

SHOULD EVERYONE OWN A GUN?

By Mahmud Jega

Within our living memory, he was an uncompromising stickler for law and order, a fearless civil war commander who fought to prevent secession, an Army GOC famous for his stern discipline, an Army Chief with zero tolerance for coups d'état or rowdy civilian behaviour, a Defence Minister who reacted fiercely to unrest by civilians by demolishing villages and towns, so why is Lt General Theophilus Yakubu [T.Y.] Danjuma now promoting lawlessness in the name of self-defense?

There was this story that former Army Major Almustapha Haruna Jokolo once told in a Citizen magazine article in 1991. It was about how soldiers sacked Fela Anikulapo-Kuti's Kalakuta Republic in February 1977. Top guns of the General Obasanjo-led military regime were holding a security meeting. Jokolo was present as ADC to the Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters, Major General Shehu Musa Yar'adua, as were other aides of the military rulers. News then came in that unruly member of Fela's commune had abducted a "Yellow Fever" traffic warden. The no-

nonsense Chief of Army Staff, T.Y., banged the table and said, "Bring Fela to me, dead or alive!"

According to Jokolo, even though the Army Chief did not direct his order to anyone in particular, the young officers in the room saw it as an order and retreated to the balcony to plan an operation. Soldiers soon stormed Kalakuta Republic and in the process, threw Fela's aged mother, Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, from an upper floor all the way to the ground. Due to the howl of protest from newspapers, government appointed a committee of inquiry, which reported that "unknown soldiers" committed the atrocity! A year earlier, as junior secondary school students, we knew the stuff that T.Y. was made of when we read about his speech to soldiers at the Command and Staff College in Jaji. In the course of the trial of soldiers who carried out the February 1976 abortive coup that resulted in the death of General Murtala Mohammed, Sgt. Ahmadu Rege said he shot Kwara State Military Governor Colonel Ibrahim Taiwo because his immediate superior ordered him to do so. "Na Oga say make I shoot Oga if Oga moved,



and I shot when Oga moved." The Army Chief was enraged; he told the soldiers at Jaji that if anyone gave them an illegal order, they must disobey it. Rege was executed at Bar Beach for obeying that order. If today we obey T.Y.'s order, find out where terrorists and bandits obtain their weapons and also obtain them for self-defense, is that a legal or an illegal order?

All the print and online newspapers were awash recently with stories that, speaking in Wukari at the installation of a new Aku Uka, General T.Y. Danjuma urged Nigerians to take up arms and fight against terrorists and bandits "before they over run the entire country." The armed forces, he said, are either "unwilling or not willing" to defend the country, so "we must find out the source of the arms of terrorists. Nigerians should equally find a means of arming themselves to face the terrorists."

T.Y. said more than that. He added, "When I said the military were colluding with the armed bandits in 2017, the then Minister of Defence made a kangaroo commission of enquiry that mischievously submitted that there was no evidence about my claim and they asked me to come and defend it. I thank God today that the



evidence is very clear to all Nigerians now. All Nigerian communities are now being sacked by the same bandits I alleged and all these bandits are foreigners...As a soldier, I must say the best way to defend is to attack. I will not buy arms for you. Find out how those attacking you acquired it, and then acquire it and attack back to defend yourselves and your territories."

Very good. If the Defence Minister in 2017 set up a kangaroo commission, then he must have learnt the trick from T.Y. who, 40 years earlier, sent soldiers to sack Kalakuta Republic, only for a [kangaroo] commission of inquiry to "find" that unknown soldiers did it. T.Y. said he refused to appear before the panel to substantiate his claims. How many of us have that facility, to refuse an invitation from the police, not to mention DSS or the Army, to come and substantiate a claim that we made?

T.Y. also says it is now established that the terrorists and bandits are foreigners. Who established that? Boko Haram's founder and all its successive murderous leaders were Nigerians. All the top North West bandit leaders Buharin Daji, Dogo Gide, Bello Turji, Ado Aleru and Dankarami are well known local folks. Their parents are well known to the communities. Rather than claim that our neighbours exported terrorism and banditry to us, I think we should accept responsibility for exporting both scourges to them.

Ok, in November 1999 when the people of Odi in Bayelsa State and in October 2001 when the people of Zaki Biam in Benue State took up arms and, in the process, killed policemen and soldiers, then Defence Minister T.Y. Danjuma did not accept their excuse that they were defending themselves. Instead, he sent soldiers to raze both towns to the ground. Has he apologised to the people of Odi and Zaki Biam and paid restitution from his ample personal funds after he found out that the military and security agencies are no longer willing to defend communities, so it is up to them to defend themselves?

There is no doubt that insecurity is currently our biggest national headache, far more than sluggish economic growth, falling revenues, industrial scale oil theft, high unemployment, mounting debt burden, crashing naira and corruption. Economic recovery is not possible in the near future when farmers cannot go to the farm, people fear to travel and citizens do not feel safe even in their houses due to the activities of terrorists, kidnappers and bandits.

T.Y. said in 1976 that whenever soldiers are given an illegal order, they should disobey it because a soldier will be held personally responsible for obeying an illegal order. There is no soldier in the Nigerian Army today who was there in 1976, so we excuse the soldiers that he sent to Odi and Zaki Biam for forgetting that advice. Otherwise, they would have said an order to ransack a Nigerian town and shoot everyone in sight was an illegal order, no matter how heinous what the communities' youths did.

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Still, if all of us borrow a leaf from the bandits, contact arms traffickers who bring assault rifles from Muammar Gaddafi's scattered armoury and arm ourselves to the teeth, what effect will it have? First of all, it will overstretch

the police, whose High Command said at the weekend that possession of firearms is still banned and no firearms licenses are being issued. The police must then arrest all of us, and I am not sure they have enough detention space to keep us all. Maybe T.Y. has a point because highway robbers, kidnappers and even terrorists are actually cowardly and they live in trepidation of local vigilantes who are armed with dane guns and poisoned arrows. Whenever the late Boko Haram terror leader Abubakar Shekau spoke about vigilantes, whom he called "kato da gora" in his rambling tapes, you could sense fear in his voice. No doubt communities should defend themselves as best they could when bandits attack them, but is freelance ownership of assault weapons the answer? The General also said in the military, the best form of defence is attack. In Zamfara State for example, some vigilante groups actually borrowed this maxim, profiled some communities and went on to carry out killings, which elicited murderous "reprisal attacks" from the bandits.

Liberalised ownership of firearms could solve one problem, only to create others. To have firearms in the hands of untrained people could create problems such as the school shootings we see in the US, demented persons opening fire at markets or worship centers or even, using them to settle marital and other scores. In Nigeria, we have learnt that even trained ex-servicemen cannot be entirely trusted with firearms because many of them lend their skills in intercommunal disputes all over the country. The military and security agencies appear to have made some gains against criminals in recent times. Especially the Air Force, whose bombing of bandit camps appears to have reduced their activities. Much, much more needs to be done, but it is doubtful if the answer is liberalised ownership of firearms as General Danjuma is advocating.

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