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## The generals and their confidence

Posted by kasajja - 2008/08/03 19:35

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When lumped together, all the professors in President Museveni's government are now worth approximately half a general; if the general participated in the 1981-86 bush war!

In good times, the generals put on a swagger; and when under pressure from non-military institutions to account for their various misdeeds, they arrogantly hide behind the banner: "We fought to liberate you", as their inviolable sanctuary.

What do you do with such a curious bunch of men? When they quarrel over their alleged transgressions, they are re-united by their heroism. When they quarrel over the levels of their heroism and due rewards, they are re-united by their untouchable sinfulness. In other words, none of their ways is outlandish enough to upset the balance.

Some interpreters read this condition as political stability.

The police chief is a military general. Several weeks back, in separate incidents, three members of parliament – two of them women – were treated very shabbily by the police.

In Uganda today, it is extremely difficult to get a consistent official explanation of such incidents. Indeed, one senior official may present two dramatically different accounts of the same event, as long as there is a 24-hour interval between the two statements. It would therefore be useless to cite the police spokesperson's version of the legislator's humiliation.

However, the police chief, Maj. Gen. Kale Kayihura, came under intense fire from several quarters. Some MPs, civil rights activists and sections of the public called for nothing short of his resignation. Now, regardless of his other accounts, there was at least one occasion when the general was reported to have said that he could not resign over this incident, because "no orders were issued".

Presumably, the general meant that the order to arrest and otherwise mistreat the legislators was not initiated at – and was not approved by – his desk.

You can debate the question of his overall responsibility, if you want, but the key point here is that the IGP was quite comfortable to impute that there were operators in the police force (which he headed) who had a free hand to play dirty without instructions from the expected authority. Only a few weeks later, in the wake of the arrest, detention and psychological torture of (also three) Buganda government officials, the general again said that he was not aware of the arrests until they happened.

Really? You can see why the collection of figures of great learning in government is worth only half a general. The professors have been shrinking in stature. The generals, who started with their heroism, then gradually added impunity, are now free of any knowledge of some of the dark actions of their immediate subordinates.

For older people, if what Gen. Kayihura is true (and it is credible), it is easily the most dangerous development in Uganda for a long time. They will remember that the departed Field Marshal Idi Amin and Dr Milton Obote lost control of the State at the same rate as they embraced an ever-growing number of "trusted cadres" who operated with a free hand.

The generals, who often brag that they started out as only 27 brave men, but are now armed to the teeth and are therefore invincible, may be basking in false confidence. They seem to assume that their enemy will take a form similar to their own guerilla outfit.

But Obote I was overthrown in a military coup, Amin was (essentially) driven out by a foreign army, Obote II by a combination of guerilla war pressure and an army coup, and Tito Okello by guerilla war alone. Their fates were all different.

What if the next enemy is a generalised unarmed passive (boycott type) socio-economic rebel, for instance; would the generals bring out the guns to stage a genocide? Quietly, if the generals permit, the professors could smuggle in a word of old wisdom: Pride goes before a fall.

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