

Wanted: A State of Emergency on Banditry and Kidnapping

by Mukhtar Ya'u Madobi

Despite the concerted efforts of Nigeria's security forces, with commendable support from the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA), Malam Nuhu Ribadu, the country continues to face unprecedented security challenges, with banditry and kidnapping wreaking havoc across several states. This escalating violence perpetrated by armed groups has reached a critical point, prompting the Center for Crisis Communication (CCC) to issue a clarion call, urging the federal government to declare a state of emergency on banditry and kidnapping. The Chairman of the Center, Major General Chris Olukolade (rtd), in a press statement issued in late August, expressed concern that the situation might degenerate into a major crisis if left unchecked, as it endangers innocent lives and undermines national security. Furthermore, the retired General noted that the kidnapping epidemic has evolved from sporadic criminal activity into a full-blown lucrative industry, with individuals and bandit/terrorist groups adopting it as a primary source of revenue, despite security measures. "Just recently, the nation was jolted by the killing of a traditional ruler in Sokoto Emirate who was earlier abducted on his way home by bandits. A few days before his eventual death at the hands of his captors, the monarch was seen in a video pleading for his life. "Equally saddening is the report that days after the death of the traditional ruler in the hands of merciless abductors, the bandits regrouped, stormed communities in the same axis, and reportedly abducted about 150 people! Those folks are still in the hands of the bandits," Olukolade was quoted as saying.



It can be recalled that the late Alhaji Isah Bawa, of blessed memory, the Emir of Gobir in Gawata town of Sokoto state, was kidnapped on July 29 alongside his son and six others on the Sokoto-Sabon Birni Road. Regardless of prejudice, it is clear that this proposal by the CCC underscores the severity of the crisis, the systemic gaps in security, and the urgency of deploying extraordinary measures to restore peace and stability. In recent years, Nigeria has witnessed a surge in insecurity, particularly in the northern and central regions. Bandits have laid siege to

rural communities, engaging in mass abductions, killings, and violent raids. Kidnapping, initially a localized menace, has evolved into a lucrative criminal enterprise, targeting everyone from schoolchildren to prominent politicians and traditional rulers. Several reports indicate that tens of thousands of Nigerians have been killed, and millions displaced, as entire regions are subjected to the terror of bandits who operate with seeming impunity. For example,

according to data sourced from the National Security Tracker (NST), an initiative of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), and the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 3,841 Nigerians were reported to have been killed by non-state actors, while 4,243 others were kidnapped in 2023. Meanwhile, the economic impact of this violence is equally devastating. Agricultural activities have been crippled, trade routes disrupted, and entire communities forced to abandon their homes and livelihoods. Beyond the immediate human toll, the long-term consequences of this insecurity are far-reaching, potentially eroding the country's social fabric and threatening national unity. It is worth noting that the Nigerian government, through its security forces, has made significant strides in addressing insecurity. The military, police, and paramilitary forces, supported by the ONSA, have launched various operations aimed at dislodging bandits from their hideouts, particularly in states like Zamfara, Kaduna, Niger, and Katsina, while equally targeting insurgents in the Northeast region. Joint operations with intelligence agencies and the use of aerial bombardments have led to the capture or neutralization of several key bandit leaders. Recently, Nigeria's Defence Headquarters revealed how the military eliminated Kachalla Fadama, Ameer Modu, and four other wanted terrorist kingpins in August 2024.

However, despite these efforts, the situation remains dire. In many cases, bandits have regrouped, adopting more sophisticated tactics and exploiting ungoverned spaces to evade security forces. The porous nature of Nigeria's borders, coupled with the influx of illicit arms, has further exacerbated the problem. Many critics argue that while security forces have shown commendable prowess, the



One of the critical components of the CCC's call is the need for an enhanced strategy among Nigeria's security agencies. While individual military and police units have made progress, the lack of seamless collaboration often undermines the overall impact of security operations. In many cases, intelligence sharing is either delayed or hampered by inter-agency rivalry, allowing bandits and kidnapers to operate with greater freedom. Thus, the CCC recommends a significant investment in technology to enhance intelligence gathering and equally suggests greater responsibility and accountability from the security forces. No doubt, a state of emergency would enable the creation of a unified command structure, bringing together

scale and complexity of the insecurity challenge demand more decisive and extraordinary measures. The CCC's call for a state of emergency on banditry and kidnapping is not just a rhetorical plea; it reflects a growing consensus among security experts, civil society organizations, and the general public that Nigeria needs to go beyond conventional responses. A state of emergency, if declared, would enable the government to adopt extraordinary security measures, including the temporary suspension of certain civil liberties, the deployment of additional military assets, and the establishment of special tribunals to expedite the prosecution of bandits and kidnapers. As stipulated by the Nigerian Constitution, a state of emergency grants the President sweeping powers to restore order in times of grave national crises. Under Section 305 of the Federal Constitution of Nigeria, the president can issue a proclamation of emergency where there is a breakdown of public order and safety, or where there is an imminent danger to the federation. In the case of banditry and kidnapping, both conditions are met. Section 305 provides: "Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, the president may by instrument published in the official Gazette of the Government of the Federation issue a proclamation of a state of emergency in the Federation or any part thereof." However, declaring a state of emergency is not without its political and legal implications. Critics may argue that such a move could be seen as a failure of the government's current security strategies, while others may fear the potential abuse of emergency powers. There is also the risk of undermining democratic governance, particularly if emergency powers are extended indefinitely. To mitigate these risks, the federal government must work closely with the National Assembly, state governors, and civil society groups to ensure transparency and accountability in the implementation of emergency measures. Clear timelines, objectives, and oversight mechanisms should be established to ensure that the state of emergency is both effective and limited in scope.

all security and intelligence units under a single operational framework. This could include establishing special task forces, with the mandate to focus exclusively on kidnapping and banditry, and equipping them with the resources and intelligence needed to root out criminal networks. Nevertheless, beyond military solutions, there is a growing consensus that Nigeria must address the root causes of insecurity. Banditry and kidnapping, while driven by criminal elements, are also symptoms of deeper socio-economic issues. Widespread poverty, unemployment, and the marginalization of rural communities have created fertile ground for armed groups to recruit followers. Declaring a state of emergency should, therefore, go hand-in-hand with socio-economic interventions aimed at addressing these underlying issues. Programs that promote youth empowerment, job creation, and access to education are crucial in reducing the appeal of banditry. Equally important is the need for rural development, improved infrastructure, and access to basic services such as healthcare and clean water in affected regions. Presently, Nigeria is at a crossroads in its fight against banditry and kidnapping. While security forces have demonstrated considerable prowess, the sheer scale of the crisis demands extraordinary measures. The CCC's call for a state of emergency is both timely and necessary.

However, the success of such a declaration will depend on the government's ability to balance military action with socio-economic development, uphold the rule of law, and ensure the protection of human rights. The road to peace may be long, but with the right policies and the political will to act decisively, Nigeria can overcome the scourge of banditry and kidnapping, securing a brighter future for its citizens.

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