Boko Haram Insurgency and the Nigerian State: Exploring the Challenges and Harnessing the Potentials of Negotiation

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Abstract

The Boko Haram insurgency has had far-reaching implications for the Nigerian state and has affected various aspects of the country's development process including crippling of the economy, loss of livelihoods, alongside displacement and forced migration of Nigerians. Over the past years, terrorist groups and bandit networks have posed significant security threats particularly in northern and central Nigeria. This paper explores the negotiation challenges and strategies for engaging with Nigerian terrorists and bandits and employs secondary sources of data in discussing potential negotiation strategies, such as confidence-building measures, inclusive frameworks, amnesty programs, and international mediation, as means of resolving the Boko Haram insurgency. Findings reveal that while negotiations may be a viable option for conflict resolution, they must be carefully utilized to avoid legitimizing violence and ensuring long-term peace. The study concludes that negotiations, when combined with military action and socio-economic development initiatives, could stem the tide of insurgency in Nigeria.

Keywords*: Negotiation, Nigerian, Bandits, Terrorists, Terrorism*

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Background to the Study

Since 2009, Boko Haram's campaign of terror has been the biggest security challenge facing Nigeria, although the escalating clashes between pastoralists and farmers across the country struggle to eclipse the insurgency. The group's ideological objective has evolved from simple advocacy for Islamic puritanism in northern Nigeria to the creation of the Islamic State in West Africa and Lake Chad region in particular. Its campaign of violence started as a less organized and less sophisticated uprising in 2002; but by 2015 it had acquired the infamous title of the "world's deadliest terrorist organization" (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2015). Ever since then, Nigeria has not known peace in its north eastern region resultant from the escalating violence and insecurity unleashed by the Boko Haram insurgent group.

The escalating violence in Nigeria, particularly in the northern and central regions, has created a significant security crisis. Over the past two decades, banditry and terrorism have become two of the most pressing challenges faced by the Nigerian state. Terrorist organizations like Boko Haram and its splinter group, the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), as well as numerous criminal gangs, collectively known as "bandits," have terrorized local populations, destabilized communities, and prompted widespread humanitarian crises. The Nigerian government has responded primarily through military operations, but with limited success. As the violence continues unabated, the idea of negotiating with these non-state actors has become increasingly controversial.

Negotiating with bandits and terrorists in Nigeria raises a complex array of political, ethical, and strategic challenges. These groups operate outside the legal and moral boundaries of the state, with their actions often involving kidnappings, extortions, and the deliberate targeting of civilians. The motives behind these groups' actions are diverse; while terrorist groups like Boko Haram seek to impose their version of a strict interpretation of Sharia law and challenge the authority of the Nigerian state (Adebayo, 2020), the bandits, often motivated by financial gain, engage in kidnapping for ransom and other criminal activities, destabilizing rural areas (Hassan, 2021). As such, negotiations with these groups could be perceived as legitimizing their actions, potentially empowering them and encouraging further violence.

In the past, there have been instances where the Nigerian government has considered or engaged in negotiations with these groups, most notably through attempts to secure the release of hostages. However, these negotiations have often been fraught with difficulties. For instance, the government's interaction with Boko Haram in securing the release of kidnapped schoolgirls led to significant public debate about the ethics and effectiveness of such deals (Ogbu, 2020). The lack of a clear leadership structure within these groups further complicates the negotiation process. With numerous factions within Boko Haram and bandit groups acting independently, it is often unclear whom to engage in talks (Kassim, 2021).

The concept of negotiating with such groups is contentious due to concerns about the implications it could have on Nigeria's long-term security. Critics argue that negotiating with armed groups could lead to the normalization of criminality, embolden other insurgents, and set a dangerous precedent for future conflicts (Akinyemi, 2020). However, proponents of

negotiation argue that, in the face of an escalating humanitarian crisis, dialogue may be the only viable path to peace. Several studies and researches have been conducted on the activities of the Boko Haram terrorists in Nigeria by numerous researchers and scholars. For instance, Innocent and Onyishi (2014) examined the issue of Boko Haram insurgency and security challenges in Nigeria, Babajide (2018) studied the political economy of Boko Haram in Nigeria, Okwara (2023) discussed Boko Haram insurgency and its implications on Nigeria's national security and Mahmoud (2018) examined Boko Haram's messaging strategy, membership and support networks while Onuoha and Oyewole examined the rise and decline of a violent group in Nigeria in their study on the anatomy of Boko Haram insurgency. However, none of these studies have captured in any way the need for the use of negotiation as an instrument in resolving the Boko Haram violence against the Nigerian State, a development which makes this study not only quite apt but a deliberate attempt in filling that lacuna in existing studies on Boko Haram and their activities in Nigeria.

Given the above scenario, this paper aims to explore the issues surrounding negotiations with Nigerian bandits and terrorists, focusing on the challenges, ethical dilemmas, and potential strategies that could lead to a sustainable resolution of the conflict. In doing this, it attempts to address two fundamental questions viz: (i) what are the challenges faced by the Nigerian state in her efforts in negotiating with the Boko Haram insurgents and bandits? (ii) to what extent can the process of negotiation assist the country in the resolution of the Boko Haram insurgency and banditry? The study is structured into seven (7) sections beginning with an introduction, a background to understanding the origin of Boko Haram and banditry in Nigeria, a methodology, a conceptual framework, the challenges and strategies for resolving the insurgency before drawing appropriate conclusion.

Understanding the Background to Boko Haram and Banditry in Nigeria
The rise of banditry and terrorism in Nigeria is a complex issue rooted in socio-political, economic, and religious factors. In northern Nigeria, the twin problems of terrorism and banditry have worsened over the last two decades, as various militant groups have emerged, significantly undermining security and development in the region. The most notorious of these groups is Boko Haram, which has become synonymous with violent insurgency in Nigeria. Founded in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf, Boko Haram initially emerged as an Islamic group advocating for a strict interpretation of Sharia law in northern Nigeria (Adebayo, 2020). The group escalated its insurgent activities in 2009 after Yusuf's death at the hands of Nigerian security forces, leading to a full-scale war against the Nigerian government and its institutions. Boko Haram's insurgency, marked by brutal attacks on civilians, military installations, and public institutions, spread across northeastern Nigeria, causing significant displacement, loss of life, and a deepening humanitarian crisis.

By 2015, Boko Haram's violent campaign had severely destabilized the region, with the group controlling large parts of the northeastern states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa. As the violence raged on, a splinter group led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and became known as the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP). This faction has since grown in strength and gained a significant foothold in the Lake Chad Basin,

with attacks on both military and civilian targets, further compounding the complexity of Nigeria's security challenges (Kassim, 2021).

In addition to Boko Haram and ISWAP, the emergence of armed bandits in Nigeria's northern and central regions has led to another layer of violence. Banditry in Nigeria, primarily in states like Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna, is driven largely by economic motives, with bandits engaging in kidnapping for ransom, robbery, and cattle rustling (Hassan, 2021). These groups operate more loosely than Boko Haram and ISWAP, often acting in smaller, decentralized units that frequently shift alliances based on shared interests or resources. This fluidity in structure makes it difficult for authorities to track and dismantle these criminal networks, complicating any efforts at resolving the crisis.

The Nigerian government's primary response to these groups has been through military force, which has had limited success in curbing the violence. Despite the deployment of the Nigerian military, with assistance from regional and international partners, the insurgencies have not been decisively defeated. The inability of the government to effectively combat these groups has led to calls for alternative solutions, including negotiations. However, the idea of negotiating with non-state actors involved in violent insurgency and criminal activities presents a host of challenges. Notably, these include issues related to legitimacy, the risk of encouraging further violence, and the moral dilemma of negotiating with groups that have caused significant suffering and loss of life (Ogbu, 2020). Consequently, while military responses remain central to the Nigerian government's strategy, negotiations are increasingly seen as a potential avenue for de-escalation and peacebuilding.

In recent years, there have been attempts at negotiating with armed groups, especially in the context of securing the release of hostages. These negotiations, however, have been fraught with difficulties, and they have often led to public debates about the ethics and effectiveness of engaging with terrorist and criminal organizations (Oyedepo, 2021). While these negotiations have sometimes yielded temporary successes, such as the release of kidnapped schoolgirls, they have raised important questions about the long-term consequences of such dealings and their potential to impact Nigeria's broader security and political landscape. The background of these negotiations reveals the intricate web of challenges, ethical concerns, and political ramifications involved in the pursuit of peace with non-state actors in Nigeria's conflict zones. The need to balance military efforts with diplomatic and peacebuilding initiatives has become critical to finding a lasting solution to the ongoing violence in the country.

Methodology
The study on the negotiation issues with Nigerian terrorists and bandits is primarily based on secondary data sources, which provide an in-depth analysis of the conflict, its causes, the nature of the involved groups, and previous attempts at negotiation. Secondary data refers to data that have already been collected, analyzed, and published by other researchers, scholars, governmental bodies, or international organizations. This methodology relies heavily on the examination of existing literature, reports, and case studies to gather insights into the subject matter. The secondary data collected through the aforementioned sources were analyzed

qualitatively. The qualitative analysis focused on thematic content analysis, where key themes such as negotiation challenges, the role of leadership, public opinion, and the impact of international mediation were identified and examined.

Structural Approach to Negotiation: A Framework of Analysis

This study adopts the Structural Approach to negotiations as an analytical framework in order to aid a proper understanding of issues involved in negotiations as one of the key methods of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. This approach considers negotiated outcomes to be a function of the characteristics that define each particular negotiation. According to Alfredson & Cungu (2008), these characteristics may include elements such as the number of parties and issues involved in the negotiation and the composition or relative power of the competing parties. Structural Approaches to negotiation find "explanations of outcomes in patterns of relationships between parties or their goals" (Zartman, 1976). In structural approaches to negotiation theory, analysts tend to define negotiations as conflict scenarios between opponents who maintain incompatible goals. Analysts who adopt a structural approach to the study of negotiations share an emphasis on the means parties bring to a negotiation. One of the main theoretical contributions derived from the Structural Approach is the theory that power is the central determining factor in negotiations (Alfredson & Cungu, 2008). In this view, the relative power of each party affects their ability to secure their individual goals through negotiations. Structural theories offer varying definitions of power. For instance, power is sometimes defined as the ability to win, or alternatively, as the possession of "strength" or "resources".

The perspective that power serves as a central structural feature of every negotiation has its intellectual foundation in traditions of political theory and military strategy including the writings of Thucydides, Machiavelli and von Clausewitz. A central idea in this school is the notion that the strong will prevail, or, in the language of classical realism, the idea that "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must" (Thucydides, 1910 cited in Druckman, 1997). Yet even in conflicts that pit the very strong against the very weak, the range of outcomes is wide. To wrestle with this conundrum, analysts taking a structural approach have looked at additional structural properties such as symmetry-asymmetry, the availability of alternatives, or the role of tactics in detail to try to understand why victory in negotiations does not always go to the party who is ostensibly the more powerful.

The approach has been criticized as being complex and time-consuming and requiring a deep understanding of the underlying issues and power dynamics. It is equally said to be resistance to change as parties may resist changes to the underlying structures or power dynamics, especially if they benefit from the current situation, has limited flexibility, is dependence on expertise and the approach lays much emphasis on structure with a potential for unintended consequences. The above notwithstanding, the structural approach to negotiation in conflict focuses on underlying structural issues which has to do with identifying and addressing the underlying structural issues driving the conflict, rather than just its symptoms. It is aimed at providing long term solutions by addressing the root causes of conflict thereby proffering more sustainable and long-term solutions and as well help in building trust and improving

relationships between parties by addressing power imbalances and promoting mutual understanding. Structural approach also engenders increased creativity by encouraging parties to think creatively about solutions that addresses the underlying structural issues while it could equally lead to more equitable outcomes by addressing power imbalances and promoting fairness and justice in the process. Above all, the structural approach to conflict negotiation aside from fostering communication and cooperation by encouraging open communication and cooperation between parties can be particularly effective in conflicts where there are deep-seated issues or power imbalances. It must also be clearly stated here that aside from the asymmetrical nature of the contestation between the Nigerian armed forces and Boko Haram and other bandit groups, the power potentials of both parties remain incomparable as Nigeria parades an array of very skillful and highly referenced armed forces which if opened to real combat with the insurgents would claim outright victory within the shortest possible time.

Challenges in Negotiating with Nigerian Terrorists and Bandits
Negotiating with Nigerian terrorists and bandits presents numerous challenges that complicate the prospect of achieving lasting peace. These challenges are deeply rooted in the fragmented nature of the groups involved, the moral and ethical dilemmas posed by negotiations, the humanitarian impact of ongoing violence, and the potential risks of legitimizing criminal behavior. Below are the main challenges faced when attempting to negotiate with these groups.

1.   Lack of Clear Leadership and Organizational Structure
One of the most significant challenges in negotiating with Nigerian terrorist and bandit groups is the absence of a unified leadership or centralized structure. Boko Haram, for instance, has fractured over the years into multiple factions, each with its own leadership and agenda. The emergence of ISWAP as a splinter group from Boko Haram further complicated negotiations, as the various factions have different leadership structures and competing priorities (Kassim, 2021). This fragmentation makes it difficult for the Nigerian government or international negotiators to engage with a single, authoritative figure who can speak for and control all elements of the group.

Similarly, bandit groups in northern Nigeria are often decentralized and operate in smaller, fluid networks. These groups do not have a central leadership, and bandits frequently switch allegiances based on economic opportunities or shared criminal goals. This lack of cohesion means that even if one group is engaged in negotiation, other factions may not adhere to any agreements reached, which makes achieving sustainable peace or disarmament extremely challenging (Salihu & Bello, 2022).

2.   Humanitarian Concerns and Hostage-Taking
Hostage-taking is a central feature of both terrorist and bandit operations in Nigeria, with these groups frequently using kidnapped civilians as leverage in their negotiations for ransom or political concessions. The humanitarian toll of such abductions is devastating, and the government faces pressure to secure the release of hostages, often with limited options for

negotiating peacefully (Ogbu, 2020). However, engaging in such negotiations presents ethical dilemmas. For instance, agreeing to meet ransom demands may encourage further kidnappings, thus incentivize criminal behavior and potentially lead to the proliferation of such acts.

Additionally, the public backlash over negotiating with terrorists and bandits is significant. In the case of Boko Haram, the Nigerian government faced criticism when it negotiated the release of kidnapped schoolgirls, with many arguing that it legitimized the group's violent tactics and further emboldened them (Adebayo, 2020). The dilemma is that while negotiations may save lives in the short term, they could also embolden the group, prolong the conflict, and ultimately undermine the state's ability to maintain law and order.

3. Legitimacy and Political Ramifications

Negotiating with armed groups, especially terrorist organizations like Boko Haram and ISWAP, carries political and legitimacy risks for the Nigerian government. The very act of negotiating can be seen as giving these groups political recognition and legitimacy, which may undermine the authority of the government. Boko Haram, for instance, seeks to delegitimize the Nigerian state and replace its secular government with an extreme interpretation of Islamic law. For the government to negotiate with such a group could be interpreted as a concession of legitimacy to a violent and radical ideology that seeks to replace the existing political order (Oyedepo, 2021).

Moreover, negotiations may weaken the government's stance in the eyes of the public and its international partners. The perception that the government is willing to engage with groups responsible for killing civilians, destroying communities, and undermining national sovereignty could damage its credibility. For instance, any negotiation that involves political or economic concessions to these groups could fuel dissatisfaction within the Nigerian populace and create political instability (Akinyemi, 2020).

4. Risk of Enabling Terrorism and Banditry

A central argument against negotiating with Nigerian terrorists and bandits is that it could set a dangerous precedent for future conflicts. By negotiating with violent groups, the Nigerian government risks normalizing the idea that terrorism and criminality can be rewarded. This could embolden other insurgents or criminal organizations, both within Nigeria and across the region, to adopt similar tactics to achieve their objectives. The fear is that such negotiations might lead to more kidnappings, more violence, and the further fragmentation of the country's security landscape (Akinyemi, 2020). In some cases, negotiated ceasefires or truces have been used by these groups to regroup, acquire more weapons, and recruit new fighters. This opportunistic behavior has been seen in other parts of the world, where insurgents used periods of negotiation to strengthen their military capacity before resuming hostilities (Schlichte, 2018). Thus, the fear is that negotiating with terrorist and bandit groups in Nigeria could inadvertently prolong the violence and embolden new waves of extremism and criminal activity.

5.   Mistrust and Historical Failures of Past Negotiations

Trust is a crucial element in any negotiation process. However, the Nigerian government and the armed groups involved have a long history of broken promises and mistrust. Past negotiations with Boko Haram have often resulted in failed ceasefires, where both parties accused each other of violations. For example, the 2014 ceasefire agreement between Boko Haram and the Nigerian government, which was supposed to lead to the release of kidnapped schoolgirls, quickly collapsed after both sides accused each other of breaking the terms (Gandhi, 2019). Such historical failures have created a deep mistrust between the government and armed groups, making future negotiations even more difficult. Additionally, these groups have shown little incentive to honor peace deals, as their primary goal is often to achieve political, religious, or financial objectives through violence. As a result, many Nigerians view negotiations with these groups as futile, believing that these groups will only exploit the process to further their agenda without any real intention of achieving peace (Gowon, 2022).

Strategies for Negotiation with Nigerian Terrorists and Bandits

Negotiating with Nigerian terrorists and bandits is a highly contentious and complex issue, given the challenges discussed earlier. Despite the risks involved, there may still be strategic approaches that could facilitate dialogue, reduce violence, and eventually contribute to peace. Several strategies can be considered, depending on the context and the nature of the group involved. Below are some possible strategies for negotiating with these non-state actors.

1.   Engaging in Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs)

One of the first steps in any negotiation process is the establishment of trust between the parties involved. In the context of negotiating with Nigerian terrorists and bandits, confidence-building measures (CBMs) are essential to initiate dialogue and create an environment conducive to negotiations. These measures can include temporary ceasefires, the release of some hostages, or the provision of humanitarian aid to areas affected by violence. Such steps would signal to the armed groups that the government is committed to peace and willing to engage in meaningful discussions.

In the case of Boko Haram, confidence-building measures were seen in previous efforts to negotiate the release of kidnapped schoolgirls and other hostages. Although these negotiations did not lead to an overall peace deal, they temporarily halted violence and established a channel for communication between the government and the insurgents (Ogbu, 2020). A series of small, incremental measures could be employed to gradually build a foundation for larger negotiations. By showing goodwill through actions such as halting military offensives or offering amnesty to low-level fighters, the government could potentially encourage factions within terrorist and bandit groups to come to the negotiating table.

2.   Fostering Inclusive Negotiation Frameworks

Given the fragmentation of terrorist groups like Boko Haram and the decentralized nature of banditry in Nigeria, it is crucial to adopt an inclusive negotiation framework that considers the diversity within these groups. Negotiators must recognize that multiple factions or networks exist within each group, and therefore, a one-size-fits-all approach to negotiation may not

work. In the case of Boko Haram, for example, the faction led by Abubakar Shekau might have different demands and interests compared to the ISWAP faction (Kassim, 2021). Similarly, bandit groups operate in shifting, localized networks that may have different motivations, ranging from financial gain to political ideology. To address this, the Nigerian government could consider a multi-level negotiation strategy that involves engaging with different factions separately or within a broader negotiation framework. This approach would ensure that each faction's specific needs and grievances are addressed, reducing the chances of a fragmented peace deal. It would also provide a platform for local leaders, community representatives, and civil society organizations to engage in the process, fostering a sense of ownership and ensuring that the solutions reached are more widely accepted by the affected communities.

3.   Offering Amnesty and Reintegration Programs

One strategy that has been used successfully in various conflict zones is the provision of amnesty to combatants in exchange for their disarmament and reintegration into society. This strategy has been particularly effective in addressing insurgencies and terrorism in other parts of the world, such as in Colombia and Northern Ireland. In Nigeria, an amnesty program could be offered to low-level fighters, bandits, and insurgents who agree to lay down their arms and participate in a reintegration process.

This would include social and economic support programs to help former combatants' transition back into society. In the case of the Niger Delta, the Nigerian government previously offered amnesty to militants in exchange for disarmament, which helped reduce violence in the region (Bamidele, 2018). A similar program could be introduced for bandits and even lower-ranking Boko Haram fighters. The reintegration process should be holistic, involving job training, education, mental health support, and community-based reconciliation programs. This would reduce the appeal of banditry and terrorism, particularly for individuals who may have been coerced into joining these groups or who joined for financial reasons.

4.   Leveraging International Mediators and Facilitators

The Nigerian government may also consider bringing in international mediators or facilitators to assist in the negotiation process. In many global conflicts, third-party mediators have played a crucial role in bridging gaps between conflicting parties, ensuring that both sides adhere to agreements and managing delicate negotiations. In the case of Nigeria's fight against terrorism and banditry, international organizations such as the United Nations, the African Union, or regional actors like ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) could play a supportive role in facilitating dialogue between the Nigerian government and non-state armed groups.

International mediators can help to build trust by offering neutrality, expertise, and diplomatic leverage. For instance, the United Nations has often been involved in peace negotiations in regions experiencing similar conflicts, such as in Somalia and Sudan, providing both technical assistance and diplomatic pressure (United Nations, 2021). By

involving third-party mediators, the Nigerian government could reduce the perceived bias in the negotiation process and enhance the legitimacy of any potential agreement. Furthermore, international involvement could bring more resources and expertise to support peacebuilding efforts, as well as ensure accountability for any commitments made during the negotiations.

5.   Addressing Root Causes of Banditry and Terrorism

One of the most critical long-term strategies in any negotiation is addressing the root causes of conflict. In the case of Nigerian terrorists and bandits, many of the groups involved are driven by a combination of economic, social, and political factors. For instance, the widespread poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment in northern Nigeria have contributed to the rise of criminal groups seeking financial gain, as well as insurgent groups with ideological motivations (Hassan, 2021). Additionally, religious extremism, lack of governance, and the marginalization of certain ethnic and social groups have played a role in fueling violence.

Negotiating without addressing these root causes would be a short-term solution that may only result in temporary peace. For negotiations to lead to a sustainable resolution, the Nigerian government must commit to long-term efforts to reduce poverty, improve education, strengthen governance, and address grievances related to marginalization and injustice. Development initiatives targeting the most vulnerable regions, particularly in the north, could help reduce the appeal of joining terrorist and bandit groups. By focusing on human security and inclusive development, the government could create conditions for lasting peace and make the continuation of armed resistance less attractive (Ogbu, 2020).

6.   Conditional Negotiations with Clear Terms and Consequences

Lastly, the Nigerian government must adopt a firm stance when negotiating with terrorists and bandits, setting clear terms for any dialogue. Negotiations should be conditioned on the cessation of violence, including kidnappings, attacks on civilians, and destruction of property. Any deals made should be contingent on the armed groups' commitment to adhere to international humanitarian laws, respect for human rights, and a commitment to demobilization. Additionally, negotiations must include clear consequences for groups that fail to comply with the terms of an agreement, including renewed military action or sanctions.

By establishing clear boundaries and making it clear that negotiations will not lead to concessions in the face of violence, the Nigerian government can prevent any perception of weakness and avoid setting dangerous precedents. It is important that any negotiation serves not only as a means to end violence but also as an opportunity for these groups to realize that peace can offer them a better future, while continued violence will only result in further destruction and loss.

Conclusion

This study examined the challenges facing the Nigerian state in her bid to negotiate with the Boko Haram insurgents and bandits and how negotiation as an instrument can be used in resolving the insurgency. It highlighted the lack of clear leadership and organizational structure by the insurgents, humanitarian concerns and hostage taking, the issue of legitimacy

and political considerations and the risk of encouraging terrorism and banditry among others as the major challenges. Additionally, negotiating with Nigerian terrorists and bandits presents a range of challenges that require careful, strategic consideration. The complexity of these groups, marked by their decentralized leadership, fragmented factions, and varying motivations, ranging from ideological extremism to financial gain, makes any form of negotiation a delicate and contentious endeavor. Despite the risks associated with such dialogues, particularly the potential to legitimize violence and criminal behavior, negotiations can still offer a path toward reducing violence and achieving long-term peace.

One of the most important elements in these negotiations is the establishment of trust and confidence-building measures, such as ceasefires and humanitarian support, which can pave the way for deeper discussions. By engaging with different factions separately and fostering inclusive frameworks that address the grievances of all parties, negotiations can be more inclusive and effective. Additionally, offering amnesty to low-level fighters and creating reintegration programs could provide an opportunity for the disarmament of these groups, potentially reducing their influence and mitigating the immediate threat they pose to local communities.

However, for negotiations to be successful, they must be approached with caution and clarity. It is critical to avoid making concessions that could empower these groups or set dangerous precedents for future conflicts. The government must adopt a firm stance, ensuring that any peace agreements are contingent on the cessation of violence and adherence to international law. Furthermore, any negotiation efforts must be coupled with long-term development programs aimed at addressing the root causes of banditry and terrorism, including poverty, unemployment, and socio-political marginalization.

Ultimately, while military responses remain essential in combatting terrorism and banditry in Nigeria, negotiations present a potential tool for de-escalating violence and providing a foundation for peace. These discussions should be seen as part of a comprehensive approach that combines diplomatic, military, and socio-economic efforts to tackle the root causes of insecurity. By adopting a strategic, inclusive, and conditional approach, the Nigerian government may be able to negotiate with these armed groups in a way that balances immediate security needs with the long-term goal of peace and stability.

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