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TRENDS OF ILLICIT ARMS PROLIFERATION IN NIGERIA AND CURTAILMENT STRATEGIES

Olusola O. Isola, Ph.D.
Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.
sola_isola@yahoo.com

Abstract

Small arms proliferation has accelerated the rate of crimes, endangering civil security in Nigeria. Terrorism and escalating ethno-religious violent conflicts can also be traced to this trend. The situation which began since the end of the Nigerian civil war appears to have defied efforts to curtail it. The paper rationalised the situation from the frustration-aggression and weak or fragile state theoretical perspectives. It examined the factors that have contributed to the arms proliferation, the dynamics of demand and supply of small arms and the implications of the proliferation on national security and development. Several reasons have been attributed for the trend, including weak regional security arrangements in West Africa and porous security borders. Even though there are existing security and legal measures to stop the trend, it appears there is inadequate coordination among existing agencies to stop the trend. The paper suggests that government and the civil society need to demonstrate more commitments to exposing traffickers of small arms and strengthen the relevant agencies to stop their illegal activities.

Keywords: Small arms, Criminality, Terrorism, Nigeria

Introduction

The increasing circulation of illicit weapons among Nigerian population has accelerated crime, violent conflicts and terrorism. The proliferation of weapons has ruptured the hitherto peaceful socio-economic environment to such an extent that it is having unquantifiable effects on the economy, security and social interactions among people. Nigerians are now constrained to conduct business activities at certain period of time daily in more secured locations, rather than in

other locations that are perceived as insecure. Until very recently when terrorism activities have been degraded, the entire Northeastern part of Nigeria was under siege, having been seized by terrorists, while virtually every economic activities in three states – Borno, Yobe and Adamawa- were paralysed for several months. All these were attributed to the activities of the Boko Haram terrorists who have been operating with the aid of light, medium and even heavy weapons,

some of which are superior to the arms in the possession of the Nigerian armed forces tackling them (Salaudeen & Ancell, 2017). In the Niger Delta part of the south, oil production was greatly reduced until recently, as a result of the activities of militants who engaged the armed forces in several asymmetric skirmishes with the aid of illicit weapons. These developments have had untold effects on the economy and have accounted for an economic recession.

It is estimated that globally, about 640 million illicit Small and Light Weapons (SALWs) are in circulation. Among these, about 100 million are circulating in Africa from which about 30 million are said to be circulating within the sub-Saharan region (Okeke & Orji, 2014). About eight million of such weapons are estimated to be in West African countries. Even though there is lack of accurate statistics on the exact number of illicit SALWs in Nigeria, a survey of the SALW conducted in Nigeria in 2007 estimated that between one million and three million of such weapons are circulating among civilians in Nigeria (Ayissi & Sall, 2005). This figure could have been tripled with the outbreak of the Boko Haram insurgency conflict in 2009, in which the country has experienced series of medium to high intensity armed conflicts between the insurgent group and the Nigerian armed forces. It is also expected that a larger fraction of the illicit weapons in West Africa could be within the Nigerian geographical space considering the large diverse population of the country and the porosity of the country's border lines with other countries.

Apart from the intensive armed conflicts in the Northeast and Southern

part, there has been a predominance of gun-related violence in the major cities in Nigeria such as Lagos, Port Harcourt, Onitsha, Enugu, Ibadan etc, in the last two decades. Tragically, in recent times, such violence had spread into rural communities especially with the rising inter- and intra-communal violence across the country. Variants of criminal activities and communal violence are now spreading into farm steeds, mostly between farmers and cattle herders some of whom are now armed with SALWs which they use to force their cattle across farms to destroy crops, thus sparking violent conflicts between them and farmers (Isola, 2018). According to the Nigeria Watch Project report (2015), between 2006 and 2015, a total of 94,470 deaths as a result of fatal gun violence were recorded in Nigeria. About 24 percent of these were recorded in 2014 and 18 percent in 2015. Most of these deaths emanated from criminal activities related to gun violence but excludes the medium intensity war and violence that has commenced in the Northeastern part of Nigeria since 2009. Okeke and Orji (2014) estimates that about 59% of the eight million illicit weapons in West Africa can be found in the possession of civilians, about 38% are held by government officials and members of the armed forces, about 2.8% are held by the police while about 0.2 % are held by various armed groups. This statistics are however suspect considering the emergence of new armed groups in West Africa, especially in Nigeria in the recent times. For example, the Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb have spread their influences into West Africa and have in fact supported the Tuaregs insurrection in Mali, while also making available more weapons for

other non-state armed group in the sub-region as a fall out from the Arab spring (Tar, 2013).

The Boko Haram terrorism have escalated as a result of the weapons they acquired from the various international extremist organisations such as Al-Qaeda, al-Shabab, the Islamic State group and other foreign extremist groups, who not only made available insurgency training but also weapons to prosecute the violence against the Nigerian state. They engaged in intensive combat against the Nigerian armed forces and for a while captured major towns in the Northeastern Nigeria such as Gwoza, Damboa, Gamboru Ngala, Buni Yadi etc. They later went on to capture 15 local government areas across at least three states in the Northeastern Nigeria where they declared an Islamic Caliphate, patterned after the activities of the Islamic States in the Middle East (*Daily Trust*, 2016). They held on to the captured territories for about a year before the Nigerian armed forces dislodged them after a massive military operation during which they destroyed the terrorists' stronghold and captured some of their weapons. Unfortunately, there is no accurate data and estimation of the kinds of weapons deployed into combat by the Boko Haram terrorists, but it is obvious that they went beyond using SALWs and also deployed heavy weapons to engage with the Nigerian military before they were dislodged from the captured territories. Many of the militants escaped with SALWs to other locations in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and other West African countries which further made the various parts of the sub-region unsafe.

The militants dislodged from the creeks of the Niger Delta and notorious criminals have found safe haven in the

waterfronts and swamps of Ikorodu in Lagos. Many residents of Arepo, Agbowa, Ikosi and other riverine communities abandoned their residences because of the activities of militants armed with SALWs operating with powerful motor boats who initially engaged in vandalism of oil pipelines criss-crossing the swamp in order to siphon fuel. When they could not continue with such illicit business because of the intervention of the security, especially the military in securing the locations, they diverted into other criminal activities such as kidnapping of residents of the communities and invasion of elite schools and colleges in the area where they abducted school children and their teachers for huge ransoms.

The ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Ammunition and Related Materials (2006) defines SALWs as weapons destined for personal use, such as firearms, destructive devices such as exploding bombs and explosives, hand grenades, rocket launchers, revolvers and pistols with automatic loading, gas bombs, rifles and carbines, assault rifles and light machine guns, pump action shotgun, AK 47 and other varieties of sub-machine guns. Ammunition used for operating such weapons range from 5.56mm to 9mm bullets for rifles (Chuma-Okoro, 2011). The SALWs are preferred weapons for criminal activities especially among the civilian population and terrorists because of number of factors that favour their usage. Such weapons are technically plain and easier to handle by individuals. In most cases, no formal training is required before an individual can use them and absolutely no maintenance is required while using them, beyond the procurement of munitions to service the weapons,

which are equally available and could be procured through the same black market routes where the weapons are procured. They are very easy to conceal and could be transported to the crime point without detection. Hence, they can easily be delivered by gun runners and criminal elements to end users. Most importantly, SALWs are now very cheap and easily accessible to criminals and terrorists who only have to identify the network of dealers and smugglers of the weapons.

Small bombs, gas bombs and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) are favourite weapons for prosecuting guerrilla attacks by terrorists in Nigeria. These devices are strung onto suicide bombers who embark on deadly missions in targeted areas, most especially in crowded locations such as markets, motor parks, churches, mosques and locations where men of the armed forces are gathered, such as barracks and road security checkpoints. Many of such suicide bombings had taken place in Maiduguri, Abuja, Suleja, Kano and other major cities in the Northern Nigeria. Criminals and terrorists also use such devices to blow up bank vaults, armories and other fortified locations where they could have access to large sums of money and weapons to carry out their dastardly acts. This tactic has also become the favourite of the Boko Haram terrorists after their field activities have been degraded by the Nigerian armed forces.

The objectives of this paper, first, is to examine the factors that are contributing to the escalating trend of proliferation of SALWs in Nigeria; to examine the dynamics of demand and supply of SALWs; to critically review the implications of arms proliferation on national security and make viable

suggestions on how small arms proliferation can be curbed across Nigeria.

Theoretical Perspective

Acquisition and usage of illicit arms by individuals and groups could be rationalised with two theoretical constructs. At the individual and group levels, it could be argued from frustration-aggression theoretical perspective; while at the state level, failing or fragile state theory could explain the trend of illicit arms proliferation which has gone beyond the control of the state. Dollard *et al* (1939) first explained the frustration-aggression theory by connecting the behavior of people in reaction to external stimulus which prevents them from achieving an expected goal. In relation to the present discourse, sometimes people are pushed to acquire or accumulate illicit weapons when there is a wide gap between social expectations and reality. In many post-colonial developing societies, expectations of improved livelihood were aroused in citizens at independence. However, the nature of leaderships that have emerged have been selfish, uncaring and having little sympathy for citizens. Nigeria happens to fall into this category. With high level of unemployment, high poverty rate and near hopeless population, people are sometimes pushed to the extreme in order to survive.

Corroborating the frustration and aggression thesis, Davis (1962) have attributed the principal cause of insurgencies, mass actions, violence and criminalities to shattered hopes and widespread dissatisfactions produced by long periods of rising expectations and low gratifications. This trend has produced massive appetite for acquisition

of small arms to fight the state and has provided opportunities for criminal elements to carry out nefarious activities that could enable them to forcefully and illegally acquire resources. Feirabend and Feirabend (1972) also opined that social conditions produce individual and collective frustrations when “want formation” far exceeds “want satisfaction” and where needs and capacities are out of balance. The outcome is likely to be social instability which obviously could be nurtured by acquisition of illicit arms.

The theory of the failing, fragile or weak state could be argued from the perspective of a modern state that has failed in relation to the security, economic, social and political factors within its territory (Vannoni, 2009). This extends to the inability of a state to control its land, water and air space to prevent influx of illicit weapons and its proliferation among its population. Most of such weapons are smuggled into or are produced illegally within the state and the state could not control its proliferation because of its weak capacity. Many of such states do not even have an idea of how many of such weapons are within their populations. This much was explained by Newman (2009) and Eriksen (2010) as one of the signs of fragility or weakness. While such states may not have completely failed, there is apparent danger of failure. Other states that have experienced complete collapse naturally began with this trend before completely collapsing. Countries such as Somalia, Afghanistan, Libya, etc. have treaded on this path until eventual collapse of state apparatus because they could not control the influx of arms into their territories and into their populations. Nigeria was ranked as 13th on the Global State Fragility Index

(Newman 2009), but since the state institutions still remain intact, even though inefficient, it cannot be ranked as a collapsed state but it possesses all the ingredients of fragility and imminent collapse.

Trends of Gun-related Violence in Nigeria

The proliferation of the SALWs among Nigerian population has aggravated the rate of criminalities and disruption of social interactions among the population. It has led to increasing rate of armed robbery and various forms of hijackings on the major and minor motor ways across the country. Residential neighbourhoods especially in the major towns and cities across Nigeria have experienced multiple robberies, while banks and other business premises are often burgled by armed criminals brandishing dangerous weapons and explosives. Incidents of kidnappings and hostage taking for ransom have increased in the past decade with the perpetrators collecting millions of Naira. Hired assassination of prominent and not so prominent individuals has escalated, many of which the security organisations have not been able to resolve because of the increasing sophistications of carrying out such deadly killings with small arms.

The spate of political violence has also increased across Nigeria. It is on record that prior to major elections in Nigeria, illicit arms are procured by politicians and distributed to thugs and criminal elements to terrorise political opponents (Ibrahim, 2003). Many of these weapons are diffused into the population after they have been used during elections to secure elective offices for politicians. In

the Niger Delta, many of such weapons procured by politicians have been seized and appropriated by militants who engaged in kidnapping of the staff of oil companies and government officials. Many of the militants have engaged in pipeline vandalism and other economic sabotaging activities in the Niger Delta area.

Proliferation of SALWs has also accounted for the rising spate of cultism and violent cult activities in educational institutions and in several urban and rural communities across the country. Cult members brandishing pistols and other small arms have become terror to students on campuses while many cult members and innocent students have become victims of cult violence across the country. In spite of the intensive campaign against the trend by the government and civil society organisations, cult activities still continue in many higher institutions and have even spread to elementary schools because of the difficulty in controlling the proliferation of small arms. In the same vein, small arms are the favourite weapons that ritual killers now use in catching their victims. This trend has now become problematic to the society as criminal minded people who believe they can make money by using parts of human body or sacrifice a whole human being now carry out their dastardly acts with impunity.

The increasing rate of ethno-religious and sectional violence across Nigeria cannot be divorced from the proliferation of SALWs. Many communities that have been co-existing for centuries have suddenly become hostile to themselves and have resorted to settling their differences through gun

violence. Security interventions in such sectional violence in Osun, Nassarawa, Benue, Kaduna, Imo, Rivers, Lagos and several other states in Nigeria have discovered large catches of arms and ammunitions being used by local warriors to prosecute the various inter- and intra-ethnic conflicts and religious violence that has become common in the last two decades across the country. The sources of these weapons are still a mystery and yet to be totally unraveled, but it is suspected that they are smuggled into the country and into the various communities by conflict entrepreneurs who profit from such business. Even when the security forces capture some of the weapons after their interventions in the communal violence, the remainders of such weapons are still buried and kept in various locations in the communities which ultimately fuel a resurgence of the communal violence.

The rampart herdsmen-farmers clashes in rural communities across Nigeria are fallout of the proliferation of small arms. It is now a common trend for herdsmen to move around with their cattle brandishing automatic weapons, usually AK47, slung on their shoulders. Slight disagreements between the herdsmen and farmers, which were hitherto settled through dialogue, now often snowball into armed violence in which many lives are lost in rural and sometimes in urban communities where herdsmen roam with their cattle. The sources of the weapons, which the herdsmen brandish is yet to be unraveled.

Dynamics of Demand and Supply of SALWs

The spreading and proliferation of SALWs is driven by large demand stimulated by unsecured and unstable socio-economic environment. In Nigeria, factors such as massive youth unemployment, bad governance, corruption and political violence accelerated the militarisation of the society and stimulated demands for SALWs. Other factors include ethno-religious violence, privatisation of security, the instinct for self-defence among citizens as a result of receding confidence in the Nigerian security forces who are often overwhelmed by the activities of neighbourhood criminals and are not sufficiently equipped to tackle all facets of criminalities.

The first wave of weapons proliferation occurred in Nigeria after the end of the Nigerian civil war in the early 1970s. Many of the SALWs used in fighting the war could not be completely mopped up after the war and many of the demobilised soldiers went away with the weapons, many trading it away for means to survive after the civil war. The arms were used for criminal activities by some of the ex-soldiers while others found their way into the hands of criminal elements leading to increasing armed robbery incidents, smuggling and other kinds of criminal activities. The then military government imposed stringent penalties such as firing squads to punish armed robbers and other stricter punishments for other categories of gun-related offences to curtail the varieties of gun-related criminal activities. For a while, gun-related criminal activities abated, but there was resurgence when other sources

opened up for criminals to access SALWs. The trend has since continued across Nigeria to date and it has become difficult for government to curtail it.

The backlash of the Arab Spring which occurred within the last decade in North Africa and the Middle East has accelerated the spreading of SALWs into the sub-Saharan region. The state collapse in Libya especially after the demise of Colonel Mohamar Ghadafi, leading to proliferation of state acquired weapons into the hands of rebels and global religious extremist groups led to thriving of arms black market trading and movement of weapons down south to West Africa (Tar, 2013). The extremist groups such as the Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb, the al-Shabbab and ISIS started operating in a network, sharing captured weapons to smaller extremist groups such as the Boko Haram, the Ansawrul and the Tuareg dissident groups in the sub-Saharan areas. The weapons from Northern Africa infiltrated into Northern Nigeria and strengthened the capacity of the Boko Haram, who was offered training and combat resources to prosecute a medium scale war against the Nigerian state forces. In the process, the Northern Nigeria, especially the North Eastern part became heavily militarised and unsafe for economic and social activities for several years. The Sambisa forests in the Northeastern part hosted most of the weapons the terrorists used in fighting against the Nigerian armed forces and in the process of trying to capture the forest from the terrorists, Nigeria lost many soldiers and civilians. Heavy casualties were also recorded among the victims and vulnerable groups including women, children, the elderly and infirm in areas where the terrorist groups operated.

Large numbers of illicit SALWs are produced in Nigeria by local blacksmiths and gunsmiths and are sold to persons without licenses to carry weapons. According to the Presidential Committee on small arms, about 60% of illegal arms circulating in South Eastern Nigeria are produced locally, while 40% are imported by politicians. The implication of this is that arms production is a very big business locally, which is contributing to the high level of insecurity. The skills and dexterities displayed by local gun makers in producing the weapons is such that one sometimes wonder if the government should not license some of them in order to boost the nation's resource base (Okolie-Osemene & Aghalino, 2013). However, local production of weapons has partly accounted for high rate of kidnapping, armed robbery and other criminal activities in the eastern part of Nigeria from where kidnapping had spread to the south-south and other parts of the country.

One other major source of illicit arms proliferation is the connivance of the security men with criminals to procure weapons. There are many reports in the media about soldiers and para-military staff supplying arms to criminals and other elements involved in insurgency and terrorism activities across the country. Such security men sometimes loot the armories of the armed forces and police, steal guns and sell them to criminals for profit. Several of such security men have been court-martialled and jailed by the armed forces, according to the media reports. In January 2017, the Nigerian Customs men in Lagos apprehended a trailer load of pump action machine guns which escaped the attention of the customs service from the Apapa ports. It

took the diligence of the patrolling custom men on the streets of Lagos to detect that a truck load of purported building materials arriving from a foreign country was actually conveying high caliber weapons concealed among building materials. Further investigation revealed that a number of customs officials actually collaborated with criminal elements to smuggle the weapons into the country. What is still not clear till date is the regularity with which such weapons are smuggled into the country and the destinations of such weapons. There is however no doubt that the porous port entry points and large expanse of unmanned land border lines in the country are sources of SALWs into Nigeria. Since Nigeria has become a hub for trading in SALWs, it is also likely that the weapons could be spreading into the neighbouring countries from here, while weapons from other countries flow in and out freely through the activities of international criminal gangs and individuals.

Implications of SALWs Proliferation on Nigeria National Security

The proliferation of SALWs naturally has consequences on insecurity, which affects every facet of national life in Nigeria. The last two decades has witnessed the rise in the number of ethnic militias across the country; communal violence, insurgencies, religious violence, armed robberies and other gun related criminalities had also been prevalent. Agitations by ethnic militias such as the Odua Peoples' Congress, the Egbesu Boys, Bakassi Boys and other such bodies that are advocating for local independence for ethnic nationalities have led to low intensity armed conflicts which has led to

the extermination of many Nigerians and displacement of people from their communities.

There has been major intra-ethnic violence such as the ones between the Ife-Modakeke communities, Aguleri-Umleri communities and major inter-ethnic violence between the Hausa/Fulani against minority groups in Kaduna, Fulani-Tiv-Jukun in Benue and Taraba, Fulani vs Beroms in Plateau and other communal violent conflicts in various states in Nigeria. All these violent conflicts are predicated on proliferation of SALWs in various communities. It is on record that between years 2000 and 2002, about 1,713,306 people were displaced from their communities as a result of ethno-religious violence across the country (Nigeria Watch, 2015). In June 2013, it is estimated that there were about 1.3 million internally displaced people as a result of communal conflicts in Nigeria. Since then, the activities of the Boko Haram terrorists have intensified and this number would have been doubled, if not tripled most especially in the Northeastern part of the country.

The conflicts in the Niger Delta took violent dimension with the infiltration of SALWs into the region. Most of the weapons in this area came into the country through the sea ports and water fronts, which are prevalent in the area. Prior to the Amnesty Programme, several armed groups fighting for resource control acquired many deadly SALWs with which they fought the armed forces until some of those weapons were mopped through the amnesty granted to the insurgent groups. Even though many of those weapons were surrendered, it is also anticipated that many more remained buried in the local communities in the

Niger Delta and others remain with individuals many of which are still being used for criminal activities.

The security implication of having a large number of Internally Displaced People (IDP) as a result of communal violence, camped across the country and being hosted in local and urban communities is ominous. The SALWs are hidden in some of the IDP camps. Many of the IDPs camp residents become victims of crimes such as rape, robbery, prostitution and many of them also engage in such crimes to survive and live from day to day. This brings serious insecurity into the host communities and camps and greater challenges to the security apparatus in managing security in the host environments of the IDPs. Local security surveillance in the IDP hosts and neighbouring communities often become difficult. Terrorists and criminals who mingle with residents of IDPs constitute serious threat to local security as such communities experience various incidences of crimes, including suicide bombings, armed robberies, burglaries etc.

National economic productivities have suffered as a result of proliferation of SALWs. Insecurity has prevented new investments to come into the country while the existing ones could not expand. In order to grow any economy, according to the global standard, there is need to drive production and human productivity up to 24 hours. However, insecurity as a result of criminal and other violent activities does not encourage people, manufacturers and investors to move beyond 12 hours when there is daylight, and the economy is virtually asleep in the night. Workers in essential services organisations in many parts of Nigeria work under special security arrangements

which further drive the costs of services and goods up. In spite of the efforts of government to encourage foreign investors to invest in the Nigerian economy, inadequate security has been the major issue that has not encouraged many of them to come. The few that are around often incur additional cost to procure the services of private security guards to complement the services of government security forces in securing their investments and premises. Ultimately, this drives up the cost of production with many manufacturers preferring to import finished products rather than producing locally.

Security and Legal Measures to Check the Proliferation of SALW

Measures have been taken to control the proliferation of illicit SALWs in Nigeria. Such measures range from legal activities to local control mechanisms and collaboration with bodies and organisations at the regional and international levels established for the control of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Even though there is a rich historical tradition of civic ownership of firearms in Nigeria, the Firearms Act of 1959 (as amended) was the first law enacted to regulate the possession and usage of arms by private individuals in Nigeria. The law specifies the conditions for manufacturing, trading in and acquisition of firearms and punishment for illegal possession and use of firearms (Chuma-Okoro, 2007). In addition, there are provisions in the Penal and Criminal codes of the constituent states that spell out punishment for armed robbery and fire-arms related offences. The Robbery and Firearms (Special Provisions) Decree

5, 1984 was promulgated by the military government to reinforce the previous law and to control the use and proliferation of firearms for criminal purposes. During the military era in Nigeria, the standard punishment for armed robbery and firearms related offences was execution through the firing squads in public locations in order to serve as deterrent for other potential offenders. However, it became controversial if such punishment actually had any impact in deterring such offences. Even though public execution of offenders ceased with the exit of the military from government in Nigeria, the rate of armed robbery and firearms related offences did not abate but in fact increased across Nigeria even before the exit of the military when public execution was the norm.

Nigeria is a signatory to the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons and Related Materials, 2006. It is also a signatory to the United Nations Firearms Protocol of 2001. In order to implement the contents of the regional and international agreements to curtail the trends of arms proliferation, the government in Nigeria established the National Commission for the Control of the Proliferation and Unlawful Circulation of Light Weapons (NATCOMS) in July 2000. Apart from implementing the various international agreements, the commission was saddled with the responsibility of monitoring the importation, exportation and local manufacturing of small arms across Nigeria (Hazen & Horner, 2007). It also has the responsibility of registering new acquisition of SALWs and grant exemption for new acquisitions under the 2006 ECOWAS moratorium. The commission carried out a survey of the

SALWs in circulation in Nigeria and went on to destroy a stockpile of weapons worth millions of Naira captured from individuals and groups who possessed them illegally. However, there has been no study to measure the impact of the activities of the commission on SALWs reduction in Nigeria since its establishment and it is doubtful if it has made any appreciable impact on reducing the quantity of illicit small arms in the country.

Nigeria has entered into bi-lateral co-operation with its immediate neighbours (Benin, Niger, Chad and Cameroon) in order to control smuggling and infiltration of SALWs through the borders with these countries (Adejo, 2005). The various bi-lateral agreements with these countries have led to the establishment of joint commissions, joint border patrols and monitoring with the relevant security bodies of each of the neighbouring countries. These efforts have yielded results in terms of reducing the cross-border traffic of SALWs, but the sheer length of Nigeria's border with its neighbours and inadequate workforce and resources to exercise total control over the land border has limited the impacts of the various efforts.

Suggestions of further Measures

It is very clear that availability of small arms and light weapons among the Nigerian civil population had contributed to increasing crimes and violent conflicts. In order to curtail further proliferation of SALWs, there is need to strengthen the existing measures to monitor and control the trend. The existing legal mechanism to control the proliferation in Nigeria is due for overhauling. The provisions of the

1959 Firearms Act is outdated for the pace of the proliferation of firearms in the contemporary times. There is already a shift in the understanding of what constitute SALWs because of the operation of non-state violent groups. Crime and terrorism trends are more sophisticated now than the prevailing law could cope with and so there is a need to re-enact new laws to cover the expanded scope of what constitute firearms and explosive devices and the way they circulate and used by criminals and terrorists. The penalty for possession and distribution of weapons in the prevailing law has also been trivialised and rendered impotent to curtail the trend because of the changing social and economic dynamics. There is therefore, an urgent need to review the penalty to act as deterrents to traffickers and dealers in SALWs.

The National Commission for the Control of the Proliferation and Unlawful Circulation of Light Weapons (NATCOMS) appears presently to exist on books and have not been able to carry out its mandates effectively. This is not surprising because the organisation has been bedeviled by underfunding, lack of attention from official quarters, official corruption and inadequate enforcement mechanism. The commission is currently placed under the foreign affairs ministry, obviously to implement the various international protocols for small arms control entered into by the federal government, which makes it appear that its domestic responsibilities may not really matter in its activities. The commission as currently constituted does not have its permanent staff since staff are deployed on ad-hoc basis from other sectors of government and security

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Suggestions of further Measures

It is very clear that availability of small arms and light weapons among the Nigerian civil population had contributed to increasing crimes and violent conflicts. In order to curtail further proliferation of SALWs, there is need to strengthen the existing measures to monitor and control the trend. The existing legal mechanism to control the proliferation in Nigeria is due for overhauling. The provisions of the

1959 Firearms Act is outdated for the pace of the proliferation of firearms in the contemporary times. There is already a shift in the understanding of what constitute SALWs because of the operation of non-state violent groups. Crime and terrorism trends are more sophisticated now than the prevailing law could cope with and so there is a need to re-enact new laws to cover the expanded scope of what constitute firearms and explosive devices and the way they circulate and used by criminals and terrorists. The penalty for possession and distribution of weapons in the prevailing law has also been trivialised and rendered impotent to curtail the trend because of the changing social and economic dynamics. There is therefore, an urgent need to review the penalty to act as deterrents to traffickers and dealers in SALWs.

The National Commission for the Control of the Proliferation and Unlawful Circulation of Light Weapons (NATCOMS) appears presently to exist on books and have not been able to carry out its mandates effectively. This is not surprising because the organisation has been bedeviled by underfunding, lack of attention from official quarters, official corruption and inadequate enforcement mechanism. The commission is currently placed under the foreign affairs ministry, obviously to implement the various international protocols for small arms control entered into by the federal government, which makes it appear that its domestic responsibilities may not really matter in its activities. The commission as currently constituted does not have its permanent staff since staff are deployed on ad-hoc basis from other sectors of government and security

organisations so that even if it is in full operation, there is a limit to its institutional memory structure for sustainable operation. The appropriate place to domicile NATCOM is in the interior ministry for effectiveness and efficiency. The federal government should endeavour to strengthen the commission by allocating more resources to it and nurturing it to take full control of its responsibilities.

The Nigerian land and sea borders are very porous and in its present condition of ineffective protection, it is very difficult to prevent infiltration of SALWs. Currently, about 20,000 Customs Men in service are monitoring an estimated 4,500 kilometers of land borders. This is grossly inadequate considering that a considerable number among these men are also deployed to monitor sea ports and airports in the country. There is urgent need to deploy massive technology to aid security in monitoring the many entry points in Nigeria from where substantial numbers of illicit SALWs are entering into the country. The connivance of the security men at the entry points has been established in most of the discoveries of arms smuggling in the country (Eselebor, 2013; Adedoyin, 2013). If this trend continues, the rate of proliferation of SALW is bound to continue and increase. Measures should be taken to curb official corruption at the entry points while complicit security men who aid and abet arm smugglers and dealers in their nefarious activities should be apprehended and appropriately punished.

The connivance of the members of the armed forces with criminals to procure weapons for criminal purpose has equally been established and this has impacted on

the activities of insurgencies and terrorists. Until recently when members of the armed forces were able to reduce the activities of terrorists, the media has been swashed with reports of looting of the armories of the armed forces by corrupt soldiers who have been selling weapons to insurgents and terrorists (*Daily Trust*, 2016). Additionally, critical tactical intelligence had been passed by unscrupulous members of the armed forces which aided the activities of the terrorists. These are pointers to the need to overhaul the operations of the Nigerian armed forces to strengthen discipline, efficiency and effectiveness to curb the trend of arm proliferation and to curb the activities of terrorists, insurgents and criminals who rely on SALWs to carry out their activities. The issue of welfare and training of the members of the armed forces need to be addressed to prevent corruption. Specifically, there is the urgent need to provide training and technical support for the armed forces and covert security operatives on detection and mopping-up strategy of SALWs among the civil population. This process obviously would require specialized training and investment in appropriate technology.

The need for government to partner with local weapon manufacturers to curb the spate of SALWs proliferation is now very urgent. There is no need to continue to pretend that such individuals and groups producing weapons and profiting from it do not exist. Apart from legal mechanisms to control their activities, there is also the practical aspect of assisting them in identifying alternative vocations that could earn them sustainable livelihood and clean profit instead of their current deadly vocation. Moreover,

government could evolve a policy that would enable the armed forces to identify and work with the honest and genuine weapons makers who could help in strengthening local production of legitimate weapons for national defence purposes. This could contribute to conserving the foreign exchange resources that are used in importing weapons. Local weapon producers could also be involved in research and development of new weapons for the armed forces and encouraged to channel their individual skills and knowledge towards legitimate national development that could earn them decent living rather than involving themselves in criminal activities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

There is need to build synergy between security and local communities to curb continued spreading and proliferation of illicit SALWs. Most of the illicit weapons are hidden in communities by people who use them for illegal violent purposes and members of communities could identify such people. Except there are genuine information about the location of weapons, the security cannot detect and seize them. Information have to come from members of the communities that could assist the security in mopping up weapons especially in communities that have recently experienced violent conflicts; otherwise future outbreak of violence should be expected in such communities. This suggestion also points to the need for effective community policing of grassroot communities across Nigeria. Even if the number of the current policemen is doubled, the sheer size of this country and its population would not make the police force to be effective.

Partnering with communities for their safety and encouraging them to be active in providing information is the best antidote to make the police effective in Nigeria. Detection and collection of illicit weapons should be made one of the central focuses of policing in Nigeria.

As a matter of fact, the federal government's whistle blowing policy should be expanded to go beyond economic and financial malfeasance to cover detection and exposure of illicit weapons. Majority of weapons kept by individuals under the guise of using them for hunting purposes are not registered. Since there are categories of the kinds of small arms allowed for games, it is the responsibility of the relevant authorities to embark on public enlightenment to inform the people of the kinds of arms allowed among the civil population and to encourage them to expose those who have illegal arms in their possession. If people are assured of adequate protection and rewards for exposing illicit weapons, more of such weapons would be detected and mopped from communities so that communities could become safer. Since there is a record of incentives given to militia men who surrendered illegal weapons during the amnesty programme for the South-south, such programme and incentives could be designed for nationwide delivery to every community. The incentives should be extended to whistleblowers who would be encouraged to expose those who have refused to surrender illicit weapons while adequate protection should be arranged for them.

Finally, the NATCOM, in collaboration with other relevant security bodies should embark on a national project to enumerate every weapon – small, light and heavy weapons – within

the geographical space of Nigeria. This enumeration should be extended to weapons in the custody of security agencies and the armed forces. This process will lead to establishment of a data base for both licit and illicit weapons and could point to the direction of how illicit arms among the population could be retrieved and the kind of incentives required for such retrieval. Organisations dealing with explosive materials, especially mining companies should be compelled to disclose the amount of explosive materials in their custody and to explain the measures taken to safeguard such explosives from straying into the hands of criminals. There should be a new and stricter regulation regime to guide the activities of traders in explosive materials in order to ensure that only credible and recognised individuals are permitted to deal in such materials. Such regulations should be established in conformity with international standards and there should be effective collaboration with international monitors such as the International Atomic Energy Agency to monitor the trafficking in such materials in the local environment.

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