

## **An Examination of the Early Arab-Israeli Wars: Lessons in Tactics and Strategies**

By

**Prof. Tunde Agara**

**Department of Political Science**

Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma

Tel: +2348035671431, tunde\_agarah@yahoo.com

### **Introduction**

The conflict and wars between Israel and her neighbours; the Arabs, can be traced back to the time of Abraham. According to Biblical tradition, Abraham was the father of both Ishmael and Isaac. In this regard, both the Jewish and Arab traditions are agreed that the Jews descended from Isaac while the Arabs descended from Ishmael. Basically, because the Biblical account focused more on the Israelis, there was no sufficient account of Ishmael and his offspring in the Bible. However, the Biblical account of the children of Isaac has been documented and archaeological findings have confirmed the movement of the Hebrews led by Moses from Egypt through Sinai into Jordan. Putting aside the religious intonation of the migration of the Hebrews from Egypt, what is very clear is that the migration was reminiscent of other peoples who had fled from persecution or who were in search of suitable places to dwell. The Hebrews incursion into the "Promise Land" marked the first violent conflict between them and their Arab 'cousins' who had earlier settled in this region. The five dominant tribes who inhabited Palestine and the eastern shores of the Mediterranean were the Canaanites, Philistines, Amorites, Edomites and Moabites. These were the ancestors of the present Palestinian Arabs, as we know them today (McKay et al, 2007:22-24).

The first period of Jewish domination of Palestine started with the various conquests of the neighbouring lands by the Hebrews under the leadership of Joshua. The whole of Palestine was then under the suzerainty of the Pharaohs but Joshua and subsequent Hebrew leaders were able to maintain their autonomy. It was under Saul's successor, David that Jerusalem was captured from the Jebusites and David's son, Solomon, built the first temple there in 962 B.C. The kingdom was eventually broken into two; the Northern and Southern kingdoms. While the former lasted for two centuries before being destroyed by the Assyrians, the latter lasted for three and a half centuries before being sacked by the Chaldeans under Nebuchadnezzar who exiled the Jewish population to Babylon (Craig et al, 2009:25-28). Under Cyrus the Great of Persia, the Jews were allowed to return. Counting from the time of Joshua, this would be the second return to Palestine by the Jews after been dispersed.

In A.D. 70, the Romans totally destroyed Jerusalem and barred the Jews from ever returning. Jewish tradition had dated the final dispersion from this time. It was during this dispersion that the Jews encountered the founder of Islam in Medina. However, religious differences and criticism of Islam were behind the deterioration of relations between the Jews and the Moslem in Medina. This led to the expulsion of the Jews from Medina and this conflict had coloured the attitude of Moslems toward Jews in subsequent centuries. The breakdown in relations between the two was however marked by less conflict and violence than what had characterised the relations of Jews and Gentiles in Europe. It is very significant that until the rise of Zionism, which was born in the fervent intellectual climate of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe through the effort of a Viennese German; Theodor Herzl who wrote *Der Judenstaat*, which became the manifesto of political Zionism in 1896, Jews escaping from persecutions always fled to the east. For instance, the Spanish Jews escaping persecution in

Spain fled to North Africa and Palestine while the Russian Jews fled to Turkish territory. In all these, it would seem that the Moslem East was made to bear the burden of the crimes committed against the Jews by the Christian West.

The purpose of this paper is to take an analytical look at the nature of the early conflicts between these two. Although much has been written about them but the lessons of limited wars derived from a study of these early conflicts have not been adequately articulated. These wars were fought between an established enemy and one that was relatively young albeit not a stranger to conflicts. In view of the fact that both parties to the conflicts have warrior-like mentality and culture but with limited access to modern armaments, what strategy was adopted to overcome this inadequacy? The motif of this paper is, on one hand, to be able to explain how the struggle had escalated from sporadic guerrillas sabotage and disruptions into more conventional wars, and on the other hand, to be able to account for the various diplomatic manoeuvrings by the great powers and how the Israeli-Arab wars became a proxy for the Cold War between the East and the West. The early wars proffer us opportunities to look at the various lessons in tactics and strategies of war. The rest of the paper is divided into three parts. Apart from the introduction, the second part looked at the first stage of the struggle which adopted a guerrilla warfare, while the third part looked at the onset of conventional warfare. The last section attempts to articulate certain lessons of tactics and strategies adopted by both sides.

### **First Stage of the Struggle: ‘Irregular’ or Guerrilla Warfare**

Gray (2007:245) had argued that “it is both useful and historically justifiable to divide the experience of warfare into two broad categories: regular and irregular”. What we refer to as irregular war amounts to what Callwell (1990, p. 21) had called ‘small war’ and which he explained as “including all campaigns other than those where both the opposing sides consist of regular troops”. As Gray (2007, p. 246) had equally noted, “irregular warfare...has been known by many different names. The most popular of those names has been guerrilla warfare, a title borrowed from the Spanish word for ‘little war’.” Gray (2007, p. 248) had further explained that;

Guerrilla warfare is the character of warfare waged of necessity by irregular belligerents. Its hallmarks are surprise and the avoidance of large-scale open combat. It is technique in the waging of war that any group or army, regular or irregular, can learn. But to be conducted successfully, guerrilla warfare generally requires a friendly, or at least acquiescent, civilian context.

Many modern states with regular army also trained troops specifically for irregular warfare. These soldiers are members of an elite group of warriors called ‘special forces’ such as Special Air Service (SAS) and Special Boat Squadron (SBS) in Britain, Delta Force (DF), Army Green Berets and Navy SEALs (Sea, Air and Land) in America, and Spetsnaz in Russia. As a result of the special training in sabotage, explosives and selective destruction of targets and because cruelty and brutality unmodified and unsanctioned by rules of war under which regular army operates are the enduring characteristics of irregular warfare, these elites qualified to be called terrorists-in-uniform.

At the first stage of the struggle and conflict between the Jews and Arabs, both parties made extensive use of guerrilla warfare, albeit for different reasons and this had effect on the successes and failures recorded by both sides. This also explained why this method of



confrontation was abandoned for the more conventional warfare. Guerrilla warfare constitutes only an aspect of conflicts and perhaps, the initial stage before the on-set of a full-blown insurrection and revolution. A common denominator of these three is that they entail some element of violence and the use of force as means of coercion. Scholars have attempted to make some distinctions among these three (Arendt 1963, Neumann 1949, Durotoye 1989 and Black 1964). Basically, an insurrection may take the form of a rebellion or guerrilla-type activities. A rebellion is distinguished from other forms of struggle or conflict because it represents an overt violent opposition directed at particular laws, practices or individuals (Agara 2008, p. 52). Guerrilla warfare, on the other hand, is specifically directed against military targets and the guerrilla combatants are irregular fighters lacking organised military power and personnel commanded by regular armed forces. They employ sporadic acts of aggression and violence as means of drawing attention to their cause because they cannot hope to win in an open battle. Theoretically, guerrilla organisations have mostly sprung up in such states where there is either acute political oppression or very unequal distribution of social wealth. When diplomatic and consensual means failed, guerrilla activities become the only means available for the discontents to express their grievances.

It would seem that the Arabs were not new to irregular or guerrilla warfare. The fabled “Lawrence of Arabia” of World War I, T.E. Lawrence (2008, pp. 244-251) had based his study of the science of guerrilla warfare on the Arab revolt against Turkish hegemony which started in June 1916 and ended in 1918. However, Arab guerrillas made their appearance in Palestine in the riots of April 1920 and May 1921 and again in 1929 in a dispute concerning the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. These conflicts marked the prelude in the on-going struggle between Arabs and the Israeli settlers. The 1936 Arab revolt against the British and the Jewish actually started as a spontaneous peasant revolt led by the poor village sheikhs. It escalated into a full guerrilla activity when the traditional land-owning families; the Husseinis and Nashashibis; hijacked it and under the auspices of the Arab Higher Committee (AHC), order a general strike against the British, a boycott of Jewish community and guerrilla operations in the countryside. The AHC was an amalgamation of different parties which were formed around the most prominent land-owning families in Palestine, and so as the apex organisation for the Palestinians then, it was made up of several factions. Chief among these factions were the Palestinian Arab Party, which represented the Hussein family, the National Defense Party that represented the Nashashibi family, the Reform Party representing the Khalidi family, the National Bloc composed of a group of Nablus leaders, the Congress Executive of National Youth led by Ramallah family and the Istiqlal led by a Jerusalem lawyer. An ensuing power tussle between the two most powerful families led to the withdrawal of the more moderate Nashashibi family. The Hussein family took-over the AHC and made demands for a halt in the immigration of Jews and land transfers to Jews and the call for the establishment of a Palestinian national state, which was supported by Pan-Arab leaders in Iraq, Syria and Egypt.

The first guerrilla leader was Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Oasim, a religious and nationalist figure from the hills of Galilee. He was later overshadowed by an ex-Iraqi officer Fawzi al-Din al Kawukji. Initial guerrilla activities were limited to disrupting communications by mining and barricading roads, sniping, setting fire to crops and cutting the oil pipe from Iraq to Haifa. These operations were equally restricted to the Galilee area because of its nearness to Syria, which was the base of Arab support and cover for the guerrilla. Slowly, guerrilla activities spread southward to Samaria and there developed a pattern of sustained and



coordinated attacks against Jews and the mandatory government. It was during this phase of the struggle that the traditional headdress of the Arabs – the Kefieh – became the symbol of identity for the guerrilla. This also became a sort of camouflage for hiding the guerrilla as all townsmen wore the headdress instead of the more common fez thereby enabling the guerrilla rebels to circulate more freely among the townsmen without detection. At the height of its operation, both the Jews and the British recorded many casualties, which led the British to bring in more troops from Britain to suppress the guerrillas. This led to a brief respite but guerrilla activity was to resume in 1937 on a more extensive scale. The peak of guerrilla activities and strength came in October 1938 when professional guerrillas called Mujaheddin (Holy Warriors) supplemented by part-time guerrillas joined the rank of the guerrillas and were able to inflict much casualties to British, Jews and those Arabs deemed as not sympathetic to the control of the AHC by the Husseini family. At this point, the guerrillas were able to control communications to and from Jaffa, the Old City of Jerusalem, Gaza, Beersheba and Hebron.

Meanwhile the Jewish settlers were not passive as they realised that they could not rely solely on Britain's assistance in their future encounter with the Arabs. Thus, falling back on the experience gained in Eastern Europe where the Jews had to organise against hostile communities, two organisations were formed to rally the Jews against Arab's assault and attacks. These were the Haganah (Self-defence) and the Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organisation). Although they were seen as illegal, the British, however, tolerated them and they became the paramilitary arm of the Jewish Agency in Palestine, organised to defend Jewish settlements from Arab guerrilla attacks. In the early years of its existence, the Haganah was mainly used for defence and never for offensive, as they feared Britain's repression and world opinion. Thus, the Haganah was used for protection and local police work during the disturbances of 1920, 1921, 1929 and 1936-1939. With the acceptance of nominal British control, the Haganah grew in number and developed an elite fighting unit, the Palmach. However, not all members of the Jewish community accepted this defensive posture of the Haganah and this discontentment led to the formation of the first Jewish guerrilla unit of note in 1935 when Vladimir Jabotinsky turned his Zionist followers into military units.

From the onset, Jewish guerrilla activities differed from its Arab counterpart. While the Arab guerrilla activities were concentrated to the rural area, the Jewish guerrilla activities assumed an urban setting and style of operation. The first Jewish paramilitary actions started in 1938 in reaction to the unprecedented spate of attacks by Arab guerrillas on Jewish properties, installations and communities. Under the leadership of David Raziel, the Irgun Zvai Leumi directed the reprisal attacks. The successes recorded by the Arab guerrillas made the British to agree to train some Jewish volunteers for anti-guerrilla raids. Those trained, the majority being members of the Haganah, became the nucleus of the "Special Night Squads" under the command of Captain Orde Charles Wingate. The outbreak of World War II offered the Jewish society a unique opportunity to form a distinct Jewish fighting force to participate in the war against the Axis. This opportunity enabled the Jewish Agency to enlarge and legitimize the Haganah and to have it trained in the techniques of modern warfare.

With the end of World War II in the offing, Jewish leaders began to make demands on the British policy and eventually turned against them. The Irgun under the leadership of Menachem Begin called for a revolt against Britain in January 1944 and even carried out an attack against the British offices in the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. The British found



themselves in between two warring parties. Between 1936 and 1946, British authorities in Palestine faced guerrilla operations. They were confronted by Arab guerrillas in the hills of Palestine and by Jewish guerrillas in the cities. The confrontations between the Arab and Jewish guerrillas were fuelled by widespread arms smuggling to both sides. As Schmidt (1974, pp. 120-121) had noted; “the main sources of supply were the Axis and the British stocks abandoned in Egypt’s western desert, equipment stolen from Allied camps and European surpluses. The agents were local Arabs or European dealers, but the buyers were predominantly Zionists”. The pullout of Britain inevitably not only led to more confrontations but new forms of conflicts. The withdrawal of Britain led to regular confrontations between a regular Israeli Army and the regular armies of the surrounding Arab states.

### **Second Stage of the Struggle: Conventional Warfare**

On May 15, 1948, the British left Jerusalem and returned to the United Nations the Mandate they had received from the League of Nations in 1918. This not only signalled the resumption of hostilities but on a more grand and direct scale now involving regular armies. Between this period and 1973, four conventional wars using regular armies were recorded between the Arabs and the Israelis. The first round of assault started when the Arab regular armies, the well-trained Arab Legion, under the command of Brigadier-General John Bagott Glubb, moved quickly into the offensive, crossed the Jordan River and occupied the Old City of Jerusalem. The Egyptians entered Palestine through the Gaza road and linked up with the Jordanians to besiege Jerusalem. A small contingent of Iraqi’s army also moved into northern Palestine and the Syrian force crossed the international border but did not attempt to press further. Khouri (1969) estimated the total Arab forces thrown into the war as been between 20,000 and 25,000 men. This number was to increase to between 50,000 and 55,000 on the Arab side while the Israelis were able to muster between 75,000 and 120,000.

The Israelis, who had declared a state of Israel following the withdrawal of British military presence in the Middle East, pursued different tactics. Rather than being on the defensive, they went on the offensive. After a brief waiting period to stockpile weapons received from Czechoslovakia and other parts of the world, they struck out against Arab forces in what became popularly known as the “Ten Days Offensive.” With heavy barrage of mortal gunfire, the Israelis were able to break the siege of Jerusalem, were able to advance, and captured Elat at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba, thereby guaranteeing them access to the Red Sea. It is significant to note that at no time during the war were the Arabs able to mount a successful assault against any major Jewish positions but rather they merely occupied the high ground from where they were able to observe Jewish communication lines. It seemed that their tactics was to rely solely on their superior numerical strength to wait out the Jews by paralysing and starving them out. The Jews, on the other hand, utilising efficient mobilisation, were able to field more men than the Arabs and combined with superior weaponry, were able to win the war.

The second round of confrontation between the regular armies was in 1956 after a rather long build-up of guerrilla activities on both sides. Arab guerrilla activities took the form of unorganised, individual raids aimed at stealing, smuggling and killing Israeli citizens. The Israelis retaliated by mounting periodic reprisal attacks designed to pressurised Arab governments to clamp down on border crossings. Although any Arab government did not sponsor the Arab raids, the death tolls on both sides were higher on the side of the Arabs and

this made some of the Arab governments to prevent their countries being used as a launching pad by the guerrillas (Love, 1969). Apart from being mere nuisance, the raids did not pose any serious threat to the Israeli government whose policy of reprisal raids became an effective deterrent to Arab sponsored guerrilla activities.

However, a number of events moving on the fast lane were to culminate into bringing about the second round of conventional warfare. Primary among these spates of events was the denial by Nasser the Israelis use of the Gulf of Aqaba for shipping activities. This prevented oil shipment to Israel. Also of equal consideration was the massive arms build-up, which Egypt was receiving from the Soviet. Policy makers in the Israeli cabinet believed that if the Egyptians were given time to integrate these new weaponries into their arsenal they could pose a serious future threat to the nation of Israel. The belief was equally shared among members of the cabinet that a pre-emptive strike was necessary. Third was the fact that Egyptian-backed Palestinian guerrilla activity was growing along the Gaza Strip and in Sinai using arms procured by Egyptians from the Soviet. However, before the Israelis could do anything at all, they needed heavy military equipment and her sources of supply were limited by the fact that Britain, America and France were determined to maintain a military balance in the Middle East. To break this embargo on her procurement of military hardware, Israel had to turn to France, which was prepared to sell warplanes to the Israelis Air Force. This turnaround was occasioned by Egypt's support for the Algerian rebels who had been in revolt against France since 1954. The final catalyst that accelerated the war was the nationalisation of the Suez Canal by Nasser; a waterway that was very essential to oil shipment of Britain and France. This action by Nasser eventually brought the two world powers into the conflict and so got for Israel, the needed British support and arms.

The announcement on October 23, 1956 of the formation of a united military command made up of Egyptian, Jordanian, and Syrian forces prompted the Israeli to strike on October 29. The Israeli tactics was informed by the need to involve both Britain and France on their side and this could be achieved by creating a threat to the Suez Canal. This was counterbalanced by the need for the Israelis troop to be able to pull back in case both the British and French needed support did not materialise. The needed support came and the Israeli army facing under-strength detachments of demoralised Egyptian soldiers met with complete success. In the seven days that the war lasted, Israel was able to achieve all her military aims; the opening up of the Gulf of Aqaba, the control of Sinai, the occupation of Gaza and the destruction of Fedayeen (meaning, "those who are prepared to sacrifice their lives"), Palestinian Commandos, bases on her south-eastern flank. Diplomatic pressures and the threat of sanctions by the United Nations eventually made the Israelis army to pull out of Gaza and the United Nations Expeditionary Force (UNEF) moved in on March 6, 1957.

The third round of the Arab-Israeli conflict shifted to the Syrian border. The aftermath of the Sinai campaign was to give Israel ten years of peace along her borders although this was occasional shattered by sporadic violence occasioned by guerrilla activities and Israelis reprisals. The focus of conflict during this period was the 100-square mile demilitarised zone, which stretches along most of the Syrian-Israel border around the Sea of Galilee. This area had witnessed a number of skirmishes such as Syrian shelling of Israelis kibbutzim (settlements) followed by Israeli retaliatory raids. Just as in the 1956 war, organised raids by guerrillas played a key role of catalysing and initiating a conventional war. The events preceding this round of conventional wars were more complex that the first two rounds of



conventional wars. The Syrian government decided to risk Israel retaliatory policy by sponsoring and harbouring a nascent band of guerrillas called the Fatah. This group was formed in the aftermath of the 1956 War in the Gaza Strip and was made up of those disenchanted with official Arab support and military performance. Prior to this period, a coup in Syria had changed the leadership of the ruling Baath Party in February, 1966 and installed Colonels Salah Jadid and Hafez al-Assad who took a more direct and militant stand by not only supporting but also supplying, training and equipping the Fedayeen.

At no time had the guerrilla commando attacks constituted a military threat to the Israeli government apart from being a nuisance. At best, the importance of guerrilla activity lay in its political rather than its military reverberations. However, with the support of the Syrian government, the spate of attacks on Israelis' settlements and kibbutz increased considerably as to attract Israelis' attention. When particularly severe shelling and raiding flared up across the border from Syria, especially on Kibbutz Gadot, the Israelis retaliated on April 7 by sending a contingent of her Air Force. In the ensuing air war, six Syrian MIGs were shot down. The Syrian leadership interpreted this Israeli reprisal as an attempt to topple their government. The Syrian call for assistance from Egypt coupled with intelligence report received from the Soviet about a possible Israeli build-up and troop concentration for an imminent strike into Syria led Nasser to place Egyptian army on maximum alert.

Several opinions and questions have been raised as to why the Soviet decided to misinform the Egyptians. Schmidt (1974, p. 138) had offered three explanations for the Soviet action. First is that it was possible that the Russians actually believed that an Israeli attack was in the offing and by relaying the information to the Egyptians, they would be warning their allies in advance and set in motion defensive measures. Second is that the Russians may have done so in order to get themselves into the good books of the Egyptians and to assure them of Russian's support in the eventuality of war. The third was that the Russians might have concocted an Israeli attack in order to take the pressure off the Syrian leadership at home and at the same time assuring them of Egypt's (Nasser's) support.

However, Nasser's actions following this precipitated the confrontation. On May 16, the Egyptian Chief of Staff requested for the withdrawal of UNEF personnel along the border including the strategic one at Sharm el-Sheikh commanding the access to the Gulf of Aqaba and the Port of Elat. By May 21, Egyptian forces had occupied the vacated positions by the NUF and on May 22, the second day, Nasser closed the Gulf to all Israeli shipping and all strategic cargoes bound to Israel. Again, the question had been raised as to why Nasser made these moves. Schmidt (1974, pp. 139-140) had, once again offered three possible explanations. The first was that Nasser had to revive his waning popularity among other Arab leaders and to do this he needed to respond to Syria's request for assistance in a credible manner. Second was that he felt assured of Russian support in the eventuality of war and translated this to mean favourably conditions for a successful campaign against Israel. In arriving at this conclusion, Nasser was also influenced by America's preoccupation in Southeast Asia and without America's backing Britain and France may not get involve on the side of Israel. Third was that Nasser's actions were not meant to result into actual confrontation but was meant to act as deterrent against further Israelis' aggression against Syria.

However, things do not usually happen as planned, the process of escalation of conflict has a momentum and a logic of its own, which once started, may not be stopped.



Initially, Israelis leadership under Premier Eshkol temporised but with the appointment of Moshe Dayan as Minister of Defence, Israelis troops were quickly mobilised and deployed. On June 5, the third round of conventional war popularly known as the Six Day War started with a crippling series of Israeli air strikes against Egyptian targets. With all its aircrafts put in operation except for a few left behind to give Israel air cover, Egyptian, Jordanian and Syrian targets were simultaneously bombarded. With complete mastery and control of the air, it was just a little time before Israeli victory on the ground was confirmed with Israelis troops entering Nablus, Jericho, Ramallah and most importantly, Jerusalem. On June 11, all parties accepted the UN-sponsored cease-fire and the third round of conventional war ended with the Israelis showing that Arab rhetoric was no match for the tactically superior Israeli forces, commanded by extraordinary officer corps and control of the air.

The fourth conventional war for our consideration in this paper started at 2 o'clock in the afternoon of October 6, while the Israelis were celebrating Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year. It was on this day that Egypt and Syria attacked Israel simultaneously and with complete surprise. The initial success by the Egyptian forces showed that they have been truly and well-trained by the Russians. With a combination of artillery and ground to air missiles providing the necessary cover as taught in the Soviet military textbooks, the swiftness and audacity of the Egyptian and Syrian attacks took both Israelis and the Americans by surprise. Developments at both the Egyptian and the Syrian fronts have left analysts guessing. For instance, the Egyptian troops moved only about ten miles beyond the Suez Canal and stopped. The question is why? Why did the Egyptian forces proceed to capture the Mitla and Giddi Passes; the mountains range that parallel the Cana and by so doing, they would have been able to consolidate their defences. The Syrians, on the other hand, were able to regain much of the Golan Heights before the Israelis were able to push them back.

Characteristically, the Israelis after the initial surprise were able to respond in their usual manner. They sent into the air their American-built Phantoms and Sky Hawks and tanks on the ground commanded by Major General Ariel Sharon. Ten days after the commencement of the war, Israelis soldiers had been able to overrun the ground won by both Egyptian and Syrian armies. With the Israelis ground troops twenty mile from Damascus, the UN called for a cease-fire in October. The cease-fire was signed by Lt. General Mohammed Abdel Ghany el-Gamazy and Major General Sharon Yariv on November 11.

### **Some Lessons and Conclusion**

Deriving from the discussion above, certain important lessons in strategies and tactics can be gleaned. For instance, to use a Clausewitzian concept, it is obvious that the 'grammar' of irregular warfare is radically different from that of regular warfare (Clausewitz 1976, p. 605). Irregular warfare is so different from the regular warfare that the armed forces of states confronted by an irregular force may have to discard their standard doctrinal manuals if they are to wage the war successfully. Regular soldiers, trained to fight regular wars, soon find out that they are out of their depths when confronting irregular troops basically, as Clausewitz (1976, pp. 595-597) had noted, they do not have a "centre of gravity." This translates to the fact that irregular soldiers do not have a capital city that can be bombed; no fixed line of communication that can be destroyed in order to isolate them; they are inseparable from the civilian population and refuses to stand and fight fair except at places and times of their own choosing or when they are trapped and have no choice but to stay and fight. Lawrence (1991,





p. 192) had described the regular army as plants, immobile, firm-rooted and nourished through long stems to the head in contrast to the irregular guerrilla soldiers who he described as being like vapour blowing where we listed or like. Irregular warfare has now become the cutting edge of strategic combat. Irregulars fight not because they cannot fight any other way but because they cannot succeed or even survive in any other way. The choice of guerrilla warfare is a forced one because the practitioners are unable to fight in regular combat.

Mao (1961, p. 49), who was an admirer of Clausewitz, has argued that guerrilla warfare is an end in itself and thus it is incorrect to attempt to divorce it from those of regular forces. Rather, guerrilla hostilities can under specific conditions, develop and assume orthodox characteristics (Mao 1961, pp. 55-56). Regular and irregular forms of warfare differ only in tactical character although guerrilla form of warfare is usually the choice of the weaker side. As Mao had emphasised, guerrilla warfare are instruments of protracted war whose conduct requires patience, a high measure of discipline and an outstanding leadership quality (Cabral 1974). Irregular fighters face a life of great hardship when compared to regular soldiers and need to sustain faith in their cause even when victory seems elusive. Morale therefore becomes important for both regular and irregular combatants. While it may not be sufficient for irregular campaign alone to bring about victory in war, there is always a time that the irregular army must metamorphosed into regular army in pursuit of a definite strategic and political success. In fact, a skilful modern army must be able and capable of conducting both regular and guerrilla warfare simultaneously.

Another fact that emerged was that British presence in the Middle East before and after World War II was a moderating factor to the escalation of the conflict. Immediately following Britain's withdrawal, irregular guerrilla activities on both sides metamorphosed into regular and full-scale wars with all parties employing regular armies. Equally, of importance is that the assurance of constant supply of small arms and ammunition will always fuel conflicts. It is interesting that both Arab and European arms dealers were involved in this phase of the struggle. The conflict escalated when it became a proxy for the West-East Cold War with the Soviet supplying the Arabs especially Egypt with sophisticated weapons while the American were the chief suppliers of weapons to the Israelis. The involvement of these two world powers dramatically changed the texture and nature of the conflict. Instead of direct confrontation of the two armies, tactics and strategies became the focal point. With supply of aircrafts and fighters, Israel tactics emphasised air attacks on the fortifications and defences of the Arabs states. In virtually all the confrontations, Israeli's superior air power had always swung the tide of the conflicts in their favour with fewer casualties than the Arab opponents had. The importance of superior air power in winning wars has been alluded (Overy, 2008, pp. 135-155; Byman and Waxman, 2008, pp. 156-180).

The question that needs answer was "Why did the Israelis win and the Arab lose the first round of encounter between their regular armies? The answer which Schmidt (1974, p. 124) offered became instructive to us in understanding the part play by psychology and justification on the morale of soldiers. Above all the answer must be given in terms of morale. The Israelis were inspired not only by the sense that they were fighting for survival, with their backs to the sea, but also by an awareness that they were Jewish fighting men vindicating the honor of their people. The idea that Jews could not fight, born of centuries-old ghetto tradition, was totally destroyed. For the Arabs the reason for fighting were not so clear as they would become twenty years later. The Egyptian army's morale low. Its officers, the

product of a corrupt social system...had no heart for combat and little concern for the welfare of the rank and file. The soldiers of this army were ill-fed, ill-armed, and understood only vaguely why they were fighting.

To this must be added the advantage, which the Jewish Army had. They fought on interior lines of communication whereas the Arabs, moving in from outside the circle, stretched their lines of communication and supplies and did not succeed in establishing a unified command under a single military leader whose responsibility would have been to coordinate the various activities of the Arab armies.

The fourth round of confrontation highlighted the importance of intelligence work in winning wars and creating an advantage that could ensure quick and decisive battles. Among other tactical lessons was the need to know the strength and weapon capability of your enemies. For instance, the Egyptians were able to gain an upper hand and inflicted great losses on the Israelis because the Israeli Air Force was not familiar with the effectiveness of the Russian-supplied SA-6, which employed different radar wavelengths – one for high altitude, one for low and one for locking onto the target. This led to many Israelis losses despite eventually winning the war. However, either these losses were blamed on faulty intelligence network, which did not prepare them for a pre-emptive strike, or quick response to the attacks. This became a major issue in the December elections in Israel. The hero of the 1967 War, General Moshe Dayan and his Premier Golda Meir, were held responsible by their political opponents for the heavy loss of Israeli lives in this war. The great world powers are not so great because of their ownership of nuclear and heavy armaments but mainly because of their ability to gather information and forestall unfavourably events from happening through intelligence and information gathering. Today, ranking well above the American CIA, the British MI5, French and Russian KGB intelligence agencies is the Israelis' intelligence agency, the Mossad.

Wars have been fought, won and lost since antiquity for many reasons most importantly for political space, sense of nationalism, the state and for acquiring and securing a place to call 'our own'. All these wars have lessons for us in terms of tactics and strategies. We shall forever continue to learn how to fight wars even when we desire a war-free world. This is merely utopian because conflict will always ensue when more than one person vie for resources and space, both of which are not finite. As Zartman (1991, p. 370) has observed, conflict is the result of interaction among people; "an unavoidable concomitant of choices and decisions and an expression of the basic fact of human interdependence". The Realist school views human interaction as taking place within a power arena, with possession of power becoming a scarce resource which can engender frustration in the one who does not possess or is denied it. In this respect, Coser (1956, p. 121) has argued that conflict occurs when two or more people engage in a struggle over values and claims to status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. Coser (1956, p. 8) further explained that conflict emerges whenever one party perceives that one or more valued goals or means of achieving these valued goals is being threatened or hindered by another party or parties or by their activities. These perceived threats occur especially if both parties are seeking to expand into the same field or physical sphere or the same field of influence or behaviours. In consonant with this, Stagner (1995, p. 53) has observed that the occurrence of aggressive behaviour always suggests the existence of frustration which always leads to some form of conflict. Within this ambit therefore, it is

possible to consider conflict as a social necessity and a normal functional and inevitable aspect of the healthy functioning of all societies.

Coming nearer home, terrorists all over the world from antiquity to date have never employed conventional wars. They have always relied on guerrilla wars as this allows them some leeway to determine the place and mode of engagement. The choice of the Boko Haram abode in the forest region of the North East of Nigeria is a tactical and strategic one, but one that renders useless the employment of conventional war tactics, and weaponry such as aircrafts, tanks and foot soldiers trained for conventional combats. There is, therefore, an urgent need to have men trained in guerrilla tactics along the line of the developed world's 'Special Forces.' America, in its fight against global terrorism has never deployed regular soldiers. Rather, they deploy these special forces trained to be 'at home' in all types of terrain (wet, desert, hilly or even mountainous), weather and situations.

## References

- Agara, T. (2008), Ethnic Militancy, Insurrections and the Future of Democracy in Africa, *Journal of Issues in African Development*, vol. 1, no. 1.
- Arendt, H. (1963), *On Revolution*, New York, Viking Press
- Black, C.E. (1964), Revolution, Modernisation and Communism, in C.E. Black and Thomas P. Thornton (eds) *Communism and Revolution: The Strategic Uses of Political Violence*, Princeton, Princeton University Press
- Byman, D.L and Waxman, M.C. (2008) Kosovo and the Great Air Power Debate, in Mahnken Thomas, G. and Maiolo, Joseph, A. (eds), *Strategic Studies: A Reader*, London, Routledge.
- Cabral, Amilcar (1974) *Revolution in Guinea: An African People's Struggle* Brussels, Imperimerie Jos. Adam
- Callwell, C.E. (1990), *Small Wars: A Tactical Textbook for Imperial Soldiers*, London, Greenhill Books
- Clausewitz, C. von. (1976), *On War*, (ed. and trans.) M. Howard and P. Paret, Princeton, N.J. Princeton University Press.
- Coser, L., (1956), *The Function of Social Conflicts*, New York, Glencoe Hill Press
- Craig, A.M., Graham, W.A., Kagan, D., Ozment, S. and Turner, F.M. (2009), *The Heritage of World Civilizations* (8<sup>th</sup> ed.), Volume 1 to 1700. New Jersey, Prentice Hall.
- Durotoye, Y. (1989), Military Revolution: Contradiction and Latency in Bayo Adekanye (ed) *Studies in Politics and Society, Special Issues on the Military, Social Classes and Revolution*, Journal of the Nigerian Political Science Association, no. 5 June.
- Gray, C.S. (2007), *War, Peace and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic History*, New York, Routledge.
- Khouri, F. (1969) *The Arab-Israeli Dilemma*, New York, Syracuse University Press.
- Lawrence, T.E. (1991), *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*, New York, Anchor Books.
- Lawrence, T.E. (2008), Science of Guerrilla Warfare, in Mahnken, Thomas, G. and Maiolo, Joseph, A. (eds), *Strategic Studies: A Reader*, London, Routledge.
- Love, K. (1969) *Suez: The Twice Fought War*, New York, McGraw-Hill
- Mao Tse Tung (1961) *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. by S.B. Griffith, New York, Praeger
- McKay, J.P., Hill, B.D., Buckler, J., Ebrey, P.B. and Beck, R.B. (2007), *A History of World Societies* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.), New York, Houghton Mifflin Coy.

- Neumann, S. (1949), The International Civil War, *World Politics*, vol. 1.
- Overy, R.J. (2008) Air Power and the Origins of Deterrence Theory before 1939, in Mahnken, Thomas, G. and Maiolo, Joseph, A. (eds), *Strategic Studies: A Reader*, London, Routledge.
- Schmidt, D.A. (1974) *Armageddon in the Middle East*, New York, John Day Company
- Stagner, R., (1995), The Psychology of Human Conflict in Elton, B.M. (ed), *The Nature of Human Conflict*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice Hall.
- Zartman, W.I., (1991), *Conflict Resolution in Africa*, Washington DC, The Brookings Institute.

#### **About the Author**

**Professor Tunde Agara** teaches politics in the Department of Political Science, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma where he also doubles as the Director, Centre for Strategic and Development Studies in the same University. His research interests include comparative politics and government, research methodology, development and strategic studies among others.