

Nigeria at the Edge: Action, Not Rhetoric

By Pat Onukwuli

Nigeria today stands as a fragile porcelain vessel delicately balanced in the hands of a potter intent on shaping a national ideal but distracted by ongoing pressures. The vase is precious; its breakage would be catastrophic. Yet, despite recognizing its value, the potter's grip remains unsteady. This imagery illustrates the nation's deteriorating security landscape, an environment in which a country molded by aspiration is increasingly threatened by those determined to fracture it. The escalation of insecurity across Nigeria, manifesting in insurgency, banditry, targeted religious violence, communal killings, and widespread abductions, has progressed from sporadic disruptions to a systemic national affliction. Communities in the North-West, Christian populations in the Middle Belt, and rural settlements in several states now endure a cycle of violence that has undermined both public confidence and national cohesion. In many of these communities, attacks occur with chilling predictability, often with little or no immediate state intervention. When security forces respond, they frequently do so after the damage has been done, reinforcing the perception that the Government's actions, however well-meaning, remain largely reactive.

Within this context, United States President Donald Trump's recent call for the Nigerian Government to halt what he described as a "Christian genocide" highlights a troubling reality. His remarks, though provocative in tone, reflect a global awareness of Nigeria's worsening security situation. Nigeria, a sovereign state with complex sensitivities regarding foreign commentary, should ideally not need international leaders to remind it of its responsibilities to its citizens. Yet when external actors amplify domestic issues on the world stage, it indicates that the crisis has reached a point where diplomatic silence is no longer possible. Whether one agrees with Trump's characterization or not, the fact that such descriptions have gained international attention warrants serious consideration. The Federal Government's responses have been notable but reactive in timing. President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's recent declaration of a nationwide security emergency, authorizing additional recruitment into the armed forces and police, deploying trained forest guards under the DSS, withdrawing officers from VIP duties for redeployment, and directing improved coordination across security agencies, is significant. The directive for an additional 20,000 police recruits, bringing the total to 50,000, and the explicit mandate to "flush out terrorists and bandits from the forests," were emphasized in the recent State House statement. Again, Tinubu's pledge to support state-level security formations and promote legislation for autonomous State Police is commendable, signaling a potentially significant shift away from centralized policing. Nigeria's vast terrain and diverse demographics continue to reveal the weaknesses of a single command structure. If well designed and protected from political interference, State Police could offer quicker response times, enhance local intelligence, and help restore community trust. These measures, at least in principle, signal a strengthened government commitment. However, Nigerians have heard similar announcements from past administrations. The ongoing insecurity shows that rhetoric alone cannot eliminate deeply rooted threats. A key question, therefore, is: Does Nigeria have the political will to address insurgency, terrorism, and banditry at their source, including identifying, exposing, and prosecuting their sponsors?

Insurgency in Nigeria has never been solely an ideological issue. It is upheld by financial networks, arms supply chains, political enablers, and opportunistic actors whose vested interests thrive amid chaos. For far too long, inquiries into the financiers of terrorism have remained confined to theory, never advancing into actionable scrutiny. Public

reports of "high-profile financiers" have rarely led to publicly disclosed prosecutions. As long as these networks remain intact, security forces will find themselves combating symptoms rather than the root causes. Nigeria must shift from tactical responses to strategic dismantling, which demands not only intelligence capabilities but also a staunch political will to pursue the truth, regardless of whose interests it may threaten. The Government's repeated dependence on negotiations with terrorist groups further complicates this situation. The recent release of abducted schoolgirls, confirmed by both the Inspector General of Police and the Presidential Spokesperson, Bayo Onanuga, reignited longstanding public unease. While negotiations may offer immediate relief for vulnerable individuals, they inevitably entail longer-term costs. Terrorist organizations exploit such engagements to legitimize their tactics, often using them for financial gain, recruitment, and increased bargaining leverage.

In Greek mythology, efforts to mollify Ares, the god of implacable warfare, invariably proved counterproductive; each concession only intensified his fury and widened the scope of conflict. The ancients cautioned accordingly that he who accommodates destructive forces merely widens their dominion. Thus, negotiating with violent non-state actors risks creating a cycle in which abduction and kidnapping continue to become lucrative, and the state unintentionally funds the mechanisms that undermine its authority.



If the Government sincerely believes it lacks the present capacity to confront these groups through force, then an honest national dialogue is required. It must acknowledge its limitations and welcome international support from partners, including the United States, which has expressed readiness to assist. Sovereignty is not diminished by collaboration aimed at safeguarding citizens; rather, it is strengthened when leadership prioritizes security over political optics.

Despite these systemic challenges, it remains essential to acknowledge the bravery of the country's armed forces, police officers, and intelligence operatives. These individuals operate in demanding conditions, often with limited resources and under constant threat. Many have made the ultimate sacrifice; many more continue to demonstrate steadfast dedication. Their contributions form the backbone of national security, and any sustainable reform must be anchored in improved welfare, training, equipment, and operational coordination.

Nigeria remains that precious clay jar in the hands of its potter, which should be shaped into form by national unity and fired into strength by the furnace of patriotism. Yet even the most skilled potter cannot mould a durable amphora while ignoring fractures. This moment requires structural intervention: political resolve, operational competence, transparency in security expenditure, and a collective national commitment to justice. The country cannot continue its precarious dance at the precipice of escalating insecurity. The winds are rising, the ground is unstable, and the consequences of a national fall would be severe and enduring. The imperative is clear. Nigeria must act with resolve. It must act with integrity. And it must act now. Only decisive action will prevent the fragile vessel from slipping irretrievably from the potter's hands.

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“Betrayal of Nigerians” — House of Reps Condemns FG for Negotiating with Bandits Over Abducted Students

The House of Representatives has condemned the Federal Government for negotiating with bandits to secure the release of 24 students abducted from Government Girls Comprehensive Secondary School, Maga, in Kebbi State. The lawmakers, under the coalition “House to the Rescue,” said the government’s engagement with kidnapers, disclosed by President Bola Tinubu’s aide, Mr Bayo Onanuga, amounted to a betrayal of Nigerians and undermined national security. The condemnation followed a special plenary session on Tuesday, during which members decried rising insecurity and the daily fear faced by citizens as kidnapers and bandits operate with seeming impunity. In a statement signed by representatives from all six geopolitical zones, the group said, “The House to the Rescue unequivocally condemns the Federal Government’s ongoing negotiations with bandits and criminal networks responsible for the wave of kidnappings tearing through Nigeria. “At a time when citizens are crying out for protection, the government has chosen to sit at the same table with those who abduct children, violate women, terrorize communities, and undermine the authority of the Nigerian state.”

The lawmakers criticized Tinubu’s approach to security, saying, “This is not leadership. This is an abdication of responsibility.” They added, “In recent weeks, Nigerians had endured fresh kidnappings in Kano, Kwara, Kebbi and other states, while communities remained vulnerable and traumatised. Instead of decisive action, they said, the Federal Government had offered “silence, excuses, and back-door concessions to violent groups. “No functioning nation rewards criminality with dialogue. Negotiation with bandits has never worked anywhere.” Citing international examples, the lawmakers warned that negotiations with violent non-state actors had failed elsewhere. Citing examples from around the world, the lawmakers noted that in Colombia, “Talks with the Revolutionary Armed Forces emboldened kidnapers, increased ransom operations, and strengthened the group militarily.” They added that in Mexico, “back-channel contacts with cartels worsened kidnapping rates, empowered gangs, and created a security collapse from which Mexico still suffers.” In Afghanistan, they argued that concessions to the Taliban, “including prisoner swaps—allowed the group to regroup and eventually overthrow the entire government.” They further warned



that in Somalia, “Engagement with warlords only deepened the conflict and gave militias space to expand,” while in Mali, “deals with jihadist/bandit groups allowed them to spread violence into neighboring countries.”

The lawmakers cautioned the Federal Government that “Negotiating with violent non-state actors leads to more violence, not peace. Nigeria is not an exception.” The House members argued that engaging bandits in dialogue legitimizes criminality, encourages further kidnappings, and erodes public trust in security agencies. They added that this approach had created “a dangerous business model where abductors take citizens and wait for government representatives to arrive with negotiations instead of force.” The lawmakers demanded that the Federal Government immediately halt all negotiations with bandits, launch intelligence-driven operations to rescue victims, and publish a clear national security strategy with accountability mechanisms.

They also called for full National Assembly oversight of officials involved in unauthorized talks with criminals. They said the approach created “a dangerous business model where abductors take citizens and wait for government representatives to negotiate instead of facing law enforcement.” The statement was

signed by Muhammed Soba (North West), Zakari Mohammed (North Central), Olasupo Abiodun (South West), Sadiq Ibrahim (North East), Uko Nkole (South East), and Bassey Ewa (South South). Also the United Nations has strongly condemned a surge in mass kidnappings across north-central Nigeria, calling on authorities to take immediate measures to halt the attacks and bring the perpetrators to justice. “We are shocked at the recent surge in mass abductions in north-central Nigeria,” UN rights office spokesman Thameen Al-Kheetan said in Geneva. “We urge Nigerian authorities at all levels to take all lawful measures to ensure such vile attacks are stopped and those responsible are held accountable.” The remarks come as the abduction of hundreds of Nigerians—including nearly 350 schoolchildren in just days—has reignited urgent concerns over the country’s persistent security crisis. “At least 402 people, mostly schoolchildren, have been abducted in Niger, Kebbi, Kwara, and Borno states since November 17,” Kheetan said, noting that only 88 have reportedly been freed or escaped