Nigeria's Collapsing Security: A Predictive Analysis

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Introduction

Without an effective form of prevention, deterrence, or clear demonstration of disapproval, Nigeria risks a total collapse of its security architecture, especially in the north. Compensations and appeasement approach to aggressors is at the centre of this. It contributes to the growing insecurity. Rather than solve, it encourages aggression and opens it up as a lucrative means to exploit government. Thus, the aggression is not only likely to continue, it invites other non-state aggressors and aids their membership growth. In addition to this, violent extremism is being encouraged.

On one hand, the South-Western part of the country, for example, have responded to the herdsmen crisis and it is led by the respective State Governments. At a tipping point where host communities were to resort to self-help and the Ondo State Governor issued a vacation order to unregistered herdsmen, South West governors met with Miyetti-Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) in Akure, Ondo state.[i] They banned open, night, and underage-grazing.[ii] This was in addition to the South-Western Regional Security outfit codenamed *Amotekun* established in 2019.[iii] Hence the demonstration of disapproval and show of deterrence. On the other, steps to address insecurity in northern Nigeria has not proven efficient. Responses have been rather permissive.

Hypothesis: Positive Reinforcement

A behaviour that is rewarded or perceived as being rewarded is interpreted as acceptable or permissible, and it is therefore encouraged.[iv] Therefore, any form of actual or perceived

reward for violence reinforces violence or the notion of violence as acceptable. Hence, when responding to security threats and vulnerabilities two critical questions are important to policy: how will this policy be interpreted by non-policy practitioners/scientists, especially in the concerned environment?[v] And, would the possible interpretations do more harm or good for security?

Compensation and Appeasement

In response to Boko Haram terror attacks in North-East Nigeria, the government initiated a reintegration program for repentant ex-Boko Haram members. The aim was to help repentant fighters become productive members of society.[vi] The problem with this program, asides its approach, time frame, methodology and impact (on soldiers of the Nigerian Army), is that locals who had a first-hand experience of Boko Haram's horror and are economically disadvantaged are at risk of conceiving violence as the path to government privilege. This is more likely to encourage violence because they suffer socioeconomic neglect.[vii] This neglect and its effect partly constitute or fuelled why many joined Boko Haram in North-East Nigeria.[viii] [ix] [x] Thus, compensating ex-terrorists with socio-economic privileges sends a message that is problematic to security. Such message include:

a. This is a way to gain government's attention, which they lack
b. This is a means to economic prosperity, which they were deprived of; and
c. This is an opportunity for double advantage: Here, the terrorist repents, receive government advantage and then re-joins Boko Haram after his release. Instances were acknowledged by the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Army, Senator Ali Ndume[xi]

In North-West and North-Central, bandits raid villages and towns, destroying homes and properties, kills or kidnap victims, and employ the use of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) such as rape.[xii] In response to this, the Federal Governments and concerned State Governments engage negotiations and pay ransoms. Examples include ceasefire agreements between North West Governors and bandits in 2019 which later broke down; and more recent cases of kidnapping in the same region in 2021 in which ransoms were paid. Apart from failed negotiations, bandits are given ransoms and let go, only to prepare for and execute another attack.

The Nigerian Government (Federal and State) employs compensation or appeasement as a response to the major security threats in the region and it has failed. In addition, it does not respond to the root causes of increase in armed banditry.

Religious Cleric: Reinforcing Extremism

A complication to this is the role of Islamic religious clerics as middleman between the government and armed bandits in 2021. Officially, the cleric, Sheikh Gumi, is not sanctioned to represent the interest of the government but he has been at the vanguard of advocating for amnesty for bandits and seem to represent the bandit's interest.[xiii] Amidst this affinity is the question concerning religious extremism. In a leaked video, the Sheikh Gumi admonished the bandits towards an (re)action that is based on religious identity against the Nigerian army. In his words,

> *What I want you people to understand is, soldiers that are involved in most criminalities are not Muslims and non-Muslims. The non-Muslims are the ones causing confusion just to ignite crisis* – These were the words of Sheikh Gumi, to Bandits in a meeting with them in a Forest in Northern Nigeria.[xiv]

Northern Nigeria is vulnerable to violent religious extremism.[xv] Framing the duty and responsibility of the Nigerian army to protect Nigeria's sovereign territory as a religious onslaught is more likely to stir religion-based aggression against and within the military. As of now, there are no known links between why banditry started and religious extremism. Evidence establishes that banditry in the region is motivated by economic accumulation.[xvi] However, a success of this extremist narrative amongst bandit groups would signify the emergence of another breed of violent extremists. In addition to this, a core dimension of this extremist ideology disapproves of the secularity of the Nigerian state.[xvii] Therefore, this will, in the long run, threaten Nigeria's sovereignty and legitimacy of its government.

Prediction: Some Possibilities

Compensation and appeasement approaches has failed because neither Boko Haram attacks, banditry, nor kidnapping have stopped or reduced. Compensations and appeasement in this context can therefore be rated as a failure. The government's actions so far suggest that:

1. Aggressors' actions are rewarding or permissible,
2. The political will and commitment to address the threats is lacking, or
3. The Nigerian State lacks the required capability.

As a result of 1, 2, and 3 above,

i. The groups are more likely to grow in membership;

ii. They are more likely to pursue expansion, not otherwise;

iii. Attacks are more likely to increase or maintain the same tempo; and

iv. With full consideration of the Sahel's security, economic, and political vulnerability, this may also be an invitation for non-Nigerian armed groups.

Geographic Concerns

Lastly, see the map below. It shows areas where Shekau (Abubakar Shekau), a leader of one of the Boko Haram factions, have secured or in the process of securing fighters' allegiance.
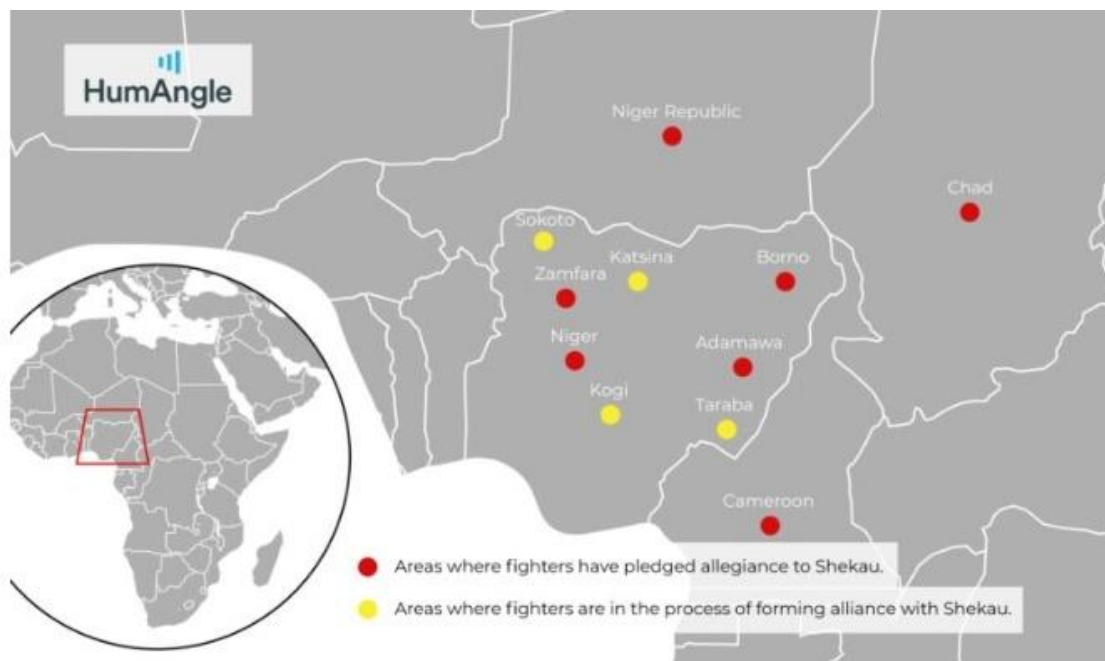
Source: HumAngle 2020

This geographical distribution suggests the likely expansion of Boko Haram's sphere of influence. It is strategically arranged to capsule northern Nigeria, and it does not exclude Nigeria's capital, Abuja. Therefore, a security policy thrust that encourages aggressors' membership is a huge risk. In this case, the Nigerian government is likely to lose its already fickle sovereign grip over the region, and tensions concerning the Capital may rise.

Conclusion

There is a need for the Nigerian government to review its security posture in northern Nigeria. More effective deterrent and preventive measures are required, and there is a need to defuse extremist narratives. Apart from the high propensity towards religious extremism, the socioeconomic condition of the region already conditions violence as an option to put food on the table. Not only that, but numerous attacks have also left many displaced. Therefore, encouraging the resort to violence for economic gain or government attention is a seed that will keep the region unstable for decades. Porous borders, proliferation and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) are also a major concern. There is therefore an urgent need for the Nigerian government to focus its security attention on the region.

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