THE MENACE OF BANDITRY AND KIDNAPPING IN NIGERIA: AN ASSESSMENT OF SHEIKH GUMI'S MEDIATORY ROLE IN THE RELEASE OF GREENFIELD UNIVERSITY KIDNAPPED STUDENTS

SOLOMON AYANTAYO OJO
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, KOLADAISI UNIVERSITY, IBADAN, ojoayantayo@gmail.com

OLUSEGUN STEVE ADEGOKE
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS, LAGOS, olusegunsteveadegoke@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT
The increase in banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria has created significant security challenges in recent years, particularly with attacks on educational institutions where students are abducted for ransom. Military and non-military strategies have been employed to address these problems but have not yielded the desired result, highlighting the potential of a mediation strategy. Studies on the menace of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria are largely focused on their causes and sustenance, typology and military solution with less attention on mediation as a solution strategy. This study, therefore, examines the mediatory strategy employed by Sheikh Ahmed Gumi during the kidnapping of Greenfield University students. Utilising a qualitative research design, including case study and ex post facto methodologies, the findings indicate that Sheikh Gumi's mediation efforts played a crucial role in securing the release of the abducted students. The study also reveals that Gumi's informal mediation approach demonstrated elements of established mediation techniques including co-mediation, shuttle, and evaluative mediation. Consequently, the findings suggest that mediation can serve as an effective alternative strategy to address this security issue in Nigeria, and it recommended that the government promote such methods to combat banditry and foster peace and security in the nation.

Introduction

Nigeria has long grappled with various security challenges including farmers-herders clashes, religious riots, inter-ethnic conflicts, border disputes, and ethno-religious tensions. Additionally, security issues such as ethnic militancy—exemplified by the Biafra separatist agitation in the South East zone, insurgency in the Northeast, and unrest in the Niger Delta have compounded Nigeria's security situation. The northwest zone of Nigeria has been experiencing an unprecedented surge in banditry and kidnapping with deliberate abduction of school children. This rise in kidnapping has further

deepened the security crisis in Nigeria. Kidnapping by armed bandits originated in north-western Nigeria including Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, Kaduna and Niger States which are now bearing the brunt of this violence and have caused the loss of many lives. There are two prevalent types of kidnapping in Nigeria. There is kidnapping for ritual purposes and kidnapping for ransom. While the former has existed for a long time, the latter is a recent phenomenon in the country and is the area of concern of this study with particular emphasis on mediation as an alternative solution strategy.

Banditry is a violent criminal activity that involves the raiding of communities and settlements by armed marauders during which crimes such as kidnapping, cattle-rusting, robbery, extortion, murder and sexual abuses are committed. Generally, bandits are motivated by the desire for money. The prevalence of this security problem has attracted academic attention from different perspectives including causes and sustenance of banditry (CDD, 2022; Lawretta, 2021; Mohammed, 2015), classification of banditry (Okoli and Ugwu, 2019), and military solution strategies (Aina, Ojo and Oyewole, 2023). Factors exacerbating banditry include unemployment, widespread poverty and low literacy levels among the population, environmental degradation, land-use conflicts between farmers and herders, retaliatory ethnic violence, failures in the justice system, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, the breakdown of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, a large expanse of ungoverned spaces, etc. Banditry is classified according to "intent or motive, location, agency and autonomous, form and formation, and operational mode" (Okon, undated:21). However, concerning the strategies for addressing the menace, both kinetic and non-kinetic methods are used including military operations, state governments' dialogue and negotiation with bandits, community vigilante engagements, economic and social reforms and communication restrictions. Of all these strategies, it is the kinetic option that is still ongoing while the others were short-lived. However, the direct military intervention like the others has not been successful as evident in the continued escalation of banditry and kidnapping.

The ineffectiveness of the previous attempts at solving the banditry and kidnapping security problem inspires attention to examining the use of mediation as exemplified by Sheikh Ahmad Gumi. Mediation can be defined as a conflict management strategy wherein parties seek assistance from an external party to alter perceptions or behaviours without resorting to physical force or legal authority. Sheikh Ahmad Gumi, a former Army Captain and prominent Muslim cleric, has emerged as a key figure in addressing the kidnap-for-ransom crisis in northern Nigeria. He played a significant role in the release of 27 students abducted in March 2021 from the Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation in Afaka, Kaduna State.

While military solutions for banditry in Nigeria have garnered significant attention, the focus on mediation as a non-kinetic approach is under-studied. This paper highlights mediation as a means of combating banditry by analysing Sheikh Gumi's role in the abduction case involving students from Greenfield University, Kaduna. To explore this, the study seeks to address two key questions: What mediatory strategies did Sheikh Gumi employ in his interventions, and how effective were these strategies in securing the release of the abducted students? Addressing these questions will draw attention to the effectiveness of mediation as a conflict resolution strategy suited to tackling this protracted security problem.

Statement of Problem

The rise in banditry and kidnapping has created a serious security challenge contributing to the fragile security state of Nigeria. However, despite the option of a military solution to address it, the menace persists leading to loss of combatants' lives, civilian casualties, property destruction and the refugee problem. This makes the need to adopt a non-military approach more compelling to address the menace. In light of this, a soft approach with the use of mediation has been made popular by Sheikh Gumi as manifested in the case of abducted students of Greenfield University, Kaduna. Mediation as a non-kinetic strategy has not received sufficient attention in scholarship, unlike other non-kinetic strategies such as Government negotiation and dialogue with bandits, communication disruptions, etc.

Literature review

Nature, typology and causes of banditry

Banditry refers to criminal activities that range from armed pilfering to village or market invasion with the use of force. Sometimes threats can be employed to create the desired

effect of actual force to cause havoc. It is instructive to note that bandits are aggressors with exclusive criminal and economic intents (McGregor 2014; Okoli and Ugwu, 2019). This is established by the fact that the criminal activities of the bandits who are a heterogeneous collection of militants include cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, community or village raids, and armed robbery (Okoli and Okpaleke, 2014b; CDD, 2022). However, the CDD (2022) report on banditry in the northwest region of the country establishes that while the bandits terrorising the region are mainly Fulani, they also include Hausa, Kanuri, and Tuareg. The report is supported by Okon (undated) who considers the 'political dimension of banditry' to mean that 'most of the bandits are Fulani nomads'. The tag is influenced by their nomadic lifestyle which makes them not to have a clearly delineated homeland. There is also a religious colouration of banditry because of it appear synonymous with terrorism and bear semblance of neo-jihadism (SBMI, 2015; Omilusi, 2016). This echoes the narration that bandits may subtly be Islamizing northern Nigeria with the Middle Belt as the focal area.

A broad attempt at understanding the typology of banditry includes: social, political, or economic which is derived based on intent; urban or rural (location); maritime, coastal or mainland (geo-location); stationary or roving (*modus operandi);* mercenary or autonomous (level of autonomy) and petty or organised (level of organisation) (Okoli and Ugwu, 2019). To a very large extent, the typology applicable to Nigeria is rural banditry. This is because the bandits that wreak havoc in the northwest of the country operate largely in the countryside and remote border areas. They transverse the length and breadth of forests in Zamfara, Kebbi, Niger, Kaduna, Katsina States, and the neighbouring Niger Republic.

The cause and sustaining factors that fuels banditry, among other, include absence of good governance (Olaniyan and Yahaya, 2016), corrupt practices leading to massive poverty and weakening of the security agencies' capacity (Adegbami and Uche, 2016; Adegoke, 2021), large track of ungoverned spaces (Onwuzuruigbo, 2021), massive unemployment (Lawretta 2021; Mohammed, 2015), accessibility to small arms and light weapons (Akinyetun, 2022). Lastly, Okoli and Atelhe (2014) opine that banditry insecurity takes origin from ethno-communal violence compounded by fissures within identity conflicts. This point of view is anchored by a cross-cutting narrative hinged on the socio-economic and socio-ecological dynamics of this criminal occurrence. What seems to sustain and accentuate banditry and kidnapping is the Nigerian state leaderships' lack of governing will (Shettima and Tar, 2008) which in itself is a cause for its occurrence. Although, this is arguable given the fact it is the primary responsibility of the state to secure its citizens. However, going by the continuous spike in insecurity in the country, it does appear that the government is not demonstrating enough political will to combact it.

Significance of Mediation in Dispute Resolution

The importance of mediation is affirmed when conflicts are successfully resolved by involving third-party actors (Wallensteen, 2012). Its significance is also seen when it helps to reduce tension between conflict actors. Furthermore, the essence of mediation can be determined through its role in post-conflict peacebuilding activities to help solidify peace agreements. Notwithstanding the important place of mediation in dispute resolution, Ramsbotham et al., (2011) aver that it does not always successfully settle disputes. This shows that mediation has its shortcomings with Bercovitch & Gartner (2008) being favourably dispose to direct negotiation by conflict parties. According to them, this could be more effective than otherwise. However, the scholars fail to understand that it can sometimes be difficult for feuding parties to discuss peace terms without a third-party mediating. This oversight is buttressed with the realisation that often negotiation for peace comes into play when other attempts have failed or the parties do not see the reason for them to reach any terms. By and large, mediation can be an effective strategy in managing conflict if the parties in the conflict are willing for peaceful settlement of dispute.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a purely qualitative approach, utilizing case study and ex post facto research designs. It focuses on a detailed examination of Sheikh Gumi's mediatory role in the release of the abducted students from Greenfield University in Kaduna State. The research is based on a desk review of secondary

sources, including newspapers, reports, academic literature, online journals, workshop papers, and publications from non-governmental organizations. Specifically, daily newspaper articles concerning Sheikh Gumi's mediation efforts over three years (2019, 2020, and 2021) were systematically reviewed.

This data collection method was deemed appropriate due to the sensitive and security-related nature of the issue, which made direct access to the key individuals for confirmation difficult. While acknowledging that newspaper reports may carry some bias, the absence of any rebuttal provides a measure of credibility to the information. However, the inability to interview the affected parties, including Sheikh Gumi himself, is a limitation of this study.

Data analysis was conducted thematically using content analysis. To ensure accuracy and avoid alterations in context or meaning, the data was reviewed multiple times throughout the analysis process.

Ethical Consideration

Babbie and Mouton (2006) state that, while doing research, even desk research, the researcher needs to be aware of what is considered acceptable and what is not. With this in mind, the researchers acted in line with the best ethical considerations required of desk review standards.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Thematic analysis

1.1 Emergent Themes

	Themes	Newspaper Excerpts
1	Gumi's amnesty position	Reacting to the murdered students from Greenfield University abduction, murder, the Islamic cleric, Sheik Ahmad Gumi, on Friday said the incident had underscored his position that bandits were now at war with the nation. He said the only way forward was for the government to take his advice and grant amnesty to the bandits for them to lay down their arms. Punch-24 April, 2021
2	Mediation is with a 'contact person' outside the abductors' circle	"Yes, really. When we tried to trace them and put some sense into them, the contact who is also a nomadic Fulani, they threatened him. They said if he insists on them they were going to catch him and he will have to pay a ransom before he gets out." Vanguard May 4, 2021
3	Information of non-Fulani leadership of the abductors' group	"And the leader is from Jalingo. He is from Adamawa. He is not the local Fulani we have here. So this means that the North-eastern

		element is coming into this area and we have to move fast. We don't have that luxury of time." Vanguard- May 4, 2021
4	Gumi's pro-negotiation stance with terrorists	Gumi urged the government to negotiate with the abductors to avoid further loss of students' lives, stressing that no amount of money was worth the lives of the students. He said the government could eventually track and recover the ransom paid. International Centre for Investigative Reporting-May 5, 2021 He said, "The money they are asking for is too much; if I give you that money, you cannot run away with it. Nobody can run. So, why not give them the money, they release the boys and then we pursue them and get our money back and do what is necessary; it is simple logic. So, bring the money from the Central Bank. How can they move that money? We should not be stupid. Punch- 5 May 2021
5	Gumi's perception of government's seriousness towards negotiations	Speaking on the issue of bandits reneging on the terms of past negotiations, Gumi said that the bandits had no trust in the seriousness or sincerity of the government. "They told us no government is serious and I can tell you, yes, no government is serious. Because after negotiating with them, leaving their weapons or given out some of their weapons, the reaction of the government is aloof. They leave them alone with nothing, no programme of rehabilitation, no programme to see into their welfare, nothing. And so, they definitely have to go back there," he said International Centre for Investigative Reporting-May 5, 2021

6	Gumi's knowledge of abductees' whereabouts	The Cleric noted that he had provided security agencies with the information he had on the whereabouts of the Greenfield students, and that their location was no more a secret. "Everybody knows where they are. The security operatives and parents know where they are. But the lives of the students are in danger. We don't want to see 19 corpses of our students," he said. International Centre for Investigative Reporting-May 5, 2021
7	Positive outcomes of Gumi's interventions	"The talk with the Greenfield University students' abductors is also going on because we are. You know they threatened to kill all of them after a particular deadline, but after talking to them, they are now lowering their bar…so, we are thankful they have stopped killing. And we are still negotiating with them." Vanguard- May 8, 2021
8	Linkages between Boko-Haram and bandits in Greenfield abduction	"The Greenfield abduction is unique because for the first time we saw a cooperation between some bandits and Boko Haram elements which confirm that Boko Haram are encroaching into the field, which is a bad situation," Mr Gumi said. "But the Greenfield abduction is proving difficult because of the linkage between the bandits and Boko Haram" Mr Gumi said. Premium Times-May 16, 2021
9	Gumi's self-appointed mediation activities is not backed by government	Gumi's media aide, Malam Salisu Hassan, told Sahara Reporters in an interview on Thursday that the cleric halted his plans because the State Government was not interested in negotiations. "No, it is not that Sheikh is busy. The problem is that since the government is not interested in reconciling with those people, so Sheikh just tried to have some other way so that he can achieve his goals." Hassan said. Sahara Reporters-April 22, 2021

Table 1: Newspaper reports on Gumi's mediatory activities.
Authors'compilation.

Discussion of Findings

While Gumi has been a person of interest in the narratives of banditry, kidnapping and Boko Haram negotiations in Nigeria, the thematic analysis of this study is based on his interventions as reported in the pages of the dailies as regards the Greenfield University abductions which occurred in Kaduna State, Nigeria in April of 2021. Significant themes obtained from the analyses are highlighted and discussed in the following paragraphs.

i. Gumi's Amnesty Position

In the wake of the Greenfield University abductions, Sheik Gumi advocated amnesty for kidnappers and bandits in Northern Nigeria. "The Federal government should give them blanket amnesty, then if somebody continues, then we will deal with them," Sheik Gumi said. Granting amnesty for outlaws in Nigeria is not a new phenomenon as witnessed with the Niger Delta militants in 2007 by the federal government of late Umaru Yar'Adua. The amnesty policy pardoned the militants and gave them a new orientation about peaceful coexistence and prepared them to become members of civil society.

ii. Mediation with a 'Contact Person' outside the Abductors' Circle

In conflict negotiations, no party is forced to participate in a negotiation. The parties are free to accept or reject the outcome of negotiations and can withdraw at any point during the process. Parties may participate directly in the negotiations or may choose to be represented by someone else. In this Greenfield case, the abductors were not in direct contact with Gumi but through a representative of the group who was not part of them. This tallies with mediation concept which allows a mediator to have direct access to either party directly or through a representative. Gumi was able to maintain contact with the abductors through a nomadic Fulani man who at a point was threatened by the abductors if their messages and responses obtained were not in tandem with their expectations.

iii. Non-Fulani Leadership of Greenfield Abductors

The Fulani have often been alleged to be at the forefront of banditry and kidnapping incidents in Nigeria. However, in this instance, it was established that the leader of the Greenfield University abductors was of non-Fulani descent from Jalingo, Taraba State. This could be a deliberate ploy to exonerate the Fulani tribe from this particular incident. Either way, as observed from Gumi's mediatory interventions, not all of the atrocities of kidnapping and banditry are led by the Fulani tribe. For instance, the Greenfield abductions were perpetrated by northeastern elements with linkages to Boko Haram. According to Gumi, 'the Greenfield abduction is proving difficult because of the linkage between the bandits and Boko Haram' (Premium Times-May 16, 2021). This finding corresponds with CDD's (2022) report and Okon's opinion but negates the general view that the Fulani tribe are the only perpetrators of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria.

iv. Gumi's Pro-Negotiation Stance with Terrorists

While the Nigerian Government opposed negotiating with terrorists, Gumi's mediatory approach was geared towards reaching a mutually acceptable ransom payment. This was highlighted when he appealed to the Nigerian government to give in to the demands of the terrorists, as this was the only possible solution to saving the students' lives. Gumi was of the opinion that not negotiating with the terrorists and paying the ransom demanded was an unwise stance by the Government, stressing that no amount of money was worth the lives of the students. In his words:

> *Why not give them the money, they release the boys and then we pursue them and get our money back and do what is necessary; it is simple logic. So, bring the money from the Central Bank. How can they move that money? We should not be stupid.*
> *(Punch- 5 May 2021).*

Elements of bias can be deduced from Gumi's utterances above. Whereas the mediation principle avers that an arbitrator must perform his or her duties impartially, without bias or prejudice by words or conduct. But his position above greatly undermined his impartiality and questioned his genuine intentions as a self-appointed mediator.

v. Gumi's Knowledge of the Abductees' Whereabouts

One of the issues that limit the activities of security agencies in rescuing kidnapped victims in Nigeria is their claim of not knowing the location of the kidnappers' den. On the contrary, Gumi's mediation talks with the Greenfield abductors showed that the whereabouts of the abductees and their kidnappers was public knowledge which should have made their freedom by the Nigerian security agents easy. In his words, 'everybody knows where they are'

(International Centre for Investigative Reporting-May 5, 2021.

vi. Outcomes of Gumi's Mediation

While Gumi's mediation tactics may not be acceptable amongst many stakeholders, nonetheless, his efforts yielded positive results in securing the release of the students. For instance, parents of victims appealed to Gumi to help secure the release of their children and wards more so when the Kaduna State government refused to negotiate with the kidnappers. Moreover, these same parents came back to show gratitude to Gumi after their release. This suggests that while Gumi's efforts may not be too popular, his efforts yielded positive outcomes in securing the release of the kidnapped victims.

Analysis of Gumi's Mediation Style

Gumi's mediation strategies are quite informal because they are not based on a designed structure. He is also a self-imposed mediator in the negotiations between the government and the Greenfield abductors. Moreover, there is no information on Gumi's knowledge, skills, abilities and certifications in the art of mediation, arbitration and negotiation. While Gumi's mediation style is informal, there are elements of established mediation styles embedded his approach. Some of these mediation styles are highlighted.

i. Co-mediation

Co-mediation is a process in which two mediators try to help the parties resolve their differences. One mediator works with each party, thereby eliminating any concerns about fairness or objectivity sometimes associated with traditional mediation. The use of co-mediation can be observed in Gumi's mediation approach during the Greenfield abductions when he disclosed that his contact with the abductors was through a representative who was not part of the group but acted on their behalf. While not much evidence on the exact role of the abductors' representative is known, some statements suggest that the abductors passed and received messages from their representatives via interactions with Gumi.

ii. Shuttle mediation

Shuttle mediation is a technique in which one mediator works with both disputants. Sometimes the disputants will have meetings with the mediator at different times. Within the context of the Greenfield abductions, Gumi's role in shuttle mediation is highlighted in his to and from movement between the abductors and the government to deliver and receive messages from each party. Though Gumi's mediatory role is not in an official capacity, the government and the abductors were able to reach out to each other through his interventions.

iii. Evaluative Mediation

Evaluative mediation is the style of mediation where the mediator exerts control over the mediation process by being the most vocal about the position of the parties and their offers. An evaluative mediator will offer opinions on the strengths and weaknesses of the parties and usually is in control of how and when the parties interact. This style tends to work well if there are uneven power dynamics in the mediation and allows the mediator to drive the conversation to focus on important issues and what the parties need. In line with the tenets of evaluative mediation, some of its basic elements can be observed in Gumi's style of mediation. Firstly, Gumi was the most vocal entity during the Greenfield abductions. It was through Gumi that the position of the abductors (in terms of demands and ransoms) was known by the government and the public at large.

> *They are demanding for money…so, why not give them the money, then they release the boys … it is simple logic (Punch- 5 May 2021).*

Gumi was also very vocal in describing the position of the government towards the negotiation process. For instance, in one of his numerous media interviews, Gumi describes the government as being unserious and unwilling to negotiate with the abductors. Another notable feature that fosters the use of evaluative mediation is the imbalance in power between both parties. In the case of the Greenfield abductions, a clear power imbalance existed between the abductors and the government. While the government has the advantage of more ammunition to stage an attack and overpower the abductors, the hostages in the abductors' custody are an ace which gave the

abductors their measure of power in the process. Thus evaluative mediation style used by Gumi is appropriate within this context of power imbalances. Gumi as an evaluative mediator points out the strengths and weaknesses of both parties in several of his media interviews when he noted that he had provided security agencies with the information he had on the whereabouts of the Greenfield students.

In evaluative mediation, the mediator also presents recommendations for settlement. This can be informal suggestions after the initial evaluation or it can be formal suggestions in written formats which are presented to the parties as an opening option. This can encourage the parties to consider a settlement based on the strengths of their case. This is exhibited in Gumi's mediation style as he initially proffered an amnesty solution for the crisis. Reacting to the murdered students from Greenfield University abduction, Gumi said that the incident had underscored his position that bandits were now at war with the nation. He said the only way forward was for the government to take his advice and grant amnesty to the bandits for them to lay down their arms.

Conclusion

This study examined the mediatory strategy used by Sheikh Gumi in his interventions in the release of Greenfield University abducted students. This study has found and concluded that Gumi's mediation style is informal but it demonstrated some characteristics of established mediation styles including co-mediation, shuttle mediation, and evaluative mediation. Also, this study confirmed that Gumi's mediatory role in the release of the abducted students by the bandits was effective because it resulted in saving the lives of the students and the trauma that the incident brought on every stakeholder. Therefore, the findings suggest that there are other ways of addressing this security problem in Nigeria. The study has contributed to knowledge in the area of security challenges caused by banditry and kidnapping by confirming that mediation principles can be effectively applied to solve the problem of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria. Conclusively, mediation as a non-kinetic or soft-power strategy should be encouraged and promoted in managing the security crisis in Nigeria.

Recommendations

- The government should encourage non-governmental interventions to assist or support in reducing the insecurity problem as exemplified by Gumi's mediatory intervention.
- Further studies should examine the role of autonomous persons or agencies in addressing security challenges using primary data where possible.
- The government should address the root cause of the banditry and kidnapping in the country which is mass poverty through multifaceted strategies including the creation of employment opportunities for the citizens.

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