Revisiting Regional Security Complex Theory in Africa: Museveni’s Uganda and Regional Security in East Africa

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ABSTRACT
This article revisits Buzan and Waever’s Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), and asks what is the utility of Buzan and Waever’s RSCT framework in understanding African security issues? It includes theoretical insight and criticism of RSCT whilst simultaneously providing an empirical case study of Uganda’s President Museveni within East Africa. It focuses in particular on a period between 2010 and 2015 when East African security dynamics were in flux. The article argues, primarily, that Regional Security Complex Theory can be improved by including a clearer articulation of how African leaders assert influence within, and shape, regional security dynamics in Africa. Doing so allows for a better realization of how Regional Security Complexes come into being. The article draws on over four years of desktop research and over one hundred fieldwork interviews in East Africa and South Africa with regional security specialists, military personnel, politicians, government officials, journalists, academics, market traders and economists. The paper highlights President Museveni’s uniquely active and influential role in shaping regional security dynamics in East Africa.

INTRODUCTION
Buzan and Waever admit that Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) struggles to fully explain the African context. In their seminal “Regions and Power: The Structure of International Security”, which presented the authors’ overarching theoretical framework that a previous array of works had built toward, they stated their reliance on secondary sources did not reflect the nuanced complexity required to undertake a detailed analysis of the continent. RSCT nonetheless provided, and continues to provide, the analytical framework of a vast array of subsequent literature on Africa (as it has done for various other parts of the world).

This article revisits RSCT to assess its applicability to Africa. It asks, what is the utility of Buzan and Waever’s RSCT framework in understanding African security issues? How well does RSCT explain the nature of African security challenges, agency, statehood and inter-state relations, and the effects therein on regional security?
security dynamics? The article’s main contribution to discussions on Regional Security Complex Theory in relation to Africa, is, primarily, that the theory can be improved by including a clearer articulation of how African leaders assert influence within, and shape, regional security dynamics. In addition, the case study of Uganda’s President Museveni within East Africa showcases that understanding this influence of leaders within regional security dynamics allows for a better realization of how Regional Security Complexes come into being. The significance of African leaders in shaping regional security dynamics; and this potential becoming of a Regional Security Complex in East Africa, where security dynamics between actors fluctuate, shift and settle somewhat to form an increasingly definable region, is not explained by Buzan and Waever.

The paper provides theoretical insight and criticism of Regional Security Complex Theory through an empirical case study of fluctuating regional security dynamics in East Africa, in particular between 2010 and 2015 (although reference is made to events outside this period). President Museveni of Uganda has shown impressive degrees of agency against partners during this period (and beyond) in shifting and shaping regional security dynamics in a way that better structures relations whilst benefitting his own agenda.

Following this introduction, the paper is divided into five sections. Section one, below, reviews the literature surrounding RSCT within International Relations (IR) theory, followed by a brief outline of how it was used methodologically for the subsequent case study analysis. Section two unpacks the political economy of, and statebuilding processes underway in, Uganda’s “domestic-level” and Museveni’s role therein; and outlines two securitization processes related to terrorism and the oil sector. Section three discusses the “global-level” and “interregional-level” role in Uganda’s security concerns. Section four then unpacks the crucial “regional-level”. Particular attention is paid to events within the East African Community (the most functional and progressive regional organization in greater East Africa) during a time period when security dynamics were particularly in flux. The conclusion then summarizes the implications of the case study on the utility of RSCT and outlines future lines of inquiry, arguing that better articulating the role and influence of African leaders in regional security dynamics would add value to the theory.

**Literature review and methodology: RSCT and its discontents**

Classical Realism and Neo-Realism’s explicit interest in nation-states and Great Power politics has largely failed to explain the complex fluidity of the African context. Post-colonial theorists have argued such mainstream IR has been “complicit in shoring-up a hegemonic world order by naturalising the terms of reference,” and expounds the need for original, Africa-born terminologies and concepts. RSCT, meanwhile, asserts that the uniqueness of particular regional contexts must be highlighted and interrogated, whilst also claiming to move away
from traditional IRs focus on a state-centric, militarized conception of security issues. This potentially offers an all-encompassing framework that allows Africa’s exceptional (regional) circumstances and unique nuances to be brought to the fore, whilst also remaining applicable to other areas of the globe and IR discourse more broadly. Tuva notes (when assessing Chinese policy toward North Korea) that “in prioritising a lower level of analysis than more abstract systemic theories, RSCT offers a practical framework for security analysis and a better chance of reflecting the real concerns of policy-makers.”

But does the theory achieve this, theoretically and in terms of practical utility, for Africa? Wolff maintains that RSCT retains a biased state-centric approach that “does not capture fully the increasing significance of non-state actors”. More traditional security scholars, meanwhile, fear RSCT’s argument that a speech act and referent object determine what constitutes a (socially constructed) security issue. This “securitisation process” means that potentially “everything becomes security” whereby any number of issues can be included, risking security studies becoming largely redundant. In addition, the “New Regionalism” literature, appearing around the same time that RSCT was fully presented in Regions and Power, arguably diminished the supposed uniqueness of Buzan and Waever’s work by also drawing attention onto the regional nature of security concerns. Hettne recognized the increasing prevalence of regional and sub-regional institutions in the post-Cold War era (regionalism), as well as the more complex locally driven, informal socio-political-cultural processes that interlink and enmesh regions (regionalization).

**An evolving theory**

The value of RSCT, however, has remained compelling for authors. Unequivocally, Buzan and Waever’s ideas around the social construction of insecurity “gave birth to a completely new perspective on how security can be studied.” RSCT’s authors, also, envisaged future scenarios where some of RSCT’s assumptions become outdated, explicitly stating it is “a strength of the theory that it establishes the possibility of its own overturning.” This has greatly encouraged a plethora of authors to utilize the theory whilst also critiquing, adapting and enriching its frameworks to offer compelling analyses.

Santini blended RSCT with Donnelly’s “heterarchy” concept to compare Middle Eastern-North African rivalries across historical eras, for example. Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll argued for an alternative typology of Regional Security Complexes than the ones Buzan and Waever outlined. They sought to understand order within Regional Security Complexes, and – interestingly – the role of regional leaders in initiating agreements on security policy. Crucially, however, they retained a state-centric focus that conceptualized states as the “leaders”; rather than the role of individual leaders operating within state
structures but asserting agency across national, regional and international boundaries as commonly understood.\textsuperscript{15}

Cannon and Donelli more recently investigated whether a Middle Eastern RSC was expanding to include the Horn of Africa (they concluded not); but did not seek to uncover how and why any RSC formation comes into being initially in the way this paper attempts.\textsuperscript{16} Brosig discusses African regime security complexes that “comprises a multitude of actors”, such as African regional organizations and key states like South Africa, Nigeria, the UK and France.\textsuperscript{17} Regime Security Complexes are not mutually exclusive – a defining “rule” of Buzan and Waever’s Regional Security Complexes – and Brosig tries to explain how these have come into being: regional organizations investment in security architecture; the post-Cold War world’s security governance (with focus on Peacekeeping etc); and resource scarcity requiring collaboration on such matters.\textsuperscript{18} But African agency and the role of African leaders in shaping these development is largely missed.

As per this paper, Hills explicitly queried the relevance of RSCT for Africa, concluding that “RSCT offers a framework rather than a means to explain the dynamics of the situation.”\textsuperscript{19} Hills explained the importance of non-state actors – African police chiefs – in framing securitizations. She recognized how securitizing moves and regionalism in Africa cannot be separated from everyday politics, and that state (meaning incumbent regime) interests and personal relationships were crucial to dynamics. The explicit influence of African leaders and their agency was missed, however, as was discussion of how regions may be shifted toward greater stability or not (although police chiefs’ links to Presidents was noted). Hills concluded that although RSCT remains relevant it does not explain change very well: “it presents a static picture of the world that fails to explain how or why the various levels of security are manipulated, subverted, or merely changed to accommodate different circumstances or goals.”\textsuperscript{20} Improving this aspect of the theory is a key area of investigation for this paper.

That very many authors have used and queried RSCT makes its allure enduring. Its policy relevance in Africa is also worth noting. A 2017 UNECA report on conflict in the Sahel, for example, utilized RSCT to make a noteworthy analysis of how a state-based regional security complex existed alongside, and in contradiction to, a people-based transnational security complex. These different security complexes were each compelled by different logics and concerns and were often in contradiction; such as state’s security concerns over protecting the national borders that people traversed as a means of survival.\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{Framework and methodological utility}

This research, therefore, revisits the utility of Regional Security Complex Theory in Africa. The paper used RSCT’s levels-of-analysis framework in assessing the degrees of influence that different actors have in shaping regional security
dynamics. RSCT emphasizes the importance of the Domestic level (meaning nation-state, in this case Uganda); Regional level (the immediate regional environment, namely East Africa); the Inter-regional level (relations between regions, therefore Africa); and Global level (great power actors such as US and China, and structural role of the international system). These all play a role in specific security issues and within regional security dynamics. But Buzan and Waever emphasize that the regional level is always important to varying degrees.22

The analysis below draws on over four years of desktop research and over one hundred field-work semi-structured interviews in East Africa and South Africa with regional security specialists and military personnel, politicians and government officials, and a variety of local actors including journalists, academics, market traders and economists. RSCT was used as a framework for formulating operational interview questions, with responses tabulated within a datasheet based upon RSCT’s levels-of-analysis, allowing a visualization of how responses adhered to or challenged the assumptions of the theory.

RSCT provided a useful starting point of analysis through its defining of three regional typologies: Regional Security Complexes (well-structured, interlinked security concerns across the region); unstructured (weak or isolated states whose national security issues do not affect neighbors); and overlayed (Great Power interests override the region’s own security dynamic). They also define less settled and coherent typologies, more relevant to Africa: Pre-complex (bilateral security relations are clear but currently lack the cross-linkages to bind the region into an RSC); Proto-complex (manifest security interdependence to delineate a region but security dynamics thinner/weaker than a formed RSC).23 In addition, a sub-complex is a distinct sub-region enclosed within a larger RSC, and an insulator state sits in-between larger regional formations.

RSCT accepts both neo-Realist assumptions of polarity, balance of power, and importance of material conditions, alongside the role of “patterns of amity and enmity,” in creating an “overall constellation of fears, threats, and friendships.”24 According to RSCT, each region can be placed within a sliding scale: a “conflict formation” where security interdependence is “shaped by fear of war and expectations of the use of violence in political relations”; a “security regime” sees the fear and expectation of conflict remain, but behaviors “are restrained by agreed sets of rules of conduct, and expectations that those rules will be observed”; and a “security community” is where members “do not expect or prepare for the use of force in their political relations”.25

Interviewees spoke to these issues, concepts and processes outlined by Buzan and Waever whilst adding the insight available only to those experiencing, promoting and reacting to particular security issues and regional security dynamics. The author was able to discern the key security challenges in Uganda and East Africa, the nature of the responses to them, the perceptions of local actors across a variety of sectors to those responses, and gain a better informed understanding of the nature of agency within those security processes. Using the framework showed
that certain leaders and key actors influence processes to a greater extent than material or normative conditions may assume; and through means not fully articulated by RSCT.

**Misunderstanding leadership**

Structures, organizations, institutions and processes that are well defined allow for “normal” behavior, which is the realm of management and governance. There seems to be an assumption from Buzan and Waever that if African states become closer to the Westphalian-state model with such functional governance structures and processes, that they will increase regional security linkages and become more recognizable RSC formations. But there is no serious analysis of how RSCs emerge from unstructured regions or how internal transformations occur, beyond brief mention of assessing material and discursive changes.

As noted by Burns, the study of leadership offers “a more sophisticated understanding of power, and of the often far more consequential exercise of mutual persuasion, exchange, elevation, and transformation”. In Africa, leadership is required for enacting change and problem-solving amongst the complexity found. Olonisakin notes that African states do not share the same historical and institutional trajectory of those in the West, the model and ideal of which is often assumed to be the solution to African security issues. She recognizes that “Leadership therefore becomes crucial to building, strengthening and sustaining such institutions of governance and thus critical to building the foundations of peace and stability.” Olonisakin’s work does not, however, extend to regional security issues and the role of African leaders in stabilizing (or not) regional dynamics or within regional organizations.

The below case study focusses on East Africa due to its especially troubled history and its regional East African Community institution being Africa’s most ambitious: revived in 2001 following a failed effort in the post-independence period, it is Africa’s only regional organization to have political federation of member states as its espoused end-goal. Uganda was of particular note due to President Museveni – in power with his National Resistance Movement (NRM) regime since his guerrilla “Bush War” victory of 1986 – enjoying a history of manipulating global level powers and deploying especially active security forces. This means that regional security dynamics, with competing regionalism and regionalization processes underway, are particularly intriguing in East Africa, whilst domestic-global level interactions confound what might be assumed.

**The State of Uganda**

Buzan and Waever argue that the domestic level in Africa “is better seen as substate, involving a quasi-autonomous pattern of actors and security dynamics
that is only partly attached to, and only partly dependent on, the ragged framework of the Westphalian state system.” They acknowledged, however, that: “A more detailed exploration of the security dynamics among these actors has been beyond our resources. But it may be the key to knowing how ‘regional’ security dynamics in Africa really work.”

In Uganda, President Museveni has to account for the interests and ambitions of competing power centers within the domestic political economy. The elite “King-Makers” are pandered to and/or coerced in order to maintain his authority. Museveni also has to manage and co-opt: Parliament (both NRM and opposition MPs); the military; NRM party (cadres and elites); and the general population, including the militia gangs who can fluctuate between being seen as useful loyalists or troublesome criminals. A local journalist, consultant and oil expert notes: “you really have a distinct absence of hierarchy … it’s difficult to say in what direction things are going to go, because you do have many moving parts.”

**Museveni’s challengers**

The West, China and other emerging powers interact with each of these pillars of statehood. MPs undergo regular capacity building training in the UK; and travel to China on fact-finding tours “promoting China and cementing that relationship, and trying to tell developing countries that China was your best ally.” These MPs then pass anti-terror legislation or sanction regional military deployments, as well as passing oil legislation or that related to Chinese infrastructure construction. The military is another key constituent in the state building process. In Uganda, “you have to be in full control of the military. This is an important component of who exercises power and how it is exercised.” Historically, the Ugandan People’s Defense Force (UPDF) “is more or less a British army … the British have been at the forefront of UPDF modernisation and professionalization.” Peacekeeping missions also still tend to be funded by the West; but China now provides significantly increased numbers of military training slots, and military equipment is brought from the East (including North Korea). A Brigadier explains “we have a very independent leadership … we have always stood our ground with donors on that to say we will go for the fairest prices and we will go for what we think suits our demands.” And regarding the King-Makers, any foreign business operating in Uganda, whether government or private, has to go through local “fronts” who inevitably have ties to the elite inner circle of NRM officials. Skimming of Western donor funding has caused scandals, and the Irish Tullow Oil was embarrassed by e-mail leaks showing they had discussed bribing Museveni in exchange for contracts. A member of the Uganda Overseas China Association also confirmed that Chinese government and private business are very adept at dealing with the nefarious business networks in Uganda. This creates networks of “very important stake holders who are not yet certain
whether their interests would still be protected and promoted if the NRM was not in power . . . politicians, possible players in the oil industry, very important entrepreneurs, and stakeholders abroad.”

This fluctuating complexity of Ugandan statehood is, therefore, more intriguing than a simple labeling of “substate” actors who are “only partly attached to, and only partly dependent on” the state: these are the institutions and actors vying for position within the ongoing state-building process, to which they are integral. A Western Defense Attaché who has worked in Uganda for many years, notes that “controlling this country is not about controlling 40 million people, it’s about controlling 5000.” Museveni to-date has retained the most leverage and influence over these competing forces: he has proven himself able to sack or arrest former allies when he deems them stepping out of line or gaining too much influence for themselves. But the President has to negotiate and manage, rather than simply dominate and dictate. As various institutions have slowly developed under Museveni’s NRM they have gained their own different levels of stature, independence and influence, even as the President seeks to maintain degrees of control over them.

Museveni retains influence through exercising a transactional leadership style which allows these actors to enjoy material or political rewards in exchange for their loyalty and labor. MPs are influenced through cajoling and rewarding rather than simply beaten and harassed (although that certainly does occur). The local fronts and King-Makers remain important players in Uganda’s military, political and development sectors. These are not “the alternative story to the state system” as discussed by Buzan and Waever. They have vested interests in the nature of state security responses and the national development agenda more broadly. A local expert explains that “the people we are talking about who steal, are actually performers. They are performers when it comes to work, and they also have mass following.”

Loyalty from the UPDF military is also not assumed, but actively sought and maintained: military deployments often afford opportunity for material gain for officers and generals; and keep troops busy and paid rather than idle and potentially subversive. The UPDF is now also being positioned as central to national development as it is “moving into infrastructure construction”. And amongst the citizenry, the political capital that Museveni retains for having brought a degree of order over Uganda is immense. His social bases of power include the ability to reward and coerce: this is used against different actors and the citizenry and is unquestionably an important feature of his leadership. However, his continued influence also stems from his legitimacy amongst the less-developed, country-side areas of Uganda who remember the post-independence periods of open conflict and general chaos. The narrative of Museveni being the protector of Uganda’s security interests, therefore, is central to his rule.
The securitization process

Buzan and Waever see security issues as social constructs. A securitized issue is one that has been promoted as a threat to a referent object by a securitizing agent; accepted as such by an audience, tacitly or explicitly; and reacted against through the employment of special measures. During field work in East Africa from 2013–15, two security issues were frequently cited as major concerns by both elite and local interviewees from all sectors, including political, military, economic and social: terrorism; and the fledgling Ugandan oil sector.

“Terrorism” has been consistently promoted as a security threat to the nation by President Museveni. Following 9–11, there was an immediate shift in Museveni referring to the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), who brutalized populations in Northern Uganda, as “terrorists”, having previously used the mockingly dismissive term “bandits” far more often. The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) – the remnants of a rebel movement relocated to the DRC border in Western Uganda – were also included. On 12th September 2001, Museveni publicly declared:

‘We in Uganda know very well the grievous harm that can be caused to society by terrorists, having suffered for many years at the hands of Kony (leader of the LRA) and the Allied Democratic Forces, terrorists supported by Sudan.’

Later, at a time when Western donor funding was in jeopardy due to Uganda’s controversial involvement in the Congo Wars, Al-Shabaab in Somalia was incorporated into the terrorism discourse. The 2007 African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) deployment was, in practice, a Ugandan mission initially. A UPDF Lieutenant Colonel noted “there was a certain degree of unilateralism in our deployment . . . it doesn’t happen very often, just one country deciding to deploy.”

Museveni’s terrorist securitization presented these disparate, time and context specific localized issues into a single phenomenon that was accepted by key Western security interests and made Uganda seen as a staunch ally in the US Global War of Terror. The LRA and ADF were placed on the US Terrorist Exclusion List soon after 9–11, and the AU facilitated the Somali deployment in 2007 as well as officially designating LRA a terrorist organization in 2011. Resultant special measures were obvious: the UPDFs northern campaign against the LRA was increasingly brutal; military attacks on ADF occurred throughout the Congo Wars until 2003 and periodically ever since; and the AMISOM mission would last 13 years and counting, eventually including a coalition of six African troop contributors.

Regarding the oil sector, revenues are estimated at approximately 9% of GDP sometime after first oil appears, now slated for 2021 after years of delays. For this securitization the oil is referent object; the threat is any group or act that challenges tight government control of the resource. During interviews, a shadow minister
confirmed that Museveni threatened that the army would takeover parliament if MPs failed to pass oil law laws in 2012/13 which centralized executive control of the sector, stating “he has his mechanism and the message was on. He made a statement that if we were dilly dallying he was going to dissolve parliament.”61 The Chief of Defense Forces, General Aronda, also told the press: “the message was well taken for those to who it was intended . . . Should you not change course, other things will be brought into play.”62 In 2015, Museveni made a further unsubtle threat of returning the country to violence if he did not remain in control of the oil, stating to supporters “they want me to go so they can come and spoil the oil money. These people want me to go back to the bush.”63

MPs, although some clearly under duress, accepted the move by passing the Oil Law legislation in 2013. Locals have also accepted government and business incursions into oil areas. Resultant special measures include: the Production Sharing Agreements (PSAs) between government and International Oil Companies only available to MPs through unusually stringent conditions64; and an army barracks being built along with a general militarization of the oil region with secret service operations managing any local dissent.65

Museveni, therefore, has overseen a domestic-level in Uganda whose state-building trajectory remains uncertain. However, his centrality in securitization processes and continued ability to assert influence over competing forces means that his leadership has dominated the Ugandan political economy for the past 34 years. RSCT’s so-called substate in Africa compels analysis to search beyond a simplistic Eurocentric assumption that the nation-state domestic level is a coherent entity. But the scene is more complex than a regime incumbents vs rebel actors framework, which Buzan and Waever slipped in to with their constant discussion of “dictators, warlords, and insurgency movements” in Africa.66 Museveni’s leadership of Uganda does not neatly fit such categories; and his influence against supposedly more powerful actors also belies expectations.

**Global players: meddling or collaborating?**

Buzan and Waever present a historical portrait of Africa in which the global-level geo-political context and role of Great and Super Power actors often aligns itself to local-level conflict formations, where regional dynamics are shaped by the fear and expectation of war. They present substate subversive groups being supported by different international actors depending on those global actors’ interests.67 Regarding the securitizations of focus here, certainly this global level has been strong in offering discursive and financial support for Uganda’s fight against terrorism. AMISOM made Museveni somewhat indispensable to US and Western security interests.68 In exchange, the US has supported Ugandan operations against the LRA in the DRC and Central African Republic, sanctioned members of ADF, and generally tolerated
Museveni’s abandoning of term limits and anti-homosexuality legislation (for example). Despite some frictions with the West, “the relationship is excellent ... Uganda has the capacity to do Peace Support Operations to a higher level frankly than most countries in Africa. And they are kinetic; and they have the will.”

Of additional note is that Chinese Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) are still circulating across the region, due to the supply given during the liberation era as well as those given more recently to Sudan and other sitting governments. Western arms are also in the region, however the Chinese are a major source to all of these “terrorist” groups. A Minister of State confirmed “Chinese made weapons have been in this region for years ... our radar in Uganda here captures on average per week up to 400 small aircraft that come from North Africa bringing weapons to the region ... we never find Western kind of weapons, they are mainly Chinese.”

This is more complex a relationship than arming incumbents vis-à-vis rebels in some kind of Cold War-era style proxy war, as Buzan and Waever assume. China does not deliberately create or exacerbate SALW proliferation or support particular terrorist groups; but its arms are clearly some kind of fuel in their continuation. And Museveni is not a Western stooge; but actively engages in operations against security threats (framed as terrorism) as a deliberate means of maintaining favor with the West when it suits his agenda, whilst ignoring their pressures when it does not.

Uganda’s oil sector likewise has a clear global level role with International Oil Companies heavily invested. Museveni has consistently resisted over-reliance on one foreign power within Uganda’s wider development agenda, however, and the oil sector has been no different. Museveni and NRM “have no interests in benefactors that control them ... Ugandan foreign policy is just a patchwork of strange bedfellows.” Western companies operated in the oil exploration and discovery phase in the early 2000s. There was then a deliberate turn East once more expensive production-related infrastructure was required, because “the government knew that if the maths were done then the West might not back the whole project”, which includes a costly refinery and mega pipeline, discussed further in the next section. Wikileaks cables also confirm that interest from US Exxon Mobil was actively resisted due to American and UK nagging over corruption scandals in 2009.

The China National Offshore Oil Corporation became a key partner instead, as part of China’s wider efforts in Uganda, operating alongside France’s Total and the Irish Tullow. China has also become a key player in the wider infrastructure development agenda on which Uganda has become increasingly fixated, for projects both directly related to the oil sector and those built with the clear intention to pay costs with future oil revenues. Chinese involvement in oil along with associated high capital mega projects “sets the stage for an era of
Chinese investment… the Chinese have taken like fish to water as far as the course of doing business in Uganda.”

**Inter-regional complexity**

In Africa, discussion of the inter-regional level – relations between regions – is problematic. Regions themselves are not well structured or clearly formed (as per the focus of this paper), meaning that “inter-regional” becomes something of a misnomer. Nonetheless, incorporating an inter-regional analysis is useful when taken to be embodied in the African Union, that (supposedly) oversees the regional organizations under its orbit and security matters specifically embedded within the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).

This level is generally rather weak in influencing security issues in Uganda and East Africa, where “it becomes interesting to consider whether APSA pushes the regions along or whether the regions push APSA along”. The African Union has provided tacit acceptance to various UPDF deployments against terrorist issues, without any overt hostility or reaction to the moves. It also provides institutional legitimacy and frameworks in certain instances, explicitly with the AMISOM deployment and more generally through Uganda’s role in APSA.

This inter-regional level is also less relevant regarding the oil issue. The AU enjoys very little influence as no agreements need to be discussed at or go through the body. The AU does produce long term visions and strategies calling on member states to enact particular frameworks and norms in relation to governance of oil and mineral sectors, but these are often easily ignored and have no discernible input on the Ugandan sector. A Secretary to the Ugandan Defense Doctrine, remarked: “we thought maybe the AU would come out re-invigorated … but peoples traditional thinking, non-interference in the countries affairs, that kind of thing … you see the club of gentlemen where they can meet and shake without sorting out the issues.”

Of additional importance however, and in relation to the subsequent section, are the immediate neighbors of “East Africa”: if any Regional Security Complex is forming or to be formed, these neighbors are clearly relevant to this inter-regional distinction. Below, the regional level – the immediate inter-state regional relations between Uganda’s neighbors – is discussed within the East African Community (EAC). This is because despite ostensibly being an economic body, EAC members’ cooperation on security matters preceded discussions on economic and political integration. Several interviewees remarked that military cooperation was, in fact, one of the most impressive and well-established aspect of the integration agenda compared to other sectors.

This contrasts with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which includes EAC members Uganda, Kenya and South Sudan,
plus five others from the Horn: Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea and Sudan. IGAD remains a mediation forum rather than an institutionalized security arrangement actively pursuing sectoral cooperation and integration between members. It has seen perpetual disagreement between member states since its creation in 1986 – including proxy and full-scale war – which has hindered its functioning and relevance. Ultimately, EAC has emerged “in a better shape to develop its security arm as compared to the IGAD,” due to IGADs focus on mediation efforts rather than mobilization capacity.

IGAD Members provoke significant security concerns for EAC partners, however, as noted elsewhere: Somalia is the home of Al-Shabab who have launched attacks in Uganda and Kenya; Sudan provided arms and support to the LRA and ADF for decades; Ethiopia is a military and economic heavy weight who is part of geo-strategic concerns. In addition, Eastern-DRC (on the West of EAC) is intensively unstable and home to ADF as well as the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) – the remnants of the Rwandan génocidaires. To-date, therefore, EAC has not formed a coherent region with “inter-regional” relations with these neighbors. Instead, there has been a structural tension between the institution’s members regarding whether a northward or southward “drift” is more desirable, as different partners seek linkages with neighboring states and regions depending on their borders and history (discussed further in the next section).

In summary, Museveni has displayed an ability to engage and utilize Great Power actors by forging mutuality between his and their own security interests. This mutuality “produces lasting results from the relationship of shared goals between leader and follower,” due to a “a sense of shared feelings or intentions among people experiencing a particular situation”. RSCT encourages an analysis of the relationships between these different levels, but there is an assumption that the global-level has something of an undue, meddling influence over African security; whereas Museveni frames mutually shared interests with the West and others in ways that suit his own agenda. The “inter-regional” environment has proven troublesome; which has encouraged Museveni to think regionally, within East Africa and in relation to Horn and other sub-regional neighbors, and seen him engage partners and influence processes in ways that few others have accomplished.

**Museveni as regional leader**

The regional level is strong in East Africa, and Museveni has very much seen regional security collaboration and EAC integration as integral to his domestic stability. The UPDF Chief Political Commissar explains, “we see ourselves as an East African force. Because we believe we can’t survive on our own as a country, we are too small to survive in this competitive world.” Museveni’s securitized terrorism and protection of the oil sector have played a key role in
this effort. RSCT’s regional typologies of “Pre-complexes” where notable bilateral security do not yet bind into an RSC; and “Proto-complexes” where weak/thin security linkages are enough to delineate some kind of region, are useful concepts for analysis of East Africa. It is not a necessity to distinguish and decide a suitable label for the region or partner states within the EAC. But analyzing why security linkages increasingly “bind” (or not) adds insight into which actors or processes influence such changes; and, therefore, how meaningful change – and potential transformation – of regional security dynamics may occur.

The East African Community is pro-actively forging an institutional arrangement that aims to better structure and control regional security dynamics, so that the security operations that EAC members currently undertake are “organised from our framework.”⁹² There has been an active institutional effort to “capture” neighboring states that are linked to members’ security. Museveni has been at the forefront of this regional restructuring: binding Ugandan security concerns to other partners has been a key strategy. He pushed fellow-2001 founders Kenya and Tanzania to expand EAC membership to include Rwanda and Burundi in 2007. This was actively resisted by Uganda’s wealthier neighbors initially – it even risked halting the formation of the EAC revival when first touted – but Museveni ultimately succeeded.⁹³ He was also instrumental in South Sudan joining in 2016, it being Uganda’s leading export market and an intense security concern.⁹⁴ These moves mean that four landlocked neighbors now balance the wealthier, sea-facing Kenya and Tanzania.

This expansion will likely be followed in future by Somalia, DRC and others joining (Ethiopia and Sudan are also perceived as possible future members).⁹⁵ EAC partners have also explicitly, although not publicly, asked Tanzania to leave the Southern African Development Community (SADC) of which they are also a member.⁹⁶ This would potentially bind a more structured East African RSC. Yet Tanzania’s historical kindship with the liberation struggles in Southern Africa has made them unwilling to leave SADC; and be perceived as a somewhat more reluctant advocate of EAC federation, which has had significant impact on security dynamics and Museveni’s ambitions.⁹⁷

Framing a regional agenda

Other regional leaders have sought to emulate Museveni to some extent by publicizing the terrorist threat to justify militarized responses to essentially localized, homegrown security issues that have rather dubious links to any other wider “terror” menace (the FDLR in Rwanda; opposition protestors or activists in Burundi and Tanzania; and over-stating linkages between Al-Shabab and Al-Qaeda in Kenya).⁹⁸ None, however, had been able to quite achieve Museveni’s unique standing with the West, with a Western Ambassador accepting “the
alternatives to Museveni are not readily apparent. One would wonder, in fact, if Museveni is the best development option for Uganda at this moment.” Museveni always engaged his regional counterparts regarding the terrorist issue on his own terms, rather than being subsumed within whatever regional agenda was materializing. Tellingly, for example, Museveni resisted regional offers from Kenya and others to help with the LRA menace in Uganda; he only promoted a regional solution once LRA were chased from Uganda and began operating in South Sudan and Eastern-DRC after 2008.

Terrorism encouraged further institutionalization of an East African security agenda, including through instruments such as the 2012 Protocol on Co-Operation in Defense Affairs and 2013 Protocol on Peace and Security. The Protocols were the culmination of a longer term trend within the EAC, but the security threats facing the region at the time “facilitated a quick response and rapid intervention toward completing them.” Their direct impacts are so far limited; however, “the spirit behind them is important, to a larger extent that spirit has cemented security relations, that idea that there will be more coordination and cooperation across the region.”

This cooperation has made violent inter-state conflict increasingly unlikely. A UPDF Colonel remarked “we face the common threat of terrorism and that has brought us together like never before.” Yet more pro-active regional interventions have caused serious issues; and also shown the increasing neighborly and intra-regional linkages occurring. Kenya joined the fight against the Al-Shabab terrorists in Somalia (independently in 2011 before officially joining AMISOM soon after in 2012). It was noted at the time that this “has shifted international attention from AMISOM to Kenya … Nairobi is positioning itself geo-politically”. This would certainly have been of concern to Museveni, whose role as chief protector of Western anti-terror concerns was being challenged.

Geo-strategically, Uganda’s oil is also crucial to regional dynamics; and during the early 2010s period the security and development challenges for these two crucial issues became enmeshed. In Uganda, the ADF terrorists had been explicitly promoted as a threat to the oil due to their location in DRC across from the oil wells, and similar linkages were made elsewhere, along with a general trend of regional cooperation – and rivalries – appearing around these combined issues. Construction of Uganda’s oil pipeline to the coast will create the longest heated pipeline in the world. Reliance on a seaport exit routes through neighbors potentially makes Uganda beholden to EAC partners whims and desires. It is a huge security issue, starting on the troubled border with DRC and potentially including a proposed tie off to Southern Sudan which would be built through the desolate and vulnerable Northern Karamojong region in Uganda. Oil finds elsewhere in the region have also appeared in particularly volatile areas of each country: “in the marginal areas, at the border point, at the pastoral lands, communities that have not been
integrated.” The security concerns and long-standing tensions in such areas are exacerbated by perceived new oil wealth, and been met with heavy government responses in certain instances. Kenya’s own oil discovery around the time of their Somali deployment further increased international attention on the major economic power in the region.

The oil sector also relies on other key projects, notably the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR): a 11 USD billion dollar+ regional mega-project which originally proposed linking Kenya’s Mombasa coast with Kampala in Uganda and through to Kigali in Rwanda. An East African Legislative Assembly representative states “Oil is just part of the bigger agenda, because the bigger agenda is to build an integrated economy of East Africa ... Top on the agenda is infrastructure development.” The EAC as an institution, however, has a “loose management of the oil sector which means that you can’t integrate the economies properly.” This lack of institutional oversight means, therefore, that power relations between leaders remain vitally important, whether within or outside the EAC as an institution.

Northern and Southern corridor divides

This regional structure – in relation to the domestic, inter-regional and global level influences discussed in the preceding sections – set the context in which Museveni sought to deliberately shift regional security dynamics in the 2010s. The SGR project became the flagship of EAC’s regional integration agenda early in this period amongst Northern Corridor partners (Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda). These became known as the Coalition of the Willing (CoW) and sought to speed-up integration efforts: the move was deliberately aimed at forcing the historically more reluctant Tanzania to take integration more seriously, after EAC members had been presented with a draft model of federation in 2011, “but Tanzania got cold feet about it”.

Museveni was central to this effort, as he actively influenced security issues in a way that created greater cross-linkages between member states – one of the prerequisites for “proto-complex” status. Up until that point, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta seemed more interested in Kenya’s LAPSSET project – a long-sought after mega-infrastructure initiative that has far more links to South Sudan and Ethiopia. This would greatly disadvantage Uganda by creating a “northward drift” and leaving them out of the economic benefits of an independent South Sudan that Uganda had invested significant time, money and blood in helping enable. As noted by a former Director the East African Standby Forces, “that means Uganda have not gotten the pay back ... it (LAPSSET) can shift the regional geo-politics, so definitely it is something of very serious concern.”

Museveni seduced Kenya’s President Uhuru Kenyatta into concentrating on the EAC Northern Corridor initiative which increased the importance of Uganda’s oil find. “They started a regional infrastructure thing at the EAC
level, and the scope changed,” according to a leading Kenyan economist, “it was no longer about a pipeline from Juba coming this way, there were railways, the connections and all that.”

Around this time, South Sudan descended into crisis and Civil War, which Museveni swiftly deployed UPDF troops to in December 2013:

‘The re-entry of Uganda was an opportunity for them to reposition themselves as a country. To say hey guys, you see, we are the guys who can stand by you. Could you make sure we are repositioned in the entire economic ball game … in the (Coalition of the Willing) network Uganda is pronounced as an equal partner of sorts.’

Museveni had ensured that he remained central to regional issues at a time when animosity between the CoW partners and Tanzania (along with Burundi) became extremely tense. Tanzanian troops made a serious impact against Rwanda’s FDLR “terrorists” in 2013, during a UN Peacekeeping Deployment in Eastern DRC that had been given an unusually aggressive mandate. When Rwandan President Kagame became publicly furious after Tanzania’s Kikwete suggested Rwanda and FDLR should consider negotiations, it was Museveni who intervened between the pair behind the scenes to cool down the public enmity.

After several years of resultant publicity and excitement around the CoW partnership, Museveni then thoroughly embarrassed his Kenyan counterpart by announcing Uganda’s oil pipeline would go to Tanzania’s Tanga port. This was only days after Uhuru had addressed the Ugandan parliament as a guest of Museveni (a rare honor). The related SGR project linking Mombasa to Kampala and on to Kigali, which had dominated regional integration efforts, was also disrupted by Museveni: he announced Uganda would link first to Juba in South Sudan (who were not yet full members of EAC), to the chagrin of Rwanda and frustrations of Kenya, who had already built to Nairobi but now had little chance of financing the project further. Museveni also visited Sudan’s Omer Bashir – historically a sworn enemy – one month before UPDF troops eventually withdrew from their South Sudanese intervention in 2015, in order to forge geopolitical alliances that maintained Ugandan influence in Juba.

**Museveni’s leadership role**

Museveni’s historic role in East Africa and more recent specifics around terrorism and oil security issues has, therefore, seen him accomplish regional maneuverings that none of his counterparts have been able to replicate. Firstly, Museveni’s institutionalizing of linkages between Uganda’s own security interests to the concerns of other EAC members through the inclusion of landlocked Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan must be seen as one of his great successes. Secondly, his active military deployments and “anti-terror” efforts have seen Uganda influence regional dynamics to a far greater extent than might have been expected by material and normative capacities. And thirdly,
regional politicking around oil-related infrastructure first prevented Kenya from drifting north toward Sudan and Ethiopia; then clawed back Tanzania from their own southward drift. Shifting Uganda’s oil pipeline from Kenya created cross-linkages outside of the northern corridor countries, whilst also undermining the supposed regional hegemon by reminding Nairobi of Kampala’s continued centrality to any regional ambitions.

This is not to say that Museveni is able to bend security dynamics to his will; or that he is the only leader to assert influence on geo-political matters that profoundly influence regional security. For example, although Museveni’s continued status was evident when EAC partners chose him to persuade Burundi’s Nkurunziza to quell the disquiet over his 2015 election crisis, those efforts were fairly futile as Nkurunziza did not seem to change any course after the intervention. President Magufuli replaced Kikwete in Tanzania in 2015, and immediately began more forcefully pushing the countries’ interests in EAC (Museveni’s statement on not building Uganda’s SGR to Kigali may have ultimately helped heal the Rwanda-Tanzania rift, with Magufuli deciding on a Southern SGR link to Rwanda). Kenya’s economic superiority and sea border of course makes whoever is President there a key regional actor. And several years after the events discussed here, Abiy’s Presidency in Ethiopia provoked dramatic regional reverberations, first through reconciliation with Eritrea and, at the time of writing, potentially overseeing major domestic conflict that could destabilize all of Greater East Africa. It is to say, however, that Museveni – along with other leaders – is far more influential in shifting and shaping regional security dynamics than was assumed by Buzan and Waever. East Africa remains too much in flux and with too many connections to Horn and Southern African dynamics to be seen as any kind of RSC. But open conflict is becoming less likely, although still not inconceivable, with the EAC partners moving closer to some kind of “security regime” where rules and expectations of conduct restrain the fear of (or preparations for) war as key to dynamics: “The kind of mechanisms they have put in place, conflict management and things, would not allow any conflicts between EAC members from happening … But just because it has not taken a lot of time, people will say ah but you never know.” Buzan and Waever’s conceptual framework provides useful entry point of analysis but their portrait of Africa is too static: the above case study better showcases how increasing cross linkages and bindings are occurring deliberately and actively. In 2003, they stated “given the high degree of political fragmentation in Africa, changes in individual actors may not matter all that much to the essential structures of its RSCs.” But in Uganda (and certainly elsewhere) Museveni’s eventual departure will have profound implications for the essential structures of any existing or emerging RSC.

**Conclusion**

The utility of Buzan and Waever’s RSCT framework in understanding African security issues is, firstly, its recognition of security issues as a social construction,
which allows analysts to uncover the importance of African leaders in driving the promotion of particular threats. Secondly, it provides a useful levels of analysis framework that captures key component of, and influences on, said security threats; as long as the analyst takes the time and trouble to unpack the complexity of those levels, especially in relation to the domestic and regional. This was not done sufficiently in the original “Regions and Power”. Finally, its emphasis on regional security dynamics, including useful concepts related to binding of security concerns and patterns of enmity and amity amongst powers, is particularly apt for an African context whose regional security dynamics remain very much in flux.

Articulating the role of African leaders and leadership processes within the theory and its frameworks would greatly enrich its usefulness for Africa and elsewhere, however, and better explain the nature of African security challenges, agency, statehood and inter-state relations, and the effects therein on regional security dynamics. Global-level powers have shared interests in encouraging particular security issues to be tackled in particular ways, but the key drivers of regional security dynamics and responses remain at the domestic and regional levels. African statehood remains contested although institutions of state-building have, in Uganda and elsewhere, progressed beyond a simplistic regime vs rebels dichotomy. This contestation influences the securitization processes that occur domestically and regionally, and therefore the nature of regional relations and security dynamics. In a context less constrained by institutional forces and stabilized patterns of friendship across national borders, individual leaders become especially influential. This understanding also helps explain how a Regional Security Complex may, or may not, come into being. This, again, was not attempted in the original theory.

Regardless of what one thinks about the nature of his regime in Uganda, Museveni in East Africa exemplifies the importance of African leaders and the role of individual actor agency in regional security dynamics. Museveni is a master tactician able to recognize shared mutual interests of different players at different levels and consistently exploit those interests for his own benefit. Amity and enmity amongst regional actors has shifted for reasons beyond material and normative conditions, as understood by RSCT and within IR theory more broadly. Museveni is a transactional leader able to reward and coerce domestic players and regional partners, but he also enjoys legitimacy in both spaces as a key security actor. The two most pressing East African security threats, terrorism and threats related to the oil sector, cannot conceivably be tackled successfully at present without a prominent role for him and Uganda. The personality of Museveni and role he has carved himself in both Uganda and within East Africa is unique: he has moved Ugandan importance and agency beyond what one might expect from the material and ideational factors afforded merely by being Head of State of Uganda as a nation-state construct.

Other leaders, in East Africa and beyond, are potentially very capable of employing similar such measures and enjoying resultant benefits. Many already are. Similar analyses to the one undertaken here would be welcome across all regions
of Africa. This paper has had a national-level focus and interest in the political
leadership of President Museveni. But such questions can easily be applied to
African leaders operating at different levels within different sectors, which would
further enhance the utility of RSCT by moving it beyond this more state-centric
focus. Questions arise such as where is there mutuality between different African
leaders and their espoused security concerns? What bases of power do leaders draw
upon domestically and regionally to maintain their leadership role in acting against
perceived security issues? How and why are particular leaders effective in achieving
mutually shared goals? Uncovering African leaders’ role in shaping regional
security dynamics through a dispassionate objective analysis rather than any
morally loaded expectations, allows for a better understanding of how Africans –
and their preferred partners appearing at different levels – can intervene mean-
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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr Eka Ikpa, Prof Kiven Kewir and Leonide Awah for their support in writing this article, including doing pre-submission peer reviews as part of the African Leadership Centre’s Research Cluster Six work on African statehood and the international political economy.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This work was supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York [grant number G-18-56408].

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