

# Democratic peace theory vis-a-vis “energy peace theory”

**By Melaku Muluaem**

Starting from time immemorial there were conflicts and wars among the people of the world. Many combatants and innocents died as a result of such fighting. Parallel to this, various philosophers and thinkers have developed their own theories in order to avoid war and maintain peace. One of the theories is the “Democratic Peace Theory”. This underlines that the spread of democracy in the world will help to maintain peace in the international arena. It argues that democratic countries do not fight each other. The reason for this is that – unlike a dictatorship rule - a democratic country should consult the people and representatives of the people before going to war. It presumes that people would not opt for war, preferring a peaceful solution to conflicts.

According to this theory the U.S.A , Britain, France, the Netherlands and many other democratic countries would not fight each other. And it wanted to show that undemocratic or authoritarian countries would fight each other. The implication is a possibility that democratic countries would fight against undemocratic countries. For instance the former war of the U.S.A and Britain against President Saddam Hussein can be mentioned as a case in point.

In writing this short article I am not trying to develop my own theory - as done by great thinkers. Rather I want to show the other possibility of making peace among African countries. My argument lies in the concept of “Energy Peace Theory”. For the purpose of this article “Energy” is defined as any power (with the exception of nuclear power) that can be exported to other countries through wire and pipeline. According to this narrow definition, “Energy” includes petroleum, hydroelectric, thermal, wind and solar energy.

My benchmark in this article is the east African region. It is a well-known area for problems, including piracy, terrorism – a branch of Al-Qaida exist in Somalia -, draught, food shortages , refugees, and wars such as the Ethio-Eritrea conflict. In addition, Somalia is not yet fully stable, there are problems between the two Sudans, internal conflict in Sudan (the Blue Nile force, Darfur force, Nuba Mountain force) and a humanitarian crisis in Darfur. Eritrea is playing a negative role in the Horn of Africa and is being punished by sanctions implemented by the U.N. and similar organizations.

Moreover there is no democracy in Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Djibouti. Only Ethiopia and Kenya are trying to exercise democracy in the region. According to the Democratic Peace Theory, it is hopeless to maintain peace in the Horn of Africa. In such a situation the economic link can serve as a transitional period to maintain peace until democracy spreads in the region.

As is common knowledge, Ethiopia has started exporting electricity to her neighboring countries - 100 MW to Sudan and 35 MW to Djibouti. Ethiopia and Kenya are building a 1,000 km high-voltage power line from Gibe III dam to Kenya. She will also export to South Sudan. After the construction of the dam on the river Abay - the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam - many other African countries can benefit from the export of electricity from Ethiopia. This is a lucrative business for Ethiopia as well as maintaining peace with her neighboring countries. In exchange for exporting electricity, Ethiopia can get petroleum from both Sudans. Similarly, Ethiopia can balance the revenue of electricity exports for the port service of Djibouti, though the latter needs additional money. This means that the hard currency Ethiopia acquires from electricity can be used in buying petroleum, a port service and other imports from outside the country.

It is clear that the import of petroleum and the port service will take the lion's share of Ethiopian currency. However, balancing the export of electricity with petroleum imports and the port service will save the hard currency of Ethiopia, and any reserves can be used for development - especially industrialization projects. Therefore - to Ethiopia - electricity means paying for petroleum, electricity means paying for a port service, electricity means peace with neighboring countries, electricity means industrialization and electricity means economic development.

For a long period of time the river Abay was a bone of contention between Ethiopia and Egypt as well as between Ethiopia and Sudan. On the other hand, the three countries are also suffering from a shortage of electricity, needed for running their industries and households. Cooperation among the three countries will be beneficial for all of them.

Economists have developed the concept of "competitive advantage" and "comparative advantage". A competitive advantage is when a state, company or individual has an advantage over their competition in delivering their products or services to other users. Comparative advantage has to do with natural and human resources of a state or company. Just to give examples on these two concepts - Ethiopia has no "competitive advantage" in exporting industrial products in comparison with the products of South Africa and other developed countries. However, Ethiopia has "comparative advantage" of electric power generation in the Horn of Africa. Similarly, Djibouti has "comparative advantage" of a port service. If countries can use of their "comparative advantage" they can compensate for what they lose in "competitive advantage". Moreover, one country can exchange its "comparative advantage" with the "comparative advantage" of the other country - like the export of electricity by Ethiopia to Sudan for petroleum, and the port service from Djibouti. Because of conflict and war with Ethiopia, Eritrea is not using her "comparative advantage": port service.

I hope in the future Ethiopia and Eritrea will exchange their "comparative advantage" ie electricity from Ethiopia and the port service of Eritrea. This will contribute to the sustainability of good relations between the two countries.. Eritrea will not arbitrarily increase the tariff of the port service, because Ethiopia will do the same with electricity.

Thus both will think twice before deciding once. The same is true with the relationship between Ethiopia and Djibouti.

In general terms African countries do not have "competitive advantage" of industrial products. But they do have their "comparative advantage", be it hydroelectric, thermal, wind, solar energy, port service or petroleum. The Congo River, the Niger River, the Orange River, the Zambezi River are some of the longest rivers of Africa. They are good sources to generate hydroelectric power. Similarly, the Sahara Desert is a good source of solar energy. Based on multilateral agreements and establishing partnerships - such as the Nile Basin Initiative - upper riparian and lower riparian countries can use the common resources for common benefit. An exchange of these comparative advantages to one another will contribute to peace and development in Africa. Thus until Democratic Peace Theory has become successful in East Africa and Africa at large, "Energy Peace Theory" can help to maintain tranquillity and economic development in the continent. African countries and their partners should work for developing energy in parallel to striving for democratic governance.

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