

Proliferation of Arms and Security Challenges in Nigeria

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Abstract: *In Nigeria, the trade in small arms and light weapons has been on the increase since the end of the Nigerian Civil War. The trend has continued despite the illegality of the trade. The proliferation has taken a serious dimension since the beginning of the current political dispensation. As a result of this, Nigeria has faced serious security challenges. They include the Maitatsine religious riots in Kano and Bauchi; religious riots in Kaduna; conflicts in Jos, the Zango-Kataf, Yoruba- Hausa/Fulani, Ife-Modakeke, Aguleri-Umuleri, Tiv-Junkun, Ijaw-Ilaje, Ijaw-Itsekiri, Urhobo-Itsekiri and Ijaw-Urhobo; Niger Delta crisis and of recent the Boko Haram insurgency. The perceived attack from the Fulani herdsmen in certain parts of the country are various crisis faced as a result of the proliferation. This development calls for serious attention from the states as it poses serious security challenges. the increased number of internal crises or conflicts has been subsequent to the proliferation of arms in the state, and has engendered the further proliferation of arms. Given this background the paper explores the origin of the present insurgency in Nigeria and how it has been intensified through the use of weapons that are primarily smuggled into the country.*

Keywords: *Proliferation, Security, Arms, Challenges.*

1. INTRODUCTION

It is no longer gainsaying that recent events in Nigeria have revealed the sordid situation the country has finds herself as a result of numerous conflict borne out of proliferation of arms*.

In nearly all the conflicts, the diffusion of small arms, particularly from the industrialized nations to the developing world has played a decisive role I the escalation, intensification and resolution of these conflicts. The ease with which these arms are available, leads to easy escalation of festering conflicts. These small arms have played a major role in exacerbating aimed and armed violence.

Thus, this phenomenon threatens the consolidation of democracy and security in Nigeria which is necessary for sustainable development. As of today, the greatest security challenge facing this country and president Goodluck Jonathan's administration is the impunity of activities of government and the terrorist activities of its Boko Haram and Islamic fundamentalist based in Northern Nigeria.

The proliferation of light weapons and illicit arms trafficking in Nigeria pose a major threat to peace, security and development in the continent. Although they do not in themselves cause the conflicts and criminal activities in which they are used, the wide availability, accumulation and illicit flows of such weapons tend to escalate conflicts; undermine peace agreements; intensify violence and impact on crime; impede economic and social development; and hinder the development of social stability, democracy and good governance.

In the current world environment in which the realities of globalization are literally forcing the rapid break down of border lines, low-intensity conflicts in which small arms are critical, and widely used, are threatening the non negotiable core value (national security) of especially developing countries of Africa and indeed the countries of the West African sub-region including Nigeria.

The proliferation of small arms is thus a brisk business in the West African sub-region. It has become a serious matter of concern not just to all countries in the region but also to the international community. Dokubo provides a graphic picture of the perturbing effects of small arms generally and in West Africa in particular:

Of the 500,000 people killed every year across the world, an estimated 300,000 of them are as a result of small arms. An estimated 50 percent of illicit weapons that

proliferate in Africa are used in internal conflicts, armed robbery and drug trafficking. West Africa alone is reported to have an estimated eight million illicit weapons. Availability of small arms outside the formal security structures had contributed greatly in creating continuous cycle of violence and instability in which particularly women and children are brutalized. (Dokunbo, 2003:118).

Experts have agreed that, "the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, rifles, handguns, machineguns grenades and bazookas - is just as harmful as the increasing number of so-called weapons of mass destruction. Of the 50 or so conflicts fought since the end of the Cold War, the vast majority of them have been fought predominantly with small arm"

2. HISTORY OF PROLIFERATION OF SALW IN NIGERIA

Perhaps, gun possession by civilians in Nigeria is not new and predates colonialism (Saburi Biobaku, 1957). Guns were introduced by the Europeans prior to colonialism during legitimate and illegitimate (slave) trade between them and Africans. Subsequently, guns and other arms, ammunition and weapons were used by Europeans to realize their imperial ambitions when they used force to suppress Africa's resistance to European incursion, conquest and colonialism. The gunboat diplomacy was popularly employed by the British to compel African chiefs to enter into various treaties with them. There was establishment of West African Frontier Force (WAFF) used by the British which was used to execute the British-Aro War of (1901-1902), and other forms of resistance in Nigeria, West Africa, and Africa. The role of Royal Niger Company (RNC) later United African Company (UAC) backed by British Government in using force to suppress dissenting communities is imperative (Chuma-Okoro, 2011). These arms or guns possibly found their ways to the hands of Africans during the period of colonialism subsequently used in tradition and hunting in the rural community. In no time, guns and gun powder became symbols of strength and power, and were later transformed into ceremonial weapons displayed during funerals, burials, ceremonies and customary festivals among the natives. They also became symbols of individual and ethnic grandeur, and for deterring aggressors and invaders. Today, guns are no longer just ornaments of prestige, or just for hunting, safari and expedition. Guns have transformed in terms of functionality, lethality, sophistication, ubiquity and motive of ownership. They have become more weapons of criminality and instruments of the underworld (Chuma-Okoro, 2011). Ostensibly, the 1959 Firearms Act was enacted to check the increasingly rate of arms proliferation in Nigeria towards independence. The failure of the Nigerian government to execute a comprehensive disarmament and arms destruction programme after the civil war (1967-1970) exacerbated the proliferation of guns and illicit arms trafficking. As at 2002, the number of SALW in Nigeria was estimated by various reports and studies at between 1 and 3 million including arms in lawful possession of members of the armed forces and the police and those (majority) in the hands of civilians. The 80% of SALW in civilian possession were illegally acquired because of the strict regulations. There is fear that a larger percentage of the SALW in circulation in Nigeria are illicit or illegal. Some of these illicit SALW were used in armed violence such as ethnic-religious conflicts, communal clashes, sectarian violence, cultism, political violence, electoral violence, vigilantism, militancy and criminality. Between November 2006 and February 2007, 212 cases of violent crime were reported, 189 of these were carried out with firearms, 34 with other tools and two involved bombs (Chuma-Okoro, 2011).

The rate of accumulation of SALW is increasing and becoming endemic as various forms of violence and casualties are in the recent times recorded in the Northern part of Nigeria. Thus, the proliferation of SALW in Nigeria has a destabilizing effect. There is lack of capacity and strong legal or effective institutional frameworks to regulate SALW and combat the phenomenon of SALW proliferation in Nigeria, particularly Northern part of Nigeria (Chuma-Okoro, 2011). More fundamentally, the Nigerian state is yet to deal with the demand factors of SALW proliferation preferring to dwell on the symptoms rather than the root causes. The demand factors are the root causes of SALW proliferation, because if there is no demand there will be no supply. Nigeria is the source, transit and destination of SALW, and therefore the demand factors include mass unemployment, poverty, corruption, excessive militarization, failure of political leadership, mis-governance, bad leadership, poor governance, state violence, among others. There is indeed excess politicization, state-sponsored violence and state proliferation of SALW leading to political violence, electoral violence and other forms of violence. For example, virtually all the law enforcement or security agencies are allowed to carry arms with exemption of few that are even lobbying to be allowed to carry weapons, thus militarizing the society more. In fact, the Nigerian state was not been able to deal with these demand factors, because dealing

with it means dealing with itself or starting by reforming itself. The political class in their struggle or contest for political power has sacrificed everything in the name of politics including suppressing class consciousness and promoting ethno-religious consciousness. The promotion of ethnic and religious consciousness at the expense of class consciousness has resulted to the increasing demand of SALW for executing ethno-religious violence, election and political violence, communal wars, sectarian violence, etc. The unemployed and ignorant youths have been a willing tool in this intense struggle for state power. No doubt colonialism and many years of military rule contributed to the excessive militarization of the Nigerian society and intensive political contest for the soul of the Nigerian state resulting to the rising demand factors for SALW. So it is actually a product and a combination of many years of political leadership failure tilting the Nigerian state towards the status of a failed state. A state that is not able to deal with matters or issues of political corruption, poverty, mass unemployment and economic hardship leading to increasing demand for SALW (Okafor, Okeke and Aniche, 2012). Thus, we conclude that the inability of the Nigerian state to deal with the demand factors of SALW heightens proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in Nigeria, particularly the northern part of the country. As an indication of this militarization of the Nigerian society, the oil companies are allowed to operate private security outfits. Private security outfits, bodyguards, vigilante and thugs have proliferated over the years (Nte, 2011). One stimulant for the proliferation of SALW in Nigeria is elections such that in 2003 elections, locally fabricated and imported pistols, and a range of assault rifles were used by political thugs. In one of the states in Nigeria, Cross River State, the police recovered 54 guns in 2002, 16 in possession of politicians and another eight from politically motivated murders. In Edo State a gubernatorial aspirant by name Lucky Imasuen was arrested in possession of arms. In Bayelsa State, eleven people were killed in shootout by politicians contesting councillorship elections. In Ondo State, police confirmed that a politician was stockpiling light weapons and found 13 single-barrel guns in his residence. In August 2003, the police arrested the son of a prominent senator whom the police believed to have been behind the importation of sophisticated arms used by armed robbers and feuding ethnic groups. The police themselves are frequently involved in what is called "gunpowder politics". In 2003, a governor encouraged the production of pistols by a gang for a political campaign. Also, in 2003 elections political agents visited a number of university campuses and recruited students into their thugs arming them with various weapons (Vines, 2005).

3. THE NIGER DELTA: SMALL ARMS AND CONFLICT

The widespread availability of light weapons in the Delta Region of Nigeria is a particular challenge. The criminalization and political economy of conflicts in the region are establishing a basis for escalated, protracted and entrenched violence. Factors that contribute to the destabilization of the region include illegal oil bunkering, ready availability of weapons, endemic corruption, high youth unemployment and social disintegration. Combined, they contribute the resources, weapons and foot-soldiers for continued conflict.

Micro-level conflicts in the Niger Delta are part of a complex conflict system that is issue-based, ethnic and geographic in nature. Hundreds of criminal and politically motivated gangs have sprung up - many with eye-catching names such as Blood Suckers, Gentlemen's Club and the Royal House of Peace. Most of these are linked to well-known politicians. The Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force and the Niger Delta Vigilante Group have attracted international attention because of their public profile in 2004 and threats to disrupt the oil industry - threats sufficient to have an impact on world oil prices for a short period.

A key stimulant is illegal oil bunkering has grown significantly over the last few years. According to the federal government, some 300,000 barrel/day are illegally freighted out of the country, but some estimate the true cost lies between US\$1.5 billion and US\$4 billion. The figure can fluctuate greatly depending on political efforts to deal with the practice' Such illicit bunkering is fostered by the sense of poverty and inequality among youth in the delta: in a situation where many communities feel they do not legitimately benefit from the oil industry, it is easy for criminal groups to make illegal oil bunkering appeal. The Delta provides these illicit networks with both a pool of unemployed youth and armed ethnic militias who known the terrain well. It is also characterized by a corrupt or ineffective law enforcement effort, coupled with a weak judicial process. The criminal networks also enjoy patronage from senior government officials and politicians, who use bunkering as a source of funds for political campaigning. These local groups are also linked into international networks, both West

Africa (from Sao Tome, Liberia, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire and the Gambia) and International (involving Moroccans, Venezuelans, Lebanese and French).

At a meeting on 1 October 2004 in Abuja with representatives of the federal government, the leaders of two of the main armed groups, the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force under Alhaji Mujahid Abubakar Asari Dokubo and the Niger Delta Vigilante Group led by Ateke Tom, agreed to disband and disarm. There followed further meetings in late 2004, and a disarmament process under which 1,000 guns were handed over, the majority of them AK-47s or SA Vz 58s. The condition of the weapons was poor, suggesting that the best weapons have been retained.

4. WEAPONS AND ELECTIONS

One stimulant for the proliferation of light weapons in Nigeria is elections. In 2003 it became evident that the goals of political violence were shifting from traditional instruments - matches, clubs and knives - to small arms, such as locally fabricated and imported pistols, and a range of assault rifles. Among gangs (composed for the most part of unemployed youth) are used by politicians for both offensive and defensive purposes. In one of Nigeria's 36 States (Cross River State), the police recovered 54 guns in 2002, 16 in the possession of politicians and another eight from politically motivated murders. In Edo State, a gubernatorial aspirant (Lucky Imaseun) was arrested in possession of arms. In Bayelsa State, eleven people were killed in a shootout by politicians contesting councillorship elections. In Ondo State police confirmed that a politician was stockpiling light weapons and, in search of his residence, found 13 single-barrel guns.

The Nigerian security forces are active in trying to uncover the source of illegal sales in the country. In August 2003 the police arrested the son of the a prominent senator, whom the police believed to have been behind the importation of sophisticated arms used by armed robbers and feuding ethnic groups.

5. THE WEAPONS

Although Nigeria has a manufacturing capacity for small arms through the Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON), the emphasis in recent years has been on importing weapons rather than domestic manufacture. Such domestic manufacture has been for the Nigerian military and police. The late military Head of State, General Sani Abacha spent US\$1 7 million on imported rifles despite DICON having large numbers on its inventory. Nigeria sought to revive talks with a South African arms company about a joint venture agreement.

Many of the weapons illicitly in circulation in Nigeria have been imported. At a UN Small Arms Conference in 2001, the Nigeria minister of Defence confirmed that he believed that there were a million light weapons illicitly circulating in his country.

Light weapons are widely available in the delta. According to community leaders in this region, many villages have small annouries of AK-47s. As elsewhere in West Africa, the preference is for industrially manufactured weapons and the cost of procuring the e is high - an AK-47 with two magazines can sell for US\$1,700. in Warri, an oil-rich town in the delta, youths have openly hawked pistols and automatic rifles (referred to by local dealers as 'pure water') for between US\$200 and US\$400. Pistols can be much cheaper. The high cost of purchasing an AK -47 in the delta suggests that there is a scarcity value. Some informants suggested that prices fall during escalation of conflicts, but the volume of sales increases considerably. The same weapon is sold in Sengal or Cote d'Ivoire for US\$300 by traders from Liberia.

Apart from the Niger Delta Volunteer Force, the other ethnic group that has acquired small arms and light weapons is the O'odua Peoples Congress (OPC)

6. BOKO HARAM: RELIGIOUS INSURGENCY

The Boko Haram group takes a queue from others in Nigeria as MEND, MOSSOB, and OPC even though it is more violent. Its focus in the most recent time appears confusing as it kills innocent Nigerians instead of attacking the corrupt officials in government. But generally speaking, it is a resistance against bad government. The first target of their onslaught was Borno State, where series of snip killings were being carried out. For instance, on January 28, 2008, Fannami Gubio, Goni Sheriff, the ANPP gubernatorial candidate and younger brother to Governor Sheriff of Borno State, and six others were killed by Boko Haram members just three months after the party's Chairman, Awana

Ngala was murdered in his house (Ola, 2011). Borno State suffered the impact of Boko Haram murderous activities for quite some time, after which the sect extended its activities to other northern States and the Federal Capital Territory. The territorial scope of their destruction also keeps expanding and this time, it extends to the academic institutions as some Nigerian universities have been bombed causing heavy destructions and loss of human lives. The first casualty was the Gombe State University, where Akhoragbon (2012) reports the bombing and destruction of the building housing the University Senate. Next was the turn of Bayero University Kano where Muslim worshippers in the University's old campus were bombed on April 29, 2012 by the Boko Haram Islamist sect, which resulted in the death of two professors and seventeen others (Adamu, 2012). The following day, a time bomb was discovered in its new campus (Adamu, 2012). The Nigerian media also got their share of the Boko Haram insurgency when the Abuja office of This Day newspaper was bombed simultaneously with its office in Kaduna alongside that of The Sun and Moments newspapers on April 26, 2012 killing eight persons and destroying several cars (Alliet-al, 2012).

It really of no gain mentioning every bit of the destructions caused by Boko Haram, suffice to add the attack on the Taraba State Commissioner of Police, MammanSule by three suicide bombers on motorbikes on April 30, 2012 resulting in the death of eight members of his convey and the three bombers (Igidi, 2012). As the situation is presently, the likelihood is that more and more killings and destructions of properties will be done by the sect as government appears overtly helpless

7. IMPLICATION FOR NATIONAL SECURITY

It is ironic but real that the post-colonial Africa is, in large measure, a threat to its survival. The argument is that, most of the post-colonial states in Africa are without any visible capacity to engender is kind of development with quite a number becoming "failed states". This is because, as further argued, the post-colonial African states are "deficient in managing the economy and natural environment and the nature of their performance has often given rise to divisions and conflicts resulting within some of them into popular resurrections and uprisings." We can cite the examples of Somalia, Zaire, Uganda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Rwanda and Burundi.

This declining capacity of the post-colonial African states, including Nigeria has several implications to the national security of the states themselves. They are thus a threat to their survival. The declining capacity of these states in Africa for development is clearly seen in the record of their economic failure, lack of human development, poverty, illiteracy, debt burden etc.

Nigeria has recently emerged from a period of prolonged military misrule. And although democracy is a constitutional means of resolving conflicts, the expansion of the democratic space has released the cap on pent-up anger suppressed over the years of autocratic rule. The nation is currently trying to consolidate democracy after conducting a first civilian-to-civilian election.

However, the acrimony within the contesting tendencies is palpable. Localized conflicts have been sustained by massive socio-economic disparities and the emergence of emancipatory movements. These issues present a major obstacle to achieving long-term peace (with justice) and human security. Communal conflicts have been exacerbated and even intensified by the availability of small arms, which have provided the protagonists with the tools which enable them to resolve conflicts violently and improve their socio-economic position by engaging in criminal activities. Ironically, most of those small arms are residue of the ongoing conflicts in the sub-region, which as a result of uncompleted disarmament and weapons control programmes have consequently become a source of security in Nigeria. Added to this problem, porous borders and weak governmental capacity have facilitated the trans-shipment of these weapons.

The advent of small arms and light weapons impacts on more than just individual well-being, they typically have the potential to challenge the very existence of the state. In a democratizing polity like Nigeria, where resources tend to be scarce and state capacity relatively weak, small arms provide ethnic warriors with the means and power in criminal activities, and in the process severely undermine the rule of law. Consequently, this leads to an increasing sense of insecurity as a result of lack of faith in the state's ability to provide personal protection.

8. CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the accumulation of small arms and their diffusion into the larger society are both casual and symptomatic of the erosion of governance. The opportunity cost of arms

accumulation is the promotion of sustainable security based on the provision of basic needs and infrastructural facilities.

An integrated and comprehensive response is needed to meet the complex challenges of weapons proliferation and illicit trafficking, yet existing responses remain fragmented and inadequately resourced. A set of co-ordinated sub-regional programmes does not exist to tackle illicit arms trafficking. Programmes to develop effective controls on legal arms possession and transfers, among civilians and state security forces, remain inadequate. So, too, are programmes to disarm ex-combatants, remove unlicensed arms from civilians, and destroy or safely dispose of 'surplus' stocks of arms or confiscated illicit weapons. Transparency, information exchange and consultation among countries on these issues remain weak.

Note: Small arms include revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifle and carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns. Light weapons include heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems and mortars of calibres less than 100 mm. From the United Nations "Report of Government Experts on Small Arms,"

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