

The republic of Uganda has probably the most aggressive foreign policy agenda of East Africa's Great Lakes Region (GLR). Since Yoweri Kaguta Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA) battled its way to power in the capital city, Kampala, in January 1986, the Pearl of Africa has served as the cockpit of regional diplomacy as well as the staging ground for regional military interventions by the NRA's successor, the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF), in countries as far-afield as Liberia, Somalia, and the Central African Republic. No less significant has been the country's historical role as midwife to the guerilla resistance movements which have since come to form the national governments in neighboring Rwanda and South Sudan. Yet, scarcely little in the way of scholarly analysis has emerged which might detail *what*, exactly, Museveni's foreign policy is.

At the same time that Museveni's overarching foreign policy aims have been largely ignored, scholars and international observers who might have filled this gap have lavished an inordinate body of commentary about the President's place within the so-called "new breed" of post-Cold War African statesman. With much ink having been spilt on the subjects of Museveni's perceived success or failure to develop Uganda in the wake of his disastrous respective predecessors, Apollo Milton Obote and Idi Amin Dada, scholars seem less intent on analysing the Ugandan President's geo-strategic vision. Why? Beyond that, is it possible to assess Museveni's foreign policy outside of a scholarly consensus on his diplomatic legacy? As the President's reign at Statehouse extends into its fourth decade, what can be said of this legacy at all?

In attempting to answer these questions, this paper begins with a brief survey of what might be called 'the Museveni discourse.' After assaying what academics have written about Yoweri Museveni and his diplomatic conduct, I argue that the President is too complex an operator for any single narrative to adequately cover his foreign policy legacy. Ultimately, I find that a massive effort by concerned scholars to study the President's highly personalized statecraft is needed if future generations are to fully appreciate Museveni's centrality to Ugandan foreign policy in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, much less Uganda's centrality to the GLR in the late 20th in that time. As for Museveni's current foreign policy projections, these must be teased out of the historical record, such that only a general, tentative evaluation can be made.

'The Museveni Discourse': Who Is Yoweri Museveni?

Writing in 2001 the Africanist scholar and International Relations (IR) analyst John F. Clark observed of Museveni that, "the will of the President is indisputably the key to foreign-policy decision-making in Uganda." Two years before the Lusaka Accords tentatively stemmed the African "world war" then raging in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, or simply, 'the Congo'), Clark amply demonstrated that Museveni had single-handedly deployed the UPDF in a joint intervention with Paul Kagame's Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), first in the spring of 1996 to install Laurent Desiré Kabila in Kinshasa after the alliance had toppled Zaire's dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko's Zaire, and for a second time a year later, this time to oust Kabila. In particular, Clark argued that Museveni's second, much more forceful intervention in the Congo in the

autumn of 1997 was prompted by the RPA's failure to dislodge Kabila following the Angolan and Zimbabwean counter-intervention that October. Clark went on to highlight Museveni's astute reading of the geo-strategic situation presently unfolding in the fledgling DRC: Here Museveni seems to have appreciated that a Rwandan defeat inside the Congo may well have upset then Vice-President Kagame's hold on power in Kigali, and that any successor to Kagame's Ugandan-backed government would loom as a serious military threat along Uganda's southwestern border. Kagame, after all, had been deputy head of military intelligence within Museveni's NRA, and Museveni knew well that his thinly-veiled sponsorship of the former's Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) during the Rwandese Civil War would not go unnoticed by any Hutu government to displace Kagame.

Whether or not Kagame's Rwanda was existentially threatened by Kabila's survival as suggested by Clark, and regardless of whether this would have imperilled Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM, or 'the Movement,' more plainly) government in Kampala, scholarship by IR scholar Gerard Prunier and others has demonstrated that Museveni's successive Congolese interventions can be seen as having also been significantly motivated by strategic imperatives largely independent of the Ugandan-Rwandese alliance. In particular, Prunier's contribution to the Museveni discourse does well to underscore the salience of the Congolese wars within Museveni's security calculations vis-à-vis the President's long-running proxy-war with Omar al-Bashir's Sudan.

It is worth noting here that Museveni had long held off from retaliating against Khartoum's well-known support of Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) since coming to power in January 1986, despite the LRA's having prevented the NRM from integrating Uganda's disaffected Acholi north. But Sudanese support for the LRA had by the mid-1990s bled into a policy of exploiting Mobutu's and Kabila's respective inability to control Zaire/Congo's periphery by funneling war materiel through the country's easterly Kivu provinces to a smattering of other anti-NRM rebel outfits then operating on both sides of the porous border with Uganda. Among these, the newly-fledged Allied Democratic Force (ADF) had recently burnt to death eighty Ugandan students the rebels had locked inside Kasese's Kichwamba Technical School in the summer of 1998. With a fire-breathing Kony still very much an irritant to the north, it seems Museveni had capitalized on the chaos of the Second Congo War to, in Prunier's words, extend "the bit of cross-border cleaning," the UPDF had begun in the wake of the RPA's invasion of Zaire two years earlier.

However strong Museveni's geostrategic imperatives for intervention, it would be flatly naïve to conclude here that other, less conventionally statist interests were not also at play. Echoing Clark's suggestion that Museveni's original security concerns were quickly superseded by the UPDF's establishment in the Eastern Congo of a lucrative black market in Congolese natural resources, pundit-scholars Roger Tangri and Andrew Mwenda would go on to stress the prominence of military corruption within Museveni's foreign policy agenda. Tangri and Mwenda have thus suggested that the President's own

brother, UPDF General Salim Saleh, was instrumental in making the case for intervention based on the prospect of the UPDF's perceived ability to essentially pillage eastern Congo. After the United Nations (UN) in 2001 and 2002 labelling both Museveni and Kagame as "accomplices" to this illegal plunder, and after Museveni's refusal to punish Saleh after the latter confessed his personal involvement therein, one cannot help but conclude that either the heads of the military alliance were directly involved, or that neither were fully in control of their militaries at the time they infamously turned on each other at Kisangani over the course of 1999-2000. Here access to natural resources was undeniably the *causus belli*, with differences between how each military preferred to deal with Kabila amounting to a decidedly secondary factor.

Moving past Museveni's handling of the Congolese affair, it is important also to consider what scholars have had to say about the extent to which Museveni's foreign policy agenda has been influenced by the NRM's strategic dependence upon Western aid, including and especially in terms of the Movement's relationship with the United States. As Africanist scholar Samuel H. Baligge observed in 2011, if Museveni remains "the most visible actor" in Ugandan foreign policy formulation, it is still true that, "[l]ooking for the rationale for Uganda's foreign policy towards the United States...has far reaching epistemological implications in understanding Uganda's foreign policy paradigm shifts on the one hand, and why the UK and USA should turn to Yoweri Museveni...to do the impossible in Somalia." Putting Somalia momentarily aside, Baligge's observation sheds light on a much younger Museveni of, freshly victorious after the Bush Wars of 1980-1986, who ditched his erstwhile revolutionary-Marxism for sheer pragmatism in the service of political power. If Ugandan academic and human rights activist J. Oloka-Onyango and others are wont to note Uganda's macro-economic success on the heels of Museveni's strict adherence to the World Bank's and the International Monetary Fund's Structural Adjustment Programs, they also agree that his sudden conversion to neo-liberal capitalism reflected the president's need to regain the Western diplomatic support and, more importantly, aid flows which had dried up under his disgraced predecessors Amin and Obote.

If Museveni's excursions in the Congo did upset relations between the NRM and the United States government, his propaganda value to the West as the poster-boy for African structural adjustment far outweighed both his abandonment of the military demobilization he's promised the World Bank in exchange for continued aid and his democratic deficits at home. Having produced an average of 8% annual growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) between 1994 and 1998, American President Bill Clinton was only too happy to rub shoulders with what scholar James McKinley fawningly dubbed a "new generation of [African] leaders," gathered around Museveni at a 1998 international summit held in Uganda, "who care less about establishing full-fledged democracies than about developing their countries."

With the Western "donor discourse" tending to value economic development over democracy, it is little wonder that international aid to Museveni's government has never

been conditional upon a serious commitment on the part of the NRM to meaningfully 'develop' Uganda's political culture. Uganda's constitution has allowed for multiparty elections since 2005 (the first being held in 2006), but this démarche emerged from Museveni's need to purge his NRM of dissidents and only after the president had wrangled a further amendment from the national judiciary that removed term-limits on his administration. As will be discussed in conjunction with Museveni's burgeoning commitment to the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM), the West is happy to give so long as Museveni reciprocates in areas beyond the realm of Ugandan politics.

The exception that proves this tenet of Ugandan-US relations has been Museveni's deft handling of Uganda's s hotly controversial Anti-homosexuality bill. Drawing immediate condemnation from the international community after it was tabled in 2009 by the NRM's David Bahati, the proposed legislation would have made gay sex a capital offense in Uganda. In what Harvard University Africanist Richard Ssebagala described as "Nazi overtones," the bill also mandated stringent prison terms for Ugandans who refused to report homosexual activity to authorities. The problem for Museveni was that, despite overwhelming domestic support for what Western media had scorned as Bahati's "Kill the Gays Bill," the legislation's obvious human rights implications were simply intolerable in the eyes of the NRM's Western benefactor's, most notably the Obama administration in Washington D.C.

With the Western world agog as an acerbically homophobic Museveni told America's CNN that gay people were "unnatural and disgusting," the President had in fact swung into full damage-control behind the scenes. After placing a tight-lipped Sam Kutesa, then Uganda's Minister of Foreign Affairs, to uphold the NRM's deliberately ambiguous position that "the government does not support the promotion of homosexuality," Museveni privately assured the United States Embassy in Kampala that Ugandans would never be executed for being gay. Museveni has not since retracted his homophobic stance, but it seems his very public 2014 signing of the anti-Homosexuality Act was mere window dressing to a law the President never intended to operationalize. Ultimately, the "Kill the Gays Bill" was itself killed in the Ugandan Supreme Court on Constitutional grounds, with Museveni having thus demonstrated to the Obama administration that he'd made good on his earlier promise to personally "handle" Bahati's offensive legislation.

Towards a Bright Future?

Whatever the future holds for Ugandan diplomacy after Museveni, the president's foreign policy has certainly grown more assertive in the past decade. The end of the Sudanese Civil War in 2006 saw an abrupt halt to Khartoum's material support for Joseph Kony, with the sharp decline in the LRA's fighting capacity allowing Museveni to wield the UPDF as an instrument of foreign policy in places like Liberia, the Central African Republic, Somalia. While Uganda's contribution to the "African solution" to the continent's humanitarian crises may well reflect Museveni's earlier Pan-African idealism, it clearly dovetails American attempts to get Africans to perform the kinds of armed interventions and peace-keeping missions for themselves which Americans won't

have *their* military performing for Africans. Baligdde's claim that the UPDF has been "do[ing] the impossible in Somalia" since July 2007 is thus not overstated in light of the US Army's ignominious withdrawal from a war-torn Mogadishu in the early days of Clinton's first administration, and much less so when we remember that the entire Western world abandoned Rwanda to its ghastly fate as the Tutsi genocide got underway two years later.

The broader implications of Baligdde's assertion can be seen in the light of Museveni's willingness to wage America's "Global War on Terror" in the Horn of Africa, where battling *al-Shabab* in Somalia probably outweighs Washington's concerns to stabilize that country after its descent into violent chaos nearly a quarter-century ago. It is well to add here that the United States, together with Great Britain and the European Union, provided the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) with \$65 million (US) when it was conceived in 2007, with the United States having contributed over \$185 million on its own by 2011.

As the University of Birmingham's Jonathan Fisher noted in 2012, Museveni's enthusiasm for the UPDF's central role within AMISOM has only deepened since the first 1,500 UPDF troops were deployed to Somalia five years earlier. With the West largely footing the bill, deployment in Somalia has been incentivized within UPDF circles in ways not altogether unlike the earlier Congo example. It is true that, unlike Museveni's bid to topple Mobutu and then unseat Kabila, the UPDF is serving its internationally-sanctioned mission in Somalia under the twinned aegis of the African Union and the UN; it was not deployed at the President's personal behest. It also bears mentioning here that the Ugandan military's peace-keeping mission on behalf of AMISOM has not devolved into shady natural resource-grabbing as in the Congo ten years earlier. All the same, that the UPDF's ranks within AMISOM had swelled to 6,000 troops by 2011 suggests that the lucrative opportunity of foreign service (Ugandans serving abroad earn more money than those posted inside Uganda) has afforded Museveni a welcome chance to patronize his military after its withdrawal from the Congo had brought an end to its illicit "war economy" there.

Museveni can claim that the UPDF has ramped up its commitment to AMISOM in the wake of *al-Shabab's* 2010 bomb attack which killed 74 Ugandans in Kampala. However, this explanation ignores, one, that the UPDF went into Somalia despite having been warned by Somali clan leaders and local Islamists to stay out of the conflict and, two, that despite *al-Shabab's* having sponsored the 2010 attack, the plan was contrived by Uganda's very own Isa Ahmed Luyima. It follows, then, that if either combating terrorism or stabilizing Somalia are the operative goals behind Museveni's pledge to AMISOM, the UPDF might do well to work toward these objectives at home.

Museveni's Legacy: Pinning Down Uganda's Sphinx

In the end, what we are looking at when we try to describe Yoweri Museveni's foreign policy behavior is a leader equally prepared to preserve his power by resorting to drastic measures within the broader GLR, and by aligning himself with the West when this has

suiting his purposes. When the collapse of Mobutu's Zaire and the broadening of the Second Congolese War threatened to destabilize the region, Museveni deployed the UPDF in a way that contained the violence within the DRC and, perhaps more importantly from a geo-strategic standpoint, kept all the regional players alive. In this sense, a perhaps overambitious Kagame survived his botched attempt to depose Laurent Kabila. Even if Kabila was himself later assassinated, his blood was not on Museveni's hands. Crucially, Kabila's son, Joseph, has been left in place to make as smooth a political transition as possible under the Lusaka accords which (at least nominally) ended the Second Congo War in 2003.

With the GLR more stable in recent years than at any other point since independence, Museveni's hand has been freer to project Ugandan power farther afield. As discussed in the case of Somalia, it seems that the UPDF's involvement in AMISOM has paid diplomatic dividends in the way of stronger ties between the NRM and its Western benefactors. Critically, Museveni has been playing this angle since he took over Statehouse in 1986. Baligge has commented that improved relations with the west are among Museveni's more pronounced foreign policy accomplishments. Queen Elizabeth II, who once joked about taking a ceremonial sword to Idi Amin's head in the event he were to "gatecrash" her 1977 jubilee, said in November 2007 of Museveni's dedication to AMISOM: "Uganda's regional role is also widely appreciated. In particular, the contribution made to peacekeeping operations in Somalia has been a tribute to the courage and professionalism of Uganda's armed forces. I am also pleased that the educational and cultural ties between our two countries are now stronger than ever before". If the Queen's exaltation is an accurate gauge of Museveni's general reception by the West, it was probably Museveni who was more "pleased" by Her Majesty's warm words.

It would be a mistake to view Museveni's involvement in AMISOM in the vein of an African despot bending to the whims of his stronger Western patrons. It is rather Museveni who has reaped the rewards of fulfilling a Western-inspired mission that has blended regional security aims with the delivery of American, British and EU aid money which the president is free to disperse among the top brass within the UPDF. Here one can almost hear the seventeenth-century words of the English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes that, "If one can get another to use their power on behalf of his purpose, then he can add their power to his arsenal."

Further deciphering Museveni's foreign policy legacy must remain the work of future scholars. As Makerere University Africanist and IR scholar Paul Omach has candidly shared with the author, it is frustratingly difficult for today's scholars to tackle Museveni's diplomatic strategy. Lacking access to official documents in State archives in Kampala, scholars are left to tease out the president's statecraft variously from the historical record and from the President's typically self-serving public speeches. It is possible that comprehensive theoretical analyses by concerned scholars have not been forthcoming because, one, Museveni's foreign policy behavior doesn't conform to any

coherent ideology and, two, the subject is a politically field of research that, to quote Omach, “most [scholars] would stay out of.”

My attempt at the above analysis does not claim to be comprehensive, much less definitive. It has been selective in its approach and, owing to gaps in the available sources regarding parliamentary involvement in Ugandan foreign-policy making, vague in key areas of Museveni’s role within the Movement. Yet I believe the overall pattern that emerges is nonetheless instructive, if only in terms of broad strokes. Speaking for myself, it has been emotionally distressing not to have penetrated more deeply into the inner workings of Yoweri Museveni, and if I can admit here that the man looms in my own mind as something of a taunting Sphinx, the admission brings no comfort. I want to learn more, but must content myself with what I’ve so far managed to glean, consigning the task to future scholars shrewder and more persistent than myself.