



IDI AMIN DADA

Idi Amin Dada, who became known as the 'Butcher of Uganda' for his brutal, despotic rule whilst president of Uganda in the 1970s, is possibly the most notorious of all Africa's post-independence dictators. Amin seized power in a military coup in 1971 and ruled over Uganda for 8 years. Estimates for the number of his opponents who were either killed, tortured, or imprisoned vary from 100,000 to half a million.

He was ousted in 1979 by Ugandan nationalists, after which he fled into exile.

Date of birth: 1925, near Koboko, West Nile province, Uganda

Date of death: 16 August 2003, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

An Early Life

Idi Amin Dada was born in 1925 near Koboko, in the West Nile Province of what is now the Republic of Uganda.

Success in the King's African Rifles

Idi Amin received little formal education: sources are unclear whether or not he attended the local missionary school. However, in 1946 he joined the King's African Rifles, KAR (Britain's colonial African troops), and served in Burma, Somalia, Kenya (during the British suppression of the Mau Mau) and Uganda. Although he was considered a skilled, and somewhat overeager, soldier, Amin developed a reputation for cruelty - he was almost cashiered on several occasions for excessive brutality during interrogations.

He rose through the ranks, reaching sergeant-major before finally being made an *effendi*, the highest rank possible for a Black African serving in the British army. Amin was also an accomplished sportsman, holding Uganda's light heavyweight boxing championship from 1951 to 1960.

A Willing Soldier for the State

On his return to Uganda in 1964, Idi Amin was promoted to major and given the task of dealing with an army in mutiny. His success led to a further promotion to colonel. In 1965 Obote and Amin were implicated in a deal to smuggle gold, coffee, and ivory out of the Democratic Republic of the Congo - the subsequent funds should have been channeled to troops loyal to the murdered DRC prime minister Patrice Lumumba, but according to their leader, General Olenga, never arrived. A parliamentary investigation demanded by President Edward Mutebi Mutesa II (who was also the King of Buganda, known colloquially as 'King Freddie') put Obote on the defensive - he promoted Amin to general and made him Chief-of-Staff, had five ministers arrested, suspended the 1962 constitution, and declared himself president. King Freddie was finally forced into exile in Britain in 1966 when government forces, under the command of Idi Amin, stormed the royal palace.

Coup d'Etat

Idi Amin began to strengthen his position within the army, using the funds obtained from smuggling and from supplying arms to rebels in southern Sudan. He also developed ties with

British and Israeli agents in the country. President Obote first responded by putting Amin under house arrest, and when this failed to work, Amin was sidelined to a non-executive position in the army. On 25 January 1971, whilst Obote attended a Commonwealth meeting in Singapore, Amin led a coup d'etat and took control of the country, declaring himself president. Popular history recalls Amin's declared title to be: "*His Excellency President for Life, Field Marshal Al Hadji Doctor Idi Amin, VC, DSO, MC, Lord of All the Beasts of the Earth and Fishes of the Sea, and Conqueror of the British Empire in Africa in General and Uganda in Particular.*"

The Hidden Side of a Popular President

Idi Amin was initially welcomed both within Uganda and by the international community. King Freddie had died in exile in 1969 and one of Amin's earliest acts was to have the body returned to Uganda for state burial. Political prisoners (many of whom were Amin followers) were freed and the Ugandan Secret Police was disbanded. However, at the same time Amin had 'killer squads' hunting down Obote's supporters.

Ethnic Purging

Obote took refuge in Tanzania, from where, in 1972, he attempted unsuccessfully to regain the country through a military coup. Obote supporters within the Ugandan army, who were predominantly from the Acholi and Lango ethnic groups, were also involved in the coup. Amin responded by bombing Tanzanian towns, and purging the army of Acholi and Lango officers. The ethnic violence grew to include the whole of the army, and then Ugandan civilians, as Amin became increasingly paranoid.

The Nile Mansions Hotel in Kampala became infamous as Amin's interrogation and torture center, and Amin is said to have moved residences regularly to avoid assassination attempts. Amin's killer squads, under the official titles of 'State Research Bureau' and 'Public Safety Unit' were responsible for tens of thousands of abductions, tortures and murders.

Amin personally ordered the execution of the Anglican Archbishop of Uganda, Janani Luwum, the chief justice, the chancellor of Makerere College, governor of the Bank of Uganda, and several of his own parliamentary ministers.

Economic War

Also in 1972, Amin declared "economic war" on Uganda's Asian population - they dominated Uganda's trade and manufacturing sectors, as well as forming a significant proportion of the civil service. Seventy thousand Asian holders of British passports were given three months to leave the country - the abandoned businesses were handed over to Amin's supporters. Amin severed diplomatic ties with Britain and 'nationalised' 85 British owned businesses. He also expelled Israeli military advisors, turning instead to Colonel Muammar Muhammad al-Gadhafi of Libya and the Soviet Union for support.

Links to the PLO

Idi Amin has been strongly linked to the Palestine Liberation Organisation, PLO. The abandoned Israeli embassy was offered to them as a potential headquarters; and it is believed that flight 139, the Air France A-300B Airbus hijacked from Athens in 1976, was invited by Amin to stop at Entebbe.

The hijackers demanded the release of 53 PLO prisoners in return for the 256 hostages. On 3 July 1976 Israeli paratroopers attacked the airport and freed almost all the hostages. Uganda's air force was badly crippled during the raid as its fighter jets were destroyed to stop retaliation against Israel.

Amin -- the charismatic African Leader

Amin was considered by many to be a gregarious, charismatic leader, and was often portrayed by the international press as a popular African independence leader. In 1975 he was elected Chair of the Organisation of African Unity (though Julius Kambarage Nyerere, president of Tanzania, Kenneth David Kaunda, president of Zambia, and Seretse Khama, president of Botswana, did boycott the meeting). A United Nations condemnation was blocked by African heads of state.

Amin Becomes Increasingly Paranoid

Popular legend has Amin involved in Kakwa blood rituals and cannibalism. More authoritative sources suggest that he may have suffered from hypomania, a form of manic depression which is characterized by irrational behavior and emotional outbursts. As his paranoia became more pronounced he imported troops from Sudan and Zaire, until less than 25% of the army was Ugandan. As accounts of Amin's atrocities reached the international press, support for his regime faltered. (But only in 1978 did the United States shift its purchase of coffee from Uganda to neighboring states.) The Ugandan economy faltered and inflation reached an excess of 1,000 percent.

Ugandan Nationalists Reclaim the Nation

In October 1978, with the assistance of Libyan troops, Amin attempted to annex Kagera, the northern province of Tanzania (which shares a border with Uganda). The Tanzanian president, Julius Nyerere, responded by sending troops into Uganda, and with the aid of rebel Ugandan forces, the Ugandan capital of Kampala was captured. Amin fled to Libya, where he stayed for almost ten years, before finally relocating to Saudi Arabia, where he remained in exile.

Death in Exile

On 16 August 2003 Idi Amin Dada, the 'Butcher of Uganda', died in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The cause of death was reported to be 'multiple organ failure'. Although the Ugandan government announced that his body could be buried in Uganda, he was quickly buried in Saudi Arabia. He was never tried for gross abuse of human rights.