

## **CHALLENGING REALISTS INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY: SOFT BALANCING AND AGENCY IN THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF AFRICAN STATES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Historically the focus of International Relations Theory has been with the power of states. More specifically, the debates and development of international relations theory and the conceptual basis which underpinned it, was and continues to be heavily biased in favour of studying great powers. All systemic theories of international relations take as a point of departure the centrality of the state. The African state, according to most of these theories is not institutionally functional and therefore devoid of any normative content. As such, international relations theory has put the study and utility of the African state at the periphery. This is particularly the case with realism which is concerned mainly with the actions of great powers. Recent activism shown by African states from issues such as the environment, trade and security suggest that they are increasingly becoming vocal in determining the content and scope of their international relations. This, the paper argues, is in no small measure a result of the development of linkages among Africa and China in particular and India.

### **Introduction**

The ability of African states to exercise structural and relational power as actors in international relations has been questioned by scholars from diverging theoretical traditions. Yet, Africa has always played a fundamental role in international relations. For Ian Taylor, this role and Africa's participation in international relations can be traced back to "The slave trade, the Scramble for Africa and the subsequent colonial period; the proxy wars of the Cold War; and the increasing

importance of the continent's natural resources..." (2010:1; Bayart, 2000:218; Bayart, 2010: xi). Despite the afore-mentioned, African countries are still not considered useful units of analyses primarily because of the focus of international relations on great powers. For these great powers, like the different theories of international relations, Africa was of marginal importance (Dunn, 2001: 1; Lee and Smith, 2010:1091). The emergence or rather imposition of the state in Africa and the contested notion of sovereignty are two of the reasons often advanced to explain the marginality of Africa in international relations. Moreover, the genesis of international relations as a field of study is the product of Western experience, and consequently inappropriate for the study of Africa's international relations (Brown, 2006:121). In this regard, Kevin Dunn (2001) has noted that the use of European precepts to understand and analyse international relations in general has contributed to the absence of a coherent body of thought on African international relations. In the aftermath of the Cold War in general, and since the tragic events of September 2001, in particular, the international security architecture has changed considerably.

In addition to the above, recent changes in international political economy, which have seen a more assertive economic role being played by countries such as China and India, has also given rise to a reconfiguration of the economic balance of power globally. In particular more assertive economic role of China has meant that the distribution of material power into the inter-state has become more fluid. This change in the global economic power structure has had and continues to have a profound impact on Africa's international relations. International relations as a field of study have thus far been unable to theoretically explain the changing nature of African countries' economic and security alignments. This paper contends that the agency shown by weak African states in the conduct of their international relations in the domains of economics and security undermines the balance of power assumption that 'weak' states will always bandwagon with hegemonic states. As such, the primary concern here is to illustrate that the actions of African states allows for theoretical interventions in international relations theory which should take into consideration the primacy of state action as a determinant of Africa's international relations.

Our point of departure is to illustrate that Africa's international relations are both shaping and are being shaped by international processes and structures (Taylor and Williams, 2004:1). Towards

that end, the paper argues that the use of soft balancing to define Africa's international relations is not new. Indeed the first argument to be made is that the Cold War and Africa's role in it, laid the edifice for the way in which African leaders currently conduct their international relations. It proceeds to ascertain how theories of international relations have been used to lay bare the claim that Africa and in particular the weak states on the continent, make the study of Africa in international relations redundant. Here the primary focus is on realism. Soft balancing as a theoretical construct to analyse and explain the recent assertiveness of Africa in international relations is explored. The practical cases of how soft balancing are applied by African states in the domains of economics and security is examined. Finally, the conclusion explains how the use of soft balancing by African states requires scholars of international relations need to recast their perception and analysis of the continent. This perception that Africa has theoretical utility to scholars of international relations theory gained particular currency with the rise of China and India in the aftermath of the Cold War period.

### **Theoretical Neglect: International Relations Theory and Africa**

The genesis of international relations theory and its primary preoccupation has always been states and in particular the power politics exercised by great powers. In particular, concerns with states and the power of states find expression in the theory of neo-realism. Kenneth Waltz, the father of neo-realism, contends that "So long as the major states are the major actors, the structure of international politics is defined in terms of them." (1979:94). The aforementioned suggest that theories of international relations only deals with Africa in relation to the major powers. The afore-mentioned suggests that Africa's international relations were ostensibly defined in relation to the major powers. There is, however, a need to use different analytical tools if we want to understand Africa's international relations. This need is prompted by the fact that "International politics affects these states and people in ways that often differ appreciably from the ways in which it affects the people and governments of more powerful states. (Clapham, 1996:3). Hitherto, however, no serious theoretical attempt has been made to understand the contribution of African states to international relations. The most pertinent question to answer is how African states engages the international community in the domains of economics and security and respond to the demands of their domestic constituencies.

From the above reading, there is clearly a need to understand the reasons and tools that African states use in their interaction with the external world. This requires that we transcend the theoretical impasse that has thus confined itself to circumscribed foreign policy options available to rulers on the continent in the conduct of their international relations. Simply put, we need to move from a position of theoretical neglect to theoretical engagement. While a forceful argument can be made that the continent suffers from theoretical neglect, the general argument that Africa lacks meaningful politics is no longer a viable one. This is because the actions of Africa states in the conduct of their international relations and the nature of international society have changed profoundly. This theoretical neglect suffered by African international relations stems from the absence of "... theoretical frameworks within which to conceptualise and analyse different, and particularly non-Western and post-colonial regions of the international system." (Brown, 2006:123). The absence of understanding Africa's international relations as a discursive construction stems from two fundamental concerns of international relations theory in general: concerns with the nature of the state and the concept of sovereignty.

### **The African State and International Relations**

Theoretical discourses in international relations have explained the continent's marginalized position through notions of statehood (Clapham, 1996). The general agreement is that the state in Africa does not conform to the empirical requirements for statehood (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982; 1986; Jackson, 1992:1). As such, the existence of weak states in Africa can be attributed to the international recognition that is accorded to them by the international community of states. Consequently these states do not have the ability to influence the decisions of each other or the wider international world. However, the Westphalian conceptual framework that has hitherto been used to analyse and understand Africa's international relations is theoretically flawed. This is because "... the Westphalian sovereign state model has never been an accurate description of many of the entities that have been regarded as states." (1995:115).

Despite the above, the common argument often advanced is that the theoretical neglect suffered by African states has to do with the fact that the state in Africa is seen as an artificial construct. The consequences of this artificiality account for the weakness of most states in Africa (Hyden, 2006; Englebert, 2009; Reno, 1997, 1999). This weakness of most states in Africa in turn means

that these states lack agency in international relations. Not only are these states not viable categories for analysis in international relations, they are deemed as one of the most important problems for establishing international order (Fukuyama, 2004:92). While there is general agreement about the weaknesses of African states, there is disagreement among a wide spectrum on how to define this weakness. Robert Rotberg for instance contends that state weakness in Africa stems from the inability of such states to "... mediate between the constraints and challenges of the international arena and the dynamism of their own internal economic, political and social realities (2003:2).

For Edward Newman, African states are not viable units of analysis in international relations because of the domestic condition of these states. He asserts that "The phenomenon of weak states refers here to a situation where central government has a poor capacity to control public order within its territory, is unable to consistently control its borders, cannot reliably maintain viable public institutions or services, and is vulnerable to extra-constitutional domestic challenges." (2009: 422). Subsumed under both these conceptions of weak states is the inability of Westphalian vision of the world "... to seek to understand the realities of the structure of political power as they are in fact to be found in post-colonial African societies." (Chabal and Daloz, 1999: 3). In part this failure to understand the African reality is a result of the fact that the analyses of the continent's international relations were based on an ideal statehood, Western in descent (Clapham, 1998:143).

As William Brown has noted "... the most general idea is an assertion that traditional IR theory, and the models of the international system which it uses, when taken to the African continent, fail to explain much about the continent's international relations nor help us understand the key problems and issues which are deemed to be central to Africa's international politics." (Brown, 2006:120). Yet, African states, like states elsewhere, are much more varied in their capacity and capability than they once were. Christopher Clapham has asserted that "... the less solid the state, the greater the need to look beyond it for an understanding of how the society that it claims to govern fits into the international system." (1996:5). Moreover, William Zartmann has noted that "The level of power in Africa is low, both within the system and toward the outside states. This simply means that African states have little capability of influencing the decisions of other

African and non-African states.” (1983:550). However, the assertiveness of African states in both the economic and security domains, as will be illustrated elsewhere, in the conduct of their international relations suggests the need to recast the analysis of the continent in a manner that reflects its contribution to the notion of soft balancing as a new theoretical approach to the study of international relations theory. Another concept critical to the understanding of international relations which also requires revisiting is the notion of sovereignty.

### **Sovereignty and Africa’s International Relations**

The general Realists conception of sovereignty concerns itself with ability of the states to make authoritative decisions (Thomson, 1995). A broader conception of sovereignty suggests that “... they have the authority to relegate activities, issues, and practices to the economic, social, cultural, and scientific realms of authority or to the states’ own realm- the political” (Thomson, 1995:214). But, state-centric conceptions of sovereignty posit that weak states are only nominally sovereign. Like with the arguments of weak states and the negative connections assigned to it when analyzing Africa’s international relations, the notion of sovereignty also needs to be recast when discussing the continent’s relations with the rest of the world. The need to change the way in which we think about sovereignty, especially as it relates to Africa, stems from changes in the international environment (Kegley, 1993). This reformulation of the concept of sovereignty is necessitated by the fact “... that post-colonial sovereignty constitutes a historical deviation from the Western norms, both as a juridical fiction and empirical reality.” (Grovoqui, 2001:30; 2002:316). Moreover, the classical understanding of sovereignty which suggests that structural hierarchies exist in international relations also requires closer scrutiny. Indeed, the argument here is that by recasting sovereignty through African lenses, we may be necessitated to come up with new conceptual categories not only about the politics on the continent, but also about the understanding of sovereignty. To do this, we need to interrogate the postulate by David Blake (2003) that sovereignty revolves around a relationship of authority in which one country is expected to obey the commands of another country. A fruitful entry point to address the current scenario in which Africa’s interpretation of sovereignty is seen as an anomaly, which deviates from Westphalian sovereignty, would be to look at the classical understanding of sovereignty.

Generally, sovereignty is defined as “... the recognition of the claim by a state to exercise supreme authority over a clearly defined territory, is not a single norm, but an institution comprising several, sometimes conflicting norms, and is associated with a bundle of properties, such as territory, population, autonomy, authority, control and recognition.” (Zaum, 2007:3; Agnew, 2005:439). Important to note is that the concept sovereignty contains both an internal and external dimension. Internally, a state is considered sovereign if it has complete control over its territory: domestic sovereignty (Krasner, 1999). Externally, a state should get the recognition from other states that it is indeed one of them (Lake, 2003). External sovereignty is also referred to as juridical sovereignty (Jackson, 1990) or international legal sovereignty (Krasner, 1999). From the afore-mentioned, sovereignty in international relations essentially deals with the dichotomy of inside and the outside and has as its core principle the notion of legal state sovereignty (Walker, 1993). The inability of African states to control the inside, and especially, the outside, make the utility of analysing sovereignty and its application tenable on the continent. Attempting to understand the notion of sovereignty has resulted in controversial debates about empirical and juridical sovereignty and also about negative versus positive sovereignty.

The arguments advanced about sovereignty and Africa’s international relations is that the inability of these states to have complete control over their domestic territories means that they do not have empirical or positive sovereignty (Jackson, 1990; Kaplan, 1994). The existence of African states during this period: “... have been permitted to exist on the sufferance of the major powers, especially when it suited them to allow defenceless states to retain their independence as a means of regulating conflict between themselves.” (Clapham, 1998:144). This suggests that the agency of African states to decide their own path in engaging the international community was to a large extent determined by the policy choices made for them by the external environment. In analysing negative sovereignty, Christopher Clapham concludes that African states only “... existed ultimately because the dominant states of the global order had deemed that they should be permitted to do so.” (1998:144). Moreover, the principle of sovereignty was often invoked to protect the leaders of African weak states (Jackson and Rosberg, 1986).

Another argument also put forward to justify the contention that African weak states cannot lay claim to full sovereignty, is premised on the notion that leaders in these states benefit from invoking the notion of sovereignty often, which endows their governments with external validation and legitimacy. In this regard, Christopher Clapham has claimed that “Quasi-statehood understandably led the rulers of weak states to place an emphasis on sovereignty, which was critically important to them because they have so few other cards to play.” (1998:145; Jackson, 1992:24). Moreover, he asserts that “... international relations actually *was* important to these rulers, because their access to international resources played a critical role in their own survival strategies...” (1998:145; Weiss and Hubert, 2002: 364). Yet, such an analysis of Africa’s international relations does not reveal the whole picture. This is because “... the regime of sovereignty implemented in Africa did not involve a different morality than that which applied to European powers. It simply established a distinct degree of moral solicitation consistent with the historical wills and desires which effected specific modes of identities and subjectivity and corresponding modalities of allocation of values and interests.” (Grovoqui, 2001:31). Consequently, we argue here that the actions of African states suggest that for them sovereignty is “... the idea that there is a final and absolute political authority in the political community... and that no... final and absolute authority exist elsewhere.” (James, 1986:40). Following this postulate, the paper contends that the notion of soft balancing represents the most useful way of understanding Africa’s increased assertiveness in international relations.

### **Soft Balancing: A Theoretical exploration**

In the aftermath of the bipolar world, the general arguments about the structure of international society have coalesced around the nature of a multipolar world or a unipolar world, with the United States of America at its apex. The common assumption about Africa’s position in international relations was always premised on the fact that the states on the continent would accept the legitimacy and authority of those great powers that lead the international hierarchical structure (Hurrel, 2006). Such an approach to international order and international relations suggests that theorists still do not “... take seriously the possibility that different regions of the world might indeed be different.” (Kang, 2003:166). Moreover, the military weakness of most African states suggests that they have to find other ways than (hard balancing) to conduct their

international relations. The argument here is that soft balancing as a strategy offers African states the opportunity to conduct their international relations in a manner which make them relevant. The notion of balancing and bandwagoning from the balance of power literature, suggest that some states adopt ‘strategies of opposition’ towards the global hegemony while others pursue ‘strategies of accommodation’ (Whitaker, 2010).

Theory of soft balancing suggests that states balance to secure interests. African states, by and large, do not have the military capability to challenge any major great power. From this reading, the foreign policy options of these states are extremely limited if the only consideration is military or hard power. Hence the use of non-military tools such as international institutions, economic statecraft and other diplomatic arrangements are used (Pape, 2005:10). The above definition is in contrast to the one provided by T.V. Paul who contends that soft balancing

“... involves tacit balancing short of formal alliances. It occurs when states generally develop ententes or limited security understandings with one another to balance a potential threatening state or a rising power. Soft balancing is often based on a limited arms buildup, ad hoc cooperative exercises, or collaboration in regional or international institutions; these policies may be converted to open, hard-balancing strategies if and when security competition becomes intense and the powerful state becomes threatening.” (2004:4).

The conception of soft balancing elicits different responses from the literature. Beth Whitaker offers two contending definitions of soft balancing. Firstly, she asserts that soft balancing: “... include nearly any action taken by a weaker state to gain influence with a stronger state.” ... and secondly points out that it involves: “... coordinated efforts among less powerful states and to actions responding to security threats from the hegemon.” (2010:1110). Yet, others view soft balancing in less military terms. For instance, Andrew Hurrell (2005) highlights the need to adopt soft balancing as a foreign policy tool to protect their primacy and relevance in the conduct of their international relations. He asserts that the: “... lack of power in the international system multipolarisation must become a priority foreign policy objective of developing states, as unbalanced power will permit the powerful to ‘lay down the law’ to the less powerful and skew the terms of cooperation in its favor.” (2005:16). But while the literature on soft balancing offers

us alternative ways of analysing weak state behaviour, soft balancing as a theory has thus far only been used to explain the second-tier powers, in Europe and rising powers such as China, India, Brazil and Russia (Whitaker, 2010; Hurrel, 2006). The contention here is that soft balancing as a theory serves as a powerful theoretical construct to explain the behaviour of African weak states towards the United States, the European Union and their attitude to world trade negotiations. Deliberate policy choices and not position in the structure of the international society determines the behaviour of states.

The next sections contend that the increasing assertiveness of states in Africa in the aftermath of the Cold War has to do with a change in geo-strategic relations with the external world. However, the point of departure is that the alteration of Africa's international relations has less to do with a negative impact of the post-Cold War on the importance of the continent, but is more shaped by the agency shown by these states themselves.

### **African Agency in International Relations: The Economic Dimension**

Debates about Africa's international economic relations are often invoked to explain the marginal role that the continent plays in the global political economy. Writing on African marginalisation in the 1990s, Bayart et al have noted that: "The main actors in the international system are inclined to disengage from a region whose geostrategic significance has declined and whose economic potential seems to have been placed on hold for an indefinite period." (1999:6). Part of the answer to this structural weakness and increased marginalisation during this period relates to international economic structural power (Thomas, 2004). The common argument is that due to the economic weaknesses of African states the policy options available to these countries profoundly circumscribe what they can and cannot do to improve the material conditions of their citizens. From this reading, no cognizance is taken of the fact that it is: "... the strength of domestic policies that counts in promoting [economic] development." (Lee and Smith, 2010:1097). Simply put, internal needs and constraints of weak states determine the actions that they take to promote their international economic relations. The sovereignty of African states was challenged by the introduction of SAPs. Moreover, the introduction of SAPs also became an

ideological tool for protecting the statehood of these African countries and those who benefitted from protecting such statehood.

In addition to the above, the notion of vulnerability (read weakness) is often invoked to describe African state behaviour in international trade. Donna Lee and Nicola Smith note that: "... international policy elites in the 1990s and 2000s used a language of vulnerability and constraints in the context of globalisation debates to argue that small states' policy options were limited to a neoliberal agenda (including policies such as trade liberalisations, re-regulation and financial monetarism." (2010:1097). In essence the logic of smallness and weakness use was intended to: "... argue for a limited set of policy opportunities available to solve the material condition of being a small state, to obscure other policy possibilities, and to (re)produce dominant discourses surrounding neoliberal globalisations. Yet, the defiance and opposition to multilateral trade negotiations of these small and weak African states illustrate that their actions are motivated by deliberate policy choices and the availability of alternatives to policies prescribed to them.

Economic interests and the availability of alternatives to the USA and EU economic aid and trade can also explain the use of soft balancing by African states. These alternatives which were not available previously relates to the increase economic engagement between African countries and China primarily and India generally. Indeed Dominik Kopyński (et al) assert that: "In seeking to cultivate external relations with African countries, China has long stressed its commonly shared roots with African nations as a developing country rather than a Western state, and as such the symbolic attraction of China clearly reverberates with many African elites who seem to look on China as a positive development model." (2011:129). Moreover, Chinese investment and trade on the continent has increased dramatically over the past decade. According to a Report by the United States Government Accountability Office (2013), Chinese investment in the continent has increased to US\$ 1.7 billion in 2011. Similarly, trade between China and Africa has increased from \$4.4 billion to \$56.3 billion from 2001 to 2011, surpassing USA whose figures has increased from \$6.8 billion to \$20.3 billion during the same period, according to the report. Aid to Africa, without the prescriptions that normally accompany aid from Africa's traditional donors is estimated at 1, 3 billion in 2008 (Brautigam, 2009). At the Focac meeting in Sharm El-Sheikh (2009), China promised US\$5 billion in concessional loan for the period 2009 – 2012. The

alternative economic avenues that China offers Africa, also serve as a powerful antidote to the prescriptive policies the continent was compelled to adhere to since the 1980s. More critically, it has brought new dynamics into the continent's relations with the external world and has also changed the domestic scene in many African countries.

Similarly, increased involvement by India in Africa offers the continent an opportunity to further diversify its international relations away from its conventional partners: The EU and North America (Taylor, 2010; 2012). An increase in trade and aid figures bears testimony to the blossoming of this relationship. For instance, trade between Africa and India for the period 2010/11 reached US\$45 billion and is estimated to grow beyond US\$ 75 billion by 2015 (Taylor, 2012:779). The magnitude of the increase in India-African trade volumes have also recently been recorded by the WTO. Its report points out that: "The value of bilateral trade jumped from US\$ 5.3 billion in 2001 to US\$ 12 billion in 2005 to US\$ 63 billion in 2011." (WTO, 2013:15). The report further projects that trade between India and Africa can reach US\$ 176 billion by 2015 (ibid.). During the period under review, India has also increased considerably its development assistance to the African continent. In 2011, India pledged US\$ 700 million to Africa for the establishment of new institutions and training programmes across the continent (Taylor, 2012). This diversification of Africa's trade and aid relations has provided the continent the opportunity to become more assertive in the conduct of their international relations.

The assertiveness of African countries economically is also illustrated in the agency shown by them in multilateral trade negotiations of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Indeed, the inability of the WTO to conclude the trade talks which started in 2001 has much to do with the level of deviance shown by these economically weak African states. Donna Lee and Nicola Smith posit that: "The current state of play in the WTO is that developing countries insist that, unless agreement is reached on agricultural market access and non-agricultural market access (NAMA) then negotiations on the other key issues (the priorities of the major developed countries), namely services, trade in environmental goods and services, and trade facilitation, will not take place." (2010:1098). The most vocal of these weak African states are Tanzania and the so-called Cotton Four comprising Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali. The challenge posed

by African countries to challenge prevailing international political economy is not only limited to the WTO.

Both economic domestic factors and availability of alternatives seems to have contributed to the current impasse in trade talks between the European Union and African countries. Moreover, the current negotiations between the European Union and African countries also provide some insight into the changing nature of Africa's international relations. In part, the deviance some states in Africa, such as Angola, Mozambique and Namibia have shown towards the EU can also be explained by the emergence of China as an alternative centre for trade and aid. Indeed, Maurizio Carbone has argued that: "... the EU may indirectly have suffered from the fact that some African countries sought to use China as leverage in the negotiations with the EU." (2011:2004; Naidu and Davies, 2006:80). The provision of alternative policy options and the reconfiguration of the international relations of these states do not suggest that they are wholeheartedly opposed to trade with the EU. Rather, they act in ways to shift the economic power of great powers in favour of themselves. The reluctance of Angola and Namibia to sign the EPA has much to do with the changing environment in both the trade and aid sectors.

The change in international political economy as a result of the emergence of China has implications for trade and aid, as well as North-South relations. Moreover, the amount of trade and aid provided by the Chinese now makes it the second largest economy in the world. Jean Chaponniere points out that: "Between 2000 and 2012, China-Africa trade increased twelve folds [and] has reached 140 U\$ billion" (2012:1). By and large, this has changed the balance of power in international relations. This is because: "By quietly offering alternatives to aid-receiving countries emerging donors are introducing competitive pressures into the existing system." (Woods, 2008:1206). Such alternatives not only provide African countries with new avenues to define their varied economic national interests, but also compel us to reconceptualise notions of economic power and influence so central to understanding realists thought.

In the domain of security, soft balancing also offers African states the opportunity to demand that we transcend the Realists viewpoints on understanding and analysing notions such as the balance of power, sovereignty, the state and international security.

### **African Agency in International Relations: The Security Dimension**

The end of the bipolar rivalry has seen international relations theorists of different persuasion refocusing on the security concerns of great powers. More forcefully, Realists theorists argued that the downfall of the Soviet Union has given rise to a revival in Realism as the dominant theory in a unipolar world in which the United States had no military rival (Freedman, 1998). From this reading: "... the United States is sufficiently powerful so as to be unconstrained by the international system: the 'pressure of competition' are absent; no other state, or combination of states, can mount a serious attack against the survival or autonomy of the United States." (Sørensen, 2011:109). Other theorists focused on possible challengers to America's military preponderance (Waltz, 1993). In this trajectory, the contribution of Africa to ensuring international security was once again reduced to the margins (Buzan, 1991, Lake, 1997; Van De Walle, 2009). Indeed, in the aftermath of the Cold War, the debates surrounding Africa centered on weak and failed states (Buzan and Hansen, 2010:179). Simply put, Africa was discussed for its nuisance value and insecurity. In this regard Jan Bachmann and Jana HÖnke have noted that: "New cartographies of the periphery have emerged which represent deficient states as dangerous, not only to their citizens, but most of all to Western states." (2009: 99-100). The catalytic events of September 2001, introduced a new dynamic into understanding and analysing international security. The tragic events prompted the great powers to not only view the security of these ostensible weak states to be intimately linked to theirs, but also brought into relief new security challenges, such as energy security. In the aftermath of September 2001, great powers were compelled to revisit their understanding of international security to accommodate the concerns of African states. The opposition which African countries have shown towards the security policies of the United States in particular started with their opposition to the war in Iraq.

In the aftermath of September 2001, the United States began to frame international relations in its image. Its point of departure was an attempt to remove Saddam Hussein as the leader of Iraq. The opposition that follows the 2003 attempts to build a global coalition to remove the leader of Iraq found strong resonance in Africa. Collectively, African governments thought the African Union voiced their disapproval to the actions of the United States. While some African countries, notably, Angola, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda and Uganda joined the 'coalition of the willing, a

number of African countries opposed the war in Iraq. The strongest opposition to the invasion of Iraq came from South Africa, Nigeria, Senegal and Tanzania. The actions of these States can by and large be attributed to domestic protest and entangling diplomacy. In view of the fact that Nigeria and South Africa are considered key allies (anchor states) of the United States and some of the biggest trading partners on the continent, Realist theory has been unable to explain the actions of these countries. While South Africa and Nigeria cannot be considered weak states in the real sense of the word, their actions is in line with the theory of soft balancing, which suggest that these relatively powerful regional actors' actions are motivated by a desire to maintain the regional balance of power.

In addition to the opposition to the Iraqi war, African countries have also defied Realists' logic in opposing the 'war on terror'. The 'war on terror' was anchored in the establishment in the United States of the Patriotic Act. Amongst the many provisions and aims of the Patriotic Act was to improve law enforcement powers, increase surveillance and encroach or circumscribe freedoms in the name of national security (Whitaker, 2007, 2010). Many African countries adopted legislation similar to that passed in the United States (see table 1). However, while some African countries passed this counter-terrorism legislation without much domestic opposition, in a number of these countries such legislation was very contested. In key anchored states in Africa, such as South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria, for instance, counter-terrorism legislation have faced opposition from civic leaders and the general population (Bachmann and HÖnke, 2009; Whitaker, 2008, 2010). In these three instances, the concerns with domestic legitimacy superseded all other considerations. As such, Realism must be broadened to explain internal factors in addition to focusing on the external environment (David, 1991).

**Table 1: Counter-terrorism in Africa since September 2001**

Passed with minimal debate	Passed after extensive debate	Still pending
Tanzania (2002)	Mauritius (2002)	Somalia
Tunisia (2003)	Seychelles (2004)	
Uganda (2002)	South Africa (2004)	
Namibia (2012)	Kenya (2008)	
	Nigeria (2011)	
	Swaziland (2008)	
	Egypt (2008)	
	Ghana (2008)	
	Zambia (2007)	
	Zimbabwe (2007)	

**Various Sources**

The establishment of the African Command (AFRICOM) in October 2007 in the Department of Defense by the United States was seen as marking the advent of a new strategic relationship between Africa and the United States (Van De Walle, 2009: 3). The creation of AFRICOM was also seen as a strategy to counter-act the increasing influence of China in Africa, concerns with terrorism and oil (Whitaker, 2010). South Africa was once again at the forefront of the criticism about the establishment of AFRICOM. South Africa’s opposition to the establishment of AFRICOM finds resonance in the literature on soft balancing which suggest that regional balance of power concerns serves as a powerful antidote for counter-acting the actions of a great power. The regional body, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), also agreed that no country in the region should host AFRICOM (Whitaker, 2010). African countries expressed similar opposition to the issue of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Six countries were in particularly opposed to a demand by the USA that countries provide immunity under the American Service members’ Protection Act. These countries were Kenya, Mali, Namibia, Niger, South Africa and Tanzania (Whitaker, 2010). While the actions of the continental giant South

Africa is understandable, the actions of other relatively economically and military weak countries defy Realists logic which suggests that these countries normally bandwagon with stronger or great power/s. Finally, Africa's opposition to the Libyan conflict also provides new insight into the repositioning of the continents' international relations. While the opposition to the conflict initially was spearheaded by the African Union, a number of African countries were ferociously opposed to any intervention in Libya. Led by South Africa, Kenya and Zimbabwe, African leaders have expressed concern about the intervention in Libya. In all the instances mentioned above, soft balancing as an alternative theory offers a more viable way of explaining the international relations of contemporary Africa.

### **Concluding Remarks**

International relations generally are best seen as reflecting upon practice. The multidimensional character of the international relations brings into relief the contention that military force alone is not the only measure of power. Yet, in the aftermath of the Cold war Realists contend that international relations will once again return to the study and analysis of great power politics only. To be sure, the general argument was that following the end of the Cold War we would once again witness a decoupling of great power security structures from those of weak states. Because of the relative weakness of African states, their contribution to international relations would be limited to study its nuisance value. Yet, in the aftermath of the Cold War and in particular since September 2001, African states have shown a deviance in the conduct of their international relations which defies conventional realists thinking. In the domain of economics, small African countries such as Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Namibia and Tanzania have shown a deviance during the trade negotiations at the WTO and the negotiations for EPAs. The actions of these states are primarily driven by domestic politics and the availability of alternative international donors and trading partners. Moreover, the availability of alternative centres for trade and aid means that African states are no longer compelled to accept the terms of North-South trade and investment proposed by the industrialised states and the major international lending institutions. The afore-mentioned suggests that in an attempt to protect their sovereignty, weak African states have been able to resist challenges to their control over policy, particular in the economic domain.

As regards the exercising of soft balancing in the domain of security, opposition from African countries was aimed at standing up to the United States. Moreover, the actions of African states suggest that security can be enhanced through negotiations and compromise rather than through the use or threat of force. From the enactment of counter-terrorism legislation, the opposition to the war in Iraq to the conflict in Libya, African countries have shown opposition to US policies. Mostly, these actions by African countries are driven by domestic politics in the case of small countries. However, regional powers such as South Africa and Kenya have shown opposition to US policies primarily because of regional balance of power concerns. Through their actions, this paper has illustrated, African states are challenging the central premise of realists' international relations: that great power politics is central to political life. As such, Realism as a theory is not helpful in explaining the behaviour of states in Africa. A theoretical response to such deviance, demand that we use the theory of soft balancing to explain contemporary Africa's international relations. Ultimately, a theory of soft balancing helps us to move the theoretical understanding of contemporary international relations beyond its hitherto biased framing as a subject concerned with great power politics only. Moreover, the above suggest that Africa's negotiating behavior demonstrates clearly that the era of relative passivity for many African countries in international relations is over.

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