The Battle of Mengo: An understanding of the evolution of the 1966 Ugandan Constitution Crisis

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Abstract
The battle of Mengo was the culmination of a sequence of events that occurred between 4 February 1966 and 24 May 1966 in Uganda. Unfortunately, little mention has been made of these momentous events that had far reaching consequences. There also still little clarity on how the crisis evolved and the events that led up to and precipitated the outbreak of the battle of Mengo. The purpose of this study therefore is to reconstruct these events. By showing the sequence of how events unfolded, the study not only reconstructs the range of events of 1966 that culminated in the battle of Mengo but also offers a detailed critical analysis of these events. A clear and candid assessment of which shows that the 1966 constitutional crisis was Obote’s response to the power struggles within the ruling Uganda People’s Congress party (UPC) and the imagined threat from the Kingdom of Buganda.

Key Words: Kabaka, Mengo, Lukiiko, Buganda, Constitutional crisis

1. Introduction
On the early morning of 24 May 1966 barely four years into independence, government troops commanded by Idi Amin, the army commander on the orders of Prime Minister Milton Obote, attacked the Lubiri at Mengo which is the official residence of the Mutesa, the King (Kabaka) of the Kingdom of Buganda. This marked the beginning of the battle of Mengo, which left an indelible scar on both the history of the Kingdom of Buganda and the state of Uganda. For the first time in Uganda’s short history, the state deliberately and systematically turned its guns on its own people. The battle of Mengo was a climax of a deep political constitutional crisis that arose in the state of Uganda in the first half of 1966. However, this attack must be understood in light of a series of events that occurred prior to the 24 May 1966.

2. The Build up to the Crisis
Prior to the outbreak of the crisis in 1966, some major events unfolded that had a significant bearing on its occurrence. This study has singled out three events that occurred between 1964 and 1965; the collapse of the coalition government, the Annual Delegates Conference of the Uganda People’s Congress party (UPC) in Gulu in 1964 and finally the referendum on the lost counties that was held in 1965.

2.1. The collapse of the coalition government
The maneuvers among the different political groupings in pre-independent Uganda gave to the rise to an alliance between the UPC and the Kabaka Yekka (KY) loosely translated as King alone. This led to the formation of a coalition government by the above two groups that governed Uganda as the country attained independence in 1962. Milton Obote becoming the executive prime minister while Sir Edward Mutesa who at the same time was the king of Buganda becoming the President.

Milton Obote the then leader of the UPC and the man who led Uganda to independence, failed to honour his commitment to the alliance. Firstly, contrary to the agreement that had led to the formation of the alliance in the first place, the UPC had begun establishing party offices in Buganda. (Jorgensen, 1981; “New law may restrict KY movements”, January, 1966; “Eteekaly’okuwera KY terikyazze mu assembly”, January, 1966; “OlwaKabaka Yekka poliisi yalwekisemu”, January, 1966) Secondly, and most importantly Obote encouraged
the opposition members to defect from the KY, and the Democratic Party (DP) to the ruling UPC by using offers of patronage and promise of rewards. In essence, this meant that the coalition government was such in name only. Hence, on 24 August 1964, Prime Minister Obote announced the termination of the 27 months old alliance, which he had skillfully exploited to become Prime Minister in 1962. However, this decision was just a formality because, as already mentioned above cracks had already began to emerge in the alliance by 1963. The UPC had already attained supremacy in the National Assembly, and thus would be able to pass whatever resolutions it desired. On 27 January 1966 Obote took this step further to the Parliament to pass a law banning the KY.

The significance of the collapse of the alliance had three aspects;
Firstly, it ensured that Obote’s intentional subjugation of Buganda became readily apparent, because by terminating the alliance, Obote aimed to end Buganda’s political hegemony. Secondly, the collapse of the alliance intensified the divide within the UPC between those who professed themselves republicans and those who were pro-monarchist. The pro-monarchist group led by Grace Ibingira sympathized with Buganda. According to Ibingira (1973) “when Obote dissolved the alliance and began to plot the political death of Buganda, we chose, rather than betray our allies and friends, to stand by them in what eventually became a very costly undertaking for us.”
Thirdly, as Mutibwa (1992) notes the breakup of the alliance led to an open leadership challenge to Obote as the few remaining KY members of parliament joined Ibingira who had sought to replace Obote as the leader of the UPC. Ibingira enlisted the help of Edward Mutesa, the King of Buganda as one of his strongest backers. Mutesa then advised “the KY members to infiltrate the UPC and vote for Pro-Ibingira candidates as a way of changing the leadership of the UPC.” Kasozi (2013).In essence, the stage had been set for the removal of Obote from the leadership of the UPC. Indeed, the July 1965 elections in Buganda were a clear testimony of this, as Ibingira’s group which included all former KY members, won easily. Similarly, in the other regions, the Grace Ibingira-led group won in the west and the east and as expected, the Obote-UPC faction won only in northern Uganda. Thus, amidst the tension, the political battle had not only turned ethnic but there was also substantial evidence that the leadership within the UPC was shifting.

Thus, although Obote’s formal termination of the alliance in 1964 had aimed to curtail the Kingdom of Buganda’s political power, the effects were spilled over to the UPC. For instance, the pro monarchists group (Ibingira) within the UPC openly challenged Obote’s leadership hence raising the tension during to the period preceding the crisis. Obote realizing that he could not defeat Ibingira’s group politically, and yet not willing to lose his grip on power, resorted to the use of violence- and it, is this that contributed to the crisis.

### 2.2. The Gulu Conference of 1964 and the widening ethnic divisions within the UPC

By the time the UPC held its Annual Delegates Conference in Gulu in August 1964, divisions within the UPC were glaringly visible. Major realignment of political forces began to given the fact that whoever controlled the UPC would ultimately control the country. Milton Obote was leading the forces of the northern pro-republican group while Grace Ibingira was leading the pro-monarchist Bantu south group.
The significance of this conference in relation to the momentous events of 1966 can be seen in two main respects.

Firstly, it was at this conference that the group of Grace Ibingira began a process of removing Obote from the leadership of the UPC and, therefore, from the country. This process began with the weakening of Obote’s hold on the party. John Kakonge, his close associate, was removed from the post of Secretary General of the UPC. He was replaced by Grace Ibingira who now came to occupy the second most powerful post in the party, which was a triumph for the pro-monarchist group.

Kakonge’s youthful and influential supporters, who included “Kirunda Kivejinja, Bidandi Ssali, Charles Onyuta, Wadada Musani, Chango Macho, Raiti Omongin, Lomity Obbo, Livingstone Ojepa, Natilo Masaba and Wadda Nabudere were also expelled from the party”. (Kasozi, 2013). In December 1964 immediately after his election as Secretary General, Grace Ibingira made a trip to the United States of America to shop for funds. He is reported to have returned with money estimated to be one million dollars purportedly to embark on a protracted struggle to remove Obote from the leadership of the UPC. According to Kanyeihamba(2002), this claim that Ibingira received such funds is substantiated by “Nabudere’s observation that by 1965 there was a sudden manifestation of opulence among a section of UPC leadership generally associated with Ibingira”.

Secondly, as Ingham (1994) notes, the conference also highlighted the fractured nature of the UPC, - and its supporters, and the prominence of regional and linguistic divides within the party.

These divisions, which deepened over time, had a significant bearing on the events of 1966. For instance, in mid-1965 a year after the conference, a number of Bantu ministers and leading Baganda politicians from the south began plotting to oust Obote in order to “reverse the northern and supposedly radical bias of the Cabinet”. (Glenworth and Hancock 1973). This was partly because throughout the 1960s as noted by Sathyamurthy (1986), Obote had manipulated ‘the tribal composition of the political environment in order to retain support for the regime’ and excluded ethnic factions that he deemed unreliable and, of these, Baganda came first. This plot by Bantu ministers coupled with other developments, meant that 1966 was an incredibly tumultuous year in the history of the Ugandan nation.

2.3. The ‘Lost Counties’ Referendum in 1965

On the 25 August 1964 a day after the termination of the UPC-KY alliance, Obote introduced a bill for a referendum to be held on the question of the ‘lost counties’ of Bunyoro. As Ingham (1994), states “The imminence of this referendum unleashed one of the most fervent political struggles Uganda has known”. This was between the Kingdom of Buganda on[the] one hand [and] the Kingdom of Bunyoro and Milton Obote on the other. Both Kingdoms in response, embarked on massive settlement programmes within these counties.

The referendum was held on 4 November 1965; when the results were released on 6 November 1965 the inhabitants of the counties of Buyaga and Bugangaizi had voted overwhelmingly to return to the Kingdom of

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The ‘lost counties’ were the territories that formerly belonged to the Kingdom of Bunyoro but that were handed over to the kingdom of Buganda by the British following the signing of the 1900 Buganda Agreement.
Bunyoro. On 1 January 1966 the transfer of these two counties from the Kingdom of Buganda to the Kingdom of Bunyoro was legally effected thereby apparently ending one of the greatest political and constitutional problems in Ugandan history.

Holding this referendum won Obote much support in the Kingdom of Bunyoro, but it also created much enmity with the Kingdom of Buganda. Unrest broke out in Kampala as angry Baganda flocked to Mengo the seat of the Kingdom of Buganda. Police cars were stoned and the ministers of the Kingdom of Buganda were not spared either. There were seriously manhandled, and the Premier of Buganda (Katikiro) Micheal Kintu was attacked and only saved by the 14 central government police officers who were in charge of protecting Bulange House, the seat of the Mengo government. (“Police etaasizza Katiikiro e’Mengo”, November, 1966).

The unrests in Kampala where eventually quelled by the army, which mounted road blocks and guarded all key institutions and installations such as the Uganda Broadcasting Station, the Parliamentary buildings, the Post office and electrical installations. On 8 November 1965, two days after announcing of the results, Kintu resigned as Kattikiro of the Kingdom of Buganda and was replaced by a youthful Mayanja Nkangi. (“Referendum rocks Buganda” November, 1966)

It is worth noting as supported by Ibingira, (1973), the events during the period preceding the referendum were indicative of Obote’s dishonesty and treachery toward his colleagues, and proof of his flawed; - a character which raised tension during that period. For instance, whereas it was clear to Obote, that the ex-servicemen from Buganda who were being settled in the lost counties were not to take part in the referendum vote, Obote not only directed his Cabinet Ministers never to discuss anything concerning the lost counties issue, but by his inaction he encouraged Baganda hopes, and even went a step further to secretly assuring Mutesa the Kabaka of Buganda that he would ensure that the counties remained part of Buganda. Obote did the same to the King of Bunyoro, assuring him that the lost counties would be returned to the Kingdom of Bunyoro. Thus, by making false promises to the Kingdom of Buganda, Obote not only fueled tension in an already bad situation but also acted contrary to what his promises.

Secondly the referendum marked a turning point in the relations between Obote and the Baganda and greatly contributed to the upheaval of 1966. For instance, the working relations between President Sir Edward Mutesa II who at the same time was the Kabaka of Buganda and Executive Prime Minister Milton Obote were never cordial again. Mutesa increasingly came under pressure from his conservative chiefs like Amos Sempa, who urged him to adopt a militant stance. Consequently, the President, not only refused to open the Parliamentary session of December 1965, which was to confirm the referendum results but also refused to sign the Parliament Act which had altered the boundaries of both the kingdoms of Buganda and Bunyoro. These instruments like the referendum Act in accordance with which the referendum was held were again signed by Milton Obote as executive Prime Minister which only helped to accentuate the brewing suspicion and animosity between Mutesa and Obote further and push the two apart, thus precipitating turmoil of 1966.

In summary, then, although the crisis happened in 1966, its roots could be traced two years back, with the three events of 1964 mentioned above all having a profound impact. They were the collapse of the KY-UPC alliance-, the widening divisions within the UPC following the Gulu conference, and the passing of the Referendum Bill in Parliament with the subsequent referendum in 1965. These three events indicated, firstly a struggle for the control of the UPC which would allow it to be used as a spring board to control Uganda, and secondly, the desire by Milton Obote to subjugate the all-powerful Kingdom of Buganda. Unfortunately, once
Obote realized that the democracy could not guarantee the fulfillment of his political aspirations, he chose a dictatorial and violent path, which precipitated the constitutional crisis.

3. The evolution of the crisis

3.1. Parliamentary acceptance of Amin Probe Motion on 4 February 1966

Although the undercurrent had been present for a period of two years, as mentioned above, the actual turmoil of 1966 commenced February of that year while Milton Obote and nine of his cabinet ministers were on a tour of the northern Ugandan districts. (“The Centre cannot hold”, 1966) On the 4th of February 1966 Daudi Ocheng, the leader of KabakaYekka (KY) in the National Assembly, introduced a bill in Parliament, calling for the suspension and investigation of Colonel Idi Amin Dada, the Deputy Army Commander, for the alleged receipt of gold and ivory from Congolese rebels under the command of Colonel Olenga. He produced a photocopy of Amin’s bank account, which proved that he had received about 125,000 pounds. (“The Kabaka Crisis – A Nation in Turmoil”, May, 1966; “Parliament accepts Ocheing motion seeking Amin Probe.” February, 1966)

During the course of introducing his motion, Ochieng also cast aspersions on the credibility of Milton Obote (the Prime Minister), Felix Onama (the Minister of Defense), and Adoko Nekyon (the Minister of Planning). These three officials, Ochieng alleged, had too improperly obtained ivory, gold and money from Congolese rebels. He further alleged that some members of government together with high-ranking army officers, were planning a coup to overthrow the Uganda constitution. Ochieng alleged that these supposedly communist inspired underground activities were taking place in a forest near Mbale in Eastern Uganda.

The motion that was passed on 4 February 1966 urged the Government to suspend Col. Idi Amin of the Ugandan Army from duty forthwith, pending the conclusions of police investigations into the allegations regarding his bank account. The results of these investigations were to be passed on to the appropriate authority, whose decision on the matter should be made public. The resolution was passed by almost all government members of Parliament, save John Kakonge the ex-Secretary General.

On 9 February 1966 following the passing of the above motion, Cabinet passed a resolution sponsored by the Army Commander Brigadier Shaban Opolot that Colonel Idi Amin be arrested. The order was however not executed by Prime Minister Milton Obote. On 15 February 1966 Cabinet approved the appointment of a judicial commission to investigate into the so-called gold scandal.

Milton Obote appeared to have been scared by the passing of the motion on 4 February 1966 to the extent that he referred to the events surrounding the motion as a ‘palace coup’ which had been intended to remove him from power. Firstly, he questioned the rationale of senior government figures led most notably by Grace Ibingira- the UPC Secretary General in rekindling the 1965 Congo gold allegations and passing the motion of censure during his absence. Secondly, he alleged that around the same time, troop movements and counter-movements, under the orders of the Chief of Staff Brigadier Shaban Opolot had been witnessed in Kampala.

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2 On 31 January 1965 this motion was rejected by the UPC Parliamentary group
and that these were intended to remove him from power should the parliamentary option fail. Thirdly, Obote stated that the Kabaka of Buganda, as one of the leaders of anti-Obote forces, had reportedly requested military assistance from Britain. (Kasozi, 2013). It was thus against this background that, when Cabinet called for the arrest of Colonel Amin, Obote, instead suspended the Colonel for two weeks and later promoted him to the post of Army Commander perhaps as a reward in advance and in preparation for the tasks he was to assign to him later, as the crisis intensified.

Overall, as Mutibwa(1992), urges the fact that Cabinet easily accepted the Ochieng motion on 4-February 1966 was a testimony to the fact that there was considerable in-fighting in the UPC. The Ochieng motion initiated a series of manoeuvres counter maneuvers as the pro-Ibingira group, delighted in a double win- of defeating Obote in the 1965 regional party elections and by passing a motion that endorsed the suspension of Colonel Amin. Obote, became anxious to forestall any opposition, as he realized that his position as head of the UPC had become tenuous and that he would face a formidable challenge at the party’s Delegates’ Conference, due to be held before the next national elections in 1967. Obote’s counter maneuvers to survive later culminated in the battle of Mengo on 24 May 1966.

3.2. The arrest of Cabinet Ministers on 22 February 1966
With the passing of the 4 February1966 motion in the national assembly, the stage was set for a showdown between Obote and his opponents within the UPC. On 12 February1966, Obote returned from his northern tour and rather than waiting for the situation to normalize he decided to react first. Having failed to persuade his ministers during the cabinet meeting of 15 February 1966 to change their stand with regard to the motion, Obote reluctantly agreed to set up a commission of inquiry into the alleged corruption. However, he refused to reprimand Idi Amin. On 16 February 1966, Obote issued a statement, “denying his involvement in the gold allegations,” (Kasozi,2013) and on 19 February 1966 he revealed that he had learned of the existence of unauthorized troop movements for a planned coup on the 22 February 1966, and that he had reportedly cancelled these troop movements. Obote alleged that “the troop re-deployment that had been intended to remove his loyal soldiers from the city and bring those that were anti- loyal to him”. (“Plan was to arrest me, says President”, July 1966)

According to Ibingira, (1973) as the crisis deepened Obote showed what a ruthless and decisive politician he was. During the special cabinet meeting of 22 February 1966, when he discussed the terms of reference of the judicial commission into the Congo gold scandal, a dozen policemen burst into the cabinet room and arrested five Bantu cabinet ministers who had taken an active part in the debating and passing of the Congo Gold scandal parliamentary motion. The five were Grace Ibingira, Balaki Kirya, Dr. Emmanuel Lumu, George Magezi and Mathias Ngobi they remained in detention throughout the remaining period of Obote’s regime. Later Obote issued a statement regarding what had happened:

“In the interest of national stability and public security and tranquility, I have today the twenty second day of February, 1966 taken over all powers of government of Uganda. I shall hence forth be advised by a council whose members I shall name later. I have taken this course of action independently because of my understanding of the wishes of the people of this country for peace order and prosperity.”(“The situation is under control”, February 1966)
Six days later, on 28 February 1966 Obote named the composition and terms of the judicial commission of inquiry in accordance with the Commission of Inquiry Ordinance. (“Inquiry commission named” 1966) It was headed by Sir Clement de Lestang of the Court of Appeal for Eastern Africa, assisted by Justice E Milter a judge in the High Court of Kenya and Justice Augustine Saidi of the High Court of Tanzania.

Obote’s use of violence to solve a political issue as Kasozi, (2013) notes, secured for him the control of the UPC. With the arrest of Ibingira the UPC Secretary General right wing of the was effectively silenced. However, although Obote achieved quick results by using violence, his actions had far-reaching consequences. They effectively led to the militarization of Ugandan politics and intensified the crisis and thereby setting the stage for further confrontations and as power struggles. Took the center stage.

3.3. The Suspension of the 1962 Independence Constitution on 22 February 1966

On 22 February 1966 the day, on which Milton Obote arrested his ministers, he too illegally suspended the 1962 independence Constitution of Uganda, and assumed absolute power of administering the country, because he maintained that the country had been destabilised. This greatly enhanced Obote’s grip on power was greatly enhanced. He had not only consolidated his position in government, but also became the supreme leader of the party. And, by suspending the constitution, he further moved to consolidate his grip on the army.

On 26 February 1966, four days after the suspension of the Constitution, Obote promoted a fellow northerner, Colonel Idi Amin, the subject of the 4 February 1966 parliamentary motion, to command the Ugandan Army, Obote placed an easterner, Brigadier Shaban Opolot whom he ‘promoted’ to the ceremonial post of the “Chief of Defense staff”, hence effectively removing him from direct control of the army. (“Ekiteseso EKigoba Dr.Obote mu Buganda”, May 1966; Kasozi, 2013). Other changes in the army also included the demotion of a southerner Major S.Kakuhiikre by transferring him to the third battalion, while Major Senkeeto, an associate of Mutesa the Kabaka of the Kingdom of Buganda, was accused of ‘stealing’ weapons from the army and was thus sidelined. Oyite Ojok another northerner, was promoted to the post of Deputy Adjutant and Quarter Master General. In addition, in April 1966, Obote passed eight hundred recruits in north-eastern Uganda, of whom seventy percent were from the north. Erinayo Oryema, another northerner was appointed as the Chief Inspector of Police. Thus, by early 1966 the army, like the political landscape, was mostly dominated by persons from the north of the country. Mudoola, (1996), contends that the manipulation of the army along ethnic lines by recruiting heavily among northerners and the consequent rapid promotion of officers from the same region, enabled Obote to create “a reliable constituency based on ethnicity that enabled him [to] suspend the Constitution with relative ease.”This northern-dominated army was also used as a base for political support when he confronted the Kingdom of Buganda in general and President Mutesa in particular who had remained as the only obstacle to his long-term ambition of subjugating the kingdom of Buganda and becoming the absolute ruler of Uganda.
3.4. Abolition of the Offices of the President and Vice President on 2 March 1966

On 2 March 1966, in a special declaration, Obote officially merged the constitutional offices of the President and Vice President. The powers of these two offices were now invested in the office of the Prime Minister, a post that Obote was holding. Although, by arresting his ministers and suspending the 1962 Independence Constitution, Obote’s main aim was to survive as both party leader and leader of Government, he was also aware that his victory was incomplete, unless he eliminated Ibingira’s powerful friends outside the party. Edward Mutesa the Kabaka of Buganda, was then his the most politically powerful opponent. According to the Kabaka Yekka records 1964-66 (Makerere, 1966), Mutesa had even written an open letter to Obote warning him about the anxiety he had caused by arresting the five ministers and the suspending the Constitution; he went on to state that “the existing tensions in the country today demand that we do our uttermost to reduce them instead of adding to them in any manner”

The un-repentant Obote replied to the President through his address to the nation, in which he reiterated his earlier allegations that, during his absence, Mutesa as President of Uganda, -had called on foreign diplomats and asked them for the support of their armed forces, and that the secretary to the Katikiro 3 was out on the same mission. (Speech by the Prime Minister, Entebbe 1966).

Obote also accused the President of refusing to sign the lost counties bill and refusing to open the December 1965 parliamentary session after the referendum had been held.

By doing so Obote’s aim was to make the rest of Uganda believe that the Baganda, including their King, Mutesa, were trying to destabilize the state. The first four years of Ugandan independence thus bore witness to the increasing isolation and eventual eclipse of the Kingdom of Buganda by Milton Obote as well as the establishment of an overtly ‘sectarian government’, dominated by individuals from the North of Uganda. (Glenworthand Hancock 1973; Museveni, 1997).

The abolition of the two offices of the President occupied by Mutesa and Vice President by W. W. Nadiope, the cultural leader of the BusogaChiefdom, -was intended to serve a dual purpose; firstly, it allowed Obote to consolidate his position in government and, it allowed him secondly to deal with his remaining opponent, Mutesa the Kabaka of the Kingdom of Buganda, and to subdue his kingdom.

3.5. The abrogation of the 1962 Independence Constitution on 15 April 1966

Notably, the suspension of the 1962 Independence Constitution and the abolition of the offices of the President and Vice President allowed Obote to consolidate his position with speed and accuracy. Gripped by a dictatorial frenzy, on 15 April 1966, he further abrogated the 1962 Constitution: Obote called an extraordinary meeting of the National Assembly and demanded that members “pass and adopt a new Constitution which they had not seen but were told would be in their pigeon holes”(Kasozi, 2013; Ibingira, 1973; Ingham, 1994)

As he delivered his speech, the National Assembly was surrounded by soldiers with helicopters hovering above the building. Out of the 92 members who were supposed to vote, the new 1966 Constitution which was approved by 55 votes against four (namely E.M.K Mulira, Dr. Francis Sembuguya, S.K, Masembe and A.J.R Kangahho) The constitution made Obote the executive President and decreed that Uganda was one united country. “The Kabaka Crisis – A Nation in turmoil”, May 1966). It was famously referred to as the ‘pigeon’

3 The Katikiro is the Chief Minister in Buganda Kingdom and next in the hierarchy to the king.
Constitution because it had been adopted by the members of the National Assembly without being read and debated upon, because Obote said a copy would be left in their pigeon holes. On that day, Obote was sworn-in as President of Uganda. The Constitution effected two major changes: firstly, as already mentioned above, Obote became the executive President and, secondly, Buganda lost its federal status. The ‘formal’ adoption of the so-called ‘pigeon hole’ law through the manipulation of the National Assembly greatly infuriated the Baganda and further worsened the relations between Obote and Buganda. Indeed, as noted by Jorgensen, (1979) the new 1966 Constitution “struck directly at the power of the traditional hierarchy in Buganda.”

Firstly, it undermined the authority of the Kabaka as his Mengo government was deprived of the right to send indirectly elected members to the National Assembly, as per the provisions of the 1962 Constitution.

Secondly, the Mengo government was also deprived of the right to appoint civil servants to different posts in the central government, again something over which the Kabaka had always had much influence. Finally, Buganda’s economic base was also undermined, as the mailo-Land system which chiefs had collected large amounts of money was abolished. (Jorgensen, 1979; “The Centre cannot Hold”, February 1966) Thus, in response to the 1966 Constitution, members of Buganda’s legislative assembly, the ‘Lukiiko’ resolved not to obey it. While some members went as far to call for a boycott, some demanded secession of Buganda. The mood in the Lukiiko was similar to that throughout the Kingdom of Buganda.

The Kabaka too was infuriated and with the support of the Lukiiko, wrote an open letter to U Thant, the United Nations (UN) Secretary General, calling for the intervention of the United Nations to avoid any political unrest that might occur. The UN responded negatively to this call for assistance but the political unrest as predicated by the Kabaka occurred.

The adoption of the new Constitution in April 1966 thus further raised the tension between Obote and Buganda and greatly contributed to the occurrence of the Battle of Mengo. The first parliamentary seating under the new Constitution was held on 16 May 1966; as during the promulgation of the 1966 Constitution on 15 April 1966, the parliamentary building was surrounded by the military, with military aircraft flying overhead. (“Parliament meets under the new constitution”, May 1966; “Parliamentietuulaleero”, May 1966.)

As expected, the six remaining members of KY namely Mrs. F Lubega (representing the constituency of North West Singo), Mr. B Lukyamuza, (Masaka North), Mr. YK Musiywa, (Mengo Central), Mr. AK Sempa, (Sezibwa West), Mr. PN Serumga, (Masaka South West) and Mrs. H Visram Kiboga, refused to take oath to the new constitution. They argued that the new Constitution was illegal.
3.6. The Lukiiko Resolution of 20 May 1966

The Kingdom of Buganda was one of the few political institutions, if not the only remaining one that could speak out against Obote’s undemocratic approach and the turn of events that were being witnessed in the country in 1966. The Lukiiko of Buganda outraged by Obote’s abrogation of the 1962 Constitution, which had formed the basis of the Kingdom of Buganda joining the rest of the country in 1962, could no longer tolerate “the arrogance of Obote’s government, so in its sitting of 20 May 1966, the Lukiiko firstly, declared all of Obote’s action null and void. Secondly it passed a resolution demanding the withdrawal of the central government from Buganda soil within ten days, in other words before 30 May 1966”. “The Centre cannot hold,” February1966; “EkitesesoEkigobaDr.Obotemu Buganda”, May 1966). The Lukiiko noted that “there was no need to continue respect a government that was un–constitutional, hence the debate on ordering the government of Uganda to leave the soils of Buganda”. Once again, in the view of some Lukiiko members, “secession was the only answer”.(Hancock, (2002). This resolution was not unanticipated; on 10 May 1966 the Lukiiko had passed a resolution supporting Sir Edward Mutesa’s Petition to the UN secretary General. (“Lukiiko supports Appeal”, May 1966). The petition had clearly pointed out that the 1962 Constitution was still the supreme law of the land, with no provisions empowering either the Parliament or anybody else to suspend it. Indeed, the Lukiiko which had almost remained the lone voice in opposing Obote’s dictatorial tendencies was quite right. According to the provisions of the 1962 Constitution, constitutional disputes could only be settled in courts of law but this had not been done, yet the in the new Constitution of 1966 no such provision had been made. Moreover, to effect amendments, the 1962 Constitution had required sixty- two members of Parliament and two–thirds of all kingdoms and districts councils throughout the country, to vote on such amendments; - this had not been done. Instead, Obote’s unilateral actions had created a constitutional dispute that resulted in widespread chaos and instability. (“Lukiiko supports Appeal”, May 1966.)

It is important to note, however, that the Kingdom of Buganda had no means to enforce the Lukiiko resolution of 20 May; it could simply only use the resolution as a mere bargaining ‘chip’. To Milton Obote, though, this represented an excellent opportunity to get rid of both Kabaka Mutesa and the Kingdom of Buganda, both of which could have opposed his emerging dictatorial tendencies. Consequently, Obote convened an emergency Cabinet meeting and declared a state of emergency in Buganda, with an all-night curfew from 7:00pm to 6:00am. He claimed that the ultimatum by the Buganda Lukiiko meant the de facto secession of the Kingdom of Buganda from the rest of Uganda and that this was an act of rebellion. The central government reacted by arresting the three militant chiefs who had apparently influenced the Lukiiko, resolution namely, Michael Matovu of Buddu, James Lutaaya of Singo and Lameka Sebanakitta of Kyaggwe; these were detained at Kampala Central Police Station, alongside Amos Sempa the leader of the KY. As news of their arrest spread, disturbances within the Kingdom erupted as angry Baganda rose up in uncoordinated resistance. At Makindye the former Kabaka’s Lodge, ex-servicemen and angry crowds fought against government troops.(“The Kabaka Crisis – A Nation in Turmoil”, May 1966). These events though uncoordinated precipitated the outbreak of the ‘Battle of Mengo’
4. The Attack on 24 May 1966

The Battle of Mengo on 24 May 1966 marked the climax of the crisis that had begun on 4 February 1966. Although Obote projected the struggle as a fight between Uganda and Buganda feudalists, the Battle of Mengo, as pointed out by both Kasozi (2013) and the descriptions presented above, was a struggle over who would control both the UPC and the Ugandan state, as well as to subdue Buganda. (“The Kabaka Crisis – A Nation in Turmoil”, May 1966). The attack came four days after the Lukiiko resolution that ordered the central government off Buganda’s soil. The Lukiiko resolution gave Obote the excuse he needed to crush the Kingdom of Buganda. On 24 May, Obote ordered the Ugandan Army under the command of Amin, to march on the Kabaka’s Palace at Mengo; elsewhere in the Kingdom of Buganda, as well as in Kampala, security forces were also ostensibly ordered to forestall a coup. However, Obote provided no evidence of this alleged coup, and his allegations of the said coup were far-fetched, as nothing in the alleged Lukiiko resolution had warranted this attack on the Palace. Indeed, no weapons were found in the palace other than a few assault rifles that were being used by the one hundred bodyguards.

The Battle of Mengo began in the early morning of Tuesday 24 May 1966 as government soldiers stormed the Kabaka’s Palace. (Mutesa, 1974). Two infantry companies from each of the Uganda Army’s four battalions and an advanced team of the Special Forces were involved in the bloody attack. The attack began at the Kalala gate where the grass thatched huts found there were set on fire. After twelve hours of fierce fighting the Ugandan Army overcame the Kabaka’s bodyguards and the Palace fell.

At the end of the battle which Mutesa, (1974) described as “an amazingly inexpert attack on his Palace” hundreds of innocent and defenseless people had lost their lives in Buganda. (“The Kabaka Crisis – A Nation in Turmoil”, May 1966) Government claimed that only 40 people were killed, while the foreign press put the figure closer to 1500 people. (“The Kabaka’s Flight into exile”, August 1966). This had marked the “first major blood bath in independent Uganda.” (Mutibwa, 1992) The Palace was set ablaze, and many centuries old cultural treasures were destroyed fortunately, though the Kabaka escaped from the Palace and able to flee to exile.

5. Conclusion

A clear and candid assessment of the events discussed above shows that the 1966 constitutional crisis was Obote’s response to the power struggles within the UPC and the imagined threat from the Kingdom of Buganda. The genesis of this crisis was the political dispute within the ruling party the UPC which had led to divisions; on the one side were Obote and the central government, and, on the other were Ibingira, Sir Edward Mutesa and the Kingdom of Buganda. The significance of controlling the UPC lay in the fact that whoever controlled it would ultimately control Uganda. As a political crisis, this could have been resolved peacefully, because there was no evidence that Uganda’s stability was in danger and thus an amicable solution was possible. However, because Obote knew that a peaceful resolution would not have guaranteed his continued hold on power, he chose to use violence instead. Given the absence of a political or social force to oppose his dictatorial ascent and the existence of structural flaws within the weak post-colonial Ugandan state, Obote resorted to the use of violence, and it was this decision that precipitated the Battle of Mengo.
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