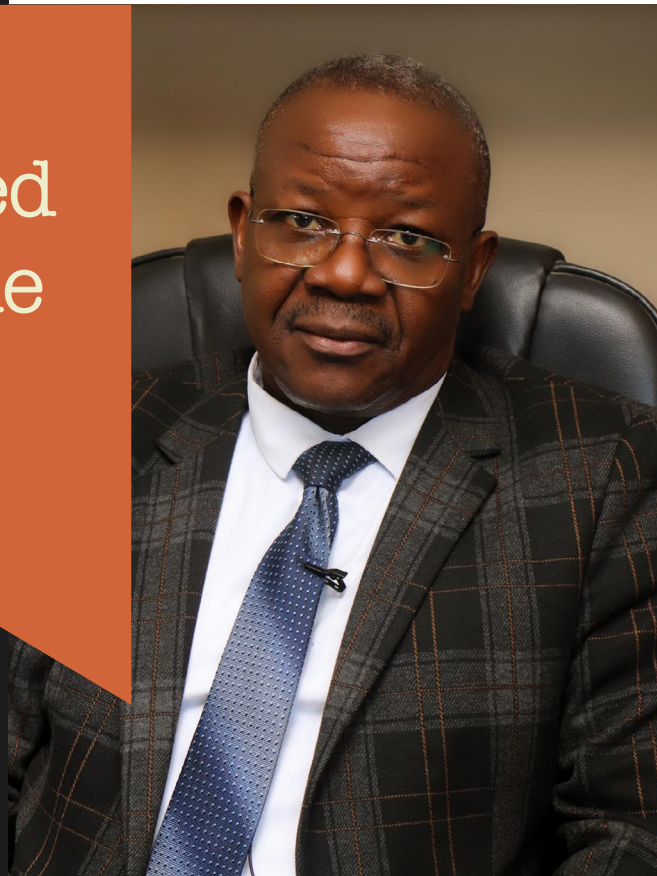


“ I Think the United Nations has Outlived its Usefulness in the World Today ”

— Commodore Kunle Olawunmi



Retired Navy Commodore Kunle Olawunmi is a man with a wealth of experience in the military and academia who is also a global security specialist and it is a privilege to have him share his knowledge with us. He graduated from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and Harvard University. He is an author, security expert, and social crusader. He held a couple of sensitive and strategic positions in the military and served meritoriously until his retirement as a Navy Commodore from military service. He is affiliated with the African Institute of Strategic Studies, the International Society of Military Law, and the National Institute of International Affairs. He is currently an associate professor in one of the private universities in Nigeria. His exclusive interview revolves around why democracy is a catalyst for terrorism and social vices, the roles of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) in the overall development of the African Continent, the classification of the powerful nations of the world who possess nuclear weapons as the big terrorists, as well as the state of the nation Nigeria and the way forward. Commodore Kunle Olawunmi bares his mind on these important subject matters and concludes that just as it is difficult if not impossible to have the countries in possession of nuclear weapons to reform themselves in order to have a nuclear-free world, the same is the case with Nigeria, which he believes can neither be restructured nor salvaged and therefore needs to breakup.

Excerpts of his interview below:

LHM: How best can you describe what terrorism is going by the various concepts of ideology and motivation behind the act?

Kunle Olawunmi: Even at Harvard, there is no acceptable definition of terrorism. I tried to find a definition. After my PhD, I proceeded to study national and international security at Harvard as an executive program. And yet, I couldn't find a definition of terrorism. And that's what got me thinking. What is actually terrorism? And I discovered that terrorism is not really what we think it is. We must be careful to distinguish between the ideals, that is the idealism of defining terrorism from the academic point of view, and the realistic view of terrorism. So, from the academic point of view, you can say terrorism is that situation where, due to ideology, politics, and sometimes religion, some people raise the bar by causing trepidation, and fear among the citizens.

But that is the academic definition of terrorism. If you look deeper, you will discover that terrorism is the same as what it is, but the people behind terrorism are not what we think we know. If you look at what happened in Algeria far back, what is happening in Palestine, the Zagreb region in Africa, if you go to the Horn of Africa, where you have the Ashaba, you will see that if you ask the right question, it's not to look at the action itself, that is, the action of terrorism, it's to look at the minds behind the action, then you begin to understand the concept of terrorism.

A lot of academicians, I won't say they are lazy, but I think they have not been able to look beyond the action of terrorism and try to focus on the minds behind the action of terrorism. If you want to define it, I think it's what we refer to today as state terrorism. I think we should remove the state and say that terrorists are actually the big powers. The United States, Britain, France, and Russia also. I'm not very sure about China, but I think those big powers, the P5, maybe minus China, or I can say the P5 plus one, that is including Israel. Basically, what I can refer to as terrorist states, they are the terrorists.

Using proxies cannot really remove that responsibility or the responsibilities of the actions that we see all over the world. ISIS, ISWAP, Boko Haram, and so on, they are not standing alone. They are sponsored by people for different interests, which is not really the issue of ideology or religion, it is more of economy. Look around the world, where we have terrorist actions, you will see that those regions have resources, but they are strategic.

The Horn of Africa, for instance, is a strategic point where all the major powers in the world want to be seen and want to protect that choke point because of trade and commerce. Basically, you see that terrorism is actually something that is derived from the economic interests of states.

LHM: There is a school of thought that tries to drag in the superpower countries who have nuclear weapons in their possession into the classification of terrorists, how would you describe the disparity between the act of terrorism that is

borne out of ideological motivation and that which results from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction?

Kunle Olawunmi: No, that's a mix-up. They are completely different. But when you mention ideology, then I think you get it. Let's treat the nuclear issue and terrorism. There is what we know as nuclear terrorism. In other words, you carry out terror threats because no one can dare you or stop you from doing terror. Let's look at the issue of Russia and Ukraine. What the Russians are doing is completely out of tune with international ways that states should behave.

For no reason should you attack another state, because that's what we discussed about the issue of sovereignty. So Ukraine is a sovereign state, and you decide to attack because of whatever reason. When you can actually recourse to the United Nations, and there are other provisions in the international arena where the Russians could have laid their claim.

But when we relate it to nuclearization or nuclear power, nobody is going to stop the Russians from those atrocities because they have nuclear power. Same with Israel, because Israelis have nuclear capacity. Even though the bombs are not that many, but one is enough, they could attack another people and commit so much crime. And everybody is afraid to stop Israel. So in that sense, you can begin to have the theoretical linkage between nuclear power and terrorism, just because you cannot stop the activities of those nuclear power states.



But when you go to the issue of ideology, for me, I think those are proxies that they use to shield or cover the activities of some of these states. There's no kind of ideology or religion that actually will make people to commit atrocities. What they do is to use ideology or religion as an excuse for terrorism to cover the real motive.

Behind the scene, you're going to find that it's economic interest or strategic interest that makes all of those things happen. So I don't like to talk about ideology. There's no ideology again since the end of the Cold War. Since the end of the Cold War, everybody is the same. China, Russia, when it comes to making money. The one percent in the world, they all talk to each other, they eat together, they do things together. So let us not discuss ideology. That was gone since the era of the Second World War. So they are just excuses. They are all the same.

I simply would like to refer to them as the deep states. Whether you are Russia or China, they are all in the same loop. The



pharmaceuticals, the weapon industries in the United States and Europe, they all work together. Spain also, they all manufacture planes together, producing different spare parts for themselves. If you look at Russia's weapons, sometimes you see that some American components are inscribed there. There's nothing like ideology. Let's just leave that out of it. It's about economic interest. When you have nuclear power, you don't want another state to have it. That is why Iran is in trouble. That's why Iraqi was in trouble. That's why Libya was in trouble. Syria also, the axis of evil. **So the world is becoming a place that is being destroyed gradually by those that are actually given the responsibility to protect it, the p5 plus one.**

LHM: What are the factors that make terrorists look like they are spirits and what solutions can you proffer towards the eradication of terrorism and banditry in the African continent?

Kunle Olawunmi: When you come to Africa, it's a different ball game. They are spirits because there are people behind them. In Africa, we have masquerades and there are human beings behind the mask. That's why it's like they are spirits. They are masquerades but there is somebody inside the gown.

The second reason why I think they behave like they are spirits is because we are completely flabbergasted as to how to approach the issue of terrorism. We don't even know where they are coming from. We just think, oh, these people are grieved because of their Islamic fundamentalism. Oh, these ones are Christians, oh, they are born Christians, their ideology is communism versus capitalism and so on. Because we look at the wrong side of everything. It's like a mirage. We don't even know what's going on. That is why I said earlier that there is nothing like ideology anymore.

Why they look like they are spirits is because it is like the hands of Esau and the voice of Jacob. That is why people are confused. That is why this interview is very important. People should begin to look elsewhere. We have been looking in the same direction for more than 60



The Fulanis

years. We should begin anew to know that terrorism or terrorist acts are something that is initiated by the world powers because of economic interests.

LHM: There are contrary views regarding the deradicalization and integration of terrorists into our society, what views do you share on the contrary and what are the disadvantages and advantages of both ideas?

Kunle Olawunmi: You cannot appease terrorists. That is because, as I said earlier, the action is what we focus on, the activities of terrorists. We don't focus on the causatives. So if you now say you want to de-radicalize, it no longer makes sense because somebody is behind playing the drums. And what you see is that the masquerade is dancing. So except you go after the person that is playing the drums to stop drumming, the masquerade will continue to dance. So it's a very wrong notion that people have when it comes to the issue of terrorism.

I took my time. I used to be with my friend Todd at the Global Counter-Terrorism Institute. We set it up together. It's because I see that the whole world is getting it wrong. What is terrorism? If you want to talk about Africa, the main source of terrorism in Africa is resources. So if you go to the Zagreb region where they are mining uranium, gold and so on, you see terrorist activities.

If you go to the Azawar region in Northern Mali, you will see that a lot of Western interests are there because of the resources there. So what they do is to basically stimulate terrorist activities

and reinforce it by sponsoring the other country to also fight terrorism and reinforce the terrorists to continue to fight the government. And in the process, during the chaos, it is easier to cart away the resources, either by the country that is incident on to pay for the weapons they are buying to fight the insurgency.

So they use their resources to pay for the arms to fight the insurgency. And the insurgency is also being financed to fight the government. So it's like Tom and Jerry, you know, you can go fighting and they are just taking away your resources. **So that is the formula. And once we can interrogate this formula, people will begin to see terrorism as a different thing. It is just about resources and it's a trick by the world powers to have access to the resources almost free of charge.**

LHM: If the proliferation and possession of nuclear weapons are considered threats and fit in for description as an act of terrorism, what recommendations would you make to the United Nations, and how feasible is the realization of a nuclear-weapon-free world?

Kunle Olawunmi: Let me be realistic, it's not feasible. You cannot take power just by wishing it or by appealing to people to get rid of their nuclear power. It will never happen. The second reason is that the United Nations itself, being a supranational entity is governed, or is backed up by the P5, that is the Security Council. So how do you reform yourself? You want the Security Council to reform itself, to disarm itself of nuclear power? It can never happen. Because the people that have nuclear power are the people



The Yoruba Nation Agitators



Nnamdi Kanu, Leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)

that are supposed to reform, they are supposed to answer this question of a nuclear-free world and the issue of trust. If you disarm one or two and the rest refuse, then they're going to pin you down.

They're going to actually rule you. Everybody wants to be able to rule the world. So who is going to bail the cat? Who is going to be the first to disarm itself? Is it Russia? Is it the United States? Is it China? You know, the issue of Taiwan is there, China is a nuclear power that is trying to venture into Taiwan. Once you disarm China of nuclear power, then the British and French, are going to march into their doorstep and actually enslave them. They will colonize them. **So I cannot see the possibility of a nuclear-free world. It is utopian, something we all wish for but I don't see it happening.**

LHM: How would you describe the difference between the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israeli-Palestinian war? What are the critical lessons to learn to forestall future conflicts?

Kunle Olawunmi: That's a double-barreled question. Let's take it one by one. Because it is a big question so we have to take our time. When you look at Russia and Ukraine, fundamentally, you have to go back to the time of the Soviet Union, whereby they were all one country. After 1989-1991, when the Cold War ended and Russia was basically balkanized, there

have been peace relatively in that area. And you can also look at the Minsk agreement in Belarus. There's Minsk-1, Minsk-2. Then, it had to do with the issue of nuclearization or disarming Ukraine of their nuclear arsenal, which they did. And that is why my former comment is very germane.

Immediately they saw that Ukraine no longer had nuclear power, and now Russia can go in there. But it's more of an issue of boundaries, whereby you have a lot of Russian-speaking tribes in the Donbas region of Ukraine. And perhaps NATO countries, in 2014 tried to whip up or escalate the Donbas affair. And the Russians felt that they had to come in. And you have to also bring in the issue of Crimea, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and how the West felt that their expansion towards Russia was going to be halted because Crimea is a strategic point in the Black Sea.

So, if you look at the historical background, and the way the issue of the Soviet Union now and Russia, try to take back the former Soviet Union, so to say, you can't say the same of Israeli-Palestinian issue. You have to go to the issue of the Balfour declaration, how the Europeans basically drove away the Jewish community in Europe. You can remember the Second World War, where Hitler actually killed almost six million Jews, and the holocaust stories – and now the solution of moving the Jewish population from Eu-

rope to the Middle East by Britain in particular, over the years elicited some disgruntlement. Middle East, I mean you can't bring the Jews to their space, and they basically are taking the space and expanding it. And we have to talk about Iran, Russia, Syria, and the Hezbollah in Lebanon.

These are the actors there, and it has to do with what I would consider as what we were experiencing in South Africa before, which is the issue of discrimination. I don't want to use the word apartheid, but something similar to apartheid, where the people of Palestinian origin were being discriminated, and being subjected to abuse daily. So, is it the same with the case of Ukraine and Russia? No, because the Jewish population was not in that space before.

But the Russians, the Russian-speaking population, the Donbas region, the eastern part of Ukraine, has been there forever. It is just the boundary that took them into Ukraine, and now they're trying to protect them. That's a pretense anyway. The main reason why the Russians are doing what they're doing is that they want to expand the boundary towards Poland, Belarus, and Georgia, to ensure that the NATO forces do not come and put missiles on their doorstep. Look at the issue of Israeli-Palestinian, it is completely different. It is just imposing a population on a space that hitherto belonged to another group of people.

It's normal for such skirmishes to occur but don't forget the issue of the axis of evil, the issue of Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, and their place in the Middle East. Everything finally boils down to economy in the case of the Middle East. While the case of Russian-Ukrainian has to do with the issue of ego. That differentiates the two.

LHM: So what are the critical lessons to learn to forestall future conflicts like that?

Kunle Olawunmi: All the things that are needed to forestall such occurrences are already in place. As I told you, the United Nations tried to pretend to be a supra-national entity with all the ingredients of statehood present. I use the word pretend because they are unable to enforce some of the laws. There are a lot of international laws and conventions that actually guide the conduct of states within and among themselves. So, if those laws are there, and the people that are supposed to enforce it are the P5, the UN Security Council, including some of the members that come randomly at a particular time.

My view is that the people that are supposed to enforce the laws are the ones breaking the law. So, there's no way you can talk about a solution without talking about the P5, that is the Security Council. And if they have become so irresponsible to the point we are seeing now, look at what the Americans are doing in the coast of Lebanon, the coast of Gaza, protecting the inequities that are so to say, and what the Russians are doing. These are members of the P5. The Chinese are also carrying out aggression in the streets of Taiwan, threatening to take Taiwan. So, China, Russia, France and Britain are always together with the United States in the Security Council.

So, this is where I think the United Nations need reforms. Maybe that will answer your question. We need to reform the United Nations. **I think the P5 have overstayed their welcome since the Second World War. I think they are expired, so to say.** So, the Committee of Nations should start thinking of reforming the United Nations, so that we can reprogram what we saw during the First and Second World War that actually necessitated the United Nations. So, I think since the end



of the Cold War, we've gotten to a different era now. We're talking about cyber security, cyber warfare, we're talking about artificial intelligence. **I think the United Nations has actually outlived its usefulness in the world today.**

LHM: In what ways would you want to describe democracy, either as an antidote or catalyst for terrorism and banditry in the African nations?

Kunle Olawunmi: I think democracy is a catalyst, it is not an antidote. It is a catalyst especially in Nigeria. It is the reason why we're having Niger Delta militancy and Boko Haram. **I don't want to be misquoted, but democracy has a great role to play in the evolution of terrorism in Nigeria.** And why do I say so? I know the history of terrorism, how it started, I mean, the Boko Haram, how it started in Borno region. It was just a governor that educated people to, basically, create fear in the opponent – come, if you don't do my will,

then I'm going to take you out.

And it worked. So, he became governor and abandoned the boys in the bush. And those ones had to survive. So, what did they do? They started attacking people, attacking banks, kidnapping people, and collecting money, because they had to survive, basically. Because the person that brought them to do the job, the job has been done, and he has put them aside. So, that's democracy for you, okay?

Niger Delta militancy is the same. An aspirant, maybe a presidential aspirant will gather some people, arm them to intimidate the opponent, then after winning the election, they're abandoned. So, that is democracy, the way we practice it here. And it's not that different from what is happening in America. The only place where you see democracy in action, for me, is in the Nordic regions, where you have the Scandinavian countries where they have been able to achieve a very high

level of integrity when it comes to democracy. But in Nigeria and Africa, it is the catalyst for all the problems we have now.

And I think we should begin to change the way we govern ourselves. We can't copy what is happening in America. America has just two parties. In Nigeria, you have many Parties, and the more Parties you have in a country, the more divided that country is. Look at what happened in the last election in Nigeria.

We had Obi, all the Igbos said Obi must rule, we had Tinubu, all the Yorubas said, yes that is who we want, and Atiku, all the people in the North are going for him. So, it is the catalyst for division. And the longer you run democracy the way we run it in Nigeria, the more the chances there are of division in the country.

As it were now, we have a lot of nationalities trying to break away from Nigeria. And it's as a result of the democracy we

practice. The South East said they want to leave, since their own son did not win.. Oh, the people in the North also, I have heard some voices that they also want to have their country. And I know with the Yoruba nation, there is also an agitation that maybe below the radar now, but it is going to erupt. Then the Yoruba nation is going to be a fundamental challenge for this country.

Despite that Tinubu is the one ruling, they are not very convinced that the North is still not controlling the power in Nigeria. And this is where I think I would advise the country to look critically into the current situation. **As a practitioner in the field of security and intelligence gathering, I know that this country is sitting on a keg of gunpowder as a result of the kind of democracy we practice.** So to answer your question, I think it is a catalyst and it is something that people should come together and think about how we can practice democracy that will not hurt the system.

LHM: What is your assessment of the regional organizations such as the ECOWAS and the African Union regarding the progress and retrogression of the African continent?

Kunle Olawunmi: I want to be kind to the two organizations because I don't want to use words that come to my mind. It is a shame let me just be mild, that the African Union has become a place where the Diplomats just go to collect estacodes and collect money and just funfair. It is a shame. I remember Gadaffi was so strong that time that we had African Union, maybe like the United States of America where we can have free movements, free movement of people, goods, and services, but it will not work because that will not be in the interest of the world powers. When I say world powers, I'm talking about the bigger countries. Because this is their farm. This is where they come to take their resources. So if the African Union is able to stand, then it's not going to be in their interest because they will not have free access to resources in the DR Congo. They will not have free access to resources in the Zagreb region because you have to contend with the African Union if you want to take anything out. The issue of cohesion within the AU is going to be the panacea for developments in Africa.

ECOWAS is jinxed. Recall the role ECOMOG played in Liberia and Sierra Leone during the civil wars. Since Nigeria did that, the global powers felt that we are becoming a threat to their interests in Africa, particularly France. And the monetary aspect, the free movement, all the good programs of ECOWAS, they make sure that it never happens. We're supposed to be spending ECO in ECOWAS. The French ensure that the Francophone countries in West Africa are spending the money they don't spend anymore, SEFA.

They don't spend SEFA anymore. They are now spending euro. And they pin down all the West African countries to be spending SEFA, which they don't spend again. They tied their economy, and 80% of their GDP is tied to France. And why should they allow them to have common currency in ECOWAS? So I don't need to say more, but it implies that ECOWAS has basically almost failed.

We just call on the chairman of ECOWAS at this point to put his ass together and bring Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger back to the fold, and try to understand that the challenge that they are having is from outside Africa because of the resources in this area and how these people have continued to enslave the people of West Africa in order to develop Paris, London, and perhaps New York.

It's not rocket science to know that these people come to disorganize you, and to make sure that you are not talking to each other. I mean, look at Nigeria, it is the only country speaking English in West Africa. This has happened since 1884, during the Berlin Conference. Look at Cameroon to our East – French, Chad to the North – French, Niger to the North – French, to the West, Benin Republic, French-speaking. And they reinforce it with Togo, who also speaks French. Before you can get to Ghana, that speaks English.

Are we being tied? Is our brain being tied? Why can't we dissolve this cancer that was planted some years back? I don't blame the foreign powers. They will always pursue their interests. Anybody will pursue their interests. So their interest is to ensure that we don't speak one language and we don't trade together. And if you think you are smart and you want to trade with Benin or Togo, they are going to flood Benin and Togo with goods and services that will kill your own economy in Nigeria. Because they are going to throw in all subsidized goods. Chicken will be maybe like half a dollar, and your farmer cannot produce chicken at half a dollar. So they will flood the place and destroy your economy, make your economy dependent on them. It's a very complex situation. So ECOWAS and AU need reforms. The people in Africa should open their eyes.

It is common sense that you need a strong African Union to be able to chase these foreign people out of your continent. We cannot go to Norway and say we want to go and dig for crude oil in Norway. We cannot go to the North Sea and say we want to take crude oil from the North Sea. But they are here. Destroying the environment and causing terrorist actions, I mean, terrorism, war, division, and taking



the resources, we should see beyond the veil. Why we cannot see beyond the veil is what is disturbing for me.

So AU and ECOWAS need to be reformed. They need to perform their roles, and they should not allow the foreign powers to keep on dividing the people.

LHM: Is restructuring the way out and forward for Nigeria?

Kunle Olawunmi: Nigeria cannot be restructured. They cannot. No matter how they try because, in any society, trust is very important. When I was younger, we only knew Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo. That doesn't mean that others did not exist but today, I started hearing Hausa-Fulani, then after some time, we only hear Fulanis and it's like Nigeria has been colonized by the Fulanis right now no doubt about that. We were colonized by the Arabs before. We were colonized by the British. We regained our independence, and now, we are being colonized again by the Fulanis in the political sphere, economic sphere, and even social sphere, because we have some parts of this country now that are run by the Sharia law.

Recently, some northern governors carried themselves to the United States to go and discuss the issue of security in

the northern part of Nigeria. Nigeria is already polarized, it's already divided, not because I'm saying it, but because of the actions of the North. They see themselves as a monolith. The Arewa, they just talk like a country and take action like a country.

Where is the National Security Adviser when some people gather themselves as governors and travel outside to go and perform the job of the National Security Adviser. This country cannot be restructured because the cancer has eaten so deep. We allowed the cancer to eat so deep that I think we've gotten to a point of no return. It's just a matter of time that there'll be conflagration because I know deeply that the Yoruba nations are ready to go. And I know that the Igbos have been ready to go their way since a long time. And you now say we should sit down and restructure when all the powers, all the political powers in this country is in the hands of the Fulanis. If you want to win an election in this country, you must go to them.

Even when Tinubu is there right now, he is a Yoruba man, he's there, but he's not controlling the states. That is why people will come out and say that people should go and appease Boko Haram because they are still in government. So the deep

states in Nigeria are the Fulanis. They are enshrined and they are actually controlling the state of affairs, and restructuring Nigeria is not going to be in their interest. They're not going to allow it to happen.

What do you do with the constitution? Are you going to tear the paper? As long as that constitution is there, you can never restructure this country. And the people that are supposed to do it are in the legislative arms of the government. The majority are from the North, majority are Fulanis. They're not going to allow you to reform the system because when you do, they're going to be out of power. So it is just wishful thinking.

I know some people, even the Southwest Yorubas that feel that the best way to go now is to restructure, but I think the best way to go at this point is for everybody to go their way. There is no way countries within the country can continue to tolerate the Fulanis the way they have done.

If you have been colonized by the Arabs, you've been colonized by the British, so now we are being colonized by the Fulanis and we want a reform? What happened to Oronsaye's report? There was a constitutional conference during President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's time, what happened to it? Who is making sure the constitutional conference report is not utilized? Who's doing that? It's the

Fulanis. And those are the things that should be reformed. The restructure that you are talking about, it's not going to happen. We're not going to continue like this. It's either people make bold to break out of jail, or you pretend that all is well, and you keep on pretending that you can restructure this. How? It's like you said that the P5 should restructure the issue of nuclear proliferation, they should drop their nuclear power so that the world would be safe. You want to tell the Fulanis to drop their power so that Nigeria would be better.

So it's not going to happen. Please don't talk about restructuring. I know a lot of people would criticize what I'm saying. It's because they don't know, I know. Nigeria cannot be restructured. So it's either we keep on pretending that all is well, and we allow Fulanis to continue to govern us and colonize us, and others will take your resources. Eighty percent owners of your oil wealth are from the north.

Now they brought in the Chinese to also colonize us. Recently, they said the Chinese said that we cannot shop in their shopping complex, because we are black people. Who brought the Chinese in? So, I know a lot of people will criticize my position, but it's going to happen because the North will not allow restructuring the way you think, and we cannot continue with the status quo.

So if you cannot continue with the status quo, what else? If you don't allow peaceful negotiation, then I think the alternative is maybe people will either take laws into their hands and break away from the slavery. It has happened before, apartheid in South Africa. People rose and said, no way and they got out of it.

So, there's limit to which you can continue to enslave people using ego, you know? If you look at the cause of treasonable issues like terrorism and so on, one is money, two is ideology. Then ego.

So, all are present in the present-day Nigeria, sliding towards the Fulanis. They have access to the money, and they have ego issues.

Sokoto said they are born to rule. So when you look at their psychologies and their psyche, and they're talking about restructuring, if you restructure, how can they be born to rule? They can't. So, it's not going to happen.

Interview By
Chiamaka Favour Julius
Babatunde Christopher Ajayi

