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# **How to Stage a Military Coup**

**From Planning to Execution**

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## Training Coup Teams

If you have the resources to train your coup team, train them. And then train them some more. In the build-up to the Uganda coup of 1971 (see Chapter 6), MI6 officer Beverly Barnard had five hundred mercenary soldiers, mostly recruited from southern Sudan, in a training camp in the north of the country. He even used his own single-plane airline, Southern Airmotive, to supply them with food and *matériel*. You might not need that many extras but Barnard was so unimpressed with the Ugandan army, and so uncertain that it would support the putsch, that he decided to hedge his bets with a short battalion of additional troops.

Assuming that the soldiers you are using are beyond the essentials of basic fitness, weapons handling and fire-and-manoeuvre, what are the new skills they should have to make the coup a success? These include urban warfare, patrolling in a peacekeeping role and dealing with civil disorder. Do not assume that any modern, well-equipped army will be able to undertake these tasks - as the US Army and US Marine Corps proved in Iraq. The philosophy of overwhelming force can easily backfire and needs to be replaced by one of *escalating* force. Remember, you want to keep the population on *your* side.

tries [Chile, Argentina, etc.] who are to travel anywhere in the world to non-member countries to carry out sanctions up to assassination against terrorists or supporters of terrorist organizations from 'Operation Condor' countries. For example, should a terrorist... be located in a European country, a special team from 'Operation Condor' would be dispatched to locate and surveil the target... A second team would be dispatched to carry out the actual sanction against the target.'<sup>55</sup>

Apart from the minor technicality of the lack of due legal process in this activity, there are many people who would be unconcerned if the targets were dyed-in-the-wool terrorists of the type who would murder more than three thousand people in an office complex in New York or more than three hundred children and adults in a school in southern Russia.

Scherrer, however, goes on to reveal his suspicions that the murder in Washington DC of former Chilean Ambassador Orlando Letelier might have been an Operation *Condor* sanction. Whatever Letelier had done to upset the Pinochet junta, he was not a terrorist; nor was his American assistant, Ronni Moffit, killed by the same car bomb.

### **The Kampala Strangler: Uganda 1971**

The story of Uganda in the 1970s is the story of Idi Amin, or 'President for Life Field-Marshal al-Hadj Doctor Idi Amin Dada, VC, DSO, MC, Lord of All the Beasts of the Earth and Fishes of the Sea, Last King of Scotland, Conqueror of the British Empire in Africa in General and Uganda in Particular', as his wives called him in more intimate moments.

Amin gained power in 1971 by overthrowing Milton Obote in a British-backed military coup; his reign of terror lasted until Tanzanian troops and refugee Ugandans finally ejected him from the capital, Kampala, in 1979. It is estimated that at least 300,000, possibly 500,000 of his people were butchered in the intervening eight years. Amin became a guest of Colonel Qaddafi, then Saddam Hussein before settling in Saudi Arabia, where he died in 2003 aged between seventy-eight and eighty. Few grieved his passing.

But it is the circumstances of his rise to power and the involvement of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) in sponsoring the coup that

## HOW TO STAGE A MILITARY COUP

is of interest here. Uganda is a land-locked state in East Africa, its capital, Kampala, on the northern shore of Lake Victoria. Until it gained independence in 1961, Uganda was a British colony. It was a country with potential; a sound agricultural economy was boosted by copper, a nice foreign-currency earner. The political structure was fairly typical; a multi-party parliamentary system in the European pattern overlaid a more traditional tribal structure. In the 1960s, Milton Obote's nationalist Uganda People's Congress (UPC) held sway over the country and Obote held sway over the UPC. He clearly thought that one party was enough to hold sway over at any one time, and put the rest out of business and introduced a one-party state. He ousted President Sir Edward 'King Freddie' Mutesa four years later and rewrote the constitution so he could take the job for himself.

The British shrugged; such was the way of things in the new post-colonial Africa. Then Obote decided to nationalise business and industry, starting with about eighty UK-owned companies. The British stopped shrugging and decided that this Obote chap had gone too far - it was time for a *coup d'état*.

The man for the job was MI6 officer Beverly Gayer Barnard. He had prior experience (see Chapter 3, Iran 1953), was already operating in nearby Sudan and ran a useful one-plane cargo airline. By all accounts - and we concede there are not many of them - Barnard was an interesting character. In 1938, at the age of twenty-two, he was working for the British Broadcasting Corporation as what has been described as a 'researcher'. It is hard to believe that this means 'researcher' in the sense we understand it today, especially as he was working in the infant field of television. When the war with Germany broke out, he moved to Bristol, where he worked for Westland Aircraft, now a helicopter manufacturer. The fact that he was not conscripted into the army or air force suggests that he was in a 'reserved occupation'; in other words he was a scientist or technologist whose skills would be invaluable to the war effort. This is confirmed by his later move to the Royal Aircraft Establishment, Farnborough, which was, and still is, Britain's premier centre of aeronautical research.

It is not known when Beverly Barnard became an intelligence officer, but towards the end of 1944 he was selected as member of the Control Commission. This had the task of governing the British sector of post-surrender Germany and, given that it oversaw the process of 'de-Nazification', was considered to be a somewhat spooky operation. During his three years in this job, Barnard must have joined the Secret

Intelligence Service and in 1947 was sent to Tehran, where he was given the quasi-diplomatic cover post of 'Civil Air Attaché'. As his brief covered Iraq and the Gulf States as well as Iran, MI6 gave him a small aircraft, which suggests he had learned to fly before leaving RAE Farnborough.<sup>56</sup> It is not clear how Barnard kept himself busy in the following years but we could speculate that, in addition to Iran 1953, he took a professional interest in other Middle East coups: Yemen 1955, Iraq 1958, 1959 and 1963, Syria 1963, Sudan 1964, Abu Dhabi 1966, Yemen 1967, Iraq 1968 and especially Sudan 1968. Certainly, in 1959 he had 'Middle East Consultant' on his business card.

Small, intelligent and bespectacled, Barnard had the job of cultivating a man who was almost entirely his opposite. Idi Amin Dada was a giant of a man in everything but intellect. His behaviour the first time the British put him in a position of authority should have been a warning sign. Amin was a sergeant in the King's Africa Rifles during the 1950s and served in Kenya during the colonial power's bloody conflict with the Land Freedom Army, the 'Mau Mau'. While working as a guard at an internment camp, his favourite party trick was to grab a prisoner by the throat and lift him bodily from the ground, earning himself the nickname, 'The Strangler'. For seven years he was heavyweight boxing champion of Uganda.

When Obote came to power, Amin was rapidly promoted through the ranks to general and made commander-in-chief of the armed forces. His power base in the army was a large group of Sudanese mercenaries who had been recruited by the British. These soldiers were exclusively from the Christian and animist area of southern Sudan and were battle-hardened from the long and bloody war with the Muslim-led north of the country. Also owing allegiance were the Anya-Nya guerrillas, the military wing of the Nile Liberation Front from the Ugandan-Sudanese border region, home base to Amin's tribe, the Kakwa. This alliance was useful to MI6; the Sudanese fighters were loyal to Amin, not particularly to the state of Uganda, and certainly not to Milton Obote.

Idi Amin was Beverly Barnard's first choice for coup leader. He had Obote's trust and a considerable power-base. And, as military commander-in-chief, he had only one place to go - head of state. As the MI6 man reported to London, Amin was 'intensely loyal to Britain' although 'a little short on the grey matter'.

By the end of the 1960s, Barnard had set up a training camp over the Sudan border and his airline was delivering *matériel* to the five hundred irregulars being put through their paces there. The weapons and

## HOW TO STAGE A MILITARY COUP

ammunition were being supplied by Anthony Divall, a British arms dealer and contract MI6 agent based in Hamburg. The UK spooks had also managed to solicit the support of Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service. Its interest was not in the overthrow of the Obote government but in undermining the Islamic regime in Khartoum, which they considered a threat in the wake of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. (Until 1969, the British had a military training team in the north supporting the Sudanese army. This arrangement ended with that year's coup and the Brits were replaced by Egyptian and Soviet teams. Nonetheless, it may have been, for a short time at least, that the UK was backing both sides in the civil war.)

On 11 January 1971 President Obote was out of the country, having decided to attend the Commonwealth Heads of State conference in Singapore. This was a particularly unwise decision on his part; trouble had been brewing for some time and, only eighteen months earlier, he had survived an assassination attempt. At the conference, Obote made an impassioned speech condemning Britain's decision to renew arms sales to the apartheid regime in South Africa. In response, Prime Minister Edward Heath prodded his finger at Obote and said, 'I wonder how many of you will be allowed to return to your own countries from this conference.'<sup>57</sup> It is hard to believe that Heath was unaware of the coup being orchestrated by his intelligence service in Uganda as he spoke.

Indeed, Beverly Barnard's plan went smoothly. Amin's troops sealed off Kampala's airport at Entebbe and tanks and infantry took to the streets of the capital. The presidential palace was seized and vehicle checkpoints set up on all major routes. And the plotters didn't forget to take over the radio station! A national broadcast announcing Idi Amin's self-elevation to head of state also accused government ministers and senior civil servants of widespread corruption; the army had acted in the belief that bloodshed would result from the president's policy of giving preference to his own tribal region.

Alarmed at hearing all this, British High Commissioner Richard Slater rushed around to Amin's office. There, with his feet metaphorically on the general's desk, was the Israeli Defence Attaché Colonel Bar-Lev. (The two were old chums, Amin having facilitated the shipment of Israeli arms to the rebels in southern Sudan in return, no doubt, for a considerable commission.) In a recently declassified cable to London, Slater stated: 'In the course of last night General Amin caused to be arrested all officers in the armed forces sympathetic to Obote...

Amin is now firmly in control of all elements of [the] army which controls vital points in Uganda... the Israeli defence attaché discounts any possibility of moves against Amin.<sup>58</sup> The reason why it wasn't Beverly Barnard's polished shoes on Amin's furniture was obvious: at that time MI6 didn't officially exist; nor therefore did its officer Barnard. What is clear from the incident is that the High Commissioner had been kept in the dark, a common practice among British and American coup plotters. Amin showed his appreciation by making his first official overseas visit to Israel, where he alarmed Prime Minister Golda Meir by demanding enough munitions to keep her country's arms industry busy for a decade. Within months 'The Strangler' was having lunch with the Queen at Buckingham Palace. God only knows what they chatted about.

Not in the dark about developments in Uganda was a colourful Kenyan businessman-politician and World War II fighter pilot called Bruce McKenzie. McKenzie had astutely backed jailed opposition leader Jomo Kenyatta during the build-up to independence and was later rewarded with the influential post of minister for agriculture. He was the ultimate wheeler-dealer, his interests extending to the ownership of Cooper Motors, which held the Kenyan and Ugandan distributorships for Volkswagen Beetles and British Leyland trucks, including the ubiquitous Land Rover. His sales team could also rustle up a squadron of armoured cars, should you have the need and the cash.

These business activities were helped by a wealth of political contacts. He was a close friend of Colonel David Stirling, the founder of the British Special Air Service, then active in African politics. (At the time, in the late-1960s, 22 SAS was training Kenyan special forces in return for the provision of a bush camp near Nyeri, sixty miles north of the capital, Nairobi.) When in the UK, McKenzie was a regular house-guest of Maurice Oldfield, Barnard's ultimate boss as 'M', the director-general of MI6.<sup>59</sup> Indeed he had also been McKenzie's 'boss' since 1963 when the businessman had signed up as an agent of the Secret Intelligence Service.

Alarmed by the threat of Obote's policy of nationalising foreign businesses, Bruce McKenzie was a keen supporter of 'Amin for president' and those views were undoubtedly impressed on Oldfield and Prime Minister Harold Wilson. When he lost his job as agriculture minister in 1970, he remained the most influential white man in East Africa, taking the opportunity to expand his business

## HOW TO STAGE A MILITARY COUP

interests by becoming chairman of Kenya Airways.

An excellent coup... shame about the consequences. Less than two years later Amin had 'ethnically cleansed' Uganda's Asian population and wrecked the economy. With the benefit of hindsight the country's middle-managers, professionals and traders were better off out of Africa; the 'President for Life' started slaughtering his own people on the slightest whim and at a rate that was once estimated to be seven thousand per week.<sup>60</sup>

On Sunday, 27 June 1976, Air France flight number AF 139 was hijacked by four terrorists affiliated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), two of them actually members of the German Baader-Meinhof Gang. After a short stop in Benghazi, the plane took off again and headed for Entebbe Airport, where the group was joined by three others already in-country. The hijackers announced they would start killing the Israeli and Jewish passengers if fifty-three terrorist prisoners in five countries were not released. It was clear from his behaviour that Amin was supporting the PFLP and so the Israelis activated their Sayeret Matkal special-operations unit. What happened next made Amin look an even bigger buffoon, should such a thing be possible. The Israelis managed to land three C-130 transport planes unchallenged and unopposed. With the help of a limousine and an Amin look-alike, they stormed the terminal building and freed the hostages with minimal loss of life - except among the terrorists and Ugandan soldiers.

The Israeli team with its liberated and relieved hostages exfiltrated to Nairobi Airport in Kenya, where refuelling facilities, food and medical assistance for the wounded were on stand-by; all courtesy of Bruce McKenzie. Whether McKenzie was motivated by remorse at the havoc he'd helped unleash in Uganda is less important than the fact that he'd supported the Israeli operation with the full backing of MI6 and the British Government. A grateful Israeli government showered him with honours. But it was a decision that was to cost him his life.

By May of 1978 the lure of the big government contract - or pressure for intelligence from MI6 - had got the better of Bruce McKenzie's judgement. That month he flew with two business associates in his own light aircraft to Uganda for a meeting with Amin at Entebbe airport. By all accounts, the get-together in the VIP lounge was congenial enough. As the visitors were about to leave, Amin asked McKenzie to deliver a gift of an antelope skin to an address in Nairobi. The MI6 agent tucked the parcel under his arm and shook the president's big hand. Amin



stood on the apron and waved his visitors off as the plane taxied to the end of the runway. There was, no doubt, a huge grin on his face. As the small plane reached five thousand feet it exploded, killing Bruce McKenzie and his two passengers.

An article in the London *Sunday Times* of 11 December 1980 revealed that Amin had brought in some help to achieve this brutal revenge murder. Also in the airport at the time of McKenzie's visit were two renegade CIA operators, Frank Terpil and Edwin Wilson; both were more than capable of making an improvised bomb that would trigger at a predetermined altitude. Terpil was later indicted by a New York Grand Jury on charges of illegally supplying arms to Uganda but he skipped bail and disappeared. Supposedly, he died in the Lebanon, hopefully not before his time.

By 1979 the British had had enough of the thug it had sponsored as the saviour of Uganda, and the Labour Foreign Secretary Dr David Owen (now Lord Owen) proposed that MI6 be ordered to assassinate Idi Amin. Speaking on BBC radio shortly after the tyrant's death in 2003 he admitted that his proposal was seen as an outrageous suggestion, but: 'I'm not ashamed of considering it, because his regime goes down in the scale of Pol Pot as one of the worst of all African regimes.'<sup>61</sup>

Perhaps David Owen was influenced by the fact that, ten years earlier, MI6 had actively planned for the assassination of President Milton Obote as an alternative to the coup plot. In addition to Barnard's camp in the north of the country, there was another one in which Ugandan security personnel were being trained in the fine art of assassination by use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) – home-made bombs.

The tuition must have been excellent; the team doing the job was from MI6's own training facility at Fort Monkton near Gosport in Hampshire. 'The Fort' was one of a string of four coastal defences built by Henry VIII in 1545 to protect the strategic city of Portsmouth from foreign invaders. Its fascinating history has reflected the needs of the day; by 1944 it had become the communication centre for the invasion of occupied Europe. The Royal Engineers took it over and, when they moved out in 1954, the SIS moved in (conveniently forgetting to tell the Ministry of Defence, who continued to pay the bills for thirty years).

All MI6 recruits, some from the military, some from university, would have to pass IONEC, the Intelligence Officer's New Entry Course at Fort Monkton. It was here that they would learn their 'tradecraft', the lore of dead and live letter boxes, bump contacts, agent handling, surveillance and counter-surveillance.<sup>62</sup> Special Air Service Regiment

## HOW TO STAGE A MILITARY COUP

instructors took on the job of teaching the trainees weapons and explosives handling. So it was a team from Fort Monkton who found themselves in the East African bush teaching the practical differences between the 'culvert bomb' and the 'car bomb'. As it turned out, the training was not needed because Beverly Barnard's coup worked just fine.

Nor was Lord Owen's proposed assassination of Amin needed. Milton Obote returned to power that same year (1979) when Tanzania lost patience with Amin's repeated armed assaults across their border and invaded the country with the support of Ugandan exiles. To show willing, the British paid the Tanzanian Government for the cost of the operation; hence paying to restore the man they had previously paid to dislodge. In the aftermath severed heads and a huge library of pornography were discovered in 'Big Daddy's' house. When accused of cannibalism he responded by saying, 'I ate them before they ate me'. He also said, 'Sometimes people mistake the way I talk for what I am thinking.' Most politicians are faced with that problem, of course, but in this case few people had any doubt that he meant exactly what he said.

Short of cannibalism, Obote was almost as much a tyrant as Amin and he didn't last, being overthrown in yet another military coup a few years later. Beverly Barnard died in 1973, aged fifty-seven.

The coups of Uganda 1971 and Chile 1973 had one important thing in common: a bloody aftermath for the ordinary people of those countries and one which later proved embarrassing to their foreign sponsors. Certainly in the case of Chile, resentment towards the United States by many ordinary people throughout South America remains irreparable.