

Cattle Rustling and Armed Banditry along Nigeria-Niger Borderlands

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Abstract: One major challenge bedevilling the Nigeria-Niger borderlands has been the aspect of cattle rustling and armed banditry whose paucity of records on its gravity on the affected victims has left much to be desired over time and space. Most of the analysis provided by security on these perennial phenomena has so far glanced at it as a national rather than international crime activity. However, evidence extant seemed to indicate an international crime linkage factor also, especially when the prevalent relationship between some parts of Nigeria and Tahoua Region in Niger Republic has been considered. The likelihood of these perpetrated acts (i.e. cross-border cattle rustling and armed banditry in particular) and proliferation of small arms and light weapons, drug and human trafficking including other heinous deeds has led to apprehending of criminals by security personnel across borderlands. The preoccupation of this paper therefore, is to examine cross-border cattle rustling and armed banditry in the Nigeria-Niger Republic borderlands in historical perspectives, as well as to analyse the nature and dynamics of the phenomena and how that has further affected the relationship of the duo inclusive the downstream economy.

Keywords: Cattle rustling; armed banditry; borderlands.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Border porosity across most West African countries has led to increase in different forms of crime. This spate of criminality obviously undermines social and economic activities along most of the borderlands of West Africa, (Thom,D.J,1975:48). It further heightened suspicion between countries, especially where the perpetrators of such criminalities are untraceable, (Jimi Peter.2011:33). The growing rate of cross-border cattle rustling and armed banditry has recently become a nightmare across different parts of West Africa, (Gabriel A.R & Fayomi O. E, 2012:48). In line with this, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), 1998 Heads of State Decision A/DECS/10/98 was basically meant to regulate transhumance and its resultant consequences among the Member States (Alemika, E, E,2013:142). The assumption is that the deed was perpetuated by transhumance and it should be curtailed if not stopped completely through bilateral agreements,(Okoli, A.C. 2016: 82).

Furthermore, Mali and Cote’d Ivoire signed agreement to regulate cross-border transhumance in 1994 while Burkina Faso and Niger Republic established a framework of consultation in 2003. The result thus, was the emergence of Niger Rural Code of 1993 and Niger Pastoral Ordinance of 2009 which all aimed at curbing raids in the areas and beyond (Mohammed, S.A. 2016: 15). Cattle rustling and armed banditry started to show its ugly face in North-eastern parts of Nigeria in 1999, (Egwu Sam. 2015:12). In view of this, Senators from the affected constituencies called for the Presidency to mount diplomatic pressures on the frontline countries of Niger Republic, Cameroon and Chad whose citizens in connivance with Nigerians were allegedly perpetrating such violence, (Alemika, E.E and Chukwuma, I.C, 2005: 148).

To further checkmate this deadly trend in the early period, the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs organised two national seminars in Yola and Sokoto in 1999 and 2001 respectively with the theme ‘Cross-Border Armed Banditry’ for serious discussion, (Shalangwa, M. W. (2013:48). This is not common to Nigeria alone as different countries at regional level made decisive efforts to curve the menace. In spite of all these policy frameworks at regional and national levels, the challenges of such insecurities continued to plague different countries with devastating effects. Therefore, the major concern of this paper is to study the nature and dynamics of cross-border cattle rustling and armed banditry along the frontline States of Nigeria and Niger Republic.

II. CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

The acts of cattle rustling and armed banditry are interwoven in most pastoral communities of Africa. Only on few occasions rustling could take place without involving banditry. This does not dispute the fact that there have been instances where cattle were quietly stolen in the night or even in the broad day light (Okoli, 2016: 8). In fact, East Africa has high rate of cattle rustling in Africa, drew in the light of this, a protocol of Eastern African Police Chiefs Cooperation (EAPCCO) which legally defined cattle rustling as “the stealing or planning, organizing attempting, aiding or abetting the stealing of livestock by any person from one country or community to another, where the theft is accompanied by dangerous weapons and violence” (EAPCCO, 2008:8). Incidentally, there were a lot of factors that influenced the prevalence of cross- border cattle rustling in West Africa, which include the inability of most states to govern effectively its borderlands, hinterlands and forestlands. (Mohammed, 2016: 10).

The concept of banditry has been changing over time, space and circumstances. A bandit in the 19th century Europe and Americas was a freedom fighter whose aim was partly to ensure the emancipation of the downtrodden from the upper class or colonised over the colonizer (Warto,1994:128). Furthermore, bandits like Chuchito el Roto, Herachio Bernel and Santanon were often celebrated as heroes of Mexican independence. Therefore, Mexicans have warm regards and respect for those ‘social workers’ termed bandits, while on the contrary, the State often considered them as nuisance and outlaws that need to be eradicated (Michael Watts,1987:8).

Therefore, in some pre-industrial societies peasants see bandits differently from the State not as outlaws, hoodlums and miscreants but as avengers and ‘bread winners’. However, a bandit in traditional African setting is entirely opposite to that of Americas and Europe, the former specialised in armed robbery and other related crimes (Curott N.A & Fink A.2008:46). The most common feature of banditry in Africa has been maiming, killing and wanton destruction of properties and hence, it has a direct relationship with cattle rustling (Rufa’i M.A.2017:8). Since most herdsmen could do anything possible to prevent the rustling of their herds, then the bandit also apply force with the aid of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) to ensure effective stealing of livestock (Addo Peter,2006:7). Hence, the application of force during livestock theft is what is herein considered cattle rustling and armed banditry.

The area of study herein refers to borderlands is also synonymous with frontier lands which are basically of two types: minimal and maximal with both striking differences. A minimal borderland refers to a situation whereby the area of interaction between the two countries is limited in scope particularly, where it was a product of treaty with little historical and cultural affiliations (Prescott J.R.1965:42). The USA- Mexico borderlands have been is a typical example of such demarcations which was defined as 20 kilometres in width on either side, while the maximal refers to a situation where ethnic, linguistic and even ancestral links existed between people on either side of a border (Thom,D.J,1975: 13). In that case, the borderland could be as wide as the extent of the territory of each ethnic group in a given State. The Nigeria- Niger borderlands falls within this category, people from both sides shared a lot of things in common Thus, about 27 villages formed up the borderlands of Nigeria-Niger Republic that covers a boundary length of about 1,500 kilometres (Mohammed Iliya,1993:37). Most of the aligning borders usually suffered from neglect by Government(s) which resulted into poverty, illiteracy and poor infrastructural facilities. This often creates a fertile ground for all sorts of cross-border crimes (Asiwaju A.I,2001:16).

III. HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY OF BANDITRY ALONG THE BORDERLANDS

Historically, Nigeria and Niger have been one and the same in many respects. The only difference was the tiny colonial dividing line. The border was just there in principle because it has not deterred interactions amongst the two hitherto same but now colonially divided communities (Miles,M.F.1994:67).The nature and impact of this demarcation as well as pre-colonial interactions should not bother us much since it has been adequately treated by scholars (Asiwaju, A.I. & Barkindo, B.M 1993:128). The concern herein is to look at historical trajectories of cattle rustling, banditry and other related border disturbances between the state of Tahoua and some parts of North-Western Nigeria.

In view of the above, most of the villages along both sides of the border were founded and inhabited by people from the two countries. In present day Tangaza Local Government of Sokoto State for instance, villages such as Kwaccefur, Karfe, Kurdula and Raka were basically established either by Fulani, Taoureg or Hausa people from *Kasar Adar* (Adar Land) in the present Tahoua region (WJHCBS,1955:25). The historical tie between the communities has created an opportunity for steady occurrence of cross-border disturbance related to cattle rustling, banditry and even farmer-headsmen conflict (WJHCBS,1956:15). The first major recorded bandit’s strife along this border area was recorded in 1901 when both British and French authorities lamented bitterly on the number of traders killed by the bandits. Thus, 12,000 camels laden with assorted grains were attacked and their goods stolen on their way from western Hausaland to Tahoua region, (NAK/PRO/FO/1901/403-316:18). The French authorities put the total property lost incurred at £165,000 and

210 traders killed in the incidence. This seems to be the major bandit operation in French colonial experience in Niger Republic, but that does not dispute the fact that there were other minor incidences during the period (NAK/PRO/FO/403-316:10).

No sooner was the artificial border created; some towns and villages started expanding as border markets. Areas like Jibiya, Illela, Dankama, Kwonni, Mai'adua, Kwangolon, Gurbin Baure among several others sprang up not only as centres of trade but markets for the sale of rustled proceeds (Inuwa M.M.1993:54). There were series of complains about harassment by bandits and rustlers along this borderlands in 1940s. The bandits and rustlers who caused havoc to the communities were found around Danburaima, Gidan Zomo and Bamgi. Gidan Arab (Zangon Arab) for instance, was allegedly famous for housing bandits,(WJHCBS,1942:42). It is located at the border edge of Nigeria and Niger in present Sabon Birni Local Government Area of Sokoto State. The village was founded in 1948 by a Touareg called Arab from Tahoua region,(WJHCB 1948:12). According to information, Arab harboured all sort of criminals from both sides of the borderlands (Abubakar A. 2017). Some of the bandits who stayed with him were Amadu Dadai from Sabon Birni, Shehu from Madawa, Amadu Tsola from Bamgi, Dantabizo from Tsamaye and Aluwa from Makuwana(WJHCBS: PCJ/981/SI/51:28). In line with the deadly operations of this criminal gang, a letter of complaint was written to the two countries appraising the words of the then Sarkin Gobir of Madawa

The man (Arab) is a menace to the community, which should be removed... The main occupation of his people is cattle rustling, stealing and banditry. The leader has twice been convicted... by French court; first for theft and second for banditry. His village provides a refuge for all who flee from justice on either side of the border; it is a public knowledge that many of the rustlers operating in our territory are based there. Therefore, both Sarkin Gobir of Sabon Birni, Mayaki and myself would be only very glad to get rid of him,(WJHCB/158/1948/104:12).

As follow up to this complain, a joint meeting between the French and British Colonial Officers as well as Local Chiefs across the two countries was held at Madawa on the 5th of July, 1951. It was agreed that the Village (Gidan Arab) should be jointly stormed and the bandits arrested (WJHCBS, 1951:115). In line with this, the Village was jointly attacked, 10 bandits were apprehended and 130 head of rustled cattle recovered belonging to herdsmen from Bamgi, (WJHCBS 1951:115). Moreover, some rifles and other related Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) were also collected from the bandits. Unfortunately, neither the gang leader (Arab) nor some of the leading members were arrested by the Joint Patrol Team (WJHCBS 1951:115). After this incidence the operational base of the bandits shifted northward to the forest of Gundumi another hub of hoodlums (WJHCBS,1952:10). This was a major epicentre and hideout for criminals. Most for the prisoners involved in Niger Republic jail break in 1951 used to assemble and operate freely from this forest (WJHCBS, 1951:12).

Some of the most wanted criminals in the forest include some Bamgi Fulani who were notoriously known banditry. The Fulani were clan was accused of attacking Bachaka market on 3rd December, 1954. They killed 5 Touaregs and carted away with their animals (WJHCBS,1954:10). Similarly, such hoodlums were declared wanted by the people of Gawakuke, Madawa and Maradi in 1954, (WJHCBS 1958:18). These cross-border disturbances led to the formation of Joint Border Patrol between the French and the British in 1953. In line with this, 529 horses were mounted on regular border patrol under the leader of Sergeant Mamman Katsina who was assisted by Sarkin Rafin Madawa. This effort led to the reduction of banditry in the border vicinity (WJHCBS/SBDNB/1954:10). Rural banditry and other forms of criminal activities along this borderline could partly be attributed to several factors such as the harsh French colonial policy of corvee and taxation which turned most people to wretchedness (Kware,M.2000:128). Those that could not withstand the hardship however, found refuge along the border and ventured into different debilitating acts. By so doing some rampages also established cohorts with their likes in both environments of Nigeria and Niger Republic and continued to pose security threats clandestinely to two States and of course to the general public.

IV. CONTEMPORARY TRENDS AND DYNAMICS

Cross-border cattle rustling and banditry along Nigeria- Niger Republic took a new dimension around 2010, due to the proliferation of criminal gangs who specialised in different acts of banditry (Rufa'i, M.A 2016:8). Prior to this period, cattle stealing was more dominant in Tahour, which involved the act of stealing 1-5 animals only and was, usually done by the local thieves. In most cases, such undesirable elements were often known by their names, locations and even the local butchers that purchased the animals from them. (Shitu A,2017). Thus, whenever and wherever, livestock have been reported missing such people were usually contacted as the prime suspects unless otherwise (Muhammadu B. 2017). Most of the Police Stations in Department of Tahoua have a comprehensive list of such local criminals. Since most of the theft was executed with the aid of motor-bikes, the animals grazing on the outskirts of the Villages had thus been rendered easy to cart away with by the young criminals (Ibrahim M, 2017).

Another reason advanced more to easy theft of the livestock has been the less noise behaviour and durability to hardship of most animals compared to that of goats during the rustling process. Perhaps, that might have attributed to high incidence in cattle than in others. Information has it that most of the animals stolen around Kwonni, Sarnawa, Gidan Iddar and Bada-Gishiri in Department of Tahoua were usually recovered from Danburema and Gudun-Gudun in Gada Local Government Area of Nigeria, (Muhammad B. 2017). Those unrecovered were usually taken to either distant markets to as far as Shinkafi, Talata Mafara and Kasuwar Daji or slaughtered at home by the local butchers (Musa, S. 2017). The people of Kwonni expressed dissatisfaction over rampant cases of cattle rustling, while, the border communities on the Nigerian side were also not left out by the bandits. In either case, it was the locally known criminals who suffered most aspersion and blame. It is generally assumed that no cattle theft would be successfully conducted without collaboration with the locals. Furthermore, the presence of large number of markets, porosity and proximity of the borders, as well as weak security system had with time facilitated further borderlands cattle rustling and banditry (Ibrahim Muhammad, 2017). There was a sudden transformation from cattle stealing to rustling in 2010 due to a lot of interrelated factors as stated by Okoli (2017:9) below

- i. The rising cost (price) of cattle in national and regional markets;
- ii. The influx and proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) in the country;
- iii. The dislodgement of some nomadic herdsmen from traditional pastoralism in the Sahel as a result of loss of their herd in the context of prevalence of conflict, drought, and disease;
- iv. The involvement of opportunistic criminals and militants in the cattle theft enterprise;
- v. The emergence of local and trans-local networks and markets for the organization and sale of stolen cattle;
- vi. The involvement of transnational syndicates in the criminal venture;
- vii. The prevalence of criminal franchise, opportunism and impunity in Nigeria amidst growing failure of security governance.

Most of the States in the North-West started feeling the impact of this transformation around 2010. There were reported cases of large scale cattle theft and some elements of injuries inflicted on pastoral communities in the course of the rustling (Rufa'i, 2017:10). As this was going on in Nigeria, only the border communities were mostly affected, while the remaining part of the country was still battling with the challenges of animal theft. Comparatively, first major incidence of cattle rustling in the Tahoua region, according to information was reported in northern part of Tahour around 2010 which is one of the main pastoralists' zones in Niger Republic (Muhammadu Barte, 2017). As revealed by an informant, some unknown armed men during the period were said to have rustled about 145 heads of cattle around Azawak and Chinta- Barade. The incidence became an issue of great concern to the then authority of the regions, while Northern Nigeria side the menace was gradually gaining grounds as bandits and rustlers were busy forming criminal gangs as well as devising means to intensify their activities (Rufa'i, M.A.2017:7). Thus, information has it that some Touareg and Fulani from Niger Republic formed part of the early bandits that established criminal gangs in Nigeria (Police Official, 2017). Membership of said gangs received training around Birnin Gwari and Dansadau forests which is very large but extended thickest that cut across the States of Kaduna, Niger, Katsina, Kebbi, Zamfara and Sokoto down to some parts of Niger Republic (Jimi, 2011:).

Some of the animals rustled in the early period were either sold or kept in this forest zone. As argued by Okoli, proceeds from banditry were partly used in the procurement of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) for further perpetration of insecurity in the regions. There was constant interception of illegal SALW movements across the borderlands (Okoli, 2017:8) Therefore, new business emerged when some people along the border areas suddenly became gun-runners at the expense of the communities' peace and made a lot of money from it. A typical example was Rabe who had since been serving a jail term in Tahoua prison for the supply of arms to the bandits in both Nigeria and Niger Republic (Police Officer, 2017).

In fact, the situation was not just about cattle rustling but the gross human right violation associated with it. It was during this period that the people of Kwonni started witnessing large scale cattle rustling which involved even maiming and killing (Shittu, Abba.2017). According to Sarkin Fulani of Kwonni the within a period of two weeks about 300 (three hundred) heads of cattle were reported to have been rustled in the area alone in 2014 (Muhammad Barte.2017). This could only be possible with the assistance of the local collaborators from Kwonni. There is no doubt about the existence of a high level of connection and communication between the Nigerian and Nigerein bandits. At the climax of such criminalities both Fulani and Touregs in Niger, received information about their beloved ones killed either in Nigeria or Niger Republic for their alleged involvement in banditry (Muhammad Barte.2017).

Therefore, Banditry became more violent along the borderlands with the emergence of centralised leadership, hence, it became an organised crime. The leader on the Nigerian side was Buharin Daji (leader of the forest) who was said to have direct contact with late Suleiman Labo who claimed to be the leader of the Nigerian bandits. His main area of operation includes Tsibiri, Tahour and Maradi axis (Isah

Abubakar.2017).However ,both leaders have their immediate lieutenants; Buharin Daji was assisted by late Kundu, Ibrahim driver and Isah Dansadau (Rufa'i, 2017), while Suleiman Labo was assisted by Muhammad Maradi and Saleh Bagobiri Dantsibiri (Police Officer, 2017). The strategies and tactics of these two gangs were almost the same but with very little difference. Both were involved in mass raiding of villages, stealing and confiscations of properties. In fact, killing people and raping of both married women and children formed part of their operational tactics (Police Officer, 2017).The leaders have large number of followers and specifically target wealthy individuals for elimination. Alhaji Samaila Dan Kano, Alhaji Al-Kwatta, and Alhaji Rabeh Dan Jodan in particular were part of the wealthy individuals killed by these Nigerian hoodlums. In fact, from Alhaji Rabeh's assassination alone, these bandits have collected over 100 million CFA (Anonymous Source). The same bandit group also attacked filling station in 2013 at Maradi and went away with over 70 million CFA (Anonymous information, 2017). Whereas, both gangs usually threaten security personnel, the Buhari led group often mobilise attacks on Police and Villages, while Suleiman harassed Customs and other border officials. However, there were instances when the bandits crossed-over to carry out or even conducted a joint operation as the case of Isa Police Station indicated in the early part of 2014 (Anonymous information, 2017).

Furthermore, both groups used to employ extensively make extensive use of mobile phones and other related communication gadgets in their operations. Spies and other forms of informants through the years also have formed an additional circle of information flow constantly in use by the gangs in most of the areas involved. In fact, the use of such agents played an important role in the successful prosecution of most of the attacks. The people of Tsibiri lamented bitterly about the role of such secret agents in the bandits operations across the border (Abdullahi Muhammed.2017). It was the adoption of same strategy and tactic that made one to presume that there was a strong link between the bandit groups of both regions. Information has it that the telephone of Suleiman Labo contained some numbers of his fellow Nigerian accomplice. Statistical evidence on the death tolls across the two areas is hard to come by, but available evidence has shown that there were more killed in Nigeria than in Niger Republic (Rufa'i, 2017).

In view of this, the most striking difference is that the Buhari-led bandits used kidnapping and abduction as a means of getting money, while same was not commonly practiced by Suleiman Labo. As a retired military officer, Suleiman has more strategic plans and professional way of executing such plans than Buhari who has no military background. The only advantage the later has over the former is that he has a large number of followers with a form of loose autonomy, but as the recognised leader. Suleiman Labo was killed on 18th August, 2014, while Buharin Daji is still alive and busy causing a lot of havoc and threat to human security in some parts of Nigeria (Anonymous information, 2017).

V. COMPLICATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF BORDERLANDS BANDITRY

Cross-border banditry has formed part of the major security challenges facing Nigeria and Niger Republic in recent years. The persistent and pervasive nature of cross-border banditry has caused a lot of security implications on both countries. The harmonious but free-movements of people across the areas is now being watched very closely by security personnel for both present and future protective measures. There seems to be a limit to the nature and manner in which the fight against the crime could be tackled by both countries. Whereas, the historical and strong cultural ties between the border areas has made it difficult if not impossible to easily identify who constitute a bandit and who is not, the striking similarities of the animals and their herdsmen as well posed a conundrum to proper policing (Inuwa, M.M. 1993:53).

Incidentally, while security personnel were unable to plug the numerous entry points between the two countries, they could not until now also form a common strategy of Joint Task Force that would effectively check the excesses of bandits undoing. That is why when these rustlers were able to cross borders they mostly breathed freedom from arrests because the hands of the security often assumed a dimensional tightness owing to bureaucracy and differential legalities of international standings. Hence, the borderlands could not easily be crossed owing to criminal diversion that requires some quick action.

Furthermore, people accused of banditry could not be tried in the court of another country without enough evidence, which could only be provided by their country of origin. According to an informant, such legal complications have set so many bandits free from both sides of the country. However, in an event where evidence abound and proved beyond any reasonable doubt, then the verdict is announced. In this respect, according to information, there are a lot of bandits from Nigeria serving their jail terms in Niger Republic and vice-versa too. As revealed by security officials, however, the prison too has its own weaknesses because most of the convicted criminals often turn out to be 'jail birds' signifying the worst leap forward upon a society.

Another complication has to do with identification of recovered animals from the bandits. There have been instances whereby, animals from Nigeria could be intercepted in Niger Republic, it then becomes very difficult to trace the owners and return them back. Similar problem upholds on the Nigerian side too. Therefore, a need to coordinate transfer of apprehended animals or goods to rightful owners becomes imperative for any emergent success to be reckoned with so far.

One area of complexity is identifying the source of arms and weapons supply to the bandits. It has been argued extensively that the *Boko Haram* insurgents have a direct connection with the bandits and substantial part of arms used were procured either through sale or donation from the insurgents (Okoli,2017:18). This would not negate the fact that there have been other sources of arm procurement which secretly continued to nourish the recipients. In the Nigerian context for instance there were such reported cases of security personnel, particularly the police either participating overtly in the banditry or supplied weapons covertly to the culprits for money. Some top government officials, traditional rulers and businessmen across the two countries were too alleged to be conspiratorial in these nefarious acts against the society for multitude of reasons.

VI. CONCLUSION

Provision of security along Nigeria-Niger borderlands is a collective responsibility of the two countries. Security threat on any part of the country could undoubtedly pose challenge to the other. The level at which bandits were operating within the borderlands and posing serious threat to the downstream economy needs to be given its rightful attention by both countries. The bandits and rustlers seized the opportunity of long historical ties and cultural similarity in an ever increasing border poroucity to perpetual different crimes. There has for long been a high level of connection and interaction amongst the bandit groups both in Nigeria and the Niger Republic. This interconnection makes their entire criminal endeavours more sophisticated and deadly. Sadly enough however, some of the borderland villages and towns have been providing refuge for these misfits. Therefore, there is an urgent need for both countries to synergise and established cross-border security patrol team that could regularly reconnaissance the borderlands.

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Oral Informants

S/No	Name	Place	Date
1.	Oral Information	Kwonni	24-11-17.
2.	Oral Information	Kwonni	24-11-2017.
3.	Oral Information	Tahoaur	25-11-2017.
4.	Oral Information	Tahoaur	25-11-2017.
5.	Oral Information	Tahoaur	25-11-2017.
6.	Oral Information	Tahoaur	25-11-2017.
7.	Oral Information	Tahoaur	25-11-2017.
8.	Oral Information	Illela	26-11-2017.
9.	Oral Information	Illela	26-11-2017.
10.	Oral Information	Araba	26-11-2017.

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