



ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD KIDNAPPINGS IN BOKO HARAM

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The most notorious means that terrorist groups use to implement their policies and ideological goals and objectives are violence, sabotage, kidnapping innocent people as hostages. Such terrorist operations have alarmingly increased over the recent years. Infamously enough, Boko Haram in Nigeria is the most notorious organization that commit such terrorist crimes. Kidnappings in schools substantially increased in 2020 across northern cities and states; thousands of children and women fell victim to Boko Haram, making Nigeria third in the world as per the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) of 2020.

Mass Kidnapping by Boko Haram

Boko Haram feeds on extremist ideology in interpreting religious scriptures. As an approach, it has adopted the violent armed confrontation with the nation-state and any entities or individuals that go against its ideology, especially after transformation from a civil advocacy group of a civil nature to an armed group in 2004 when it first sparked off the confrontations with the security forces.

Northern Nigeria has recently sustained mass kidnappings by terrorists, following the 2009 events, in which the leaders of Boko Haram, including Boko Haram Founder, Mohammed Yusuf, along with sympathizers were liquidated, although kidnappings of foreign workers are common in the Niger Delta Region, east of the country, by armed gangs and tribal groups to exercise pressure on the central government for political bargains. Boko Haram's long-term goals of mass kidnappings can be summarized as follows:

1. Agitating public opinion, frightening and threatening citizens to show seriously evince readiness to promote its ideology that rejects western secular education and address the preference of youth to western regular schools.
2. Carrying out revenge and retaliatory acts against members of the security forces given the detention of key leaders by the authorities.

3. Using kidnapers in swap operations and strengthening its position with the authorities as a strong pressure lobby.
4. Providing a quick material resource to support its members by recruiting new fighters.
5. Creating a public opinion issue that exercises pressure on the political decision-makers and the key authorities, and stirring up emotions, especially when kidnapers are children or women. Children are very important in group activities and in pressure on government given the emotions they arouse. Other militant groups have followed suit, making kidnapping a profitable business.
6. Financing various operations, capitalizing on the ransom paid to release the kidnapped individuals.
7. Promoting the Boko Haram ideology in the media to achieve more global fame and keep its reputation resonating in the media, which would achieve free publicity.

Trajectory Stages of Kidnapping

The individual and collective kidnappings of Boko Haram have gone through several stages, subject to the nature of relations and development of terrorist activities:

1. Kidnapping-Based Existence: It confirms military prowess and supremacy. Boko Haram used to take kidnappings as a goal, mostly carried out by individuals.
2. Kidnapping-Based Balance: It strengthens the situation; such kidnapping operations focus on security and army commanders or counterparts of peer groups. For instance, after the Nigerian government imposed a state of emergency in May 2013 in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe, Boko Haram intensified targeting vulnerable groups, especially women, children, students and locals in rural areas. The Boko Haram Leader, Abubakar Shekau, warned that his fighters would take revenge on the families of the Nigerian security forces because they arrested the wives and children of the Boko Haram members.
3. Kidnapping-Based Multi-Functions: It depends on mass kidnapping to use the kidnapped people in various fields, such as recruiting new fighters, obtaining ransom, gaining sympathy, exercising pressure on the other party, and achieving media propaganda.

Most Notorious Kidnappings

Nigeria has sustained many kidnappings of different manifestations, driven by political, criminal, commercial, and social motives. However, Boko Haram is one of the first terrorist groups to have carried out mass kidnappings for purely ideological terrorist purposes. As Boko Haram has adopted kidnappings in its terrorist strategy, the situation escalated with four kidnappings carried out in less than three months. The following are the most notorious kidnappings:

- **Bama Kidnapping:** It is a mass kidnapping from a police military barracks in Bama, Borno State, in May of 2013, targeting 8 children and 4 women.
- **Chibok Kidnapping:** It is the most notorious kidnapping, April of 2014, targeting 276 secondary school girls in Chibok, Borno State; about 100 schoolgirls are still missing.
- **Dapchi Kidnapping:** 111 girls from the boarding section of a government school were targeted in Dapchi, Yobe state, about 300 KM from Chibok, February 19 of 2018.
- **Kankara Kidnapping:** December 20 of 2020, armed men targeted a school in Kankara in the northwestern state of Katsina, the birthplace of President Buhari. The armed men kidnapped nearly 350 boys. Later, the security forces successfully liberated the hostages.
- **Kajara Kidnapping:** Less than three months into the Kankara kidnapping, in the latest episode of mass school kidnappings, February 17, of 2021, an armed group that stormed the Governmental Science Secondary School in Kajara District, Niger State, kidnapped 27 students, three staff employees and 12 individuals.

The repeated mass kidnappings caused glaringly negative effects on all social activities, especially education by closing schools, imposing lockdown, and forcing teachers, students and children to give up all educational activities. Violent attacks on schools have claimed the lives of more than 600 teachers, 19,000 teachers have fled for fear of being killed, and others have been threatened to be targeted or kidnapped in states such as Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa.

Kidnapping of Female Students

Boko Haram for several reasons; it has caused social repercussions locally, regionally and globally.

Boko Haram attacked the Government Secondary School for Girls in Chibok, Nigeria, at night on April 14 of 2014. The gunmen stormed the school, shot the guards and kidnapped many female students in trucks, possibly heading to the Sampsia Forest. Meanwhile, several houses in Chibok were also burned down.

The school was closed for four weeks before the attack due to the poor security situation. In fact, all secondary schools in Borno district have been closed since March due to the horrific Boko Haram attacks.

On May 6 of 2014, 8 other girls were kidnapped from Waraba village in northeastern Nigeria, and Boko Haram claimed responsibility for the said kidnappings. According to the data of the records of the Examinations Department, a total of 530 schoolgirls were registered from the various villages surrounding the city to take the secondary school certificate exams. However, the exact number of schoolgirls present at the time of the attack is unknown, and the schoolgirls were between 16 and 18 years old, in their senior years of school. Due to the paucity of information made available for us about the said kidnapping, albeit mixed reports, we can provide no accurate account on the issue.

Pos-Kidnapping Situation: one month into the kidnapping, May 12 of 2014, Abu Bakr Shekau, Boko Haram Leader, published a video footage evincing the Boko Haram readiness to return the kidnapped schoolgirls to their respective families, in exchange for the Nigerian authorities' release of the Boko Haram members detained by the Nigerian government. In the video snippet, appeared about 130 girls, reciting Surat Al-Fatihah, and Shekau, while speaking in the video clip, indicated that the schoolgirls had converted to Islam.

The Nigerian government rejected the Boko Haram conditional offer, in an official statement announced by the Nigerian Minister of the Interior. On May 22, Nigerian school teachers organized demonstrations across the country, calling for the girls' release and return alongside the construction of fences around open-air schools. On May 27, the Nigerian Army's Chief of Staff announced that the army had been able to locate the girls, but could not reveal the clandestine location, speaking to protesters who had gone to street to demonstrate in front of the defense permanent headquarters: «We are working very hard, and we will bring the girls back.» On May 28, it was announced that four kidnapped girls had escaped from the detention location. As reported, the total number of the schoolgirls released is 163 out of 276.

International Response to Kidnapping

The said kidnapping attracted remarkable attention at the international arena. Several countries and major international bodies offered to assist the Nigerian government in liberating the kidnapped schoolgirls. To this effect, American units launched search operations, and a campaign was created on social networks calling for their liberation. The United Kingdom provided a team of experts and advisers in international development from the Foreign Office and other institutions, and the United States sent a team of military, police and hostage negotiators.

Gordon Brown, the UN Special Envoy for Education, talked about a project to enhance the security of Nigerian schools. The said project aims to identify the schools most at risk and engage communities, students and children themselves in preventing similar attacks. Former French President, François Hollande, expressed France's readiness to host a security meeting of the African countries to discuss the crimes committed by Boko Haram, which was held later. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang announced China would provide Nigeria with useful intelligence information by satellite and intelligence agencies. Israel also offered its readiness to help Nigeria to overcome the said ordeal.

Kidnapping and Ransom

The frequent tragedies of mass kidnappings confirm the theory of skepticism in public behavior, which holds that kidnapping has snowballed into a craft for some parties. The theory also reveals the economic aspect of such kidnappings, emphasizing that the victims are not only rich or famous; kidnapped victims are also from the poor, who are perhaps the most targeted, especially boarding schools that are overpopulated and flooded with school children. The perpetrators are usually terrorist gangs and thugs who take advantage of the poor police apparatus, in addition to the weapons easily made available in the country.

Kidnappers are enticed by several factors, such as poverty, unemployment, despair and inequality. Equally important, kidnappings have become notoriously rampant because the government does not control the entire territory, given the fact that armed gangs are mushrooming and sprouting up ubiquitously, weapons are easily made available aided by advanced communication technologies. It is critically important for the government authorities to put in unremitting efforts to crack down on such a sociopolitical malice.

Unfortunately, ransom has contributed to the ubiquitous growth of kidnappings, which government officials usually deplore. A report by the Nigerian intelligence company (SB

Morgen) revealed that the kidnapers obtained at least \$18 million between June 2011 and March 2020.

Government and Mass Kidnapping

The Nigerian government has taken several policies and measures against the mass kidnappings committed by Boko Haram including:

- **Replacing Military Commanders:** President Buhari replaced the army commanders given the increase in violence and ordered a large-scale military operation following the safe return of nearly 300 kidnapped girls and women.
- **Launching Joint Operations:** President Buhari stated that the priority and primary goal of the Nigerian government is to return all school hostages. He also called on state governments to review their policies in clamping down on thugs. To this effect, the police and army forces began joint operations to rescue the kidnapped schoolgirls.
- **Launching Bring-Back-Our-Girls Campaign:** It has received great support on social media, including the support of the then first lady of the United States, Michelle Obama. The said campaign called for their rapid and safe release and return.
- **Safe School Initiative:** This initiative was launched after the Chibok schoolgirls were kidnapped to further enhance security in schools in the northeastern region of Nigeria, by building a fence around each open-air school. The Government has pledged at least \$14 million for a three-year project, with the support of Gordon Brown, the UN Special Envoy for Education, and former British Prime Minister, in addition to building several schools temporarily for education as part of the said project.
- **International Declaration on Safe Schools Adopted by Nigeria:** In March 2015, the Nigerian government adopted it, which provided for the commitment to protecting education in armed conflict. President Buhari approved the said declaration in 2019, pledged that the Government would implement it in accordance with the law, would be committed to ensuring programs and policies to prevent such attacks on schools when they come into play, and to combat impunity for those who carried out such attacks. The Nigerian government and private donors have paid for at least six years of education.
- **Financial Aid Allocated by Local Authorities and Federal Government:** It has been appropriated for about 57 schoolgirls who escaped from Boko Haram. The said

financial aid were from international agencies and foreign governments. However, it seems that the other victims, who were also abused by Boko Haram terrorists, did not benefit from such financial aid.

- **Launching Voluntary National Initiatives:** Such efforts were spearheaded by religious, political and social figures to establish a direct dialogue project and peaceful negotiation between the society segments and prevent military options to free the kidnapped schoolgirls.

Conclusion

In the foreseeable future, all manifestations of kidnappings do not seem to come to an end. As such, government efforts, especially the faultless military and security operations, may reduce the number of terrorist operations and limit the capabilities of terrorist groups to carry out mass kidnappings. Several measures and precautions have been taken in this regard, and many other options are still being considered.

The good offices efforts of the national initiatives launched recently in more than one area in the north of the country seem so far to be seminal and productive, and have come to fruition, albeit slowly. More importantly, the welcome displayed by the people alongside the civil society heralds a good indication of the efficient mediation between all parties, including extremist and terrorist groups.