

THE POLITICS OF TERRORISM AND THE TERRORISM OF POLITICS

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We all grew out of the overcoat of Karl von Clausewitz's dictum that war is "the continuation of politics by other means." This Clausewitzian notion has influenced the writings of treaties in military strategy and (international) politics. However, to define *war* in this way implies that we can also perceive *politics* as the continuation of war by other means. Thus, *war* and *politics* have dialectical relationships explicable by the correlation of forces that determine the socio-political dynamics of society. As used in this context, war could be a hostile activity within a nation or between nations, as it could also mean a hostile activity or struggle between conflicting political forces. The Marxian concept of class struggle is in fact a hostile activity between opposing classes within and between nations. War as "the continuation of politics by other means," should therefore not be perceived as simply a hostile activity between states as actors in the international arena. Non nation-states, for example, political organizations have become important actors in contemporary international politics.

We view terrorism as the use or threat of the use of violence to attain socio-economic and political objectives, of public or private interests, by engaging in destructive activities that are geared to compel the other party or parties to comply with the demands of the terrorists. These destructive activities could be either sporadic or protracted. For all practical purposes, terrorist activities constitute a state of *war* between contending forces over the distribution of power or of resources or of territorial adjustments, etc.

We already know what terrorism is. But who is a terrorist? Could a State be a terrorist? Or a terrorist is one - a guerrilla, an armed organization, the oppressed - that engages in terrorism against a State? If we invoke the Marxian concept of class struggle as a *war* between contending forces of society, that is, a *war* between a State and those opposed to the regime of the State, which of these would be labelled as "terrorist?" For the British, Kwame Nkrumah was a subversive element suspected of being a communist and therefore a terrorist. For the apartheid regime of South Africa, Nelson Mandela and members of South Africa's resistance movements were terrorists. For the British authorities in Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta and his colleagues in the Mao Mao movement were terrorists. For the British authorities in Palestine, Menachem Begin and his colleagues in *Ingun Zvei Leumi* (Jewish guerrilla army against British rule) were terrorists. For the French authorities in Algeria, Ben Bella and his colleagues in the Algerian Liberation movement were terrorists. For the Nigerian government, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Odua Peoples' Congress (OPC), and the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) are terrorist organizations. These are just a sample of cases in contemporary international politics. In all these

cases, can we consider the issue of *state power* as represented by Britain, apartheid South Africa, France, and Nigeria as legitimate and therefore not terrorism? Consider a situation whereby a political party perceived to be unfriendly toward the US is projected to win an impending election, and a US warship navigates close to the territorial waters of that country on the eve of that country's election, would we say the US Government was engaging in terrorist acts? As we recall during the cold war, **radical** anti-colonial movements were routinely classified as terrorist organizations by the colonial powers, while *moderate* anti-colonial movements were routinely referred to as lackeys of colonialism by the communist states.

Thus, the definition of terrorism is influenced by the ideological orientation of political protagonists. In a recent article entitled "Israel must defeat the terrorists and fundamentalists," (see <http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com/content/view/3489/55/>) Lawrence Chinedu Nwobu referred to the Hezbollah and its supporters as "ideological brutes and forces of darkness" and invited "all men of goodwill" to "pray for the nation of Israel to prevail." The Palestinians are engaged in the *same* struggle that propelled Menachem Begin's struggle against British rule in Palestine, but from contending perspectives and principles. The Palestinian question is more complex than Nwobu's simplistic position would allow. For example, since 1948 when the State of Israel was established, the government of Israel has consistently refused to abide by the series of resolutions passed by the Security Council of the United Nations, ordering it to withdraw from occupied Palestinian and Arab territories. That no world power had thought it "right" to compel Israel to comply with UN resolutions, by invading Israel, as was "justified" in the case of Iraq in 2003, is a question for public discussion. Both the Jews and the Palestinians have legitimate rights to live in peace in their respective territories, but a mutually beneficial framework must be negotiated and agreed upon by both contending parties. Unfortunately, because of the depth of the conflict, proponents of both parties have refused to accept the legitimacy of the other. Interestingly, while Golda Meir, a former Israeli prime minister, said Palestinians did not exist, Menachem Begin, as prime minister of Israel, recognized Palestinian legitimate rights. Some elements within the Palestinian resistance movement also do not recognize the right of Israel to exist. It is the challenge of the international community to persuade both extremities to engage in a meaningful dialogue that will lead to peace in the Middle East. But it would be tragic if any member of the international community, disguised as a mediator, is scheming to undermine the sovereignty of one of the contending parties in favour of the other. It is easy to engage in war, peace, on the other hand, is a difficult proposition to attain especially in a region that has not known peace since 1948.

Nwobu made a troubling linkage between the Hezbollah-Israeli war and Nigeria that, in my view, defies reason and logic. Besides congratulating the "United States of America, the European, Ndigbo, and all men of goodwill" for supporting Israel, he informed us that "Igbo youths have volunteered to go and fight to defend the nation of Israel." In referring to the ethno-religious conflicts in northern Nigeria over the past years, he declared: "These Northern Nigerian fundamentalists are lucky Biafra was not actualised in the 60's; they would have been getting exactly the same treatment from the Biafrans that Israel is currently giving to the Arabs." He continued: "Christians and Southern Nigerians must get ready to defend their religion and civilisation by preparing to do what the Israelis are currently doing....For this group of subhuman brutes, human life is worth probably less than that of a chicken. It is foolhardy to assume that

they will become civilised overnight and stop the killing of Christians. We can only hope to put a final stop to such killings if we employ the same tactics that Israel has sufficiently employed, which most honestly is the only language such brutes understand and respect....”

Though I am not privy to the information in Nwobu’s possession regarding the engagement of Igbo youths in the Israeli army against the Hezbollah, it would however seem plausible given the support of Israeli pilots for the Biafran army during the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970. Similarly, I have no way of ascertaining the validity of Nwobu’s statement on Biafra’s policy toward northern Nigeria, if Biafra was “actualised in the 60’s.” But, if we concede that Nwobu’s statement reflects Biafran policy, what is the intent of Nwobu’s declaration on ethnic and religious relations in Nigeria? Is it possible that this is part of MASSOB’s policies?

The political party in power in any state normally defines the rule of political engagement in the polity. In doing so it ensures that its core interests are never threatened by opposing political parties or organizations. Where it perceives a threat to its core interests, it quickly labels the opposing political parties or organizations as enemies of democracy and therefore, by implication, terrorists. The readiness to append such a label on political opponents has acquired political currency in several countries. In this regard, politics is a euphemism for war. The boundary between politics and terrorism becomes blurred, as the properties of terrorism are brought to bear on political intercourse. A polity defined by this phenomenon increasingly lacks the capacity to resolve political contests peacefully, a situation which renders instability inevitable. But politics ceases to be a continuation of war by other means, if the contending forces agree to be regulated by the rules of civil society. Where a party declines to obey these rules then we witness a tilt toward anti-politics. Nigeria is currently experiencing this phenomenon. It is simplistic to assume that the contradictions in Nigeria can be resolved by labeling opposing political parties or organizations as terrorists. Contradictions can only be resolved by a genuine engagement of the contending parties in a search for mutually beneficial solutions.