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The Cotter Pin

By Andrew Rice

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KAMPALA, Uganda—The sirens' wail was getting louder. Outside the Nile Hotel's International Conference Center, the hexagonal slab of port-holed concrete where three decades of Ugandan presidents have welcomed important visitors, the blue-uniformed honor guard stiffened to attention in the late-November heat. The ministers and generals took their places on the steps. Reporters pulled out their notebooks, news photographers lifted their cameras to their shoulders. All eyes fixed on the front gates. The presidents were about to arrive.

A little after 10a.m., a pickup truck peeled through the gates, loaded with security officers, machine guns at the ready. A pair of motorcycle police followed, leading the way for the black Mercedes limousine. It glided to the front of the building and stopped.

The doors of the limousine opened, and the presidents emerged. From one side, His Excellency Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi, president of Kenya, dressed in his customary fashion: a dark blue suit and a garish multicolored necktie. From the other, His Excellency Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, president of Uganda, nattily attired as always.

Let it be said: These were not two men who liked each other. Moi, the gravelly-voiced, self-proclaimed "Professor of Politics," who happened into the presidency of East Africa's most prosperous nation at the death of its founder, Jomo Kenyatta, and ruthlessly held onto it for 24 years, bankrupting the country and making himself a model of the kind of authoritarian Big Man Africa would be

President Yoweri Museveni (right) toasts his old rival, President Daniel Arap Moi, on his farewell trip to Uganda. "We wish Mzee *Moi a happy retirement," he told Uganda's Parliament. Ugandans wonder, will their own president follow his example? (Photo courtesy of the Ugandan Presidential Press Unit.)*

better off without. Museveni, the New Man, the rebel turned free-market democrat, disdainful of Moi's old generation, hailed by admiring leaders the world over.

The two men had never agreed on much. But there wouldn't be any bickering today. This was the last day of Moi's final state visit Uganda, and Museveni was bidding his old rival farewell.

From the top of the steps, Moi turned to face the honor guard. He held up his *rungu*, the short scepter that for so many years was the physical manifestation of his absolute power. These days, however, that power was waning fast. A combination of international pressure and domestic opposition had forced Moi to obey his own constitution and step aside when this, his final presidential term, ended. In less than a month, an election would be held to choose his successor. He had already handpicked his candidate: Uhuru Kenyatta, Jomo's son. The day before, as Moi and Museveni had driven together from the airport at Entebbe to the capital, Kampala, well-wishers had gathered along the 40-kilometer route, chanting, "Uhuru, our man!" Kenyans were less enthusiastic. Just a few weeks before, Moi's presence at a Kenyatta rally had sparked a riot in which one person was killed and dozens of Moi supporters were beaten by an angry mob. All indicators suggested that Mwai Kibaki, the leader of the Rainbow Coalition, a recently formed agglomeration of longtime opposition figures and disgruntled Moi cronies, would be the next president. The Professor, the commentators said, had lost his touch.

December 27, 2002: Outside Uganda's Parliament building, a New Vision *advertising placard carries the big news of the day. Ugandans watched Kenya's presidential elections with fascination.*

As the "Uhuru" chants along the road suggested, Ugandans had followed these events with close interest. Sales of Kenyan newspapers increased sharply during the election, vendors said, and local papers often played Kenyan news on their front pages. At night, radio commentators debated the meaning of Kenyatta's implosion and Kibaki's rise; at weekend meals, families speculated about whether Moi had one last dirty trick up his sleeve.

The way Ugandans talked, it was almost as if their own country's future was at stake in the elections next door. And in a way, it was. Just like Moi, their own president, Museveni, was soon scheduled to exit. In 2006, just three years away, he would reach the end of his second elected term in office. The constitution said he couldn't run again. So Ugandans watched the elections next door, wondering all the time whether they might presage for them. For many, the Kenyan example offered hope that one day their own country might experience, for the first time in its history, a democratic handover of power. And none watched more with more interest—more outright glee—than the leaders of Uganda's opposition political parties, which have been all but outlawed since Museveni marched into Kampala in 1986. "To me, it shows it is possible to run a political system with these options, and that people need not be at each other's throats," said Yona Kanyomozi, a veteran opposition politician and member of the East African Legislative Assembly. "And I think it goes down to the ordinary people also—they are definitely following what is happening and what could happen."

Yet Moi's visit came amid signs that something very different was developing in Uganda. A growing chorus of Museveni loyalists was calling for a constitutional amendment to allow the president to serve another term, pushing his retirement date far into the future. A crackdown on dissent in newspapers and on the radio was afoot. And even as Uganda's neighbors to the east were preparing to go to the polls, ominous rumblings could be heard from the west, where exiled Colonel Kizza Besigye, Museveni's closest competitor in the last presidential election, was rumored to be preparing a guerrilla invasion.

For the last decade, Uganda has been lauded as one of Africa's success stories, and Museveni, time and again, has been cited as a new breed of leader. ("A blend physically and philosophically of Nelson Mandela and the late Deng Xiaoping," the editor of the *Times* of London recently wrote of him.) Yet the president has always had another side. The Museveni whom the *Times* recently marveled at, somewhat patronizingly, for his ability to

"muse on the collapse of Enron, display an understanding of the subtleties of drug pricing, [and] quote Tennyson to support his development theories," is the same Museveni who, last March, told Uganda's Parliament that those in his government "are people in suits by day and uniform by night."

"Don't play around with freedom fighters," he warned. "You can see Mugabe."

As his own speech indicates, there is example besides Kenya's that Uganda might follow. Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, too, was once the "new model": an erudite rebel leader determined to heal his nation's wounds. That was long ago, of course, before a rigged election, orchestrated political violence, and an ill-conceived land reform that enriched his cronies even as it starved his own people.

Museveni is hardly a Mugabe—yet. No one seriously disputes that Uganda is a freer, safer and at least marginally more prosperous place than it was in the days of his predecessors, Idi Amin and Milton Obote. But there is every indication that many Ugandans would like to see Museveni make way for someone else. (Notwithstanding his record eighth-straight selection as the government-owned *New Vision* newspaper's "Man of the Year.") According to a recent United Nations-funded survey, just 26 percent of the urban population, and only a bare majority of the rural population, think Museveni's "Movement" system of government is democratic and competitive. And, while my sampling is hardly a representative, I have yet to meet a person in Uganda who *doesn't* think he should retire in 2006.

It is this group of Ugandans, the nascent opposition, who watched the Kenyan elections with such interest. Their numbers are growing, though they have yet to coalesce around a single person or party. They are united, however, in agreeing that Uganda is coming to a crucial juncture, and that the coming year, 2003, will likely be the one in which the outlines of the country's future start to emerge. Will he stay or will he go? Will there be peace or war? Will Ugandans continue their remarkable recovery, or slip back into the abyss of anarchy?

* * *

Winnie Byanyima has no doubt. She knows Museveni will never leave unless someone dislodges him.

"There is a militaristic attitude here that differentiates us from Kenya," she said. "In their minds, they feel that they owe it to the gun. This whole thing with elections is just window dressing."

Byanyima has reason to know. She was a close companion of Museveni during his guerrilla war, and is the wife of Kizza Besigye, the man who Museveni defeated in 2001's bitter presidential election, and who now may or may not be plotting to remove him through more brutal means. She is also a member of Parliament, and, since her husband is in exile, easily the most visible opposition figure in Uganda today. When I met with Byanyima for breakfast at her home in early January, Ugandan commentators were still breathlessly dissecting the mean-

ing of Mwai Kibaki's landslide victory in Kenya. She, on the other hand, was wondering if she might be arrested.

"I think they may pick me up again today," she said nonchalantly, as she spread jam on a slice of bread.

Byanyima is a willowy, beautiful woman, with a flair for fashion; her colorful headscarves have become a political trademark. The walls of her house in Kololo, a chic Kampala neighborhood, were painted pale green and covered with tasteful art. Her bookshelf included, I noted, biographies of Margaret Thatcher and Nancy Reagan. ("Gifts," she said, a bit embarrassed. But they looked well-thumbed.)

Considering her prominence, her ambitions and her sex, Hillary Clinton comparisons are inevitable—she provokes the same sort of visceral hatred in her husband's enemies, and even some of his friends. ("Winnie is just a nasty lady," Museveni said during the campaign.) But as with Clinton, it's hard to square the animus with the person you meet: She has a soft, motherly voice, and as we spoke on her porch, she was constantly forced to interrupt our conversation by the demands of her three year-old son Anselm. "It is such a difficult age," she said. "He is so rebellious." But, she added, she didn't want to raise her child in the traditional African way, which prizes deference to elders above individuality. She likes it that he says no.

Winnie Byanyima, leader of the Reform Agenda, with her son Anselm and her niece, Carol, outside her home in Kampala. Her husband, Kizza Besigye, gave Museveni a tough challenge in the 2001 presidential elections. Now he is in exile, and the government says he and his wife are plotting rebellion. "I think they … [have] a belief—a wrong belief—about what my role in the insurgency is," she said.

Byanyima was born into opposition. Her father, Boniface Byanyima, was a prominent Democratic Party politician from the west of Uganda. When, by the mid-1960s, it became clear that Uganda was becoming a one-party state, with Prime Minister Milton Obote's Uganda People's Congress party firmly in control, Byanyima *père* was one of the few members of parliaments who refused to cross the aisle. "Our home was where every person who was dissatisfied with the government brought their frustration," his daughter recalled. "I grew up knowing that the truth should be told, should be pursued, even if it costs one's life."

As a young girl, Byanyima was fascinated by politics. When Idi Amin was ousted, and elections were held in 1980, she traveled the country, campaigning for Paul Ssemogerere, the Democratic Party's candidate. But when it became evident that the military junta running the country was determined to fix the election for Obote, who had returned with the invading armies, she became disenchanted with her candidate. Ssemogerere, in her view, didn't have the spine to stand up for himself. Though he almost certainly won more votes than Obote, he refused to fight the fraudulent result, saying Uganda had had too much war. Instead, it was the candidate who finished a distant third, the young Vice President Yoweri Museveni, who went to the bush. Byanyima joined the struggle, and it was there that she met Kizza Besigye, a young doctor, though they did not become romantically involved until much later.

In some ways, the 2001 presidential elections reprised the pattern of 1980. Only this time, Museveni played the role of Obote, his critics say. Besigye, the former insider, campaigned for president on a platform that might be termed "Museveni-lite": less corruption, more conversation. But Museveni counterattacked viciously; among other things, he claimed that Besigye had AIDS. When Besigye said he had widespread support within the army, Museveni retorted that *he* was the only candidate who could control the soldiers. He proved it by unleashing them to stamp out opposition rallies, causing a few deaths.

In the end, it turned out that Museveni probably didn't need to play so dirty: He won with nearly 70 percent of the vote. But his tactics cost him. Besigye carried a contest of the election to the Supreme Court, which largely agreed that the campaign had been grossly unfair while still awarding the election to Museveni on a 3-2 vote. Today, it is the Supreme Court's condemnation of Museveni, and not his wide margin of victory, that sticks in the minds of many Ugandans.

Shortly after the court's decision, Besigye fled the country, claiming that Museveni's security men wanted

to arrest him. But Byanyima stayed. For the last year and a half, they have played a kind of inside-outside game against the government. Byanyima's political group—she doesn't call it a party, because parties are severely restricted under the Ugandan constitution—the Reform Agenda, has focused on pressuring the government to change from within.

"This is a coalition to change the rules of the game," she said. "Mainly, to get the army out of politics. … That's the one single reason that Museveni went to the bush. And he abandoned it."

Kizza Besigye, at a rally during the 2001 presidential election campaign. (Photo courtesy of The Monitor.*)*

Since her husband left, the government has harassed Byanyima in innumerable small ways. When I met her, she told me that on the following Monday, her 44th birthday, she was due in court to hear whether she'd been convicted on a gun-possession charge. She ended up being acquitted; the judge found that the police had falsified evidence with the intention of "framing the accused." Other members of the Reform Agenda have not escaped so easily. Several, Byanyima claimed, have been arrested by government security organizations and been taken to secret "safe houses" for interrogation. "They have torture chambers there," she said. "They are asked to confess."

But it's Besigye's outside game that really seems to have the government worried. Immediately after he fled the country, Besigye went to Washington, where he tried to convince policymakers at the State Department to cut off international aid to Museveni—a step that eventually forced Moi to open up his political system. His message apparently piqued at least polite interest. Then came the September 11 attacks in the United States. Suddenly, protesting a tarnished election didn't seem quite as important to the U.S. as retaining a reliable ally just south of the Sudan and Somalia.

Subsequently, Besigye's rhetoric took a bellicose turn. This fall, in a radio debate with Uganda's military intelligence chief, he instructed his followers to "train and wait" for civil war. Then, in mid-December, he published an article on the Internet, entitled "Is Uganda Ripe for War?" Written in a dry, scholarly style, the paper made reference to Pericles and Oliver Cromwell, and listed eight 'conditions' in Uganda that, he concluded, "[suggest] a strong likelihood of more wars." Since Besigye made his reputation as a soldier, not a political theoretician, everyone assumed the article represented something more than an academic exercise.

Is this for real, or just saber rattling? There is reason to think it could be the latter. A climactic conflict between Uganda and Rwanda has been "imminent" for four years now. Besigye has been making warlike noises for many months. And yet nothing has happened. More than one optimistic observer has suggested to me that Besigye might just be talking tough to preserve his future political viability. History shows that Ugandans can be unforgiving to politicians who lose gracefully. Ssemogerere, who came back to run unsuccessfully against Museveni in 1996, is almost universally disdained as a weakling.

But the government seems to be taking Besigye seriously. A few months ago, I met with a Ugandan intelligence official who, for obvious reasons, asked not to be named. At length—and without any real substantiation—he recounted a litany of indications that Besigye was girding for war: several thousand rebels supposedly being trained in the Congo; alleged arms transfers from Rwanda, Uganda's regional enemy; reported phone calls from Besigye to old army comrades, asking them to join the struggle. In June 2001, two colonels, veterans of Museveni's rebellion, defected to Rwanda and announced their intention to form a "People's Redemption Army" to install Besigye as president. And more recently, a picture turned up showing one of Besigye's campaign aides posing with leaders of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a murderous guerrilla force led by a messianic "prophet" named Joseph Kony. (Byanyima says the picture is a fake, but, significantly, the aide himself has never spoken up to clear his name.) The intelligence man claimed that Besigye's aim was to unite all the sundry bands of wackos, psychopaths and Muslim fundamentalists currently fighting the government into one formidable rebel army—a kind of Evil Rainbow Coalition.

All through the winter, the government pressured its American and European benefactors to allow it to redirect financial support from other areas of its budget,

which is heavily dependent on foreign aid, to defense, ostensibly to fight the LRA. The effort was ultimately successful; the U.S. even announced it would chip in an extra $3 million to help Uganda fight its war on terrorism. Every day, says David Ouma Balikowa, the managing editor of the independent newspaper *The Monitor*, more shiny new military machinery passes his offices, located near Kampala's train depot. But is all that firepower really necessary to contain a few thousand guerrillas? Another possible explanation, local analysts suggest, is that the government is readying itself for a possible war with its neighbor and erstwhile ally, Rwanda. The two countries fell out when they backed different rebel armies in the Congo. Since then, Uganda has accused Rwanda of supporting Besigye. If he attacks—still a big if—Uganda would likely view it as an act of aggression by Rwanda. Rwanda, for its part, has recently stepped up its own rhetoric, claiming that Uganda is training former *interahamwe*—Hutu militiamen who hacked apart 800,000 Tutsis in 1994—in camps near the border between the two countries.

The Reform Agenda has consistently said the government's clams against Besigye are nothing more than propaganda, intended to discredit legitimate political opposition. Yet when I asked Byanyima what her husband was up to, her answer came perilously close to admitting there is something to what the government says.

"As dictatorship grows, so too does insurgency. They are two sides of the same coin," she said. "In Uganda here, when a leader comes to power and deemphasizes consensus-building, and instead relies on military means to hold power, the Ugandan people will organize to overthrow that military power. That is normal and I don't think it is peculiar to Uganda alone. All people are born with a desire to be free. When their freedom is usurped, they resist. When they can find ways to undermine or overthrow the person who is taking their freedom away, they will [use] them. I think it's a natural law: action and reaction."

What will the government's reaction be? By all indications, as war tension continues to mount, so will repression. As I wrote this article, a roundup of Besigye supporters—political or, as the government claims, otherwise—seemed to be underway. This was why, on the day I visited her, Byanyima was expecting a visit from the police.

"This time," she sighed, "[the charge] is likely to be terrorism." After September 11, Uganda, like many nations, adopted tough new laws that make consorting with terrorists an offense punishable by death. Since the government contends that Besigye is palling around with the LRA, which the United States has called a terrorist organization, life inside Uganda could soon become considerably more uncomfortable for Byanyima.

A friend who knows politics here once told me that if Byanyima goes into exile, it would be a sure sign that war is coming. I asked her if she ever thought about leaving.

"Last night, I thought about that," she said, wearily. "I thought that the end may be coming for me. The more the regime is brought under pressure by insurgency … the less it is able to tolerate opposing views. And I think they have an exaggerated and mistaken view of what my role is as an opposition leader, and even a belief—a wrong belief—about what my role in the insurgency is. For once, I feel that in the interests of my son should come before the political work I have to do. …

"But I feel conflict within myself," she continued. "I think being here, being that voice, is a duty that I have. So I'm in anguish."

She sat back in her seat, and stared blankly across the back yard. "I'll probably be debating this when they come to pick me up."

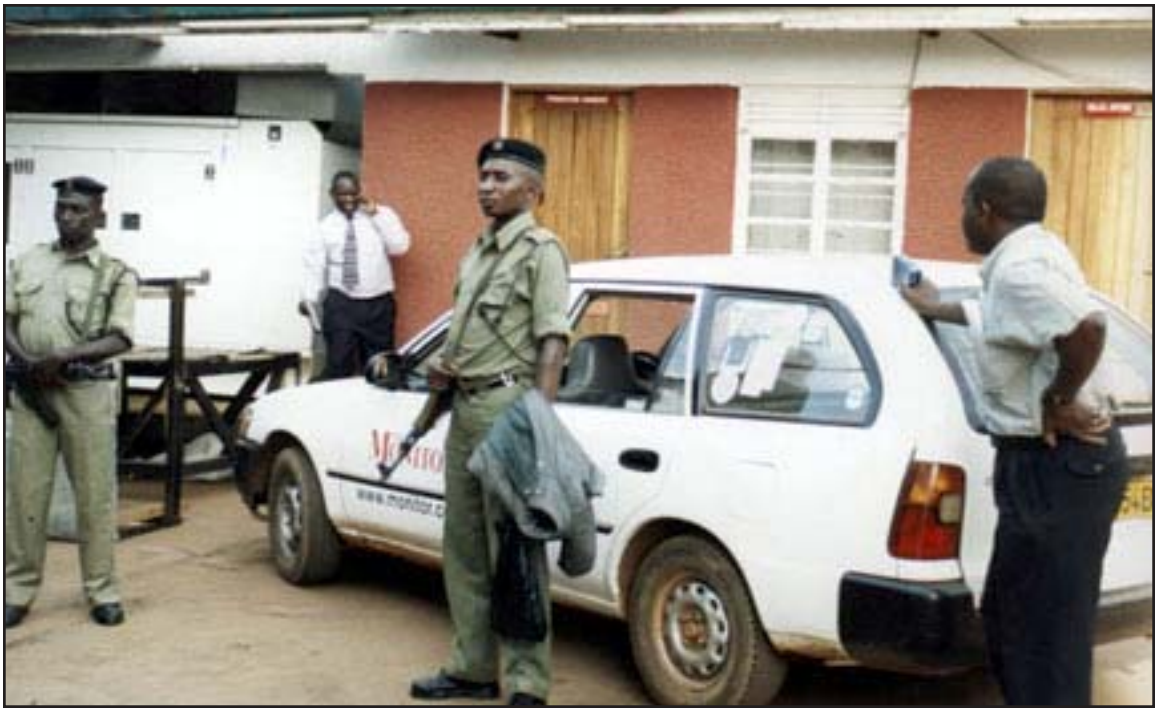
* * *

"Even Besigye today—let's say he fights and wins the power. Then he becomes like Museveni."

It was a Sunday afternoon in mid-October, and David Ouma Balikowa was in a gloomy mood. I had been trying to get in touch with him for days, ever since the government had abruptly shut down the newspaper he edits, the *Monitor*. The police had confiscated his cell phone, so I finally found him at home, sitting on his couch, wearing sweatpants, sandals and a t-shirt, and disinterestedly watching a French soccer match on television.

He seemed happy to see me—I think he was grateful for the company—and he welcomed me inside. "To me, it was not surprising," he said. "Whenever war intensifies in this country, the media always suffers." He told me what had happened. Three days before, the *Monitor* had run a front-page story, based on claims by "military sources," that a Ugandan army helicopter had crashed, and might have been shot down by the LRA.

The article had infuriated the government. As it happened, the morning it appeared, I had an appointment to talk about Besigye with John Nagenda, Museveni's media advisor and a columnist for the government's *New Vision*. Nagenda, whose writings might best be described as a literate projection of the president's id, had professed to be unconcerned about the threat of war. "It will inconvenience Uganda," he said, " but he cannot possibly win." When the subject turned to the "chopper story," as it would become known, he grew truly angry: "It's just rubbish." Later that day, I subsequently learned, a furious Museveni had convened a meeting of top advisors. Whatever was said there (accounts conflict), that evening, as the *Monitor* was about to go to press, a swarm of police officers burst into the newsroom. They confiscated everyone's cell phones, disconnected handsets from the



Police stand by as David Ouma Balikowa (far right) prepares to lead his staff back into the Monitor*'s offices after a week-long shutdown. (Photo courtesy of the* Monitor.*)*

regular phones, and began to search the premises.

Now, sitting on his couch, Balikowa was contemplating prison. The reporter who wrote the story was already sitting in a jail in Gulu, a northern town, and it was clear some of the paper's editors would be arrested, too. Balikowa's biggest fear was that he and the others might be charged under the new anti-terrorism statute, which includes clauses intended to keep newspapers from publishing information deemed favorable to terrorists—saying that rebels had bagged of a helicopter, for instance. Theoretically, conviction for such an offense could carry the punishment of death, but Balikowa was more worried about spending a long time in jail awaiting trial.

"I still have to have that conversation with my wife. Give her the bank account numbers and so forth," he said. "Some people say it's time to run, but I say, why?"

In the end, Balikowa didn't go to prison. Two other editors at the paper, along with the reporter who wrote the story, were charged with the lesser offense of "publishing false news." (Whether the news was actually false remains a matter of some speculation.) The three are out on bail; if convicted, they face prison terms of up to seven years. The paper was allowed to reopen again after a week, on the condition that it publish an apology and watch its future behavior.

The chopper-story saga was, to many Ugandans, a watershed event. Not that many believed, as many western visitors do, that Museveni's tolerance of a freewheeling media scene constituted positive proof that he was, at heart, a democrat. Rather, the incident undermined the widely held notion that speech freedoms were so entrenched that Museveni could no longer shut people up, even if he wanted to. The closure sparked not a single demonstration. Quite a few people spoke up to say the government was right. At dinner one night shortly after the shutdown, my waiter leaned over and confided that he thought it was about time someone stopped the *Monitor* from saying such destructive things.

In retrospect, the whole affair seems to have been just the first move in a concerted effort to rein in the media. Recently, private radio stations have been instructed not to carry interviews with Besigye, and to stop broadcasting popular live political debates from local bars. (Though many stations are trying to find legal ways to circumvent the ban.) On January 2, Minister of State for Information Basoga Nsadhu announced that the government would soon require journalists to register with the government, and would begin enforcing the journalistic provisions of the anti-terrorism statute. "This year," he told reporters, "we are determined to clean up our house."

The new media restrictions coincided with a renewed effort to crack down on what remnants remain of Uganda's political parties. Under a new law, parties are required to register with the government, and accept sharp constrictions—they cannot hold rallies, for instance. If opposition party leaders were to refuse to register, as most seem likely to, the parties will be officially outlawed. (A deadline for registration is currently on hold while a court considers the constitutionality of the law.)

This could just be chest thumping. Museveni, longtime observers say, frequently tacks back and forth between Good Yoweri, the jovial, suited democrat, and Bad

Yoweri, the fatigue-clad autocrat. Lately, he's been wearing a lot of olive, but tomorrow he could be back to Savile Row. And, sure enough, as this newsletter went to press in February, he abruptly swung back. *The Monitor* reported that, at a closed-door meeting, he told a group of top aides that he was now in favor of allowing opposition parties. The president was "relentless, persistent and passionate," the newspaper report said — as passionate as he had been two days before, when he told a large rally that parties were a cancer. The meeting had produced a report discussing how Museveni's Movement might be turned into a real political party. Someone leaked a copy of the report to *The Monitor*. When the paper tried to publish the document, the government blocked it.

* * *

So is democracy blooming in Uganda? The government's opponents will believe it when they see it. Still, the most charitable of Museveni's critics say all the recent Bad Yoweri — the party crackdown, the strongman posturing, the war talk — makes tactical sense, in light of Good Yoweri's recent reappearance. All the ominous talk and the repressive laws (which no one is talking about rescinding) have weakened and destabilized the opposition. This should make it easier for Museveni,s chosen successor to win in 2006.

This line of reasoning presumes there will be a chosen successor — an issue that, at present, is still very much up in the air. When I first arrived in Uganda last May, people who know politics here had already begun to speculate that Museveni would try to stay on for another term. There was plenty of precedent for a convenient change in the constitution: President Sam Nujoma had recently amended Namibia's so he could run again; President Bakili Muluzi of Malawi was trying to do the same. It's easy to understand why. African leaders don't always enjoy comfortable retirements. In Zambia, President Frederick Chiluba tried to change the constitution and failed. He rigged the election for a handpicked successor, but he didn't stay handpicked, and now Chiluba and his cronies are under investigation for corruption. There are suggestions that the same fate may now befall Moi in Kenya.

My cynical Ugandan friends told me to expect a "grassroots" movement to pop up, begging Museveni to stay on. Sure enough, calls started in October. At a ceremony for graduates of a "political education" course in the provincial town of Fort Portal, a few students presented Professor Gilbert Bukenya, a top government minister, with a petition demanding a constitutional revision. Bukenya said he would give the petition to the president. "My reasoning," he said, "is that if the power belongs to the people, then it should remain with the people. But then the constitution takes it away by saying the president should govern for only two terms."

In mid-November, at a ceremony for the opening of a health center in a rural western village, a group of local women performed a traditional dance and sang: "*Honashi, omuntu kwakora kurungi bamuhereza obwa siisi, nari abajungu ekibarikweta* bonus!" Translated, the lyrics said the president had done so much good that he deserved a "bonus" term. Brigadier Jim Muhwezi, the health minister, told the crowd he thought that sounded like a grand idea. Since then, hardly a day has gone by without news of another religious leader or small-fry politician pleading that Museveni not abandon Uganda.

The government's propagandists seem to be readying themselves for a presidential change of heart. Reading the *New Vision*'s op-ed page lately has been a bit like watching figure skaters warm up for a competition. The columnists dart around the ice, changing direction, spinning and twirling justifications for an event that has not happened yet. John Nagenda told me in October that it would be a "very sad day" if the constitution were changed, but by January was attacking opposition leaders for demanding the president to publicly disavow the amendment push, saying they had no right to dictate what the president should say. "How democratic!" he wrote, sarcastically. Onapito Ekomoloit, Museveni's deputy press secretary, compared the opposition to "a soccer player who wants to prove he is the best, and but insists that another star player must not be fielded," and advanced the novel argument that term limits are only necessary in places like the United States, where political parties control the nominating process. The nightmare scenario, he noted, was the case of "Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a.k.a. FDR," reelected time and again by benumbed

An old man, wearing his yellow "Vote Museveni" t-shirt, walks by the side of the road near Gayaza, a village in southwestern Uganda. Rural areas have long been strongholds of Museveni's ruling "Movement." But that support may be waning: A recent poll found only slightly more than 50 percent of voters outside the cities still believe the president's ruling "Movement" is democratic.

Americans mindlessly pulling the Democratic lever.

Finally, in early January, the clamor became such that the president announced that everyone should stop talking about the issue, which he called a "small matter."

"I cannot allow myself to be part of the speculation," he said. "That's why I give a clear answer."

Actually, his pronouncements on the issue have been something less than Shermanesque. They have always been variations on the theme, "I will obey the constitution"—which leaves the door open to an amendment. Recently, in his interview with the editor of the *Times* of London, Museveni elaborated on the question more than he ever had before. "We will follow the constitution because that is what I fought for," he said. "The reason why some people say Museveni should continue is because they are worried about the country's checkered history. They say Museveni has given us some stability and should stay. The present constitution says not more than two consecutive terms."

A classic Museveni answer. The first and last sentences suggest that all this talk about a third term is ridiculous: Uganda has a constitution, and he will follow it—he fought for it, after all. The middle two sentences, in which he lapses into speaking about himself in the third person, imply just the opposite: How can people really be thinking about replacing him, the president who brought peace, Uganda's indispensable man?

Which half of the answer conveys the real Museveni? The preponderance of the evidence suggests it is the middle two sentences. He has often referred to himself as the "cotter pin" of Uganda, the screw on the bicycle that holds the whole thing together. Without him, the place falls apart. It's hard to dispute him. There's not a politician inside or outside the government who seems capable of filling Museveni's shoes. This is the point western diplomats in Uganda constantly reiterate: Museveni, they say, may not be wonderful, but he sure beats the alternatives.

The president's critics suggest that those wondering who the alternative is are asking the wrong question. Why, they ask, are there no alternatives? Even within Museveni's ruling Movement, there are those who would not shed a tear if he leaves in 2006, if only because his exit would clear the way for their own ambitions. A few of Museveni's closest allies, including his childhood friend Eriya Kategaya, the interior minister, have suggested that the political system be opened up to allow parties. But, Balikowa told me, "their own belief is that the man is not going anywhere unless he is pushed." And that push is does not seem to be forthcoming. "The Americans, the Europeans, pressurized Moi to open up political space," said K.K. Chapaa, a presidential candidate in 2001. "Why have they not done so to Museveni?"

Chapaa, who was once imprisoned on sedition charges for calling Museveni "corrupt," told me there was another dimension to Museveni's cotter-pin analogy. To insert it, you have to hammer it in. To remove it, you have to knock it out. During the 2001 campaign, Besigye's supporters gave him a nickname: "the Hammer."

Michael Mabiike, 28, was first elected to parliament in 2001, as a member of the Democratic Party. Now his party faces being outlawed. But he's still trying to plot strategy for the next presidential election. "There are so many potential Saitoti's in Uganda," Mabiike said, referring to the Kenyan vice president who was lured to the opposition when it became apparent Moi wouldn't choose him as a successor.

"Now, in Uganda we have a political sphere where people believe democracy and dialogue are irrelevant," he said. "We believe in the power of the gun."

He didn't seem entirely displeased by the prospect of a civil war in his country. This was something I noticed over an over again in my conversations with members of the opposition: the resignation—even anticipation—with which many people within it viewed the possibility of a Besigye invasion. He was, after all, the enemy of their enemy.

To me, this sounded like madness. It's not so much that Uganda doesn't need another civil war, though it doesn't. The opposition's attitude is also utterly self-defeating. It actually proves the worst thing Museveni has ever said about his people, which is that they can't be trusted to recognize the border between politics, and politics by other means. What does it say about the country's democratic progression when the first candidate to come close to defeating a sitting president starts raising an army? Besigye has now become a living, breathing justification for every one of the president's crackdowns on civil liberties, past and future, and perhaps a reason for him not to step down at all.

There are still a few optimists left in Uganda, though. On December 28, the day after the Kenyan elections, I met one of them: Michael Mabiike. We ate hamburgers at a local restaurant and talked about the future.

"I think the president is just throwing stones into the bush

to see what comes out," he said of the third-term rumors.

Mabiike is 28, thin-faced, with a whisper of stubble on his chin. He was first elected to Uganda's Parliament in 2001. He is a member of the Democratic Party, and even though (or perhaps because) Museveni came to campaign for his Movement-endorsed opponent, he handily won his race in Kampala, an opposition stronghold. I had first heard of Mabiike when I read about his efforts to send university students, members of his party's youth wing, to Kenya to assist Mwai Kibaki's election campaign. The government was concerned enough about this to issue a communiqué on the eve of the election, calling on Ugandans to "desist from the illegal act" of interfering with another country's politics.

"President Museveni has the key," he told me. "He

The day after Moi left, the Monitor published this editorial cartoon. In it, Moi heads off to the "Ex-Presidents' Village," his rungu stuck in his pocket, carrying a suitcase stuffed with bananas and sugar cane. He asks whether he should expect a visit from his Ugandan counterpart in 2006. Museveni dissembles: "Er, we shall see."

can choose to turn it to the right side, or the wrong side. President Mugabe chose to turn it to the wrong side. … President Moi had the key and chose to turn it to the right side, and believe you me, Kenya is never going to be the same again."

"But one thing which is for sure," he continued, " is that President Museveni is not predictable. It can go either way. We may have the Mugabe scenario it‡Uganda. Or we may have the Moi scenario."

* * *

The two presidents walked into the wood-paneled International Conference Center hall to the tune of martial music. Uganda's Parliament, called together for a special session to hear Moi say farewell, sat along long tables. The parliamentarians rapped their knuckles on them to applaud to Moi's arrival.

Neither Moi nor Museveni mentioned recent events in Uganda, but they were never far from the surface. "A nation cannot be built unless it is unified," Moi told the assembled notables. "The experience of Uganda demonstrates that national unity cannot be taken for granted."

In his wooden, phlegmatic style, Kenya's president recounted the litany of problems that, in his view, had led to decades of dictators and civil war, prior to Museveni's ascension to power: tribalism, "parochialism," and destructive party politics. "The peace and stability this country has enjoyed for the last 16 years," he said, "demonstrates that visionary leadership is essential for development." Then he went on to lament the fact that elders—presumably elders like him—were not more appreciated these days in Africa. "The younger generation maybe feels that the older generation has made its contribution and has therefore ceased to function," he complained. He did not sound like a man who was looking forward to retirement

Museveni, by contrast, was having a Good Yoweri day. He was extemporaneous and funny, totally at ease as he spoke beneath a giant gold seal bearing his own profile. "We wish *Mzee* Moi a happy retirement," he said. "I would not like to call it a retirement. It is rather a mutation of roles, from active contribution to consultative contribution. Africans, actually, do not retire." He picked up a favorite subject, his family's cows, and began sprinkling in words in his mother tongue, Lunyankole. "My father, *Mzee* Amos Kaguta, now 86 years old, has not retired yet. He has just changed roles from herding cows, *kuriisa*, to guiding, *kuragirira*, the younger people who now herd the cows. It is only when he is unable to stand up, *eboote*, or senile, *endondogozi*, that he retires."

So, will this African retire, or won't he? As usual, you could divine any answer you wanted to from what he said.

Museveni had a press conference and a big sendoff planned for Moi, but Al Qaeda did not cooperate with his schedule. Even as the two presidents were speaking to parliament, Kenyan emergency workers were rushing to the scene of a bombed Mombasa hotel, and an Israeli passenger plane was headed to Tel Aviv, having narrowly averted a pair of missiles. The press conference was a thrown-together affair, held hastily before Moi, escorted by military vehicles, rushed to airport to fly home. Still, the Ugandan media managed to ask the question they most wanted answered: Would President Museveni be following Moi's example?

"Yoweri Museveni will follow the constitution of Uganda as it is," he replied. He widened his eyes, as he often does when he wants to emphasize a point. "I am the one who wrote it, I will follow the constitution as it *is*."

Ugandans were only left to wonder what the president's definition of the word "is" is. ❑

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INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS
Fellows and their Activities

Alexander Brenner (June 2002 - 2004) • **EAST ASIA**
A linguist who has worked as an French-language instructor with the Rassias Foundation at Dartmouth College and also has proficient Mandarin and Spanish, upper-intermediate Italian, conversational German and Portuguese, and beginning Cantonese, Alex received a B.A. in History from Yale in 1998 and has just completed a Master's degree in China Studies and International Economics at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. He is prepariing for his two-year ICWA fellowship in China with four months of intensive Mandarin-language study in Beijing. His fellowship will focus on the impact of a new government and a new membership in the World Trade Organization on Chinese citizens, institutions and regions both inside and far from the capital.

Martha Farmelo (April 2001- 2003) • **ARGENTINA**
A Georgetown graduate (major: psychology; minor, Spanish) with a Master's in Public Affairs from the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton, Martha is the Institute's Suzanne Ecke McColl Fellow studying gender issues in Argentina. Married to an Argentine economist and mother of a small son, she will be focusing on both genders, which is immensely important in a land of Italo/Latino machismo. Martha has been involved with Latin America all her professional life, having worked with Catholic Relief Services and the Inter-American Development Bank in Costa Rica, with Human Rights Watch in Ecuador and the Inter-American Foundation in El Salvador, Uruguay and at the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing.

Andrew Rice (May 2002 - 2004) • **UGANDA**
A former staff writer for the *New York Observer* and a reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the Washington Bureau of *Newsday*, Andrew will be spending two years in Uganda, watching, waiting and reporting the possibility that the much-anticipated "African Renaissance" might begin with the administration of President Yoweri Museveni. Andrew won a B.A. in Government from Georgetown (minor: Theology) in 1997 after having spent a semester at Charles University in Prague, where he served as an intern for *Velvet* magazine and later traveled, experienced and wrote about the conflict in the Balkans.

Matthew Z. Wheeler (October 2002-2004) • **SOUTHEAST ASIA**
A former research assistant for the Rand Corporation specializing in South and Southeast Asia, Matt will spend two years looking into proposals, plans and realities of regional integration (and disintegration) along the Mekong River, from China to the sea at Vietnam. With a B.A. in liberal arts from Sarah Lawrence and an M.A. from Harvard in East Asian studies (as well as a year-long Blakemore Fellowship in Thai language studies) Matt will have to take long- and short-term conflicts in Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia into account as he lives, writes and learns about the region.

James G. Workman (January 2002 - 2004) • **SOUTHERN AFRICA**
A policy strategist on national restoration initiatives for Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt from 1998 to 2000, Jamie is an ICWA Donors' Fellow looking at southern African nations (South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia and, maybe, Zimbabwe) through their utilization and conservation of fresh-water supplies. A Yale graduate (History; 1990) who spent his junior year at Oxford, Jamie won a journalism fellowship at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies and wrote for the *New Republic* and *Washington Business Journal* before his years with Babbitt. Since then he has served as a Senior Advisor for the World Commission on Dams in Cape Town, South Africa.

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