

# Marriage between realism and liberalism in Uganda

**By Melaku Mulualem**

The field of international relations has various interesting theories that define the interaction of countries in the world arena. Among other theories realism and liberalism are the two major theories.

According to these theories, there are different actors in the international system. States, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and multi-national corporations are some of the actors in global politics. Both theories are agreed that there is an anarchical nature in the international system. But they have theoretical differences in their approach for making this world peaceful to human beings.

The aim of this article is not to discuss the overall theoretical framework of both theories. Rather it is aimed at relating some concepts of the international relations theories with the present political conditions in East Africa. The focus of this article is on the peace and security of the region. As it is well-known, the East Africa region is one of the most volatile regions in the world.

Currently, the realism theory is a dominant paradigm in international relations. The core idea of the realism theory is summarized in the three "S"s: statism, survival and self-help. According to this theory, the state is the main and the primary actor in international relations. international organizations, non-governmental organizations and others are secondary actors.

For realism, the survival of a state is also taken as a precondition to attain all other goals such as economic and political objectives. It also underlines that, in order to maintain the security of a state (when the state is at crucial stake), one's own military might or self-help and participating in the balance of power are crucial than to rely on

international organizations – such as the former League of Nations and the present United Nations. Because of this view, realism gives international organizations a secondary position to the rescue of a state.

On the other hand, however, the liberalism theory rejects the realist notion that says the state is the main actor on the world political stage, although they do not deny that it is important. Liberalism underlines that collaboration between and among states through international organizations is important than relying on the military power of a state. Unlike the realism theory, however, the liberalism theory is optimistic for the existence of genuine collaboration among states and individuals in maintaining peace and security in this world. As a result of this, liberalism advocate that peace can be maintained between countries through cooperation.

Having seen the above brief background about the two major theories, I will now focus on Uganda in her relations with South Sudan and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which is a regional organization for the east African countries. As it is well-known, South Sudan is now in trouble. The violence in South Sudan began after President Salva Kiir of South Sudan announced, on 16 December 2013, the attempted coup which was orchestrated by the former vice-president, Riek Machar, against his government.

As a result of the violence between the forces of the president and pro-Machar supporters, many people have been killed, displaced and migrated to neighboring countries. After the commencement of the fighting, the United Nations Security Council, the African Union, IGAD, major powers and neighboring countries have expressed their concern on the matter. For the purpose of this article, I will now focus on Uganda and the role of IGAD in South Sudan.

On 27 December 2013 the heads of state and government of member states of IGAD appointed Ambassador Seyoum Mesfin of Ethiopia, General Lazarus Sumbeiywo of Kenya and a representative from the Republic of the Sudan as special envoys for South

Sudan. Based on this decision a peace talk between the delegations of both sides is under way in Addis Ababa.

Uganda, as member of IGAD, has also participated in the decision of the regional organization. This shows that Uganda is in line with the liberalism theory which says that collaboration through an international organization rather than military power is helpful for maintaining peace in a state and the world at large.

On the other hand, Uganda has deployed her national army (UPDF) in Juba, South Sudan. President Museveni has appointed Col. Kayanja Muhanga as commander of the army. With the exception of resistance from few opposition party members in the parliament of Uganda, the deployment has got majority support from the lawmakers of Uganda.

According to the Sudan Tribune, "Several lawmakers[of Uganda], during a heated debate, said they supported UPDF presence in South Sudan provided they were there to ensure safety of Ugandans trapped in the weeks of violence". Contrary to this support of the lawmakers, Riek Machar is complaining that the Ugandan army is attacking his supporters by being on the side of the incumbent government. Even if the government of Uganda had been saying that its army was aiming at protecting her nationals in South Sudan and protecting civilians from attack, recently, her officials are saying that they have participated in the fighting against the supporter of Riek Machar in the city of Bor.

According to the Agence France-Presse report of 17 January 2014, Uganda has confirmed its troops are fighting alongside South Sudan's government against "rebels". Speaking at a summit meeting in Angola late on Wednesday, Museveni said, "The SPLA and elements of our army had a big battle with these rebel troops... we inflicted a big defeat on them"

The Kenya Daily has also stated that the 'Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni had said his troops were supporting the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) – the first official confirmation that foreign forces were taking part in combat'

In my opinion, the deployment of an army in South Sudan shows that Uganda is also in line with the realism theory which says that "self-help" is important than relying on international organizations – in this case IGAD. This dual position of Uganda in South Sudan shows the existence of a marriage between realism and liberalism in the foreign policy of Uganda.

In a marriage between the two theories, depending on the foreign policy of the country, one of them will be dominant over the other. However, the domination of liberalism doesn't entail the death and the funeral ceremony of realism and vice versa. On the contrary both co-exist in the current international political arena. This is to say that if a state relies more on its military power, the dominant foreign policy is in line with realism than liberalism. I have coined a term for this: "realistic liberalism".

On the other hand, if a state relies on collaboration through international organization (in resolving conflicts) the dominant foreign policy is in line with liberalism than realism. I use a term for this: "liberalistic realism". I borrowed the term "liberalistic realism" from A. C. Harth who wrote about it in 2003. He uses the term "liberalistic realism"- as a middle way recommendation for American grand strategy. He was advocating the need to bridge the divide between realism and liberalism and to make it the base for the foreign policy of the U.S.

Even if South Sudan has six neighboring countries, it is only Uganda that deployed her army in Juba unilaterally. Parallel to this, Uganda is also part of the IGAD mediation effort. Because of this I would say there is marriage of realism theory and liberalism theory and practices in Uganda. In my opinion, this has a negative impact on the mediation effort of IGAD in South Sudan. The success of IGAD mediation means the success of the region as a whole, but the success of Uganda in maintaining her national interest doesn't entail the success of the region and the world at large.

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