

# Opinion

## Notes on the current situation

By Erwin Madunagu

WHAT, really, is happening in Nigeria? This is a simple question. But it is not that a complex or difficult question is being simplified for didactic reasons. No. The question is simple, direct and straight-forward, and I am putting it as it is: What, really, is happening in Nigeria? Many of our compatriots are mistaking shadows for the real object; many others are even chasing the shadows. Many others, unfortunately and tragically, are deliberately promoting the confusion and benefiting from it. However, in attempting to answer the question you need not aspire to be as brief or concise as the question is. You may choose to begin with the general or the central picture and then proceed to the details and ancillaries; or you may start with the latter—that is, what immediately hits you as you begin to observe and contemplate—and then try to see their relationships or their common root or roots, if any. The caution here is: “Weep not, laugh not, but understand”.

If I choose to start with the general or central picture this is partly because I have been contemplating this question for a long time and partly because I wish to avoid a tragedy I read in a book a long time ago. Two hunters set out on a joint hunting expedition in a thick forest. Let us call them Hunter A and Hunter B. Suddenly Hunter A alerted his mate, Hunter B. “See an elephant there!”, he pointed and his mate looked. “Yes”, Hunter B answered, “I have seen the legs”. “I am not talking about the legs, see the main body”, said Hunter A, becoming agitated. “Oh yes, I have now seen the tail”, said Hunter B. To cut a long story short, the two hunters were still arguing on which part of the elephant could be seen when the huge animal saw them. You may imagine what happened: the two hunters were attacked and consumed by the elephant.

How then would I concisely answer the question: What, really, is happening in Nigeria? I would answer: *Boko Haram insurgency in the battle for 2015*. Some months ago I had, in this column, described an earlier stage of this phenomenon as *Struggling for seats in a sinking boat* (January 31, February 7 and 14, 2013). The present description is more explicit, reflecting the emergence of dominant (and more urgent) elements of the national crisis in which the country is now engulfed. Several other elements

find meaning and relevance in these two dominant elements: The struggle for 2015 and the *Boko Haram* insurgency. Now, I would be the first to respond that there is not much that is new in the formulation above. Many analysts have said almost what I am now saying. The only new element in what I am saying is implicit, namely, that the *Boko Haram* insurgency will, at least as much as any other factor, determine 2015—what happens and what does not happen.

The proposition here is that there are links between the *Boko Haram* insurgency and the struggle for the country's presidency in the 2015 general elections. And my fear is that as more weapons—legal and illegal, orthodox and unorthodox—are deployed in this struggle, the links between *Boko Haram* and 2015, which are at present indirect and mediated, would eventually become direct and open. By then the power struggle in Nigeria would have rendered the constitution, the law elections and the existing democratic institutions *totally* irrelevant for its resolution. That is the second proposition, or, if you like, a corollary to the first. For now, the power struggle finds expression in the following crises among others: *the politics of the Boko Haram insurgency; the crises in the central, regional and partisan forums of Nigerian governance; attack on, and defence of President Goodluck Jonathan and the Jonathan presidency; the struggle between power and office; the politics of combination and dissociation (around the country's two power blocs); the resurgence and intensification of "hate politics"; and General Olusegun Obasanjo's politics*.

All these crises, and several others, have no meaning by themselves; they can only be explained by and have their roots in, the battle for 2015. The direct implication is that criticising or attempting to resolve any of them through the application—honest or dishonest, cynical or sincere—of “democratic” principles is like chasing shadows. And yet, an *interim* resolution of the central question—the question of *power*—has been offered to Nigeria's ruling classes: a sovereign national conference; insertion of “zoning” and “rotation” principles—mandatory and clearly stated—in the country's constitution, thereby compelling every political formation that desires power by constitutional means to adopt the principles;

constitutional recognition of the geopolitical zones; adoption of collective or collegial presidency (with rotational headship and deputy headship) on the basis of this geopolitical restructuring; and the massive redeployment of national resources to the needs of the desperately poor in the country. You can see that like the methods being used for the prosecution of the crisis, the methods for its resolution lie outside the Constitution—original or amended.

Before taking up the listed elements or instruments of the current power struggle and expanding on the two propositions presented above I would wish to preface what I have to say with a number of recent newspaper reports, opinions and editorials. The president of the Nigerian Senate, David Mark, captured several manifestations of what I have called “power struggle” in the speech he delivered “at the end of the second session of the 7th Senate appraisal” on Thursday, June 6, 2013 (as reported by the *Leadership* newspaper of the following day, Friday, June 7). In a story titled *Mark to Jonathan, Amaechi, Others: Stop overheating the polity*, the Senate President was reported as warning “players in the Nigerian polity to stop causing commotion in the country ahead of the 2015 general polls but to focus on efforts to deliver good governance to the citizens”.

Senator Mark, according to the report, “was apparently reacting to the inflammatory remarks and actions by some political stakeholders and bitter face-offs which have pitted President Goodluck Jonathan, Rivers State Governor Rotimi Amaechi, former Heads of State, Generals Olusegun Obasanjo and Muhammadu Buhari, former militant leader Mujahid Asari Dokubo and Northern interests, among others, ahead of the 2015 presidential elections”. David Mark lamented: “Elections are two clear years ahead, yet the collision of vaulting personal ambitions is overheating the polity and distracting the onerous task of governance. With so much work yet to be done, we, as elected officials, should focus on governance”.

Three days before this report, on June 4, 2013, the *Leadership* newspaper carried on page 5 a report titled “*Amaechi, Jang may step down for consensus chair*”. The section of this long report that is relevant here is titled “*NGA: you cannot solve political problem with threat—Aliyu*”. The first two paragraphs of the section read:

“Meanwhile, the Niger State Governor, Babangida Aliyu, has said that there is no internal democracy in political parties in Nigeria, even as he stated that negotiation rather than threat should be used to solve political problems. In the same vein, he stated that to end the security situation it must go beyond amnesty and require deeper findings to why people took arms and the sponsors”. The governor was addressing members of the *Presidential Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges* in Minna, the state capital the previous day, June 3, 2013. Senate President, David Mark and Governor Babangida Aliyu are frontline mainstream politicians and government functionaries.

On Monday, May 13, 2013, *The Guardian* newspaper carried an angry editorial titled “*Kuku, Asari-Dokubo and the limits of blackmail*”. I reproduce the first two paragraphs of the editorial: “it would have been enough to dismiss the utterances as the rantings of overzealous and misguided courtiers. But against the background of the fragility of Nigeria's security today and the embarrassing spectacle of scums stumping around the national stage as potentates, it is risky to weigh the recent statements of Kingsley Kuku and Asari-Dokubo lightly”. That was the opening paragraph. The paper then went on in the second paragraph to tell or remind its readers of what the two “indicted” men had said.

The second paragraph: “Kuku, Special Adviser to the President on Amnesty reportedly warned while on a visit to the United States that the peace in the Niger Delta area cannot be guaranteed unless President Goodluck Jonathan gets a second term come 2015. And leader of the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force, Asari-Dokubo, went even further to declare that “there will be no peace, not only in the Niger Delta, but everywhere if Goodluck Jonathan is not president again... (because) Jonathan has an uninterrupted eight years of two terms to be president according to the Nigerian Constitution”. The editorial was angry at what it called Dokubo-Asari's “ignorance” of the relevant sections of the Nigerian Constitution dealing with presidential “second term”, particularly the fact that this “second-term” is not automatic. *The Guardian* ended by urging President Jonathan to call his frontline supporters to order.

• To be continued next Thursday.

# Opinion

## Notes on the current situation (2)

By Edwin Madunagu

LAST Thursday in the opening segment of this series, I listed some of the weapons and manifestations of the power struggle now going on in the country. My intention was, and is, to examine them and relate them back to the central question: *power struggle*. Before embarking on this, however, I considered it helpful to start with a number of recent newspaper reports, opinions and editorials that are relevant to the propositions I wish to make and argue. I reported the *Leadership*'s stories on what the Senate President, David Mark, and the Governor of Niger State, Babangida Aliyu, said on different occasions on the power struggle, and an editorial by *The Guardian* on what Kuku, a Presidential Adviser, and Dokubo-Asari, leader of the Niger Delta Volunteer Force, said on President Jonathan and 2015. The present segment proceeds from there.

On Monday June 3, 2013, three weeks after *The Guardian* editorial summarized in the first segment, the newspaper came out with another editorial: "*Regional leaders and the state of the nation*" in which the paper questioned the credentials, antecedents and patriotism of a group of Nigerians "from the southern part of the country" who "met in Lagos the other day to deliberate on the national security crisis and the premature politicising ahead of 2015 general elections". The editorial saw sectional and partisan, rather than national interests as informing the conclusions of the meeting – appearances notwithstanding. This second editorial was even harsher in language than the first.

A "universal democrat" or a "democrat-at-large," not conversant with Nigerian history and politics, would enthusiastically endorse the two editorials as general democratic interventions and acknowledge the patriotic spirit in which they were produced. I have a fundamental reservation – because I know Nigeria and I am a Nigerian. My reservation is that the editorials proceeded from a fundamentally wrong, though silent, assumption – namely that Nigeria's political class, the mainstream politicians taken as a whole, believe in the Nigerian Constitution and desire to play by the rules of the Constitution or even by the rules and agreements of their own parties. The editorials are

premised on the wrong assumption that the main trend or substantial trend, in Nigerian politics as played since General Olusegun Obasanjo became president in May 1999, is democratic, and that what is needed is to correct or defeat the marginal undemocratic and unpatriotic tendencies and personages. No. What *The Guardian* criticized and denounced in its two editorials is the dominant tendency in contemporary Nigerian politics.

In its Sunday, May 26, 2013 issue, *The Guardian* published an interview it had with Dr. Junaid Mohammed in Dutse, capital of Jigawa State. Mohammed was described by the newspaper as "medical doctor turned politician, convener of the Coalition of Concerned Northern Politicians" and a "Second Republic member of the House of Representatives". The interview is titled *Mohammed: Jonathan merely playing politics with amnesty for Boko Haram*, with the rider, *Jonathan's 2015 ambition will destroy Nigeria*. I carefully read through the one-page interview (page 58) but had to re-read the last quarter. In that section Mohammed criticized the manner the Nigerian army was conducting the current military operations against the *Boko Haram* insurgents, arguing that what the army was doing – in particular the killing of innocent people – amounted to genocide going by the Geneva Convention. I noted that several people – inside and outside the country – had expressed similar opinion.

Two particular segments of what Junaid Mohammed was reported to have said, however, disturbed me. First: "... some of the officers under this Ibo man, General Ihejirika, are doing what they like because they think it is their turn to avenge what was done to the Ibos during the civil war. Ihejirika has already finished the extended period given to him. He is there to do a dirty job..." Second: "... All Dokubo or the Ibos who are now ruling the Nigerian army think that they can play with the intelligence of Nigerians let them continue and let the war start tomorrow, nobody is afraid of war. Only cowards make noise. Those who know the real implication of war don't make noise about it and they do not go to war until war is forced out of them. If the Ibos and the Ibo army officers now running the Nigerian army and Ihejirika want a war they will have a war."

I was disturbed by these passages, as I said. But then, I quickly cautioned myself that they are not the worst of what our print media report

from the "war fronts" and from both sides of the bitter power struggle now going on in the country. By the way, Kuku, Dokubo-Asari and Junaid Mohammed are not politically marginalised, they are not on the fringes of Nigerian politics; they are in the mainstream. This *hate politics* – for that is what the forces for and against President Jonathan are playing – is not conducted underground; it is conducted in the open, using the media, especially the print media and the Internet. Several national newspapers have literally adopted hate politics as editorial policy. The current situation reminds me of the last months of the First Republic (1960–1965).

After this rather long preface, we may now look at the elements of the national crisis – or rather, power struggle – as listed in the opening segment; and, in doing this, we may have recall parts of the preface. I need to present the list again. There are, at present, seven main elements and they are necessarily linked: The politics of *Boko Haram* insurgency; the crises in the central, regional and partisan forms of Nigerian state governments; attack on, and defence of, President Goodluck Jonathan and the Jonathan presidency; the struggle between *of-fee* and *power*; the politics of combination and dissociation (around the country's two power blocs); the resurgence and intensification of "hate politics"; and General Olusegun Obasanjo's politics.

We begin with the politics of *Boko Haram* insurgency and proceed by means of propositions or theses: One: If, for clarity, we make a distinction between a movement and its organisational expressions then it will be correct to say that the historic movement (at once socio-political, religious and cultural) within which a specific organisation now popularly known as *Boko Haram* sprang up a few years ago is an old one – older, perhaps, than independent Nigeria. The specific historical conditions under which the movement was born and the conditions which continue to nourish it, enabling it to continually throw up organisational forms like the *Boko Haram* can be investigated. The specific historical conditions under which *Boko Haram* itself came into being can equally be investigated. But that is not the focus of this article.

Two: Thesis similar to the one on *Boko Haram* can be formulated on organisations like the Movement for the Survival of the Sovereign

State of Biafra (MASSOB), Odua Peoples' Congress (OPC), the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF). The organisational forms listed above and similar ones not listed, as well as *Boko Haram*, are not the only types that had developed in the respective movements within which they came into being. There had been, and there are, others whose methods are not "militant" or "violent". Prominent examples would include the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo and Afenifere. The irony or paradox here is that these "non-violent", "non-militant" organisations are generally more resilient than the "militant" groups.

Three: The differences between *Boko Haram* and the other "militant" groups mentioned in the second thesis are: *in the first place*, that the former is more violent and aims not at obtaining concessions from the Nigerian state or its various governments but at over-throwing the state and establishing a new one – either in the country as a whole or in a substantial segment of it; and *in the second place*, that the *Boko Haram* developed in the period of global resurgence of militant political Islam which aims at liberating not a segment of the world, but the entire world. Hence its "internationalism". Some prominent scholars, including Ali Mazrui, have linked the rise of militant political Islam to the "decline of socialism and communism" and the end of the Cold War. All I would permit myself to say to this is that the three "ruptures" took place about the same time.

Four: The debate as to whether *Boko Haram* has "sponsors" or not appears to have run its full course. There now appears to be a national consensus: the organization has "sponsors". The question now is who the "sponsors" are. Fingers are being pointed at different (and opposite) directions by different (and opposite) groups. Accusers have themselves been accused. The Federal Government appears to know the "sponsors" or the directions in which to search for them; but it keeps the information to itself. But this we can say: We know from history, from logic and from social theory that an organisation like *Boko Haram* (with its record and credentials) must have not just "sponsors" (a term that chases shadows rather than substance), but big "collaborators" in the civil society in the political class, and even in state institutions and security apparatuses.

\* To be continued next Thursday.

# Opinion

Thursday, July 11, 2013

## Notes on the current situation (3)

By Edwin Madunagu

**T**HE last segment ended with the fourth thesis on *Boko Haram* and its insurgency. We continue from there.

Thesis Number Five: In some historical conjunctures the balance of forces may permit the identities of big "collaborators" ("sponsors") of armed insurgents or terrorists not only to be known publicly but also to be able to operate publicly and even to receive semi-official recognition (Check the recent histories of Northern Ireland and Spain). The people carrying arms and the "big collaborators" (inappropriately called "sponsors") are in the same game, playing different roles. *Boko Haram* may have reached that stage of development or may be rapidly approaching it.

Six: The response of the Nigerian state to insurgencies and rebellions had been to act like Nigerian fire fighters, that is: recognize very late that there is fire; move in to stop the fire if it can, or allow it to run its natural course; and then withdraw - to await the next fire outbreak. This was the response the Nigerian state initially had for *Boko Haram*. In 2009 the Nigerian state discovered that it could no longer ignore the existence and reality of *Boko Haram* and the threat it posed to its own authority. It attacked. But, after the attack, the state could not "withdraw". Why? Because the insurgency quickly bounced back - more ferocious than before and expanding rather

than receding. Today, the *Boko Haram* insurgency is the strongest armed challenge to the Nigerian state since the Civil War. The insurgency has become a factor in the general power struggle in the country and, more specifically, in the battle for 2015. You just need to observe the politics of the *Boko Haram* insurgency as played by the vanguards and organs of the frontline combatants for 2015.

Seven: the present situation is that of war between the *Boko Haram* and the Nigerian state. Before the declaration of state of emergency in three northeastern states of Nigeria and the formal proscription of the sect, *Boko Haram* had - according to President Jonathan himself - taken control of a sizeable territory of the country and had hoisted its flags there. The war has now become international: the insurgency has for-

mally and openly called for foreign support, and the "international community", represented by the government of the United States of America, has joined the war on the side of the Nigerian state - but reserving for itself the right of independent action. I do not now know the status of the "talks" and "amnesty" I had heard earlier.

Eight: The ruling classes, in general, and the political class in particular, are so deeply divided both on the nature of *Boko Haram* and on how to respond to it that it can now be proposed that the *Boko Haram* has a solid bloc of allies in them. And the battle for Election 2015 has been engaged: a battle in which, it would appear, all weapons are allowed. So? The way I see the situation suggests that only a united ruling class and a united nation can resolve the *Boko Haram* question. This dual - unity cannot be achieved by either Election 2015 or politics of hate. We are back to the imperative of a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) or a special national conference organised specifically to respond to the present c o n j u n c t u r e .

Politics of combination, association and dissociation (around the country's two power blocs): I assume that many readers of this column are conversant with my concept of Nigeria's power blocs (not power blocs in general). For those not familiar with the concept, three recent references from this column can be offered: Provisional report on Election 2011 (May 12, 19 and 26, 2011; and June 2 & 9, 2011); As the succession battle begins (April 26 and May 3, 10, 17 & 24, 2012) and The presidency and Nigeria's power blocs (June 7, 2012). The last reference is quite sufficient for those who do not have much time. The following summary may however be offered here: Nigeria's power blocs are sociopolitical forces that are strong enough to push for power at the centre. There are only two of such blocs in the country. This thesis first appeared in this column about 1990.

For clarity and to guard against misrepresentation: Nigeria's power blocs are not ethnic groups, although they have ethnic cores; they are also not religious groups, although some religious beliefs may be particularly strong in them. Nigeria's power blocs are not political parties, although they are present in political parties - in some of which they are dominant

tendencies or factions or pressure groups. Nigeria's power blocs are capitalist blocs. Each of the two power blocs mobilises and attaches to itself non-power bloc sociopolitical forces in order to achieve hegemony over the other power bloc (and hence over the nation) or to achieve a balance with the other power. The Jonathan presidency is currently under fire from the two power blocs. "We are not only in office, but also in power", General Babangida once declared when he was military president. I doubt if President Goodluck Jonathan can confidently make such a declaration. He cannot because Babangida was referring not to the Armed Forces Ruling Council over which he presided, but to a power bloc. I shall come back to this.

What has here been called "politics of combination, association and dissociation" within and between political parties and their factions are the results or manifestations of the aggressive mobilisations currently being conducted by the two power blocs. This process will continue and intensify. My fear now is that the *Boko Haram* insurgency which is already having impacts on the process will - sooner than later - become part of the power-bloc mobilisation. Should this happen, Nigerian politics will become militarised. This, history teaches us, is a prelude to civil war.

It is because of the fear expressed in the preceding paragraph that I am now proposing that the *Boko Haram* insurgency be part of the agenda of the urgently needed special national conference to respond to the current crisis. I hasten to say that the special national conference is different from the Sovereign National Conference (which I understand and have promoted and theorised for over 20 years) and the Conference of Ethnic Nationalities (which, I confess, I do not understand). The special national conference will not only involve the forces in combat, including the current government, but also popular

-democratic and patriotic forces that are not in the current power struggle as defined. The labour movement is an example. The special national conference is proposed on these grounds: first, it is increasingly clear that the Nigerian state as presided over by the Jonathan presidency - with or without foreign support - cannot resolve the *Boko Haram* crisis; and secondly, history teaches us that elections -

even when they are democratic, free and fair - do not resolve all crises of political legitimacy, authority or confidence; in particular, a democratic, free and fair election is not a magic solution to power struggle. In certain historical conjunctures national dialogues and conferences aimed at arriving at fundamental agreements must precede elections. It is the agreed principles and fundamentals that give elections a chance of success. Otherwise elections might simply inaugurate a new, more serious, phase of t h e

crisis. Algeria teaches us so; Mozambique teaches us so; and South Africa teaches us so.

On the last example, we may note that by the time Nelson Mandela was released from jail (in 1990), the apartheid system had been decreed out of existence not just by the forces that created it; but also by the forces of history. However, it took another four years of discussions, negotiations and agreements (on principles) before a genuinely national election - through which Mandela emerged president - was conducted. In Algeria and Mozambique the lesson of history stated above was (initially) ignored in the early 1990s. We saw the results. Older readers may recall the election conducted in Southern Rhodesia under the contraption "Zimbabwe - Rhodesia" in the late 1970s and how the election created a farce. The combatants went back to the "drawing board" and thereafter went into an election that produced "black majority" rule.

Power and Office: Power is superior to office; power determines and shapes office in the following sense: Since a Nigerian power bloc's objective is to rule over the whole country, it necessarily has to seek (subordinate) allies to which it may have to concede office. But the power bloc rules while office holders govern. How contradictions between power and office are resolved is a study in concrete history, not theory. But do not envy a Nigerian office-holder, however highly placed, who is at loggerheads with the two power-blocs at the same time! The way forward is two-pronged: Collective Presidency with rotational headship based on the existing geopolitical zones AND urgent and massive deployment of our national resources to the rescue of the desperately poor, the "wretched of the earth", the "rejects of life".

• These Notes will now continue under different titles.