Memorandum: Tackling Kidnapping and Banditry

Executive Summary.

Starting with the current surge in incidents of kidnapping/banditry in Nigeria, we identify peer countries that have faced such challenges and overcome them. Nigeria can then where applicable 'copy&paste' the lessons they have learned. We then outline short-term measures that can be implemented immediately to mitigate kidnaping risk but emphasize that they will not function to deter kidnapping (de-incentivizing) nor will they solve the problem. This can only be done in the medium term, we suggest, and can best be achieved by establishing a rapid-deployment Nigerian Special Operations unit that can hit miscreants hard and fast. We outline what such a unit will need in terms of hardware and support and how it could be trained. In the long term, the seedbed for insecurity -joblessness amongst young people – must be eliminated.

Status quo:

Kidnapping is not new in Nigeria, but the current scourge, which is essentially commercial in nature, namely, kidnapping for ransom, seems to have spread all over the country and in the process has severely exacerbated an existing insecurity challenge. While forms and methods of kidnapping vary from one region of the country to the next, the same is true of the composition of gangs of bandits and of the degree to which these are being instrumentalised for other ends. [1]

Kidnapping is not an uncommon global phenomenon. Nigeria can learn from other countries that have successfully combatted this form of banditry and insecurity. Evidence shows that Pakistan at one point in its history faced a similarly diverse surge in insecurity.[2] Pakistan resorted to a policy of hitting the various criminal elements causing insecurity hard and fast. This approach was successful not only in reducing incidents, but also putting a clear deterrent in place. Central to the deterrence philosophy was the notion that kidnapping would result not in a high return on investment but a loss to the perpetrators.

While a raft of instruments ranging from well-trained anti-kidnapping units, deployment of technology, punitive measures, etc., can be deployed to contain this form of banditry, the root causes, however, suggest that there is no immediate solution, a quick-fix, despite the potential digitization may seem to offer.

In this context, to address the immediate insecurity, the nation's security forces must concentrate on those geographical areas where the problems have become most acute with specifically designed measures to address the problem in the short- and medium-term.

Proposal:

Short-term policy options

While recognizing that in the short term there are no immediate remedies for the current insecurity situation, there are some pragmatic measures that can be enacted by way of risk mitigation. These can be implemented as best practices that can be adopted and which can be leveraged to good effect.[3]

Security-side measures

1. Ramp up security by removing all the personnel attached to political cavalcades and redeploying them to the designated 'kidnapping / banditry' flashpoints.

2. Immediately re-assign all security staff on roadblocks / checkpoints, preferably to the checkpoint in that same state that is furthest away; this will immediately undermine bribing checkpoints 'to look the other way'.

3. Start immediate retraining scheme for checkpoint personnel:
(i) comms behaviour – clear checklists on who to inform if something is suspicious, who to inform in the event of a hit, etc.
(ii) teach checkpoint personnel to run checkpoint-to-checkpoint patrols regularly (provide fuel budget for this).
(iii) initiate regular-interval checkpoint A – checkpoint B reporting to create information lines. Create report checklist to include 'all clear', 'suspicious vehicle licence numbers', etc.

4. Create central forward ops bases in each of the states worst affected. Conduct checkpoint training there.

5. Get that unit access to satellite data from regular satellite overflights, so that movements can be discerned early on. Alternatively, or additionally, start using the many small crop-sprayer craft to fly aerial reconnaissance in hot zones. It may not prevent the bandit hit or the kidnapping, but it means you know where you will need to be very soon.

Behavioural measures

1. Make it clear to governors that until such a time as they have their own police forces, this is a matter for the NSA, which should have/possibly already has a dedicated unit.

2. Do not negotiate other than to gain time; otherwise, it compounds the problem.

3. Prohibit officials from allowing state/LGA ransom payments. Such payments (see Katsina recently) run the risk of kindling public-sector interest in monetary participation in the deals.

Public communications measures

1. Introduce whistle-blower hotlines with remuneration as a % of the ransom demand – for people blowing the whistle before ransoms have been paid a greater percentage than those acting afterwards. In this way start to sow disunity amongst the kidnapper industry staff.

2. Launch nationwide radio education/enlightenment programme encouraging people to only move in convoys of more than "xyz" vehicles.

3. Publicly encourage private individuals who have been kidnapped or members of their family to report these – even if the matter was 'settled out of court'. This will allow better intelligence gathering on the precise location of the hot zones.

While none of the above is a solution to the problem, each item on its own can help to either avoid kidnapping or to speed up response times. In short, policymakers should at present focus on reducing the opportunities to kidnap and increasing the efficiency of existing security system.

Medium-term: Change the security architecture:

The key here is a change to the country's current security architecture. Examining the latter in light of studies of institutional overlap and chains of command, and comparing to peer countries (e.g., Indonesia, Mexico, Pakistan), Nigeria does not have a rapid deployment military or police Special Operations Unit (SOU) that can be fielded to tackle kidnappers, bandits, insurgents, etc.[4] In the past, it has at various times relied on international forces operating within its own borders.

Such an SOU could be modelled on the US Navy Seals, the British SAS or the German KSK. Given that the country has existing bilateral agreements on military assistance in training and material, these should be leveraged in this context and this envisaged in the policy formulation.

Whether such an SOU comes under military or police command is not of relevance here. What is relevant is that it must be very well-trained, well-equipped, and disciplined for optimal efficacy in its possible deployment.

In the absence of such a unit, it will not be possible to act judiciously and quickly on intelligence and surveillance data gathered. The SOU will need to be equipped with the relevant hardware resources to lock into such data sources, including:

• Access to regular satellite imagery

• Access to other surveillance data sources

- Ability to gather its own data: medium-range drones

- Fast transportation.

In addition to the SOU itself, the Federal government would need to implement a nationwide digital roll-out to enable monitoring/surveillance in three areas:

1. Introduce transponders in all registered vehicles (could be done during the annual MOT). The system has already been used by private corporations inside Nigeria to track-and-trace stolen vehicles, but can be used proactively to follow vehicle movements or detect strange vehicle movements (e.g., in kidnapping-prone areas, side ramps onto highways, etc.)

2. Ensure blanket adherence to the telco NIN system as far as possible. (Currently only about 43 million persons are registered; assuming two handsets each that is 86 million out of 285,259,320 registered GSMs; GSM data and local mast data is already widely used worldwide as a track-or-trace system.

3. Install efficient CCTV and specifically checkpoint communications systems that link to central regional commands.

At the same time, the security services will need to put in place a system monitoring for any activated foreign mobile telco systems inside the country's borders.

Long-term: Create jobs and prosperity to eliminate the seedbed of insecurity

Any long-term strategy for combatting insecurity must rely on a portfolio of policy instruments designed to eliminate poverty and create jobs. Evidence clearly shows a correlation between insecurity and jobless among young persons. Therefore, the emphasis must be on upskilling that segment of the population and getting them into gainful employment. Such instruments can be brought to bear parallel to the above medium-term recommendations being implemented.

1.

The Washington Council of Foreign Affairs goes so far as to distinguish in its "Nigeria Security Tracker" between four different types of perpetrators - https://www.cfr.org/blog/nigeria-security-tracker-weekly-update-january-23-29-0 ↑

2.

In this regard the situation is perhaps most comparable to that experienced by Pakistan in the 2014-7 period. Afghanistan, Colombia and Mexico all see high levels of insecurity, but the causes and the form of insecurity are in no way comparable with those in Nigeria, just as

these countries all have far smaller populations. By contrast: Pakistan's security landscape is characterized by sectarian and ethnopolitical tensions and in-country terrorist and militant groups – coupled with a comparable population. In 2016, Pakistan recorded 749 violent incidents (deaths: 1,887) related to politics/elections, terrorist attacks, security operations against terrorist groups and armed insurgents, ethnopolitical tensions, and sectarian cleavages. Moreover, there are various foreign experts closely familiar with the situation in Nigeria who could be recruited to assist in such an effort. ↑

3.

The list is in part gleaned from corporate experiences in the SouthSouth in the mid-to-late Noughties. The major companies at the time hired consultants such as "Control Risk" to advise them on how best to protect themselves by implementing 'best practices' within companies. The insights the consultants brought to bear had been gained in different operational theatres, such as Latin America and countries that had formerly belonged to the Soviet Union. Complying with such behavioural best practises was deemed the most effective non-military means of 'containing' the problem. ↑

4.

The last attempt to set up such a grouping was under the Babangida Administration, when there was a project to create a National Guard. ↑

Poverty, Insecurity and Conflict Mitigation – The Nigerian Special Case?