

# Idi Amin: London stooge against Sudan

by Linda de Hoyos

In February 1971, Gen. Idi Amin came to power in Uganda, in a military coup against President Milton Obote. British sponsorship of the semi-literate Amin, son of a sorceress, was quickly evident; Britain was one of the first countries in the world to recognize the Amin government, long before any African country. And when relations with Britain had soured after Amin expelled the Asian business community from Uganda, British intelligence operative Robert Astles remained as Amin's mentor in Uganda until the very end. Amin's tyranny, lasting until 1979, trampled Uganda's political and economic institutions, leaving the country a wreckage from which it has never recovered.

For London, as the book *Ghosts of Kampala* by George

Ivan Smith reports, the primary reason for fostering the Amin power grab was Sudan. Idi Amin was willing, in fact eager, to permit Uganda to be used as a base of operations to aid the southern Sudanese in their war against Khartoum; Obote was not.

## Nurtured Nilotics

Amin, now safely ensconced in Saudi Arabia, was a member of the Kakwa tribe, which straddles the borders of Uganda, Zaire, and southern Sudan. The tribe supplied Amin with his power base in the Ugandan Army.

As a young man in 1946, Amin joined the King's African Rifles, founded in 1902. The British had traditionally taken soldiers of this outfit from the grouping designated "Nilotic peoples," particularly southern Sudanese. In London's recipe for colonial rule, minority groups were assigned to the enforcement roles, enhancing reliability. In 1891, contingents of southern Sudanese were recruited by Captain (later Lord) Lugard for service in Uganda on behalf of the Imperial British East Africa Company. After Britain ruled Uganda officially, large numbers of Dinka and Azande troops, then living in Egypt, were sent to Uganda. Although nominally Muslim, they had fought against the Mahdi's army in the 1880s, on the British side. In Uganda, they were called "Nubis."

After Amin took power, he staffed all Army command posts with "Nubis," in much the same way that Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army is commanded by Himas, or Tutsis of southern Uganda, and the Banyarwanda, former Rwandan Tutsis. During the Sudanese civil war of 1955 to 1972, southern Sudanese had been brought directly into the Ugandan Army, making Uganda the perfect buttress for the southern Sudanese fighting Khartoum.

## Obote bucks policy

In the early years of independence, Obote had invited delegations from Israel to help carry out farming projects in northern Uganda and to assist training the Army. Israel had a specific interest in Uganda: its proximity to Sudan. The Israelis were soon moving into southern Sudan to assist directly the Anyanya movement against Khartoum.

In 1966, however, Obote visited Khartoum, and came to an agreement that Uganda would exert every effort to restore peace in the south. But the policy was ignored by the Defense Ministry and by Idi Amin, who was up to his eyeballs in smuggling operations in the Congo (now Zaire) and Sudan. Amin was in charge of an operation which smuggled gold and ivory out of Congo, in exchange for giving weapons to Congolese rebels, and was brought before a commission of inquiry when it was discovered that he was pocketing thousands of dollars in the process. The commission further discovered that Amin had become involved in the Congo venture through Robert Astles, who was making contacts between the Congolese rebels and the Ugandan

## Major ethnic groupings of southern Sudan and Uganda



Army. Astles's private airline company was handling the smuggling.

Ugandan Army officers also charged that Amin was working—against government orders—with the Sudan rebels inside Sudan. They alleged he went on a number of unauthorized flights with a foreign pilot—possibly Astles—to meet Sudanese rebels and arranged to supply them with matériel intended for the Ugandan Armed Forces.

A German mercenary named Rolf Steiner was an accomplice in the operation. In his autobiography, *The Last Adventurer*, Steiner relates that he had arranged a meeting in Kampala “under the supervision of General Idi Amin with the purpose of reaching an agreement on the leadership of the [Sudanese] liberation front.” Out of this meeting, Steiner was given money to buy goods wholesale and ship them across Uganda to the tribal chiefs in southern Sudan. Steiner notes that “although not all-powerful, he [Amin] was strong enough to order his army to turn a blind eye to my harmless smuggling service.”

Meanwhile, Obote refused to grant Israel landing rights for their supplies to the Anyanya. The crisis over Sudan policy hit in November 1970. Steiner was arrested by Ugandan police upon reentering Uganda from Sudan. Obote stated, in a later interview, “The government of Uganda as such was not involved in aiding the Anyanya but was involved in finding political solutions in the Sudanese conflict. The arrest of Steiner brought out the fact that Israel was using Uganda to supply Anyanya.”

Obote was couped while he was in Nairobi, on his way back from the Singapore Commonwealth conference. As he relates, “It is doubtful that Amin, without the urging of the Israelis, would have staged a successful coup in 1971. . . . Israel wanted a client regime in Uganda which they could manipulate in order to prevent Sudan from sending her troops to Egypt. . . . The coup succeeded beyond their wildest expectations. . . . The Israelis set up in Uganda a regime which pivoted in every respect to Amin, who in turn was under the strictest control of the Israelis in Kampala. . . . The Israelis and Anyanya were hilarious; the regime was under their control.”

When the Sudanese civil war was halted in 1972, Israel quickly lost interest in Amin. Enter Libya. In February 1972, Amin visited Libya, striking a pact with its President Muammar Qaddafi. In March 1972, all Israeli personnel were told to leave Uganda. In August 1972, all Asians were expelled, whereupon Britain withdrew its support for Amin. In September 1972, Libya proffered full military assistance to Uganda and sent 500 technicians to Kampala. By 1974, the intelligence services in Uganda were being run by Libya, and Libya was giving Amin Soviet MiG fighters. Libya even supplied troops to defend Amin when the Tanzanian Armed Forces invaded Uganda to drive Amin out. Overseeing the entire venture, from beginning to end in 1979, was London's Astles.

## Baroness Chalker's Ugandan mercenary

by Linda de Hoyos

Uganda remains today the on-the-ground headquarters for operations against Sudan. It is the major source of supply for John Garang's Sudanese People's Liberation Army. The SPLA is supplied from Kidepo Valley Park in northern Uganda, and Kidepo is the site for SPLA training and the SPLA headquarters. According to Ugandan sources, food, gasoline, and supplies are stored for Garang at the Mbuya military barracks, and the supplies are delivered by the National Resistance Army's 4th Division.

In the days when the SPLA was more militarily viable, Ugandan dictator Yoweri Museveni attempted to procure sophisticated weapons for Garang. In August 1992, Museveni's private secretary, Innocent Bisangwa-Mbuguje, and Ugandan Ambassador to the United States Stephen Kapimpina Katenda-Apuuli were arrested in Orlando, Florida, for illegally attempting to buy 400 TOW anti-tank missiles and 34 TOW launchers for \$18 million. The weapons were bound for the SPLA, through the border towns of Nimule or Kaya in northern Uganda.

Museveni and Garang are old school buddies, both having matriculated at the Dar Es Salaam University—the Julius Nyerere “kindergarten” where the curriculum centered on Franz Fanon, Lenin, and Marx.

Museveni came to power in Uganda in 1986, after five years of bush war. His most immediate sponsor was Tanzanian President Nyerere, who had ordered the coup against Ugandan President Godfrey Binaisa in 1981. During his years in the bush, Museveni received funding and arms from Libya, with which he retains close relations and a continuing arms supply. He also received cash injections from Nigerian businessman Mooshod Abiola, who in the early 1980s served as the bagman for ITT; and from Tiny Rowland, then director of Lonrho, who became an “honorary” member of the SPLA.

However, Museveni's most significant sponsor is Baroness Lynda Chalker, British Minister of Overseas Development. Chalker was the first foreigner to meet Museveni when he finally took Kampala in 1986. Her ministry has posted British civil servants as the “seconds” throughout Museveni's government. The relationship is personal. As one British source put it: “Chalker spends a lot of time, a disproportionate amount of time, in the Horn of Africa and Uganda.” Soon after the Rwandan Patriotic Front took Kigali in July