

Deconstructing the Ambivalence in Kenya's Foreign Policy: A Neoclassical Realism perspective.

Since the attainment of Kenya's independence in 1963 up until the 21st century, Kenya's foreign policy has largely been linked to the political leadership of the country. In particular the leadership style of a particular head of state. Much that has been written and discussed of Kenya's foreign policy has been characterized by undertones of "The Big Man Syndrome".

Another defining characteristic of Kenya's foreign policy has been its low-key engagement within the East African region, while at the same time upholding moralistic and idealist positions in the international system. This inconsistency has been the enduring ambivalence



in Kenya's foreign policy orientation.

"Why the ambivalence?" This question seems to have escaped the attention of scholars and students of Kenya's foreign policy. Key to understanding a state's foreign policy is by looking at the determinants of foreign policy. In this area, much has been done to indicate that a state's foreign policy is determined by either its domestic or external environment. This is where neoclassical realism parts ways with systemic and Innenpolitik theories of foreign policy.

Neoclassical realism explicitly incorporates both external and internal variables, updating and systematizing certain insights drawn from classical realists' thoughts. Neoclassical realism contends that the scope and ambition of a state's foreign policy is first and foremost driven by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities. Further, neoclassical realists point out that systemic pressures must be translated through unit-level intervening variables, such as decision-makers' perceptions and domestic state structures



Kenya has since independence enjoyed a relatively superior position in East Africa, owing to its more robust economy. This advantage has seen the state seek to maintain the status quo, thereby employing a very cautionary approach in engagements with her neighbors. On the other hand, Kenya is by fact a Third World developing state according to international standards of economic

development, and has therefore had to toe the line with the demands of the international system. Kenya's foreign policy orientation has therefore had to always play a balancing act between its regionally "powerful" position, as well as its "weak" position in an anarchic international system. Kenya's place in the IS has been the determining factor of Kenya's foreign policy, as well as the source of the ambivalence in Kenya's foreign policy.

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