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CIA/ONE/MEMO 72 6121

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

21 September 1972

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Amin's Uganda: What Next?*

NOTE

This paper is intended to provide some perspective on recent events in Uganda, particularly in light of this week's unsuccessful invasion from Tanzania, and to outline some of the problems likely to come up in the next few months.

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* *This memorandum was prepared in the Office of National Estimates and discussed with appropriate offices in CIA, which are in agreement with its principal judgments.*

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1. When Idi Amin ousted President Obote in January 1971, it caused at least a mild sigh of relief among Western countries with an interest in Uganda. Obote had become increasingly difficult to deal with. He had nationalized most of the foreign-owned companies in Uganda and appeared to be growing ever more radical and anti-Western. Government finances had become pretty chaotic, internal tribal tensions were severe, and the general outlook for Uganda was not rosy.

2. Under Amin, Uganda has moved from the frying pan into the fire. His coup was generally popular in Uganda -- especially among the Baganda (the largest tribe, which had suffered under Obote's rule) and among the resident Asians who had come to fear Obote's intentions towards them. But the relatively bloodless coup became a very bloody affair in the ensuing months as Amin permitted tribal hostilities nearly free rein in the army. The number of Lango and Acholi officers and enlisted men, who had formed the backbone of the army under Obote, dropped by more than half. Total army personnel grew from about 8,000 to around 12,000 within a matter of months, while about 4,000 army men were killed or disappeared. Few experienced officers or NCOs are left, and

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the army is almost out of control. The once effective civil service is demoralized by the sudden arrests and disappearance of some of its leaders, the police have been reduced to impotence by the disappearance (and probable death) of the top echelon. The populace appears generally fearful and stunned, wondering where disaster will strike next.

3. Since his coup, Amin has devoted most of his energies to army affairs and to his peculiar brand of foreign policy. He has made a number of trips (some on the spur of the moment) abroad -- to England, and most of the Arab states -- and carried on noisy feuds with several neighbor states. He has no patience with the intricacies of government finance and no interest in matters economic. The situation of the modern sector of the economy has gone from bad to terrible in the past two years.

4. When he first came to power, Amin was avowedly pro-British -- grateful for the UK's early recognition of his regime -- and pro-Israeli -- loud in his praise for their assistance to Uganda's military establishment. Conversely, he was "anti-Communist" and very sympathetic to the rebel cause in neighboring Sudan. In the past eight months,

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these positions have shifted 180 degrees. The Israelis were expelled in March and Israel is now considered enemy number one; British military advisors have just been expelled and the UK appears to have become enemy number two. Some of his former "enemies" -- Sudan and the Communist powers -- are now seen as "friends".

5. To Western eyes Amin appears at best erratic, and possibly crazy. He has, for example, lectured Jordanian officers, including the King, about allowing US B-52 bombers to cross Jordanian airspace on the way to bomb North Vietnam. More recently he has threatened to invade Rwanda, to make it stop "harboring Israelis"; offered to take on the British army, air force (and navy!) if necessary; and claims that the British, Israelis, and "other Western nations" are plotting to assassinate him. Last week he applauded Hitler's policy toward the Jews and suggested all the Israelis in the Middle East be sent back to England.

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6. There may, however, be some method in this madness. Amin is ill-educated (primary school only) and unsophisticated in comparison with most African heads of state but he is shrewd and has long been popular with his troops. He served under the British and rose

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fairly high in the enlisted ranks, as well as becoming Uganda's top boxer. He seems to be something of a bully, enjoys public appearances and speechmaking; and appears untroubled by violence and disorder in government operations. He believes in direct and simple solutions to problems; compromise and negotiation do not appeal to him. He makes virtually all policy decisions himself and many seem illogical or even paranoid. But practically all his abrupt policy shifts have been preceded by warnings or threats, and he has a keen appreciation of the usefulness of scapegoats. He kicked the Israelis out last spring, for example, after he had begun to make advances to the Arabs, and after the Sudanese rebellion, in which Israel had helped the southern tribes to which he claimed some kinship, had been calmed. He promptly sought replacement aid and technicians from among new-found Arab friends, without much success. Israeli plots and machinations thereafter became the favorate scapegoat for many of Uganda's ills.

7. Amin's decision in early August to expel Uganda's Asians appears directly related to the worsening economic situation.* Never

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* *The extent of this order has changed several times since -- at first it included all Asians, even citizens; it was later amended to exempt some Asians with certain skills (like engineers and teachers) and currently also exempts those who can prove, in the face of arbitrary and shifting bureaucratic requirements, their citizenship.*

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mind that the Asians run virtually the whole of the modern economy, and contribute the bulk of the doctors, lawyers, teachers, mechanics, tradesmen, and entrepreneurs. The order for their expulsion was generally popular among the Black Ugandans. Amin has repeatedly accused the Asians of sabotaging the economy, milking it of profits, making life hard for the Africans. Moreover, his declaration that by November, Black Ugandans will regain control of their economy and finally achieve independence strikes a sympathetic nerve.

8. While the British grudgingly accepted responsibility for most of Uganda's Asians (35,000 to 50,000 are probably either British subjects or stateless; a few thousand have Indian or Pakistani papers; possibly as many as 15,000 have clear Ugandan citizenship),* they first sought to persuade Amin to cancel the expulsion order. It soon became clear that there is little hope of that and the British in recent weeks have sought an extension of the deadline. Amin remains adamant and, as various pressures are applied -- by the British in the form of suspending promised economic aid, by a few other nations such as Zambia, Tanzania, and Canada who point out the inhumane and racist aspects of Amin's expulsion policy -- he is becoming even more stubborn and angry.

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* *Estimates of the total number of Asians in Uganda vary widely.*

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9. In the past few weeks foreigners of many nationalities have been subjected to humiliations by Amin's soldiers -- often drunken, usually sullen and suspicious. American diplomatic personnel trying to cross the border by car have been manhandled; tourists subjected to rough baggage searches and confiscation, in some cases, of valuables. Amin's orders to his hand-picked border forces to shoot on sight any Israeli trying to cross the border; his subsequent accusations of British plots and sabotage -- accompanied by observations as to what good targets white faces would make for his troops -- have naturally alarmed most of the foreign community in Uganda.

10. Amin has demonstrated a great tolerance for violence and bloodshed and an exceptional ability to find someone to blame for Uganda's troubles. So far, a relatively small number of Asians (perhaps a hundred or so) and three Americans* have been killed. It is clearly unrealistic to expect green or drunken troops, under orders to shoot Israelis, to be able to distinguish between Israelis

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* *Two Americans were killed by soldiers in July 1971 when they went to investigate reports of a mutiny. This week a Peace Corps Volunteer was shot at a roadblock.*

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on the one hand and Dutchmen, Englishmen or Americans on the other -- especially since Amin's speeches have begun lumping "Europeans" (which in the local context means Whites) together as "spies" and "plotters".

11. Clearly, the British -- numbering about 7,000 -- seem to be the next focus for Amin's wrath. The military advisors have already been ordered out (accused of plotting the assassination of Amin) and a number of prominent English civilians have either left or been expelled. As British efforts to ensure an orderly departure of many thousand Asians encounter the confusion and obstruction of the Ugandan bureaucracy, frictions are bound to get worse. Amin has begun to accuse the UK of dragging its feet. He seems perfectly capable of suddenly ordering the British to leave. Nor would the fact that he needs their presence and help in removing the Asians necessarily deter him.

12. The danger to Americans -- both private and official -- is clearly increasing. There are nearly 1,000 Americans in Uganda -- nearly 400 are officials or dependents of officials and the rest are there in a private role -- mainly missionaries and teachers. Most of the private citizens are outside the capital, in towns and

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villages. They are aware of the unruly and capricious behavior of the army, keep their heads down, and mostly feel confident that the inhabitants of their areas are friendly. Many of the officials, especially Peace Corps and AID technicians, are posted outside the capital.

13. Until recently, at least, Americans have been threatened only by the general disorder and violence in which occasionally they were inadvertently caught up -- drunken border guards, soldiers on trains, urban crimes, disturbances near military installations, etc. The roads are probably most dangerous since they are sporadically patrolled by army units ordered to watch out for foreign spies and suspicious characters. Given the prevailing disorder, additional incidents affecting Americans are highly likely.

14. Tensions have increased greatly in the aftermath of the abortive invasion from Tanzania by Ugandan exiles this week. The army is still nervous and Amin is highly likely to order reprisals against anyone suspected of sympathizing with the invaders. Internal movement for civilians -- both native and foreign -- is almost certain to become even more difficult and dangerous.

15. A second and far greater danger for Americans and other foreigners lies in a potential policy shift, e.g., if Amin intensifies

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his xenophobic outlook in the wake of the invasion and begins to worry about the whole Western presence. The chances of this seem tied to how greatly his suspicions of British and other foreign plotting against him are increased by recent events, and on how the British behave in arranging the Asian exodus. The outlook is not appealing.

16. If, under such circumstances, he turns on the British, the Americans will probably be next in line. In Amin's view, Americans and Israelis are closely aligned; in the past few months he has accused Peace Corps personnel of spying and is convinced that "Israeli-Americans" are plotting against Uganda. Moreover, the US and UK are so linked, in his eyes, in NATO that their interests are very similar. Several months ago, he asked for and got a list of all Americans in Uganda, by location and job. In the past few days he has lumped all Westerners together when accusing them of trying to do him in. There are reports that he is thinking of kicking us out.

17. Amin is quite capable of expelling Americans from his country. So far, expulsions (of Israelis, Britons, and others) have been peaceful. Also to the good, Ugandans have generally been friendly

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towards Europeans and disinclined towards violence against them. But even if Amin decided foreigners could leave peaceably, his lack of control over his soldiers -- combined with general disorder -- could make it dangerous for the expellees. Nor is there much that neighboring states or other powers could do to help.

18. It is not inevitable that events will follow such a dismal course, or that the British and then the Americans will be told to leave. But the odds seem to lie in this direction. Nor can we estimate how long the present dangerous situation will last. Amin is making enemies, even in the army, at a rapid rate. We cannot rule out an assassination. Coup plot rumors abound, but we know of no potential leader or group capable of ousting Amin. It is clear, however, that if he stays in power he will need many scapegoats, and Americans constitute a tempting target.

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