

# The Once and Future Biafra?

by Hugh Fitzgerald



**In Nigeria**, the war in the north against Christians continues to widen, with Christian girls kidnapped (and some used as sex slaves), Christian villages and churches destroyed, and Christians killed, by both the Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram, which is largely made up of Hausa tribesmen, and by Fulani (Muslim) herdsman. Recently Vice President Yemi Osinbajo [called on](#) Muslims and Christians to unite against “radical Islamist terrorism,” stressing that it was a common enemy of all faiths. It was the usual hopeful hopeless call for the “real” Muslims to join forces with Christians against those Muslims who follow a “twisted creed”:

*Osinbajo urged Christians and Muslims to unite against fanatics committed to a twisted creed, which exploited the tenets of Islam, poverty, and exclusion “to recruit men and women and use children to perpetuate the most heinous*

*atrocities.”*

*The vice president spoke at the 2019 Nigerian Army Day Celebration and Combat Support Arms Training Week held at the Ikeja Cantonment, in Lagos. He said terrorists did not have responsible grievances and, therefore, no terms of reference for peace.*

*According to him, radical Islamic terrorism “is an evil that must be seen as the common enemy of all faiths, including Islam. As the president said, and I paraphrase, anyone who says Allahu Akbar and goes on to kill is either insane or dangerously ignorant of the tenets of Islam.”*

Perhaps Osinbajo really believes that what is driving Muslim terrorists is not Islam but, rather, a “twisted creed” – that is, a distorted version of the real and peaceful Islam – derived from “tenets of Islam, poverty, and exclusion.” Let’s take those claims in reverse order. What “exclusion” is he referring to? Don’t Muslims in Nigeria participate fully in the political and economic life of the country? Some would argue that, given their numbers – Muslims are 48.3%, and Christians 49.2%, of the population, they are over-represented in the military and in the political class. Many of the upper officer corps are Muslims. Far from being “excluded” from political life, most of Nigeria’s presidents have been Muslims. It is true that Boko Haram discourages its members from engaging in politics, believing that any political system not based on Sharia should be rejected, but the vast majority of Muslims participate eagerly, hoping always to retain greater power for the Muslim half of the population.

As to poverty helping to explain Muslim terrorism, this is the same claim that used to be made about Muslim terrorists elsewhere – that “poverty” was a root cause of Islamic terrorism – but then researchers examining the data on captured and killed Jihadis discovered that the terrorists

were both better educated, and better off economically, than the average Muslim. Bin Laden, the son of a Saudi billionaire, had a private fortune of tens of millions of dollars. Ayman Al-Zawahiri, his second in command, was a surgeon and scion of one of Egypt's most prominent families. His grand-uncle was Azzam Pasha, the first Secretary-General of the Arab League. Mohamed "Mike" Hawash was earning \$300,000 a year as an Intel engineer, living with his American wife and children, when he tried to travel to Asia to join up with Taliban terrorists. Major Nidal Hasan was earning \$90,000 a year as an army doctor when he killed 13 of his fellow soldiers in a terrorist attack. Among the Muslims flocking to ISIS from Europe there have been many professionals – engineers, doctors, lawyers, computer specialists. The most famous of Nigerian would-be terrorists was Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the "Underwear Bomber," whose father, Alhaji Umaru Mutallab, was described by The Times in 2009 as being "one of the richest men in Africa."

Which brings us to the "tenets of Islam" that have been distorted into a "twisted creed." The Vice-President doesn't tell us which "tenets of Islam" have been "twisted." It is difficult to believe that he doesn't know perfectly well what is in the Qur'an. In Nigeria, Christians in positions of power need to understand the Muslim belief system. He surely has read many of the 109 Qur'anic verses commanding Muslims to wage violent jihad, that is, to "kill" and to "fight" and to "smite at the necks of" and to "strike terror in the hearts of" non-Muslims. He also must know the verses describing non-Muslims as "the most vile of created beings" while Muslims are "the best of peoples." But he prefers to look away, to choose to believe that Muslims themselves don't believe these verses, that to take them seriously is to accept a "twisted creed" rather than the "real Islam." For if Yemi Osinbajo were to be quite honest about the texts, and to recognize that many Qur'anic verses command terror attacks on Christians and other non-Muslims, could he dare to admit it openly? He would only

enrage Muslims for telling the truth, and terrify many Christians, who would be left only with the prospect of endless warfare, to defend themselves against the Jihadis. It's understandable that this Nigerian politician, like so many political and media figures in the West, cannot allow himself to face the horrifying truth about Islam's texts and teachings.

But he is whistling in the dark. And he is choosing to forget that there is a history here, that goes back half a century in Nigeria. It's the history of a previous Jihad by northern Muslims, determined in 1967 to snuff out the young life of the newly-declared independent state of Biafra, where the Christians in southern Nigeria hoped to be free from Muslim persecution and pogroms. They lost their war for independence. That first Biafra War, and a possible second Biafra War, will be taken up tomorrow.

Ethnic and religious tensions go at least as far back, in modern Nigeria, to 1945, when Muslim Hausa-Fulani people killed 300 Christian Ibos in Jos. It was described thus: "At Jos in 1945, a sudden and savage attack by Northerners took the Easterners [Christian Ibos] completely by surprise, and before the situation could be brought under control, the bodies of Eastern women, men, and children littered the streets and their property worth thousands of pounds reduced to reduced to shambles." A similar unprovoked attack by Muslims occurred in 1953 in Kano. Muslim clashes with Christians continued after Nigeria gained its independence from Great Britain in 1960. In 1964, the southern Christians rioted against the results of elections that they believed had been unfair in perpetuating the political dominance of the Muslim North. In January 1966, there was a military coup, led by Ibo officers, in which 30 senior political figures were killed, including the Prime Minister and the Northern Premier. In July of that year, there was a counter-coup which brought Muslim officers to power, and in September of that year, there

was a massacre of 30,000 Ibos in the north by Muslims. It was that massacre that finally led Christian, chiefly Ibo, officers to declare the independent state of Biafra. The Muslims promptly declared war, and that first Biafra War lasted from 1967 to 1969, when the Biafrans surrendered. Close to two million Biafran civilians died of starvation and disease. During the war, the most important outside help given to the Muslims came from Gamal Abdel Nasser, who sent both Egyptian planes, Russian-built Migs, and pilots who repeatedly strafed and bombed Ibo villages, killing tens of thousands of defenseless villagers.

The Western nations behaved shamefully. The United States did nothing to help the Biafrans; the U.K. did even worse – it helped the Muslim side to enforce the blockade of Biafra. There was a feeling in some quarters that Nigeria had to be kept together no matter what. Nigeria was the most populous state in Africa, and if the white West helped in its dissolution, this could be seen as a blow to African pride, and a source of resentment against the West.

Biafra was formally recognised by Gabon, Haiti, Ivory Coast, Tanzania and Zambia. Other nations, which did not give official recognition, but provided support and assistance to Biafran civilians, included Israel (which also supplied – the only nation to do so – significant military assistance), France, Spain, Portugal, Norway, Rhodesia, South Africa and Vatican City. Biafra also received aid from non-state actors, including Joint Church Aid, Holy Ghost Fathers of Ireland, Caritas International, and U.S. Catholic Relief Services.

It was not enough. The Biafrans lacked weapons of all kinds, while the Muslims were well-supplied with the national army's weapons, the Nigerian Army having been mostly Muslim-officered. Those Egyptian planes and pilots terrorized the Christians. A most shameful aspect of British policy was the blockade that Great Britain helped the Northerners to enforce against Biafra, leading to mass starvation of Biafran

civilians. What were they thinking in Whitehall? The policy may have been based on pure self-interest: all of Nigeria's oil was in the south, in Christian-populated regions. The longer the war went on, the more likely it was that Nigeria's oil production would plummet because of destruction to wells, pipelines, refineries. Great Britain thus had a stake in bringing the war to a quick end. But the British chose to hasten that end not by helping Biafra gain independence, but by aiding the Northerners to crush the nascent state. The British did not then realize what a moral and military mistake it had been to take the Muslim side against the Christian Biafrans. After all, had the British militarily helped the Biafrans, for example by shooting down the Egyptian Migs that strafed Biafran civilians at will, and had broken, rather than aided, the Northerners' blockade of Biafra, they might have brought the war to just as quick a close, but with a Christian victory. And then the grateful Biafrans would have invite the British troops in to secure the oil fields and pipelines in the south, and kept the oil flowing. Tens of millions of Christians would have been rescued from Muslim domination and persecution. Such a victory would have been of great symbolic value, might have heartened other Christians in Africa, who were alarmed at the inroads being made by Islam. Instead, the Biafran loss in a war, which few in the West remember, testifies to the pusillanimous abandonment of the Christians by the West, as the major powers either took the Muslim side, as did the U.K., or remained studiously uninvolved in the conflict, except for some deliveries of humanitarian aid. There was no media outrage over the mass deaths of Biafran civilians. Only two Western reporters wrote sympathetically and at length of the Biafrans – Frederick Forsyth in the U.K. and Renata Adler in the U.S.

After two and a half years of war, during which almost two million Biafran civilians died from starvation caused by the total blockade of the region by the Nigerian and British governments, Biafran forces, under Nigeria's motto of "No-

victor, No-vanquished," surrendered to the Nigerian Federal Military Government (FMG). The Biafrans had no doubt that the war waged against them had been a "Jihad." That was what the Biafran leader, Colonel Ojukwu, called the Muslim military campaign in his 1969 Ahiara Declaration. In the fifty years since the end of that war, there has been a steady spread of Sharia in the northern states. The easygoing, syncretistic Islam gave way to a harsher, more orthodox version, no doubt partly the result of Saudi-funded mosques, madrasas, and imams. In the last few years, there have been many attacks on Christians living in the north and center of the country. There has been, destruction of churches, kidnapping of Christian girls (Michele Obama's "bring back our girls" did not bring them back), murders of Christian villagers. What the Biafrans feared might eventually happen if they were forced to remain in Nigeria has in fact happened: the renewal of Jihadist attacks on Christians, the steady encroachment of Muslims on Christian lands in central Nigeria, the gradual weakening of Christian influence in the corridors of corrupt power in Abuja.

Christians who live in central and north-central Nigeria, that is, outside the Christian-dominated south, are again the object of Muslim attack, from both the largely Hausa terrorists of Boko Haram and from the Fulani semi-nomadic herdsmen. If the Christians in the south were to again attempt to establish an independent state, as many wish, a Biafra Redux, a refuge for coreligionists from all over Nigeria, how would they fare? What could be different this time?

Certainly the British government, whether led by Boris Johnson or Jeremy Hunt, would behave differently than it did during the First Biafra War. After 35,000 Muslim terror attacks since 9/11, and especially after the many Muslim terror attacks in the West, that is, the U.K., Europe, and North America, no British government would now help Muslims suppress Christians in Nigeria, as it did by helping to enforce the blockade of

Biafra in the first Biafran war. Were the Northerners to again receive outside help from fellow Muslims, as they did during that first war, with those planes and pilots sent by Egypt's Nasser, the British might now supply weaponry to the Biafrans, perhaps even including ground-to-air missiles and aircraft. And Israel, which did send some weapons during the first Biafran War, might be sympathetic to pleas for similar help against Muslim aggressors trying to crush the self-determination of Nigeria's Christians. Under a Trump Administration, though not a Democratic one, it is no longer fanciful to believe that American military aid might be sent to the Christians. Other countries in Europe that sent humanitarian aid to the Biafrans, such as France (which did send some obsolete weaponry and French mercenaries to aid the Biafrans) and Spain, might now be willing to send military aid. It would not be a repeat of the previous war; Europeans have learned a good deal about Muslims in the half-century since the first Biafra War, and few will now want to abet Muslim aggression by abandoning their fellow Christians. The Israelis, who greatly sympathized with the Biafrans, did send them modern weaponry in the first war, and would certainly be willing to help them again, with training and updated weaponry, including drones.

There is already a clandestine Christian independence movement in the south. [Radio Biafra broadcasts daily](#), with tales of a once and future Biafra. Young Ibo men have been recorded in the last two years chanting in street protests, not just against the Muslim President Muhammadu Buhari, but for "Biafra" and "independence."

Things might be different now if the Western powers see Biafra Redux as a justified attempt by the Christians to end their persecution and murder by Muslims. In the last few years, there have been so many attacks on the Christians by Muslims – the kidnappings of girls who become "wives" and sex slaves, the burning down of churches, the destruction of Christian



villages and the killings of Christian men, women, and children – not just by Boko Haram, but by mainstream Muslims who are only following the Qur’anic commandments to fight and to kill the Infidels, that independence again seems like the only solution that will ensure the safety of Nigeria’s Christians.

Economically, Biafra could easily be self-sufficient. All the oil of Nigeria is in the Niger Delta, in the Christian-dominated south. That oil would continue to be exported, just as it is now, through pipelines to the coast, and then to waiting tankers; there would be no need to ship the oil through enemy territory. The only change would be that the oil revenues would now belong entirely to the Christians, under whose land the oil reserves are located, instead of having the lion’s share go to the politically dominant Muslims. The Christians may even decide, in order to ensure that the Muslims accept the war’s outcome, to offer them a cut of the oil revenues.

An independent state of Biafra, well-armed and financially stable, would deal a blow to Muslim ambitions in Africa, would give heart to other Christian groups that have felt abandoned by the West, and put a dent in Muslim triumphalism everywhere – including that found among the tens of millions of Muslims now living in Europe. It would be a stirring example of how to roll back the Jihadist tide. Fifty years on since the first Biafra War, with many lessons having been painfully learned about Islam and the Jihadist imperative, this time the West can do what not only makes geopolitical sense, but also happens, at least as importantly, to be right.

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