

Opinion

Notes on the 'international community'

By Edwin Madunagu

THE term, "international community," came on board the active political lexicon between 1988 and 1992 following a series of inter-connected political events which, at least in my own life-time, marked a definitive turning-point in world history. The historical conjuncture defined by these earth-shaking global events led to the emergence of the ideology of "international community" and "unipolar world" as a reflection of the definitive shift in balance of power internationally and in several countries and regions of the world.

My first proposition here is that the term, "international community," as used today, is essentially ideological. Unfortunately this fact is largely not understood by many people including my own compatriots in Nigeria who frequently invoke the term as you would invoke a holy diktat. This is a tragedy - for the term "international community" is a new weapon of domination and enslavement by imperialism in its relationships with most nations and peoples of the world; it is a defining element of the "new world order" which emerged about 20 years ago. The fact is that the world is today no more a "community" than it was 20 years ago.

In my own "interrogation" of the concept of "international community" I recently checked the *internet* for definition and description. I selected two short essays: one from *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia* titled *International community*; and the other by Martin Jacques with the caption, *What the hell is the international community?* The first essay defines the "international community" as "a term used in international relations to refer to all peoples, cultures and governments of the world or to a group of them. The term is used to imply the existence of common duties and obligations between them." It goes on to say that "activists, politicians and commentators regularly advocate the term in the context of calls for action to be taken against political repression and to preserve the respect for human rights."

This definition is clear and straightforward. As an abstract, general and academic definition, it is fair and fine. But in the last section of the essay, titled *context and trends*, the authors became cautiously critical: "States may sometimes refer to 'the will of the international community' to strengthen their own point of view. It is sometimes claimed that powerful countries and groups of countries use the term to describe organisations in which they play a predominant role, regardless of the opinion of other nations."

Wikipedia is thus critical of some invocations of "international community." But I am also critical of the encyclopedia's mild criticism. My second proposition in this piece is not that "states may sometimes refer to the will of the international community to strengthen their own point of view," as this encyclopedia says, but that all those states and entities that now consciously - or unconsciously - make this invocation *always* do so to strengthen their own point of view, or the point of view of their principals. The leading state and non-state entities include the United States of America (U.S.), the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the G-7 of leading capitalist countries. But these powerful appropriators and cynical exploiters of an otherwise humanist concept constitute a very tiny fraction of humanity and nations of the world, as *Wikipedia* correctly says below.

This is what the *Wikipedia* article says in this regard: "The Kosovo War is described as an action of the 'international community' undertaken by NATO, which represented under 10 per cent of the world's population during the Kosovo War." And then: "An example of the term used by some Western leaders is when denouncing Iran, for its nuclear ambitions of suspected nuclear proliferation by stating that 'Iran is defying the will of the international community by continuing uranium enrichment.' The Non-Aligned Movement which consists of 118 countries from the 192 United Nations member-states, has endorsed Iran's right to enrich

uranium for civil nuclear energy." For the accordance of doubt, by the *West* the authors mean America, Western Europe, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Martin Jacques, the author of *What the hell is the international community?* is either a citizen of the United Kingdom (UK) or a resident, going by the opening passage of his angry essay: "You have heard it a thousand times. Our prime minister uses it, so do cabinet ministers and opposition spokespersons. It slips off the tongue of BBC correspondents and newsreaders as if it is just good old plain common sense. Newspapers constantly use it. We all know what is meant by the term 'international community,' don't we? It's the West of course, nothing more, nothing less."

The angry man continues: "Using 'international community' is a way of dignifying the West, of globalising it, of making it sound more respectable, more neutral and high-faluting. The international community thinks this... believes that... is concerned about... You know the stuff. But just remember: when you next hear the term, what is being referred to is not the international community at all - understood as all the nation-states that make up the world - but just a small sliver of it, our bit." This proposition like the preceding one, calls for no clarification.

Then follows the third proposition: "The great majority of the world, indeed - the West constitutes less than one-fifth of the world's population - is, in fact, being tacitly ignored: unless, of course, it happens to agree with the West, in which case it is implicitly tagged on the end as a good old Western fellow-traveler. Usually, though, a large majority of nations don't agree with the West. That is why, for example, the West finds it almost impossible to win votes on many issues in the UN general assembly." Jacques' fourth and final proposition is directed at journalists: "This kind of political thinking is also an excuse for the most extra-ordinary lazy, and arrogant, journalism. The media don't need to find out what the rest of the world thinks because they treat the West as synonymous with it" (emphasis mine).

My own third proposition requires some background. The Charter of the United Nations, signed on June 26, 1945 in America, was drawn up eight months earlier by delegates of five countries: China, France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States. The five countries became, and today remain, the permanent members of United Nations' Security Council, each with a veto power. The UN thus emerged as an organisational form of the alliance and compromise reached between the big powers that won World War II (1939-1945). But this "alliance and compromise" began to break down even as the Charter was being signed. There then appeared three global "camps": The "West," led by America; the "East," led by the Soviet Union; and the "Middle," led by India, ex-Yugoslavia, Ghana and Egypt.

The Charter of the United Nations and the structures that were established for the organisation, though a compromise between the founding core members were the best that could be obtained under the circumstances of 1945. The imperfections of the organisation notwithstanding, it managed for 45 years (1945-1990) to "save the succeeding generation from the surge of war" (that is, another "World War"). But the hope that it will continue to do this is now gone - with the emergence of the "International Community" which has virtually neutralised the United Nations.

My proposition is this: "What is now called the "International Community" is a statement of domination and neutralisation, by the "West," of both the "East" and the "Middle." But this domination and neutralisation, rather than being the "end of history," is the beginning of a new contradiction or dialectics which is qualitatively different from the West-East-Middle divide into which my generation was born but which will be a truer reflection of the state of human liberation and human progress on the planet earth. This proposition is, of course, made in the hope that, in the meantime, this false "International Community" does not destroy this our common planet, or cause it to be destroyed.

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SOME questions definitely arise from the two preceding articles in this column: *Ratko Mladic in historical context* (June 23) and the first part of the present article (last Thursday, June 30). The same questions can also be asked in confrontation with my most recent comments on the current revoits in North Africa and the Middle East: *Explosions in the African continent* (February 17, 2011); *Further lessons from North Africa* (March 10, 2011); and *Reflections on the Libyan catastrophe* (March 17, 2011).

The questions I have in mind can, in fact, be summarised into a single query: *Should the world have looked on while an obviously mad regime systematically liquidates its own people?* The answer is NO: the world must not, and cannot, look on. A follow-up question, a more concrete one, is: In the face of the United Nations' inability to intervene effectively in humanitarian situations and "crimes against humanity", should other state and non-state entities not intervene? Again, the answer is, and should be, immediate and straightforward: in the face of United Nations' failure, other entities (state and non-state) are morally obliged to intervene to stop "crimes against humanity" or eliminate threats to "world peace and security" or halt, and then reverse, the descent to another World War - a war in which there would be no winners and no losers.

Again, a more concrete, though still general, question is: What state and non-state entities currently have the capacity to intervene in humanitarian situations, serious local conflicts and genocidal campaigns? Again, the answer stares us in the face. The entities that currently possess the capacity to intervene in such cases are the United States of America (U.S.), the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Our answer, which by the way, is realistic and absolutely correct, nonetheless puts us exactly where these three entities - which in aggregate are equal to the "international community" - want us to be: global helpless dependence on entities that had

appropriated the place of the United Nations.

In any case, how has the "International Community" been discharging the responsibility which, it would now appear, history has placed in its hands? Everyone knows the answer: The International Community has been discharging its "historical responsibility", in accordance with its own interests and its own vision of the world order it wants to bring into being. Even the blind and the deaf know that the International Community is not neutral and cannot be neutral or altruistic. But, then, how did the United Nations fail? How was it effectively supplanted by the International Community in the critical tasks of preventing, stopping and punishing "crimes against humanity"? Finally, what can be done to restore the authority and capacity of the United Nations?

An answer to the first question was attempted last Thursday in the first part of this discussion. A single-line answer can be given to the second question. And this is: Mobilise the nations and peoples of the world who are currently outside the "International Community" to re-appropriate the functions and power which have been alienated from them. They must re-establish the United Nations: "We, the peoples of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small..."

The charter of the United Nations established six main organs: the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, Trusteeship Council, International Court of Justice and the Secretariat. The Security Council, whose membership is presently 15 and functions continuously, is given the responsibility of "maintaining international peace and security in accordance with the principles and purposes of the United Nations". It is given the responsibility of determining the "existence of a threat to peace or act of

aggression and to recommend what action should be taken"; "to call on members to apply economic sanctions and other measures not involving the use of force to prevent or stop aggression"; and "to take military action against an aggressor".

The last two *sub-mandates* of the Security Council are as important individually as they are in the distinction between them. In taking action against an erring state the Security Council may "call on members to apply economic sanctions and other measures not involving the use of force to prevent or stop aggression or "take military action against an aggressor". The two can, of course, be taken simultaneously. But the crucial point is that it is the Security Council, and not any other state or non-state entity, that is required to take military action, if this becomes necessary or inevitable. And the United Nations knows how to do it and had indeed been doing it - until the "International Community" emerged and, with its practice of pressure, manipulation, blackmail, intimidation, bribery, threat, etc, effectively supplanted it.

The United Nations was formed in 1945. Four years later, in 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was formed. In 1955, the Western European Union was formed. Five days later, there came an announcement from Warsaw, capital of Poland, of the formation of the Eastern European Mutual Assistance Treaty, otherwise known as the Warsaw Pact. This was followed by the crystallization of the Non-Aligned Movement formed by the "non-bloc" nations. Allied or supportive, but equally ideological, groups sprang up in subsequent years. But all these formations, except NATO and EU, are now either dead or neutralized. And leading these surviving ones in maintaining the "new world order" is the "International Community" whose undisputed leader is the United States of America.

Seven years ago, in 2004, Samir Amin put out a book through the New York-based Monthly Review Press, titled *The liberal virus: permanent war and Americanisation of the world*. In the book the author listed five global objectives being pursued by America. The first is to "neutralise and sub-

due" Western Europe and Japan, America's partners in what Amin calls the *collective imperialist project*. To neutralise and subdue is to "minimise their capacity to act outside of American control". The second objective is to "establish military control through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and 'Latin Americanize' the former parts of the Soviet world". The third objective is to "establish undivided control of the Middle East and Central Asia and their petroleum resources". The September 11, 2001 bombing was a global tragedy, a crime against humanity. But, then, it provided the perfect excuse for the rulers of America to realise their strategic plan of militarily colonizing or re-colonising the Arab and Muslim World.

America's fourth strategic objective, according to Samir Amin, is to "dismantle China, ensure the subordination of other states (India, Brazil) and prevent the formation of regional blocs which would be able to negotiate the terms of globalization". And the fifth is to "marginalise regions of the South that have no strategic interest for the United States". The author warned: "The militarist option for the United States threatens everyone. It arises from the same logic as Hitler's: to change economic and social relations in favour of the current chosen people through military means".

The Preamble of the UN Charter speaks of "twice in our lifetime". The reference here is to the First World War (1914-1918) and the Second World War (1939-1945). The United Nations says that such a war must never happen again. Why? William Shirer, in the last paragraph of the Foreword to his massive work, *The rise and fall of the Third Reich: A history of Nazi Germany*, answers the question: "In our new age of terrifying, lethal gadgets, which supplanted so swiftly the old one, the first great aggressive war, if it should come, will be launched by suicidal little madmen pressing an electronic button. Such a war will not last long and none will ever follow it. There will be no conquerors and no conquest, but only the charred bones of the dead on an uninhabited planet".

• Concluded.