

Arms Trading and Weapons Proliferation in Africa: Implications for Nigeria

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Abstract: This study investigates the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) in Africa and its implications for Nigeria. SALWs are prominent classes of weapons due to their portability and capacity to ensure defense. As such they are in high demand and are also produced in large numbers. However, these weapons are also illicitly trafficked and transported across state borders. Africa is not excluded as 100 million SALWs are trafficked in the continent. The study adopts the failed state theory to explain the proliferation of weapons and their effects. The study employs the qualitative research method and utilizes the case study research design. The study draws data from secondary sources which include already published books, book chapters, academic journals, newspapers, and internet sources. As its method of data analysis, the study adopts thematic analysis, segmenting data retrieved into themes following the objectives of the study. The findings of the study reveal that the proliferation of SALWs is an enabler for insurgency, militancy, and crime in Nigeria. The study recommends that strict monitoring and surveillance be instituted at the countries and illegal access roots to the country be blocked to discourage the transportation of illegal arms.

Keywords: Africa; implications; Nigeria; Proliferation; SALWs

1. Introduction

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) remain the most desirable out of all categories of weapons known to man. This is as a result of the cost and handling as they are cheap, easily assessable, and easy to use as compared with heavy weapons (International Peace Institute, 2009). Additionally, SALWs present its users with the opportunity of variation of use. Put differently, Small Arms and Light Weapons provide users with a wide range of users including defense, etc. This is the reason

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behind the large number of SALWs in circulation in South Africa. Accordingly, South Africa has four million SALWs in circulation, a fraction of the number of weapons in circulation in Africa (Fleshman, 2011:6; Jacqmin, 2019). This however creates an opportunity for individuals with criminal intentions to employ such weapons to fulfil their intents (Moses & Ngomba, 2017). This in turn creates room for the transference of SALWs through unprotected and porous borders. The security risks posed by the wide availability of SALWs are evident in the number of people killed on a global scale per year. According to Malam (2014:6), SALWs kill between 500,000 and 700,000 people annually.

Apart from the number of recorded deaths, SALWs are known to fuel conflicts. Ayuba & Okafor (2014) opine that conflicts are invigorated due to the abundance of SALWs procured by criminal non-actors and national governments, with state-owned financial resources. This is the experience of the African continent as states have witnessed different dimensions of ethnic and religious conflicts. Some of the interstate conflicts that have occurred in the continent include the Nigeria-Cameroon dispute over Bakassi peninsular, Algeria-Morocco conflict, Eritrea-Ethiopian crisis between 1962 and 1979 and a host of others, not to mention issues such as the Rwandan Genocide, the Nigerian civil war and so on. These conflicts are fueled by the constant circulation of SALWs in the continent.

2. Statement of Problem

According to (Pytlak, 2010, p. 2), about 100 million SALWs are in constant circulation in Africa. The effects of this are devastating as they fuel wars, conflicts, and other forms of violence and crimes. While in circulation, these weapons find their way into Nigeria and in some cases are successfully retrieved by security forces and in other cases fall into the hands of those individuals or groups with criminal intent. Such an occurrence is not only detrimental but inimical to Nigeria's security and development. This research problem is reinforced by the absence of studies investigating the implications of the proliferation of SALWs in Nigeria. Several studies subsist on the proliferation of SALWs in Africa. Malam (2014) examined the subject matter about its implications for West African Regional Security. Caleb and Gerald (2014) from a different perspective, focused on the role SALWs play in African conflicts. Nganga (2008) investigated the effects of Small Arms Proliferation in Sub Saharan Africa. Despite the many studies that exist, only a few studies examine the effect of arms proliferation in Africa and its implications on

Nigeria, thus the objective of this study. This paper therefore investigate the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Africa and its effects on Nigeria

3. Significance of the Study

This study serves both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it serves as a resource material for students, scholars, and researchers in the field of policy and strategic studies investigating the proliferation of SALWs in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. Practically it examines the proliferation of SAWs in Africa and its implications on Nigeria. In line with this, it presents workable solutions to the challenges faced.

4. Literature Review

4.1. The Concept of Small Arms and Light Weapons

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) are subject of discourse in academic circles, among governments and international organizations. These discussions not only border on SALWs but also on their implications for security. In clarifying its meaning, a plethora of definitions exist due to the numerous suggestions and submissions of scholars. SALWs refer to portable weapons either a barreled weapon or an explosive device, capable of expelling a bullet or the projectile through an explosive force and/ or capable of causing significant damage by its explosion. (Beeck, Fegurson, Hesta, Groenewald, Hutton, Mobekk, Ossome, Rupiya, Russell & Skinner, 2012). The Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery (2008) attempts a dichotomization of the concept and explains each term individually. Small Arms refer to weapons that are designed for individual use or use by a single person. This is due to their size and design and include all barreled weapons. Light weapons on the other hand refer to weapons that can be used by two to three people.

Significant to note is that SALWs are not the only category of weapons available in the world today. However, in a plethora of the weapons and armaments available, they are the most preferred. Moses & Ngomba (2017) explain that in comparison to Big Arms and Heavy Weapons, SALWs are preferred due to their size and cheap nature. Big Arms and Heavy Weapons are expensive and weigh heavily on the purchasing actor (either state or individual). SALWs on the other hand are cheaper, simple, durable, easy to control, lighter, and equally lethal (Moses & Ngomba,

2017). Mogire (2017) corroborates this by adding that SALWs is the choice of military and police organizations as well as civilians because they are highly lethal, simple to use, durable, etc.

Table 1. Classification of Small Arms and Light Weapons

S/N	Small Arms	Light Weapons
	Recoilless Rifles	Portable anti-aircraft guns,
	Portable Launchers	Recoilless rifles
	Anti-Aircraft Missile Systems	Portable anti-tank guns
	Mortars and Calibres less than 100mm	Portable launchers of antitank missiles
	Sub-Machine Guns, Assault Rifles, Light Machine Guns	Handheld-under-barrel guns
	Heavy Machine Guns	Mounted grenade launchers

Source: *Moses & Ngomba (2017)*

Be this as it may, innumerable security challenges confront states due to the wide availability of these weapons. In congruence, Malam (2014) asserts that the significant implication of small arms accumulation and circulation is its capacity to increase the risk of armed conflict. Concerning this study, the wide availability and/or the proliferation of SALWs is examined in the next segment.

4.2. Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons and Conflict in Africa

The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) describes a situation of wide availability of weapons of this grade. Similarly, Malam (2014) explains the proliferation of SALWs as the accumulation and circulation of small arms and weapons. Vines (2005) from another perspective describes the proliferation of SALWs as the illicit transfer of such weapons. The world is awash with these weapons for reasons ranging from mass production to illicit sales and transfer. Specifically, the proliferation of these weapons around the world is because some state actors provide non-state militias and insurgent actors with SALWs, government stockpiles are not effectively managed and monitored, as such significant amounts of these weapons are stolen. Between 700,000 to 900,000 SALWs are manufactured each year. More than 100,000 people are killed by these weapons all over the world, every year (Ashkenazi, Kosling & Kogler, 2013). Globally, about 640 million Small Arms and Light Weapons are in circulation, 100 million of which are in Africa (Abiodun et al, 2018).

African countries have in one form or the other suffered from the proliferation of these weapons. This is evident through the frequent eruption of ethno-religious conflicts and crisis in the continent. Chad, Ethiopia, Sudan, Rwanda, Niger, Mali, Nigeria, and other countries in the continent encounter ethnic and religious conflicts. These conflicts have and still find expression in civil wars, insurgency, etc. (Jinadu, 2007). There is however a nexus between the proliferation of SALWs and conflicts on the continent. Small Arms and Light Weapons in their abundance fuel the eruption of these conflicts and other forms of armed violence. Malam (2014) in agreement asserts that the wide circulation of weapons leads to armed violence among other issues. Among the nations with prominent issues of conflict and arms flows in Africa is Somalia.

Somalia a state in the horn of Africa has endured perpetual conflicts since the 1980s. The roots of the conflict lay in political, socio-cultural and economic factors, chief of which is the competition for scarce resources among the unemployed of the society. The numerous conflicts the state has faced has generated a significant number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP). More probing is the malnutrition issues of children in Somalia and the many lives lost through the conflict directly or indirectly (Moller, 2009). Atalay (2019) estimates that more than 500,000 people have been killed since the inception of the conflict in the 1980s. In addition to the mass loss of lives, so many have been displaced within the country. As of February 2018, more than 2.6 million people are displaced in the country (CCCM Cluster Somalia, 2018). The effects of the conflict are not felt alone by the war-torn state. Somalia's war generated a situation of insecurity in East Africa which has given rise to terrorist organizations notably al-Shabaab. The al-Shabaab is responsible for several activities including the December 2010 attacks in Uganda and Kampala which culminated in the deaths of more than 75 people (Gumbi, 2015).

While the war in protracted conflict continuously ravages the East African state, scholars have recognized linkages between the fragile nature of the state and the extensive flow of arms and weapons into the state. Opongo (2016) explains that fragility situations in Somalia are closely connected to the illicit flow of SALWs. The wide availability of arms in the country not only fueled the conflict but also contributed to the insecurity of lives and properties. Despite the United Nations (UN) arms embargo on the conflict-ravaged state, SALWs still trickle in through numerous channels. Supplies of these weapons are made available by backers of warring factions in the state. Eritrea allegedly supplied arms to the Somali opposition groups.

The impact of the continuous flow of arms into the state is that the arms market and sales are prominent in Somalia despite the arms embargo (Wezeman, 2010).

The Rwandan Genocide of 1994 is also another conflict in the history of Africa. The Genocide was sparked by the death of Rwanda's then-president Juvenal Habyarimana who was of the Hutu ethnic group when his plane was shot down by two surface-to-air missiles. While there is no consensus as to the perpetrator of the act, the death of President Habyarimana contributed to the already existing ethnic tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi (Human Rights Watch, 2006). Within hours after the President's death, members of the Armed forces began killing those opposed to Hutu dominance, some of which were Tutsi (Human Rights Watch, 2006). This sparked reprisal killings and the situation subsequently degraded to a genocide. More than 800,000 people were slaughtered during the genocide (World Vision, 2008). Many were orphaned, widowed, aid dependents, disabled. Ultimately, the genocide ravaged society and destroyed lives and properties (Nikuze, 2014).

The genocide and the proliferation of SALWs are closely linked. On this premise, Enuka, (2012), asserts that the flow of arms particularly SALWs is central to the Rwandan Genocide. Before the genocide, militia leaders and members had received AK-47 assault rifles, mortars, grenades, and other weapons. These weapons were procured with cash and kind payments. Suppliers of these weapons included state and non-state actors. Notable states were China, Greece, Egypt, Poland, and South Africa (Enuka, 2012). The constant supply of SALWs to civilians as well as militia members increased the possibility of a conflict erupting.

4.3. Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria

Since the re-introduction of democratic rule in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed an upsurge in the availability of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs). This is deemed responsible for the prevalence of violence and crimes in the country. Affirming this, Moses & Ngomba (2017) point out that the level of insecurity in Nigeria is as a result of the availability of Small Arms of Weapons which are used to perpetuate robberies, murders/ assassinations and other crimes. In congruence, Abdullahi (2016) notes that the illicit trafficking of Small Arms and Weapons has proven problematic for security within the Nigerian state. While the immediate consequences of the proliferation of these weapons remain robberies, murders, and other forms of armed violence, certain indirect outcomes abound. These include but

not limited to the discouragement of foreign direct investments, negative perception of security in the country, lack of or no confidence in security apparatus, and so on (Moses & Ngomba, 2017).

Despite itemizing its effects, scholars have also pointed out the reasons and rationale behind the proliferation of this grade of weapons in Nigeria. Abiodun et al (2018) attribute the abundance of SALWs in Nigeria to the porous nature of the country's borders, points out that the border security agencies witness difficulty in securing the country's borders due to inadequate resources and poor border demarcation between Nigeria and other neighboring countries. Compounding the existing problem of porous borders is the fact that there are numerous illegal entry points to Africa's giant. According to Babatola (2015), there are more than 1,400 illegal routes into Nigeria. These points serve as pathways and channels for conveying illegal goods including SAWLs. Another factor responsible for the proliferation of SALWs is the provision of weapons in the Cold War era. During the Cold War, western and eastern power blocs represented by the United States and USSR made provisions of arms into certain states to serve for use in conflict. However, the end of that era marked a problem of insecurity as these weapons were collected by illegal arms dealers, and local smugglers (Jacob, Ishaya & Ado, 2019). Corroborating this argument, Malam (2014) establishes that the supply of weapons during the cold war, inevitably laid the foundations for the current crisis of weapons proliferation witnessed in modern-day Nigeria.

4.4. Methods of Small Arms and Light Weapons Acquisition

There are numerous means and methods of acquiring SALWs in Nigeria. However, the following are observed:

a. **Local manufacture of SALWs:** Nigeria is endowed with industries and craftsmen capable of manufacturing Small Arms and Light Weapons ammunition. The country possesses a broad base of weapons manufacturers, who specialize in the manufacture of SAWLs. Weapons such as these are manufactured at either the local level or the industrial level (Moses & Ngomba, 2017). Be this as it may, the most reported level of SAWLs manufacturing in Nigeria are from local manufacturers who produce weapons including Dane guns, handguns, shotguns, assault rifles, muzzleloaders, etc. Notable states in Nigeria that witness the manufacture of these weapons include Adamawa, Abuja, Anambra, Benue and Plateau states (Nowak & Gsell, 2018). The

manufacture of these weapons in itself is not problematic. However, the illicit trade and movement of these weapons repudiates the positive gains of local weapons manufacture in Nigeria as they lead to issues of organized arms violence and other forms of criminality (Chuma-Okoro, 2011).

b. Porous Borders and Illegal Access Routes: The porous nature of Nigeria's borders generates adverse effects for security within the country. Put differently, the risk of insecurity in Nigeria is heightened by the permeability of the African giant's borders. In support, Babatola (2015) asserts that the prominence of porous borders has aided crimes and security challenges across the country. Chief among the reasons for Nigeria's porous borders is the inability of border agencies to adequately monitor and halt illegal activities in and around the country's access points. A major fall out of this is the unabated movement of people and commodities in and out of the country (Olomu, Alao & Adewumi, 2019). These commodities include Small Arms and Light Weapons. Other points of entry for SALWs include illegal access and entry routes. These routes prove problematic and challenging for security in Nigeria. Babatola (2015) points out that over 1,400 access routes exist around Nigeria. These give access to smugglers of these weapons.

5. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the failed state theory as its theoretical framework. The failed state theory describes a situation of failure by a state in its performance of certain duties. Put differently, the theory explains a state that has failed in the performance of its duties (Abiodun et al, 2018). Central to the failed state theory is the definition of a state as a service provider. In this sense, a state protects the lives and properties of its citizens, creates an allowance for political participation, health, education, and maintains security of the rule of law (Eriksen, 2011). On this premise, state failure refers to the inability of a state to provide essential services. In line with this, Englehart (2009) submits that state failure occurs when states are unable to fulfil their obligations which in this case reflects the failure to provide essential services. In essence, failed states refer to states that are no longer capable of performing their obligations.

The following are the assumptions of the failed state theory:

1. Failed states are embroiled in conflicts
2. Failed states are incapable of maintaining peace, order, security and so on within their borders
3. Failed states can be viewed in terms of the absence of governmental functions and operations
4. Failed states suffer a restriction of the free flow of information, the subjugation of women, the inability to accept responsibility for failure and domination by a restrictive religion

Within the scope of this work, the precepts of the failed state theory explain the proliferation of SALWs as a result of the inability of the Nigerian government to secure state borders and also seal of illicit access points. In agreement, Mark & Iwebi (2019) affirm that the lack of effective control over the borders creates room from smuggling of arms and by implication, the proliferation of SALWs in the country. Inevitably, these arms end up in the hands of individuals with ill intentions and are used to perpetrate varying degrees of crimes.

6. Research Methodology

This study adopts the qualitative approach and utilizes the case study research design. The study retrieves data from secondary sources including books, book chapters, journal articles, and newspapers. To analyze this data retrieved, the study adopts thematic analysis to segment the data retrieved into themes following the objectives of the study.

7. Effects of Arms Trading and Weapons Proliferation in Nigeria

The effects of the proliferation of SALWs in Nigeria cannot be underestimated. Explains that the proliferation of this class of weapons in Nigeria is responsible for fueling some ethnic conflicts, insurgencies, violent crimes such as rape and robbery. Ultimately, these situations contribute to the displacement of persons (Abiodun et al 2018).

The following are the threats posed by the proliferation of SALWs

a. **Terrorism:** Nigeria has not been excluded from the list of countries confronting terrorist groups and their activities in Nigeria. Africa's most populous black country has been confronting the scourge of terrorism since 2009 as perpetrated by the Boko Haram sect. due to the attacks of the Boko Haram sect, over 100,000 people have been killed since May of 2011, along with more than 244,000 Nigerians seeking refuge in Neighboring countries (CFR, 2020). This caused outcry and protests from international organizations and notable figures in the world. Boko Haram takes advantage of the porous nature of Nigeria's borders to gain weapons and ammunitions to perpetuate its attacks. Abiodun et al (2018) establishes that the boundaries shared between Nigeria and Niger possess close to 1,500 illegal entry points. These access points serve as channels the Boko Haram sect receive their weapons and ammunition. Asides from the illicit transfer of these weapons, Boko Haram is also able to add stolen weapons to its arsenal. The Boko Haram sect steals weapons from army bases. In November of 2018, Boko Haram militants raided an army base in Metele, Borno State of Nigeria. The raid culminated in the deaths of a large number of soldiers and stealing military weapons (Reinl, 2019).

b. **Militancy:** Militancy is another activity in Nigeria that constitutes a threat to the country. One such is the militancy in the Niger Delta. The Niger Delta militants continually launch attacks against oil installations of the country, kidnappings, killings, and other forms of violent crimes (Abiodun et al, 2018). Militants in the region capitalize on the availability of SALWs to perpetuate their activities.

c. **Crime:** The proliferation of weapons in Africa and Nigeria has facilitated various acts of crimes. This is as a result of the fact that criminals see the abundance of SALWs as an opportunity to perpetrate varying forms of armed crimes. Some of the crimes in this category include murders, robberies, armed assault (including rape), and other activities inimical to security (Chuma-Okoro, 2011). The implications of this are also worrisome, being that crime has adversely affected human security, economic and social development in Nigeria. Metu, Kalu, & Maduka (2019) points out that the increase in crime rates aided by the illicit transfer of weapons had a broad range of consequences for sustainable economic growth in Nigeria.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study investigated the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Africa and its effects on Nigeria. SALWs, produced on a large scale are in constant circulation in the African continent. The flow of arms from Africa into Nigeria has resulted in insurgency through the Boko Haram insurgency sect, militancy in the Niger Delta Region, Increased Crimes, and a host of other issues. These issues have adversely affected human security, social and economic development within the state. In line with this, the study recommends that:

1. Stricter levels of monitoring and surveillance are instituted at the country's borders. The study also recommends that the illegal access points into Nigeria be blocked by security operatives, to discourage the illicit transfer of weapons into the country.
2. The study also calls for tighter regulations on the manufacture and production of SALWs in Nigeria.
3. Also, acts of insurgency, militancy, and crimes must be decisively dealt with to reduce their prevalence in Nigeria.

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