

Security: Explaining Uganda’s military intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan

Author: Owiny Moses (2020)

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Abstract

Security as a concept is quite difficult and complex to make sense of as often various definitions of security in scholarship, if not used precisely may make different meanings to all people or even no meaning at all. This paper uses security as a concept, drawing from pertinent schools of thought to derive an understanding of what security means following certain actions or choices that states pursue regarding their own security. Using Uganda’s military intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Southern Sudan in 1996 and 2013 respectively to clarify the meaning of security is the cornerstone under which this piece of work is hinged.

1.0 Introduction

Security studies since its inception has represented the core of international relations discipline which largely and predominantly dealt with the issue of war and peace. Subsequent years after World War II witnessed a situation in which security studies became a synonym for strategic studies with a distinct focus on the military sector¹. Most writers have agreed that security is a “contested concept”. The most important question here is also whether there is a generally accepted meaning of security in theory or its more suitable to contend that the concept itself is ‘insufficiently explained and blurry’. Indeed, the concept of Security can be dangerously “confusing” when used without additional specifications².

2.0 Explaining the meaning of security

Arnold Wolfers (1952) reiterated this fact when he explained that when political formulas such as “*national interests*” or “*national security*” gain popularity, it has to be carefully scrutinized because according to him, such political formulas may not mean the same to different people or may not have any precise meanings at all. Baldwin (1997) for instance, in response to the specification problem formulated a series of questions regarding security as a policy objective by asking questions such as security for whom, security for which value, how much security, from

¹ Vladmir, Sulovic (2010). Meaning of Security and Theory of Securitization.

² Arnold, Wolfers (1952). “National Security” as an Ambiguous Symbol. Political Science Quarterly, Vol.67, No. 4. (Dec 1952) pp. 481 - 502

what threats, by what means, at what cost, in what time period³. This according to him, should be able to make appropriate analytical framework for future security studies.

Waltz defines security studies as “*the studies of the threat, use and control of military force*”⁴. Realists believe that in order to survive in an anarchic international system, actors (states) must pursue principal goals that are essential for their security survival. In other words, the realist political thinking is summed in Wolfers (1952) piece entitled “*National Security*” as an Ambiguous Symbol where he noted that no sovereign nation can be absolutely safe from future attack.

The other school of thought is the so called “*wideners*” with Barry Buzan at the forefront. These thinkers have challenged the traditional conception of security by widening and deepening security studies agenda both horizontally and vertically. Horizontally, the wideners think that in reality the security concept has expanded from exclusively military, onto political, economic, societal and environmental sectors. Vertically, the security concept should also be opened to referent objects other than the state to include individuals, social groups, and humanity as a whole⁵.

3.0 Contextualizing Security: Uganda’s Military exploits in the Region

Security is also understood as “*pursuit of freedom from threats*”⁶. This is significant in explaining Uganda’s security problems in the context of threats and the goal to survive within the realist assumption. Uganda’s involvement in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) for instance, dates back to 1996 when it, along with Rwanda, gave support to the Congolese rebel group; Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (ADFL) under the Leadership of former President Laurent Kabila⁷. The reasons for Uganda’s involvement in the conflict are many but while pleading before the International Court of Justice, Uganda noted the practical “*need to deal with threats from anti-Uganda insurgents who had found sanctuary in Congo’s vast eastern province, with the support or at least toleration, of Mobutu’s Government*”.

The Uganda High Command document which formed the basis of operations of the Ugandan military in DRC stated that the DRC government had given logistical and military support to anti-Ugandan insurgents operating out of its territory in circumstances which engaged the direct responsibility of the DRC⁸. Uganda reportedly asserted in the alternative that the DRC, by

³ David, Baldwin (1997). The concept of security. *Review of International Studies* 23, 5-26

⁴ Waltz, K. (1993). The Emerging Structure of International Politics. *International Security*, 18(2), 44-79. doi:10.2307/2539097

⁵ Buzan, B (1991). *People, States and Fear: An agenda of international security in post-cold war era*

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Kasaija, Apuuli (2001) *Africa at the Crossroads: Current themes in African Law: III: Current Legal Issues in the Great Lakes Region of Africa: International Law and Uganda’s involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)*.

⁸ *ibid*

tolerating and acquiescing in the activities of these rebel groups, had failed in its duties of vigilance and as a result incurred international responsibility for their actions.

The case of Uganda's involvement in the DRC conflict is illustrative of the meaning of security as advanced by Buzan (1991) but also within the realist security thought - where the maximization of security relative to each other is the principal goal of any state within the International system. Interestingly, it's also important to relate this submission to the other so called "wideners" school of thought of the fact that security concept has virtually expanded to cater for other referent objects such as individuals, social groups and humanity as a whole. For instance, its noted that Uganda's involvement in the DRC also range from a dislike for Mobutu's illiberal policies and the desire to exploit Congo's vast natural resources. Therefore, while in the period after World War II the main area of interests as far as security was concerned tended to largely resonate around military capabilities for States to deal with threats facing them militarily, states have now intervened in the interests of security largely defined by other referent obligations e.g. for the case of Uganda's alleged economic reasons in the case of DRC or in any case the need to protect its citizens within its own territories.

Wolfers (1952) notes that security points to some degree of protection of values previously acquired. He observed that a nation is secure to the extent to which it is not in danger of having to sacrifice its core values if it wishes to avoid war, and is able, if challenged to maintain them by victory in such a war. He succinctly says that what this implies is that security of any given state rises and falls with the ability of a nation to deter attack or to defeat it. It's also important to note that the ability of states to acquire greater level of security is dependent on their own opportunities and Power. Uganda's ability to be a leader in most of the regional military intervention as seen in the fight against terrorism can be likened to this approach. Uganda for instance, has intervened in the activities in South Sudan due to various reasons but one key reason is the ability of the country to deter any possible security threat and dangers within its territories and the commitment to deter those security threats of other states within the Greats Lake Region and Africa as a whole.

The case of Uganda's involvement in the conflict of South Sudan is illustrative of the argument advanced above regarding power and opportunities of a state to exercise such functions and mandate. During the night of 15th December 2013, fighting broke out between factions of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in Juba, the capital of the Republic of South Sudan. The fighting pitted forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and his former Vice President Riek Machar. Five days later, Uganda sent troops into South Sudan, advancing a number of reasons for intervention, including that it had been invited by the legitimate government of South Sudan to ensure order; it needed to evacuate Ugandan citizen caught up in the fighting; it has been asked by the United Nations Secretary General to intervene and that the regional organization, the Inter-governmental Authority on Development had sanctioned the intervention⁹.

⁹ Ibid

These reasons advanced are significant because it shows the extent to which the Uganda Government has remained a key player in issues of security within the Great Lakes Region and the Africa as a whole. This is also a testament of the fact that security is indeed a value for which a nation such as Uganda can have more or less and which it can even aspire to have it in greater measure. In fact, Wolfers (1952) agrees to this assertion and has this to say, “*National efforts to achieve greater security would also prove in part at least to be a function of power and opportunity which nations possess of reducing danger by their own efforts*”.

Uganda’s involvement in conflicts in the DRC, South Sudan and its ability to provide Peace keeping operations in Somalia under the Amison and Equatoria Guinea among others is informative of the country’s ability to play the game of international politics and security as a Champion. Drawing from the works of scholars such as W.B Gallie, Baldwin (1997) uses the concept of a champion to better illustrate the point. He notes that to label a team as a champion is to say that it plays the game better than other teams and thus questions whether the concept of security is similar to the champion analogy.

He answers this through the neorealist proposition of security as the most important goal of any state and that in the same way winning a championship is presumably the goal of all teams, just as teams compete to be champions so does states compete for security. As the champion is better at playing the game than other teams, so states with more security than other states are better at playing the neo realist version of the game of international politics. Wolfers (1952) of course disagrees with this neorealist political thought on security because he contends that states vary widely in the value they place on security and that states do not play by the same rule of the game in international politics.

4.0 Conclusion

This paper attempted to simplify the meaning of security drawing from examples like that of Uganda’s military interventions in the DRC and South Sudan. The definition or explanations of security here is not exhaustive. I picked relevant security paradigms that I found easy and critical in explaining Uganda’s military exploits in the two countries. The ultimate aim of the paper was to ease an understanding of security as a concept by relating it to state security exploits. Its therefore important to say that, because of the various articulations on security meanings, its always good to specify which angle of idea one intends to advance within the most relevant and befitting paradigm to explain issues of state behaviors, practice and or security perceptions.