisis where Obote ousted Mutesa and assumed his office as president and commander-in-chief, abrogated the 1962 constitution, and purged the ranks of his opponents— perceived or real. This led to the cancellation of the elections due; and in the ensuing crisis, a purge was conducted to rid the forces of officers presumed or known to be disloyal, or potentially disloyal. Sycophancy overrode competency within the army's ranks.

During Obote's time in office, which spanned two non-consecutive terms (1962-1971 and 1980-1985), the military continued to play a complex and influential role in Uganda's political landscape. Obote, however, faced several challenges in managing the military and maintaining its loyalty. One significant event was the 1971 military coup led by General Idi Amin, which ousted Obote from power. It set in motion a series of coups and countercoups that featured the ouster of his successors Yusuf Kironde Lule (1979), Godfrey Lukongwa Binaisa (1980), and Paulo Muwanga (1980), Obote II (1985), and Tito Okello Lutwa (1986).

Amin's rise to power marked a period of authoritarian rule characterized by brutal repression and human rights abuses. The military, under Amin's command, became a tool of oppression and terror, perpetrating widespread violence and targeting various ethnic and political groups. This phase highlighted the considerable influence the military wielded in shaping the country's political direction.

Following Amin's overthrow in 1979, Obote returned to power in 1980 through a controversial election¹¹. However, his second term was marred by internal conflicts and opposition from various rebel groups. The military's involvement remained a prominent feature in two ways: it was both a pillar of support for the government¹² and a source of internal strife due to factionalism and discontent¹³. Its influence extended beyond defence matters, often intertwining with political decisions and power struggles. However, this involvement was not without consequences as it contributed to the instability and internal conflicts that plagued Uganda during this era.

11 Avirgan, Tony, and Martha Honey. 1982. *War in Uganda: The Legacy of Idi Amin*. Westport, CT: L. Hill.

12 *Ibid.*, 10

13 Mutengesa, Sabiiti. 2006. "From Pearl to Pariah: The Origin, Unfolding and Termination of State-Inspired Genocidal Persecution in Uganda, 1980-85."

In the period between Amin's overthrow in April 1979, and Obote's return to power through a controversial election in December 1980, the most powerful institution in the country was the Military Commission – a body comprising six soldiers representing the various military groups that had taken part in Amin's overthrow. Unsurprisingly, Uganda Patriotic Movement's Yoweri Museveni, a soldier and deputy chairperson of the military commission, elected to contest Obote's second ascendancy to power threw a protracted bush war that would eventually bring him to power in 1986.

Now in office for close to four decades, the National Resistance Army (renamed Uganda People's Defence Forces in 1995) has crystallised the enduring fusion between the government and the ruling party. In its earlier days, the National Resistance Army (NRA) sought to repair civilian-military relations. It institutionalized the force with a code of conduct, regularised ranks, introduced uniforms and insignia, put in place a tiered military court to enforce discipline, and withdrew the military from meddling in political affairs, among others.

Notably, the 1995 Constitution codified the rules of engagement as follows:

Article 208:

- a. There shall be armed forces to be known as the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces;
- b. The Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces shall be non-partisan, national in character, patriotic; professional, disciplined, productive and subordinate to the civilian authority as established under this Constitution;
- c. Members of the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces shall be citizens of Uganda of good character.
- d. No person shall raise an armed force except in accordance with this Constitution.

Article 209: The functions of the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces are-

- a. to preserve and defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Uganda;
- b. to co-operate with the civilian authority in emergency situations and in cases of natural disasters;
- c. to foster harmony and understanding between the Defence Forces and civilians; and
- d. to engage in productive activities for the development of Uganda.

Article 210:

Parliament shall make laws regulating the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces, and in particular, providing for-

- a. the organs and structures of the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces
- b. recruitment, appointment, promotion, discipline and removal of members of the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces and ensuring that members of the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces are recruited from every district of Uganda;
- c. terms and conditions of service of members of the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces; and
- d. the deployment of troops outside Uganda.

This assortment of progressive efforts succeeded for some years before running into the headwinds of partisan politics, multiple insurgencies, corruption, foreign adventurism, and the weight of regime longevity, as the following chapter demonstrates. This paper contends that while there were visible signs of progress in the early years of the NRA, the transition from NRA to UPDF and civilian rule was superficial in the first instance.

Even when the NRA had an internal agreement to professionalize the army and redefine its role in Uganda's politics, serving military officers were given senior positions in civilian government without first retiring from the army. Buttressed by the support of civilian politicians in what was to be referred to as

cogently argues, unsuspecting Ugandans were hoodwinked into believing that a return to civilian rule had come, yet it was simply a transition from one “undisciplined” military rule to another “disciplined” military rule¹⁶. Just as the NRA sought to capture territory for Museveni, the present-day UPDF has continued to focus on regime protection¹⁷.

Moreover, the 1995 constitution entrenched this position further by providing seats for army representatives in the Parliament of Uganda, signalling a reluctance to allow full civilian control of the military. The justification for this representation of a supposedly non-partisan institution in a partisan parliament was ironically located in Uganda’s turbulent history¹⁸.

It was argued that the military intervened twice to disrupt civilian rule (in Idi Amin’s 1971 coup and again in 1985) because they were not sufficiently politically educated to understand their role in a democracy. They could therefore not grasp the relationship between civilian and military authority, which led to indiscipline and rivalry. As listening posts, the military would ostensibly become sensitized about the civilian politics of the day without being too withdrawn to warrant direct intervention. Even with the multiple similarities, Uganda remains the only country in Africa where the military has unelected/nominated uniformed representatives in the national assembly.

It is not by accident that UPDF representatives sit on the government side of parliament. It is designed as a symbolic reminder of their position on any political debate. It is, therefore, not surprising that all the 10 representatives of the UPDF have voted on the side of the NRM Government on all occasions, even on perspicuously partisan issues like constitutional amendments intended to facilitate Museveni’s life presidency.

A good example of this partisanship is the case of Col Fred Bogere. When the NRM moved to lift term limits on a ten-year-old constitution so that Museveni could extend his stay in power, Col Bogere publicly expressed opposition to the notion of breaking term limits in favour of his commander-in-chief. Defying pressure from several senior commanders, Col Bogere abstained but the remaining 9 representatives voted in Museveni’s favour. For this exercise of free will, Col Bogere was ostracised and eventually removed from parliament. He would retire some years later, still at the rank of colonel despite being better trained and more experienced than several officers who were promoted ahead of him.¹⁹

16 Omar Kalinge Nyago, *Museveni on the Edge: Challenges of Youth Radicalisation in Uganda*, Self Published, May 2011

17 Angello Izama; *Africa’s armies and security systems in the COVID-19 ERA: A case of Uganda’s response to the Coronavirus* – a publication of the Uganda Transitional Scenarios Thought Leadership Group

18 *Uganda’s soldier politicians* - Omar D Kalinge-Nnyago; 2006

19 Col Bogere on term limits: Museveni vowed to neutralize me, Baker Batte, Lule, *The Observer*, February 19th, 2018.

CHAPTER 04

“

Emerging Issues in the Present Day

“We need to be clear: what Ugandans have had was never “peace”, but simply security for the Empire’s interests. And without real peace, even that security will eventually disappear.”¹

Kalundi Serumaga

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1

Kalundi Serumaga, Murder as Order, <https://www.theelephant.info/features/2020/12/04/murder-as-order/>, The Elephant, accessed on 20 November, 2023

As has been demonstrated in the previous chapters, the military has been the most dominant institution in Uganda's political affairs since its formation in the colonial era. To build upon the political economy analysis on this subject, Dr Busingye Kabumba²⁰ contends that the continuous repetition of our history is not accidental. It emphasizes the fundamental problem.

Noting that there has been suppression of all forms of contestations that are natural in state formation, he argues that a change in the individuals at the helm would not significantly address the problem. The problem, in Dr Kabumba's view, stems from a design flaw in Uganda's constitution. This design flaw is the source of the successive fights and disagreements that have characterised the country's post-independence lifetime.

"The illusion begins right from the first article which rather leads us to believe that '[a] all power belongs to the people who shall exercise their sovereignty in accordance with this Constitution' and runs on until the very last provision of that document.

The simple and unadulterated truth is that for a long time in our history, this has not been the case – and it is certainly not the case at present. If one asked the Ugandan citizen on the streets of Kampala where the power lies, I believe the answer would be that 'all power belongs to the President, who exercises his sovereignty through the army'.

This is both the over-arching and omnipresent truth of our constitutional age; and also the source of the big lie that underlies the 1995 'Constitution'. It is the gun and the capacity for, and the ever-present threat of, the use of military force by the executive that currently overshadows the parliament and the judiciary. It creates the façade of a democracy within which raw and unmitigated political power is exercised by an increasingly narrow group of people."²¹

This paper associates itself with the dim view based on the history and present-day events that characterise civil-military relations (and by extension public administration) in Uganda. Even after the much-touted "Fundamental Change" speech, in which the new guns cast themselves as being a different breed from past juntas, the military remained an omnipresent force in the country's public affairs.

This much is demonstrated by the three-way fusion of the military into the ruling party and civilian institutions of State such as local governments, the police,

²⁰ Kabumba Busingye, Dan Ngabirano, Timothy Kyepa, *Militarism and the Dilemma of Postcolonial Statehood*, Development Law Publishing, 2017

²¹ *Ibid.*, 9

and parliament— all of whose day-to-day activities²² have an increasingly evident influence of the armed forces. The Uganda People's Defence Forces has received an even greater footprint in the country's public administration in the domains of agricultural extension and support programmes, law enforcement, public infrastructure works, participation in partisan discourse (i.e., through so-called commissars and army MPs), and in framing the country's foreign policy.

Considering the above facts, it is a misnomer for the Constitution to confer all power and authority of Government onto itself, based on the authority given by the people, when the lived reality indicates a preponderance of the gun in public affairs— be it in the executive, legislative, or judicial aspects.

Under President Museveni, the militarization of civilian and public life has become more pervasive than ever. Credible, free, and fair elections are generally considered the most acceptable mechanism through which citizens express their sovereignty and free will to determine those who seek to rule over them²³. Under President Museveni, however, elections have been captured by the expansive military. The military, the police, and other paramilitary structures have been central to his electoral outcomes in all the presidential elections but most pronounced in 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016 and 2021.

There have been several instances where the military has been seen to take charge of the management of electoral processes such as campaigns, and voting, among others. For instance, in 2016 the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU-EOM) reported that security forces were perceived as biased and discriminatory by opposition parties and civil society organizations throughout the electoral cycle. They documented ongoing intimidation, harassment, arrests of supporters, and violence in over 20 districts.

Reports from the 2021 elections showed security forces cracking down on opposition members and journalists, arresting numerous individuals, including presidential candidates Patrick Amuriat and Robert Kyagulanyi. The military blocked opposition candidates from accessing designated venues, prompting the Electoral Commission to seek an explanation from the Inspector General of Police, which was never provided. Apprehension of security forces has risen due to repeated violence against regime opponents, reports of abductions, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings involving elements within the security forces.

Additionally, the Uganda Police Force (which was supposed to be a civilian force) has mutated into a fully-fledged military outfit. Since Gen Katumba

22 Samantha Mwesigye, Of Army and of Government Construction Projects, Daily Monitor, July 14, 2021

23 Uganda National NGO Forum: Restoring Citizen Sovereignty – Towards election integrity and electoral justice in Uganda, 2023

Wamala was appointed IGP in 2001, the topmost leadership position of the Uganda Police Force has been held by a military soldier at the rank of a General²⁴.

Even when this changed in early 2018, the current IGP has been consistently deputized by military officers who visibly wield more power²⁵ than the Inspector General of Police himself. There are several reports of soldiers masquerading as policemen in police uniforms. The net effect of militarizing the Uganda Police Force can be seen in the nature of policing. Cases of brutal arrests, torture, kidnaps, detentions without trial and outright assassination of innocent civilians are on the rise.²⁶

It is not just the police force that is filled with military men. Museveni has appointed three former army commanders to ministerial posts, along with six other serving or retired army officers. For instance, both the Minister of Internal Affairs and his Permanent Secretary are serving generals.

Militarization also extends into public service institutions. For instance, a soldier heads the president's "anti-corruption unit", the "Presidential Investors Protection Unit", and several other auxiliary outfits under the Office of the President. It is this State House that represents an expansive military "state within a state", with several military officials wielding more authority than formal government and state institutions.

It is not unusual for a Colonel in the office of the president (or an auxiliary outfit in the office of the president) to issue orders to formal state institutions or conduct illegal arrests to implement some form of parallel presidential wishes²⁷. The army is now involved in road construction, manufacturing, agricultural advisory and extension services (NAADs), wealth creation programs like Operation Wealth Creation, tax collection, and patriotism training, among others.

As Moses Kisa and Sabastian Rwengabo argue²⁸, while there was a global trend of securitized responses to COVID-19, Uganda experienced an oversized mili-

24 Gen. Kale Kayihura, served as a domineering police chief from 2005 to 2018, before that, Gen. Katumba Wamala served in the position and was the longest serving police chief, see "Inside Gen Kayihura friction with CID" Daily Monitor Saturday, August 19, 2023 <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/special-reports/inside-gen-kayihura-friction-with-cid-4339730>

25 Although a civilian, Martin Okoth Ochola, as head of the Police Force, many analysts think real power resides with soldiers in deputizing positions.

26 Police militarization fuelling human rights violations – study, Jane Nafula, Daily Monitor, Thursday, October 12th 2023.

27 **There have been several instances where Lt. Col. Nakalema, for example has carried out arrests of government officials after conducting parallel "investigations" of on presidential orders.**

28 Khisa, M., & Rwengabo, S. (2023). Militarism and the Politics of Covid-19 Response in Uganda. *Armed Forces & Society*,

tary role. In their analysis, the pre-existing militarism of public life explains and can be linked to the nature of the COVID-19 response in Uganda.

Given that the pandemic heightened a year before preparations for the 2021 general elections, we contend that this pandemic framing provided an opportunity for institutionalized involvement of the military in the electoral process to tilt the ground for President Museveni, who had indicated all signs of frailty to marshal a popular majority. It is not surprising, therefore, that the 2021 electoral process was dominated by intense military action, kidnaps, torture and brutal arrests of political opposition activists.

Successive displays of military interference in court proceedings, legislative processes, and public administration as a whole serve to attest to this fact. The invasion of Parliament by Special Forces operatives at the height of the debate on the presidential age cap; the ferocious assault on the seat of the Rwenzuru kingdom, the November 2020 massacre, the notoriety of senior officers in indiscretions such as land grabbing, the insistence on prosecuting civilians in the military court martial (despite High Court decisions against this practice), and the intervention in elections by the military are but a few examples.

Moreover, the enactment of laws like the Public Order Management Act, the Anti-Money Laundering Act, the Nongovernmental Organisations Act, and the Interception of Communications Act, to name a few, are indicative of an agenda that is steeped towards repression, as opposed to the enjoyment or exercise of civil and political rights.

Thus far, this paper has connected the dots between the country's precolonial, post-independence, and present-day epochs. In Uganda's experience, power is violently attained, violently maintained, and similarly taken away or transferred. Led more by soldiers, militants, and individuals with a working knowledge of violence, militarism has grown and been normalised in the polity.

The first tool in this growth and normalisation has been the subordination of civilian agendas, institutions, and organisations to the priorities and objectives of the military. In the second place is the use of fear to access State resources for upward socioeconomic mobility; and in some cases, the sheer physical survival of social groups, as argued by Amii Otunnu²⁹.


Given the appearances and trappings of the power associated with proximity to the means of violence, there now exists an unspoken understanding

amongst the population that violence pays. The value system that arises from such an environment is autocratic and opposed to the growth of the rule of law and democracy, as is evident in the prevailing state of affairs.

President Museveni has justified his overreliance on the military by blaming public corruption and democratic failure on the indiscipline of civil public servants, arguing for military discipline as the panacea to all of Uganda's administrative failings. This paper, however, argues that the army's dominance of civic life and public administration shows the faultiness of the Ugandan State.

As indicated earlier, the weaknesses and deficiencies in the legitimacy of the colonial state warranted the creation of the Kings African Rifles to suppress dissent; and later, the Uganda Rifles to control opposition to colonial administration. As Museveni's government continues to lose legitimacy, he's turned to the military (the only institution he truly trusts)³⁰ to impose control and dominance of the citizenry through military force.

30 Stephen Kafeero, Museveni and the evolution of government by the military, Daily Monitor, February 6, 2022, accessed at <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/museveni-and-evolution-of-government-by-the-military-3706946> on November 3, 2023



**CHAPTER
05**

Forecasting the Path of Uganda's Military and Democratic Future

The military establishment in Uganda prides itself in the relationship it claims to have built with the civilian population. It relies upon a juxtaposition of the country's chaotic history and the appearance of "peace" (or absence of war) that has relatively prevailed over the past two decades as proof of the stabilization of the country's politics. Spokespersons, officers, and apologists have based on this to justify the military's involvement in, and domination of, politics.

Coming off the heels of the outright military rule and banditry that spanned decades, this constant reminder by the leadership of the UPDF strikes a chord with the population that lived through the horrors of past juntas. Yet, as the memories of *dduka dduka* (Luganda slang for "run for your life!") fade, and with a less grateful younger generation that has known no other leadership except the incumbent, the novelty of a disciplined people's army is wearing off.

This indifference, or outright revulsion, cuts across the so-called city-born generation, those from the countryside, and the hundreds of thousands who grew up in Internally Displaced Peoples' camps in Northern Uganda.

To further extend its grip on power, the regime has increasingly deployed the military in everything from elections to traffic control and crowd management at public events. This constant presence, coupled with their involvement in violent crackdowns, has tarnished the image of the forces in the court of public opinion. At the same time, soldiers themselves are apparently split between a reportedly pampered elite battalion (the Special Forces Command) and the rank-and-file of the regular army.

The majority of the Old Guard that led the five-year bush war which brought Yoweri Museveni to power is now aged, sickly, retired, disillusioned, in opposition, exiled, or altogether deceased. Their retreat from the fore of public affairs and military leadership has spawned ideas amongst many in the younger cadreship. Several mid-ranking officers have unequivocally expressed and continue to overtly and covertly engage in partisan activity and commentary.

Gazing into the future, we foresee five potential scenarios for the military's future role in Uganda's governance: the silent umpire, the disruptor, or the power-hungry contender.

Scenario 1: The Silent Umpire

In this scenario, the military acts as a neutral mediator between competing civilian factions, wielding its considerable financial and political clout to maintain order and facilitate dialogue. However, the likelihood of this role is dubious. Having tasted the trappings of power and forged close ties with the ruling NRM, the armed forces are unlikely to willingly step back and let civilians direct the nation's course while they play a backroom, subordinate role.

Scenario 2: The Disruptor

In this scenario, the military abandons its pretence of neutrality and becomes a force of obstruction. The military could act in ways that subvert, delay, or altogether halt the natural progression of the country's political life. This possibility looms large, considering the military's penchant for intervening in public affairs, even when such conduct is prohibited by existing legislation. However, the widespread fatigue with military interference could act as a potential stumbling block. Citizens may reject the military's attempts to tighten its grip.

Scenario 3: The Power-hungry Contender.

In this unsettling scenario, the military steps into the political arena as a fully-fledged contender. Egged on by the perceived weakness of other state institutions (i.e. ministries, departments, and authorities), the military may seek to establish a junta, sidelining the legislature, executive, and judiciary. As extreme a scenario as this seems, it is not far-fetched. The decades-long emasculation of institutions of state in Uganda has created a power vacuum that the military can exploit to exert itself over the society.

All things considered, this paper holds the view that militarism, as inherited from the country's formative history, is a major impediment to the development of the Rule of Law and Democracy. Efforts must be made to excise the militaristic tendencies enumerated in the foregoing chapters as a means of enhancing the prospects for not just a peaceful, orderly transition, but a stable, enduring, and durable democracy.

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Authors
Andrew Karamagi
Chris Nkwatsibwe