

Opinion

Reflections on Nigerian terrorism

By Edwin Madunagu

ABOUT a week after the mid-June bombing of the Nigeria Police Headquarters, in Abuja, a Niger Delta "militant" who has the rank of "general" in his rebel army, was reported as protesting the lumping of him and his comrades with other Nigerian armed rebels like the dreaded *Boko Haram* insurgents. The "general", insisted that Niger Delta militants and ex-militants were not terrorists. Why? Because, *one*, unlike the *Boko Haram* killers, the Niger Delta militants did not target "innocent" people, and two, they were clear in their demands. I believe the "general" would have added, if it was possible and safe to question him, that any lives lost in the course of the Niger Delta insurgency were "collateral damages", that is, unintended victims.

Not many people outside the ranks of Niger Delta militants and ex-militants are likely to be impressed by the rebel general's protest and clarification. Victims of the insurgency will not be impressed. And such victims are many: immediate and long-term victims, direct and indirect victims, individual and corporate victims, etc. Of course, the Nigerian state will not be impressed. Even the *Boko Haram* fighters from whom the Niger Delta "general" wanted to separate himself and his compatriots will be angry. I am sure the man will not win a public popularity test, except possibly in his own community and within the ranks of some radical political tendencies. Pacifists will definitely regard his protest and clarification as insult.

Although my support for, and solidarity with, the Niger Delta struggle is not in doubt, I do not hesitate to align myself with those who may ask the Niger Delta "general" to shelve his protest and clarification because if he presses them he will anger many good people who may ordinarily be sympathetic to his cause. But I will break ranks with those who will say that the "general" is talking nonsense. No medal, however, goes to the "general" because my position is in spite of him. What I am doing here is sepa-

rating an idea from the person who had voiced it.

One of the reasons we study an object or phenomenon, other than merely looking at it or experiencing it, is to be able to discover differentiations within it, the connections between the different parts of the object or phenomenon, and the connections between the object or phenomenon under study with other objects and phenomena in this integrated and ultimately unitary universe. As we deepen our knowledge, or our knowledge of the object or phenomenon is deepened, and the object or phenomenon itself grows or develops dialectically with other objects and phenomena around it, we begin to see sufficient differentiations within the subject of study to identify new variants or branches of the object or phenomenon. We may even discover objects and phenomena that are entirely new. The discoveries then constitute new subjects of study.

These new variants and branches of the "old" or "newly independent" areas of study then begin a life of their own, but at a higher level, since they are benefiting from the nourishment they had received in the "wombs" of their "mothers". In fact, many new variants and branches of an existing area of study, or entirely new areas of study, come into existence almost as adults. And the same dialectical progression is repeated, *ad infinitum*. Parallel with the development of objects and phenomena, and the development of our knowledge of them through study, and the development of *differentiations* as well as *associations*, is - of course - the development of new names, new categories and new concepts.

Let me try to illustrate this "differentiation and association" thing. Suppose at a stage of development of our knowledge of an object or phenomenon A (which is also a state of development of the object or phenomenon itself), we identify five of its main elements, say, A1, A2, A3, A4 and A5. Suppose at a latter stage we discover that A5 is sufficiently different from the other four elements to be separated from them - not to

form an independent subject (that is, differentiation) but to become an element of another object or phenomenon B (association) which we had for long believed was different from A. Students, scholars and intellectuals will have to effect the necessary changes. Either this, or they become adherents of sorcery and mysticism, instead of science. But, beyond that, unless this is done, our professionals, practitioners, policy makers, executors and enforcers will continue to wonder why, setting out from Calabar, they have failed to get to Makurdi in Benue State, not knowing, or accepting, that they had all the time been on the road to Libreville in Gabon.

A distant teacher of mine rudely told me very long ago that "you do not develop new concepts and categories only to turn round and lump everything together". To this admonition I added my own: "You do not continue to apply the same treatment to everything if even when it had been shown that some aspects are different and should be treated differently". In "lumping everything together" and "applying the same treatment to everything" one is, in fact, committing two crimes: refusing to apply an available, and more effective solution to a particular problem, and simultaneously, preventing the development of our knowledge of the particular problem.

Another distant teacher also reminded me of what some people had called the elementary responsibility of social analysts: In dealing with a critical social problem on which urgent actions are being taken or contemplated, it is essential, after the introductory remarks, to zero in on a definitive historical period and a definite geopolitical space. This admonition may be paraphrased and domesticated this way: "The categorical requirement in investigating any social question is that it be examined within definite historical limits and, if it refers to particular country, that account be taken of the specific features distinguishing that country from others in the same historical period".

The subject is terrorism and the immediate concern is Nigeria. It is therefore necessary, after the general global survey, to focus on

Nigeria in a definite period, say, since 1960 or 1970 or 1979, or indeed since September 11, 2001. The emphasis is on *definiteness* of historical time and geopolitical space, and not on the length of the period or the geometry of the space. We should know, for instance, whether we are dealing with Nigerian terrorism or terrorism in Nigeria or indeed American terrorism or terrorism in America or global terrorism inspired by anti-imperialism and anti-Americanism. In the latter perspective, what is happening in Nigeria appears as collateral damages.

I am not playing with words. I am as serious as the Nigerian situation is serious. "Terrorism in Nigeria" and "Nigerian terrorism" are two different formulations which, when inserted in the contemporary Nigerian situation, produce two entirely different perspectives on what the nation is currently experiencing and hence different perspectives on how to tackle it. The two sets of perspectives cannot both be right at this point in time. The bottom-line, however, is that one set of perspectives will indicate where to strike the main corrective blow, and how.

My argument then leads me to the following proposition: We are dealing with *Nigerian terrorism* since the end of the Civil War. By Nigerian terrorism I mean terrorism whose seeds were sown in Nigeria and which germinated and is now flourishing in Nigeria. This terrorism has several forms which should not be lumped together. But all can be defeated, and will be defeated. But the terrorism and the "terrorists" cannot be "flushed out" the way you flush out foreign invaders. While some forms of Nigerian terrorism follow the Shakespearean maxim, "that distribution undo excess...", some others are now an integral part of the political economy and new fronts of political struggle. Nigerian "business community" now invest in Nigerian terrorism as they invest in, say, the oil sector. The "foot soldiers" in those forms, the people who actually throw the bombs or pull the trigger, are like casual labourers in the oil sector - poorly remunerated and easily dispensable.

• To be concluded next Thursday.

Opinion

Reflections on Nigerian terrorism (2)

By Edwin Madunagu

LAST Thursday, in the first part of this essay, I advanced a consolidated proposition on home-grown Nigerian terrorism as distinct from terrorism in Nigeria which might suggest a foreign terrorist invasion. There is, of course, no "terrorist invasion" of Nigeria. But some forms of our terrorism are partly foreign-inspired. This is inevitable in this our "global village". The aim of this second part is to expand on that proposition. I am not concerned here with explicit solutions to Nigerian terrorism - although these will be implicit in, and can be deduced from, the proposition, as expanded. Explicit solutions will be suggested in the third, and concluding, part. Before we embark on "expansion" an inventory of definitions is necessary.

In late 1980s the United States Army found that "more than one hundred definitions of the word terrorism exist and have been used." We may look at some of these definitions. *Definition One:* "Terrorism is unlawful violence or any other unlawful harmful act committed (or threatened) against civilians by groups or persons for political or other ideological goals". *Definition Two:* "Terrorism is premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience".

Yet, another definition, but one with a wider horizon: *Definition Three:* "International terrorism means terrorism involving citizens or the territory of more than one country; a state sponsor of terrorism is a state that repeatedly provides support for acts of international terrorism". *Definition Four:* State terrorism is employed by governments - or more often by factions within governments - against that governments citizens, against factions within the government, or against foreign governments or groups". This type of terrorism, according to this extended definition, "is very common but very difficult to identify, mainly because the state's support is always clandestine".

It is generally taken that the term "terrorism" was first used during the French Revolution which broke out in 1789. The specific year was

1795 "when it was used to describe the actions of the Jacobin Club in their rule of post-Revolutionary France, the so-called Reign of Terror". *Definition Five:* The 2003 edition of the *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics* by Iain McMillan and Alistair McMillan says that terrorism is a "term with no agreed definition among governments or academic analysts, but almost invariably used in pejorative sense, most frequently to describe life-threatening actions perpetrated by politically motivated self-appointed sub-state groups". The "non-agreement", we can all see, is because, according to our book of reference, "one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter".

To my consolidated proposition on terrorism (see last Thursday's column) I now add a new one namely, that I hold Nigeria's ruling classes and the Nigerian state, on the one hand, and the Nigerian Left, on the other hand, responsible, through acts of omission and commission for the escalation of Nigerian terrorism. The crime of the latter is that it could not check the "excesses" of the former and could not absorb and re-channel the forces of Nigerian terrorism. I shall return to this point next Thursday. I choose the period "since the end of the Civil War" for the consolidated proposition for two main reasons: first, to show that Nigerian terrorism did not start on September 11, 2001 when targets in New York and Washington were bombed by global Islamist jihadists; and secondly because the end of the Civil War (1967-1970) marked a definitive end of an era in modern Nigerian history and the beginning another. Beyond these two reasons, the choice of January 15, 1970, when the Nigerian Civil War ended, is arbitrary.

Having said this, I agree with what can now be regarded as a general opinion, a consensus of opinions, that the event of September 11, 2001, was, for America and global imperialism, a dramatic announcement of the maturity of the "new terrorism" and simultaneous decline of the "old terrorism". But I make a minor departure from that book of reference. While the "old terrorism" was predominantly anti-capitalist imperialism and anti-national oppression and pro-popular power, pro-pop-

ular democracy, pro-socialism or even pro-communism, the "new terrorism" is anti-imperialism or anti-America or anti-West, but not anti-capitalism. Furthermore, while the "old terrorism" was predominantly secular, the "new terrorism" is predominantly for the enthronement of the Sharia.

Again, I agree that whereas the "old terrorism" aimed at impressing and mobilising the masses for clear, achievable aims, and limiting "bloodshed" and "collateral damages", the "new terrorism" appears to wish to kill as many people as possible, drawing no line between "legitimate targets" and "collateral damages" and advertising aims that are clearly unattainable except in a world that is not inhabited by human beings. For instance, to advocate, by force of arms, that the Sharia be imposed on the whole world is crazy. And coming home: to want to impose the Sharia on Nigeria or any segment of it by force of arms in 2011 is crazy. But this is the bottom-line of the "dialogue", not the end of the "dialogue".

Focusing now on Nigerian terrorism in the period indicated, we may look at the forms suggested in the consolidated proposition. Five of them stand out: the Niger Delta insurgency; the Boko Haram insurgency; the Middle Belt (Jos) killings; Kidnapping for ransom; and Armed Robbery. To these we may add the "low-intensity" ones like OPC and MASSOB. To start with, each of them has a long history, dating back either to the decade preceding Nigeria's independence in 1960, or, immediately after independence. For instance, Nigerians of my own generation can easily draw a line from Isaac Boro to Saro Wiwa, to Tony Engurube, and to the modern-day Niger Delta "militants".

Similarly we can draw alone from the pre-independence anti-Southern riots in the North to the 1966 crisis and Civil War, to the "Sharia crisis" in the 1977-1978 Constituent Assembly debate, to the Sharia debate at the beginning of Obasanjo's Republic in (1999-2007), and to Boko Haram. The trajectories of MASSOB and OPC pass through the First Republic, the Civil War and the Second Republic, Babangida-Abacha military dictatorship, "June 12" and Abiola's tribulation. Each of these dimensions of Nigerian terrorism has been modified or "enriched", or even transformed, by developments

in Nigerian politics and political economy. But their roots and their trajectories are clear.

Kidnappings have several forms: those in which ransom is the primary objective, and those whose primary objective is political: blackmail, intimidation and pressure on the opponents. Furthermore, whereas there are organised or corporate or business-like kidnappings both for ransom and for "politics" there are "freelance" and individual kidnappings - the same way you have corporate supermarkets side by side with market stores and hawkers in the distributive sector of the Nigerian economy. The same applies to armed robbery: corporate and highly organised, as well as freelance and individual.

Beyond these named forms of Nigerian terrorism, there are other forms which we may, for lack of other names, group as "miscellaneous" terrorism or "terrorism-at-large." These would include, in particular, those associated with popular-democratic protests and strikes which may turn violent or terroristic and which the so-called "hoodlums" often "hijack". Since the end of the Civil War, Nigerian students have been known to kidnap armed security agents in uniform and seize their weapons. De-classed and jobless Nigerian youths were known to have infiltrated popular-democratic or mass protests to "terrorise" the population and engage in general looting and destruction of private and public property.

Public functionaries, including Nigerian citizens and foreigners, are known to have been chased out of office or out of the country through means that fall under our current understanding of "terrorism". Finally, the first phase of the struggle to compel the validation of Moshood Abiola's victory in the June 12, 1993 presidential election involved several acts that can be classified as terrorist. The only publicized act was the hijack of an Abuja-bound airplane to Niamey, Niger Republic, in October 1993.

The question is this: Will you, and how do you, fashion a single weapon and mobilise the human and material resources necessary to fight this complex and hydra-headed monster called terrorism?

• To be concluded next Thursday.

Opinion

Reflections on Nigerian terrorism (3)

By Edwin Madunagu

IN this third, and concluding, part of our discussion, I shall pull together, and expand, the main arguments and propositions of the preceding installments and, following that, I shall attempt, to redeem the promises made and the substantiations postponed. I shall also attempt to clarify some points which I now believe require clarifications.

In the closing paragraph of the first part (July 14, 2011), I offered what I called a *consolidated proposition*. It went like this: We, in Nigeria, are dealing with *Nigerian terrorism* since the end of the Civil War in January, 1970. We are *not* dealing with *Terrorism in Nigeria* which might suggest a terrorist invasion of Nigeria. We may, however, concede that some forms of our terrorism might be partly *foreign-inspired*, a possibility that is not far-fetched, given the *reality of our* "globalised world" or "global village". We are also not dealing with global terrorism or terrorism directed at America or Europe which may produce "collateral victims" in Nigeria.

By *Nigerian terrorism* I mean terrorism whose seeds were sown in Nigeria and which germinated and is now flourishing in Nigeria. I proposed in the first part that Nigerian terrorism has several forms bound together by that phenomenon called "violence" or "terror", by material damages and, above all, by the victims produced. The victims are varied: dead and injured, deliberately targeted or appearing as "collateral damages". But it will be wrong and self-defeating to lump together all the forms of Nigerian terrorism, and attempt to respond to them in the same manner. However, all forms of Nigerian terrorism can be defeated, and will be defeated – if Nigeria survives, or rather, if Nigeria is to survive.

I went further, in the *consolidated proposition*, to suggest that Nigerian terrorism and Nigerian terrorists cannot be "flushed out" the way you flush out foreign invaders. This, for two main reasons. In the first place, the terrorists are Nigerians; and in the second place, if you insist on the "flush out" metaphor, then Nigerian ter-

rorism cannot be flushed out without flushing out the Nigerian state and the Nigerian ruling classes as presently constituted. You see now! While some forms of Nigerian terrorism are poverty – and – inequality – driven, and follow the Shakespearean maxim, "that distribution undo excess and each person hath enough....", some others now either constitute integral parts of the Nigerian political economy or are new fronts of political struggle: intra class and inter-class.

Elaborating on the preceding suggestion, I said that Nigerian "business community" now invests in Nigerian terrorism as they invest in, say, the oil sector. The "foot soldiers", the people who actually throw the bombs or pull the trigger, are like casual labourers in the oil sector – poorly remunerated and easily dispensable. In the second part of this discussion (July 21, 2011), I advanced another *consolidated proposition*: "I hold Nigeria's ruling classes and the Nigerian State, on the one hand, and the *Nigerian Left*, on the other hand, responsible, through acts of omission and commission, for the escalation of Nigerian terrorism. The crime of the latter (that is, the *Nigerian Left*) is that it could not check the "excesses" of the former (that is, the Nigerian state and the Nigerian ruling classes), and could not absorb and could, therefore, not re-channel the forces of Nigerian terrorism."

I promised to come back to the preceding statement, and I am briefly doing so now. It is generally agreed that the Nigerian ruling classes and the Nigerian state, by perpetuating the present political economy and expanding and deepening its gross inequalities, and creating, and reproducing, and expanding, and deepening poverty and misery in the land, are *primarily* responsible for I have called Nigerian terrorism. Almost all commentators and "pontificators" on this subject endorse and demonstrate this thesis – implicitly or explicitly. I concur. I am therefore left with the responsibility of the *Nigerian Left*.

This responsibility is not simply to mobilize the working and toiling people of Nigeria, and indeed all the exploited and cheated people of Nigeria in a struggle for popular

power and popular democracy – although *ultimately* it is. The primary responsibility of the *Nigerian Left*, a permanent and irreducible responsibility, is to pull together and "rationalize" all sections of opposition to the present social order, this iniquitous social order, in a gigantic struggle for self-liberation. The power of the oppressors lies partly on the divisions – on whatever bases – in the ranks of the oppressed, and the ability of the oppressors to mobilize sections of the oppressed in their effort to present *their* fight as our fight and *their* interests as *our* interests.

I may now address myself to the *Nigerian Left*. The force of what Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels said 1848 has not abated. Do you feel embarrassed to quote Karl Marx in 2011 when most of our frontline public commentators cannot end any piece without telling us what an American president said even before Marx was born? For me, I am not embarrassed. In relation to our responsibility, Marx and Engels may be paraphrased: "Revolutionaries are distinguished from the popular masses and their organizations by this *only*. In the national struggles of the masses of different countries, revolutionaries point out, and bring to the front, the common interests of the common people, independently of all nationality; and, in the various stages of development which the struggle of the masses against the exploiters and oppressors has to pass through, revolutionaries always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole." You may "domesticate" and "modernise" this pronouncement as you wish.

We are all harassed and threatened by *Boko Haram*, armed robbers and armed kidnapers, and sometimes by armed security agents. But our perceptions, our attitudes and our responses to these entities cannot, and should not, be uniform. A correct attitude of the *Nigerian Left* may be formulated like this: If a misinformed but aggrieved, compatriot approaches you in a dangerous manner, shooting rather indiscriminately, you have to protect yourself and others first, and then educate him or her. In protecting yourself and others, you should not aim at killing, but at disarming

and arresting him or her. If he or she is armed, but not shooting indiscriminately, you should simultaneously aim at educating and disarming him or her. These are general formulas whose application depends on the concrete situation.

But in neither of the two scenarios sketched above should you fail to concede that the "terrorist" has genuine reasons to be aggrieved. After disarming the "terrorist", you should tackle the originating grievances *from the roots*. This is the attitude *Nigerian Left* should be advocating to the Nigerian state. In the second part (July 21, 2011), I supplied five different definitions of terrorism. For lack of space I omitted a sixth one which ought to have been our working *definition* – coming from the Secretary General of the United Nations in a report to the Security Council on March 17, 2005. The Secretary General defined terrorism as "any action intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international organisation to do or abstain from doing any act".

After a brief historical survey of Nigerian terrorism and a presentation of an inventory of terrorist acts in Nigeria over the last few decades, I closed last Thursday's installment with a question: "Will you, and how do you, fashion a single weapon and mobilize the human and material resources necessary to fight this complex and hydra-headed monster called terrorism?" From all we have said so far, the simple answer to this question is that you cannot effectively respond to Nigerian terrorism with a single weapon, however well designed. Beyond this single-sentence answer, I would also suggest that since the current Nigerian state enters any rigorous definition of Nigerian terrorism the current sociopolitical dispensation can at most only check and manage Nigerian terrorism. Only a new social order, a popular-democratic and emancipatory social order, can create the conditions for an accelerated "withering away" of Nigerian terrorism.

• *Concluded*

• *This column will be on break in August 2011.*