

Testing the “Steak Holders”

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By Okey Ndibe

Last week in London, a friend asked why I thought the Umaru Yar’Adua regime deployed overwhelming force in dealing with adherents of Boko Haram, the group that blames western education for Nigeria’s woes. His question was informed by a sense of history. He remembered the studied slowness with which this and past governments had tackled outbreaks of sectarian violence. He also recalled the frequency and openness with which armed robbers operate in most states of the country.

“We never hear about the police showing up when armed robbers attack banks in Ibadan, Awka or Benin City for hours,” he said.

Why, then, the alacrity and brutality with which Boko Haram was decimated?

My response was that the cabal that runs – and ruins – Nigeria is not in the business of protecting Nigerians’ lives and property. Their mission, instead, is to use the instrument of the state – principally the army and police – to sustain their ability to privatize the nation’s resources.

This cabal, whose members style themselves stake holders, set out to send a chilling message to all Nigerians. And this was the message: that it would not brook any campaign to impede its access to lucre.

It was the second such message that the Yar’Adua government has telegraphed this year. Earlier, the government had authorized a slash-and-burn military offensive in the Niger Delta. The ostensible goal was to rout militants who, in their attacks on oil installations, had shown scant regard for members of the Joint Task Force detailed to contain them.

In the earlier assault, as in the recent one, the Nigerian state beat its chest after slaughtering hundreds of citizens, many of them unarmed and defenseless, quite a few of them women and children. Apparently scared to face the Boko Haram guru in court, the regime contrived to murder him – and then to concoct an implausible account of the circumstances of his death.

As the corpses of hundreds of Boko Haramites defaced the streets of several states, Yar’Adua went off on his jolly way to Brazil . If there’s a worse case of atrocious political instincts, I’d like to hear about it. For Yar’Adua and his ilk, the majority of Nigerian citizens are worth less than cattle. Why delay a foreign junket just because a few hundred “cattle” had been hunted down and killed?

There’s no question that, for the cabal, the protection of its members’ looting rights approaches a sacred duty. There’s ample proof. Remember how, in one breath, Yar’Adua and Speaker Dimeji Bankole

told the nation that former President Olusegun Obasanjo wasted billions of dollars on so-called power projects – with nothing to show for it. Then, after a panel of the House of Representatives launched a public probe that unearthed shocking details of the power scam, the entire machinery of the state went into panic mode. In a bizarre and shameless twist, the cabal in Abuja worked in concert to protect a principle dear to its members’ heart: the principle of thieving.

The collectivity of “steak holders” awoke to the grave consequences of exposing some of their number. What if Nigerians arose and demanded that all the players in the power scandal, including Obasanjo, Governor Liyel Imoke and ex-Governor Segun Agagu, be compelled to face prosecution? The nation-hijackers feared the domino effect of permitting Nigerians to see the callous manner in which men entrusted with high office conspired to defraud the nation. A new script was prepared: Tell Nigerians that not a single kobo was misspent on power projects, much less stolen.

It’s such tortured manipulations of reality, such barefaced lies, that ultimately fertilized Boko Haram’s central creed, a belief that secular education was the culprit. The group’s critique may be wrong-headed, but there’s no question that the depraved men and women who daily gnaw away the nation’s promise and potential are a disgrace to their education and training – western, traditional and religious.

Using superior armory, the regime has squelched the Haramites for now. But let nobody imagine, for a moment, that this is the end of the story. It strikes me, at best, as part of an opening act in what’s

likely to be a prolonged, multi-pronged resistance to a political system arranged to aid and abet the mindless leeches who feed fat on the collective blood of a nation.

Unless the cabal cultivates self-restraint and learns to curb its greed – and nothing inspires confidence in this prospect – the nation better brace itself for many more Boko Harams and other forms of resistance.

I suspect that the cabal’s victory will prove illusory and pyrrhic.

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About Okey Ndibe



Okey Ndibe is a novelist, poet and political activist. He is the author of *Arrows of Rain*, a critically reviewed novel published in 2000. Ndibe founded *African Commentary*, a magazine described as "award-winning and widely acclaimed." He 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*.

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