

1. Beginning of the Bush War

The Bush War refers to the civil war that took place from 1981 to 1986 between the Obote regime and, after its collapse, the Okello regime, and the National Resistance Army (NRA)/National Resistance Movement (NRM) led by Mr. Museveni. The Luwero region, close to Kampala, known as "the Luwero Triangle," was where the fighting was most intense. However, fighting occurred throughout Uganda. Luwero is originally a lush agricultural area. Since Museveni's NRA based itself here and launched guerrilla warfare, the government's army subjected the area to thorough repression. It is said that as many as 750,000 internally displaced persons were created. During the six years of the civil war, Mr. Museveni remained in this area, continuing his resistance, except for two occasions in 1981 and 1985. It is said that the name "Bush War" came about because Mr. Museveni remained in the jungle in this way.

The fighting began on February 6, 1981.

2. The Course of the Civil War: Conflict with the Obote Regime

Initially, the military organization (NRA) led by Mr. Museveni was not well-equipped. Small-scale battles continued, and the NRA carried out acts such as raiding government armories to seize weapons and ammunition. The Kabamba military barracks attack in Mubende district on February 6, 1981 marked the beginning of the liberation struggle. During this time, on June 9, 1981, an incident occurred in which nine soldiers were killed. This was because soldiers captured by the regime refused to reveal the whereabouts of their comrades and were consequently killed. In Uganda, June 9 is still a public holiday celebrated as "Heroes' Day."

During the civil war, important developments emerged that shaped current Ugandan politics. Mr. Museveni's forces organized the National Resistance Council (NRC) to assert their legitimacy and launched a movement to win over the residents. This is the origin of the ruling party, NRM, which continues to this day. Through the nationwide organization of the NRM, the lives of many Ugandans were rebuilt.

Mr. Museveni also received military support from Libya. Mr. Museveni visited Libya in June 1981 and met with Colonel Gaddafi. Libya had temporarily supported the Amin regime but had since withdrawn. It is said that Colonel Gaddafi, upon meeting Mr. Museveni, immediately promised and implemented support for the NRA. Currently, there is a beautiful and biggest mosque in Kampala called "Gaddafi Mosque" that offers a panoramic view of the city. Idi Amin originally began its construction in the 1970s, but construction was halted due

to lack of funds. Later, in the 2000s, after Museveni became president, Gaddafi's Libya supported its construction, and it was completed. Gaddafi's support for the construction was likely due to the relationship that had existed since the Bush War.

The course of the civil war gradually turned unfavorable for the Obote regime's army. The NRA also merged with the forces of former President Lule. General Salim Saleh, Mr. Museveni's younger brother, succeeded in occupying the military camp in Masindi in September 1983. In December 1983, General Oyite Ojok, a prominent general on Obote's side died in a helicopter accident. Furthermore, in 1985, a new front was opened in the Rwenzori region of western Uganda. The Obote regime's army, which was a biased army composed of certain tribes, gradually weakened.

Seeing this, in July 1985, a group led by General Bazilio Olara Okello (UNLA) staged a coup. Thus, President Obote, who had served as president twice, went into exile in Zaire (present day Democratic Republic of Congo), and the Obote regime collapsed. The new government was formed by General Bazilio Olara Okello and General Tito Okello. (Note: These two were not related by blood but were from the same tribe.)

3. Confrontation with the Okello Regime, Inauguration of President Museveni: End of the Civil War

When President Obote left for Zaire, Mr. Museveni was in Sweden. He immediately returned to Tanzania. He attempted to coordinate with the Okello side, who had seized power, but the Okellos formed a new government. At the same time, the Okello regime worked to isolate the NRA within Uganda.

Neighboring countries Kenya and Tanzania attempted to mediate to avoid further chaos, but the situation did not subside. The Okello regime also recalled Amin regime soldiers who had fled abroad to strengthen their own forces. This aroused distrust from neighboring countries.

Seeing these circumstances, the NRA went on the offensive. At this time, the NRA was commanded by General Salim Saleh, Mr. Museveni's brother. With support from Libya and Tanzania, the NRA advanced favorably throughout Uganda. By September 1985, Masaka district and Mbarara district, not far from the capital, were besieged by the NRA.

During this time, Mr. Museveni remained in Tanzania and received support from his old acquaintance, President Nyerere. Furthermore, Kenyan President Moi intervened, and negotiations on the future governance of Uganda were held in Nairobi (Nairobi Peace Talks). Around this time, neighboring countries, especially Kenya and Tanzania, began to recognize

Mr. Museveni as the next leader of Uganda. Although there were movements by the Okello regime to compromise, the NRA gained military superiority. In December, the Okello forces in Masaka surrendered to the NRA. The following year, in 1986, Mbarara was peacefully occupied by the NRA.

In January 1986, the NRA finally deployed to the outskirts of Kampala, the capital. Eventually, the UNLA forces in Entebbe surrendered, and NRA soldiers occupied the Kampala radio station. On January 26, the fighting in Kampala also ended. This is now Uganda's "Liberation Day" public holiday, and a grand commemorative ceremony is held annually in the capital, Kampala.

Mr. Museveni was inaugurated as president on January 29. The Bush War, which lasted for six long years and caused many casualties, thus ended.

Even today, Ugandan newspapers occasionally feature articles looking back on the course of the Bush War. More than 20 years have passed since the fighting ended, and the public, especially young people, have not directly experienced these events. Details such as how the NRM was formed are still reported.

4. Civil War Continued Until 2008

President Museveni, who ended the fighting in 1986, made the NRM a nationwide organization and the NRA the national army of Uganda. The NRA eventually became the National Resistance Movement (NRM) and the national army was renamed, Uganda Peoples Defense Forces (UPDF). It is said that the casualties of the Bush War exceeded those of the Amin era. The reconstruction of the war-torn country and its people began.

Even so, there were still some anti-government activities and terrorist activities in parts of Uganda. These included, the Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF), The Lords Resistance Army (LRA) and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)

Finally, a peace agreement with the rebel force UNRF was formally reached in 2002. An agreement was made between the Ugandan government and the rebel forces in Yumbe, West Nile (Uganda National Rescue Front). Peace negotiations with the LRA went on until 2008. This ended the fighting within Uganda, and an environment was finally established where the country could focus on reconstruction and economic development. It was around this time that many developed countries, including Japan, established embassies in Kampala.

In this column in December 2025, the author shared his experience of a business trip to Yumbe in northern Uganda. At that time, local government officials explained that fighting

had continued in that area until 2002. As a result of the peace agreement signed in Yumbe, people who had previously taken up arms stopped such activities, and some are now involved in JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) road construction.

After that, the ADF an extremist terrorist group emerged. . The ADF was eradicated by the Ugandan army, but Joseph Kony the leader of the LRA has continued to evade capture to this day.



Billboard for the presidential election displayed
at the NRM headquarters

In March and April, we have looked back at the formation of the Museveni regime. When the presidential and parliamentary elections were held in January of this year, I saw many interviews where ordinary citizens said they had had enough of violence in elections. Looking back at the history leading to the establishment of the Museveni regime, I believe the wish of ordinary citizens is precisely for the continuation of a peaceful life.

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