

# “Andy” Uba Goes to War (II): What OBJ Taught Uba

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*By Okey Ndibe*



"DR" "ANDY"

What kind of governor would Nnamdi Emmanuel Uba make? By his own admission, his governorship is going to be tailored along President Olusegun Obasanjo's legacy. Uba has made a fetish of his apprenticeship to Obasanjo. At each turn, he has spoken volubly about having benefited from a close study of the president's statecraft. Should he find himself in the position of governor, then, we can expect him to be a miniaturized clone of the president.

That prospect is, for me, nothing short of dismal. No dispassionate student of the OBJ presidency would wish anything to do with the president even on his worst enemies. Uba's invocation of his OBJ apprenticeship provides the precise ground to dread the possibility of an Uba governorship.

What could Uba have learned from Obasanjo? The president has distinguished himself in unredeemed promises. Nigeria will not soon forget that this is the president who, in 2000, promised them, "on my honor," that by the end of 2001, they would begin to enjoy "regular, uninterrupted power supply." To that end, Obasanjo set up a technical board headed by Liyel Imoke. He threw several hundred billion naira into the pledge. After all that money went down the drain, Nigerians awoke on December 31, 2001 to the realization that their president's word had no meaning. A whole nation had been conned. It was one whole gimmick and jiggery pokery. Uba has graduated from the "school" of a president who swears on his honor, and then plunges the nation into unremitting darkness.

Obasanjo will go down in history as the president who looked the other way and allowed criminals to overrun his country. Under his watch, a governor was abducted with the help of 200 police officers. Chris Uba, Nnamdi Uba's younger brother and a confidante of the president's, orchestrated the abduction.

Many of us suspect that the act had the president's and Nnamdi Uba's imprimatur. At any rate, while an indignant nation called for Chris Uba's prosecution, the president browbeat his party into euphemizing a treasonable act as "a family affair." Uba is a student of a

president who hasn't encountered a crime he didn't like.

Several months later, the president snoozed irresponsibly while thugs, again mobilized by Chris Uba, swept through Anambra in a bonfire spree that left damages estimated at 30 billion naira. The arsonists traversed Anambra for three days, often escorted by police officers, a clear sign that Aso Rock gave its blessing. What was this wholesale destruction in service of? It was a desperate search for a ruse to enable the president to declare a state of emergency in order to remove a governor who had resisted pressure to hand over the keys of the Anambra treasury to the Uba clan. Where was Nnamdi Uba while his state was being set on fire? Given his closeness to the president, why didn't he suggest that Obasanjo pay a visit to the besieged state to comfort the people? If he was not privy to the devastation, why did he not rebuke his younger brother for masterminding such a sordid plot?

Obasanjo is the master of the art of reaping shamelessly from public office. For all of Nuhu Ribadu's reluctance to probe the president's self-enrichment, ordinary Nigerians recognize something untoward in the president's willingness to accept billions of naira from individuals as well as corporate entities in the name of fundraising for his presidential library. What did the donors receive in return for their obscene donations? Is it not curious that the top donors to the library fund were beneficiaries of the president's transfers of huge public assets to private hands, especially through the notorious Transcorp?

From all accounts, Uba is a fervid follower of the president's script. Two weeks ago, it was reported that corporate donors raised 3.2 billion naira for his campaign. Again, the list of donors struck me as instructive, being part of the crowd that have been enriched by the president, often in questionable deals. Pray: What could Uba, the president's aide on domestic affairs, have done for these moneyed men and women to invite such generous investment in his campaign? An even more pertinent question is this: What quid are these donors (most of them not from Anambra) expecting for their quo? What did Uba do for them while he worked at Aso Rock? How many of these corporate champions of Uba's campaign would be willing to entrust Uba with the running of their businesses or companies? How many of them would even hire Uba in a mid-managerial capacity? On what account are they so determined to help a man of Uba's humble intellectual and academic credentials to assume the infinitely more challenging task of running the affairs of a state?

Uba is a product of an Obasanjo dispensation that patented failure and basically wasted eight years of the nation's life. OBJ prides himself as "the founder of modern Nigeria," but the nation he is leaving behind is in many ways in worse shape than he found it. Obasanjo's "modern" Nigeria is a laughing stock. It is a roadless, waterless, powerless nation. It is a nation where anybody who can must fly abroad for the treatment of even the common cold. It is a nation where hospitals are just a symbolic bus stop before the terminus of the mortuary.

Obasanjo's Nigeria is a polity where the police, permanently turned to the president's partisan pursuits, are incapable of solving any crimes. It is a Nigeria where a president, nearly bankrupt at the time of his first inauguration, has rebounded so miraculously and inexplicably that he was able, according to his handlers, to dole out a gift of million naira to Vice President Atiku Abubakar. It is a country where the lines between private wealth and the public treasury are all but erased. It is a country where primitive accumulation is the day's central disorder, where the president, having repudiated the mandate to effect salutary change, has found billions to mop up a stupendous percentage of the shares in Transcorp—and then transferred some of the nation's greatest assets to the corporation.

Obasanjo's Nigeria is one where the president's closest pals are thugs, some octogenarian, some unfledged. It is a collectivity where crimes are rewarded if and when favored friends commit them. It is a Nigeria where Nnamdi Uba can ferry \$170,000 in cold cash right under the nose of the president onto a presidential jet bound for New York. An astute president who is serious about fighting corruption and enthroning probity would have rusticated Uba for this insensitive act. But not only did Obasanjo approve, he permitted Uba to buy him a \$45,000 gift with the largesse. Is Uba willing to come clean with Nigerians on the source of that money? Would he have agreed to pay a fine of \$26,000 to the U.S. government if he had nothing to hide?

The bottom line is this: Uba has done nothing in his private or public life to inspire public confidence in his

preparedness for gubernatorial office. If Obasanjo is his trump card, then we have every reason to regard him as a nightmare-in-progress. He may deny it all he wants, but the fact is that Maurice Iwu's INEC is acting in a way calculated to pave the way for Uba's coronation. Privately, Uba may jeer at his "disqualified" opponents, but he must know, in his hearts of hearts, that neither Iwu nor Obasanjo is capable of having the last word on the matter.

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4. Murder Incorporated
5. No Longer at Ease
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8. My Biafran Eyes
9. My Father's English Friend
10. A female speaker's manly vices
11. The education of Umar Yar'Adua
12. The triumph of barbarism
13. Achebe's apt censure
14. Andy Uba Goes to War (1)
15. Andy Uba Goes to War (11): What OBJ taught Uba
16. Why I Take It Personally
17. Andy Uba's highest bid
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### About Okey Ndibe



Okey Ndibe is a novelist, poet, political activist from Yola, Nigeria. He is the author of *Arrows of Rain*, a critically reviewed novel published in 2000. Ndibe relocated to the United States in 1988, where he founded *African Commentary*, a magazine described as "award-winning and widely acclaimed." Ndibe is also a published poet, and a former associate professor of English at Bard College at Simon's Rock. He currently teaches fiction and African literature at Trinity College in Hartford, CT. Okey Ndibe is finishing his second novel titled *Foreign gods, incorporated*.

#### Speaking Engagements

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