



Abby Martin: Uganda Dictatorship: Imperialism's Pearl of Africa

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Abby Martin (AM): Remember that ultra viral video called Kony 2012 by the Ugandan warlord who recruited child soldiers told through the eyes of some dudes from San Diego? And after raking in tens of millions of dollars, the founder of the group behind the video, Invisible Children, drunkenly admitted to stealing money from donors. Then the narrator of the video was caught naked on the street corner in a public meltdown. Wow, that was really crazy. But even crazier than all of that is that the Obama administration used the Kony 2012's viral video, as marketing to ramp up its military actions in Uganda.

White House Spokesperson: As President Obama said upon signing the "Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act" last October, we, quote, "congratulate the hundreds of thousands of Americans who have mobilized to respond to this unique crisis of conscience. And I think that this viral video that you mentioned is part of that response."

President Obama: And today I can announce that our advisors will continue their efforts to bring this madman to justice and save lives. It is part of our regional strategy.

Captain Gregory: Our goal is helping to rid Kony, to bring peace and stabilization back to this region so they can go back to their normal lives.

AM: Well, the big kicker to the story is that the Obama team rallied all of this anger and outrage of the "Lord's Resistance Army" for their atrocities in support of the US backed Ugandan army that was carrying out the same kinds of war crimes, including mass rape and massacres of civilians. Under the command of one of the world's longest serving dictators, American puppet General Museveni.

The U.S. never cared about his atrocities, like the 2016 massacre he ordered of an entire village where his soldiers executed 15 children. Or about the fact that, like Joseph Kony, General Museveni himself came to power by ding, ding, ding, using child soldiers. This story is emblematic of U.S. policy in Uganda, where that top U.S. ally just massacred 54 unarmed protesters in November 2020 with bullets supplied by the Pentagon. It's a stunning story and

probably one you've never heard of because it wasn't considered worthy of coverage in U.S. media. 54 protesters mowed down by a government completely supported by Washington and at a protest that was demanding nothing more than a democratic election. The exact framing the U.S. uses to justify coups, sanctions and invasions all over the world.

AM: Uganda, like every other country in Africa, was carved in the boom by artificial colonial borders. It is home to 32 different local languages and a broad ethnic diversity. Its lush, fertile land and natural beauty earned it the title The Pearl of Africa of the British Empire, which declared Uganda its property in 1894. But revolts from peoples across the entire region against colonial rule marred the British in heavy fighting. So the British officers, commanding armies of Nubian and Sudanese soldiers that they conscripted, implemented a scorched earth policy, razing villages and massacring women and children of any peoples who resisted. The policy was so brutal it sparked a mutiny among the Nubian and Sudanese soldiers who were ordered to continue it, instead murdered all of their British commanders. The British had to rush an entire army regiment to Uganda just to crush the mutiny. Since scorched earth alone could not tame the new Uganda for the British crown, they implemented a different policy that echoes to the present day. Divide and conquer. With the colonial borders encompassing many ethnic groups, they heaped power and rewards on one: the Buganda peoples and imposed their language, agriculture and rule over other ethnic regions. According to Ugandan historian Salomen Bareebe Rukuuka, "the Buganda became the cruel arm of the British."

Sectarian conflict today, used by the U.S. empire to justify military intervention, has its roots in this history. The colonial era transformed Uganda into a cotton factory for the British, a virtual slave state, while fostering the growth of a local oligarchy for the privileged few who ran the plantations. Uganda did not gain independence from British imperialism until 1962. This brought to power a key post independence political figure named Milton Obote, who declared the nation would adopt a version of socialism and nationalized its resources. He also ruffled some feathers by withdrawing support from Israel's proxy war in Sudan, which Israel was training Ugandan police and rebels to fight in. So in 1971, the Israeli government helped plan and execute a military coup against Obote with armored vehicles and Israeli troops to lock down the new government. Obote would return to power in 1980, but claims the election was rigged sparked a long civil war led by General Museveni. Within a year of seizing power, Museveni signed an agreement with the International Monetary Fund, which implemented sweeping austerity. At the same time, he went to Washington to meet with President Reagan.

Ronald Reagan: I'm aware of Mr. Gaddafi's approaches and efforts to get a foothold in your part of Africa and all. And I just, would like to intervene in caution. I don't think he has worthy causes that he is promoting . I think he has a kind of world revolutionary idea.

General Museveni: I started fighting Gaddafi before you started in 1979.

Ronald Reagan: Yes.

General Museveni: So this was before you said you started fighting Gaddafi. I'm preaching to the choir then.

AM: This began an era of Uganda serving as the most important military partner in US operations in neighboring Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan and the Congo. And ever since for nearly 40 years, General Museveni has been the sole ruler of the country. That entire time, he's been a staunch ally of the U.S. empire, receiving hundreds of millions of U.S. taxpayer dollars every year. Today, that number is around one billion annually. While Uganda officially holds elections, they're widely recognized as a sham process dominated by state threats, fraud and extreme violence. For example, in the 2016 election, they simply arrested the opposition candidate, attacked any campaign rallies, prevented opposition areas from voting, and top Museveni officials told opponents, we will, quote, "kill your children" for protesting. In 2020, Museveni faced his most significant challenger yet and in turn had to use the most severe repression, Bobi Wine, the 39 year old pop star, launched a bid for president running on the platform of ending the government's repression. Wine captured massive support from the huge population of the Ugandan youth who, like Wine, have lived their entire lives under Museveni's rule.

So how did this U.S. backed government respond to this potential election defeat? Well, in the months leading up to the election, they'd carried out mass kidnappings where unmarked vans abducted and disappeared around 300 opposition activists, inflicting sheer terror on the population. They also arrested Bobi Wine so he couldn't campaign at all and use the police to attack his campaign events. When his supporters protested demanding his release, they were executed.

KTN News: No sooner had he stepped up to speak than tear gas and bullets started flying.

AM: It was in this pre-election crackdown that Ugandan forces opened fire on unarmed demonstrators, killing at least 54 with American training and firepower.

There was a violent crackdown on journalists trying to report on the carnage.

KTN News: Another journalist from City FM in Ginger (city) was also arrested in the scuffle.

AM: With the situation spiraling out of control, the government shut down the internet and social media in the entire country for the week leading up to the election. On January 14th 2021, Museveni claimed a victory with 58 percent of the vote in a clearly rigged election. Washington accepted the results as legitimate. Now, Biden's administration seems to acknowledge that this friendship doesn't look too good.

White House Staff: believe he (Biden) said this before, but it probably bears reiterating that

Uganda's January 14th elections were marred by election irregularities and abuses by the government's security services against opposition candidates and members of civil society. We strongly urge an independent, credible, impartial and thorough investigation into these incidents. We'll consider a range of targeted options to hold accountable those members of the security forces responsible for these actions.

AM: OK, easy to condemn random security forces, but what about their man in charge, Museveni himself?

White House Staff: When it comes to Museveni? Uganda, of course, does continue to play a regional role and does have an important role when it comes to use some of our interests in the region.

AM: Well, there you go. So what are those interests that the U.S. finds so important? Well, we know that the U.S. is building its forces across the African continent, swarming it from coast to coast with bases and troops under the openly imperialist U.S. Africa Command. But the U.S. can't dominate Africa alone. Just like the U.S. needs loyal clans like Israel and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East, it needs loyal clients in Africa too. Uganda has been one of those key client states that can act on behalf of U.S. imperialism instead of the U.S. having to send its own military. For example, Uganda is a key base of support for corporate control of the Congo - among the most coveted countries in Africa for its mountain of resources. Also, remember when four star General Wesley Clark revealed this 2006 Pentagon plan?

Wesley Clark: He said, I just got this down from upstairs, meaning the secretary of defense's office today, and he said, this is a memo that describes how we're going to take out seven countries in five years, starting with Iraq and then Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and finishing off Iran.

AM: Well, two of those seven countries are Uganda's neighbors. And both saw Uganda lead the charge for U.S. intervention. First in Somalia, where Uganda invaded in 2007 under U.S. command, and second in Sudan, where Uganda played a major role in the U.S. desire division of the nation into two separate countries. That's how South Sudan was created in 2011, home to 70 percent of Sudan's oil. But Uganda has also proved its loyalty to the U.S. empire outside of Africa, too. Like you probably didn't know that Uganda sent around 10000 soldiers to Iraq in 2006 to help the U.S. fight and occupy the country. U.S. military forces routinely operate in Uganda for training, military exercises and joint combat operations under the U.S. led "African Rapid Response Partnership". Of course, aside from its military role, Uganda is ripe for U.S. capitalism. One of the biggest banks in Uganda is Wall Street's Citibank. In fact, the U.S. State Department issues a guide for doing business in Uganda every year. And the verdict is, it's pretty great. A recent report stated, quote, "Uganda maintains a liberal trade and foreign exchange regime and largely adheres to IMF World Bank programs. A free market economy with few limits on foreign investment and abundant resources." Untapped oil and mineral reserves make it a rich nation that Uganda is one of the

planet's poorest countries in terms of wealth distribution, Museveni has consistently supported the geopolitical goals of the U.S. and for that he finds himself spared the fate of uncooperative leaders guilty of far less. While the Ugandan people continue to struggle against severe repression and another fraudulent election. For now, the country remains a hallmark example of American hypocrisy, exposing the myth that allies and enemies are based on democracy and human rights.

It's not like the U.S. can't make demands on human rights that twist the arm of Museveni like in 2014, when Museveni made being gay a crime punishable by life in prison. Far too embarrassing for a liberal guy like Obama. So Obama cut all aid and after that the law went away pretty quickly. So why doesn't Biden do something similar? Well, because they simply don't care. And apparently a massacre of protesters isn't a big enough scandal for Washington to feel the heat. Not that the US should be dictating human rights in Uganda, but they should definitely not be doing is sponsoring this system of state repression. The best thing for progressive forces in Uganda is an end to U.S. political, financial and military support for the regime.

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