

Tanzanian Popular Responses to International Political Events

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Abstract

Although people in Tanzania have been active in international affairs, studies on their behaviour and responses are limited. This article therefore is an attempt to contribute to this subject. It maps out the popular attitudes and responses towards international political events covering the period between 1990 and 2010. It argues that people in Tanzania demonstrate ability to perceive and react to events happening away from home. Their reactions are against wars and oppression, and support for liberation struggles and maintenance of sovereign rights among Third World states. This tradition has roots to the national liberation era. Much as the tradition survives today, the post-1990s social-economic changes pose challenges to its sustenance as society slips into theocratic divisions, among others.

Key Words: *International relations, popular responses, anti-war efforts, solidarity with the oppressed.*

1.0 Introduction

Both bourgeois and Marxist scholars agree that there is an organic link between a country's foreign and domestic policies (Kiondo, 1995). But little evidence, if any, can be produced in support of this view in relation to the question of democracy and the debate on the subject. A general survey of the debate on democracy, a subject which since the mid-1980s has remained central in Africa's political agenda, suggests that democracy continues to ignite debate among academics, politicians, donors, and ordinary people. However, as experience from Tanzania would reveal, the debate is limited to the domestic arena with a focus on the role of political parties and their limitations to democracy (Chachage, 2001), the role of civil society in democracy, and people's participation in a democratic process (Mukangara, 2000). Despite the limitation of the debate even within the realm of the domestic environment, little or no attention is paid to how democracy relates to international relations.

The limitation of the debate however does not imply that there is lack of organised and spontaneous initiatives expressing concerns about international relations. What seems lacking is a scholarly attention to these matters. It would appear that scholars tend to comfortably dig their heads in the traditional approach of international relations (Wright, 1999), which reinforces the view that international relations is an exclusive province of the elite (Akokpari, 2001). This is despite ideas on the contrary as hopes are expressed in relation to democratisation of international relations in the light of emerging and increasing role of non-state actors such as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in international relations (Taylor 2010; Nzomo, 1999).

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Conscious of the actual practice on the conduct of foreign relations, this article suggests that an emerging section of the Tanzanian society is demanding space on decisions regarding the country's direction on international relations. This section of the society is made up of various social groups organised in different ways. These groups have, in different occasions, expressed and pressed their views, wishes, desires, hopes and expectations on various matters of international relations. Much as scholars and sections of decision makers tend to ignore the said groups, their existence is undisputed and their potential enormous.

It is against this backdrop that this article seeks to make a modest contribution by mapping out popular attitudes and reactions towards international relations. The aim is not to show how people have influenced government foreign policy decisions (Gillan, Pickerill & Webster, 2008; Safran, 2006; Hughes, 1978), but to establish their potential in influencing the same. This is done in line with the view that as social actors people, under different guises, have ability to perceive and react to the world around them, shape it, and in turn get reshaped by the world around them (Hudson, 2005).

Popular attitudes and reactions examined are those which took place between 1990 and 2010. But even among these only a selected few will be covered. Most of the data informing the analysis is based on secondary sources, mainly newspapers, government reports, news bulletins, and a few observations and discussions. The period covered marks some interesting developments in Tanzania and in the world. This is a period during which a certain degree of opening up was taking place in Tanzania as a result of a combination of internal and external forces and conditions (Mukandara, 1994). During this time the political landscape was liberalised allowing the formation of political parties other than the ruling party, and the formation of advocate NGOs. This period was also characterised by a number of major international events. The cold war came to an end and the US emerged as a sole superpower. A number of other remarkable events took place. They include the release of Nelson Mandela in 1992, US war on Iraq in 1991, US invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, the War on Terror in 2002, and the Palestinian question. Most of these events caught the attention of the people in Tanzania.

However, it is important to note that people in Tanzania were not reacting to international events for the first time in the period covered by this article. They had done so in the 1960s, 1970, and 1980s. The major difference between the 1960s-1980s and the period covered in this article is that most of the independently organised reactions to international relations were confined to the University of Dar es Salaam. Outside the university campus such reactions were organised and mobilised through the party and its affiliate mass organisations. Perhaps the only legacy resulting from the party mobilisation and organisation of the masses in support of government/state international engagements is the political socialisation and awareness of the popular masses on international affairs.

2.0 Some conceptual and contextual discussions

In classical liberal democratic theory, the general public is perceived as controlling the actions of those who make policy by means of rational activist behaviour (Hughes, 1978: 224). In this regard, popular influence, observes Graber (1968:9), "is as essential

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in foreign policy formulation as it is in other types of policy formulation.” That aside, there is general concern that “public opinion is paid lip-service but in practice ignored” (Hill, 2003:262). The tendency is to embrace, though in different ways, Plato’s maxim that “... a good decision is based on knowledge and not on numbers” (cited in Graber, 1968:39). This position justifies the exclusion of popular masses in decision making and underscores the role of the elite in making informed and rational decisions in general and foreign affairs in particular.²

The centrality of the elite in influencing and making decisions on foreign relations is elaborated in Hughes’ (1978) conception of the public. In his attempt to conceptualise and differentiate the public, Hughes suggests that the public is not homogeneous but differentiated. The differences are based on three factors: the level of awareness of international events, the ability to form and make an opinion about it, and the clarity and specificity of the opinion made. On this basis, Hughes constructed three categories of the public. The first category constitutes people who are only aware of the most major events in foreign affairs. These he called the ‘mass public’ who have no opinion and when they hold one, it is vague and generally weak. The second category consists of people who are aware of major events, but are not deeply informed. He called this the ‘attentive public’. In this group the “attitudes held by individuals ... frequently lack intensity and internal consistency, and they often fluctuate markedly in response to reports of international events or public officials’ positions” (Hughes, 1978:23). The third category is made up of people who are knowledgeable about foreign affairs and have fairly stable and consistent attitudes. In Hughes’s views this group communicates its opinions to others. This group is sometimes referred to as ‘opinion leaders’. Within this group is a smaller group of what he calls the ‘mobilisers’. These give money or time to political activism, and communicate their opinions beyond their own acquaintances. It is this last group whose opinions count.

The three categories above shed some general idea on how to locate and understand public opinion. The problem of the categories though is their bias to a small section of society, the elite and their mode of organising and influencing public opinion and policies. For Hughes, the opinion of the mass public does not matter. This ideation itself reflects Hughes’s political orientation which supports the status quo and the power structure in a society. In the context of Tanzania the mass public Hughes is writing about constitutes the working people, a large section of the popular masses located in both the rural and urban areas. These people are not docile; they air and press their opinion in rather an unconventional way. They do no matter because either both the political and intellectual elites pay no attention to their views or they do but find them uncomfortable or irritating and challenging their privileged status in society. The best elites do is either to ignore or suppress them. In this case therefore it will be misleading if the three categories are taken as presented and applied to Tanzania. This is because the masses in Tanzania always look for space to have their opinions heard either within the existing power structure or by trying to break it and define new avenues. As such, it is not unusual to find some sections from the working

² For a critic of this approach see: James, C. L. R. (1956). Every cook can govern: A study of democracy in Ancient Greek. *Correspondance*, 2(12).

people expressing opinions on events happening thousands of miles away from home. The mode of expression varies. Occasionally, their views may be captured by the media but more often than not they wouldn't, as the media concentrates on the conventional opinion leaders – the elites. No wonder messages/slogans printed on bodies of motor vehicles such as long distance buses and lorries, paintings, war literature, and conversations in *coffee barazas* rarely capture the eyes and ears of the mainstream media and intellectuals.

3.0 Liberation struggles and popular support and mobilisation

One area to begin gauging popular support to international relations is the mobilisation in support of liberation struggles in Africa. After independence, the new government in Tanganyika was founded on the principle that as long as the rest of Africa was not independent, Tanganyika was also not independent. As early as 1961, Tanganyika had already distinguished itself, in Africa and the world, as an advocate of freedom, peace, justice, and human dignity. For the people of Tanganyika and their leadership, as Nyerere once remarked, peace would not exist in the absence of justice (Nyerere, 1978). This same principle continued even after the Union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar, that the struggle for liberation, justice and human dignity were top on Tanzania's agenda. "We in Tanganyika", said Nyerere in 1960s, "are prepared to die a little for the final removal of the humiliation of colonialism from the face of Africa..." (Nyerere, 1978:216).

Tanzania's support for liberation was unconditional and it was ahead of many members of the former Organisation of African Unity (OAU) who only paid lip service to the idea of liberation. Support for liberation however "was not simply the province of the state and the state institutions, for even in the most rural villages the poor peasants developed their own momentum of support" (Campbell, 1987:18). This was maintained even in the post-liberation situation. In October 1975, the independence of Angola was challenged by the Frente Nacional para a Libertacao de Angola (FNLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) with the support of South Africa and United States (Kapcia, 2008:125). Tanzania regarded the war as a threat to its very existence, as an independent and free nation. In a message to President Neto of Angola, President Nyerere reassured the people of Angola of Tanzania's 'free and unconditional support' (Tanzania, 1976a). Throughout Tanzania, people made contributions in support of the Movimento Popular da Libertacao de Angola (MPLA) Government and Angolan people in defence of their independence. The contributions were in the form of money, blood, livestock, and food (Tanzania, 1976b).

In 1986, the security situation in Mozambique deteriorated. This happened following the death of President Samora Machel and RENAMO destabilising activities. The Government of Mozambique was not able to restore security on its own and thus approached the Government of Tanzania for military assistance. Initially Tanzania was reluctant given the logistical complications of the assistance asked, and the acute economic situation facing the country. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) was also attempting to disentangle Tanzania from the war on the argument that it was costly. While the government was contemplating to support or not to support the war

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effort in Mozambique, "peasants ... spontaneously started contributing thousands of shillings to the liberation movement" (Daley, 1991:178), thanks to the party mobilisation ability and the support the party still enjoyed in the country.

It was possible for the party, under the circumstances, to mobilise domestic support because the Tanzanian society, regardless of its social status and difficult economic conditions, was still united behind the party and its ideology, and consequently the party's position and support for wars on liberation. The ideology of the party maintained and taught the people to appreciate humanity as all human beings were equal, and the belief in human brotherhood and the Unity of Africa (Nyerere, 1968). Based on these principles, Tanzania's role at the international level was defined. Summing up this, Nyerere said, in 1959, "We cannot, unlike other countries, send rockets to the moon, but we can send rockets of love and hope to all our fellow men wherever they may be" (Nyerere, 1968:72).

These teachings were rekindled and consolidated in the Arusha Declaration. The Arusha Declaration socialised the people of Tanzania to appreciate the problems of Tanzania as part of the problems of the entire African continent. The Arusha Declaration proclaimed the following:

We are at war...a war against poverty and oppression in our country; the struggle is aimed at moving the people of Tanzania (and the people of Africa as a whole) from a state of poverty to a state of prosperity. ... We have been oppressed a great deal, we have been exploited a great deal and we have been disregarded a great deal. ... Now we want a revolution - a revolution which will bring to an end our weaknesses, so that we are never again exploited, oppressed, or humiliated (Nyerere, 1968:18).

Although popular support for the liberation struggle was largely organised from above (at party level), except for staff and students of the University of Dar es Salaam who organised and expressed their views on international affairs independent of the state, the way it was organised and articulated created values which seems to have continued guiding a larger section of the popular masses and some sections of the elite on how to respond to international events and affairs. This is despite the fact that these same values came under attack when the country adopted neo-liberal political and economic reforms.

4.0 US war on Iraq

In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. Following this, the US and ally forces launched a war against Iraq. The position of the Government of Tanzania was that Iraq was an aggressor as it had invaded an independent country. Tanzania supported all the UN resolutions calling for Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait (Daily News, 1990), and in principle supported the war.

This however was not reciprocated by the people who were opposed to the war. Evidence against the war was not hard to find in the streets of cities like Dar es Salaam. There were no anti-war demonstrations and statements, but the general mood as demonstrated in the streets and *barazas* clearly registered their opposition to the war. It was here that people gathered, collectively followed the war through radios and talked about it. Watching and listening to people in the streets and *barazas*, one could

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see their jubilation every time it was reported that Iraq had launched a SCUD, and their disappointment whenever it was announced over the radio that the SCUD had been intercepted prior to hitting its target. They would talk about the valour of Saddam's armies and how they had stood up to the most powerful war machine in the world in the hands of the United States. Their major sources of information were Radio Tanzania Dar es Salaam (RTD), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Deuche Welle (DW) Kiswahili programmes, and a few local newspapers. Although the war was being fought thousands of miles away, it was as if it was being fought in Dar es Salaam. Daily media coverage created discussions, with people anticipating that the Iraq army would be able to resist the United States and its allies.³

Part of the reason why the people expressed resistance to the war was due to political socialisation. In this case the US and its allies were perceived as oppressors bullying a less powerful state. By standing up and facing the US army, Saddam Hussein was their 'hero'. The significance of this war is that the government and the people were slowly parting ways. It is important to also note that this happened under the single-party rule although economic liberalisation had already started in the country and political reforms were in the offing. These were testing moments for the political elites hence their cautious approach to the international situation in general and the US war on Iraq in particular. It was also clear that the Government of Tanzania did not want to take a position which would antagonise it with the only hegemonic power, the US. This was confirmed by the Tanzanian Permanent Representative to the UN who said, "all roads lead to Washington", in his response to a student's question on what determined voting in the UN.⁴ Of course there was another interest – Kuwait had pledged financial support for Tanzania, and this would not come because the country was in a war situation.⁵

Whereas the government and the people seemed to have taken different positions on the 1990s war, they were united against the war on Iraq in 2003. The reasons for opposing the war in 2003 varied. It is also important to note that while the government opposition to the war was short-lived and confined to the early UN efforts to stop the US war intentions, popular opposition was prolonged. This was clear in their continued condemnation of the war, and the events and destructions which kept on happening during the combat, and after the defeat of Saddam Hussein.

The government wished, like many people in Tanzania and the world over, that the war was not fought. The government concerns over the war were summed up by President Benjamin Mkapa when he said:

We begin the year 2003 when the dark clouds of war have gathered over Iraq, and I have neither an umbrella nor a boat. The precipitation overflow from those clouds can easily wash away what countries like mine have worked so hard to accomplish...we do not think war is inevitable, and we urge for alternative to war (Daily News, 2003).

³Based on notes based on the author's observations of events in 1991.

⁴The Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Nyakyi, gave a talk to Second Year students on International Relations at the University of Dar es Salaam, in January 1991.

⁵Speech given by President Ali Hassani Mwinyi when visiting the Coastal Region in 1991. The President blamed delayed financial assistance from Kuwait, for the construction of a bridge at the Rufiji River, on the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq.

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In March 2003, the Government of Tanzania was still pleading that the unilateral military invasion of Iraq by the US be stopped as it was against the wishes of the international community. In the views of the Government of Tanzania, Saddam Hussein had started cooperating and UN inspectors would have succeeded, given more facilities and time (Daily News, 2003a). Tanzania was concerned that, as the Prime Minister had said in Parliament, the war would affect the economy as price of oil might rise, the number of tourists would fall, and international trade would be affected (Nyanje, 2003). The government's position, as stated both by President Mkapa and the Prime Minister, the opposition to the war was not based on the country's commitment to peace and justice but economic considerations.

Apart from the government, many groups came out to openly oppose the US war on Iraq and subsequent events. *The Women Parliamentary Group* said no to war. Twenty six of the members signed a petition for peace entitled *Women United against War*, in which they stated that they were opposed to the war because "warfare creates endless violence, destruction and death, impoverishing ... spiritually, socially and economically". The statement came as a gesture of support to, allegedly, 25 US Congress women led by one Barbara Bell of California (US). Barbara and the other Congress women were reported to have walked out of Congress, in July 2003, refusing to a vote to give US President George W. Bush war powers (Guardian, 2003).

On Saturday 1st March 2003, an anti-war demonstration, involving students and staff of higher learning institutions, and the general public was held. The demonstration was organised by the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Dar es Salaam. Demonstrators carried banners with messages reading: 'No War on Iraq', 'The World Belongs to All not for Bush and Blair', and 'Bush Must Join Milosevic in the Hague'. Demonstrators in Dar es Salaam joined millions of people around the world who were voting by their actions and voices against the war. In his address, during the demonstrations, Zitto Kabwe, leader of the Dar es Salaam University Students Organisation (DARUSO), called upon demonstrators to march to the Embassy of Angola to protest against the Angolan Government's alleged support to the US war on Iraq. The student leader went as far as demanding that the Angolan Ambassador to Tanzania be asked to pack and go home (Michuzi, 2003).

Following this, the Embassy of Angola in Dar es Salaam quickly responded, rejecting the allegations. Peter Tindwa (2003), of *the Guardian*, reported, quoting Ambassador Brito Sozinho, that the Embassy refuted claims that Angola was supporting the United States and Britain in their bid to wage war against Iraq. The Ambassador said that Kabwe's statement was malicious, and aimed at creating hatred between Tanzania and their Angolan brothers and sisters. He further said that the Angolan people were not interested in war in Africa or in any other continent, and that the position of Angola on Iraq was that there was no need for war while United Nations weapons inspectors were still doing their assignment in Iraq. Angola came on the spotlight because it was a member of the UN Security Council and Tony Blair, then British Prime Minister, was shuttling between capitals of the three African states, then serving as Non-Permanent Members of the UN Security Council, soliciting support for the US and Britain bid for war. The bid however was aborted as the UN did not support it.

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Religious organisations were also visible in showing solidarity to those opposed to the war. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania (ELCT) issued a statement to this effect. The Church was concerned that the war on Iraq would cause abhorrence between Muslims and Christians in the world. The Church called all nations to pray so that wisdom would prevail amongst the leaders of Iraq, US and Britain to avoid the war. The Church was unhappy to see that the most powerful countries had preferred the use of war as their means of foreign policy. It did not believe that war would bring peace in the world but destruction and disaster for innocent people, including creating hatred (Moses, 2003).

In Zanzibar, the Chief Mufti called upon all Muslims to pray for Iraq. He said that war causes a lot of destruction, affecting children more seriously. He further said that the effects of the war would also be felt in Zanzibar (Uhuru, 2003). A statement issued by Sheikh Issa Ponda, on behalf of the *Baraza Kuu (Supreme Council)*, condemned the war and the US as it continued to kill the children, women, and the old people of Iraq. They organised a meeting where Muslims would pray for Iraq and collectively condemn the US (Changwila, 2003).

The war on Iraq caused many atrocities and much destruction. It was some of this destruction that kept the opposition alive. One incidence worth mentioning happened at the University of Dar es Salaam. On 30th April 2003, the then United States Ambassador to Tanzania, Mr. Robert V. Royall, was scheduled to inaugurate a USAID-funded modern transportation engineering laboratory at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) Main Campus. This was at a time when the United States and Britain were pouring a lot of money for bombs in Iraq (Chachage, 2004). In its meeting, held on 29th April 2003, the University of Dar es Salaam Staff Assembly (UDASA) decided to issue a statement condemning the US and calling for all members of staff to boycott the ambassador's visit on campus. The UDASA statement partly read:

With the tears and blood from the invasion of Iraq by the most ferocious imperial power that Mr. Royall represents hardly dry, we strongly and unreservedly protest at his presence on our Campus. We call upon all members of UDASA and the University Community to boycott the event...We refuse to be 'embedded' intellectuals – and we shall not be gagged.

The decision to prepare and issue the statement did not go well with the University Management. The management tried to stop it before it was even written using all sorts of intimidation, and threatened to incriminate UDASA leaders after the statement was issued.⁶ However, the statement was issued and the ambassador called off his visit (Chachage, 2004).

Three important issues need to be highlighted here regarding popular responses against the second US war on Iraq. First, both the government and the people were united against the war. Second, whereas the government was more concerned about the economy, other social groups such as spiritual leaders, students, university staff, women parliamentary groups, and other sections of the popular masses opposed to

⁶The author had the privilege of attending the UDASA General Assembly and was involved in the preparation of the statement.

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the war did so because they wanted peace not war. Third, the organisation initiative came from various groups. Religious organisations, university students and staff, were prominently visible. Interestingly, most of the conventional human rights and advocacy groups were mute. The print media carried stories and anti-war messages from people with diverse backgrounds. One important thing to note is that the second US war on Iraq took place eleven years after Tanzania had liberalised its politics. The myriad of social organisations mobilising against the war is a testimony for this window of freedom. The commonality of the position of the various social organisations also speaks volumes of the surviving legacies of some principles of humanity.

5.0 War on terror and the prevention of terrorist acts

On 7th August 1998, the US embassies both in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi were bombed. In Dar es Salaam, “the bomb attack”, noted the *Report of the Accountability Review Board*, “killed eleven people; one other is missing and presumed dead. Another 85 people were injured. No Americans were among the fatalities, but two were injured, two of them seriously” (USA, 1999). On 14th July 1999, after the bombings and with US persuasion, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism in Algiers (Kherbi, 2005; OAU, 1999). It was after this OAU decision that individual African countries, including Tanzania, rushed to enact domestic anti-terrorist acts.

Tanzania enacted the Anti-Terrorist Act after 11th September 2001 and the declaration of war on Terror by President Bush. The US President had already stated: “Every nation in every region now has a decision to make: Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists” (Bush, 2001). The ‘compradorised’ political elites in Tanzania who wanted to maintain good relationship with the US had no option but to side with the US. The adoption of an anti-terrorist law was passed in the context of Bush’s enticing but equally coercive and scary statement. He warned:

We will direct every resource at our command, every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war – to the destruction and to the defeat of the global terror network (Bush, 2001).

On 14th November 2002, a controversial *Prevention of Terrorist Act* was enacted into law in Tanzania. This was done amid concern and complaints from sections of the people that the new act grossly violated the constitution and principles of human rights. Those who closely followed these developments observed that:

One after another, African countries enacted similar anti-terrorism statutes, contrary to their own constitutions, which provided for the rule of law. The anti-terrorists laws made no pretence of abiding by the rule of law. In due process, integrity, the certainty of rules, open trials, the principles of natural justice and the right of appeal were all dispensed with (Shivji, 2009:224).

Opposition to the Act did not come from the familiar human rights organisations in Tanzania; instead, it came from religious-based organisations. With a significant Muslim population, and the popularised connection between Islam and terrorism, it was obvious that Muslims would be more concerned than many non-Muslims who

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chose to remain indifferent. Ponda (2010) once commented: "When the government was passing the terrorist Act we opposed it. Muslims opposed it, other groups also opposed it. Of course they passed it. This Act was in many ways against the Constitution. It was allowing the violation of fundamental rights of the people".

Some of the provisions in the Act, cited as evidence of violation of fundamental human rights, gave powers to the Minister 'to declare any person to be a suspected international terrorist' (Sec. 12(1)); to the police officer to 'arrest without warrant any person who has committed or is committing or who has reasonable grounds for suspecting to have committed or to be committing' a terrorist act (Sec. 29(1)). The Act also protects the police officer who 'uses...force as may be necessary for any purpose, ... shall not be liable, in any criminal or civil proceedings, for having, by the use of force, caused injury or death to any person or damage to or loss of any property' (Sec. 29(6) (Tanzania, 2002).

Opposition to this Act disturbed the government and the president had to react. In September 2002, he devoted his monthly speech to this subject. He explained that the objective of the Act was to establish a legal, regulatory and legitimate system of combating terrorism, and thus to maintain peace, security, and tranquillity in the country. Mr. Mkapa, refuted claims that the law was imposed by the US Government. On this he said:

This bill is not pressurised by the Americans. We are also victims of terrorist acts. 11 Tanzanians died, houses and properties were destroyed. That day of 7-August 1998, Dar es Salaam was as if it was paralysed and awed because we did not know terrorism. Today, we know what it is. We cannot ignore or take it for granted (Mkapa, 2004:177).

He also brushed aside claims that the Terrorist Act targeted religions, especially Muslims; instead, he emphasised that the Act targeted crime. He further said that those in positions of decision making have religions too. In a way, he was implying that it was baseless to claim that the Act targeted Muslims because within the government there were Muslims (Mkapa, 2004:177). Some questions however remain unanswered as to the coincidence between the time President Bush declared the war on terror and the enactment of the Act in Tanzania, and the closer ties between Tanzania and the US developing during the same time. As testimony to this, was President Bush's visit to Tanzania in 2008, which was followed by Hilary Clinton's, the US Secretary of State, in 2011. President Bush and his wife made an unofficial visit to Tanzania in 2012. If gestures are something to go by, then the frequent visits President Kikwete makes to the US, and the fact that he was the first African President to meet President Obama after his election in 2009, is another testimony to this. Equally important but without much proof is the growing military and security cooperation and collaboration between Tanzania and the US.

There are also questions asked as to why only a section of the popular masses, mainly Muslims, were opposed to the Act. Part of the explanation lies in the US propaganda on the war of terror. President Bush had declared: "The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends...[It is] not our many Arabs friends, our enemy is a radical

⁷ Translation mine

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network of terrorists and every government supporting them” (Bush, 2001). But by mentioning Muslims and Arabs in his speech he had already implied, within the United States and abroad, that the enemies of America were Arabs and Muslims. This is despite his attempt to qualify the statement by the phrase ‘not our many’. The descriptions of terrorists targeted people of Arab origin or those with names identified as ‘Islamic.’ In every airport in the world the term ‘random sampling’ for security and passport control became synonymous to stopping and checking and questioning people fitting such descriptions.

In Tanzania, a society where Islam and Christianity compete and collide in their efforts to influence state powers, the war on terror was additional ammunition for local forces against Muslims. For years, Muslims have been demanding for fair and equal treatment by the state as it does to people of other faiths. In this, they have also been demanding to create an autonomous Muslim organisation independent from state control. In the early 1990s, some people identified with these groups were branded names and labels based on their physical appearance or how they dressed. Names and labels were affixed to men who grew a beard and women who dressed in *niquab*; the men were labelled *Mujaheddin* while the women were labelled *Ninjas*. Prior to the war on terror, both labels had been regarded as representing religious fundamentalism or radicalism. When the war on terror was declared and the image of Osama bin Laden beamed on TV and printed on newspapers, the label for those who grew a beard became the *Osamas* while the women in *niquab* maintained their *Ninja* identity. Osama’s image became popular and artists in exaggeration popularised it more by painting it in extra-large portraits. These pictures dotted some of the major streets in cities such as Dar es Salaam.

After the war on terror had been announced and the Act passed, some Tanzanians were arrested. Some individuals and organisations have since pressed for the release and/or rightful prosecution of the Tanzanians arrested on allegations of carrying out acts of terrorism. The Zanzibar Legal Service Centre and the Zanzibar Law Society urged the Government of Tanzania to demand an explanation from the US Government regarding claims of assault and torture to a Tanzanian national, Mr. Abdallah Salim imprisoned in US controlled prisons. The two organisations also demanded that the US foot the medical bill for Mr. Salim. They also demanded swift prosecution of another Tanzanian Mr. Ahmed Khalfan Ghailan who was held in Guantanamo, allegedly for taking part in terrorist activities against American interests in Tanzania (Said, 2008). The Government of Tanzania maintained silence on these demands. In 2010, Ahmed Gaillan was tried in a civilian court in New York and was acquitted in November 2010 of all but one of the 285 charges of conspiracy and murder in the 1998 terrorist bombings of the US Embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam.⁸ On these matters however there has been silence on the part of the government, and many of the major human rights organisations in Tanzania. Some of the reasons could be application of double standards, conspiracy, or opportunism.

⁸ See The BBC report (as reported by Katie Connolly), ‘Ghailan’s Case foreshadows future terror trials. www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-11489277. (accessed June 12, 2012). See also Warren Richery, The Christian Science Monitor. www.csmonitor.com/Justice/2010/1117/Ghailan-verdict-could-signal-an-end-to-civilian-terror-trial. (accessed June 12, 2012).

6.0 Whither the Palestine question?

Throughout the 1960s to the late 1980s Tanzania's official position on the Palestinian question remained the same. The position, as President Nyerere restated it in 1975, read as follows:

We recognise the state of Israel as we recognise other theocratic states. But we insist that Israel should return to the pre-1967 war boundaries, and that the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people should be recognised. We hope that during 1975 policy decisions will be taken which can lead to peace and justice for all people in this area (Nyerere, 1975) [emphasis mine].

This position remains rhetorically strong but weak in practice. Tanzania's position on Palestine started to become ambivalent since the 1990s both within official circles and within the public. Questions and concerns have been raised about this ambivalence. In 2003, some Members of Parliament expressed concern as to why Tanzania, known for years as a champion of justice and humanity, had kept quiet on the killings and oppression of the people of Palestine. In his response to this question, the then Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Mr. Jakaya Kikwete, said that the Government of Tanzania had been following up closely and with great concern the humiliation and killings of the people of Palestine by Israeli. He also reminded that the government had been issuing statements in various meetings and in public condemning the killings of innocent people. Then he added:

... the position of Tanzania on this issue is obvious, this is in supporting efforts by the people of Palestine to have their own free state....In that respect Tanzania has been insisting on the importance of implementing various UN resolutions which call on Israel to stop its occupation of the land of Palestine. Tanzania also supports the Oslo Accord of 1993 which, among other things, calls for creation of a Palestine state... (Tanzania, 2003).

While this is stated as the official position of the government, developments since the 1990s show that actual policy towards Israel has been changing. In 1995, for example, Tanzania restored diplomatic relations with Israel. As a consequence Tanzania's support and solidarity with the people of Palestine continue though ambivalently. The Government of Tanzania was even contemplating about opening an embassy in Israel once its economic condition improved (Tanzania, 2009). However, such developments worried some members of Parliament. In 2008, for example, there were more concerns expressed in Parliament regarding Tanzania's wavering position on the Palestinian question. Some MPs were wondering what had happened to Tanzania's enthusiasm on the Palestinian question. The Minister for Foreign Relations and International Cooperation reiterated Tanzania's continued support for the people of Palestine. However, the Minister pointed out two issues of concern. First, was the division within the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), especially the divisions between *Hamas* and *Fatah*. The minister admitted that sometimes they did not know how to support the Palestinians. On this, Tanzania and Africa have challenged the Palestinians to keep their house in order. The second issue concerns the Arab countries and their division over the Palestinian question. The Minister argued that the Arab League was supposed to be in the frontline leading others on the Palestinian question; unfortunately, this was not the case and it was becoming hard for countries

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like Tanzania to choose the best way to assist Palestine (Tanzania 2008). Although the Minister was stating some factual issues as they were on the ground, he was rather making Tanzania's support to Palestine conditional.

In recent times, the public has also held different positions on the Palestinian question. This seems to be a tendency of the post-1990s. Prior to this, the public had been united in support of the Palestinian cause; today, there are at least three positions in the Tanzanian public in regard to Palestine. There are those who support the people of Palestine, those who support Israel, and the indifferent ones. It is not easy to quantify or estimate the size of each group but it is possible to describe both their character and ideological orientation. Those who openly support the people of Palestine include progressive intellectuals, some human rights organisations and activists, some university students, and Muslims from all walks of life. Muslims constitute the largest number of the pro-Palestine group. In this group, is the Tanzania and Palestine Solidarity Committee formed in the 1970s. The basis for supporting Palestine ranges from a history of occupation and domination of the people of Palestine to the most recent oppression and the siege of Gaza. Those in support of Israel are mainly some Christians, the majority of whom belong to the new evangelical churches.⁹ In this group are academics and intellectuals. They legitimise their support to Israel following the Bible. Some of these carry and hoist the Israel flag either in their churches or cars. The indifferent ones argue that there are so many problems at home and it would be wise to address these first.¹⁰

The debate on this question in the media pits positions of the pro-Palestine and pro-Israel groups. Organisationally, the pro-Israel groups are not as active as the groups in support of the Palestinian people. The latter issues statements and organises demonstrations condemning acts of atrocity committed by Israel against the people of Palestine. They have acted whenever any atrocity has been committed by Israel. Even where the government has not made its position known, they have called upon the government to act responsibly on the question. The reason why they have done so is explained by Ponda (2010), who said, "In the past we openly condemned Israel. We did that as a nation, the government did that on our behalf. This is no longer the case, the government does not do that, some communities and groups do that."

When Israel attacked Freedom Flotilla in 2010, the Tanzania-Palestine Solidarity Committee organised a rally to condemn the act. In its statement of condemnation the Solidarity Committee condemned Israel's actions, reiterated its support for the Palestinian people, and called for the Government of Tanzania to openly condemn Israel. The statement expressed concern over the Government's position on the Palestinian question and called for President Kikwete to restore Tanzania's unwavering and uncompromising position in support of liberation struggles. The statement further called for the Government of Tanzania to save diplomatic relations with Israel until Israel freed the occupied territories (Solidarity Committee, 2010).

⁹ This is based on observation made by the author, and discussions between the author and informants. Most of the observations and discussions were confined in Dar es Salaam and were made between 2008 and 2010.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

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In one of rare occasions, the Government of Tanzania issued a statement condemning Israel on 4th June 2010. It is not clear whether the statement was in response to the call made in the statement of the Solidarity Committee or a spontaneous reaction following Israel's attack on the Flotilla. In its statement the government condemned Israel's attack of the Freedom Flotilla bound for Gaza Strip as "inhuman, provocative and offensive". The government further said that it had received the reports of the attack with "great shock and sadness", and that it "considered the disproportionate attack against a humanitarian mission as a clear violation of international law, and aggravation of the suffering of the civilian population in Gaza". It was also concerned that the unprovoked action taken by Israel's military would be a dangerous step that was going to exacerbate tension and undermine peace efforts in the Middle East. The government further called upon the international community to take firm and immediate action by conducting an inquiry into the matter, alongside requiring the Government of Israel to lift its blockade imposed on the Gaza strip and to allow safe passage for humanitarian relief for the innocent civilians.

Different accounts may be given on the divided positions of the people and the wobbling position of the government on the Palestinian question. As noted earlier, the position of the Government of Tanzania on Palestine is not as firm or clear as it was in the past. This is evident at least in the most recent utterance. The Government in Tanzania, unlike in the past, has shied away from offering open criticism on Israel and openly showing support for the Palestinian people. This seems to have been contributed by two factors. First, Tanzania's relations with other countries are increasingly being guided by economic diplomacy which is basically an opportunistic and unprincipled tendency of seeking to attract aid and foreign investment. As such, its position on major international affairs is determined by foreign policy decision makers' judgement, seen in the light of interests of countries or other actors who render financial support or promise investment. This is perhaps more obvious in regard to the developing ties between Tanzania and Turkey. Both President Kikwete of Tanzania and Abdullah Gul of Turkey have paid official visits to each other's country. Turkey strongly condemned Israel because the Flotilla involved a large number of its citizens. These were among the ones killed in the Israel attack. Secondly, it would appear that Tanzania's position on major international issues is somehow influenced by its relations with the major powers. So, it could be argued that Tanzania felt safe to issue a statement condemning Israel because even the US had taken a position against Israel on the Freedom Flotilla. So Tanzania's open statement against Israel could be seen as a balancing act to please its internal and external constituencies.

The divisions within the popular masses on the Palestinian question have multiple accounts, but suffices it to consider only three here. The first has to do with the emergence of *Hamas* and the propagation both by Israel and the West suggesting that *Hamas* is a terrorist organisation. Whereas Israel and the West had the intention to isolate *Hamas*, in Tanzania it helped to consolidate the pro-Israel groups. The same people who were trapped in the equation suggesting that 'terrorism = Islam' are the ones who hold the position that 'Palestine = Islam = Terrorism'. These would argue that the 'blessed' Israel has the right to defend itself against terrorists. The second relates to how the state has behaved and reacted to the Palestinian question in recent

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years. As it has been shown, its ambivalent and compromising position has helped to create confusion in society, in turn cementing divisions along religious lines. The third has to do with lack of political ideological coherence in society. This has compelled people to seek spiritual inspiration and judgement. It is obvious that some people of Islamic faith support the Palestinian question because they feel connected to people of the same faith who, at home and abroad, seem to be marginalised. Muslims struggles at home are apparently echoed abroad by those forces fighting against oppression, occupation, and domination. Some Christians on the other hand find any anti-Israel forces as a threat to the 'holy land'. Only a few people think outside the religious box and continue to uphold the values taught and promoted during the *Ujamaa* and liberation era – that humanity is indivisible and uncontested.

7.0 Conclusion

There are those within the bureaucracy and political class who wish to see Tanzania remain connected and central to the cause of humanity. Their voices however are overshadowed by those elements in the state who believe that Tanzania can be insensitive to questions of humanity, and that the politics and ideology of solidarity with the oppressed and exploited do not sit well with economic interests of the country. The drive in foreign engagement seems to be dictated by outcompeting, outmanoeuvring and outsmarting others no matter the cost, injustice and immorality involved. This seems to be at the heart of the government economic diplomacy. Some of the events discussed in this article shed some light on the relationship between the position of the government and economic interests.

However, this is not the same direction the people in Tanzania have taken. Although changing and not homogeneously shared, people in Tanzania continue to identify with affairs of other people and countries away from home. It has demonstrated the capacity to form opinions, take positions and act upon them independently. This has not waited or depended on guidance of what the state feels or what its position might be. How long these attitudes and traditions will be sustained depends on how stable, coherent and unified in purpose and vision the society continues to be. There are signs that the potential for society's degeneration into divisive ideologies and visions are building up. The way the people reacted to the Terrorist Act and their reaction to the Palestinian question point to that direction.

However, there is still hope that the more the popular masses continues to debate, organise and identify with events and matters outside their country, the more they are sharpening and refining their organisational skills and horizons of knowledge. Armed with such skills, knowledge and commitment to justice they could start relating their reactions to international affairs abroad to policies and behaviour of the state at home and its external relations. The state in Tanzania may not be paying much attention to how the public reacts to international affairs now but with time it is likely to be a reality not easy to ignore in future.

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