

## AN EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS ON AFRICAN SECURITY STRUCTURE

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### ABSTRACT

*The wide availability of illegal small arms and light weapons in the hand of criminals is one of the fundamental problem affecting the peace and security not only to Africa in particular but to the entire global world communities. The paper examine the dangers posed by proliferation of small arms and light weapons like insurgency, militancy, arm bandit, criminal hijackings and evaluate the efforts by global institutions, regional bodies and national structures on combating the menace which has not address the problem so far. The paper propose alternative ways of how to address the problem of Small arms and Light weapons at various level, the paper also further investigate, the failure of security agencies, level of society poverty, high number of unemployed youth, corruption in governance and porous borders are some of the factors that led to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Africa. The paper has the position for Africa as a region to get rid of this problem, security agents must be empowered, fighting poverty, corruption and effective border management must be one of the major security frame-work to be truly implemented at Global, Regional and National level to fight down the menace of small arms and Light weapons proliferation in Africa.*

**Keywords:** *Small Arms, Light Weapons, National Security Proliferation.*

### INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a country located in West African region and has boundaries with the Republic of Niger to the North, Chad to the Northeast, Cameroon to the East and Southeast, Benin to the West, and the Gulf of Guinea to the South, all estimated to 4910km of border outstretch (Stohl and Tuttle, NTE, 2011, Okeke, Oji and Richards, 2014). The proliferation of small arms and light weapons has become a serious challenge to both international and national security more especially in African countries where states are losing control and power to manage violence as a result of wide availability of small arms in the region. African States has witnessed the most destructive and violent conflicts at the tail end of the 1980s and 1990s. From the crisis in Sierra Leone, conflict in Democratic Republic of Congo as well as conflict in Mali, all these had indicate to us the danger of circulated illegal arms in the African region. Bruce (1984) has argued that "Development is security, security is development". This shows us development and security is going hand in hand and no society can reach the level of any development without operating effective security structure in the African countries. The availability of small arms are leading factor that makes the conflict to escalate because without those illegal arms conflict in various African countries cannot be elongated for quite long time. In some point, political interest is the linked connection to armed conflict as a result of political elite offering

arms to their own recruited youth to protect the political interest while those youth after elections or stability of government, those youth engaged the arms into other criminal activities in African countries. For instance, the President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria has linked the prolonged conflict between herdsmen Fulani pastoralist and farmers as a result of arms given to youth by government of Late Khadafy of Libya to fight rebels, those arms are the tools exacerbated to conflicts emergence between Fulani and Farmers in Nigeria (Daily Trust, 2018).

Bashir M. (2014) has cited that “when conflicts end or subside, small arms often remain in circulation, which may lead to additional violence, and suffering since fighting can resume or conflicts may erupt in neighboring regions”. This means when conflict in one country ends, those arms used by criminals can be transferred to the neighboring states to emerge into new conflict or crisis, while Stolid ad Hogendoorn (2010) sees that in non-conflict areas, small arms may be used in criminal violence or may be used in homicides, suicides, and accidents, and they are frequently the primary tools of terrorists bent on sowing chaos and discord”. There are a lot of small arms and light weapons in the hands of public and private hands. It was established by Geneva Declaration (2011) SALW kill between 500, 000 and 750, 000 people annually, which is the contributory factor to armed conflict, displacement of people, organized crime and terrorism, thereby undermining peace, recreation, safety, security, stability and sustainable social and economic development. The wide availability of SALW is one of the responsible factors that fuel crime, sustain arm conflict all over the world, facilitating terrorism and creating anarchy after civil wars.

African states spend over \$300 billion dollars on managing arm conflict from 1990 – 2005 to the point of equaling the amount of foreign aid that was given to Africa in the same period, with an approximation of 79% of small arms in the hands of civilian across African states causes conflict and instability in the region . (Stohl and Tuttle, 2009). We can still understand that the availability of small arms brought nothing rather than escalate conflicts between individuals, groups or between states and group of terrorists, making people’s living their original settlement, violation of the rights of women and children as well as damage to lives and properties. The availability of small arms phenomena is facilitated and sustained by the existence of large stock piles of arms from previous conflicts, weak arms control mechanisms, long and porous national borders, established smuggling road, inadequate cooperation among national border security officials, the informal modes of trades and easy movement of cash across the border exacerbates armed conflict, this endangers peace and development in Africa. (John, 2017). The wide availability of small arms in Africa was as a result of weak security structure, weak arms control mechanism,

uncontrolled porous border where illegal arms are flowing to the country and passes into hands of criminals without effective control mechanism of SALW that brings about current notion of insecurity in different parts of the Africa. For instance in Nigeria Northeast, cases of Boko Haram terrorist attacks since the killing of their leader Muhammad Yusuf in 2010, damaging of oil properties by Niger Delta militants which is more pronounced in 2003, cases of kidnappings in the North along Abuja-Kaduna Road, conflicts between Fulani pastoralist and farmers in various states of Benue, Nassarawa, Taraba, Zamfara, and Kaduna State, rebels handling arms for criminal purposes in Niger, Chad, Libya, Mali and Somalia as a result of wide availability of small arms in the hands of criminals.

## CONCEPTUAL DEFINATIONS

The paper has the following operational terms that will help to guide the conduct of the research: -

- i. Small arms refers to arms used by one person and which include firearms and other destructive arms or devices such as exploding bombs, incendiary bomb or gas, grenades, rocket launcher, missile system or landmines, revolvers, pistol with automatic loading, rifles, machine guns and landmines.
- ii. Light weapons are portable arms designed to be used by several persons working together in a team, which include heavy machine guns, portable grenade launchers, mobile or mounted portable anti-aircraft cannons, non-recoil guns, portable anti-tank missile launchers or rocket launchers, mortars with a caliber of less than 100 millimeters.
- iii. National security is a freedom from actual and potential threats to national life that may arise either as a result of human actions or inactions, or from natural disasters such as floods, earthquake, famine, drought, disease and other natural calamitous events resulting in death, human suffering and material damage. National security derives essentially from three fundamental convictions, namely the sanctity, inviolability of human life, the universality and dignity of human rights, and the existential imperative values for individual safety in a world full of multifarious threat. The national security is therefore noted in three basic instincts, self-preservation, self-extensions and self-fulfillment.

Christopher (2011) sees security as activities that ensure protection of a country, persons and properties of the community against future threats, dangers and all other forms of perils. Babangida (2011) view national security as the physical protection and defense of our citizens and our territorial integrity of which it is a part, but also the promotion of economic wellbeing and prosperity of country in a safe and secured environment that promotes the attainment of our

national interests and those of our foreign partners. While Ngang (2012) has raised an argument that, "Security means protection from hidden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life in homes, offices or communities Security must be related to the presence of peace, safety, happiness and the protection of human and physical resources or the absence of crisis, threats to human injury among others". These various definitions of small arms debated by scholars, the Encarta Dictionary define small arms as firearms that may be both carried and discharged by one person, as opposed to artillery weapons. By extension, the automatic weapons that developed from such firearms are also called small arms. Machine guns using the same ammunitions as military rifles, as well as the larger caliber machine gun are also classified. The Northern Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), view small arms and light weapons include "all crew portable, direct fire weapons of caliber less than 50mm and would include a secondary capability to defeat high armor and helicopters". The 1997 report of the United Nations panels of Government Experts on small arms provides the most widely accepted definition of small arms and light weapons. According to the panel, the category of small arms include revolvers and self loading pistols, rifles and carbines, assault rifles, sub-machine gun and light machines while light weapons include heavy machine guns, mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-tank and anti-craft missile system, and mortars of calibers less than 100mm.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The paper has the following questions to guide the conduct of the research work.

- i. Does the availability and affordability of small arms and light weapons a threat to security in Africa?
- ii. Does a policy of government influence the widespread of small arms and light weapons in Africa?
- iii. What are the factors that cause the spread of small arms and light weapons in Africa?
- iv. Are there challenges faced by security agents in preventing spread of small arms and light weapons in Africa?

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of this paper are to examine the impact of small arms and light weapons proliferation in Africa. However, the paper has the following specific objectives: -

- i. To examine the factors behind the availability and affordability of small arms and light weapons in Africa.
- ii. To find out whether the policies of governments in West African States influence the widespread of small arms and light weapons.

- iii. To critically find out the root causes of spread of small arms and light weapons in Africa.
- iv. To evaluate the challenges faced by security agents in preventing the spread of small arms and light weapons.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The paper seek to add more strategic skills and techniques in fighting the menace of proliferation of small arms and light weapons in African states through the supplementing the efforts of fighting the proliferation of small arms by engaging community structures, civil societies groups, individual and private bodies with other stakeholders to fight the dangers of small arms for the sustenance of peace and security in Africa, by adopting effective control mechanism and its implementation process to address the wide availability of SALW in Africa.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper adopted failed state theory as a relevant theory guide to analyze the primary responsibility of states in the provision of security of lives and properties of the citizens, its strength and weakness as well as how state apparatus will uses security instrument tools in sustaining effective security in society. Scholars like Catlin, Geoffrey Roberts and Palsy has their write-up describe the nature of failed state since 1980. According to Anyanwu (2005), cited "the failed state is often used to describe a state perceived as having failed at some of the basic conditions and responsibilities of a sovereign government". A failed state is the one that has shattered social and political structures. It is characterized by social, political and economic failures. The common features of failed state are when a central government is so weak or ineffective to have control over its territory. While Musah (1999), cited in some African countries that they are perceived as failed state, because of violent crisis between arms groups and states while the thrust of international efforts to curbing proliferation of small arms tend to concentrate on the manufacture and supply of new weapons, the major pipeline of SACW remains the stockpiles that were pumped into Africa in the 70s and 80s by the ex-Soviet Union, the USA and other allies to fan or sponsor proxy interstate wars. The relevance of failed state theory has described the failure of government at national and regional level to address the impact of proliferation of small arms and light weapons which has failed in its responsibility in providing peaceful and secured society.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper uses secondary source of data to be sourced from previous relevant research on small arms and light weapons in West Africa, conference reports, journals, text books and documentary from relevant institutions like

ECOWAS Office Abuja, Institute of Conflict Resolution Abuja, National Defense College Abuja, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Abuja, United Nations Office Abuja, and Presidential Committee on small arms and light weapons. The paper analyze document on small arms and light weapons from the above stated institutions in order to suggest a way forward to manage and address the problem for the people in African to live in peace and attained the level of sustainable development.

## **THE EFFECTS OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS PROFILERATIONS IN AFRICA**

Many African countries have suffered various level of insecurity as a result of wide availability of small arms and light weapons in the region. The United Nations office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) in December 2005, has cited data from US Library of Congress, reported that during the last two decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 28 sub-Saharan African countries engaged in violent conflicts. In Rwanda alone, approximately 800, 000 people die as a result of genocide in 1994, and an estimated 4.7 million died during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the war of Democratic Republic of Congo, millions of non-combatant women, children, the elderly, the disabled, and the poor people are dying in various African conflicts, directly as a result of hunger, injuries and disease. The report also further indicated most of the world's armed conflicts now take place in Sub-Saharan Africa. At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, more people were being killed in wars in Africa than in the rest parts of the world combined together. The paper argued African conflict has deprived various group of people's mostly women and children and they are force to poor conditions of hunger, disease and injury as a result of conflicts, while the conflict is the byproduct of availability of illegal arms in the hands of criminals or rebels group in Africa. Kofi Annan, the former UN Secretary General, during his speech to African Heads of States and Government in Lusaka, July 2001, clearly stated that "Africans must reject the ways of the past and commit itself to building a future of democratic governance subject to the rule of law, the conflicts in Africa, like in everywhere else in the world, is caused by human actions and can be ended by human actions".

Proliferation of small arms is a threat to security sustenance in Africa, despite the level of efforts to manage the problem from international, regional and even local initiative, the efforts has lead to loss of many lives and destruction of properties worth billions of dollars as a result of illegal arms in the possession by criminals, rebels within and outside the region. Laurance (1998) has the view that "proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Africa is one of the major factors that are directly responsible for the frequency and intensity of the conflicts in Africa and its high number of insurgents the world has been

experiencing over the last two decades. In West Africa, a civil war that started with several hundred insurgents in Liberia in 1989 later triggered fighting in neighboring Sierra Leone, Cote D'Ivoire, and Guinea. It took more than decade of effort by the International Community, principally through arm embargoes and peacekeeping operations to stem fighting. The fighting caused a widespread death and destruction, triggered huge refugee flows, and undermined development throughout the region. The cost of conflict in Liberia alone was enormous. By time the war ended in 2003 the United States had spend more than \$430 million in Liberia, mostly on food aid. The regional peacekeeping operation cost more than \$4 million. The United Nations observed mission, UNOMIL, cost some \$104 million from 1993 to December, 1997. Also, U.N Mission, UNMIL, which peaked at approximately 15, 000 personnel, cost several billion dollars from 2003 – 2007 (Stohil and Hogen Doorn, 2010). SALW remains the most frequently used weapon used in armed conflict in Africa. The availability, portability and ease of use and re-use of SALW facilitate the discriminate use in conflict setting, aggravating human rights abuses and increasing the intensity and duration of armed conflicts.

Keith, K. (2007) has cited that of course, SALW violence it not only confined to zones of formal armed conflict. Its fatal consequences can be traced to other context where demographics, social customs, unemployment, and varying level of development explain motivations for SALW is use in interpersonal violence, gang warfare, and organized crime. Alarmingly, of the estimated global fatalities resulting from the use of firearms, over two-thirds are attributed to criminal activities and violence in non-conflict setting. The Norwegian Peace Building Resource Center (NOREF) 2013, security report in Africa titled: African security in 2013, a year of disequilibrium, provided an insight into the most recent security trends and situations on the African continent the report spotted Mali, Nigeria, Cote D'Ivoire and Liberia as the countries currently with intervention of the French military in Northern Mali in West African States (ECOWAS), African Union (AU) forces and the Malian army may not have ended the conflict in the regions, as the rebels may only been suppressed. In Nigeria, the reemergence of Boko Haram may be connected to what NOREF (2013) describes as the "main fault line in Nigerian politics, the north-south divide and the increasingly bitter conflict over positions, power and money that this cleavages creates, the sentiments arising from the last elections in Cote D'Ivoire between Gbagbo's loyalist and President Alassane Outtara's administration, poses as potentially threat to security in the region with possible repercussions in Liberia.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDING

The researcher has find out based data reviewed, the paper has observed that there are various challenges to fight the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Africa, as a result of political reasons, economic or social factor. Jekada (2005) has cited that, border is the focal point on proliferation, accumulation and easy availability of weapons should be viewed as a sufficient factor in triggering violent behavior. The idea of the availability of small arms and light weapons is as result of various porous borders which cannot be managed effectively by dominating states. The wider availability of small arms may prolong conflicts because the parties are claiming the ownership of weapons that they can fight their opponents. However, many African states, has failed in their responsibilities of protecting the lives and properties of their citizens as a result of corruption or other political differences of not empowering and strengthening security structures. The effects of proliferation in Africa has over exacerbated arms conflict, it endangers peace keepers and humanitarian workers, it undermines respect for international humanitarian law, it also threaten legitimate but weak government and also the proliferation benefit terrorists as well as the perpetrators of organized crime, it endangers the lives of defenseless individual or citizens (Dunn, 2014).

One of the efforts to preserve international peace and security in 21<sup>st</sup> century has been the issue to control or limit the number of small arms and light weapons in circulation and the way in which weapons can be used through illegal possession of arms for criminal purposes by individuals or groups in the society. The major areas of the problems related to emerging causes of arms proliferation in Nigeria are as follows: -

- i. Undemocratic governance
- ii. Weak security formations
- iii. Uneven distribution of basic infrastructures
- iv. Ethnicity
- v. Politicians training political thugs using arms (Randel, 2004).

Edeko (2011) observes that “the range from the manufacture and supply of new weapons both inside and outside the continent, to the remnants of weapons shipped into Africa in the 1970s and 1980s by the former Soviet Union, the United States and their allies to facilitate different inter-state and intra-state proxy wars.

**TABLE I: Number of Weapons delivered by suppliers to Africa from 2008 – 2011.**

Weapon Category	U.S.A	Russia	China	Major West European	All Other European	All Others
Tanks and Self Propelled Guns	0	50	190	0	440	30
Artillery	0	0	410	0	130	630
APCS and Armored Cars	0	60	310	180	90	70
Major Surface Combatants	0	0	0	0	0	0
Minor Surface Combatants	0	0	104	4	15	42
Supersonic Combat Aircraft	0	0	20	10	20	20
Subsonic Combat Aircraft	0	0	10	0	20	2
Helicopters	0	70	0	30	40	10
Surface to Air Missiles	0	120	0	0	290	0

**Source:** U.S Government in Grimmett & Kerr (2008) European includes France, United Kingdom, Germany and Italy.

In another dimension, the availability of small arms in Africa was connected economic factors of the same developed countries who are the major producers of the small arms and light weapons, the manufactured arms has to be channeled from legal and illegal means where African countries or rebel groups poses the arms for either security purpose or criminal reasons.

## RECOMMENDATION

Small arms and light weapons (SALW) remain cheap and easily accessible instruments for participating in armed conflict, terrorism and crime. It is now well-documented that the proliferation of SALW poses a threat to peace and security, development and the enjoyment of human rights.

The paper recommended the following actions to address the proliferation of small arms in Africa.

- i) Empowering security structure and border management between African countries.
- ii) True implementation of small arms and light control mechanism to regulate the proliferation of small arms in Africa.
- iii) Good operation of governance to provide for the basic needs of the citizens by fighting corruption and operating functional government.
- iv) Intervention of global communities in fighting the menace in Africa, through the effort of United Nations by engaging various stake holders and addressing the root source of proliferation in Africa.

## CONCLUSION

Reducing the degree and the level of misuse of small arms and light weapons in Africa, from the hands of combatants, criminals and terrorist there is need for a new dimension of approach with serious engagement of all

stakeholders to developed a package design that suits African countries peculiarities in terms of body frameworks for regulation SALW in Africa, action program and the evaluation instrument mechanism to ensure small arms and light weapons are not in the hands of criminal or terrorist in all over the world. Lastly, the effort of fighting of proliferation of small arms and light weapons must engage civil societies group and other community structure component to ensue peaceful and secured society.

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