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AN ISLAMIC PEACE-BUILDING APPROACH TO BANDITRY AND ABDUCTION IN NORTHWESTERN NIGERIA.

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Abstract
This paper presents a comprehensive analysis of the escalating crises of banditry, abduction, and cattle rustling in Northwestern Nigeria through the lens of classical and contemporary Islamic peace-building frameworks. Employing a qualitative methodology rooted in critical documentary analysis and thematic synthesis, the research diagnoses these phenomena not as mere criminality but as manifestations of Fasadfil-Ard (corruption on earth) under the classical Islamic legal concept of Hirabah. The study critically engages with and moves beyond Hobsbawm's theory of social banditry to analyze the complex convergence of economic grievance, climate-induced resource scarcity, governance failure, and the emergent crime-terror nexus. It posits that the Quranic ruling on Hirabah (Quran 5:33-34) provides a uniquely dual-natured framework, mandating robust state-led deterrence to establish Adl (justice) while fundamentally prioritizing Tawbah (repentance) and Sulh (reconciliation) as pathways to restoration. The paper subsequently develops an integrated, multi-track application of Islamic principles, proposing the operationalization of Sulh through community-led restorative justice, Maslaha (public interest) through developmental initiatives funded by Islamic social finance, and Tawbah through structured disarmament and deradicalization programs. This research concludes that an Islamic peace-building paradigm offers a culturally resonant, structurally comprehensive, and theologically coherent alternative to failing state-centric, kinetic approaches, capable of transforming the root causes of instability while upholding divine justice and mercy, thereby contributing significantly to decolonial security discourses.
Keywords: Islamic Peace-building, Hirabah, Banditry, Cattle Rustling, Conflict Transformation, Restorative Justice, Northwestern Nigeria, Sahel, Sulh, Adl, Postmodern Conflict

1. Introduction

Banditry, abduction, and cattle rustling in the postmodern era present a complex security challenge, particularly in regions of northwestern Nigeria. These activities have evolved from traditional practices into sophisticated criminal enterprises, causing massive loss of life, displacement, and economic devastation. These are not mere law-and-order challenges; they represent profound human security crises that catalyze massive internal displacement, the systematic collapse of agrarian and pastoral livelihoods, and the erosion of the very fabric of social trust (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2023). In Nigeria's northwest alone, conservative estimates suggest that up to 30,000 bandits operate within roughly 100 distinct gangs, effectively turning vast territories into ungoverned spaces where violence is the primary currency of power and resource control (SBM Intelligence,

2023). The human cost is staggering, with fatalities in the first half of 2025 alone surpassing 2,266 in Nigeria, often exceeding those from more widely publicized insurgencies in the region (The Soufan Center, 2025).

Conventional state-centric responses, predominantly reliant on kinetic military force and often enacted under a framework of counter-terrorism or internal security, have yielded, at best, limited and transient success (International Crisis Group, 2021). At worst, they have exacerbated cycles of violence, fostered human rights abuses, and deepened communal grievances by failing to distinguish between criminal actors and entire ethnic communities, particularly the Fulani pastoralists who are often collectively scapegoated (Higazi, 2021). This recurrent failure underscores a critical deficit in prevailing security discourses: the systematic marginalization of indigenous, culturally-grounded, and faith-based frameworks for conflict transformation (Abu-Nimer, 2003).

This paper directly addresses this significant gap by contending that Islamic jurisprudence, far from being anachronistic, offers a robust, relevant, and holistic paradigm for understanding and resolving these crises, a claim substantiated by both historical and contemporary evidence. The analysis is anchored on the classical Islamic doctrine of Hirabah—theologically and legally defined as "waging war against God and society"—which provides a precise and severe diagnosis for the crimes in question, categorizing them as manifestations of Fasadfil-Ard (spreading corruption on earth) (Ibn Qudamah, al-Mughni; Quran 5:33-34). The efficacy of this framework is not merely theoretical. Historical precedents, such as the sulh-based governance of caliph Umar ibn al-khattab, successfully transformed volatile tribal societies into stable politics through the institutionalization of restorative justice. Furthermore, modern applications provide compelling evidence: the use of sulh and Musalaha in resolving protracted conflict in Somalia and Mindanao demonstrates the practical utility of these principles in achieving durable peace where conventional methods had failed (Abu-Nimer, 2003). The central thesis of this paper is that the Islamic response, derived from a nuanced exegesis of the Quran and the Prophetic tradition (Sunnah), is inherently integrated and dual-natured. It seamlessly balances the imperative of Adl (justice) through legitimate deterrence with the divine injunction for Tawbah (repentance) and Sulh (reconciliation), all while mandating the pursuit of Maslaha (public interest) to address the root socio-economic and political drivers of conflict (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2010; Lederach, 1997).

This paper will deconstruct this sophisticated framework and propose its practical application in the complex, postmodern conflicts of the Sahel and Northwestern Nigeria. It argues that sustainable peace requires a simultaneous, multi-pronged strategy: confronting unrepentant violent perpetrators through legitimate state authority, healing deep-seated communal fractures through restorative processes, and eradicating the socio-economic injustices—such as poverty, inequality, and poor governance—that Islam unequivocally condemns (Quran 4:135; 57:25). By synthesizing classical Islamic wisdom with contemporary peacebuilding praxis, this research aims to provide a theologically-grounded, yet pragmatically viable, blueprint for policymakers, community leaders, and scholars seeking to forge a lasting and just peace. The paper is structured to first review the relevant literature, outline its methodology, present findings from case studies, discuss the integrated Islamic framework, and concludes with concrete policy recommendations.

2. Literature Review:

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Banditry and Rural Violence.

The academic understanding of banditry has been profoundly shaped by Eric Hobsbawm's (1969) seminal concept of the "social bandit." In his work Bandits, Hobsbawm characterized these figures as "pre-political rebels" who embody a primitive form of class resistance,

responding to peasant exploitation and the disruptive forces of encroaching capitalism and state consolidation. This theoretical lens remains valuable for interpreting the narratives of marginalization, historical grievance, and economic dispossession often espoused by Fulani militias in Nigeria and other pastoralist groups in the Sahel (Higazi, 2021). It helps explain the initial, localized support some of these groups may receive from communities feeling abandoned by the central state and exploited by local elites.

However, contemporary scholarship has severely complicated and largely dismantled this romanticized view. Blok, A. (1972) seminal critique, "The Peasant and the Brigand, argued compellingly those bandits are not revolutionary heroes but often entertain relations of interdependence with power elites, including landowners, politicians, and security officials. This perspective finds ~~chilling~~ validation in modern contexts, such as the 2019 Zamfara State Commission of Inquiry in Nigeria, which accused several traditional rulers, five emirs, and security personnel of direct collusion with bandit networks (Zamfara State Commission of Inquiry, 2019). This reveals a reality where banditry is often a violent enterprise embedded within, rather than opposed to, local structures of power and corruption, a finding echoed in research on the political economy of conflict in the Sahel (Bøås, 2021).

Modern research further delineates a critical paradigm shift: the transformation of traditional practices like cattle rustling from culturally embedded, ritualized contests into profit-driven, commercialized criminal enterprises (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2023). In Northern Kenya, scholars like Mooka&Kirotwa (2023) document how this has been driven by "greed-driven commercialization" and political involvement, as depicted in EgaraKabaji's novel Mourning Glory. Similarly, reports from Mali detail how jihadist armed groups have systematically industrialized cattle rustling, integrating it into a broader criminal portfolio to fund their operations, creating a direct nexus between criminal profit and ideological insurgency (Global Initiative, 2023). This evolution, supercharged by the widespread proliferation of small arms and light weapons from conflict zones like Libya, has fundamentally altered the character, scale, and lethality of these activities, moving them from a symbol of cultural identity to a primary vector of mass violence and regional destabilization (Institute for Security Studies, 2022).

2.2 Climate Change, Political Ecology, and Conflict:

A growing body of literature situates conflicts like those in Northwestern Nigeria within a political ecology framework, emphasizing the intersection of environmental stress, resource competition, and governance failures (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2019). The central Sahel is identified as a hotspot of climate vulnerability, with temperatures rising 1.5 times faster than the global average, leading to desertification, erratic rainfall, and the rapid depletion of water bodies and grazing land (Institute for Global Change, 2024). This environmental degradation acts as a "threat multiplier," intensifying existing tensions between farmers and herders over dwindling water sources and fertile grazing land (African Union, 2018). The African Union has noted that farmer-herder conflicts now account for more fatalities on the continent than terrorism, underscoring their devastating scale and the urgent need for effective intervention strategies (African Union, 2018). These are not simply conflicts over resources, but conflicts over the governance of those resources, often exacerbated by state policies that favor sedentary agriculture over pastoralism or that fail to protect traditional grazing corridors, thereby institutionalizing marginalization (Moritz, 2010).

2.3 Islamic Peacebuilding: Principles, Philosophy, and Applications:

Islamic peacebuilding presents a rich, yet frequently overlooked, tapestry of principles for conflict resolution and transformation. The Quranic emphasis on Sulh (reconciliation) is paramount, with the text explicitly stating, Reconciliation is best" (Quran 4:128), thereby establishing a clear preference for restorative over purely retributive justice (Abu-Nimer,

2003). Scholars like Kadayifci-Orellana (2010) distill the Islamic conception of peace into five core, interconnected elements: Tawhid (the transcendental unity of all humanity), Fitrah (the innate human disposition towards peace), Adl (justice as the essential backbone of a peaceful society), Afu (forgiveness), and Rahma (compassion and mercy). These principles align remarkably well with modern conflict transformation theory, as advanced by scholars like John Paul Lederach (1997), which seeks to address the root causes and relational dynamics of intractable conflict, moving beyond mere conflict management to the active restructuring of broken relationships and social systems.

Furthermore, the overarching objective of Islamic law, Maqasid al-Shari'ah, which prioritizes the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property, provides a clear ethical mandate for policies that ensure human security and social welfare (Maslaha) (Auda, 2008). The work of contemporary scholars like Mohammed Abu-Nimer in Nonviolence and Peace Building in Islam (2003) and the collected volume Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam edited by Said, Funk, and Kadayifci (2001) have been instrumental in systematically articulating these principles and demonstrating their relevance to modern conflicts. Despite this robust intellectual and ethical tradition, Islamic peace-building frameworks remain conspicuously absent from mainstream security policy discussions concerning banditry in Muslim-majority regions, a gap this research explicitly aims to fill by translating these theological principles into a concrete, actionable policy framework.

3. Methodology:

This study employs a qualitative research design rooted in the paradigm of interpretivism, which seeks to understand social phenomena through the meanings people assign to them (Geertz, 1973). The primary methodological approach is critical documentary analysis, which involves the systematic review and interpretation of existing texts to develop a novel theoretical synthesis and generate context-specific knowledge (Bowen, 2009). This approach is particularly suited for research that aims to bridge theoretical domains—in this case, Islamic studies and conflict resolution—and to develop conceptual frameworks for complex real-world problems.

A purposive sampling strategy was utilized to select primary and secondary case studies. Northwestern Nigeria (specifically Zamfara, Kaduna, and Katsina states) was chosen as the primary case due to the severity and complexity of its banditry crisis, its significant media and scholarly coverage, and its predominantly Muslim population, which provides a relevant context for applying an Islamic analytical framework (International Crisis Group, 2021). For comparative analysis and to demonstrate the regional nature of the problem, the North Rift region of Kenya and the central Sahel nations of Mali and Niger were selected as secondary cases, as they exhibit similar patterns of commercialized cattle rustling and hybrid threats (Global Initiative, 2023; Mooka&Kirotwa, 2023).

Data collection was conducted through a comprehensive and multi-layered review of diverse documentary sources. To ensure the relevance, credibility, and manageability of the data, a clear set of inclusion and exclusion criteria was applied during the selection process.
Inclusion criteria:

1. Documents that directly address the phenomena of banditry, cattle rustling, kidnapping or farmer-herder conflicts in northwestern Nigeria, Mali, or Niger (post-2010).
2. Scholarly works and reports that analyze the political economy, climate change dimensions or governance failures related to these conflicts.
3. Primary Islamic texts (Quran, Hadith) and classical juristic works (e.g from the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'I, or Hanbali schools) explicate the concepts of Hirabah, Sulh, Adl, Maslaha, and Tawbah.

4. Contemporary scholarly works on Islamic peace building and conflict resolution published in peer-reviewed journals or by academic presses.
5. Grey literature (reports, policy briefs) from reputable international organizations, NGOs, and government commissions published within the last 10 years (2014-2024), unless foundational to topic.

Exclusion criteria:

1. Documents focusing solely on Boko-Haram insurgency in northeastern Nigeria without a clear comparative link to banditry in northwest.
2. Opinion pieces, unsubstantiated blog posts, media reports that lack credible sourcing or methodological transparency.
3. Scholarly works on Islamic jurisprudence that are entirely theoretical without any application to governance, criminal law, conflict resolution.
4. Documents not available in English or Arabic, due to language constraints of the research.
5. Reports or studies published priuor to 2010, unless they are considered seminal works (e.g Hobsbawm's bandits, Bloks critique) or any primary classical Islamic texts.

The data collection proceeded through a comprehensive and multi-layered review of the following source types:

1. Academic Publications: Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and theses on conflict studies, political ecology, Islamic law, and peace-building from databases such as JSTOR, Project MUSE, and Google Scholar.
2. Grey Literature: Reports from international organizations (e.g., International Crisis Group, Institute for Security Studies), non-governmental organizations, and government agencies.
3. Primary Islamic Texts: The Quran, authenticated Hadith collections, and classical juristic manuals (e.g., Ibn Qudamah's al-Mughni) for theological and legal grounding.
4. Media and Policy Analysis: Reputable news reports and policy briefs to track the contemporary evolution of the conflicts and state responses.

The analytical process was two-fold. First, it employed thematic analysis, using a coding framework to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) across the data set, such as grievance narratives, illicit economies, and governance failures" (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Second, it engaged in conceptual synthesis, integrating Hobsbawm's social banditry theory and political ecology with Islamic conflict transformation principles to construct a new, integrated peace-building model. This methodology consciously prioritizes the decolonization of knowledge by centering indigenous and religious epistemologies in understanding and resolving local conflicts, challenging the dominance of Western, secular security models (Smith, 2012).

4. Findings and Analysis:

4.1 Case Study: The Metamorphosis of Banditry in Northwestern Nigeria (Zamfara, Katsina and Kaduna).

Northwestern Nigeria offers a paradigmatic case of the metamorphosis of rural banditry into a complex, hybrid insurgency. While Zamfara State, widely regarded as the epicenter of this crisis, the neighboring states of Katsina and Kaduna, as per the study's primary selection, exhibit distinct yet interconnected manifestations of the same phenomena, collectively illustrating a regional crisis of governance and security. Zamfara state suffers from a profound vacuum of effective governance and state legitimacy in its remote, rural areas (International Crisis Group, 2021). This vacuum has been filled by sophisticated criminal networks that are sustained by a diversified and resilient illicit economy. Initially, this

included the illicit exploitation of artisanal gold mining, a sector the government suspended in 2019 in an attempt to disrupt bandit financing. Subsequently, the networks have doubled down on systematic cattle rustling—a single raid can net hundreds of heads of cattle—and have industrialized mass kidnapping for ransom, targeting schools, villages, and highways with impunity (SBM Intelligence, 2023).

In Katsina state, the crisis is characterized by relentless attacks on agrarian communities, leading to what one study termed a "drastic decline in pastoralists", pushing entire communities deeper into poverty and (Muhammed, 2022, p. 45). The state has been a hotspot for school abductions, with the infamous kidnapping at government secondary science school in Kankara highlighting the brazen nature of these acts. The conflict in Katsina is deeply intertwined with cross-border dynamics, with bandits exploiting the porous frontier with Niger's Maradi region to lunch attacks and retreat to safe havens.

In Kaduna state, the conflict demonstrates a more complex ethnic and religious geography. Southern Kaduna has witnessed severe cycles of violence often framed in simplistic farmer-herder terms, but which are amplified by bandit militias. Meanwhile, in the northwestern parts of the state like Birnin Gwari, the crisis is defined by the blurring crime-terror nexus. This area has become a strategic corridor and contested territory between profit-driven bandit groups and jihadist fictions like Ansaru and ISWAP, who seek to co-opt local criminals for tactical advantage (the Soufan Center, 2025).

Across all three states, the social and ethnic dynamics are intentionally simplistic in public discourse but are, in reality, highly intricate. The conflict is often framed in reductionist ethnic terms, pitting "Fulani bandits" against "Hausa farmers." This framing is not only inaccurate but dangerously counterproductive, as it stigmatizes an entire ethnic group and obscures a more complex history of inter-dependence and inter-marriage (Higazi, 2021). The crisis is more accurately a perfect storm fueled by multiple factors: climate-induced desertification and erratic rainfall patterns that intensify competition for land and water; the massive proliferation of small arms from conflict zones in Libya and elsewhere; and the catastrophic failure of state-led amnesty programs. These programs have at times inadvertently incentivized further violence by providing financial rewards and political recognition without ensuring subsequent, sustainable disarmament and reintegration, effectively creating a "pay-to-not-play" economy that rewards past violence (Zamfara State Commission of Inquiry, 2019).

4.2 Comparative Case: Parallel Transformation in Cattle Rustling (the Sahel and Kenya's North Rift):

The phenomenon is not unique to Nigeria, which underscores its regional and systemic nature. In Northern Kenya, as vividly depicted in EgaraKabaji's novel Mourning Glory, cattle raiding have undergone a similar transformation. It has shifted from a cultural practice with defined rules of engagement to a ruthless, commercialized enterprise driven by a cash-for-cattle market and the involvement of political patrons (Mooka&Kirotwa, 2023). The novel recounts the story of Mzee Lelma, who lost "one thousand goats, eight hundred and fifty cows, and three hundred camels" in a single night to Pokot raiders, who also killed twelve people during the attack (Kabaji, 2022, p. 34). Meanwhile, in central Mali, as documented by the Global Initiative (2023), jihadist groups like JNIM and Islamic State-affiliated factions have become central players in the cattle-rustling economy. They tax the movement of herds, directly organize large-scale raids, and use the proceeds to fund their operations, creating a direct nexus between criminal profit and ideological insurgency. This regional pattern confirms that the drivers—commercialization, weapon proliferation, and governance failure—are systemic and require a regional, not just national, response.

4.3 The Doctrine of Hirabah: An Islamic Theological and Legal Diagnosis:

The Islamic legal concept of Hirabah provides a powerful and precise diagnostic tool for these postmodern crimes. The foundational Quranic passage (5:33-34) outlines severe punishments for those who "wage war against Allah and His Messenger and strive to spread corruption (Fasad) in the land." Classical jurists, such as Ibn Qudamah in his authoritative manual al-Mughni, defined Hirabah broadly as acts of violence that terrorize the public and disrupt safe passage on roads—a definition that directly and unequivocally encompasses contemporary banditry, highway robbery, and mass abduction (Ibn Qudamah, Vol. 9, p. 207). Crucially, and this is the cornerstone of the proposed framework, the verse concludes with a profound exception: "Except for those who repent before you overpower them. Then know that Allah is Forgiving and Merciful" (Quran 5:34). This single clause establishes a critical theological foundation for a dual-track approach: unwavering justice for unrepentant, apprehended aggressors, and a guaranteed pathway to mercy, rehabilitation, and societal reintegration for those who voluntarily desist and sincerely repent before their capture. It is this dualism—this balance between the demands of justice (Qisas) and the imperative of mercy (Rahma)—that is often lost in modern securitized responses but is central to the Islamic tradition.

4.4 The Postmodern Hybrid Threat: The Blurring Crime-Terror Nexus:

A defining and alarming finding of this research is the increasing blurring of lines between criminal enterprise and ideological insurgency, creating a hybrid threat landscape that defies conventional categorization (The Soufan Center, 2025). In Northwestern Nigeria, jihadist factions like the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Ansaru are actively cultivating pragmatic, tactical alliances with bandit groups. This convergence is not necessarily based on shared ideology but on mutual interest: bandits gain access to advanced tactical training, more sophisticated weaponry, and the legitimizing cloak of a "cause," while the jihadists secure safe passage routes, access to new resources and recruits, and the ability to tap into lucrative criminal revenue streams (The Soufan Center, 2025). This nexus presents a formidable challenge to any singular solution, whether purely military or purely negotiated, and demands a highly nuanced strategy that can disentangle criminal profit motives from extremist ideological ambitions, a challenge that the integrated Islamic framework is uniquely positioned to address.

5. Discussion: Towards an Integrated Islamic Peace-building Framework

The findings presented above reveal a conflict system of daunting complexity, one that a singular, reductionist approach is doomed to fail. The proposed Islamic framework, built upon the diagnosis of Hirabah and the principles of Sulh, Adl, and Maslaha, provides precisely the multi-faceted, principled, and pragmatic response required.

5.1 The Dual Nature of the Hirabah Ruling: Deterrence, Mercy, and State Responsibility:

The Islamic response to Hirabah is not monolithic; it is inherently and brilliantly dual-natured, reflecting the comprehensive nature of Islamic justice. On one hand, the severe prescribed punishments (Hudud) serve a critical social function: they are a powerful deterrent to establish security and uphold absolute justice (Adl) for the victims and society at large (Ibn Qudamah, al-Mughni). This aspect mandates that the legitimate state (Wilayat al-Amr) must uphold its primary responsibility of protecting its citizens (Himayah). This provides a clear theological justification for robust, intelligence-driven, and precisely targeted law enforcement and military operations against intransigent, high-level criminal commanders who reject peace and continue to terrorize communities. The state's failure to do so is, in itself, a dereliction of an Islamic duty (Auda, 2008).

Concurrently, and with equal theological weight, the principle of Tawbah (repentance) must be actively operationalized. This is not a sign of weakness but a fulfillment of a divine command. It can be structured into a formal, theologically-grounded Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program. Such a program would offer a dignified exit for low-level combatants and those coerced into violence, separating them from hardcore leaders. Framing surrender within the powerful narrative of Tawbah provides a culturally resonant motivation that transcends mere financial incentives, appealing to a higher moral and spiritual accounting (Abu-Nimer, 2003). This approach has been advocated by Islamic scholars like Sheikh Abubakar Gumi in Nigeria, who has argued for dialogue and amnesty programs, drawing parallels to successful initiatives in the Niger Delta (Gumi, 2021).

5.2 Applying Sulh (Reconciliation) and Musalaha (Restoration) at the Community Level:

Beyond the state and the combatants lies the torn social fabric of the community, which is often the ultimate victim of the violence. Here, the principles of Sulh and Musalaha (restoration) are paramount for achieving sustainable peace (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2010). This involves reviving and legitimizing traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, such as the majalis (councils of elders), and integrating them with formal peace processes. A community-led Sulh process for resolving farmer-herder clashes or inter-communal vengeance killings would typically involve a structured approach:

· Acknowledgment of Harm: A facilitated process of truth-telling where victims and perpetrators share their experiences, allowing for the validation of suffering and the establishment of a common narrative.

· Material Restoration: The payment of Diyyah (blood money) for lives lost and compensation (Iwr) for stolen property and destroyed livelihoods, calculated and overseen by the council to ensure fairness and closure.

· Public Ceremony of Forgiveness: A formal ceremony to ratify the agreement, restore the honor of the victimized party, and reintegrate the offending party back into the community, thereby restoring the social contract and breaking the cycle of revenge (Abu-Nimer, 2003).

This restorative approach addresses the victim's deep need for justice and closure while offering perpetrators a tangible way to atone for their crimes, fostering long-term communal cohesion over endless, self-perpetuating cycles of violent retaliation. It aligns with Lederach's (1997) concept of conflict transformation, which focuses on rebuilding relationships and social structures.

5.3 Pursuing Adl (Justice) and Maslaha (Public Interest) through Developmental and Good Governance Interventions

Finally, the pursuit of comprehensive Adl and the overarching objective of Maslaha (public interest) demand a proactive, developmental response that tackles the root causes of conflict, as identified in the political ecology literature (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2019). From an Islamic perspective, a state that fails to ensure equitable distribution of resources, provide education, and create economic opportunities is failing in its core duties and is complicit in creating the conditions for Hirabah (Auda, 2008). Therefore, an "Islamic" solution is inherently developmental. This involves:

· Economic Empowerment via Islamic Social Finance: Leveraging institutions like Zakat (obligatory alms) and Waqf (endowments) to establish vocational training centers, provide microloans for small businesses, and fund youth employment schemes in high-risk areas, directly addressing the poverty and marginalization that drive recruitment into banditry.

· Educational Reform: Integrating peace education and Islamic ethics against aggression into school curricula to counter the allure of criminality and build a new generation committed to peaceful coexistence.
· Good Governance and Resource Justice: Establishing transparent, participatory, and fair systems for land tenure and the management of water and grazing resources, resolving the very conflicts over Maslaha (public interest) that often escalate into violence (Moritz, 2010).
This comprehensive approach ensures that the response to banditry is not merely about stopping violence today but about building a just and resilient society that can prevent its recurrence tomorrow, fulfilling the higher objectives of Islamic law (Maqasid al-Shari'ah).

6. Conclusion:
This paper has argued that the classical Islamic doctrine of Hirabah, when intelligently interpreted through a contemporary peacebuilding and conflict transformation lens, provides a sophisticated, sustainable, and culturally resonant framework for addressing the scourge of postmodern banditry, abduction, and cattle rustling. It moves beyond the counterproductive and simplistic war-amnesty binary that has characterized many state responses. Instead, it proposes an integrated, multi-track model that harmonizes the legitimate need for state-led deterrence with the transformative power of community-based reconciliation and the imperative of socio-economic justice, all under the overarching principles of Adl and Maslaha.

By leveraging the deep cultural and spiritual resonance of Islamic principles such as Adl, Sulh, Tawbah, and Maslaha, this approach offers a path to not only suppress the symptoms of violence but to transform its very foundations. It provides a theologically coherent blueprint for a peace that is both divinely sanctioned and pragmatically sustainable, one that addresses the grievances of the victim, the redemption of the repentant, and the development of the marginalized. The success of this paradigm ultimately hinges on the willingness of scholars, policymakers, and security actors to look beyond conventional, Western-centric models and to engage seriously with the profound transformative potential within indigenous religious traditions. The future stability of the Sahel and similar regions may well depend on such a decolonial turn in security praxis.

Policy Recommendations:
Based on this analysis, the following concrete recommendations are proposed for governments, international organizations, and civil society actors operating in affected regions:
1. Establish a National Sulh and Reconciliation Commission: A formal, state-sanctioned body comprising respected Islamic scholars, traditional rulers, women leaders, and security experts should be established by Federal government specifically through an act of parliament or a presidential decree in collaboration of northwestern nigeria (Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi,and Sokoto) like South Africa and Ghana were estabilished TRC (Truth and Reconciliation commission and NRC (National Reconciliation Commission). Its mandate would be to oversee and legitimize community-level mediation, administer a fund for Diyyah and reparations, and manage the formal reintegration of repentant individuals, thereby institutionalizing the restorative justice process.
2. Design and Implement a Theologically-Grounded Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) Program: Structure a disarmament initiative explicitly framed around the concept of Tawbah would required a collaborative effort, led by a legitimate national authority and actively supported by Islamic scholars and trusted community leaders to ensure it is both theologically sound and practically effective. The process should include religious re-education, psychological counseling, vocational training, and monitored reintegration into designated host communities for those who voluntarily surrender their arms. This must be

accompanied by a robust public awareness campaign led by religious leaders to explain its theological basis and societal benefits.

3. Launch Targeted Development Zones (Manatiq al-Islah) funded by Islamic social finance: the state government of the affect regions should lead direct strategic public and private investment, specifically channeling Islamic social finance (from Zakat and Waqf funds), into the most conflict-affected regions. They should partner Projects with federal ministry of agriculture and water resources should prioritize sustainable agriculture, ranching schemes and, rural infrastructure, and primary healthcare, explicitly addressing the structural drivers of conflict like "historical neglect and resource management" (Mooka&Kirotwa, 2023, p. 1310).

4. Integrate Islamic Peace and Conflict Resolution (PCR) into Security Sector Training: the ministry of defence and the police service commission should develop and mandate a training module for military, police, and judiciary officials on the principles of Hirabah, Sulh, and Tawbah with academics from Nigerian universities. This will foster a more nuanced, culturally intelligent, and effective operational approach that can distinguish between combatants and civilians and appreciate the value of non-kinetic solutions, thereby reducing collateral damage and building community trust.

5. Foster Regional Counter-Banditry Intelligence-Sharing: the federal government of nigeria , through national interlligence agency (NIA) must take diplomatic lead to promote cross-border cooperation between Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, specifically focused on disrupting the transnational networks that facilitate cattle rustling, arms trafficking, and the movement of criminal/terrorist groups, framed within the Islamic concept of collective security for the Ummah.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can develop a response to banditry and cattle rustling that are as complex, principled, and comprehensive as the challenges themselves, ultimately paving the way for a lasting and just peace in the Sahel and beyond.

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