DILEMMAS OF POPULAR SUPPORT IN GUERRILLA WAR:
The National Resistance Army in Uganda, 1981-86

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Under what circumstances do guerrillas attempt to elicit voluntary compliance from civilians among whom they are operating and how do civilians respond?[*] In the conventional view, winning the hearts and minds of ordinary citizens is necessary for success in guerrilla war. "The richest source of power to wage war lies in the masses of the people" (Mao Tse-Tung: 1975, 232). Thus, guerrilla war is often regarded as a political contest, though one inextricably allied to military operations, in which guerrillas attempt to wrest the loyalties of the people from the existing government. This contest is often analyzed as a search for the combination of resources that will yield victory (Scott: 1970, Leites and Wolf: 1970). Whether popular participation is essential for victory by guerrillas is a contested proposition. "[E]verywhere….," Davidson claims, "[t]he unity that brought success was the unity which could achieve participation" (1981, 116). On the other hand, Kriger argues that guerrillas can also win wars while depending predominantly on coercion to achieve civilian co-operation (1992, 238). But, whichever position they take, virtually every discussion of the role popular support plays in guerrilla war deploys an instrumental approach. They focus on the analysis of whether specific factors lead to ultimate victory or defeat.

Focusing exclusively on achieving success promotes a tendency to overlook the practical problems facing guerrillas as they interact with civilians living in their areas of operation. Such explanations can lead to an overemphasis on strategy, on ideology and on the consequences of cultivating popular support. Guerrillas often need help from civilians, especially in the early stages of their struggle. In order to wage war against an

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existing government, guerrilla organizations based inside the country must depend on local inhabitants for food, protection against betrayal, and usually for recruits and intelligence. Even where guerrillas operate from an external sanctuary, they usually have to depend on civilian contacts for supplies and security during incursions. In addition, some guerrilla groups attempt to educate civilians about their objectives, recognizing that convinced supporters may not only become an important future resource in the struggle, but will help to build the society for which the guerrillas fight.

The process of engaging civilians is filled with obstacles, since the guerrillas are at war with the existing government. In addition, there is always a question of whether guerrillas intend to act on the rhetoric they pronounce. The dilemmas faced by guerrillas in realizing popular support may constrict or even subvert their public commitments, or even private principles they value. Thinking of the patterns of organization between guerrilla and civilians—or their absence—as choices about the creation of government concentrates attention on how these dilemmas are resolved.

From the outset, the organizers of the National Resistance Army [NRA] in Uganda were committed to generating popular support as a means to defeat the Ugandan Peoples Congress [UPC] government (Museveni: 1997, Ngoga: 1997, 1998, Ondoga: 1998).[1] Unlike some guerrilla organizations, the NRA was never controlled by a political wing during the war, even though the government it installed when it took power was called the National Resistance Movement (NRM) and was presented as providing civilian

[1] This inquiry into the reasons for the NRA's reliance on achieving civilian compliance by eliciting popular support during the guerrilla war and the pattern of civilian responses it evoked is part of a larger comparative study of guerrilla governance. The latter will include a second Ugandan case, the Rwenzururu Kingdom Government, which is also based on field research, and two other non-Ugandan cases developed from the secondary literature. The comparative study also will consider a second variable—the extent to which the guerrillas institute civil administration.

control over the NRA (Dungu: 1994, 32, 33).[2] The war, which lasted five years, was fought mainly in the Luwero Triangle, an area which occupies part of the Central region (the former Kingdom of Buganda) and includes Kampala, the national capital. During the last nine months of the war, a second front was opened in the Western region.

Before the war began, several NRA leaders had been directly exposed to the philosophy of Frente de Libertação de Moçambique [FRELIMO], the Mozambican guerrilla movement, and its practice in liberated areas in northern Mozambique. FRELIMO leaders put great emphasis on popular support as the basis for a people's war for liberation from a colonial power. In addition, NRA leaders had developed a critical analysis of why political competition had produced such a disaster in Uganda. This analysis identified the failure of the elite to focus on the interests of ordinary Ugandans and their development as the cause of dictatorship and disorder. But in either case, what NRA leaders meant by popular support and what they planned to do during the war to elicit it from civilians had not been worked out before the war began. Instead, the evocation of popular support was shaped as much by practical necessities discovered in the process of fighting a guerrilla war as it was by ideological predisposition. The commitment to eliciting voluntary compliance was never abandoned during the war, even when the Ugandan government subjected the NRA to extremely severe military pressure, forcing it to flee from the safe zone it had created. Civilians living in rural areas controlled by the NRA developed strong loyalties toward the guerrilla army and supplied food and

[2] The original group of 35-40 rebels named themselves the Popular Resistance Army [PRA] after their first attack in February 1981. When the PRA united with former Ugandan President Yusuf Lule's Ugandan Freedom Fighters [UFF] in June 1981, the NRM and NRA came into existence. The NRM was the external branch of the organization. The National Resistance Council [NRC] was an internal political body, subordinate to the High Command of the NRA (see also, Mission to Freedom: 1990, 256-57). With the introduction of the 1995 Constitution, the NRM was renamed the Movement and the army became the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces [UPDF].

other goods generously. The havoc wreaked by undisciplined government soldiers was also an important factor in strengthening civilian popular support. The NRA succeeded in gaining intense popular support from a large proportion of the civilians in the Luwero Triangle.[3] The issues are what did it do to get this support, what kind of popular support did it receive and what support is it possible for guerrillas to get from civilians.

Guerrilla Governance

The relations between guerrillas and civilians can be understood as problems of politics under special circumstances. Formulating the issue in this way does not imply that considerations of strategic advantage are ever far from the minds of guerrilla leaders—or committed civilians. Instrumental considerations will always be part of the political arrangements created or sanctioned by guerrilla organizations. Guerrilla governance refers to the range of possibilities for organization, authority and responsiveness created from the daily interactions between guerrillas and civilians. These possibilities vary from ad hoc contact by guerrillas to the creation of elaborate regulatory structures for civilians and from efforts by guerrillas to gain compliance by using coercive measures as opposed to inducing voluntary support. Civilians react by agreeing to guerrilla demands or requests, or by refusing them. They may act passively or actively in requesting greater roles or modifications in guerrilla structures.

In other words, governance includes both elaborately patterned relationships as well as the absence of any patterned activity. As used here, governance contains no prescriptive implication. Rather, it calls attention to explaining the empirical basis for the

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conduct of guerrilla-civilian relations, whether guerrillas treat civilians well or badly. Guerrilla governance refers to the choice by guerrillas whether or not to create government, what they design and how it works. Usually, guerrillas create government on their own initiative—they are armed and they have an overwhelming need to ensure their security. But civilians are sometimes involved in either planning or running governmental structures, and occasionally political structures involving guerrillas may grow out of actions by civilian community activists.

An analysis of popular support involves examination of both the opportunities that guerrillas initiate and responses to them by civilians. One critical set of decisions that guerrillas make is whether to elicit compliance from civilians through coercion or to encourage voluntary assent. Coercion occurs when an individual is compelled to act through the threat of a sanction. Coercive compliance differs from voluntary compliance in that the individual coerced must always choose between two undesirable alternatives. It is the absence of desirable alternatives that signifies coercion, not the absence of a choice. Strictly speaking, both coerced and non-coerced decisions are voluntary, since a coerced decision also requires the "victim" to choose a course of action—even though one that he or she would not otherwise have selected (Bayles: 1972, 18, 23-24).

But in this discussion I follow ordinary usage by regarding coerced actions as not voluntary. Acceptance or rejection of a request for food or concealment by a guerrilla, for example, is likely to create severe dangers for a civilian, either with the guerrilla organization or with the existing government, whichever choice he or she makes.

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[3] The Luwero Triangle is defined by two roads heading north from Kampala and the Kafu river cutting across them. It is located entirely in the former Buganda Kingdom. Thick vegetation, especially in the southern part of this area, provided excellent protection for the guerrillas.

Coercive acts against one person are frequently intended to influence others (Kriger: 1992, 101).

Coercion may be regarded as legitimate or illegitimate, depending on whether the "victim" regards an order as appropriate, despite its potentially painful consequences. Some guerrilla groups create elaborate administrative arrangements intended to regulate civilian activity that involve a considerable degree of coercion. For that reason a study of guerrilla governance must use a broader notion of coercion—one that involves a variety of forms of external regulation—than Kriger's operational definition which "includes only physical threats and attacks on persons and property" (1992: 101).[4] Since guerrillas force civilians to choose between them and the existing government, civilians cannot escape making coerced decisions. Thus, there is always some level of coercion underlying guerrilla governance. Nevertheless, guerrillas also have the opportunity to cultivate popular support rather than compel obedience, if they choose to do so.

Popular support is an ambiguous concept for additional reasons beyond the coercion that necessarily underlies it. Particularly in liberation movements, it frequently amounts to claims of representation of popular interests rather than claims of voluntary compliance. In other cases, guerrillas insist they have popular support by pointing to the "political education" they provide to civilians, rather than to structures through which they can discover civilian preferences. In both situations ideology can easily obscure the political relationship between guerrillas and civilians. The important question in assessing governance is to determine, as far as possible and without ignoring the existing

[4] Kriger's purpose is to demonstrate that coercion was a significant component in the relations of guerrillas to civilians in Zimbabwe's war. A parsimonious definition in which none of the acts she labels as coercion could be mistaken for either popular suppport or utilitarian benefit strengthens her argument. However, to

potential for coercion, the degree to which guerrilla political initiatives afford both the opportunity for voluntary support by civilians and the degree to which civilians respond.

Dilemmas of Popular Support

The inherent dilemma in voluntary civilian compliance, then, is the unavoidable presence of coercion that stems from the threat of armed confrontation that guerrilla activity necessarily poses to the existing government. But that threat may be immediate or remote. Civilian autonomy, the opportunity for voluntary compliance, depends on the guerrilla organization's expectations for its own security. When the military survival of a guerrilla organization is at stake, guerrilla leaders are not likely to sustain their own initiatives for voluntary participation by civilians. Consequently, the opportunity for voluntary support depends to some extent on the military situation facing guerrillas. Close inspection of civilian motives is necessary to establish that any demonstration of popular support is actually voluntary. Since threats to guerrilla security occur and dissipate during the war, popular support will be easier to sustain in one phase and in one place than in others. It would be a mistake to think that an ideological preference for popular support means that preference will be consistently manifested throughout a guerrilla war.

The best example of the opportunity to elicit popular support on a patterned basis is the establishment of a zone safe from enemy attack in which civilians are not caught between two competing authorities. Such zones will suddenly disappear during military reverses. Guerrilla governance has a fluid quality dissimilar to governance in

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make her notion (quoted above) consistent with the concept of coercion, she should have limited it to threats to persons and property rather than attacks on persons and property.

contemporary nation-states, but closely resembling responses to the constant threats faced by European states half a millenium ago (see Tilly: 1992). Closely related to this dilemma is a fundamental contradiction that is built into any guerrilla doctrine that espouses the participation of the people. Popular support engenders civilian expectations for continuous protection, whereas guerrilla military doctrine insists upon the surrender of territory whenever a guerrilla unit confronts a superior conventional force.

The presence of a safe zone is not the only phase of war when guerrillas can elicit voluntary support. If guerrillas are extremely weak, for example, at the start of a guerrilla rebellion when civilians may be as much a threat as a resource, guerrillas may try to persuade at least a few civilians to help them by voluntarily supplying food and intelligence on a regular basis. In addition, even if their safe zone is overrun, guerrillas may still be able to count on continuing, if diminished, voluntary support from civilians.

Belief by guerrillas in an ideology of popular support is an important initial condition for introducing mechanisms to elicit voluntary compliance, such as political education and elected officials. But the factors that make the population crucial to constructing the guerrillas' strategic advantage also introduce constraints on what guerrillas can and want to do. When they initiate rebellion, whether or not they believe in an ideology that commits them to seek popular support, guerrillas have to determine how they will relate to the inhabitants living on the battlefield, particularly if they are being hunted by the government's army. At those times, the mundane daily problems of getting food and supplies regularly and organizing attacks without being caught dominate the priorities of guerrilla interactions with civilians.

Ideology may provide a broad set of choices, but these can only be invoked after guerrillas learn how to stay alive and how to use their immediate environment. In fact, guerrilla leaders discover that they have to invent anew how, in their particular circumstances, they can realize a preference for evoking popular support they adopted earlier. Pat formulas that they may have learned from the doctrines of other guerrilla leaders will not tell them how to relate to civilians in their own war. "'Ideas,'" Samora Machel said, "'come from practice…. We made mistakes and saw how to correct them. We made successes and saw how to improve on them. In doing this, we evolved a theory out of our practice….'" (quoted in Davidson: 1981, 158). Nor will their analyses of what caused the problems in their own country provide them an accurate blueprint for relating to civilians after their rebellion begins.

Other dilemmas grow out of the establishment of structures that can enable voluntary compliance. Organizing compliance advantages those who direct the new structures. Villages are not neutral sites waiting for guerrillas to organize them. In addition to their connections with the existing national government, they have a life of their own, replete with cleavages, disputes and, characteristically, compromises constructed to dampen local conflicts. Civilians who are chosen to collect food for guerrillas, elected to manage villagers, or selected to teach in newly formed schools often take advantage of their new positions to settle scores with other villagers. As Kriger points out, grievances among peasants may inspire agendas other than those promoted by the guerrillas—what she calls "struggles in the struggle" (1992, 170, 170-211).

An initial commitment to gain the support of the people, to educate them about the objectives of the war or to create "new liberated personalities" is not enough to

determine whether guerrillas will cultivate voluntary compliance from civilians during any phase of the struggle, nor whether they will receive it. These dilemmas have to be traced through the political experiences of specific guerrilla organizations in the course of fighting their wars. Satisfying explanations will require comparative treatment of several cases. In this article, I am only taking a first step by examining the experiences of one guerrilla organization, the NRA, in order to explain how it managed the dilemmas of cultivating voluntary compliance it encountered after it initiated the war and how civilians responded to its efforts.

Ideology and the Commitment to Seek Popular Support before the War

As young men, Museveni and his circle of friends developed a set of ideas about revolution through armed struggle built on popular support. Many senior military officers who fought in the Luwero Triangle presently believe some of these ideas supplied their basic objectives for organizing the guerrilla war. An important question is which ideas in particular and to what degree they guided their activities.

The organizers of the NRA, and its predecessor, the Front for the National Salvation of Uganda [FRONASA], drew their basic notions about the necessity and appropriate organization of military action primarily from two sources during the late 1960s and the 1970s, and thus prior to the outbreak of the war.[5] First, they argued that

[5] Determining the ideas of the founders before they rebelled is complicated by the absence of statements they published before the war, aside from Museveni's account of his visit to a FRELIMO liberation zone in 1968 (1971). While there is a risk of post-hoc misinterpretation, analyses written during the war, Museveni's postwar account and recent interviews provide a plausible basis for outlining the founders' prewar perspectives on what to do to reverse the course of events in Uganda and how to fight a liberation war. Museveni's ideas played the most important role in the construction of the ideology that first informed the objectives and activities of FRONASA and then of the NRA. However, discussions with other participants indicate that both public perceptions of his role and his own accounts have understated the personal contributions of his associates.

Ugandan politics demonstrated that the governance of Uganda could not be made democratic without being fundamentally reorganized. Second, they felt that a protracted people's war on the model of FRELIMO's struggle for independence from the Portuguese provided the appropriate model for conducting the war. There is an important tension between the outcomes projected by these sources. The critique of Uganda could be satisfied through a nationalist reformist agenda. Liberation war, as FRELIMO understood it before its triumph, stressed fundamental individual and societal change, the creation of new mentalities and a socialist state. Nevertheless, both perspectives predisposed the organizers of the NRA to place high value on seeking voluntary civilian compliance as part of the organization of guerrilla war.

The critique of Ugandan society and politics that emerges from the writings of Museveni and his collaborators holds that Uganda became "backward" as a result of the underdevelopment created by the transformation of trade and later control of Africa by European states ("The Ten-Point Programme": 1985, 42-43; Museveni: 1997, 34-35). Rather than concentrate on development to achieve the substantive interests of the people, colonial rulers, post-independence politicians and military officers maintained power by exacerbating sectarian divisions on the basis of religion, region and ethnicity ("Towards a Free and Democratic Uganda": n.d., 5-6; Kategaya: 1990, 122-27; "The Ten-Point Programme": 1985, 48-49; Museveni: 1997, 36-43). Elections based on these divisions only diverted popular attention from pressing problems of poverty and lack of

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It is remarkable how early their basic ideas formed. Museveni claims he and Eriya Kategaya, his childhood friend and probably his closest associate throughout the war and afterwards, raised the question of armed struggle with the Chief Minister of the Ankole Kingdom in 1966 while still high school students (Museveni: 1997, 19). Their decision to attend university at Dar es Salaam rather than the more prestigious Makerere in Kampala, reflected their early interest in progressive ideas (1997: 19, 23-25). Both included law as one of their first year subjects, a field that was not then available at Makerere. Kategaya continued in law, Museveni in political science.

development. These divisions reflect cleavages familiar to Ugandans among Catholic, Protestant and Muslim adherents, between Baganda and less advantaged ethnic groups, and between Northerners and Southerners that (somewhat inaccurately) mapped linguistic on regional boundaries. In short, the analysis was immediately familiar and attractive to many Ugandans, because it captured their general understanding of the causes of the ever-increasing disorder to which Uganda seemed subject after independence (Kasozi: 1994). The analysis called for finding some way to reach the people by interacting with them in terms of their "real" interests.

FRELIMO's war of liberation provided Museveni with an example of how this could be accomplished and with contacts that later proved helpful for training members of FRONASA. In September 1968, during his second year at university, he arranged to visit safe zones under FRELIMO's control with a few fellow students (Museveni: 1971, 24; Museveni, 1997: 28, 30).[6] In his published account, he uses Fanon's notion of liberation through violence to explain how the war had liberated Mozambican peasants from their colonial mentality to become guerrilla officers with "wide horizons and great balance of mind," no longer regarding "parochial" (tribal) identities as important (Museveni: 1971, 7, 10-11, 15).[7] "Revolutionary struggles," he adds, "purify whole societies" of social disorder (1971, 12). In a prescient remark that became one of the

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[6] In Sowing the Mustard Seed, Museveni says he made the trip in December (1997, 28) and names six students who went with him (only one from Uganda and apparently none who later joined either FRONASA or the NRA). In his published version of the student essay reporting the trip, he gives the date as September-October 1968, but also refers within this article to an event he apparently witnessed on "Christmas Day…1968" (Museveni: 1971, 24, 22). He says they were six, though later says he and four others did "interviews" (Museveni: 1971, 7, 24). In his introduction to the collection of student essays, Nathan Shamuyarira gives the date as September 1968 and says six students made the trip (1971, vi).

[7] He explicitly contrasts them to Ugandans who are unable "to get beyond the tribe" (Museveni, 1971, 16).

organizing principles for the NRA, he suggests that "armies divorced from the people's interests" habitually loot (1971, 13). "Conscious activists" are needed "to arouse the masses" (Museveni: 1971, 8). Commanders and leaders must join "the fighting masses instead of staying away from the scene of the struggle. This interaction will mean mutual exchange and mutual teaching" (Museveni: 1971, 20). To mobilise the masses, "[t]he commander must suffer the same privations as the ordinary fighter" (Museveni: 1971, 21). Many of these ideas were to re-emerge a decade later in Museveni's explanations to NRA fighters about their relations with civilians and in the efforts he invested in gaining the support of civilians. His first experience with FRELIMO left Museveni in no doubt about the importance of gaining popular support during guerrilla war.

The formation of FRONASA to prepare for a guerrilla war was a direct response to Idi Amin's seizure of power in 1971 and to Museveni's disagreements over strategy with Milton Obote, the former Ugandan president and, albeit briefly, Museveni's former employer. It broadened the influence of FRELIMO's ideas on the Ugandans who officered the NRA. At first, the coup d'etat united Museveni and Obote through the idea of armed struggle. But within a few months they had split over whether the armed struggle should be a guerrilla or a conventional war—whether the war should be fought inside Uganda or by invasion from outside and also whether the soldiers should receive political education (Museveni: 1997, 53-54). Museveni's article, written two years before the coup, had hinted that Uganda could not gain liberation without a people's war similar to the one being fought in Mozambique (1971: 16, 24). His demands about how resistance to Amin should be organized indicate that in 1971 he continued to believe strongly in many of the basic ideas for guerrilla war that he had learned from FRELIMO.

FRONASA originally consisted of Museveni and the small cohort who had gone to secondary school with him and others who had joined his political discussion group at university. Museveni made use of his FRELIMO contacts to send 30 recruits to Mozambique during 1971 and 1972 for political education and military training, thus transmitting FRELIMO's ideas about guerrilla warfare to a group of Ugandans ready to play a vital role in changing their country (Ngoga: 1997, 202-04). The newly trained cadre were infiltrated into Uganda, but met with disaster at every turn (Ngoga: 1997, 206-12; Museveni: 1997, 76-86). Meanwhile, Museveni shook the faith of many of his cadre by agreeing to join Obote's ill-fated and conventional invasion of Uganda in 1972 without ensuring that those inside Uganda had been informed (Ngoga: 1997, 207-09).[8]

FRONASA ceased to operate from March 1973 until 1976. After FRELIMO took power, Museveni sent another new group of 28 recruits (including his brother) to Mozambique for training. He provided most of their political education himself (Ngoga: 1997, 212, 213; Museveni: 1997, 89-90)). The surviving members of the three cohorts trained by FRELIMO, particularly the last, later filled many of the senior positions in the NRA High Command. Thus, the basic tenets of FRELIMO's approach to guerrilla war with its emphasis on politicizing military officials and persuading civilians to give support voluntarily were well-known to many of the officers who recruited and trained the NRA.[9]

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[8] Museveni noted that he had not been told about the invasion until the day it was scheduled to be launched and he hoped that, even if it failed, an area in the Western Region could be liberated and used as a base for guerrilla war (Museveni: 1997, 61). The fact that he was not included in the planning indicates that in 1972 the Tanzanian government did not consider FRONASA an important factor in overthrowing Amin.

[9] The most important if unanticipated consequence of reviving FRONASA in 1976 was Tanzania's 1978 decision to send its army into Uganda to punish Amin for his attacks on northern Tanzania. Two Ugandan forces, FRONASA and the larger Kikosi Maalum [KM], the UPC military wing, were invited to accompany the Tanzanian Peoples' Defence Forces [TPDF] in order to legitimize its invasion. When the

Museveni and People's War in Uganda

Leaders of the NRA have always claimed they fought a "people's war," based on active solicitation of popular support. Writing six months after the war began, Museveni argues its relevance to the situation in Uganda: "The strategy of the National Resistance Army (NRA), which is the armed wing of the National Resistance Movement, is that of Protracted People's War….whereby popular forces—ie, those forces supported by the masses—wage a protracted war against unpopular elements in power" (1990, 7, 9). "[T]he basic weapon," he adds, "is the support of the people and their political consciousness" (1990, 10). But he offers no discussion of how the support of the people will further the struggle. All he can think to suggest is that people "in heavily contested areas…should run away either to neighbouring villages or even to neighbouring countries until the dictatorship is defeated" (1990, 17).

Instead, he focuses on military aspects of protracted war—the familiar stages of guerrilla, mobile and conventional war, which the NRA High Command carefully incorporated into their strategy for the remainder of the war (1990, 9-10, 15-16; Ondoga: 1998, 57). The choice of this strategy took into account the NRA's considerable weaknesses by comparison to the military, financial and international resources that the Ugandan state had at its disposal (see Ondoga: 1998, 25-26). But the doctrine is not used to explain why or how guerrillas should encourage voluntary compliance by the people who do not run away. In Museveni's words, eliciting popular support amounts to

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invaders reached Uganda's Western region in 1979, FRONASA leaders took the opportunity to recruit as many followers as they could—as did KM's officials when they reached the Northern region.

educating the people to understand why the NRA "political line…is a correct political line which will eventually be accepted by all…." (1990, 15).

The "protracted" aspect of the people's war doctrine—rather than conventional war—does provide Museveni with answers to two of the NRA's immediate problems during the first months of the war. Because the TPDF had stayed on in its role as the guarantor of order for the Ugandan regime after Obote took power, it became a target in the NRA's first attacks on army and police posts and quickly struck back. Museveni wanted to avoid the awkwardness of continuing to attack the army of a foreign government from which he hoped to gain support and which he could not hope to defeat in direct encounters. So he explains that a protracted war allows the NRA to suspend operations until the TPDF is withdrawn when the war will become an entirely Ugandan affair (1990, 11). [10] Secondly, Museveni explains that a protracted war allows the NRA to respond to the advantage the Obote government gained from its strategy of expanding its armed forces and concentrating them in Kampala while dispersing the ex-FRONASA fighters to bases far from the capital (1990, 11). His fighters needed time to desert and rejoin his forces in the Luwero Triangle.

Nevertheless, the stages of a protracted war provide an important insight into the changing relationships between guerrillas and civilians during the Ugandan war—and

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[10] After overthrowing Amin, the Tanzanians installed a transitional regime in Uganda in 1979 that prepared elections intended to restore the country as a legitimate civilian regime. By the time the elections occurred in December 1980, Obote and the UPC had seized the levers of power, both military and civilian, changed the vote totals and declared themselves elected. As a result of FRONASA's role in the war against Amin, Museveni had become a minister and some of his fighters had become part of the Uganda National Liberation Army [UNLA], though they were harassed, assigned to remote garrisons or even killed. When it was decided that the 1980 elections would be fought on a multi-party basis, Museveni and his associates hurriedly formed the Uganda Patriotic Movement [UPM]. The party won only one seat in Parliament. The TPDF provided security during and for six months after the transitional regime, pulling out most of their forces in June 1981.

probably all guerrilla wars. The possibilities for eliciting popular support vary, depending on whether a guerrilla, mobile, or conventional war is being fought. Evaluation of these relationships must be treated differently. But the direct relationship is not between the stage of war and the problems of eliciting popular support. The important variable is the presence or absence of a safe zone. It is clear that the creation and defense of a safe zone is intimately linked to the size and effectiveness of the army—another way of describing the stages of war. A safe zone allows for more open and free relationships and thus for the opportunity for more intensive efforts to elicit voluntary compliance.

In the NRA's case, the rebellion passed through five phases during which relations between guerrillas and civilians differed dramatically.[11] These phases correspond to the different stages of people's war, as it was fought in Uganda. In the first phase (approximately February - August 1981), a tiny group of fighters dependent on a few local contacts entered the Luwero Triangle and created a civilian network. In the second phase (approximately September 1981 - February 1983), the NRA gradually created a fluid "semi-safe zone" in which it could establish open and democratic political organizations in the villages.[12]

The third phase (March 1983 to approximately December 1983) involved the end of the safe zone and the mass evacuation of civilians into the northern and western parts of

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[11] Informants warned me that the relations between civilians and guerrillas were not organized in the same way by commanders and political commissars in different zones nor by civilians in different villages, particularly during the early phases of the war. Until intensive field research in local areas within the Luwero Triangle has been carried out, analysis can only provide a general picture that may be contradicted in specific localities.

[12] By "semi-safe zone" I mean an area in which guerrillas are the dominant power, but are unable to prevent attacks that disrupt civilians along the borders of the zone.

the Luwero Triangle, followed by the NRA escorting most civilians out of the war zones. The fourth phase (approximately February 1984 until March 1985) involved successful military operations in both depopulated and populated areas in the Luwero Triangle and raids in nearby districts with limited NRA attention to the cultivation of civilian support in the Luwero Triangle. In the last phase (April 1985 through the end of the war), the NRA established a second front in the Western region, which soon amounted to a regional safe zone. It also invested great efforts into creating mechanisms of popular support there and renewed them in the Luwero Triangle, as civilians returned home. In the final months it engaged in conventional war to take Kampala and then control over the country. Activities creating popular support during the first two phases are discussed later in this paper.

Ethnicity and Popular Support

Guerrillas committed to eliciting voluntary compliance from civilians have to attend to the substance of persuasion. Their task is more difficult where civilians hold ethnic beliefs that identify the guerrillas as outsiders and that prescribe a different set of political priorities from those the guerrillas advocate. In an area where shared perceptions of ethnic differences are also considered politically important, a guerrilla organization will encounter additional difficulties in persuading local inhabitants to participate actively in its support.

The choice of the Luwero Triangle, part of the former kingdom of Buganda, as the site for rebellion created several dilemmas for the NRA in its quest for popular

support.[13] The local population consists of a complex ethnic mix including Baganda, who see themselves as the rightful holders of local power, agricultural labor migrants and nomadic cattle herders, many of whom have lived in the area for several generations.[14] Over the years, class differences have sharpened ethnic tensions. While local identities are changing, particularly among migrants who purchase land, "strangers" are typically regarded as members of ethnic groups from whence they came and are thought to share the political loyalties local inhabitants presume their fellow ethnics back home hold (for example, see informant 2/10).

The small group of NRA (then PRA) guerrillas who entered the Luwero Triangle in the first month had been selected on the basis of friendship, trust and recruitment into FRONASA or the UPM. Local inhabitants perceived most of them as members of ethnic groups resident in the Western region, most notably Banyankole—in other words as outsiders. To complicate matters, a rival guerrilla group, the Uganda Freedom Movement [UFM], whose leaders and members were unambiguously perceived as Baganda and fighting for the ethnic goals of the Baganda, had already organized and had created a rural base in the same general area (Kasozi: 1994, 166).

Both groups of guerrillas and most civilians in the Luwero Triangle wanted to get rid of the existing UPC government. But a majority of civilians and guerrillas in the UFM shared reasons that differed from the NRA's rationale for overthrowing it. Most

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[13] The Luwero Triangle posed the difficulties of unfamiliar terrain and language for most of the first members of the NRA, which also caused problems for gaining civilian support. The location also deprived the NRA of direct access to any sanctuary outside Uganda, making it that much more dependent on gaining support from local inhabitants.

[14] The war caused an enormous displacement of civilians living in the Luwero Triangle making it difficult to know whether the current ethnic proportions of the population—as indicated in the 1991 Population Census—resemble either the proportions that existed before the war, or what local residents perceived them to be. The 1980 Census did not ask questions about ethnic identity and is generally considered unreliable.

Baganda, peasants and royalty alike, vehemently opposed the UPC government because Obote, during his first government in the 1960s, had forced the Kabaka into exile, and had abolished his throne as well as Buganda's special status. They saw the restoration of the Kabaka, the former king of Buganda, as an opportunity to make their culture whole and perhaps gain economic benefits from ethnic unity through a return to federal government at the national level. On the other hand, the small group of FRONASA members and UPM sympathizers who formed the NRA regarded the restoration and federalism as part of the old politics they rejected. In the NRA Code of Conduct, fighters were prohibited from engaging in "tribalism or any other form of sectarianism. We must be very stern on this point" ("Code of Conduct for the NRA": 1982, 2). At his first meeting with NRA officials, one farmer remembered them being asked by villagers whether they would "really be able to liberate Baganda, since they were not Baganda." They replied that "we have not come to liberate Baganda, but to fight dictatorial rule in the whole of Uganda. For example, rigging elections is not for the Baganda only, it's a national issue" (1/70).

To overcome this difference during the war, NRA leaders argued that the Baganda should support them because the NRA was fighting for democracy. Victory would therefore permit Ugandans to decide whether or not to restore the Kabakaship after the war.[15] It is difficult to know what Baganda thought of this formulation at the time. Most Baganda presently associated with the Movement government and aware that it had gone a surprising distance to restore the cultural, though not the political, status of the

[15] The issue of the dominance of Buganda has been central to Ugandan politics since the beginning of the colonial period. Too close an association with Baganda interests would have made it difficult for the NRA to cultivate popular support outside Buganda.

Kabaka after the war say this was also their position during the war (1/37). But some Baganda peasants remember efforts to gain their support differently. One clan leader who went to secret meetings in the first few months of the war insisted "that Museveni promised to restore our Kabaka and that's why everyone supported him" (3/53). Another Muganda, now an elected official and strong Movement supporter, insisted that Museveni had personally promised "he would remain loyal to Buganda after the war, would restore the Buganda state [that is, adopt federalism], restore the kingdom and return the properties of Buganda [seized by Obote in 1966]" (2/26). A Muganda farmer remembered NRA officials, all Baganda, saying they were fighting to restore the Kabakaship (3/56).

Museveni went some distance to overcome the obstacle of local perceptions that he headed a Banyankole dominated organization by negotiating a merger of the PRA with former President Yusuf Lule's Uganda Freedom Fighters [UFF], an externally based Baganda group.[16] But the UFM remained a competitor of the NRA, strengthened by its unambiguous support for the political and cultural objectives of Baganda. It operated in a nearby area and competed with the NRA for the support of both Baganda soldiers and Baganda civilians. One Muganda civilian who became a stalwart supporter and later an officer in the NRA, said that if Andrew Kayiira, the leader of the UFM, had prevented his soldiers from using guns to threaten civilians, "she would have gone with him, as he was a Muganda" (1/28). The NRA had sporadic discussions with the UFM over several

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[16] The merger, which took place in June 1981, replaced the PRA with the NRA and created the NRM as the external wing. Lule, who was living in exile, became the National Chairman of the NRM, while Museveni was made the Vice-Chairman and Chairman of the High Command of the NRA. Lule, who had been the first interim president of Uganda after the overthrow of Amin, had gained an extraordinary degree of loyalty from Baganda.

issues. In August 1982 they held an unsuccessful conference to try to unify the two groups. In an effort to gain popular support, the NRA arranged for several civilian village officials to attend. The issue of ethnicity was discussed and many Baganda were persuaded to stay with the NRA (Museveni: 1997, 150).[17]

Another source of ethnic concern to Baganda civilians was their perception that control of the NRA remained in the hands of Banyankole officers, despite the growing recruitment of Baganda soldiers who soon were the majority of fighters. "The population was Baganda, yet the High Command was not" (3/13). Both soldiers and civilians complained about the scarcity of Baganda officers—a few fighters even deserted to the UFM (Ondoga: 1998, 30). Once NRA leaders demonstrated they were prepared to promote Baganda as officers when they were trained, dissatisfaction among Baganda civilians in the Luwero Triangle was reduced, but lingering doubts remained. Nevertheless, for many civilians ethnicity apparently remained their primary basis for popular support.

The NRA decided to make Haji Musa Kigongo, a Muganda whose only previously involvement had been through the UPM, its most senior civilian official, and one of only three named in the agreement with Lule. The appointment was an effort to demonstrate that the PRA and NRA recognized Baganda ethnic concerns, even though the NRA insisted it was above ethnic politics. But when Lule died in January 1985, only a year before the war ended and even though the NRA's fortunes were improving rapidly,

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[17] Although the conference failed to unite the two groups, it established separate operating areas which helped establish the eastern edge of the Luwero Triangle. The UFM was destroyed by the UNLA the following month (September 1982).

"Baganda felt there was nothing left to fight for" (1/9).[18] Soon after, the NRA arranged for the son of the Kabaka who had been removed by Obote to visit the war zone in part to reassure Baganda civilians and exiles of their good intentions (Kategaya quoted in Ondoga: 1998, 31).

The contrast between the armies of the guerrillas and the state cemented the deep commitment Baganda civilians in the Luwero Triangle felt toward the NRA. The UPC government treated them all as enemies in alliance with the NRA. UPC youth-wingers who were given weapons "would then start hunting people" (Informant quoted in Tidemand: 1994, 74). Rural Baganda inhabitants of all classes repeatedly spoke of unprovoked UNLA outrages. A wealthy farmer and trained film processor said that as soon as the Tanzanian soldiers were withdrawn from a roadblock near his workshop, their UNLA replacements warned villagers that "they were hot and would finish them. Immediately they started to rape and steal" (1/59). A youth reported that "they had a hard life and were always running away while UNLA soldiers looted their property and killed people. This caused youth to join the rebels" (2/15). As one NRA officer put it, "the UNLA didn't discriminate. They treated everyone as an enemy, so we were supported" (L/2.8). By making ethnicity central to its strategy to defeat the guerrillas, the government helped dissolve the dilemma created by differences between the political agendas of the NRA and Baganda.

In addition, the NRA faced a complex agenda in trying to persuade members identifying with other ethnic groups to support their cause. When it entered the Luwero Triangle, the NRA made its initial contacts among the Baganda, in part because they

[18] What this meant of course was that Museveni rather than Lule would become President of Uganda, if the NRA won the war.

were the inhabitants most opposed to the Obote government. Most of the committees NRA officials created to supply soldiers with food (as discussed below) were led by Baganda. But that appeared to place the NRA in alliance with Baganda on issues that divided migrants from Baganda. To some degree, tensions that already existed between Baganda landowners and their migrant laborers from the North were introduced into the new struggle created by the NRA's rebellion.

Popular explanations of why migrants liked or disliked the NRA were also shaped by the relations their compatriots at "home" were thought to have with the UPC government. Thus, Alur migrants to Luwero were regarded as enemies of the NRA, first because their language is close to Acholi and Langi, the languages of ethnic groups considered to be core supporters of the UPC government. And second, because they were believed to have voted for the UPC in 1980 (Ondoga: 1998, 60). Most Lugbara migrants also come from the Northern region. But they were often regarded as neutral or friendly toward the NRA, because they spoke a language unintelligible to Acholi and Langi, and because they were thought to have supported the Democratic Party [DP] in the 1980 elections. For many Baganda these distinctions did not matter. For example, a Muganda school teacher and landowner, who held a middle-level position in the NRM at the time of interview, observed that "they were just seen as Northerners, " and added, "when the NRA came, we were happy they were trying to drive out Northerners" (2/10-11). For many local inhabitants, the cultural similarities between Banyarwanda migrants and Banyankole and the membership of many Banyarwanda in the NRA made it easy to presume that Banyarwanda were always allies of the NRA.

Eventually, most members of other groups living in the Luwero Triangle who did not flee gave their support to the NRA. But in many places the process took longer than it did with Baganda and by the time they had declared their loyalty through active participation, the NRA had established a safe zone, making it a dangerous opponent to anyone who did not sympathize with its objectives. Those who did not flee may have felt that the monopoly of force in the hands of the NRA, even if it proved to be temporary, made it prudent to support them. So, to some extent, support, particularly of nonBaganda was likely to have been coerced.

The Creation of Clandestine Committees

The first structures NRA (then PRA) officers created to connect themselves to civilians in their areas of operation were clandestine village committees. Instituted from the beginning of the first phase of the war, they demonstrate the importance NRA leaders placed on eliciting voluntary compliance from civilians and the widespread enthusiastic voluntary responses many civilians throughout the Luwero Triangle gave. A mixture of practical necessity and ideological conviction characterized the formation of these committees and a blend of willingness and coercion marked the variety of civilian reactions.

The immediate task of these committees was to arrange a regular supply of food for guerrilla units, for as long as the fighters remained near their villages. As Kategaya put it, "'[t]hese RCs [the clandestine committees were later called Resistance Committees] were born out of necessity to survive during the struggle" (quoted from New Vision, 9 October 1991, in Tidemand: 1994, 81). But NRA leaders also wanted to

use the committees to explain to villagers the reasons why they were fighting. One political commissar [PC] in the NRA insisted that "the clandestine committees were not set up due to the food problem, but for political support—so we could expand our political network" (3/22). When secrecy and security could be assured, commanders had these village committees arrange political meetings addressed by NRA officials.

In their first weeks in the field, members of the NRA depended on a few previously arranged civilian contacts to hide and feed them, but also quickly managed to persuade other civilians to help. By May 1981 the original 35 or so members of the NRA had expanded to 200 soldiers, divided into several zonal units, and supported by a civilian network that extended through the Luwero Triangle (Museveni: 1997, 133; Ondoga: 1998, 35). Their numbers included former FRONASA officers who had deserted their UNLA posts and found their way to guerrilla units, as well as local youth who had become fighters (3/15, 4/69).

Most civilians recruited to form these clandestine committees portrayed NRA guerrillas as eager to use their first encounters with them to explain why they were fighting. A woman whose husband had recently been killed by UNLA soldiers remembered that when she met NRA officials for the first time they told her that "the NRA would fight for peace. Please join us" (1/66). Later Kigongo told her and others "to make a committee in their village" (1/66).). A farmer from a different part of the Luwero Triangle recalled that in his first meeting, two NRA officers said "we have come to fight the dictatorial rule of Obote's government and asked people to co-operate with them" (4/16). Another farmer from a third area said that when he first encountered them,

NRA officials told members of his village that "since the people are also angry, they should join us" (2/1).

Upon entering a new area, the NRA unit would select one of its fighters, preferably one who had relatives in the village, or who was known in it, to make contact with someone who could solicit additional trusted contacts (L/2.5, 3/34). As an NRA officer explained, "we would locate a prominent person and talk to him at night, asking him to mobilize peasants to collect food for us" (L/1.2). NRA officers interrogated potential contacts and sometimes gave them "small missions" to see if they could be trusted (L/2.5). Then the commander would send his political commissioner to discuss how the contact could find trusted villagers to create a secret committee (L/2.5). After that had been done, a detachment would set up a camp in a spot identified by the contact. However, often the units did not have the luxury of following careful precautions. Where soldiers were hungry, "they assembled committees because they needed them" (1/33).

In one area a civilian, who later joined the NRA, explained that he was approached by the original contact, a farmer he knew well, to attend a meeting at which they formed themselves into a clandestine committee (2/8). A civilian in another area who later became a clandestine committee chair was approached by his friend to attend a large meeting with NRA officials. He was persuaded by what he heard, talked with close friends and brought them to meetings with an NRA official. Later they were told to form a secret committee containing several members and to organize food collections (1/71). In most cases, the NRA left it to the contact to choose the rest of the committee. When the unit was small, the committee could easily raise enough food without going to the rest of the village. But as the number of fighters increased, the system had to be broadened

by collecting food from the whole village (1/72), or in less fertile areas, by expanding the area over which the committee operated (2/8-9).

The choice of contacts was highly significant for how the NRA organized relations with civilians and whom they enrolled in their struggle. The original contacts usually became chairs of the secret committees, and later were frequently elected as chairs by their villagers. Members of NRA units consistently chose Baganda opinion leaders, usually relatively large land-owners living in their villages, as their original contacts. "When we started," Kategaya observed, "we used to go and approach influential people in the village" (quoted from New Vision, 9 October 1991, in Tidemand: 1994, 81). One nonMuganda officer, who had been in FRONASA before joining the NRA early in its first phase, explained that "since age and prominence are deeply rooted in Baganda culture, you have to meet well-to-do elders when you enter a village. So we were just responding to the culture" (3/18).

Every chair of a clandestine or elected committee in the Luwero Triangle whom I interviewed was a Muganda and a landowner. Since the NRA apparently made no effort to control the chair's choice of additional committee members (3/63), they were probably drawn from the same social stratum—and probably held the same conservative views. Despite the NRA's attention to ideology about liberation through people's war and fundamental change in social values, it mobilized "the village establishment" (Tidemand: 1994, 85). For its relations with civilians, the NRA chose its nationalist reformist agenda, though the ambiguity of its apparent compromises with Baganda whom it enlisted as allies left unclear how reformist it intended to be.

Whether food was voluntarily contributed, coerced or purchased from villagers is a delicate and complicated issue. It poses an important question in determining whether the NRA elicited a system of voluntary compliance and whether civilians responded voluntarily. The system appears to have varied among villages and during phases of the war, making most general observations misleading. Nevertheless, in most areas the NRA did not collect food directly from farmers. They left that to the village committees they had established. They apparently did not set quotas either—other than sometimes to tell clandestine committee chairs that they had not received enough (4/64). It is puzzling that they did not try to control such a basic resource more systematically. It may have been an indicator of the generosity peasant informants reported from almost everywhere in the Luwero Triangle. "Peasants hated the government, so they gave food willingly" (1/30). And, it may also be an indicator of NRA policy to generate voluntary compliance. As one officer put it, "we never told the village committee how to collect food from villagers. Museveni wouldn't allow it" (3/19).

Some NRA officers said they paid for food until they ran out of money and then promised to recompense villagers (L/1.2). Museveni insisted that "[w]e paid for everything because we did not want to use 'voluntary contributions' from the peasants for fear of the system being abused" (1997, 132). Other officers admitted that while money was sometimes paid for food, in many areas it was not, especially later when the NRA became larger and the war reduced available food supplies (3/19, 3/34). Running out of money created a difficult moment in creating trust. As an NRA officer remembered it, their response was "to use the committees to convince people to give us food" (L/2.7)

On the other hand, most committee members insisted that everyone gave food voluntarily and generously—even when I wondered whether poor farmers could afford to do so or whether some farmers might prefer to let others do the giving. In general, committee members claimed that the amount given was left entirely to the individual, though in a few cases, the size of the donation seems to have been specified. One chair reported that his committee collected money from villagers and bought food and cigarettes for soldiers (1/72). The moral obligation to feed visitors who were helping them probably inclined many peasants to contribute. Most peasants I talked with insisted that giving food was the least they could do for those who were fighting for them and furthermore, since their sons had become fighters, they could not refuse to give generously (3/64).

However, it would be difficult to deny that peasants felt an underlying sense of coercion, even though it is understandable that they would not want to be open about it. Several peasants nervously admitted to me that they felt coerced into giving food, especially when guerrillas came to them directly. In one such case, a farmer said they did not threaten him directly, but "because of the weapons they were carrying, he would not dare to say anything." He added that "they promised when they formed the government, they would pay him back," but no records were kept (3/59-60). Another farmer, living in the same village, bluntly said he "had to contribute food. If you did not, how would you live?" (3/72). A third farmer, living in a different though nearby village, said "everyone gave food, it was an order. We had to. No one violated the order. This order came from the guerrillas to their contact and we got orders from the village committee….No one threatened any punishments, but I understood there would be a punishment if one did not

give" (3/67-68). Tidemand reported an informant who said that he and other catechists feared they would be considered "non-supporters and possibly taken into the guerrilla camps and imprisoned," if they did not supply them with food when directly asked by guerrillas (1994, 73).

Despite the contradictions, each of these answers is plausible. The NRA leaders were committed to their belief that they could win the support of civilians only if they did not steal from them. Indeed, the second regulation in the NRA Code of Conduct requires fighters "[n]ever take anything, in the form of money or property, from members of the public. Not even somebody's kikajo (sugarcane) or menvu (sweet bananas)….Ask the owners if you must and always offer to pay" (1982, 1). In a highly publicized arrangement the NRA promised to pay after the war for cows taken from nomadic herders in 1983 when their fighters were literally starving. Records were kept of the cows taken and the herders were eventually repaid (Ondoga: 1998, 89). The NRA did receive cash donations from Ugandans in Kampala and abroad, so they had the funds to pay for some goods in cash for the first, and perhaps part of the second, phase of the war. A significant indication of the NRA's sensitivity toward maintaining popular support was their insistence that after victory they would repay civilians. But the NRA restricted this obligation to large gifts, such as cows.

Farmers became increasingly willing to support the NRA as they learned more about it and about why they were fighting. Several farmers, particularly in the southern part of the Luwero Triangle, said they gardens were so abundant that they had extra crops to give away. This is particularly plausible since once the roads to Kampala were cut off, they had few outlets for selling their crops. Still, all this "voluntary" activity was under

surveillance by the guerrillas and early in the war by the government. Other villagers would know who made donations and who did not. There was a constant risk of being denounced as a sympathizer with the UPC or with the guerrillas. In virtually every village there were farmers who had been forced to flee because of their UPC connections. Produce from their farms was immediately turned over to feed NRA units. Few wavering donors would have failed to understand that message.

As the first phase progressed and the NRA began to develop a safe zone in the Luwero Triangle, they intensified their political efforts to reach villagers. The NRA placed a PC in every unit, connected by a hierarchy to a Chief Political Commissar, while also subject to their immediate commander. PCs were there from the beginning of the war (4/53). The idea of political commissars had come from observing FRELIMO's methods of politicization (4/53). They were responsible for the political education of both the fighters and civilians. They learned their role through discussion of the war and Uganda's development, rather than through special training (3/23). NRA leaders believed that a politicized army was necessary in order that soldiers would not attack civilians. Having civilians see that their soldiers behaved differently from those of UNLA was central to the NRA's strategy of gaining popular support. Their approach was to ensure that soldiers understood why they were fighting. PCs organized civilian committees, but they did not handle food collections.

According to one PC, still holding a high position in the government at the time of interview, "we couldn't create a political network unless the population understood. Without their help, we couldn't get information about the enemy. We had to make them part and parcel of the struggle" (3/22). At first political mobilization was channeled

through the secret committees. An NRA officer observed that "we explain to the committee and they tell the villagers" (3/4). He added they were expected "to spread the gospel [the NRA objectives], but to skip the negative ones [UPC sympathizers]" (3/18). When they felt secure, leaders started to use the clandestine committees to organize public meetings at which NRA political commissars could give political education to civilians (3/23). Nevertheless, as one PC put it, "the actions of UNLA soldiers covered more ground for political mobilization than the PCs did" (3/34).

From accounts of political education sessions held by PCs, they appear to have had the character of rallies rather than discussions. The PC would give a speech, explaining the objectives of the NRA, discuss why Uganda had not developed and provide information on recent battles. A highly placed NRA official, still in the government at the time interviewed, said there were many issues "we couldn't explain to peasants, though we could and did for Makerere graduates who joined us" (4/53). Sometimes a PC would use an episode involving misconduct by a soldier to teach a lesson to civilians. In one case, a soldier had gotten drunk and fired his rifle into the air in the middle of the night. The villagers, thinking they were being attacked by UNLA, panicked and ran away. The PC brought the soldier and told the villagers they had done "the right thing in the right time." He apologized and said the soldier would be punished for violating orders (4/30). The meeting undoubtedly accomplished its main objective—to demonstrate that the NRA expected its soldiers to protect villagers, not harm or frighten them. But the session was characteristic in not providing any opportunity for civilians to ask questions or comment. The PC's remarks had to be translated from English to Luganda (3/30), though it is unclear whether that increased or decreased their

significance to the audience. In general, political education by PCs seems to have been closer to guidance than to deliberation. Political education certainly generated enthusiastic popular support. But without direct civilian participation, it could not have been expected to change basic social values.

The Creation of Elected Resistance Committees

The NRA's conversion of clandestine committees into democratically elected RCs during the second phase of the war demonstrates the NRA's interest in expanding the voluntary compliance of civilians. The presence of elected RCs in villages throughout the Luwero Triangle shows that civilians accepted the measure. However, the motives of the NRA leadership in instituting this change were not only to introduce a measure of democracy, but also to eliminate the imputation of their responsibility for decisions by committee chairs that were poorly received by villagers. Perhaps partly for that reason, NRA officials scrupulously avoided making any effort to influence the choice of committee members. There was no demand for democracy from civilians. Rather they elected their committees because an authority they trusted told them to do so.

The gradual creation of a safe zone, in which open political life could occur, created a different basis for relations between NRA guerrillas and civilians, even if enemy attacks continued to disrupt village life. During this period the national government no longer exercised any authority in the Luwero Triangle outside the towns. By this time UPC chiefs and youth-wingers had fled or been killed. The chiefly hierarchy no longer collected taxes, judged cases or provided social services. "Life was like you had another republic in Uganda" (L/1.3). The clandestine committees had

become the only civilian political structures in the villages. Their members no longer needed to remain secret—so long as the UPC government did not return.

The NRA had several choices to fill the vacuum created by the withdrawal of the agents of the national government. Each choice amounted to a different pattern for its governance of civilians in the safe zone, though it appears to have not considered most of them seriously. The NRA could have governed the Luwero Triangle directly through its military units. It could have given its PCs the central role in governance of the Luwero Triangle, perhaps combining the roles of political mobilizer and district commissioner.[19] Or, it could have introduced its main political decision-making body, the National Resistance Council [NRC], as a central legislative body to govern the Luwero Triangle.[20] Instead, it decided to let villagers manage their civil affairs autonomously, though subordinate to military necessities. Of all these choices, elected RCs introduced the greatest opportunity for voluntary compliance.

The decision by the NRA to introduce democracy into the Luwero Triangle by having villagers elect their committees was a fundamental change, as well as a solution to filling the authority vacuum in the villages it controlled. Democratic government had never existed before in villages in Buganda—or anywhere else in Uganda, for that matter. Now that the existence of a safe zone reduced the importance of keeping the identities of civilian activists secret, the NRA could demonstrate that it was prepared to act on the

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[19] After it took power, the NRM introduced an official, who combined these two functions. The position was originally called the Special District Administrator [SDA] and now is the Resident District Commissioner [RDC]. The incumbent serves in each district as the President's special representative.

[20] Originally the NRC was the clandestine network supplying the NRA from Kampala. Its members fled to the Luwero Triangle when they found it too dangerous to continue operating there. It was then reconstituted to discuss political issues as a counterpart to the High Command, which handled military issues. Its membership during the war was set at 60% noncombatants and 40% military. Under the NRM

convictions it claimed to be defending. "The whole idea was that we were a democratic country, so to begin with we should create democracy in areas we controlled" (2/23). The decision allowed the NRA to show other Ugandans how decisively it differed from the UPC government.

The decision also solved an unexpected dilemma that had complicated the NRA's original decision to set up a political network through clandestine committees. The NRA was closely linked to the clandestine chairs, because they had been the NRA's original choices as contacts in the villages. When villagers complained that some chairs had taken advantage of their positions, the NRA received a share of the blame. A chair with a personal grudge could tell the local commander that his rival was working for the UPC. In following the NRA's advice to select committee members they trusted, the chairs often turned to friends and relatives (4/63). Certain chairs had taken advantage of their new status to impose overly harsh punishments for infractions or keep property seized from NRA opponents for themselves (4/19, 4/29, 4/57-8). One NRA officer explained that, "as the army grew stronger and better known, some secret committee members became arrogant and settled scores…. Now we are strong enough to control an area, why don't we ask them to elect their own leaders" (4/4)? In the eyes of another officer, "the community had its own problems, before we came. To avoid opportunism and get credible leadership, we had to go back to the people" (L/1.3). If civilians elected their committees democratically, bad judgments by committee members could no longer be attributed to the NRA.

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government it became Uganda's legislature until the elections following the adoption of the 1995 Constitution.

The decision came from the guerrilla leadership. According to an NRA official closely involved in the process, the decision that all village committees should be elected was made by the NRC, probably in August or September 1982 (2/23).[21] One PC emphasized the democratic motive for the decision, suggesting that "clandestine committees were no longer needed in a liberated zone. Now that we are in the open, we need the population to relate to its leaders and it could only do that by electing them" (3/25). On the other hand, a commander emphasized the NRA's strategic advantage as the motive, arguing that "elections were seen as mobilization on a wider basis than was possible under clandestine committees" (3/51). But both were in no doubt that it was the NRA that had decided that village committees should be elected.

Civilians in the Luwero Triangle had made no demands for democracy, aside from complaining to the NRA about the poor judgment shown by some chairs of clandestine committees. Instead, villagers considered elections an order from the NRA that they should accept. One wealthy farmer, who had been a low level (mutongole) chief in the 1960s, explained that two political leaders "convened a meeting of the entire village and said we want each village to elect committees to replace secret committees. The number of people in the area has increased [due to the influx of displaced people] and the NRA is sure of the area it has liberated, so the work is too big for secret committees" (4/7). A widow in a nearby village, who had cooked food for an NRA detachment, said the chair of the secret committee was told by the NRA to hold elections.

[21] Informants differ over the starting date for electing RCs from the beginning to the end of 1982. Several of those claiming that elections began in January may mistake the time when clandestine committees were able to operate openly for the date when committee members were elected. The size of the safe zone and the control of villages changed during the year, which also affected the timing when committees could operate openly and be elected. Thus, elections in northern areas in the Luwero Triangle may well have occurred towards the end of 1982. Informants confirmed a report in Resistance News that "by the middle of 1982" RCs "started functioning openly" (4/63; Mission to Freedom: 1990, 258).

"That's where he got orders from" (4/15). In another part of the Luwero Triangle a civilian who later became an NRA official remembered Kigongo briefing members of her village: "he told them to form themselves [into an assembly for elections]" (1/29). Another farmer who was elected a chair simply said, "villagers did not have any idea about these elections" (1/74). After the elections, one newly elected committee member said "we were taken to the camp to meet Kigongo and Otafire [then the Chief Political Commissar] to learn how to rule people, deal with conflicts and how to deal with particular persons" (1/50).

PCs held assemblies to "sensitize" villagers, and returned soon after to supervise the elections. All adult residents in the village became the Resistance Council and met to elect their Resistance Committee.[22] Even those who had fled from their homes to the safe zone held their own elections to form committees serving "refugees" in that locality (1/62). The PCs told villagers to elect seven officials who would make up specified positions in the RC1 (later the number of officials was expanded to nine). Later the same day the elected members from all villages in the parish came together to form an electorate to choose the officials who then comprised the parish committee, representing the RC2.[23] Since the leaders elected at the higher level through this system of indirect democracy had been chosen twice, the NRA could be relatively confident that those

[22] My informants, both guerrillas and civilians, did not discuss whether village Resistance Councils held additional meetings after electing their committees. An assessment of the democratic content of council meetings is an important topic that should be investigated.

[23] Informants disagree whether indirect elections were taken to the RC3 (subcounty) level during this phase of the war. The NRM government expanded this system to the RC5 (district) level and to all parts of the country in 1986.

chosen were highly regarded by civilians from the parish.[24] Informants, both guerrillas and civilians agree that the PCs who presided over the elections did not make any efforts to influence the choice of committee members.

In general, members of secret committee were chosen for the same positions in elected committees (2/24; 4/7; 4/15). In at least one area, and probably several others, clandestine village committee officials were also elected unopposed. Now that the NRA had established a safe zone and seemed on its way to winning the war, other villagers saw that the committee members had made important contributions to that effort and so were content to let them continue. In addition, villagers probably also saw the risk for themselves of being openly identified with the NRA, if UNLA, the enemy army, ever got the upper hand again.

New political structures abruptly introduced from the top in the middle of a war are unlikely to develop deep roots. The first committees to be elected had only six months to learn about governance before the entire population had to be evacuated when the safe zone suddenly disintegrated in the face of a massive UNLA offensive in March 1983. Other committees had even less time. But most of the committees appear to have been active. Both NRA officials and the new committees saw the committees' priority as continuing to support NRA activities rather than manage problems in their villages. These tasks included the collection of food, recruitment of new soldiers and intelligence

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[24] Precedents for elected officials in the Luwero Triangle exist, so it is unclear how much of the RC format is new. Committees elected for the purpose of managing villages had never existed before in the Buganda Kingdom—before or after it was abolished. However, the Protectorate reforms of 1945 had established an indirect system of electoral colleges from the parish to the kingdom level to choose unofficial members for the Lukiiko, the Kingdom parliament. Kayunga suggests some similarities between these colleges and the RCs (2001, 255, 286). In addition, the ten house cell (mayumba kumi) system, imported from Tanzania and installed during the transitional regime after Amin had been overthrown, involved the election of leaders at sub-village levels. Tidemand's informants felt that some limited parallels could be drawn between mayumba kumi and RCs (1994, 54-55).

about enemy activities in their villages (2/12, 2/22, 4/7). But NRA officials hoped they would also fill part of the administrative vacuum created when the chiefs fled (2/22). The NRA gave them judicial powers over minor crimes and village disputes, but not over taxation, which the guerrillas had abolished for the duration of the war. Many of the committees became involved in settling village disputes and sometimes minor disputes involving NRA soldiers (1/10, 1/75, 2/12, 3/74). Some committees met weekly during that short period, while others met only when a problem arose (1/51, 1/75).

By introducing elections into its civilian support network, the NRA leadership was able to demonstrate, as well as broaden, its claim to popular support from those living in its safe zone. The reform also held the potential for making significant changes in the political relations between guerrillas and civilians. It might have stimulated civilian initiatives that could have turned the relationship with the NRA into more of a partnership. But the sudden reversal in the war shortly after the system of electing committees was adopted cut these possibilities short.

Conclusion

Examining the relationships that guerrillas form with the civilians who live in areas in which they operate or control provides an account of the nature of governance under the fluid and risky circumstances of guerrilla war. One important aspect of guerrilla governance is the degree to which guerrilla organizations try to elicit voluntary compliance rather than rely on coercion, even though there is always a coercive component in all their relations to civilians—including efforts to gain popular support. Guerrillas who have an ideological preference for cultivating popular support from

civilians will inevitably need to modify it to meet the practical necessities of security and supplies, particularly food for its soldiers. Guerrilla movements that institute political structures to increase the voluntary compliance of civilians have a new dilemma to confront when civilians try to turn these structures to their own advantage.

Museveni and his close associates developed their ideas about popular support during armed struggle from the uneasy combination of their analysis of Uganda's problems and FRELIMO's organization of its struggle for liberation in Mozambique. By sending recruits to FRELIMO for training they developed a small politicized cadre with military skills that formed the core of FRONASA when it accompanied the Tanzanian invasion that overthrew Amin and later became the core of the NRA. Museveni's adaptation of a protracted people's war to Ugandan conditions focuses more on military strategy than on organizing political participation. But the three stages of warfare he discusses suggest important differences in political relations between guerrillas and civilians. The crucial distinction is the presence or absence of a safe zone. The first two phases of the war in the Luwero Triangle involved the creation of a civilian network and after the establishment of a safe zone, open and democratic village political organizations.

The NRA encountered additional problems in cultivating voluntary compliance in the Luwero Triangle because of its ethnic heterogeneity. Many Baganda had an agenda on ethnic issues that conflicted with the objectives of the NRA. The first members of the NRA to enter the Luwero Triangle were perceived as ethnic outsiders whose intention to take power was believed to threaten ethnic domination. In the Luwero Triangle, as generally in Uganda, a person's perceived ethnic group identity served as the marker for

ascribing his or her political loyalties on the basis of presumed ethnic group alliances in national politics. Consequently, the NRA's intervention in the Luwero Triangle became the basis for interpreting who were its supporters and opponents. That also complicated efforts of the NRA to develop popular support.

The clandestine committee system that the NRA created provided it with a channel through which it could ensure deliveries of food, intelligence about spies and recruits, as well as a political link to sympathetic villagers. Its commanders consistently chose Baganda land-owners as their contacts and left it to them to choose other members of the committee. Consequently, their political network tended to reflect conservative members of the village establishment, rather than have-nots who might have been more sympathetic to radical elements in the NRA program. In support of its preference for voluntary compliance, the NRA presented itself as either paying farmers for food or as receiving it voluntarily. For the most part, committee chairs insisted that the farmers they approached gave food freely. However, some farmers felt they had no option but to contribute. Political commissars provided political education that consisted mostly of speeches explaining the war and development to villagers, not efforts to find out what issues villagers thought were important. While PCs laid great stress on explaining to villagers the political values they ought to adopt, they made little effort to engage villagers in direct discussion that might have caused them to rethink their values.

After it created a safe zone, the NRA took another step toward creating voluntary compliance by deciding that villagers would elect their committees, instead of continuing with those whose chairs had been chosen by the NRA. The initiative came from the NRA, not from the villagers. The NRA leadership's motives were not purely democratic.

They wanted to avoid being blamed for poor judgment by committee members who sometimes took advantage of their positions to settle scores or acquire resources. They also needed to fill the authority vacuum in the villages. Of the governance choices available to them, they chose the arrangement that maximized voluntary behavior by villagers. Since the committees were still responsible for supplying NRA units in their villages, the NRA decision could also be seen as expanding the basis for mobilization in support of the guerrilla organization. The elections do not appear to have been vigorously contested. The new committees were active not only in serving the NRA, but resolving village disputes during the short period in which they operated without disturbance. Their new democratic potential supports the NRA's claim to elicit voluntary compliance. The enthusiasm with which villagers participated in the elections suggests that they strongly supported the NRA.

The NRA's experience with civilians in the Luwero Triangle exhibits a distinctive pattern of governance that differs significantly from many other guerrilla organizations. Some guerrilla organizations have used coercion routinely to achieve their objectives without any efforts to elicit voluntary compliance. Despite the underlying basis of coercion that war necessitates, the modifications in the NRA's ideology caused by its own material necessities and the compromises resulting from differences in objectives from those held by the civilians on whom it depended, its leaders did not abandon their interest in cultivating popular support. They established contact with civilians, built a political network through committees and then insisted the committees be democratized. Their interest in popular support may have begun with an instrumental belief that involving the people was the way for guerrillas to overthrow a state. But in the process

of taking on the tasks of governance, NRA leaders took some innovative steps toward developing a framework for voluntary compliance that could be justified as much for opening democratic possibilities as for winning wars.

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