

# SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS PROLIFERATION AND ITS THREATS TO NIGERIA'S INTERNAL SECURITY

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**Abstract:** One of the actual obstacles to sustenance of stable peace and security in Nigeria is the existence and alarming rate in proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW). The small arms and light weapons proliferation stands a principal source of annihilation to human lives and property and worsen inter-communal clashes, resulting to serious violence. Most of the Nigerian borders are porous, therefore, giving room for easy influx, movement and exit of arms, human trafficking and drugs. However, high level of corruption in Nigeria constitutes the various security risks bedevilling the state. This study interrogates the threats posed by small arms and light weapons proliferation to the national security; it assesses the concerted efforts of the Nigerian government in combating the menace with a plan to proffer solutions on how to resolve the disheartening phenomenon. The study concludes that, the failing economy, insecurity, high rate of unemployment, poverty, failure of government to provide basic necessities of life and corruption stand as a cog in the wheel to appreciable efforts and policies at arresting the menace in the country. It also submits that there is need for collaborative efforts at each level of governance; local, state and federal governments in Nigeria to solve the problem in addition to the imperative role of security agencies for sustenance of the nation's peace and security.

**Keywords:** Small arms, Light weapons, Insurgency, Proliferation, Arms control.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Small arms and light weapons proliferation is acclaimed to be the major security challenge to people, societies and states globally, fuelling insurgency, human trafficking and drugs, terrorism, organized crimes, internal insurrections and civil wars, posing obstacles to sustenance of stable peace and security. Many a times, little internal insurrection tends to escalate into larger civil wars and could destabilize a region (Kevin, 2007:23). This trend especially in Nigeria is attributed to the weakness and fragile nature of the state and her attendant failure to deliver good governance. Small arms and light weapons are often employed to forcefully displace civilians, prevent development activities, humanitarian assistance, peace-building and peace-keeping endeavours in all sense. At the end of conflicts, small arms and light weapons usually remain in the society, which may cause more violence since crisis can resume or conflicts erupt in neighbouring regions. Also in non-conflict environments, small arms may be used in criminal violence or may be used in suicides, accidents, homicides and others while they are sometimes the fundamental tools used by terrorists for societal annihilation (Holmes, 2014).

A huge number of small arms and light weapons (SALW) now exist in private and public hands and there are at least 875 million firearms in the world (Small Arms Survey, 2007). At the same time, there exist more than 1,200 companies in 90 countries that produce small arms in the global world (Small Arms Survey, 2004). Small arms and light weapons (SALW) have been reported to claim between 500,000 and 750,000 lives annually and are a contributory factor to armed conflict, organized crimes, displacement of people and terrorism, thereby undermining peace, reconciliation, safety, security, stability and sustainable social and economic development (Geneva Declaration, 2011: 1). It is also responsible for fuelling crime and armed conflicts all over the world, resulting to terrorism and anarchy. Yemen, Kyrgyzstan, Ghana, Burundi, Sudan, Nepal, Pakistan, Somalia, Cote D'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Guinea and others are some of the states that experience from this menace (Malhotra, 2011:3).

Weapons in circulation in Nigeria come from local fabrication, residue of guns used during the civil war, thefts from government armouries, smuggling, dishonest government-accredited importers, ethnic militias, insurgents from neighbouring countries, Fulani herdsmen and some multinational oil corporations operating in the oil-rich and crisis-plagued Niger Delta. The quantity of weapons used in the execution of these crimes usually results to wanton destruction of lives and property (Adejo, 2005). Therefore is urgent need to examine the menace of small arms and light weapons proliferation and its threats to Nigeria's internal security.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS

The following provide operationalization of some concepts as used in the research:

**Small arms:** These include revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, assault rifles, submachine guns and light machine guns.

**Light weapons:** These are heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel, mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank and anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortars of calibers of less than 100mm (Report of UN Experts on Small Arms, 1997).

## 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

However, the study is predicated within the confine of using an eclectic approach comprising; radical structural conflict and failed state theories respectively.

### *Radical Structural Conflict Theory*

The basic idea of radical structural conflict theory is that conflicts emanate out of the structures that characterize a society's organizational framework. In like manner, such reactive practices as oppression, exclusion, marginalization, discrimination, inequity, injustice, just to mention a few, have been depicted as the foundation of conflicts and violence in any given society. The theory was made popular by the ideas co-authored by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the "Communist Manifesto" and "Historical Materialism" (Marx and Engel, 1977). The major points highlighted hinge on the fact that capitalism is an oppressive economic system which is to blame for conflicts in the society, as it has successfully enslaved the working class or proletariat through economic policies and control of the production of goods (Rawls, 1971). Subsequently, capitalist-enunciated process of production and distribution has divided society into the bourgeoisie or elite and the proletariat or working class. In this way, conflicts in society have become a class struggle engendered by economic exploitation of the proletariat.

Consequently, Marxists perceive every society to have a base and superstructure. Thus the base which refers to economic foundation (capitalism, communism) etc modifies and is modified by the superstructure which include art, politics and psychological prospects of both individuals and classes in the society. Since the elites hold the monopoly of power in society, they control the base, superstructure and ideology. In this manner, exclusion, oppression and exploitation is initiated in the society (Rawls, op.cit). The remedy according to Marx is to strip the bourgeoisie of both economic and political power through an action that may lead to social change and revolution.

### *Failed State Theory*

The term "failed state" is often used to describe a state perceived as having failed at some of essential responsibilities of a sovereign government. A failed state is one that has shattered social and political structures (Anyanwu, 2005). It is characterized by social, political and economic failure. Common characteristics of a failing state is when a central

government is so weak or ineffective that it has little practical control over much of its territory, non-provision of public utilities or services, widespread corruption and criminality; refugees and involuntary movement of populations, and sharp economic decline (ibid). Anyanwu (2005) notes that failing states are invariably the product of a collapse of the power structures providing political supports for law and order, a process generally triggered and accompanied by anarchic forms of internal violence. It is the collapse of state institutions, especially the police and judiciary with resulting paralysis of governance, a breakdown of law and order, and general banditry and chaos. Not only are the functions of government suspended, but its assets are destroyed or looted; and experienced officials are killed or flee the country.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

The method adopted in this research is content analysis, using mainly secondary data. The secondary data employed include existing literature on the topic such as books, journals, newspapers, magazines, conference papers, UN and ECOWAS publications, periodicals and other related documents. In the course of the research, the researcher consulted the internet, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti Main Library, Law Library of the Faculty of Law of same university; the University of Lagos Main Library, and the Library of the Centre for Strategic and Development Studies, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria.

#### 5. LITERATURE REVIEW

##### Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation in Africa

It is reported that Africa alone has suffered about 5,994,000 fatalities in the last 50 years due mostly to SALW (Renner, 2006). Narrowing the estimate to West Africa, it was estimated that 30,000 people have been killed by SALW in conflict each year since the end of the Cold War” (ibid). In Africa, the proliferation of small arms is increasing in proportion. These small arms being the remnants of conflicts in Mozambique, Angola, Somalia, Liberia, Sudan, Sierra Leone etc. as well as licensed weapons being stolen or lost, have played a major role in exacerbating crimes and armed violence in Nigeria. The continent of Africa is a major trans-shipment point for the international trade, as well as a major producer of local arms ([www.state.gov/region/africa](http://www.state.gov/region/africa)).

In Africa, the sources of SALW proliferation are many and varied of international efforts to curb proliferation tend to concentrate on the manufacture and supply of new weapons, a major pipeline of SALW remains the stockpiles that were pumped into Africa in the 1970s, 1980s and early 90s by the ex-Soviet Union, the USA and their allies to fan proxy intra-state and interstate wars. These leftover weapons have found their way through clandestine networks involving rogue arms brokers, private military companies, shady airline companies and local smugglers to exacerbate on-going conflicts and facilitate the commencement of new ones in the continent (Abdel-Fatau, 2011).

Two factors helped make it easier for these groups to act: the first one is that borders inherited by Africans are badly demarcated; hence, they are easily crossed. These boundaries inherited by African states, were arbitrarily drawn by European imperialists who colonized almost the entire continent (Imobighe, 1989: 16). A tour of the Nigerian borders in September 1984 by Nigerian Immigration officials in Sokoto revealed that there were over 1,500 illegal entry points along Nigeria’s border with Benin and Niger (Imobighe, 2003: 36). During the Meeting of States on Small Arms at the UN Headquarters in New York, between 14 and 18 June, 2010; it was observed that Liberia and its neighbours do not produce arms, but the major entry points of illicit arms and drugs, were more than 170 border points with Guinea, Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast. Thus, small arms and light weapons are spread as a result of the influx of refugees from especially other neighbouring states. In other words, unregulated movement of people facilitates the circulation of such illegal weapons (Diarra, 2005: 35).

By the way, these arms are precisely ‘small’. They are circulated easily because they are small arms, easy to buy, easy to use, easy to transport and easy to conceal. Their proliferation exacerbates conflicts, sparks refugee flows, undermines the rule of law and spawns a culture of violence and impunity. From the above point of view, one can confidently say that conflict prevention and resolution is not a question of regulating arms in general, but only a specific category of them (those that are liable to fuel civil wars or acts of banditry) (Chesterman, 2005:33). Equally, the break-up and deregulation of arms industries in eastern and central Europe have also led to the mushrooming of mini industries whose aggressive search for new markets in the developing world have made nonsense of existing export regimes. Africa itself boasts of countries that are arms manufacturers – South Africa, Zimbabwe, Egypt, Morocco and Nigeria among others, and countries that are dotted with growing small arms cottage industries (Abdel-Fatau, 2011).

Globalization is becoming an ever-influential architect of the new international security agenda. Its impact on the evolution of the relations among states is contradictory. On the one hand, globalization contributes to accelerated development of productive forces, scientific and technological progress and ever more intensive communication among states and people. On the other hand, it has facilitated the easy transportation of illegal arms from one country to the other and has transformed a domestic law and order problem to a national and international security threat (Best, 2006:313, Ninalowo, 2006: 44). Coupled with liberalization, states have in effect, lost control of markets as reflected in the rise of black markets and the inability of the states to prevent the flow of illicit arms because of the porous nature of most borders and the adoption of policies such as “free movements” of people in a particular region (Ninalowo, 2006: 44).

Evidence indicates that illegal arms transfers are easier in periods of political transition and elections that are normally preceded by periods of violence. The politicians release arms to some political thugs who assist them to rig and win elections at all costs and after the politicians must have won and sworn into office; they forget to retrieve the arms already circulated. Thereafter, the political thugs and miscreants use the arms in their possession to unleash terror on the state (Abiodun, 2016).

In recent times, SALWs proliferation has led to an increase in violent crimes that undermine human security, such as rape, cultism, herdsman's killings, armed robbery and kidnapping, in most parts of the country. While prolonging the conflict, SALW also hinders the chances of resolving such conflicts; warring factions, as demonstrated in the Liberian Civil War and Sierra-Leone conflict, have been known to concede to peace negotiations only as a strategy to buy time to stock up arsenals in order to launch further attacks. This assertion was affirmed by Weiss (2003) when he stated that, “the mere presence of guns undermines alternative conflict resolution strategies”. The availability of small arms plays a role in perpetuating the violence and making it more lethal at every level, from criminal activity to full-fledged war, in both developed and developing countries (Weiss, 2003: 4).

Finally, 80% of SALW in civilian possession were illegally acquired. Out of the 640 million small arms circulating globally, it is estimated that 100 million are found in Africa about 30 million in sub-Saharan Africa and 8 million in West Africa, alone (Jekada, 2005; Hazen and Horner, 2007). The majority of these SALW about 59% are in the hands of civilians, 38% are owned by government armed forces, 2.8 % by police and 0.2% by armed groups. The gun trade is worth \$ 4 billion annually, of which up to \$ 1 billion may be unauthorized or illicit. Eight million new guns are manufactured every year by at least 1, 249 companies in 92 countries. Ten to 14 billion units of ammunition are manufactured every year enough to kill (Ibrahim, 2005). African countries spent over 300 billion dollars on armed conflict between 1990 and 2005, totaling the sum of international aid that was granted to Africa within the same period. An estimated 79% of small arms in Africa are in the hands of civilians (Ibrahim, 2005:122).

### **Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria:**

Small arms, guns and other weapons were introduced by the Europeans prior to colonialism during the illegitimate slave trade between them and African states. 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 (Edwards, 2005).

There was establishment of West African Frontier Force (WAFF) used by the British Government then, which was used to execute the British-Anglo War of (1901-1902), and other forms of resistance in Nigeria, West Africa, and Africa as a whole. 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 into the hands of Africans during the period of colonialism subsequently used in traditional hunting in the rural communities (Ibid).

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 grandeurs, 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, op.cit). 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.

Nigeria later became a destination of SALW used in crimes, revolts, sabotage, religious crisis, communal conflicts, social agitations, internal insurrection, terrorism, insurgency, riots, militancy, electoral violence, political violence, social interest, ethnic tensions, cross-border smuggling, black marketeering, among others. Out of an estimated 640 million SALW in circulation world-wide, 100 million are estimated to be Africa, about 30 million in sub-Saharan Africa and 8 million in West Africa alone and Over 70% of about eight to 10 million illegal weapons in West Africa are in Nigeria (Osman, 2010:155). Nigeria is in the same vein, bedeviled with porous borders as it shares common borders with Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger that are known as countries that transit illegal weapons into the country. Weapons are illegally procured through Cameroon, often as part of a shipment of machinery parts or smuggled inside petrol tankers. Other countries such as Gabon and Guinea-Bissau are also known to be countries through which illegal weapons transit to Nigeria (Ojudu, 2007: 228). Other reported countries from which illegal weapons and ammunition are sourced include Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, South Africa, Turkey, and Ukraine, as well as Bulgaria, Kosovo, and Serbia (Davis et al, 2005: 3). Other sources of illegal arms into Nigeria include: (a) weapons captured from confrontations with the Nigerian military and police; (b) weapons sold to militias and illegal arm dealers by the bad eggs in Nigerian military; (c) weapons provided by political parties for electoral violence/intimidation purposes; (d) weapons provided in exchange for stolen oil off-shore; (e) weapons bought from ex-military men stationed in Bakassi and other places, and foreign/local arms dealers; (f) weapons captured or bought from Cameroonian soldiers; and (g) weapons directly supplied by Al-Qaeda links to Boko Haram fighters (Abiodun, 2016).

## 6. THREATS OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS PROLIFERATION TO NIGERIA'S INTERNAL SECURITY

Security is a major human need; it is paramount so much that absence of it will render people ineffective in spheres of life. Abraham Maslow in his classical work on human needs ranked safety/security as second (next to physiological needs) in the hierarchy of human needs. Traditionally, security of lives and property is the exclusive preserve of the state but the dynamics of the world today has clearly revealed that security is the responsibility of all (Abolurin, 2012:14). However, there seems to be synergy amongst scholars as to what internal security is all about; Hare (1973) views it as the confrontations of threats to peace in the society while Ray (1987:23) sees it as the desire and capacity for self-defence. Similarly, Brennan (1961:11) accepts that national security as the protection of national survival while in a more elaborate manner. Subrahmanyam (1973:2) sees national security as protecting the national integrity of the state and defending the essential values that constitute national identity.

However, Wilson (2014) gave the various components of national security to buttress the meaning and they include; political security, economic security, energy and natural resources security, homeland security, cyber security, human security and environmental security. Although Nigeria's problem with SALWs is not new, its increasing availability in the last decade has helped stoke a wave of insurgencies, ethno-religious conflicts, cross-border banditry, kidnapping, terrorism, human trafficking and drugs, armed robbery and other violent crimes. Arms build-up has fuelled violence in various parts of Nigeria – especially communal clashes and ethno-religious conflicts. Between 1999 and April 2010, Nigeria recorded at least 187 ethno-religious conflicts, leading to the death of several thousands of people (Osman, 2010). These weapons helped to prolong conflicts, induced huge internal population displacement, undermined social peace and devastated the economic livelihoods of individuals and communities. As a result of recurrent violent conflicts, Nigeria is faced with the herculean task of responding to a fluctuating but always sizeable number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Ibid).

Between 2000 and 2002, for instance, an estimated 1,713,306 persons were displaced by ethno-religious conflicts and, by June 2013, some 1.6 million Nigerians are estimated to have been internally displaced. The January 2010 crisis in Jos, Plateau State displaced over 40,000 persons. Situations of internal displacement undermine human security at individual and community levels. IDPs are usually vulnerable to violent crimes like robbery and rape, and are prone to contracting contagious diseases, due to poor sanitary conditions at the settlement centres (Nte, 2011). The impact of Nigeria's SALWs problem on human security is also evident in financial losses induced by conflicts. About 10 major ethno-religious conflicts between 1999 and 2004 cost the Nigerian government over 400 million naira (US\$2.86 million).

Besides, the amount of money that governments spend on security during such crises and their aftermath are huge. In the aftermath of the Jos crisis in early 2010, the federal government assisted the Bauchi State government with ₦135 million (US\$900 000) to help resettle or integrate about 30,000 IDPs from neighbouring Plateau State seeking refuge in Bauchi State (Christopher, 2011:19).

### **Other Deadly Security Threats Currently Bedeviling Nigerian State Include:**

#### ***Boko Haram***

Nigeria is currently bedevilled with profound threat of terrorism, especially in the North-Eastern part of the country. In the last six years, the country has witnessed the vulnerability of terror, criminality and instability. The disheartening phenomena include, but not limited to the devastation and annihilations of several towns, villages, churches, mosques, Police Stations, schools and other public institutions with Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) bombs planted and small arms and light weapons (SALW) by the Boko Haram insurgents in Niger, Bornu, Adamawa, Kano, Bauchi, FCT Abuja, Kaduna, Plateau and Yobe states respectively (Abiodun, 2016:145).

The proliferation of these small arms and light weapons and the new emergent trend in armed violence in Nigeria put to question the efficacy and total commitment of the Nigerian government in combating the menace. The alarming rate of SALW spread poses a serious threat and challenge to Nigeria's internal security. However, the outbreak of Islamic extremism and domestic terrorism in the North-East, Nigeria, remains evident in the growing audacity of the "Boko Haram" sect, following the attacks in the Eagle Square, Abuja during the 50th Independence Day, 1 October, 2010 in which no fewer than 12 people were killed; the Nyanya Motor Park bombing on April 14, 2014 also claimed more than 75 lives and injured several dozen others, bombing of the UN Building in the FCT and abduction of about 216 girls of in Chibok, Borno State the next day leaving the country in a state of insecurity (Abiodun, 2016:146).

#### ***Armed Robbery***

Another security threat that is plaguing the country is armed banditry using all sorts of small arms and light weapons. Only recently, a new trend of robbery which was quite different in outlook occurred at Ogolonto area of Ikorodu, Lagos State, when a lady reportedly led the gang to the banks and stayed outside while the two-hour operation lasted. The leader of the gang was said to have sat down in front of the bank bragging, and no police officer was able to confront her. It was disclosed that the gang that carried out the robbery consisted about 15 youngsters, all in their early 20s. Incidences of armed robbery have become a daily routine in many parts of the country. Apart from public institutions such as banks that are their major targets, major highways across the country are not spared as commuters are routinely attacked and dispossessed of their valuables. (The Punch, 18 April, 2016).

#### ***Militancy***

Ethnic militia has been a recurring decimal in Nigeria and its fledgling democracy. The restoration of democratic rule in Nigeria on May 29, 1999 signalled the emergence and continued proliferation of vigilante groups, ethnic and sectional militias as well as secessionist or separatist groups wielding all sorts of arms and weapons. Prominent among these are: the Bakassi Boys, a vigilante outfit set up by Abia and Anambra State governments to curb criminal activities in 1999; the Egbesu Boys (1998); the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) 2000; Ijaw Militia and Itsekiri Militias (1999), and the Militia arm of Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) 1992 (Analyst, 2010). A most recent development is the emergence of Niger Delta militants with the name 'Niger Delta Avengers'. The 'Niger Delta Avengers' (NDA) has continued to launch attacks on some major oil installations in the oil rich region, using the various arms, IEDs and ammunitions in their possession (The Vanguard, 13 April, 2016).

#### ***Cultism***

There is now proliferation of cult groups in over three hundred institutions of higher learning in Nigeria, brandishing various small arms and light weapons; whenever they "strike" on our campuses. In recent times, Rivers State has appeared to be the epi-centre of cultist activities in the country, with no fewer than 19 people reportedly killed following cult clashes in some communities in the state (Reports from Channels TV News).

#### ***Herdsman/Farmers' Clashes***

One of the security threats in the front burner today, remains the recurring crises between cattle herders and farmers. The most recent of such crises were those that occurred in Agatu community in Benue State and that of Nimbo community,

Uzo-Uwani Local Government area of Enugu State. In both attacks, several lives were lost while properties worth millions of Naira were also destroyed. Many proposals have been advanced to proffer solution to the recurring problem. While some have proposed grazing reserves, others insist that ranches would be the best solution out of the conundrum (Reports on Channels TV News).

### ***Piracy***

Almost half of the 30 deaths recorded in pirate attacks around the world between 1st January and 30th June of that year occurred in Nigerian territorial waters. In terms of the number of attacks, Nigeria was ranked third with 13 attacks, behind Indonesia (50) and the Malacca Straits (20) (Mukundan, 2004). Nigeria's growing piracy problem can be traced back to oil, the country's economic lifeblood and its large-scale theft and sale to vessels offshore. Gangs, armed with automatic rifles and rocket-propelled grenades, cruise along in speedboats and barges, finding cover in the creeks and rivers intertwined with mangrove swamps that make up the delta where the River Niger empties into the Atlantic Ocean (Ibid).

### ***Kidnapping***

Another security concern spreading across Nigeria like wildfire is kidnapping. When it began in the creeks of the Niger Delta region some years ago, nobody thought it would become a nightmare. Gradually, it has even become a 'lucrative business' for many of Nigeria's jobless youths in the South East, South West and other parts of the country. Initially, it was the kidnapping of expatriates that was predominant in the South but today, the situation has gotten so bad that "nobody is safe". Serving government officials are not spared in the kidnapping menace, as their family members, relatives and friends have become worthy 'targets'. Interestingly, armed robbers and other sorts of criminals are fast abandoning their trades for the more lucrative business of kidnapping (Ojeme, 2015:15).

### ***Cattle Rustling***

Jan Birni, a community in Birnin Gwari Local Government area of Kaduna State, which lies on the border between Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara States, is one of the areas that have been in the grip of cattle rustlers. Little wonder the traditional ruler of the area and Emir of Birnin Gwari, Alhaji Zubair Maigwari, was reported to have lamented that his community had completely been taken over by rustlers who kill, maim and rape their victims before dispossessing them of their hard-earned investments. These rustlers also carry all sorts of small arms and light weapons in executing their evil machinations. The threats posed by the existence of small arms and light weapons (SALW) to Nigeria's internal security are fast becoming uncontrollable ([www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org)).

## **7. EFFORTS TAKEN BY THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT IN COMBATING THE MENACE OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS PROLIFERATION**

The Nigerian state has made several efforts to check the proliferation of SALW but not from the demand side, or the root causes. Thus, most of these efforts had been superficial or superfluous. For example, the Nigerian government established National Commissions for the Control of the Proliferation and Unlawful Circulation of Light Weapons (NATCOM) for the implementation of the ECOWAS moratorium in July 2000 less than two years after the agreement on the moratorium which was politically-binding moratorium on the importation, exportation and manufacture of small arms, later legally binding in 2006 (Osman, 2010). A year later in July 2001, the NATCOM publicly destroyed a stockpile of arms and ammunition seized by the security forces in which a total of 1,257 weapons worth 50 million Naira were destroyed. Among the weapons destroyed were 428 rifles, 494 imported pistols and 287 locally -made pistols. These unlawful weapons were seized by the security forces between 1998 and 2011. In September 2001, a request by the NATCOM for the suspension of granting the 6 licenses to carry weapons by police a representative was accepted (Ocheche, 2005).

Nigerian government played a prominent role in the adoption of the Declaration of a Moratorium on Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Light Weapons in West Africa signed on October 31, 1998 in Abuja, Nigeria renewable for a period of three years later extended in 2001. On December 1999, the ECOWAS member states adopted a code of conduct for implementation of the Moratorium. The Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development (PCASED) was established with assistance from UNDP (Ndime, 2005). The Nigerian government has also entered into bilateral cooperation with its neighbours, Benin Republic, Niger, Chad and Cameroon. They have taken a number of measures to boost cross-border cooperation and enhance security at the borders. These measures include the establishment of joint commissions like Chad- Nigeria Joint Commission, Niger-Nigeria Joint Commission, Benin-

Nigeria Joint Commission, Cameroon-Nigeria Joint Commission, Lake Chad Basin Commission and joint border patrols between Nigeria and Republic of Benin (Adejo, 2005).

Nigeria is a signatory to a number of international measures to curb SALW proliferation. It supported the adoption in 2005 of the international instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons, and has argued that political document needs to be transformed into a legally binding instrument in order to control effectively and criminalize the illicit movement of SALW (Diarra, 2005). At the regional level, Nigeria has supported ECOWAS measures aimed at reducing the proliferation of SALW. At the global level, Nigeria is a signatory to the United Nations (UN) Firearms Protocol on November 13, 2001; which it ratified on July 15, 2004 (Hazen and Horner, 2007). Nigeria supported the extension of ECOWAS Moratorium in October 2004 for the second time and the agreement to strengthen it by transforming it into a legally binding convention (Garcia, 2006 and ECOWAS Reports).

At the national level, Nigeria continues to rely on the National Firearms Act of 1959 as the legal instrument governing small arms possession, manufacture and the use in the country as amended even though the Robbery and Firearms (Special Provisions) Decree No.5 was promulgated in 1984 and later the Robbery and Firearms (Special Provisions) Act (Badmus, 2009). In July 2000, the Nigerian government proposed and established a National Committee on the Proliferation and Illicit Trafficking in Small Arms and Light Weapons the purpose of which was to determine the sourcing illegal small arms and collect information on small arms proliferation in Nigeria (Badmus,op.cit).

In May 2001, the government established a second committee aimed at implementing the 1998 ECOWAS Moratorium. These two committees were later merged into a single committee. The committee has accomplished very little in the past five years in large part due to lack of political will, financial support, technical expertise, and institutional capacity. In other words, NATCOM was incapacitated by underfunding, corruption on the part of law enforcement agencies. There were renewed efforts in 2007 to revive the activities of the Committee and legislation is being written to convert the Committee into a national commission. It requested support from the ECOWAS Small Arms Programme to conduct the survey and to undertake other activities in support of the implementation of the 2006 ECOWAS Convention (Hazen and Horner, 2007).

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 not be supply. For instance, the Amnesty initiative saw over 15 000 militants surrender arms. at the expiration of the DD phase of the Amnesty. Weapons recovered during the disarmament process included 2 760 assorted guns, 287 445 ammunitions of different calibres, 18 gun-boats, 763 dynamite sticks, 1 090 dynamite caps, 3 155 magazines and several other military accessories, such as dynamite cables, bulletproof jackets and jack-knives (ibid). It is widely believed that militants only surrendered a small fraction of their arms, as most of them doubted the government's genuine commitment to the amnesty.

The regular interception of illegal arms trafficking within and across the borders by security agencies also reveals the worrisome dimension that arms proliferation has recently assumed in the country. The media is awash with frightening reports of sophisticated SALWs being seized by security operatives either at ports, borders, highways or crime and conflict scenes (Bestman, 2006). On July 9, 2007, about 4.30pm, a Delta State police team arrested a Warrant Officer (WO2) serving with the Nigerian Air Force 33 Logistic Section in Makurdi, Benue State, while transferring arms to a location in the Niger Delta in his Toyota Corolla car with Registration No. AJ 41 MKD. There were 5 assault rifles, 449 rounds of AK47 live ammunition, 4 brand new live jackets and 5 empty magazines. When the Police interrogated the Air Force officer turned arms dealer, he mentioned the name of a senator as being the owner of the weapons and that the arms are from the Republic of Chad (Reports from NTA News).

In August 2010, security agents in Maiduguri also arrested a commercial driver carrying 25 AK-47 rifles, 16 Kalashnikovs and hundreds of rounds of ammunition in a Peugeot 504 vehicle. These arms, allegedly smuggled into the country from Cameroon, were destined for Jos – where cascading ethno-religious violence has caused serious devastation in human and material terms. In November 2010, a woman identified as Lucy Danagana was intercepted at Dabar Masara, Borno State, trying to smuggle 10 AK-47 rifles from Chad Republic into Nigeria. She entered Nigeria from Chad through Kofia in Cameroon via a boat. Around the same period, the police in Ibadan, Oyo State, intercepted a large cache of arms and ammunition from a suspected bank robbery squad (The Vanguard news, retrieved 11 August, 2015). The seized arms and ammunitions included 47 rifles, 103 AK-47 rifle magazines, one assault rifle magazine, 2,540 AK-47 rounds of



ammunition, 727 general purpose machine gun (GPMG) rounds of ammunition, three chain bullets, explosive materials, two GPMGs and one chisel (Ibid).

A high-profile interdict was recorded in October 2010 when a combined team of security agents impounded 13 containers loaded with various sizes of grenades, rocket launchers, explosives, assault rifles, heavy machine guns and ammunition at Apapa Wharf in Lagos, Nigeria. The containers were aboard a vessel – MV CMA-CGM Everest – from Iran and were destined for The Gambia in West Africa. This discovery came a few weeks after the National Task Force to Combat Illegal Importation of Goods, Small Arms, Ammunition and Light Weapons (NATFORCE) had, on 18 October 2010, impounded a lorry load of arms and ammunition in Onitsha, Anambra State (Badmus, 2009).

In 2002, the Nigerian Customs Service reportedly intercepted small arms and ammunition worth more than N4.3 billion (US\$30 million) at border posts during the first six months of the year. Nigeria's problem with SALWs is also traceable to the civil war (1967–1970), during which the south-east made a failed attempt to secede. Deminers Concept Nigeria Limited – a company involved in the enumeration of mine victims, identification and marking of unexploded ordinances and demining exercises in the south-east of Nigeria – has revealed that it recovered over 17 000 unexploded bombs from the zone. An estimated 300 unexploded bombs and improvised explosive devices are still believed to be buried in the region (Osimen et al, 2015:15). These unrecovered explosive remnants of war still pose a threat to human security, especially for women and children that farm in the area. For example, a major and five other soldiers of the Nigerian Army were convicted in November 2008 of selling over 7,000 arms (valued at over 100 million Nigerian naira) – including AK-47 rifles, rocket launchers and machine guns – to Niger Delta militants between January 2000 and December 2006 (Osimen et al, 2015:16). These arms were stolen from the depots of the Nigerian Army at the Command and Staff College, Jaji, and the One Base Ordnance, Kaduna.

Finally in September 2003 the federal government announced an 'arms surrender' policy to recover weapons being used by ethnic militias in the Niger Delta. Although it recorded a modest success, no real long-term strategy for recovering SALW seems to be in place. Conversely, on the civil society platform, a coalition of non-governmental organizations in the Niger Delta launched a 'mop-up the arms' campaign in June 2003 (Onuoha, 2006).

## **8. RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES FOR THE CONTROL OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS PROLIFERATION IN NIGERIA**

The various recommended strategies suggested for the control of SALW in Nigeria by the findings are:

### ***Intensive Policing and Efficient Monitoring Mechanisms of the Nigerian Borders***

It is high time Nigeria started policing her borders intensively; the Nigeria-Cameroon and Nigeria-Chad borders to checkmate illegal influx and smuggling of arms and weapons. The step, if taken, will prevent the influx of illicit small arms and light weapons into the country.

### ***Identifying the Saboteurs in the Military and Other Security Agencies***

The various saboteurs in the Military, Police and other security agencies who sell out some firearms to illegal users should be closely monitored, identified and prosecuted.

### ***Engaging the Services/Supports of Nigerian Citizens***

The government of Nigeria should endeavour to enlist the support of her citizens in the fight against the small arms and light weapons proliferation in the country by incentivising anyone that provides reasonable information to security agents on the spread. Anyone caught having illegal possession of arms should be reported to the security agents.

### ***Improvement of Employment and Working Conditions of Law Enforcement Agencies***

There is need for notable improvement in the employment and working conditions of Nigerian law enforcement agencies in order to bolster their professionalism and motivation in the fight against proliferation of arms and corrupt practices.

### ***Adoption of National Arms Control Strategy (NACS) and Implementation of National Policy on SALW***

There should be a serious adoption of this policy to guide the sanitation and control of SALW spread. The proposed establishment of a National Commission on the Control of SALW (NATCOM) should fast-tracked. However, the implementation of a clear and coherent national policy on SALW proliferation control should be executed through the

organization of national conferences bringing together all levels of government; local, state and federal and individual experts.

#### ***Conducting Regular Verification Exercise and Record-Keeping of Weapons in Nigerian Armoury***

With a view to improving the effectiveness of the current practices in compliance with international standards, this should be carried out in order to ensure that government arms are not being stolen or diverted for illicit usage.

#### ***Improved Intelligence Capacity on the part of Nigerian Security Agencies***

If Nigeria wishes to protect her territory against the incessant encroachment of hostile intelligence services, it must do more than keep an eye on foreign travellers crossing its borders, more than placing guards around its “sensitive” areas. The security agencies must also find out what the intelligence services of the SALW peddlers are after; the sources of illicit act; how they are carry it out and what kind of people they are using as agents. There is also the need for effective collaborative mechanism between security agencies and border communities to enhance information sharing on SALW proliferation along the borders.

#### ***Fight Against Corruption, Good Governance and Improved Economy***

Stricter measures need be put in place on corruption fight because corruption renders fruitless most of the efforts put in place to combat the menace of small arms, most especially in West Africa. Workable remedies must be sought at all levels of governance; local, state and federal to provide good governance and at the same, set a pace for improved economy in the state.

#### ***Improved National Orientation and Employment Opportunities***

The National Orientation Agency has to partner with credible Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the media for orientation and enlightenment programmes on the security consciousness and awareness critical to crime prevention. This will assist people to swiftly report any unwholesome acts (arms trafficking) to security agencies. In addition, the Nigerian government and African states must create an atmosphere that encourages private sector initiatives and that would encourage small scale businesses to survive, since this will arguably reduce the number of individuals involved in small arms and light weapons (SALW) proliferation.

#### ***Promoting Peace Building Initiatives***

There is need for interventions at the local, state and national levels to be strengthened and promote peaceful coexistence amongst diverse ethno-religious and political groups in Nigeria to minimize the outbreak of violent conflicts that stoke arms proliferation. The Nigerian government should also ensure a successful implementation of DDR process (Demobilization, Disarmament (retrieval and destruction of arms and weapons) and Re-integration of Former Combatants into the society) and amnesty programme introduced most especially the ready-for-dialogue militants in the Niger Delta.

#### ***Strict Adherence to Professional and Meritorious Security Personnel's Recruitment***

Security agencies in most of the African states have become enemies of the citizenry owing to their officers' hostilities. This unfortunate trend, which has led to a lack of confidence in these agencies, has largely undermined the capacity of these agencies to function effectively as regards crime control and internal security management. African leaders should rise up to address this situation by ensuring a strict adherence to professionalism and merit during recruitment, training and deployment of security personnel to maintain law and order, peace and security.

#### ***Robust Funding and Procurement of Modern Equipment, Arms and Ammunitions***

Efforts should be regularly made to ensure a robust funding and procurement of modern equipment, arms and ammunitions for security agencies, including security posts at the nation's borders and entry points: land, sea and airports.

### **9. CONCLUSIONS**

A very strong optimism is assured that the proliferation of small arms and weapons with other security challenges would be largely minimized, and their effects on both individuals and the state also reduced, should measures highlighted above are strictly adhered to, by the Nigerian government and other African states respectively.

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