

ARMED BANDITRY AND NIGERIA NATIONAL SECURITY: A STUDY OF THE NORTH WEST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The State governments and citizens in the Northern parts of Nigeria have shifted their worries from the menace in the North East by non-state actors as Boko Haram and Islamic State of West Province (ISWAP); other resultant menacing social vices, field attacks from rodents, pests and diseases on their crops, to the now trending violent activities of bandits and Fulani marauders. In recent time, banditry and government counter responses in the North-West have as a matter of necessity dominated national security discourse. Hundreds of lives and properties have been lost, including people being displaced from their homes, relatives and means of livelihood. Socio-economic activities have been derailed and the end seems comatose in spite of the declaration of the bandits as terrorists by the Federal Government gazette in November 2021, days after a federal high court order in Abuja. It is on this premise that this study considers it appropriate to examine the fundamental causes of banditry, its effects and government efforts against this menace in the northern part of the country with a focus on the North-West geopolitical zone. To achieve its objectives, the study adopted historical research design and relied on secondary source of data such as books, journal articles, newspaper articles, periodicals, internet materials, among others. This study also utilizes the Instrumental theory of Violence which is premised on the assumption that acts relating to insurgency and terrorism are deliberate choice by either state or non-state actors to demand for change and drive group's agenda and intentions in a socio-political system. The study found out that the consequences of the activities of the bandits have greater impact not only on the alternative means of sustainability of livelihood of the people of the northwest, but the Nigeria national security in generally. Policy options have been suggested to ameliorate this form of terrorism in Nigeria, particularly in the northwest geopolitical zone.

Keywords: Armed Banditry, National Security, North West Geopolitical Zone, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

As the States of Northern Nigeria reels under the security threats occasion by the activities of Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda Awati Waah Jihad which in Arabic means devoted or committed people who propagate the teaching of the Prophet, also popularly known as Boko Haram terrorist organisation, and Islamic States in West African Province (ISWAP) (Onuoha, 2012), a fresh humanitarian crisis is brewing due to the continuous actions of armed groups known locally as "bandits" in the six States of the country's North-West geopolitical zone: Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kaduna, Niger, and Kebbi.

Since the return to democratic rule in May 1999 to date, the States of the Northern Nigeria, and by extension, the Nigeria State has been experiencing one form of security challenge to the other with the North-West geopolitical zone or region as one of the most affected region. Currently, the Boko Haram and Islamic States in West African Province (ISWAP) have constituted lesser threat compare to Fulani marauders, and the bandits that was only declared terrorist group in November, 2021 by the Federal Government of Nigeria under the Federal Republic Official Gazette dated 29 November 2021, Volume 108 and which declared the activities of "Yan Bindiga group" and "Yan Ta'adda group" which in Hausa language mean "gunmen" and

"terrorists" respectively as terrorist organisations. Officially, this Gazette was signed on Wednesday 5 January, 2022 by the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice, Mr. Abubakar Malami (Ameh, 2022; Kayode, 2022; BBC News Pidgin, 2022).

As Adedeji (2021) puts it, Boko Haram is making life unpleasant and unsustainable for people in the North-East Nigeria; another organised group known as the armed bandits is making life increasingly tough for residents in Nigeria's North-West. In certain regions of the country, life is no longer sacrosanct, and the cumulative impact will undoubtedly linger for centuries. The government is plainly and already overburdened, leaving citizens powerless. Shooting and murdering, cattle rustling, kidnapping, rape, burning of houses in villages, and looting of goods have all been perpetrated, with the number of deaths and displaced persons continuing to climb. While over 1,100 people were killed in the six states in 2018, over 2,200 people were killed in 2019, and over 1,600 people were killed by the first months in 2020 (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020). By September 2019 such attacks had internally displaced over 160,000 persons and resulted in over 41,000 refugees (World Food Programme, WFP, 2019; UNHCR, 2019).

Over 247,000 people have been displaced with 60,000 refugees and figures continue to increase weekly and monthly in recent time. Women and children remain the most vulnerable demographics, with many widowed women forced to take up non-traditional role as breadwinners and family heads. Before now this women are historically under "Purdah" (indoor seclusion) and are not responsible for family money generating; hence this change in social status has an impact on social duties. Some children are orphaned and come to displacement camps unaccompanied ((UNHCR, 2020; Al-Yateem Foundation, 2020, DailyStar, Nigeria, 2021). Although, banditry and other sundry crimes are not new phenomenon or problems in Nigeria but the sophistication and tactics adopted, as well as damages to properties, loss of lives, and displacement of people from their ancestral communities in recent time become questionable. Banditry in Nigeria dates back to the pre-civil war period, when government in some sections of the ancient Western region collapsed resulting in political bloodshed, criminality, and organised insurgency (Odinkalu, 2018).

Adedeji (2021) argued that the Bandit activity has recently been particularly concerning in Nigeria's northwest, particularly in the states of Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina, Niger, Kaduna, and Kebbi. Kidnapping, murder, robbery, rape, livestock rustling, and other crimes are among the actions of these bandits. Their methods of operation include maiming and murdering their victims when they are least expecting it. Typically, they deployed through the forests into the community, riding fast motorcycles into the neighbourhood, especially at night, and shooting at will. Nadama (2019) posits that the bandits sometimes unleash panic in the neighbourhoods in the afternoon, once they are sure there is no security presence of the police or military around. Hundreds of people have been killed as a result of this expanding threat. Several children have been orphaned, and women have become widows overnight, while food insecurity and humanitarian disaster will make life even more difficult for many Nigerians. Local robbers were reportedly snatching domestic animals during the civilian reign. Approximately 247,000 individuals had been displaced, and their operations alone had resulted in over 41,000 refugees. Over 8000 people have been killed in Zamfara alone in the last decade, with 200,000 people internally displaced and others fleeing to neighbouring states. The situation is so precarious that Muhammadu Sa'ad Abubakar, the religious leader and Sultan of Sokoto, declared that "Bandits now roam from house to house in the North with AK47s, lamenting that the region has become the worst place to live in Nigeria..." (Ezigbo, 2020; Adedeji, 2021)

In recent time, both the state and federal governments have responded to the menace orchestrated by the bandits, and other nihilist criminal groups in Nigeria, particularly in the states of the northwest geopolitical zone. The military and personnel of the police force have been involved in counter responses to the activities of these terrorists groups by bombarding several hideouts of the bandits in particular under various code names, but this did not have any substantial results. Again, state governments in the region have also attempted to negotiate

amnesty for repented and remorseful bandits (Campbell, 2020). While this originally succeeded, the end effect was unsatisfactory resulting to the recent clamour for effective and efficient counterinsurgent or counterterrorism measures to be adopted to end these menace in Nigeria.

Nature of the Problem

Nigeria has been a hotspot of strife for some time; aside from the constant struggle between farmers and herders, there are other major security challenges, such as Biafra separatist movement known as Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its security network known as the Eastern Security Network (ESN) in the South-East, Boko Haram and ISWAP militant Islamists in the North-East, and kidnappings for ransom, ritual killings, and armed robbery in various regions of the country. Boko Haram, ISWAP and bandits, and the self-styled Fulani herdsmen menace remain Nigeria's most serious security Challenges in recent time. These groups also pose serious threat to the neighbouring countries of Cameroon, Niger and Chad Republics, with serious economic, social, and humanitarian ramifications (The Punch, 2020).

There are several important reasons why government interventions have not yet shown results. The topography of the area is a crucial role. Because of the geography, most residents in the area, particularly those who live in isolated areas, have little access to protection. Security officers can occasionally take hours to respond to victims' distress calls (The Premium Times, 2019). This is aided by the huge forests that surround these areas, which protect the bandits location from being readily identified and apprehended, particularly when they employ forests like the Falgore, Kamara, Kunduma, Subudu, Kamuku, and Kiyabana (West Africa Network for Peace building, WANEP, 2020). This makes it harder for the military to protect the petty officers' lives and property. The Nigerian government has expressed its dissatisfaction with the lack of contemporary technology available to its security officers and has appealed to the international community for assistance for more sophisticated equipment, gadgets and accessories. Terrorism and banditry are no tea parties. To find a long-term solution; the government must be proactive and work with affected communities. This is in fact a fallacy considering government's inconsistency in the fight against the insurgency in the northwest region and beyond.

Apart from being vulnerable to all forms of security challenges, illiteracy, poverty, radicalisation of Islamic teachings, porous national borders and corruption have been identified as productive precursors to the problems of insecurity in the geopolitical zone, and by extension, in the other region in northern Nigeria. Again, the northern region of the country including the northwest geopolitical zone currently depicts the negative consequences of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) across the international borders with Boko Haram terrorist organisation and its splinter group, ISWAP, as well as bandits, kidnappers, armed robbers, cattle rustler, and Fulani marauders as beneficiaries. This has increased the sophistication of these violent criminal groups (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNOCHA, 2021).

As a consequence, the multiplying effect of proliferation of SALW has undeniably increase the capability of the insurgents and terrorist groups to destroy, kill and maim innocent citizens within the domains of the northwest geopolitical zone. Most worrisome is that the international system has become awash with more sophistication in weapons development such as rifles, assault rifles, light machine-gun, heavy machine-guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-craft guns, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles; portable launchers of antitank missiles and rockets system, ballistic missiles, landmines, rocket launchers, biological and chemical weapon and nuclear weapons.

Sambo, Sule and Deribe (2020:152) argued "that the northern part of the country presents the main landing base of the proliferation of illegal weapons (SALW) which comes through Lagos border and Cameroon, Niger and Chad borders into the northern parts of the country for illicit activities and in which terrorism, banditry, kidnappings, and Fulani herders/farmers conflict are the major threats to national development". It has however becomes necessary to examine the

causes of the recent increase in armed banditry, the obstacles to combating banditry, and how to avoid a total shutdown of the country by bandits and other terrorist or insurgent groups alike.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the nexus between armed banditry and national security challenges with a focus on the Nigeria northwest geopolitical zone. While the specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. examine the fundamental causes of banditry in Nigeria, particularly in the North-West geopolitical zone,
- ii. examine the consequences or effects of banditry in Nigeria northwest region, and
- iii. Examine government efforts in containing the menace of the bandits in the northwest geopolitical zone.

Research Questions

The following research questions are raised to guide this study:

- i. What are the fundamental causes of banditry in Nigeria, particularly in the northwest geopolitical zone?
- ii. What are effects of banditry in Nigeria northwest geopolitical zone?
- iii. What are the government efforts to ameliorate the menace of the bandits in the northwest region?

Method of the Study

This study adopted the historical research design which is qualitative in nature and this research design is used to collect, verify and synthesize evidence from the past in order to establish facts that define or refute issues raised in other research. In historical design researcher relied extensively on secondary sources of data such as textbooks, journal publications, government official documents, dailies and periodicals, and internet materials. Secondary sources of data are materials that are not directly from the researcher but from extant or already existing literature in a study area. This use of secondary sources of data help researcher to review in broad terms literature relevant in this study area and within literature that have existed and often times, relating findings to the this topic under interrogation and investigation in order to contribute to already existing knowledge in this field.

Review of Related Literature **Banditry and Bandits**

The term "banditry" refers to the presence or prevalence of armed robbery or other forms of violent crime. It entails the use of force, or the threat of force, to frighten someone with the purpose to rob, rape, or murder them. Banditry is a crime committed against people. It has long been a popular kind of criminality, as well as a source of violence in modern countries (Nigeria Watch, 2011). Banditry's definition has evolved across time, space, and circumstances. In Nineteenth-Century Europe and the Americas, a bandit was a freedom fighter whose goal was to guarantee the emancipation of the oppressed from the upper classes or the colonized from the colonizers (Warto, 1994).

Banditry is outlaws commit, which is a sort of organised crime including the threat or use of violence. A Bandit is a person who engages in banditry and commits crimes such as extortion, robbery, and murder, either individually or in gangs or groups. Banditry is a broad notion of lawlessness that has come to be associated with Gangsterism, brigandage, marauding, and stealing in modern usage. The name bandit (which came to English via Italian around 1590 BC) comes from the early Germanic legal practice of forbidding offenders, which was known as "bannan" (English ban). In the Holy Roman Empire, the legal term was Acht or Reichsacht, which meant "Imperial ban" in today's Italy (Watts, 1987).

According to the New English Dictionary on Historical Principles (NED) in 1885, "a bandit is one who is proscribed or outlawed; hence, a lawless desperate marauder, a brigand: usually applied to members of the organised gangs which infest the mountainous districts of Italy, Sicily, Spain, Greece, Iran, and Turkey". The term "one-armed bandit" for gambling devices that can leave the gambler with no money has become a synonym for "thief" in modern usage. Bandits like Chucho el Roto, Herachio Bernel, and Santanon were also hailed as heroes of the Mexican revolution. As a result, Mexicans hold high regard and respect for the "social workers" known as bandits, whereas the government views them as nuisances and outlaws who must be exterminated. Crime against humans, such as murder, rape, and robbery, has escalated in scale and viciousness in Nigeria since 1999 (Watts, 1987; Rotberg (2007). The ubiquitous tendency of armed robbery in the country, which in effect parallels the African experience, demonstrates this fact.

The Concept of National Security

The term national security has always remained an ambiguous concept because of the emphasis on freedom from military threat and political coercion, and to non-military issues (Romm, 1993). Eke and Ekor (2021:226) argued that national security goes beyond some of the narrow definitions of the concept because the scope should include the provision of all that are required to ensure there is adequate security, i.e., from social security, economic or food security, to health security. Ewa (2018:35) argues that the concept of security means more than the absence of conflict as it was conceived by some scholar who see it from a state-centric perspective. National security from a people-centred perspective encompasses areas such as education, health, democracy and human rights, protection against environmental degradation, and proliferation of deadly weapons. It means that some scholars have provided narrow definitions of the term in some circumstances to only mean the security of national territory from external aggressions.

In a succinct manner, Eke & Ekor (2021:229) argued that the concept of national security goes beyond protection or defence of a country's territorial boundary, but include the protection of the ordinary people from the threats of diseases, hunger, unemployment, crimes, social conflict, political repression and environmental hazards. This definition of national security draws attention to the human dimension of security which is sacrosanct to human development. In addition; Kim (2015) (2020) sees the concept of "national security" to mean different things to different people at different times, environment and circumstances. To him, national security includes not only the protection of a nation-state from externally and internally induced aggressions or security challenges through coercion or excessive force but through diplomacy. Safeguarding and safekeeping of the nation as a whole with economic security, energy security, environmental security, health security, children and women's security and food security are priority areas. It also includes political security, homeland security, cyber security, human security, and energy and natural resource security.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is the "Instrumental theory of Violence". This theory was adopted amidst several relevant theories because of its modest effort to explain the organisational structure of violent groups and the dynamics that inform the fundamental reasons why violent, insurgent or terrorist groups operate the way they do and their modus operandi. Scholars linked with the discourse relating to the Instrumental theory of violence include Edward Mickolus (1976), Richard Betts (1982) and Martha Crenshaw (1985). This theory is premised on the assumption "that acts relating to extreme violence or terrorism are often deliberate choice of action". In addition, the theory based its assumption on the basis that political actors or violent groups deliberately employ violence to pursue selfish gains that are often political (Crenshaw, 1985:13). Extreme violent acts such as armed banditry, armed conflict, militancy and terrorism are presumed to be intentional and for a purpose. Most violent acts in Africa are meant for the purposes of expression of

dissatisfactions over government policy programmes, marginalisation and underdevelopment, to mention but a few. Some of the extreme violent acts in Africa, and by extension; Nigeria such as militancy and terrorism occur as responses to external and internal stimuli sometimes due to export of religious extreme ideologies like the Islamic Jihadism, foreign intervention and government actions and policies, etc. Since banditry in Nigeria northwest region is presumed to be internal and intentional, and for a purpose best known to the nihilist groups of bandits, and since tactic and modus operandi reflect extreme violence and sophistication; it conforms to the tenet of the Instrumental theory of violence. Because the nihilist bandits are non-state actors using act of terror or extreme violence to pursue their grievances against communities in the North-West, particularly in Zamfara and Kaduna States for a calculated benefit or value to be achieved or gained, their actions conforms with the tenet of this theory. In most cases, extreme violent actions occur for several reasons probably to succeed especially when the status quo is intolerable (Bett, 1982). The campaign of extreme violence by the bandits and the Fulani marauders is in anticipation of a reward or desperation and response to opportunity or threat(s). Threats from natural resource scarcity or simply natural cause occasion by climate change such as flooding, desertification, deforestation, to mention but a few, has been associated with the reason or purpose for Fulani nomads migration to the south, and desperation to sustain their means of livelihood which is rearing and sales of livestock. For the bandits reason is adjudged to be jihadist campaign making it difficult for the government to actually ascertain the reasons for this extreme violence or terrorism (Adishi & Oluka, 2018:12). Explicitly, the instrumental theory of violence explains the organisational structure and fundamental reasons for the extreme violence campaign in the Northern part of the country, especially in the Northwest by the bandits, Fulani marauders and other criminal groups, especially in Zamfara, Katsina and Kaduna States.

Data Presentation and Discussion

Fundamental Causes of Banditry in North West Geopolitical Zone:

It is vital to understand that the latest Northwest conflict arose from a dispute between farmers and herdsmen over decreasing lands and water resources, with the farmers primarily being Hausa and the herdsmen primarily Fulani. One of the foundational variables accountable for banditry is the interplay of farmers/herders relations and the consequent conflict dynamics. These dynamics are linked to ecological changes and climate-related changes that have impacted access to land and land resources, resulting in agro-pastoral conflict between farmers and herders. When compared to other ethnic groups in Nigeria, the socio-cultural pattern of relationship between Hausa agriculturists and Fulani pastoralists has been considered as the finest ever. This relationship has recently worsened as a result of on-going crises between them, which have resulted in a number of atrocities such as cattle rustling, rape, robbery, attacks on villages, kidnappings, maiming, and extrajudicial executions (Adedeji, 2021).

Zamfara State has always been a hub of such criminal activity. By 2011, the crisis had worsened; with armed robberies, cattle rustling, kidnappings, and large-scale village attacks resulting in the loss of life and property. As a result of the influence of the Sahara Desert moving South there has been extensive deforestation. Furthermore, many Fulani's are preoccupied with herding of cattle in a region where poverty is firmly established and illiteracy is particularly high (Orjiinmo, 2020). As a result, whenever this source of income is endangered, whether by nature or by human interference, they will go to any length to protect it. In addition, there are issues with municipal justice failure and ethnic divide, as well as disorganised and under policed porous borders and boundaries (Campbell, 2020; Akinwotu, 2020). Indeed, banditry has become the norm in recent history as a result of the government's incompetence to protect lives and property, as well as its unwillingness to prioritise the welfare of the people.

Another factor is the government's inaction and the inability of law enforcement to act and respond swiftly and quickly. Other factors include direct reactions by Hausas to allege and perceived socio-political and economic marginalisation of Fulani herders as a result of alleged long-term injustice perpetrated by corrupt cops, village leaders, and judges. Cases involving the Fulani are preferred by the police, judges, and district and village chiefs. The children of evicted herders became available for hire as professional cattle herders for the Hausa, who had amassed

enormous herds of cattle over time, often purchased from hard-pressed Fulani. This was a case of role reversal. Some Fulani youths went on to become big-time armed robbers. Many herders were forced to flee as grazing reserves were depleted.

One obvious factor that has over the years served as precursor to the multiplying security challenges in Africa including Nigeria is globalisation which has widened and opened up global spaces and villagized the international system (Giddens, 1996). Globalisation and multiply proliferation of small arms and light weapon (SALW) have been adjudged as precursors to banditry in Nigeria northwest and other regions of the country. Salihu and Ozden (2020) argued that "the left-over arms and ammunition from the Cold War protagonists (i.e., the USA and the former Soviet Union) shipped into Africa fuelled the proxy inter-state conflicts and other forms of security challenges in some states of the continent". These arms now in the hands of illegal arm dealers, security entrepreneurs, criminal elements, ethnic militia groups, private military companies and local smugglers are now deploy for various armed conflicts, insurgency and terrorism which have resulted to the general security challenges in Africa, including Nigeria, especially in the northern part of the country.

Effects of banditry in the Nigeria North West Geopolitical Zone

Banditry has had a catastrophic effect on the local populace. Bandits killed at least 6,319 people, kidnapped 3,672 people, and burned more than 500 communities in Zamfara State alone, according to a 2019 report by the Zamfara State government. More than 200,000 people have been displaced due to the activities of the bandits, and more than 35,000 Nigerians have been compelled to relocate to the Niger Republic. This terrorist groups (the Bandits) are said to have killed more Nigerians in 2019 than Boko Haram, robbers, kidnappers, and cultists combined, accounting for 47.5 percent of all violent killings in the country. Media outlets frequently use the phrases 'bandits' and 'terrorists' interchangeably to characterise criminal gangs accused by communities of murders, ransom-driven kidnappings, sexual violence, and other violent crimes in order to emphasize the seriousness of the security situation in the North West (The Republic, 2021).

The operations of this terrorist but diverse bandit groups across the country are jeopardizing agriculture, agro-allied industries, and industrial expansion. Insecurity is already making Nigerian industries even less competitive, resulting in job losses. During crises, there can be no industrialisation. Farming villages around the state of the northwest no longer visit farms because of the threat of bandits and Fulani marauders. Farmers who are the folks that grow the crops and other foods that city dwellers rely on, and who generate some raw materials required by local companies such as edible oil refineries, bakeries, grains and animal feed producers, among others have been displaced by the incessant attacks on their crops, properties and threat of being killed by these terrorist groups.

As long as farmers stay away from their farms for fear of losing their life, local food and raw material production will be harmed, resulting in an extraordinary rise in the price of food and other basic necessities on the markets. Animal husbandry in these areas has also been affected by cattle rustling, forced labour and violence. As a result of the displacement, affected people were unable to rely on self-produced cereals for livelihood. Commercial agriculture has increased the danger of food insecurity for both displaced and non-displaced population. It was estimated that over 70% of the 309,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the northwest are food insecure, with acute malnutrition rates among children estimated to be as high as 18% and 31% in Sokoto and Zamfara, respectively (World Food Programme, WFP, 2019).

Similarly, the on-going multiplying security situations in the Nigeria northwest raise security worries for the nearly 30.6 million people residing in the six impacted states of the geopolitical zone. Since 2016, bandit assaults in Zamfara, Katsina, and Sokoto have been practically daily; causing the Nigerian government to launch several security operations in the northwest. There's a chance you'll be abducted specifically for ransom (Orjiinmo, 2020). Kidnapping, sexual

violence, and abuse, including rape, are all threats to women and girls. As banditry attacks have increased, the afflicted public has expressed scepticism about the army and police's ability to prevent a recurrence of this heinous trend. Residents and survivors in the afflicted states have claimed that when they are attacked, the police and soldiers respond slowly, if at all (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020).

Apart from the deaths and property damage, the crisis has resulted in tense inter-group relations in the affected areas. The Habe-Fulde (Hausa-Fulani) conflict in Zamfara and its vicinity is an example (Bagu & Smith, 2017; Premium Times, 2018). In many sections of the northwest, the crisis has also resulted in a drop in rural productivity, resulting in increased rural poverty and desperation. So far, the government's approach to dealing with the problem has been unduly reactive and combative. Strategic patrol and surveillance, armed reconnaissance, and coordinated aerial reconnaissance and air assaults at specific flashpoints have been part of the military-style reaction. Rather than alleviating the issue, military operations in the North West have resulted in the dispersal of criminal groups in different locations. As a consequence, states like Sokoto and Kebbi which were previously unaffected have recorded insurgency of the bandits over time (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019).

In affirmation, Mohammed (2021) states that kidnapping for ransom has become a lucrative and appealing profession for many in the northwest region of Nigeria, particularly among the region's unemployed teenagers. Many locals complain about how easy armed banditry gangs invade their communities in broad daylight to rustle cattle or kidnap individuals. The kidnapers, on the other hand, are no longer interested in abducting regular villagers. Rather, they understand that assaulting schools and interstate transportation lines generates quicker and more revenue. These have multiplied the security challenges in the region, and by extension, in other parts of the country. Despite government counter responses, this form of security challenge remains unabated and tensions escalating on regular basis.

Government Efforts at Containing Banditry in Nigeria North West Geopolitical Zone

Nigeria national security challenges have taken several dimensions as enthroned into Nigerian security services under the auspices of Buhari-led Federal Government; have used a number of strategies to suppress banditry over the years. Initially, the federal government took a tough stance, sending police and military forces to Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Niger, and Sokoto states. Raids have continued despite the security response, which has fought back attacks, demolished hideouts, and killed and jailed hundreds of bandits. In 2019, the armed bandits and the governors of Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara States reached an agreement. The agreement included disarmament, the release of kidnapped citizens, and bandit pardons (This Day, 2020).

The Nigerian federal and state governments have frequently been rumoured as haven paid ransom to keep victims alive and ensure their release, notwithstanding their denials. Because Nigerian authorities is said to frequently pay ransom to keep victims alive and ensure their release, mass kidnappings have become a major source of cash, and other request such as motorcycles for criminal and extremist groups including the bandits, but it also provides an incentive for these nihilist groups to continue their illicit activities. According to Okoli and Ugwu, (2019), while it is important to continue the military effort against the bandits, the most pressing need for the government at all level is to find a viable strategy for subverting the current social ecology of rural banditry in the focus region. This would entail, among other things, a concerted effort to police the region's diverse forested landscape, the regulation of trans-border activities at the borderlands, the harnessing of the region's transhumance and mining industries, and the management of the region's recent armaments proliferation.

From 2019 to the present, the Nigerian government has initiated a number of military operations in the North-West to combat the banditry threat, including Operation Harbin Kunama and Exercise Sahel Sanity. Exercise Sahel Sanity, which was centred at the Special Army Super Camp IV in Faskari, Katsina State, resulted in the killing of 220 bandits and the rescue of 642 abducted

victims. In Kebbi, Kaduna, Niger, Zamfara, and Katsina states, troops also destroyed 197 bandit enclaves, executed the legendary armed leader known as "Dangote" of the namesake "Dangote Triangle" in Katsina, and detained 335 suspected bandits and 326 illegal miners (Ezigbo, 2020). In July, 2020, the Secretary to the Katsina State Government (SSG), Mustapha Inuwa averred that the Katsina State government spent \$73,000 U.S. Dollars (i.e. N30 million Nigerian Naira) on repentant bandits and livestock rustler amnesty programme before it collapsed. The bandits kept breaking agreements and betraying their obligations to the government (Premium Times, 2020; Abdulrahman, 2020). Despite the government efforts to ameliorate this form of terrorism in the country's northern region, the campaign of violence persists across the region resulting in the adoption of alternative means such as extreme coercion or excessive military forces against the bandits and other criminal groups in the region by the federal government.

CONCLUSION

The extreme violent campaign by the various groups including the Boko Haram, ISWAP, Ansaru terrorist group, armed bandits, Fulani herdsman, among others, have not only affected sustainable means of livelihood of the people but resulted in the loss of several lives and properties. Armed banditry in the northwest has created one of the greatest security challenges to the government and the people of the region. In the face of this security challenge in the region, the government and populace have no option rather than believing that this form of security challenge has gone beyond the mere criminality. Beyond the normal kidnappings for ransom, cattle rustling and armed robbery, the banditry which have diverse group of criminal gangs that are often not connected have created more challenges to the people of the region. This is the main reason the federal government declared the bandits terrorist. Despite this development the federal and state governments in the northwest are yet to combat this security challenge. The activities of the bandit has left no doubt that the government and its security agencies require collective efforts from neighbouring countries, Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger Republics that have also suspected to have provided safe haven for terrorists over the years. Also required is collaboration with foreign allies that seem to be more equipped and tactically ready to help the Nigerian government to counter this form of terrorism. While it is important to continue the military effort against the bandits, the most pressing need for the government at all level is to find a viable strategy for subverting the current social ecology of rural banditry in the region. Among other things, it has become necessary for the federal government and state governments in the northwest region to embark on concerted effort to police the region's diverse forested landscapes, the regulation of trans-border activities or migration at the borderlands, and the harnessing of the region's transhumance and mining industries, and the management of the region's recent armaments proliferation.

Suggested solutions to banditry in Nigeria North West Region

Right and wrong steps taken by the Nigerian government, where negotiations with bandits or criminals are a temporary solution and unrealistic measures of this kind, rather the authority should find a way to educate the illiterate, employ the unemployed and alleviate poverty to make crime unjustifiable, as follows:

- i. Infrastructure development, communication connectivity, and police presence and protection are all critical, especially for rural people in the northwest region of the country.
- ii. Not only that, but the vigilante groups formed in various villages in the northwest to combat the bandits' actions must be professionally trained and well organised by the government in order to function more effectively and help their communities.
- iii. Small arms and light ammunitions must be checked across porous borders in coordination with other countries in the northwest region, but poverty must be drastically reduced in the long run, and provision of adequate education to all citizens must become a government priority.

- iv. Border communities supplied places for the growth of poorly maintained forest reserves, which provided cover and hideouts for armed bandits, as a result of their strategic neglect in terms of socio-economic development. As a result, the government should address issues such as unemployment, poverty, neglect of border towns, and social injustice in order to improve inhabitants' socioeconomic conditions and reduce the temptation to turn to crime as a means of survival in the northwest region of the country.
- v. Government rules that ban politicians from using conflicts for political benefit can control or check the politicisation of conflicts in the state and country.
- vi. Governments at all levels must ensure that adequate security is given across the state in order to protect people's lives and property. To combat security threats in any part of the state, more security personnel (police, army, civil defence, etc.) should be recruited, equipped, and re-energised. Rather than reacting hastily to security threats, operators should be more proactive, efficient, and effective in acquiring intelligence.
- vii. The Federal Government should address the Boko Haram insurgency, rural banditry, militancy, and ethnic militias that exist in most parts of the country, including the northwest region, as a matter of necessity and urgency. These are the origins of violence, conflicts, mercenary influx, gun trafficking, and other forms of lawlessness in the country.
- viii. The duty of crime prevention and control is not solely that of security personnel; in order to create efficient peace and order, all hands must be on desk. As a result, a comprehensive security policy involving the entire community must be implemented as soon as possible in order to effectively combat armed robbery and other crimes that threaten national security, development and growth.

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