

BANDITRY AND CRISIS OF PUBLIC SAFETY IN NIGERIA: ISSUES IN NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGICS

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Abstract

This paper examines the phenomenon of banditry in relation to contemporary crisis of public safety in Nigeria. Relying on exegesis of relevant secondary sources, the paper posits that banditry constitutes a serious threat to Nigeria's public safety and, by extension, national security. The paper recommends, among other things, a Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) approach to policing as a means of addressing the rising prevalence of banditry in Nigeria.

Keywords: Banditry, public safety; national security; armed robbery; kidnapping

Introduction

Banditry means occurrence or prevalence of armed robbery or violent crime. It involves the use of force, or threat to that effect, to intimidate a person with the intent to rob rape or kill. Banditry is a crime against persons. It has been a common genre of crime, as well as cause violence in contemporary societies (Nigeria Watch, 2011).

The prevalence of banditry in Nigeria appears to have been high and rising over the years. According to Rotberg (2007:33), "crime against persons, including murder, rape, and robbery has grown in scale and viciousness in Nigeria since 1999". This has been demonstrated by the pervasive trend of armed robbery in the country, which in effect mirrors the Africa-wide experience. In this regard, Onimode:

Car snatching robbery of homes and offices, way-laying of travellers (high-way robbery) are common forms of armed robbery in African countries. Their incidence has been rising since the African crises started in the 1980s (2001:37).

In this paper, an attempt is made to interrogate the phenomenon of armed robbery with a view to underscoring its implications for public safety and national security in Nigeria. Among other things, the paper intends to stimulate intellectual discourse on the significance of armed robbery as a veritable national security problematique in Nigeria.

Theoretical framework

For the purpose of analytical systematization, the use of a theoretical framework is germane in this paper. Hence, the Revisionist Theory of national security is hereby adopted.

The revisionist theory of national security arose in a dialectical opposition to the classical or traditional approach to national security. It was largely informed by the dynamics of the new world order and the corresponding security threats thereof. The theory is characterized by its people-centred focus, multi-disciplinary posture and radical stance (Usman, 2012).

Pioneered by scholars such as MacNamara (1968), the theory differs from the traditional conception of national security in a variety of ways as illustrated in Table 1 hereunder.

Table 1: Traditional Vs Revisionist Notions of National Security

S/N	TRADITIONAL PERSPECTIVE	REVISIONIST PERSPECTIVE
1.	It is state-centric: State Security	It is People-centric: Human Security
2.	It is pro-military	It is civil and pro-people
3.	It emphasizes territorial cum political threats and vulnerabilities.	It emphasizes human vulnerabilities.
4.	It prioritizes territorial integrity and regime security	It priorities individual and societal wellbeing.
5.	It is reductionist and conservative	It is eclectic, multi-focal and radical.

Source: Compiled from various sources: Gambo (2008); Usman (2012), etc.

The revisionist conception of national security therefore views national security more comprehensively in terms of freedom from all forms of social, socio-economic, ecological, territorial, economic and socio-political vulnerabilities (Okoli, 2012). Specifically, the revisionist theory emphasizes the following dimensions of national security:

- I. Physical security
- II. Community security
- III. Economic security
- IV. Social security
- V. Food and nutritional security
- VI. Environmental/ecological security
- VII. Regional security
- VIII. Livelihood security (Okoli, 2012; Usman 2012: XII).

The aforementioned dimensions of national security correspond to what is popularly known in the literature as the ‘human security’ paradigm. The ‘human security’ notion of national security was originally proposed by Dr. Mahud ul Haq in the 1994 United Nations Human Development Report. It emerged from the post-Cold War multi-disciplinary re-assessment of security in the light of the emerging global security exigencies and challenges (Usman, 2012).

The revisionist theory does not repudiate the classical conception of national security in its entirety. In fact, it seeks to make up its fundamental flaws and inadequacies. Thus, when the revisionist understanding of national security is synthesized with that of the classical perspective, what results is a robust and comprehensive conception that presents the total picture and apprehension of the subject matter.

Applied to the purpose of this paper, the revisionist theory enables us to come to terms with the strategic implications of crime for national security in Nigeria. In this regard, it could be argued that any threat to public safety and wellbeing is a threat to Nigeria’s national security. Granted that armed robbery poses a serious threat of public safety and wellbeing, it can therefore be submitted that it constitutes a veritable threat to Nigeria’s national security.

Overview of Nature and Causes of Armed Robbery

Armed robbery is a typical instance of violent crime. It doubles a crime against persons and a property crime, usually motivated by criminal intent to material acquisition. Relevant studies have identified a number of factors as responsible for the prevalence of armed robbery and related crimes in Nigeria. According to Onimode (2001:39-40) crimes like armed robbery has been essentially promoted by the following factors:

- i. Opportunity to commit crime with impunity
- ii. Poor law enforcement
- iii. Post-conflict access to arms and ammunition
- iv. Pervasive corruption
- v. Social injustice and oppression
- vi. Mass poverty and very poor pay
- vii. Excessive greed and materialism
- viii. Moral decay

The notion of ‘‘social injustice’’ in the aforementioned statements of fact comprehends the glaring socio-economic inequality and inequity that characterize social existence in contemporary capitalist societies. With reference to Nigeria, Onimode notes:

Since the oil boom, for example, the ostentatious lifestyle of the new rich has incited a culture of morbid greed and

perverse materialism in Nigeria, a culture that is also associated with property crimes such as armed robbery... (2001:40).

The factor of post-conflict access to arms and ammunition is pertinent to our understanding of the prevalence of armed robbery in Nigeria, nay elsewhere in Africa. The proliferation of weapons in the aftermath of armed conflicts leaves such weapons in the hands of criminals and charlatans who use them to perpetrate criminal designs among which is robbery. In respect of the Nigerian experience, the emergence of ‘proper’ armed robbery in the country is traceable to the after-effects to the Civil War that ended in 1970 (Ajayi, 2011). Similarly, the end of apartheid-engendered conflict in South Africa occasioned a wave of violent crime prominent among which is armed robbery (See Onimode, 2011:37).

The issue of criminal impunity has been reiterated by analysts as one of the most fundamental factors engendering crimes in Nigerian. In this respect, Arinze (2010:1) opined that the inability of the Nigerian criminal justice system to effectively sanction crime is responsible for the prevalence of armed robbery in the country. He also identified high unemployment rate alongside other macro-economic factors, such as volatile inflationary trends, as conditions that promote robbery in the country (Arinze, 2010).

Related to the issue of unemployment is the incidence of poverty and socio-economic malaise, which creates an atmosphere of livelihood crises in society. This predisposes people to sundry tactics of survival which may entail criminal indulgence. The socio-economic factors are reinforced and often complicated by corruption, moral depravity and the culture of materialism. Together, these factors explain the incidence and prevalence of armed robbery in Nigeria.

Classification and Typology of Armed Robbery

According to Ajayi (2011:4) armed robbers can be classified as psychotic or normal as well as professional or amateur. Psychotic armed robbers are characteristically ‘hardened’ and pathological criminals. They could be said to be operating with the ‘terrorist mind-set’. Hence, they do not mind to die. And if they do not mind to die, they would not mind to kill! This category of armed robbers is very violent and dreadful. They are feared even among the public security agents who they often engage in terrible onslaught. Normal armed robbers are the opposite of the psychotic group. They tread with caution and have appreciable regard for life and personal safety. For this group of armed robbers, killing is necessary and often expedient.

With regard to Ajayi’s second classification, armed robbery can be professional or amateur. Professional armed robbers are those who have

excelled in the ‘art’ of the crime’. In effect, they demonstrate high level of sophistication, dexterity and brutal efficiency in their operations. They go for the ‘big deal’ and are often well organized and syndicated. On the other hand, amateur robbers are usually less sophisticated and opportunistic. They dread public security agents a lot and are easy to contain by them. They often go for ‘soft targets’ and their operations are comparatively less organized and mediocre. According to Ajayi (2011:5) professional armed robbers account for 95% of robbers while the amateur constitute only 5%.

Another way of classifying armed robbery is to consider the number of robbers involved. In this regard, we can have either a gang robbery or a one-man robbery. Similar to this mode of classification is to classify armed robbery based on the level of its syndication. This has to do with the extent to which a robbery group is operationally linked to another or others within the wider context of the organized criminal world. The level of syndication can be localized or extended. Hence, we may have area robbers, regional robbers, trans-regional robbers, and even trans-national robbers.

Armed robbery can be further distinguished based on the nature, character, motivation, and mode of its operation. Hence, the following types of armed robbery can obtain.

Table 2: Types of Armed Robbery

TYPE	DESCRIPTION
Contract Robbery	When a robbery incident is a ‘paid operation’ as in the case of hired assassination.
Pre-planned robbery	Robbery operation that is well planned in advance, usually with insider involvement.
Opportunity robbery	Robbery type that thrives on opportunism or contingency operation.
Snap robbery	Robbery motivated by the need for a quick, immediate return (for instance when robbers go broke and needed money urgently, they may hit any target in their current neighbourhood).
Rescue or punitive robbery	This takes the form of retaliation or reprisal attack (for example an attack done in revenge of loss or injury suffered by a robbery gang in previous incidents).

Source: Compiled from Ajayi (2011:3).

Apart from the aforementioned types of armed robbery, one may characterize robbery incidents based on the locus of their occurrence. In this regard, we can have the following types of robbery: high-way robbery, bank robbery, community raid, market raid, etc. Bank robbery is a common occurrence in Nigerian cities. It is usually a pre-planned attack. Community raid often occurs in the form of a retaliatory or revenge attack. A case in point is the series of raids on rural villages of Zamfara State in the recent years (Okoli, 2014b). In the case of market raid, the assault on the Potiskum Cattle Market in 2011 is a relevant instance (Okoli, 2014b).

Other forms of armed robbery may be identified within the spectrum of the afore-stated typology. It must be noted, however, that there is a possibility of over-lap among these types of robbery. The meanings and nuances conjured thereof are essentially designed not to rigidify but to clarify understanding in respect of the discernible character and manifestation of the phenomenon of armed robbery.

Prevalence of Armed Robbery in Nigeria

Armed robbery has been identified as one of the prevalent crimes in contemporary Nigeria (Rotberg, 2007). It has manifested in various forms and dimensions over the years. Prominent forms of armed robbery experienced in Nigeria include car snatching, high-way robbery, house and office robberies, and kidnapping.

Available data point to an alarming scale and prevalence of armed robbery in Nigeria. For instance, in the last quarter of year 2000, police report revealed that a total of 348 armed robbers were killed in Nigeria (Alemika 2003:445). In 2003, it was revealed by the Police that 3,100 “suspected armed robbers were suppressed” (Maldar, 2005:16). A more recent figure shows that a total of 16,925 armed robbery suspects were arrested in various parts of Nigeria in the period of 2005-2009 (Alemika, 2012:4). This is in addition to 2,216 suspected armed robbers killed in encounter with the Police (Alemika, 2012:48).

With reference to kidnapping, the figures have been staggering. By the end of 2009, police record revealed that a total of 2,148 people have been kidnapped in Nigeria based on reported incidents (Alemika, 2012:48). These figures have been more than tripled as recent studies tend to suggest (Okoli and Agada, 2014).

The robbery statistics released by the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in 2009 document the prevalence and distribution of armed robbery across the various Nigerian States based on police report for the period of 2003-2007. The facts and figures are reflected in Table 3 showing hereunder.

Table 3: Police Report of Armed Robbery across Nigerian States (2003-2007)

STATE	NO OF CASES	REMARKS
OYO	224	1 st
IMO	176	2 nd
FCT	172	3 rd
RIVERS	145	4 th
CROSS RIVER	137	15 th
KANO	108	6 th
OGUN	107	7 th
LAGOS	70	13 th
GOMBE	27	
BENUE	27	
PLATEAU	26	

KWARA	25	
SOKOTO	24	
JIGAWA	16	
BAUCHI	41	
KEBBI	20	
YOBE	20	
ABIA	89	
ZAMFARA	---	Omitted
ADAMAWA	96	8 th (1)
AKWA IBOM	88	9 th
SOKOTO	24	
ANAMBRA	96	8 th (2)
BAYELSA	52	15 th (1)
BORNO	41	
DELTA	63	14 th
EBONYI	51	15 th
EDO	79	12 th
EKITI	85	10 th
KADUNA	40	
KATSINA	31	
NASARAWA	36	
NIGER	32	
ONDO	58	14 th
OSUN	51	15 th (2)
TARABA	80	11 th
ENUGU	44	as at 2006

Source: NBS 2009 as cited in Jona (2009)

In terms of specifics, the prevalence of armed robbery in Nigeria may be better appreciated from the standpoint of certain indicators among which are:

- i. The number (volume) of robbery cases recorded over a period of time.
- ii. The number of citizens killed in the robbery incidents.
- iii. The number of armed robbery suspects actually arrested.
- iv. The number of robbery suspects actually prosecuted and/or convicted.
- v. The number of robbers killed in encounter with police.
- vi. The number of police personnel killed in encounters with robbers.
- vii. Estimate worth of material losses associated with the robbery incidents, etc,

Incidentally, some of these records are not actually readily available. When they are available their accuracy and credibility may be in doubt. The following tables attempt to give vital information in the light of the foregoing (See Tables 3 and 4).

Table 4: Incidence of Armed Robbery in Nigeria (2005-2009)

FACT	FIGURE
Number of citizens killed in armed robbery	1,043
Number of robbery suspects arrested by the police	16,925
Number of robbery suspects prosecuted	3,651
Number of robbery suspects killed in encounter with police	2,216
Number of officers (police) killed in encounter with robbers	517

Source: Alemika (2012:48)

The figures reflected in Table 3 show that there is high prevalence of armed robbery in Nigeria during the period under review. This is more so in view of the fact that crimes like armed robbery are often under-reported and therefore under-documented in the country. Hence, in terms of absolute figures, the number of robbery cases recorded in the period must have been alarming. Other forms of violent crime are also very prevalent in Nigeria. Table 5 below highlights facts and figures pertaining to kidnapping within the same period.

Table 5: Incidence of Kidnapping in Nigeria (2005-2009)

YEAR	FACT	FIGURE
2006	Cases of kidnapping recorded by the Police	189
2009	Cases of kidnapping recorded by the Police	690
2010	Cases of kidnapping recorded by the Police	579
2011	Cases of kidnapping recorded by the Police	441
2012 (Jan 1 to June 30 only)	Cases of kidnapping recorded by the Police	285
TOTAL		2,184

Source: Alemika (2012:48).

Again, it should be emphasized that the above figures reflect the cases actually reported and documented by the police. In view of the apparent poor state of crime reporting and documenting in Nigeria, it would only seem obvious that these figures more or less under-represent the actual volume of such crime during the time under review.

Kidnapping is rightly a form of armed robbery except that it takes a somewhat different modality and pattern. For instance, unlike the conventional armed robbery, kidnapping is characterized by the following features:

- i. The kidnap victim is sometimes an indirect target, who is ‘grabbed’ to enable the culprits extract ransom from the real target;
- ii. The kidnapping endeavour is often more rigorously organised and syndicated, with actors taking up more or less specialized roles such as the informants, the strategists, the godfathers (kingpins), and the field-boys/men who actually carry out the armed abduction;

- iii. Kidnapping is not a one-off event; it takes a pretty long episode of abduction, hostage, negotiation, ransom making and release;
- iv. The kidnap victim is generally known to the kidnappers; it enables them to appraise his kidnap ransom value (KRP) and strategize for his abduction and hostage;
- v. Kidnapping can be free of maximum violence once the victim does not resist abduction and there is no attempt at counter-assault (rescue mission) by the law enforcement; if the victim simply ‘cooperates’ and plays along, and there is no untoward incidents arising from security agents, the kidnapping ‘deal’ can be done without even a gunshot (Okoli and Agada, 2013).

In any case, kidnapping equates armed robbery in a number of senses. A number of points may suffice to situate this observation:

- i. It involves the use of force or threat to that effect;
- ii. It entails violent dispossession and expropriation of other people’s property;
- iii. It thrives on the active utilization of instruments of coercion to steal;
- iv. It resorts to maximum violence especially when faced with a counter-threat.

Contemporary trend in armed robbery in Nigeria has revealed much sophistication in terms of operational strategy and brutal efficiency. This has been exemplified in cases of articulated bank robberies as well as robbery of notable public complexes, such as hotels and airports. For instance, in May 2012, three banks- the United Bank of Africa (UBA), Zenith Bank Plc and Guarantee Trust Bank (GTB) were raided in Wukari, Taraba State, by robbers in expertly coordinated attacks that lasted between 9:00pm and 3:00pm in the night (Okoli, 2012). The robbers were legion, believed to be numbering about twenty (20). They used improvised explosives, dynamites and heavy gunfire to burgle into the bank vaults and carted away with huge sums of money.

Similar attacks have been recorded in other parts of Nigeria including Gombe, Katsina, Kafanchan in Kaduna State, and Maiduguri. They have been often associated with the activities of the Boko Haram sect, who have been alleged to have resorting to such to such criminality as a desperate means of generating funds in support of their insurgency (Okoli and Iortyer, 2014).

There have also been notable incidents where important public places were robbed. A case in point is the attacks on a Lagos airport in 2012 and March 2013. In these incidents, over N400million naira were stolen (Akinkuotu, 2013: para 6). The robbers were said to have operated with sophisticated weapons including five AK-47 rifles, four dynamites, 64 AK-47 magazines fully loaded and two local pistols (Akinkuotu, 2013:Para 22).

More recent indicators of the trend of armed robbery in Nigeria point to the trans-national character of the crime, particularly along the border-lines of the South-West and North-East. In these areas, armed robbers are known to have operated from the neighbouring states of Benin Republic, Cameroun Republic and Niger Republic to rob places in Nigeria.

The origin of armed robbery in Nigeria has been a matter of historical debates. Some analysts, however, contend that the advent of serious armed robbery in the country is traceable to the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) (Ajayi, 2011). The argument in this regard is that the precarious state of the economy and living in the aftermath of the Civil War as well as the proliferation of arms and ammunition in that context, led to the upsurge in armed robbery in Nigeria.

Over the years, Nigeria has produced a number of high-profile armed robbers and robbery kingpins. Notable examples include Lawrence Anini, Monday Osunbor, Dr. Onyenusi, George Iyamu, Kayode Williams, Obiozor Otokoto, Dericho, to mention but a few. Some of these notorious robbers have been a subject of inquiry in crime studies and criminology (See for instance Marenin 1987; Igbinoia, 1988).

Armed Robbery and Public Safety in Nigeria: Implications for National Security

Public safety presupposes preservation or protection of the populace from risks, harm, danger, vulnerabilities or emergencies. The prevalence or occurrence of violence, disaster, conflict, or crime in a society poses a threat to its public peace and safety. So does the spate of armed robbery incidents in Nigeria.

As indicated in the preceding parts of this paper, armed robbery represents one of the biggest challenges to public safety in Nigeria. This assertion would become more plausible when considered against the backdrop of the following facts:

- i. Armed robbery has resulted in huge human fatalities and injuries.
- ii. It has led to loss of money and property amounting to millions of naira.
- iii. It compounds social risks and costs of business and discourages investment.
- iv. It creates an atmosphere of mental siege arising from public feeling of insecurity.
- v. It has often led to livelihood crises for individuals and households as a result of liquidation of business capital, etc.

In the light of the fore going, it is evident that armed robbery poses a serious threat to public safety in Nigeria. This observation may sound somewhat ‘common-sensical’; yet it holds a lot of implications for national

security *strategics* in Nigeria. One of such strategic significance is the need to acknowledge the import of violent crimes, such as armed robbery, as crucial impediments to the realization of sustainable national security in Nigeria. Conversely, there also a compelling need for the government at all levels to come up with proactive and contingency strategies that would be efficient enough to counter banditry, especially in the light of its contemporary and emerging dialectics. This constitutes one of the sapping challenges of national security administration in Nigeria today.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Crime is both the cause and effect of insecurity. Situations of material, socio-economic, social and socio-political insecurity brings about prevalence of crime. Likewise, when crime prevails, societal security is jeopardized. This paper has established that the prevalence of armed robbery in Nigeria poses a serious threat to public safety and sustainability of national security in the country. This is in view of the destructive impact of such crime on life, livelihood, property, investment, as well as social wellbeing of society. Thus, armed robbery passes for a crucial issue in Nigeria's national security praxis. To address this problem, a number of measures are hereby recommended:

- i. Government at all levels should come up with credible and implementable people-oriented policies and programmes to address the basic livelihood problems of poverty, unemployment, and the like.
- ii. The criminal justice system of Nigeria should be repositioned and revitalized through progressive reforms to enable it acquire the integrity and competences to sanction crime aright.
- iii. Public security agents in Nigeria should be exposed (by way of periodic training) to the globally tenable best practices and know-how of counter-banditry to boost their operational efficiency in combating violent crimes in general and armed robbery in particular.
- iv. Above all, a Private-Public-Partnership (PPP) framework, involving area vigilantes and public security agents, should be put in motion to ensure a better result in anti-robbery campaign in Nigeria.

It is the candid submission of this paper that conscientious implementation of these measures would go a long way in addressing the scourge of armed robbery and related violent crimes in Nigeria. It must be added, however, that a lot more needs to be done in respect of societal values in order to moderate the prevailing materialist consciousness and prediction that pervade the Nigerian society. A conscious effort at moral cum values re-

orientation would complement the aforementioned policy measures in bringing about the desired end.

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