

Armed Bandits, Abduct More than 140 People in Birnin-Gwari in Kaduna State, Nigeria.

BACKGROUND



- *Birnin-Gwari is one of the Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Kaduna State, North-West Region of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.*
- *The security situation in the Region remains challenging particularly in Kaduna and Zamfara¹ States, due to re-emerging threats of armed banditry that has weakened economic activities and also impacted negatively on the delivery of democratic dividends.*
- *The complex web of criminality perpetuated by armed bandits transcends cattle rustling to include; intimidation/threats, armed robbery/theft, killings and kidnapping for ransom. Kidnapping for ransom became a 'quick-win' for the bandits. Birnin Gwari LGA of Kaduna State is vulnerable to this threat with areas along Abuja-Kaduna highway, Kaduna-Zaria highway and Kaduna-Birnin-Gwari road prone to attacks. These route, which serves as a link road between the North and South of Nigeria has become a 'danger zone' to commuters' with frequent cases of robbery and abduction.*
- *Statistics generated from the WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS) from May 1 - 25th, 2018, put the figures of fatality arising from attacks by suspected armed bandits in Birnin-Gwari LGA of Kaduna State at 84².*

INCIDENT PROFILE

There are worrying security concerns in Kaduna State, North-West of Nigeria where armed robbers unleashed assaults against the people of Birnin Gwari, killing many and dispossessing several others of their valuables. Recently, there are reports of persistent abductions by armed bandits mainly along the Birnin-Gwari Highway in Kaduna State. On Wednesday, May 23, 2018, suspected armed bandits intercepted three vehicles and abducted 21 passengers, (males and females) and their drivers in Ladi town, along Birnin-Gwari Road. The disturbing issue in this incident was the alleged claims that the abducted female passengers were stripped off their cloths³ before being led into the forest by the bandits. On another incident the previous day, ten (10) people including nine (9) passengers and a driver, travelling to Kano State were reportedly abducted in an attack carried out by suspected armed bandits along the same route.

Similarly, on May 20, 2018, WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS) recorded two separate incidents of kidnapping by suspected armed bandits in Birnin-Gwari LGA. These include; the abduction of three (3) housewives in a mid-night attack by suspected bandits in Maganda Village. However, one of the abducted housewives was later freed by the abductors in a bid to make contact with families of the two abductees for ransom. Although no life was lost in the attack, one person (a male) reportedly sustained gunshot injuries; and also, Six (6) people in a commercial vehicle were reportedly abducted along Birnin-Gwari-Kaduna highway⁴. The attackers reportedly opened fire on the commercial vehicle, leading to a road accident wherein one of the passengers was reported dead.

Prior to those attacks, it was reported that suspected armed bandits raided communities and vehicles along Birnin Gwari-Kaduna Highway, kidnapping more than 100 people.⁵ In addition, reports from the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) in Kaduna State claimed that suspected armed bandits in Military camouflage intercepted over 15 vehicles including trucks and commercial buses and abducted the victims.



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RISK ANALYSIS:

Kaduna State has witnessed recurring incidents of armed banditry. In more recent times, cases of armed robberies and abductions for ransom have become a major security challenge. Armed attacks on highways, villages and towns have been intensified with considerable loss of lives, destruction of properties and kidnapping of people in communities in Birnin-Gwari LGA. At present, the affected communities and authorities feel alienated and dissatisfied with the state and capacity of security infrastructures to defend and protect the people.

Prior to the escalation of armed banditry in the State, the villagers formed self-defence forces 'local vigilante' but were often accused of killing suspected armed bandits, which triggered retaliatory attacks from armed bandits in the State. The preference for the formation of a local vigilante group in Birnin Gwari LGA was part of community policing to tackle the threat and jointly boost internal security. This arrangement, was supported by the Traditional Ruler of the LGA.⁶ Despite the individual sacrifices, the group's collective actions have overtime generated public discourse on the relevance, effectiveness and excesses in terms of human rights abuses/violations of the unsuspecting public.

Nevertheless, there has been increasing security efforts adopted by the Kaduna State Government in partnership with Security Services to curb the recurring armed bandits in the State. These efforts include; joint security raids/patrol, aerial surveillance of Kamuku forest (Kaduna State) and adjoining forests in neighbouring States of Zamfara, Katsina and Niger which serve as hideouts for bandits, and also the disarmament programme initiated by the Nigeria Police Force⁷ for bandits to renounce crime and lay down their weapons. Even though these security measures yielded some results in decimating and degrading the capabilities of the armed groups; the groups' ability to resist and expand their operations is still existent as evidenced by the number of recent attacks and abductions carried out in the area. With the increase in the number of attacks and kidnappings, the perceptions of the affected communities are that the state intelligence system and Security Agencies in Nigeria are not adequately responsive to their security concerns. Therefore, in recent joint press statement on the escalation of security concerns in the area, the communities called on the Kaduna State Government to establish a formidable community policing in Birnin Gwari and also recognise and strengthen the self-defence group ("Yan Sa Kai")⁸ to augment the security of the LGA. However, the risk of further relapse in crime, resonates the growing perception of ungoverned spaces- 'forest' in Kaduna State, serving as hide outs for bandits to perpetuate acts of violence and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

MECHANISMS FOR INTERVENTIONS:

- As part of measures to scale up security response to armed banditry in Kaduna State, the Federal Government approved the establishment of a new Battalion of the Nigerian Army and a new Police Area Command in Birnin Gwari LGA of Kaduna State⁹ with the view to enhance the capacity of security personnel in crime prevention and control of the affected areas.
- Security engagement/consultations with Community and Traditional/Religious leaders ongoing in response to the re-emerging security concerns to curb the menace.
- Stakeholders under the aegis of Birnin-Gwari Vanguard for Security and Good Governance petitioned the Amnesty International (AI) over the increasing cases of cattle rustling, armed banditry and kidnappings¹⁰, calling on the international human rights agency to wade into the crisis.
- The Birnin Gwari community established a local vigilante group in the area called ("Yan Sa Kai") to support the security operatives to mitigate or prevent of armed banditry.

RECOMMENDATIONS



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- The disarmament programme initiated by the Nigeria Police Command is commendable, but should be comprehensive to include demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation programs in the State, while also working with non-state actors like CSOs/NGOs and community leaders for an inclusive and sustainable intervention.
- The Kaduna State Government and Security Agencies in collaboration with Traditional and Community leaders should set up Panels of Enquiry towards addressing proximate conditions exacerbating the threat. Special attention should also be on addressing the developmental needs and concerns of communities to promote sustainable peace.
- The Nigerian Police and Army should expand the scope and source of its intelligence that reflects full interagency cooperation and local community involvement.

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