

HEIGHTENED INSECURITY

Kidnapping and Killing escalates State of Emergency, Now!

*Nigerians beg FG



Incidents and acts of killings, kidnappings, banditry and criminality are now daily affairs as we can see and read both on the news and social media. These acts have not only become rampant across the different states in the country, they are fast eroding the security of lives and properties. No part of the country is safe as the criminal have become so daring that they now operate in broad day light on our major roads, homes and even in offices. They strike at any time and leave behind them a trail of bloodshed after bolting away with their loots and victims. Our Security Agencies comprising the Armed Forces and Nigeria Police appeared to be helpless as the situation has

gone beyond their control. 74-year-old Emir of Gobir in Gawata town of Sokoto state, Alhaji Isah Muhammad Bawa was abducted by bandits on Sabon Birni road last month alongside his biological son on his way to his native town of Sabon Birni, near the border with Niger, after attending a meeting in Sokoto. His abductors demanded N1b ransom while they tortured and dehumanized him. The traditional ruler, in a viral video, was shown tied up by his abductors, pleading with the state government, his friends, brothers and sisters to pay the ransom to the bandits for his release. When he couldn't pay the ransom after about three weeks in captivity, his abductors eventually killed him and when his family members requested his corpse,

the bandits again demanded N60 million and six motorbikes as ransom.

The incident triggered a nationwide outrage as people expressed shock at the inability of the security agencies to rescue the abducted monarch as negotiation for his ransom was going on until he was eventually killed by his abductors. According to a concerned citizen whose reaction trended online throughout last week, "all these were going on, yet we have, DSS, NIA, EFCC, ICPC, Army, Navy, Air force and other paramilitary agencies, we have ministers of communication, telecommunications, information and others that have access to service providers. In fact, we have Minister Bosun Tijani who they hyped and over-hyped as a computer guru. The kidnappers were discussing on the phone with the family of the kidnapped emir just as they've been doing all over the country. So if we can't track calls made by kidnappers and know their location in this modern era, what's the use of communication, telecommunications, information and other nonsense ministries?"

From the north to the South, the east, and the west of the country, the story is the same. Thousands of the citizens have been kidnapped with their abductors communicating with their families using mobile phones to negotiate for ransom. Yet, the security agencies have been unable to track down the kidnappers.

Recently in Delta state, a young man who had gone to his farmland in Onitsah-Ugbo was kidnapped. In this case, Saturday Vanguard gathered that during the interaction between the kidnappers

and relatives of the young man, the kidnappers demanded N18 million. Unfortunately, after payment of the ransom, relatives found the abducted man dead at the designated point where they were to pick him up. To date, his abductors are yet to be tracked through the phone used. Also, on Thursday, August 15, 2024, 20 medical students from the University of Maiduguri and the University of Jos were abducted along the Otukpo-Enugu highway on their way to the Federation of Catholic Medical and Dental Students (FECAMDS) Annual Convention in Enugu State. For several days before their eventual release, the kidnappers were communicating with their relatives, demanding a ransom of N50 million for their release. Although the medical students were released after spending nine days in captivity, with security agents claiming that no ransom was paid, the larger concern remains the apparent lapses in detecting the location of the kidnappers and arresting them. The fact that

the students were held captive for some time without the authorities being able to track down the kidnappers raises serious questions about the effectiveness of the security agencies' intelligence gathering and response mechanisms. The sheer audacity of the kidnappers, striking in the full glare of other road users, is not only a stark reminder of the utter disregard for human dignity that has become the hallmark of these criminal elements but also an indictment of our security apparatus..

Many Nigerians are of the view that the focus should shift from the ransom aspect to addressing the glaring gaps in the security system that allowed the kidnappers to operate undetected and unchecked. In a tragic incident that underscores the persistent threat of extremism in northeastern Nigeria, at least 100 villagers were brutally killed by suspected Boko Haram militants. The attack, which took place in Maiduguri, saw gunmen open fire on a local market, places of worship, and



residents' homes, leaving a trail of devastation. This latest act of violence is part of Nigeria's long-standing battle against Boko Haram, one of Africa's most notorious terrorist groups. Known for targeting civilians, markets, and religious sites, Boko Haram's reign of terror has claimed thousands of lives over the past decade, making it one of the deadliest conflicts on the continent. Local residents reported the attack on Wednesday the 4th of September, expressing shock and despair over the scale of the assault. Despite ongoing military operations aimed at dismantling the extremist group, Boko Haram continues to wreak havoc across the region, exploiting weak security measures and vulnerable communities. Efforts by the Nigerian government to combat insurgency in the northeast have met with limited success, as the insurgents frequently launch surprise attacks on villages and towns. Human rights organizations have called for increased international support to assist in the fight against extremism, improve security, and

Further findings revealed the seeming indifference of security agents in the fight against kidnapping showed that some were deliberately withdrawing even when given directives. Interaction with most of them revealed that they were reluctant to go after the kidnappers because of the significant risks involved and the limited technology available to support their efforts. Pursuing kidnappers, according to them, often requires venturing into dangerous forests and remote areas, where the risk of ambush, injury, or even death is high. Furthermore, they complained that policemen are often deployed to these high-risk missions without adequate resources, including specialized allowances, vehicles and equipment. One of them, an Inspector, said: "Policemen are frequently forced to spend days in the forest without proper support or infrastructure, relying on basic survival skills and makeshift arrangements to carry out their duties."

provide much-needed relief to victims. This horrific attack highlights the urgent need for a renewed focus on security and peacekeeping efforts in the region to prevent further loss of innocent lives.

A new report released by a security intelligence gathering and strategic consulting firm, SBM Intelligence, has revealed that Nigerians paid N1.04 billion as ransom to kidnappers in one year. The report indicated that a total of 7,568 individuals were abducted across the country during this period. SBM Intelligence, a prominent geopolitical research consultancy focused on Africa, highlighted the severity of the kidnapping crisis in Nigeria in its report titled "Grim Reaping." The report notes that although kidnappers initially demanded N11 billion in ransoms, only a fraction—N1.048 billion—was actually paid. It attributes the rise in kidnapping for ransom to the country's economic challenges, which have led kidnappers to target a broader range of victims. The report also emphasizes that the ransom payments reflect the financial capabilities of victims' families rather than their negotiating prowess. The Federal Capital Territory (FCT) recorded the highest ransom demands, with Lagos and Kaduna following closely. The Southeast region was noted for having the highest amount of ransom paid and the most successful collections. Additionally, the report highlighted a troubling trend where kidnappers demand in-kind payments, such as food, drinks, cigarettes, or motorcycles, depending on the region. Zamfara, Kaduna, and Katsina states reported the highest number of kidnapping incidents and victims, with Zamfara alone recording 132 incidents involving 1,639 victims. The report also revealed that kidnapping has become increasingly lethal, with 1,056 deaths recorded in 1,130 incidents over the past year. The report further underscores that while the southern regions of Nigeria have seen only a modest increase in kidnapping incidents, the northern regions have experienced a sharp escalation in such crimes. Women have also been increasingly targeted in these abductions. The report read: "Of the 1,130 reported kidnapping cases, Zamfara, Kaduna, and Katsina have the highest numbers of incidents and victims. Zamfara recorded 132 incidents with 1,639 victims, Kaduna had 113 incidents with 1,113 victims, and Katsina reported 119 incidents with 887 victims. "These three states also have the highest number of civilian deaths. In the year under review in this report, kidnapping has become more lethal, with 1,056 people killed in 1,130 reported kidnap incidents. "In that same period, kidnappers demanded at least the sum of ₦10,995,090,000 (approximately \$6,871,931) as ransom but received ₦1,048,110,000, a mere 9.5% of the

money demanded, indicating that kidnappers have become less targeted in their victim logy. "When comparing geopolitical zones, the South-East has the highest ransom paid and collection rate overall. "This year, as in previous years, kidnappers have continued to demand in-kind payments from victims' families, ranging from food, drinks, and cigarettes in the South to motorcycles in the North.

The Nigeria Police Force, being the leading security agency in Nigeria, launched Intelligence-led Policing in 2015, with the installation of a tracking device that was installed by the then-Inspector-General of Police office, Solomon Arase. Real-time tracking devices like GPS trackers or cell phone trackers provide critical information during an investigation, such as the location where a kidnapping occurred or the route taken by the kidnappers. There was also the Operation unit code-named Intelligence Response Team (still in operation) which monitored the kidnappers' movements in real-time, with the information from the device, thereby helping them stay one step ahead. This device also helped investigators analyze the locations and patterns of calls made by the kidnappers, the routes, and potential safe houses. In addition, the device provided valuable evidence, such as call records, location data and communication patterns, to build a strong case against the kidnappers. The device helped in arresting many kidnappers through calls made from their dens while negotiating for ransom. One such arrest was that of the five kidnappers of former Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Chief Olu Falae, who was taken captive by the herdsmen on September 21, 2015, during his 77th birthday. In this case, five of the kidnappers came to pick up the N5 million ransoms in Suleja, Niger State. One of the senior police officers who affected the breakthrough told Saturday Vanguard that; "immediately the kidnappers removed the SIM card used to negotiate, we knew where they were and intercepted them at the last bridge to Minna. The ransom money they collected was still in the boot and the SIM card. Five of them were arrested. The motorcycle they used to convey Chief Olu Falae was retrieved. The N5 million ransoms were marked by the bank. They removed only N100, 000 from it. The kidnappers were sentenced to life imprisonment"

What went wrong

Asked what went wrong with the system put in place to monitor the locations of kidnappers and interception of calls for prompt arrest and rescue of abducted victims, the retired senior officer attributed it to the priority of successive Inspectors General of

Police. His words: "The priority of successive IGPs was quite different. Solomon Arase set up the platform when he was the IGP. It was a technical platform to track calls. It was mounted in the IGP's office then and only one officer, who is now an AIG, had access to the technical platform. The Intelligence Response Team, IRT was supposed to be the operational wing that would work with the technical platform. When the technical team got information, it would pass it to IRT to go to the location and make an arrest. Drones and vehicles were bought for the operation. "But successive IGPs who were analogues didn't know what to do. They merged the technical platform and IRT. Instead of the platform being used for crime prevention, it became political. People in the National Assembly and Villa got hold of the platform and used it to track their enemies and mistresses. For such a platform, you don't give both the technical and the operational units to just one person who would be compromised by politicians. That was the beginning of the collapse of the platform. It requires someone with power and intelligence, someone of a strategic level who is keen on that line. "This platform was supposed to be renewed and hooked up with the service provider. But that was never the priority of successive IGPs. They had money to pay for the accumulated subscription but they refused to pay. When you leave such a system for more than one year, it requires recalibration. This technology keeps evolving.

You can't say something you set up today will be used the same way for 10 years without being upgraded. Before long, the system broke down, and the functionality of the Police tracking equipment began to diminish and subsequently went comatose. The tracker, particularly, became non-functional due to non-subscription as well as failure to engage the relevant company to carry out required system upgrades. Due to the failure to pay subscription fees for about three years, and after a grace period had expired, the company overseeing its maintenance and upgrade decided to withdraw its services. This made it difficult to track bandits, kidnappers, and other forms of violent crimes", he stated.

However, Saturday Vanguard gathered that the present IGP, Kayode Egbetokun, reactivated the tracking device. However, despite its reactivation, in addition to the tracking devices of the DSS and Office of the National Security Adviser, ONSA, kidnappers are still having their way without being tracked in many parts of the country. They are still not getting it right.

Further findings revealed the seeming indifference of security agents in the fight against kidnapping showed that some were deliberately withdrawing even when given directives. Interaction with most of them revealed that they were reluctant to go after the kidnappers because of the significant risks involved and the limited technology available to support their efforts. Pursuing kidnappers, according to them, often requires venturing into dangerous forests and remote areas, where the risk of ambush, injury, or even death is high. Furthermore, they complained that policemen are often deployed to these high-risk missions without adequate resources, including specialized allowances, vehicles and equipment. One of them, an Inspector, said: "Policemen are

frequently forced to spend days in the forest without proper support or infrastructure, relying on basic survival skills and makeshift arrangements to carry out their duties."

Many Rank and Files from different State Police Commands expressed frustration due to what they described as the lack of recognition and rewards for their hard work and dedication in combating kidnappings. They said that unless a policeman has connections with high-ranking officers, their efforts go unnoticed and unrewarded. One of them from the Edo State Police Command, who was among those who rounded up kidnappers that attacked a sub-station of the Nigerian Railway Corporation, in Igueben, Edo State, in January 2023, where scores of passengers were abducted, lamented that they were edged out of the recent IGP awards. He alleged that an officer who never participated in the operation that led to the arrest of the kidnappers and rescue of the victims took the shine off them. *Another Police Inspector from the Enugu State Police Command said, "Kidnapping is being politicized. The federal government should demonstrate the political will to address the issue instead of endangering the lives of security operatives. Its approach to tackling kidnapping has been inadequate and the lives of security personnel are being put at risk due to lack of proper resources and support. "Response to kidnapping has been influenced by political considerations, with some cases being prioritized over others due to the social status or political connections of the victims", he said.*

Others argue that the politicization of kidnapping has hindered the effectiveness of security operations and has led to the unnecessary loss of lives. Most of them called on the government to take a more comprehensive and apolitical approach to addressing the issue of kidnapping, one that prioritizes the safety and well-being of all citizens and security personnel.

Further interaction with the policemen showed that another major cause for the seeming lack of motivation among policemen to go after kidnappers through tracking of calls is compounded by the fact that investigation demands money, creating a significant barrier to effective crime-solving. The process of tracking devices, according to police sources, is particularly cumbersome, as the necessary equipment is often only available at the Force headquarters, Abuja, and the Department of State Services (DSS). To confront the reality of the situation, most security agents from various government agencies emphasized to our reporters that welfare is a critical concern requiring immediate attention.

A key issue, according to them, is providing adequate support to families of those who die in the line of duty. To address this, they proposed that children of deceased policemen should receive scholarships for higher education up to the university level, enabling them to achieve academic goals and secure a brighter future. The majority of policemen suggested that children of deceased policemen interested in joining the police force should receive automatic employment. A Sergeant from the Lagos State Police Command said, "In December 2020, Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu compensated the families of six police officers killed in the state during EndSARS with N10 million

each. This is the type of compensation we need. We heard that an IGP proposed awarding scholarships to children of rank and file, but we haven't heard anything about it since."

However, a senior Police officer revealed that kidnappers have devised a new method to evade detection, using their victims' phones to make calls and communicate with families and friends. This tactic according to him has made it increasingly difficult for security agents to track and apprehend the kidnappers, as call tracking devices are no longer effective. The officer emphasized the need for alternative tracking devices and technologies to combat this new strategy, stressing that relying solely on call trackers is insufficient. He urged for the deployment of more advanced technologies, such as GPS tracking and digital forensics, to stay ahead of the kidnappers and ensure the safe rescue of victims.

Additionally, the officer suggested that security agencies need to invest in other tracking devices that can detect and locate kidnappers through other means, such as IP addresses, social media activity, and online transactions among other devices. Nigerians are of the view that it is no longer enough to simply react to kidnapping incidents after they have occurred. Rather, the need for security agencies to adopt a more proactive approach by using improved modern-day technology to track and apprehend kidnappers before they strike was echoed from different sectors of society. This can be achieved through the deployment of advanced surveillance systems, data analytics, and intelligence-gathering techniques that can help identify and locate potential kidnappers.

Furthermore, the Federal Government must demonstrate the political will to tackle the menace of kidnapping headlong, by addressing its root causes such as poverty, unemployment, and social inequality, to prevent the scourge from continuing to ravage the country. Many times, people have wondered how the kidnappers and other bandits who are causing untold mayhem in the country, manage to get away, even after they are captured on videos, recorded on other devices and most of all when they

make contact with their victims' families.

Senate President of the Nigerian Association of Nigerian Students, NANS, Henry Okunomo has expressed deep worry that in this age of tech advancement and the height Nigeria has attained in technological development, kidnappers could make contact with a victim's families without being rounded up by security agents the next minute. A worried Okunomo who appeared on television recently to discuss the issue of his abducted colleagues, appeared frustrated and clearly expressed dissatisfaction with the way security agencies are handling the matter. He said: "I am not satisfied with the way security agencies are going about the matter. The government cannot tell me there is no other way this kidnapping thing can be nipped in the bud. After all, there are several measures already in place, why are they not working?"

The measures Okunomo was referring to, included the SIM card registration which the Nigerian Communications Commission, NCC carried out in 2011; the Nigerian Identity Number, NIN enrolment, which the National Identity Management Commission, NIMC began in 2015; the NIN-SIM Registration exercise which the Federal government carried out in 2020, involving the NCC, NIMC and the Central Bank of Nigeria, CBN; and even the NigComSat-1R Communications satellite which the country shot into the orbit since 2012. These measures, according to the government, were mainly to improve National Security by strengthening the capacity of Law Enforcement Agencies to tackle criminal use of mobile phones by checkmating activities of criminals. They were also to help simplify verification process and thus enable more secure transactions and interactions using mobile devices boosting confidence and participation in the digital economy; and also to improve governance and service delivery by providing accurate data for policymaking, facilitate secure access to E-government services online, as well as aiding in the implementation of social programs. However, despite all these

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measures, bandits, and kidnappers operate recklessly. Victims' accounts at different times suggest that either the measures are not effective or someone in a position of taking action is complicit in the crimes.

In Zamfara State, a kidnap victim, Mallam Yushau Jangeme, was reported to have said security agents in his village, Jangeme, did nothing to trace the telephone calls of the bandits who kidnapped him. According to the publication, Jangeme said, at the time bandits kidnapped seven people in his village and he was contacted to bring ransom before they could be freed. According to him, when he got to the forest to give kidnappers N1.4m out of N3m demanded, they detained him, saying he must bring the remaining N1.6m. All these happened irrespective of him having made available the phone numbers of his kidnappers to security agents before heading into the bush. Everywhere, the story is the same. A public affairs commentator, Mr Chike Ogbu, who also expressed dissatisfaction with the way security agents are handling the case of the abducted medical students, said he could not understand the sense of SIM registration or its link with NIN when people could make ransom calls and not getting arrested with all the data that were supposed to accrue from the registrations. He said: "We have had all manner of SIM activity registrations in this country.

We have had Identity registrations and we have a communications satellite. Which one of them is not functioning or which agency of government is not releasing sensitive information necessary for picking these renegades? What is actually the problem, or are our security agents complicit?" he queried. One of the reasons the NCC took a hard stance on the deadline for NIN-SIM linkage was to fulfill its objective to clean the country's SIM ownership database and ensure that criminals could not take advantage of having multiple unlinked SIMs to carry out their nefarious activities. Yet, the situation appeared not to have abated. But the Commission insists the fault is not from its end. A top official at the Commission who craved anonymity told Saturday Vanguard: "Yes, we were adamant on the deadline of the NIN-SIM linkage because of several dangerous security trends we discovered. Our resolve hinged on the need to close in on the chaos of untoward ownership of multiple SIM cards with unverified NIN details. We had instances where a single individual had over 10,000 lines linked to his NIN. In some cases, we have seen a single person with 1,000 lines, some 3,000 plus lines. What were they doing with these lines? "From our interim findings, the owners of these lines did not purchase them for decent purposes or to undertake legitimate activities. We gave them enough time to make the decision of which of their lines they wanted to keep and discard the others. They did not. All lines in this category with unverified NINs were barred. "On the issue of kidnappers making calls to victims' families without being traced, I don't think that power is residual in our hands. What we know is that whatever supports the security agents have sought from us, as far as the national security question is concerned, we have always given to the best of our ability. Our duty is not to track and arrest people who make calls rightly or wrongly the source added.

Also, a reliable satellite Engineer at the Nigerian

Communications Satellite Company, NIGCOMSAT LTD, who didn't want his name mentioned, told Saturday Vanguard that the onus of taking action on whatever the communications satellite reveals, in terms of crimes, is squarely at the doorsteps of the security agencies, adding that, the door of the company has always been open to them for valuable information that aid their operations He said: "One of the misconceptions about our satellite is people believing that it will snap photos or record videos of crime scenes and send them to security agents, but that is not how it works. "Although NigComSat -1R is a communications satellite, it is not equipped with cameras. It gathers data and digital footprints which on demand, we usually make available to security agencies that can also read and interpret them effectively. So people should not think that because crimes are happening unabated, the satellite is not working or performing its duties" he added.

The report by Beacon Consulting, a firm specializing in security risk management, stated that between May and December 2023, 5,802 were killed while 2,754 were kidnapped. A Recent report has revealed that no fewer than 13,346 people have been killed and 9,207 abducted nationwide since President Bola Tinubu assumed office on May 29, 2023. The report stated that the increase in violence crimes, affecting 667 out of 774 local government areas in the country, is linked to terrorism, banditry, farmer-herder conflicts, and other social disturbances. The report by Beacon Consulting, a firm specializing in security risk management, stated that between May and December 2023, 5,802 were killed while 2,754 were kidnapped. According to the report, the situation deteriorated further in 2024, with 7,544 deaths and 6,453 abductions reported from January to September. Experts are increasingly concerned about the persistent security challenges and are calling for more decisive measures from President Tinubu. "The security crisis is severe," security analyst Nnamdi Chive told PUNCH, adding that, "Economic hardship has exacerbated the problem, adding to an already critical situation." During a security and peace summit hosted by the North-West Governors Forum in Katsina State in July, President Tinubu characterized the ongoing insecurity, particularly in the North-West, as "inherited security compromises." He said that current banditry and insurgency issues were partly due to historical grievances of conflict-affected communities. Despite these insights, experts argue that a more effective strategy is needed. Chive stressed the importance of securing Nigeria's borders, stating, "National security involves effectively protecting your borders. "The North-East and North-West borders need better control to prevent foreign elements from destabilizing local communities." Reviewing President Tinubu's government approach since taking office, Chive noted some successes, such as the return of displaced persons to Borno State. However, he pointed out that insurgents are adapting by moving their operations to new areas. Security expert Colonel Yomi Dare also highlighted the impact of economic hardship and corruption on the security crisis. "Economic difficulties have worsened the situation, compounding an already dire predicament," he said.

By Evelyn Usman and Prince Osuagwu (Vanguard) and additional reports