

SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS AND THE CHALLENGE OF NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Security challenges are the major issues largely explaining Africa's underdevelopment. The nature of insecurity is by and large precipitated by armed conflicts and civil wars. For example, in the early 1990s West African countries had witnessed succession of political crisis, genocides, massacres, civil wars and insurgencies that resulted into loss of countless lives and properties. These security crises led to proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) across West Africa with devastating consequences thereby compounding the crisis. In particular, Nigeria's domestic security challenges were also connected to the accessibility of SALW in the country. For instance, apart from major conflicts in the South-south and the North-east of Nigeria, there are a number of conflicts that are attributed to SALW. The paper, therefore, examined the role of SALWA in the complication and devastating escalation of conflicts and insecurity in Nigeria. The paper argues that the fight against insurgency and terrorism across the breadth and length of Nigeria must be addressed along the line of controlling the spread of illegal small arms and light weapons and all west African countries must cooperate and collaborate together to address this huge and complex challenge.

Key Words: Small Arms, Light Weapons, National Security,

Introduction

Wherever arms flow, violence follows. Bullets replace ballots as the solution to political disputes (Michael Douglas, 1998).

Remarkable changes on the African security scenery since the end of the Cold War have contributed considerably to Africa's new security challenges (Adebajo, 2004). The porous borders of African countries particularly West African Sub-region, has continue to engender crimes and insecurity in

the region, owing to the inadequate and inappropriate techniques for monitoring illegal activities across these territories. Obviously, instability undermines good governance and security, with serious consequences of economic growth and development among many countries in the world (Addo, 2006). Therefore, security challenges are the major issues partly explaining Africa's underdevelopment. The insecurity in the

continent is by and large saddened by armed conflicts and civil wars.

Africa, unambiguously the West African Sub-region has experienced domestic political violence, which include a diverse trends such as civil strife, protests, strikes, riots, plots, assassinations, coups d'état, and civil wars (Henderson, 2002). The reoccurrence of the assortment of conflicts made region the most volatile in the world.

Accordingly, individual countries in Africa have begun to feel the impact of the strife, like Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone and a host of others that witnessed vicious armed conflicts connected to explosion of SALW. In particular, Nigeria's domestic security challenges were also linked to the accessibility of SALW in the country. Therefore, Small arms are considered as smaller infantry weapons, such as fire arms that an individual soldier can carry. It is usually limited to revolvers, pistols, submachine guns, shotguns, carbines, assault rifles, rifle squad automatic weapons, light machine guns, general-purpose machine-gun, medium machine guns and hand grenades. However, it further include heavy machine-guns, as well as smaller mortars, recoilless rifles and some rocket launchers, depending on the context. Large mortars, howitzers, cannons, vehicles and larger pieces of equipment are not considered small arms (Nte, 2011). The arms are assumed to be responsible of the death of millions of people in different states in Africa.

For long, violent conflicts of one type or another have afflicted Africa and exacted a heavy toll on the continent's societies, politics and economies, robbing them of their developmental potentials. The elongated debated causes of the conflicts are as complex as the challenges of resolving them (Zezeza, 2007). Though, Proliferation of Small Arms Light Weapons (SALW) has been widely discussed amongst scholars and security

experts the continent is the foremost grounds for the escalation of conflicts with intensifying level of poverty and diseases in the continent. Nigeria in particular is understood to be the biggest receiver of light weapons in West Africa and equally perceived to be part of the reason behind insecurity largely being experienced in different sections of the country. Thus, this piece examined the position of SALW in the complication and overwhelming intensification of insecurity in Nigeria.

Conflicts and Small Arms in Africa

In Africa, civil wars, conflicts and genocide have long history of colonial violence in the form of slave trading, slave labor, plantation labor, plantation terror and a violent gun culture which all have to take into account while explaining the current situation. It cannot be overemphasized that African conflicts are remarkably unexceptional: they have complex histories; they exhibit multiple and multidimensional causes, courses and consequences (Zezeza, 2007). Thus, in the continent predominantly the West African Sub-region has for many years been the most unstable. Since 1960, of the 15 member states that make up the Economic Community of West African States ((ECOWAS), most have been through several military coups, 37 of which were successful (Keili, 2008). The sub-region has been grappling with violent conflicts and civil strife for decades. However, the period between the 1980s and the 1990s is regarded more violent with protracted conflicts, which destabilized the continent's political and economic development (Anna, 2014). Notable countries that plunged into violent conflicts during that period include Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and Cote d'ivoire (Aning and Bah, 2009).

Similarly, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the fierce competition linking the superpowers in Africa was an important

aspect, if not in starting violent conflicts, undoubtedly in sustaining them. The United States of America and the Soviet Union in particular, and less so openly the British and the French, competed for (a) “the hearts and minds” of the African elites and their followers; (b) political and diplomatic allies; (c) strategic allies; and (d) mineral resources. The rivalry and competition took various forms: supporting governments, overthrowing governments, supporting/opposing political parties, covert activities in support of or in opposition to governments, and supporting, if not initiating rebel movements (Bujra, 2002:9). However, in the early 1990s, there was immense hope throughout the world for a decline in the wars, insurgencies and threats from weapons of mass destruction that marked the Cold War era. With the breakup of the Soviet Union, the world witnessed a precipitous decline in military spending by the major powers, the ending of several wars fueled by Cold War rivalries, and renewed interest in the principles of the UN Charter and legal instrument controlling weapons of mass destruction (Laurence, 1999).

These anticipations were soon dashed as interstate conflicts, some new, others held in check by the superpowers during the Cold War, began to flare up into armed violence. The root causes of the conflicts were quickly specified as Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) had been used virtually in all the combats in many parts of the world particularly in Africa (Laurence, 1999).

Therefore, the withdrawal of Superpower support in the 1990s has compelled armed groups and governments to become increasingly self-reliant to ensure their own survival whether by selling weapons abroad mostly in Africa or by associating political and military efforts with commercial pursuits. For insurgent groups in particular this change of armed struggle has meant trading, often illegally, in resources under their control like case in Sierra Leone (Red Cross Report, 1999). For instance, in 1994 Mali, a civil war between the Toureg minority and the rest of the country resulted in the wide availability of arms in society. The ensuing instability and violence brought insecurity in the continent. Correspondingly, in Rwanda, more than 800,000 Tutsi and many Hutus were massacred at the direction of the Hutu government, made possible by the distribution of weapons brought into the country for this purpose. In addition, in the former Soviet Union, states with only arms industries left as viable commercial enterprises legally sold hundreds of thousands of small arms and light weapons to governments involved in conflicts, many of which were illegally diverted to armed groups mainly in Africa curved on enabling conflicts (Laurence, 1999:4). These actions led to the increase of Small Arms and light Weapons across the Africa. It has been estimated that during the period of the 90s millions of SALW have either officially or illegally shift to Africa to sustain the conflicts.

Figure 1: Estimates of West African SALW in or out of circulation (2000-2010)

Name of country	SALW in Circulation	SALW seized	SALW surrendered	SALW lost	Comments
Benin	135,505	1,800	-	-	
Burkina Faso	83,913	-	-	-	
Cape Verde	12,188	-	-	-	

Cote d'Ivoire	10,000 458,677	-	1000	-	
Gambia	136,850	-	28	-	
Ghana	1000,000	3,387	-	-	
Guinea	130,884	61	-	-	
Guinea Bissau	25,000	-	-	1,270	
Liberia	166,117	-	27,000 61,918,000	-	
Mali	174,752	-	-	-	
Niger	117,305	28	12432 30,000	-	
Nigeria	2.5million	3,732	20,000 1,257	140 7,000	6491 destroyed By the army
Senegal	263,714	-	8.000	-	
Sierra Leone	49,785	9,237 6,165 30,000	-		
Togo	80,339	400	-	-	

Source: GIABA Report. (2013). *The Nexus between Small Arms and Light Weapons and Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing in West Africa*. Ponty Dakar (Senegal): GIABA Publications.

The abundance of arms in the region especially in the hands of the non states actors has suddenly increased the level of violence in Sub-Saharan Africa. The proliferation and abuse of SALW occurs in an assortment of context: receding conflicts, post-conflict, and high-crime areas. Today there are Millions of SALW in circulation worldwide (Laurence and Stohl, 2002). In Africa, West Africa Sub-Region in particular is amongst the regions that received large percentage of illegal of SALW in connections to various conflicts around the world. In 2015, Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) recorded 14,640 conflict events on the African continent (ACLED Report, 2016). African countries have experienced direct, indirect and consequential impacts of weapons proliferation. Thousands of people, – both civilians and combatants –

are killed or injured every year in the continent. Yet, even when death or injury is avoided, small arms proliferation and misuse can dramatically impact a community, country or region's landscape. The former United Nation Secretary-General's Kofi Anan (2000) states that:

The death toll from small arms dwarfs that of all other weapons systems - and in most years greatly exceeds the toll of the atomic bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In terms of the carnage they cause, small arms, indeed, could well be described as 'weapons of mass destruction.' Small arms proliferation is not merely a security issue; it is also an issue of human rights and of development. The proliferation of small arms sustains and

exacerbates armed conflicts. It endangers peacekeepers and humanitarian workers. It undermines respect for international humanitarian law. It threatens legitimate but weak governments and it benefits terrorists as well as the perpetrators of organized crime.

The threat and use of small arms can undermine development, prevent the delivery of humanitarian and economic aid, and contribute to refugee and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) populations (Stohl and Tuttle, 2009). The violent conflicts are illustrated by abject poverty, insufficient service provision, political instability, retarded economic growth and other challenges to overall development that deter the enhancement of human security and development (Bowd and Chikwanha, 2010). Thus, 49 major conflicts in the 1990s, 47 were waged almost exclusively with small arms and have been responsible for the direct and indirect deaths of millions of civilians in Africa (Laurence and Stohl, 2002). For instance in Rwanda it is true that much of the killings in 1994 were executed by machetes but however the scale of the bloodshed in such a short time could not have been achieved without the massive availability of SALW (Wallman, 1999). Likewise, in Sierra Leone machetes were equally used in amputations of innocent victims but large percent of execution and bloodshed were carried out with the light weapons. Diamonds were used for exchange of SALW during the conflict in Sierra Leone. The conflict was considered as the most heinous and devastating witnessed since the end of Cold War (Mohammed, 2015).

In conflicts and related violence around the world, approximately 500,000 persons are killed each year, with SALW- 300, 000 in conflicts and 200,000 in murders, suicides and accidents. Recently released statistics show that the number of small arms in civilian

possession far outnumbers those in possession of states and police in Africa. Moreover, the evidence is clear that in contexts such as the Africa, the principal risk is the AK-47, while in other regions such as South Columbia, Handguns-Revolvers and pistols-are the weapons most often used to kill (Geneva Report, 2001). In Africa, AK-47 can be bought in some countries on the open market for as little as the price of sack of flour (AEFJN Report, 2014). The Geneva-based Small Arms Survey has also reassessed the situation, claiming that:

If rebel forces are armed roughly the same way as a typical soldier elsewhere in the world, with an average of 1.2-2.25 small arms each, the total number of insurgent small arms in West Africa alone never reached the widely assumed seven to eight million. The widespread destruction, and the killing and flight of refugees, appear to have been caused by far fewer weapons in the hands of tens of thousands of fighters (2001).

Thus, in West Africa virtually all countries in the sub-region have experienced different violent conflicts associated with the SALW. Nigeria in particular from 1999-2015 witnessed rising security concerns raging from armed banditry, insurgency and terrorism attributed to availability of small arms in the country. Experts generally concurred that availability of small arms can generate a very lasting and devastating conflict especially in Africa that is associated with porous borders, corruption and bad governance. In addition, in line with Geneva Report (2001), the proliferation of small arms also contributes to a culture of violence and a cycle that is difficult to break. The negative consequences of the proliferation and mishandling of arms are an impediment to economic development, provision of health and education services as

well as the development of effective governance and democracy in Africa.

In short, insecurity is the fundamental challenge undermining political and socio-economic development of African states. Despite recent reports of declining of conflicts and civil wars in Africa, specifically in the Sub Saharan Africa, availability of SALW and extreme poverty would continue to escalate anxiety and insecurity in the sub region and the continent at large. Moreover, bad governance and insecurity would remain as background features of Africa. Nigeria is part of states in Africa at present experiencing rising cases of violence and communal crises related to proliferation of small arms in the continent.

Proliferation of Small Arms in Nigeria

Nigeria is a diverse and vast country covering 923, 768 square kilometers with over 36, 450 kilometers of land and maritime borders, and shares land borders with four countries namely, Benin Republic in the West, Chad and Niger in the North, and Cameroon in the East. It also shares International Water Lake Chad in the North with Niger, Chad and Cameroon, and a maritime border coastline in the Gulf of Guinea or Atlantic Ocean. Along the Western border, Nigeria has 770 kilometers of shared land border with the Republic of Benin, in the North, around 1,500 kilometers with Niger and 90 kilometers with Chad and in the West, 1,700 kilometers with Cameroon. Along the Southern coastline it also shares 853 kilometers of maritime border with the Atlantic Ocean known as the Gulf of Guinea. The country has about 4910 km of borders (Stohl and Tuttle, 2009). The existence of numerous borders, vast of ungovernable lands and water areas made it difficult in curtailing griming security challenges in Nigeria.

Nigeria is a source, transit and destination of SALW. The reasons of the proliferation of SALW in the country are very complex. A lot

have been documented in the literature as evidence of explosion of small arms. For examples, crime, revolts, subversion, sabotage, religious crisis, communal conflicts, social agitations, micro-nationalism, insurrection, terrorism, insurgency, riots, militancy, electoral violence, political violence, social interest, ethnic tensions, cross border smuggling, porous borders, black marketeering, local manufacturing, privatization of security, insecurity, poverty, economic crisis, mass unemployment, among others are perceived to be the causes. The country's environment and atmosphere provided suitable grounds for violence. Virtually ranges of crimes that can imperil proliferation of SALW are being experienced today in Nigeria. For instance, Nigeria is both producer and consumer of SALW in the West African sub region. It is however, very difficult to ascertain the exact quantity of illegal SALW circulating within Nigeria (Bello, 2010).

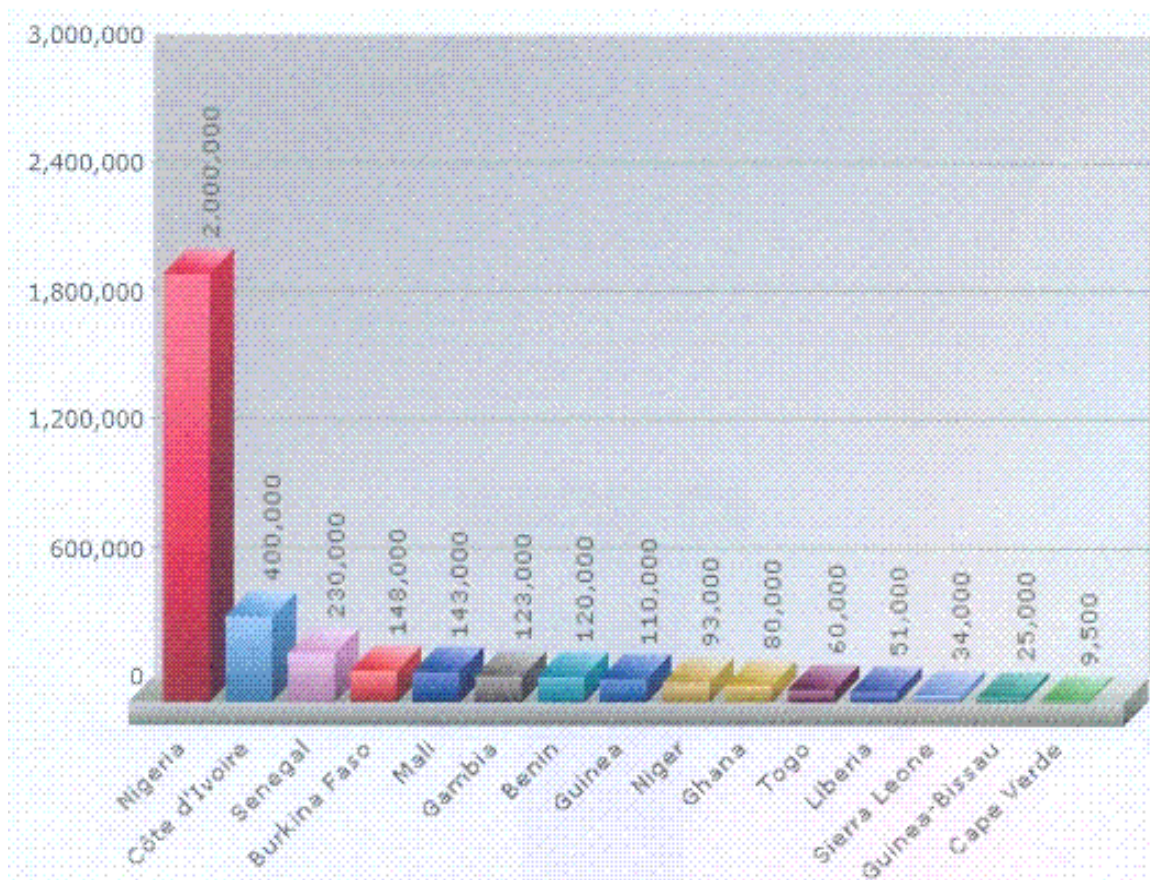
In addition, Nigeria is highly diverse, pluralistic and heterogeneous and multi-religions with over two hundred ethno linguistic groups and two major religious groups. Besides, Nigeria is the most populated country in Africa and one of the largest economies in the continent. Notwithstanding the country's potentials, insecurity has been metaphase disease affecting the country. The existence of abundance opportunities compared to its neighbors have persistently attracted lot of migrations into the country. The constant migrations often assist in transportation of arms in Nigeria considering its ungarded borders and borderless policy in the sub-region. It has been confirmed that 956,081 people migrated to Nigeria from its neighboring countries in 2013. Moreover, conflicts experienced in the West African sub-region and other regions in the continent equally increased migration trends and widening the availability of Small of Arms and Light Weapons (SAWL) in Nigeria. As of 29th

April, 2014, Nigeria documented 938 asylum-seekers, mainly from Chad (8.8%), Democratic Republic of Congo (49.9), Mali (15.1%), and the Central African Republic (9.5%). In the same year Nigeria hosted a total of 1,679 refugees (IMO Report, 2016). This amongst others persuaded Nigerian government to set up different border security agencies with the household tasks of controlling illegal transit of arms and goods within its territories.

Nigeria has the biggest security organizations in West Africa and one of the central duties of the agencies is to secure country's borders from the illicit transfer of arms. In spite of the efforts of cross-border security organizations like the Nigeria Police, Nigerian Customs Service, Nigerian Immigration Services and Naval Agency, Nigeria's borders have remained porous for illicit arms trafficking. According to the United Nations Arms Index, Nigeria is the highest recipient of illicit and illegal arms in the sub-region. Thus, the source of proliferation of SALW is a well linked to local manufacturing in

the country and conflicts in the sub region and continent at large. Thus, legally acquired SALW for a range of security activities in the Nigeria a time finds their way to militia groups (Onuoha, 2011). As a consequence of that Nigeria has the highest of small arms in the hand of civilian population compared to other countries in Africa and world at large. It was believed that large percentages of the arms are being possessed illegally and are being operated out context of the 1959 Firearms Act in Nigeria that prohibits the possession and use of any firearms by any person in the country except armed forces and police. Reports have indicated the countries that experience brutal civil wars in Africa have lesser SALW in circulation compared to Nigeria. This must however be connected to unrelenting influx of stolen small arms in Nigeria from its neighboring countries. Chad, Cameroon and Benin are contributing more to proliferation of SALW in Nigeria (GIABA Report, 2013).

Figure 2: Number of Privately Owned Firearms in each ECOWAS State



Source: GIABA Report. (2013). *The Nexus between Small Arms and Light Weapons and Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing in West Africa*. Ponty Dakar (Senegal): GIABA Publications.

The weapons in circulation in Nigeria is largely believed to have come from local fabrication, residue of guns used during the civil war, thefts from government armories, smuggling, dishonest government-accredited importers, ethnic militias, insurgents from neighboring countries and some multinational oil cooperation operating explicitly in the oil-rich Niger Delta (Onuaha, 2013). Not amazingly, in 640 million small arms circulating around the world, it is estimated that 100 million are in Africa, about 30 million in sub-Saharan Africa and 10 million in West Africa sub region. It has been estimated that around 7.2 million SALW are in Nigeria, which is more than seventy percent of small arms in the sub region. The bulk of these SALW about 59% are in the

hands of civilians, 38% are owned and control by the government armed forces, 2.8 % by police and 0.2% by armed groups. The total gun trade in Africa is worth \$ 4 billion annually, of which up to \$ 1 billion may be unauthorized or illicit. Around 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 every person in the world twice over. African countries spent over 300 billion dollars on armed conflict between 1990 and 2005 equaling 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 explicitly in Nigeria (Ibrahim, 2003).

Accordingly, the proliferation of SALW in Nigeria has been considered a product of the failure of political leadership owing to bad leadership, poor governance, militarization of the society and state violence leading to poverty, mass unemployment, economic crisis of development and other forms of poor human development indices in Nigeria (John, et al. 2007). The long history of the militarization of the Nigerian society is said to have been responsible for the proliferation of SALW in Nigeria. The military, for instance, has ruled Nigeria great part of the period following independence from Britain in 1960. During the Biafran Civil War (1967–1970), large cache of SALW passed into general circulation. Civil–military relations have worsened since the transition to civilian rule in 1999, and most of the population see the armed forces and police as coercive and corrupt (John, et al. 2007). For instance, since the amalgamation of the Northern and the Southern protectorates in 1914, two major issues are said to be dividing the country: ethnicity; and religion, and one often wonders which of them divides Nigeria even more. These two divisive elements in contemporary Nigeria result to numerous ethno-religious violence in the Northern part of Nigeria (Aniche, 2006). For instance, the rough nature of Nigerian politics has equally provided grounds for proliferation of small arms in the country. The continuing violence in political process and endearing elections turn out to be peculiar aspect of promoting illicit trafficking of arms in Nigeria.

The colonial authority it is argued sow the seed of discord among the diverse people of Nigeria through numerous divide and rule tactics. Moreover, at the independence, the political leadership and indeed the political class further deepened these divisions created during colonial rule by raising ethno-religious

consciousness in their intense power struggles for the control of the Nigerian state (Okafor, et tal. 2012). The process of state formation and nation-building are at the incipient stage. Therefore, ethno-religious conflicts seem to be a part of the unfinished business of state formation and nation building. All these constitute part of the demand factors for proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in Nigeria.

Correspondingly, corruption treaded as the most impending disease of many states in Africa. Nigeria in particular rated high among the most corrupt nations in the world. Explosion of small arms in the country were particularly linked to corruption amid security agencies' challenges of safeguarding the country from domestic and international security threats. Dishonesty and fraud has become fundamentally institutionalized in both the public and private sectors in the country, and the security sector has become worse for it. Recently, Nigeria soldiers were charged for supply of arms to Boko Haram terrorists. For instance, in 2008 five soldiers of the Nigeria Armed Forces were convicted for selling of over 7000 small arms valued around \$285, 715 (N100,000,000:~) to the Niger Delta Militants. The weapons include amongst others AK-47 Rifles, Rocket Launchers and Machine Guns. The arms were believed to have been stolen from the Nigerian Army at the Command and Staff College, Jaji, Kaduna state (Onuaha, 2013). Explosions of small arms from the security personnel considered as the most dangerous proliferation considering the magnitude and enormity of damage of small arms used by the security agencies can inflict on lives of individuals. The arms were mostly designed for full scale warfare amongst countries. For instance, Niger Delta militants are amongst the insurgency groups believed to have possessed and operate arms and ammunitions that are rare in the Nigerian military armories.

However, the inability of the Nigerian state to deal with the demand factors heightened the proliferation of SALW in the Northern part of Nigeria. Recently Economic Community of West African States has sought to establish Small Arms Commission in Nigeria being the only country in the sub region without functional National Commission (Daily Trust, August 5, 2016). Ahmed (2016) stated that:

We in the ECOWAS region have advanced in the establishment and strengthening of National Commission on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) based on the provisions of Article 24 of the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their ammunition and other related materials. Except for Nigeria, all the member states have functional commissions on small arms. We encourage Nigeria to do the same (Daily Trust, August 5, 2016).

Lack of functional Commission of small arms in the country led to many devastating security effects in Nigeria. The circulation of illegal arms within and across states has increased the proclivity of conflicts within the country with increasing rates of inter-communal violence. However, the defies and consequences of SALW are often as foremost component of security challenges currently facing Nigeria, Africa and indeed the world in general. The trafficking and wide availability of these weapons fuel communal conflict, political instability and pose a threat, not only to security, but also to sustainable development. The widespread proliferation of small arms is contributing to alarming levels of armed crime, and militancy (Nte, 2011). Moreover, the challenges in Nigeria are compounded with the level of extreme poverty, unemployment, low wages and poor conditions of service of institutions charged

with the mandates to protect lives and properties of millions of citizen.

Small Arms and Security Challenges in the Country

The security of the state is aimed at protecting the national integrity of the state and defending the sovereignty and essential values that constitute country identity. The changing trend of national and international threats to national security is occasioned by the evolution and development of new factors in the internal and external environments of the independent states. Many African states are experiencing new grime security threats as a result emerging circumstances within and outside the continent. Nigeria's problem with SALW is not new; its increasing availability has persistently helped in rising insurgencies. For instance, Nigeria's security has deflated in the last decade. The existing security challenges have become more complex and placed in worrisome dimensions, while the emerging threats are compounding the ugly circumstances of the country's insecurity. Some known challenges that fashioned fresh intimidation to the internal security of country comprised proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), Cattle Rustling, Kidnapping, Militancy, Human Trafficking and Political Assassination among others (Onuoha, 2011 and Mohammed, 2015). Substantially, small arms turned out to be the critical tools for effecting of scores of aforementioned political and violent crimes in Nigeria. By and large SALW has been recognized as the catalyst behind the ethnic and religious conflicts experienced at various categories in the country.

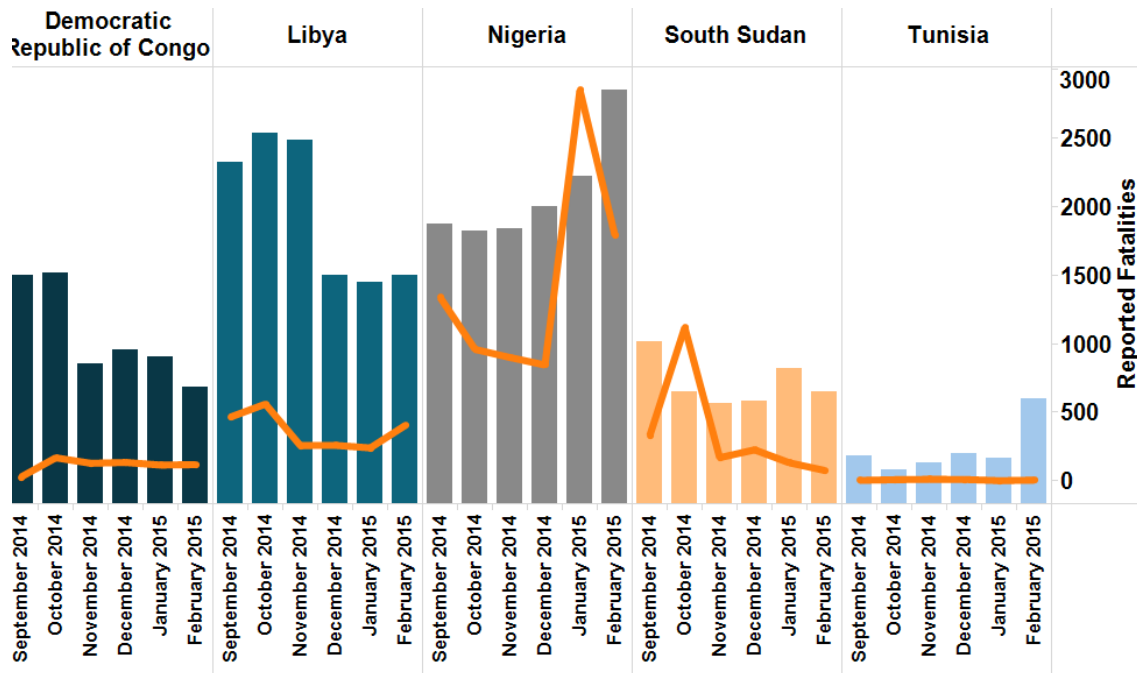
Though, the relationship between SALW and instability has remained the object of political debates amongst scholars in Nigeria. Divergent opinions are held on the affiliation

of small arms and insecurity in the country. For example, part of the scholars maintained that small arms have direct bearing in creating insecurity, while others argue that SALW are merely prompt of instability or precipitating factor. Even though there are opposing views, both experts commonly agreed that proliferation of SALW poses serious challenges to the sustenance of peace and security in Nigeria (Olasile, 2015). In support of that, lot of literature documented the compounding effects of SALW on lives of individuals and security of a nation. Godnick, et al. (2013), argues that the direct effects of SALW occur as deaths, injuries and disabilities, as well as direct cost that result from the treatment of injuries and disabilities. In addition, small arms are often used to forcibly displace civilians, impede humanitarian assistance, prevent or delay development projects, and hinder peacekeeping and peace building efforts. At the war ends, availability of small arms would continue to lead to additional violence and suffering and would remain as frequent

primary weapons for terrorism and insurgency (Olasile, 2015).

Similarly, Nte (2011) posits that there is a direct link between the acquisition of weapons like SALW and escalation conflicts into a full-brown war. For instance, in Nigeria the exodus of arms increased the violence and insurgencies across the country. The United Nations Regional Center for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC) reported that Nigeria witnessed the largest number in terrorist deaths ever by any country, increasing by over 300% in 2014 to 7,512 fatalities (Daily Trust, August 5, 2016). In spite of history of civil wars and violent conflicts in many African countries Nigeria recorded the largest fatalities of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). The record on SALW effect established in Nigeria surpassed the countries that experienced vicious conflicts in recent times like Libya, Southern Sudan, Mali, Central African Republic, Egypt and Democratic Republic.

Figure 3: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Country, from September 2014 - February 2015.



Source: ACLED Report. Conflict Trends (No. 35) Real Time Analysis of Africa Political Violence: March, 2015. Available at: <http://www.acledadata.com>, accessed on 20th July, 2016.

In estimated effects, between 1999 and 2003, there were over 30 communal clashes, sectarian violence and ethno-religious conflicts with each claiming hundreds of lives and properties, and huge populations internally displaced, mainly of women and children. It is widely documented in the literature that civilian populations are the most affected or vulnerable to SALW crimes. Annan (1997) argues that:

Small arms are widely used in conflicts in which a high proportion of casualties are civilians, and in which violence has been perpetrated in gross violation of international law. This has led to millions of deaths, injuries, the displacement of population, and suffering and insecurity around the world. ... Although accumulation of weapons of such weapons by themselves does not cause conflicts in

which they are used, their easy availability tends to exacerbate and increase the lethality of the conflicts and obstruct development and relief assistance efforts.

The proliferation and use of SALW in ethno-religious clashes and armed robbery have killed more than 10,000 Nigerians, an average of 1000 people per year since 1999. The majority of casualties about 66% in Kano riot of 2004 were SALW victims sustaining permanent disabilities. Injuries due to SALW have increased as much as ten-fold in urban Nigeria because most homicides are committed using SALW (Mohammed and Nte, 2011). The problems of armed violence and proliferation of SALW are worsened by the inability of the police to reduce violent crime, ensure law and order and provide adequate security to the populace. None of the security

agent currently possesses the training, resources or personnel to perform their duties effectively due to lengthy and porous nature of Nigerian borders (Hazen and Horner, 2007). In the last 10 years, the number of deaths as a result of violence in different parts of Nigeria has been spiking steadily. The fifth report of the Nigeria Watch Project released in early 2016 indicates that between June 2006 and December 2015, a total of 94,470 deaths were recorded from fatal violence related to availability of SALW across the country. The country attained the climax in terms of number of deaths recorded from violence in the last 10 years. 2014 and 2015, accounted 24 per cent and 18 per cent, respectively, of the total deaths recorded during the period (Daily Trust, 2015).

Similarly, the oil-rich Niger Delta remains the scene of inveterate violence amid rival groups of different ethnic groups competing for political relevance and dominance. This crisis has been aggravated by the theft of crude oil, known as illegal bunkering-with the availability of SALW. Likewise, as a result of illicit arms, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) spent decades in incantation of country's security and economy. Recently, other groups called Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) and Reformed Niger Delta Avengers (RNDA) have inflicted serious security defies in the country by worsening the economic situations. Generally, Small arms and Light Weapons are the tools mostly used in carrying out acts and bombings of oil installations in the region. Boyloaf, then MEND Commander, explained that it was based on targeting oil facilities rather than the military. In his words:

I believe the economy is the power. Like you may have known, I don't believe in fighting human beings, I believe in crumbling the economy. On my way crumbling (sic) the economy, if any military man comes across me and

tries to stop me, I mean those people will kiss their graves. My bullet, nozzle is always targeted at the flow stations, pipelines etc, I don't believe in fighting human beings. Before we formed the MEND, our people were fighting, but it was a war between the Ijaw and Itsekiri, that was not the Niger Delta struggle.

The activities of the Niger Delta Militants have cost the country monstrous amount of funds meant for development of the country. It has been estimated that Nigeria has lost \$200 billion to the crisis from the Niger Delta crisis between 2000 and 2015. This includes the cost resulting for oil bunkering, ransom for kidnapping and billions of dollars expended in provisions of corporate security by the multinational companies and Nigerian government. Since the resurgence of militant attacks in the Niger Delta region, particularly Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) confidence in Nigerian oil has depreciated. This is as a result of the uncertainty that comes with the delivery of oil. Moreover, it has become difficult for oil workers to continue production and it let a drastic reduction in the volume of crude oil exported daily. Nigeria currently produces 1.6 million barrels per day (bpd), the lowest production in 20 years – this is far below the targeted 2.2 million barrels per day production projected in the 2016 budget. Similarly, the crisis has affected the power sector tremendously. In the energy profile of about 4000 Megawatts in 2007, 30,000Megawatts, in 2011 and 50,000Megawatts in 2015 (David, 2016). The enormity of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in armories of the militants assisted in compounding the strength of the groups to operate easily in achieving the target goals in the region and create insecurity in the country. The losses caused by the militants has further increased tensions on the Nigerian economy and generate poverty amongst its

populace thereby causing chaos and uncertainty in the country.

On the side of Boko Haram, the SALW has been the major equipments in causing havoc and insecurity in Nigeria. The religious group has become major security challenge in the Northern Nigeria. The *Boko Haram* menace and uprising has proved more brutal than the Niger Delta Militancy in the south-south, MOSSOB in the south-east and Ethnic Militants OPC in the south-west, deploying the deadly strategy of using Small Arms Light Weapons in shooting and suicide bombing-hitherto unknown in the country. Thousands of people have been killed and property worth millions of dollars has been destroyed since 2009 when *Boko Haram* first appeared (Mohammed, 2015). The increased militarization of the *Boko Haram* group, resulting in frequent attacks on both civilians and foreign nationals in Nigeria, has also caused a large dent to the nation's image. Their operations reliable are conducted with the SALW. Since July 2009, more than 15,000 people have been killed in bombings and gun attacks by *Boko Haram* (Agbibo, 2013).

The violent attacks, which show evidence of articulated coordination and sophistication, adds a further complication to the festering security challenges in Nigeria by exacerbating existing ethno- religious tension and inter communal violence explicitly in the northern Nigeria (Maiangwa, 2014). Nigeria and Nigerians have lost millions of US dollars as a result of Boko Haram insurgency. Thus, the impact of SALW on the security is also evident in financial losses induced in conflicts. Boko Haram insurgency is becoming the longest domestic security threat that the country has ever witnessed. It has been estimated that Nigeria has expended more than \$60 billion in curtailing the insurgency since it started in the Northern part of the country. Though lot of funds allocated for the fight against the insurgents were believed to have diverted for

personal gains among the Military officials and politicians.

Similarly, orphans usually left behind end up as social miscreants who contribute to violent crimes. Thus, for every person killed or injured in conflict and crime involving the use of SALW, there are more who must cope with the psychological, physical and economic effects that that endure in the aftermath (Onuaha, 2013). Thus, violence and conflicts in Nigeria are invention of SALW. Illicit arms trafficking in the country has compounded the growing security menace in the country thereby creating fertile ground for exiting tensions and crises to escalate.

Conclusion

Based on the preceding, the security challenges in Nigeria have very long history. It has acknowledged that the root causes of all the conflicts in West Africa have strong linked to Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) even before the independence of many countries in the Sub-region. The sub-region remains an area of considerable SALW proliferation because of their affordability, accessibility and availability; and porosity of the borders and legal frameworks legitimizing their use. However, the rising effects of small arms on security deterioration in Nigeria equally perceived to be new threat considering the negative ramifications linked to SALW to economic and political development of the country. The illicit trafficking of SALW in Nigeria is attributed to porous borders, unemployment, poor wages among the working and lack patriotic commitments from the side of security agencies. Correspondingly, government commitments in the control of the exodus of small arms in the country are still controversial considering the rising levels of crime scenarios in the country. The incapability of the law enforcement agencies to check the supply factors of SALW worsened security situations in Nigeria.

Moreover, the rate of poverty level and unemployment considerably boosted the proliferation of SALW in the country. Nigeria is among the countries in Africa with high rate of poverty. It has been estimated that 60% of Nigeria's population are living below poverty level. The rate of unemployment among the teeming youth provides ample opportunity for them to engage in illicit and used of SALW to

organize crimes as the only means of survival. Thus, the paper argues that unless Nigerian government considers control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, proliferation of SALW would remain to be a threat to Nigeria's peace and security. Nigeria equally most strengthen its law enforcement agencies to enable them check the supply of SALW that worsens security situations in Nigeria.

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