
AGLI - Report from Kenya - March 31, 2010

Is Uganda Next?

Dear All,

I am afraid that Uganda is going to be the next country to explode into violence. President Yoweri Museveni has just completed his twenty-fourth year of ruling the country. He has survived with an alliance of strong support from Western Uganda where he comes from, strong support from Buganda (25% of the population that live around Kampala), moderate support in the East of the country, little support in the North, and 1,000,000 ghost voters. The “ghost voters” are not individuals but mythical polling stations that return 100% of their votes for Museveni. Since the electoral commission in Uganda is not independent of the Government and ruling party, one can assume that they will again tilt the playing field towards their boss just the same way the Kenya Electoral Commission, dominated completely by Kibaki, tilted the election in his favor.

Americans need to bless George Washington because he quit the presidency after two terms or eight years. This then became the tradition, and after Franklin D Roosevelt broke the tradition, it was turned into constitutional law. When someone stays in power longer and longer—Robert Mugabe is an excellent example; the country continues on a downward slide as the ruling elite steal more and more of the country’s wealth and the society begins to break down when people have no non-violent option for change.

Uganda’s next election is in 2011 and Museveni’s coalition is falling apart. To win he is going to need more than his usual 1,000,000 ghost voters. The reason is this. Museveni came to power by the gun in 1986 when he ousted the government led by Tito Okello. He ruled as a military dictator for 10 years and then was forced into holding elections beginning in 1996. In the first two elections in 1996 and 2001 he won handily and probably did not need his 1,000,000 ghost voters.

But in 2006 there was a problem. The Ugandan Constitution allowed only two terms of five years each. This problem was easily taken care of. Remove that clause from the Constitution and he could run again. The Constitution also says that the President has to win by more than 50% of the votes so if the top candidate does not get 50% of the vote, there is a run-off by the top two candidates. In 2006, without his 1,000,000 ghost voters, Museveni would have had to be in a run-off election which he could well have lost.

Clearly Museveni has no interest in giving up power and will try whatever it takes to become re-elected. Let me note that we are not talking about Museveni as an individual. Rather he is the head of an elaborate, extensive, network of closely connected individuals including many of Museveni’s relatives who are the “winners” in their control of the Ugandan Government. In

Zimbabwe, Mugabe once offered to resign but his generals - who were the head of the corruption there – knew that they had to have him continue as President if they were also going to continue. Mugabe continued.

The problem is that Museveni's alliance with Buganda has fallen apart. In order to secure the allegiance of the Buganda in the prior elections, he agreed to the restoration of the Buganda kingdom as a cultural institution. Like most former British colonies, the Ugandan Government owns a considerable amount of land and some of this is economically quite useful and rented out to individuals and companies. The Buganda have demanded that the land which had formerly belonged to the Buganda Kingdom be taken away from Government control and given back to the Kingdom. Museveni has not agreed to this, and probably will not. If he did do this, the non-Bugandans who have supported him in the past would probably desert him. If the Buganda can claim re-control of their land, the Buganda Kingdom will become immensely wealthy.

The first three presidents of Uganda were all from the North because the British gave these minority non-Bantu speaking groups control of the police and military. They feared the numbers, education, wealth, and influence of the Buganda. So the Buganda have always been marginalized in the politics of the country.

There already have been riots by the Buganda. In September last year Bugandan youth shut down Kampala and the police retaliated with violence, killing eight. Recently the grave site of the Kabaka ("king" of the Buganda) was burned down and more violence occurred as many Buganda felt it was arson. In other words, the precursors of large scale violence are already happening. This is a warning sign; but as soon as calm is returned, the warning is ignored.

Museveni's only hope of winning re-election, even with outright fraud, is to have many candidates oppose him. President Moi of Kenya used this technique in 1992 and 1997 to stay in power for an extra, disastrous ten years. But it will be difficult for Museveni to get the 50% of the vote needed to prevent a run-off election. He is not going to get votes from the North of the country, opposition to him in the East is increasing, and if the Bugandan 25% vote against him, he is in a real pickle.

It is still possible that Museveni will pull the rabbit of re-election out of the hat, by hook or by crook. But if he does "win", it may well be pyrrhic as those who have lost—particularly the Buganda—are not going to peacefully agree for him to rule another five years. If so, then the post election violence may rival or surpass the Kenyan post election violence in 2008.

Let us hope that I am wrong.

Peace,
Dave

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