

Research Article

Proliferation of Small Arms, Light Weapons and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria: What Role for the United Nation?

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Abstract: The study examined the increase in the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons, with a view to literary establishing its effects on the growing state of armed conflict in Nigeria. Upon review of relevant literature, the study established that the spread in Small Arms and Light Weapons can be equated to the numerous conflicts ongoing in different parts of the world. The underlying conflicts have increased the demand for Small Arms and Light Weapons and have spillover effects across other countries. Furthermore, the study is of the view that the fractionalized nature of the Nigerian society across different cleavages has further heightened the propensity of armed conflict. Accordingly, it is of the view that the United Nation needs to put in more efforts in curtailing the Western habit of armed invasion on the basis of fighting terrorism or exporting democracy. Also the study claims owing to weak state capacity amongst other contextual factors, Nigeria is largely unable to address the trend informing its continuous dependence on United Nations.

Keywords: Small Arms and Light Weapons, United Nations, Ethnic Conflict, Armed Conflict, Armed Intervention and Colonialism.

Introduction

Of the central themes as obtained in mainstream colonial literature, presuppositions that colonial administrators pursued a policy of divide and rule in a bid to thwart national consciousness, foster disunity and maintain uncompromising dominance is far reaching. Relatedly, Okeke and Orji (2014) argue that Nigeria is highly diverse, pluralistic and heterogeneous society with over two hundred ethno-linguistic groups and two major religious groups. Thus, sequel to the amalgamation of the Northern and the Southern protectorates in 1914, two major issues are said to be dividing Nigeria, namely, ethnicity and religion, that one often wonders which of them divides Nigeria more.

For Aniche (2006), these two divisive elements in the contemporary Nigeria resulted in ethno-religious violence across federating units in varying propensities. The colonial authority created these diversities but made little effort to unite the country rather deepened division of the country through divide and rule aimed at frustrating any concerted or united resistance against it in order to perpetually suppress the people. Resultantly, the uneasy marriage that characterizes the arbitrary mashing up of various nationalities and ethnicities to constitute contemporary Nigeria birthed numerous inter-tribal, ethnic and religious violence as well as civil unrest. Before now, a handful of the unrests were depicted by the burning down of structures, businesses and place of worship belonging to persons of other faith or ethnicities. In the 1990's Nigeria witnessed a handful of conflicts premised on the basis that affected persons are either affiliates of other regions or are not indigenes of where they reside.

However, the advent of globalization and trans-nationalism has been accompanied with certain unintended negative consequences, such that criminal persons and organizations have exploited the free movement of human and other capital resources to move arms and weapons across national borders illicitly. For Mallam (2014, p. 262) globalization bring with it opportunities and challenges, the near elimination of state enforced restrictions on exchanges across borders and the increasingly integrated and complex global system of production and exchange that has emerge as a result further complicate the challenge of containing Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) proliferation.

The idea of globalization and its advocate for free market forces with minimum economic barriers and open trade for world development provides ground for illicit trade in arms by minimizing custom regulations and border control, trafficking of small arms becomes easier. Malhotra (2011) on the other hand is of the opinion that a miniscule percent of container ships have cargo checks, therefore making the arms movement smooth. Faking documents bribing officials and concealing arms as humanitarian aids are common practices.

For developing countries such as Nigeria, the inability of the state to effectively monitor and curtail activities around its numerous borders both land, air and sea has resulted in the importation of illegal arms into the country. Furthermore, the inability of the state to regulate the fabrication and sale of locally made riffles and other hunting gums has resulted in the illegal sale and circulations of arms and weapons. These amongst other mitigating factors have resulted in the high demand of weapons by ethnic militias, bandits, insurgents amongst other armed groups across the country.

In assent John, Mohammed, Pinto and Nkanta (2007) are of the opinion that proliferation of SALW in Nigeria is a product of failure of political leadership due 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.

Against this backdrop, the study relying mainly on secondary literature sets out to examine and establish theoretical if any, a negative correlation between proliferation of small arms, light weapons (SALW) and persistence of armed ethnic-conflict in contemporary Nigeria. It will also delve into some of the initiatives that has constituted with a view to addressing the underlying trend. In doing so, the study will place particular emphasis on the roles played by the United Nations with a view to ascertaining their efficiency on the above subject matter.

Conceptual Framework

By way of complimenting the introductory section of this chapter, this section is committed to operationalizing certain pertinent concepts that are central to the better understanding of the ongoing literary discourse. They include ethnic-conflict and small arms, light weapons respectively.

Ethnic-Conflict

The concept ethnic-conflict is derived from ethnicity which abstractly entails a form of primordial or constructed identity based on shared dialect, geography, values, norms, traditions, believes and in other times religion while conflict depicts a situation of unrest, tension or instability arising from the inability of different groups to arrive at a consensus on a variety of issues. While for small arms they include, but not limited to revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, assault rifles, submachine guns, and light machine guns.

Light weapons on the other hand constitutes heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank and anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortars of calibers of less than 100mm. (Report of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms, UN document A/52/298, 27 August 1997). While the sale and purchase of arms by individuals are permissible on the basis of obtaining relevant license, persons and criminal groups such as ethnic militias have devised numerous means through which such arms are bought and sold sophisticatedly across the globe.

In Nigeria, the unhealthy competition for access to resources and political power has degenerated over time taking a dimension which inculcates the use of arms and weapons. Notable amongst these ethnic-conflicts amongst other armed confrontations and agitations include the militancy in the oil producing Niger Delta Region, Farmers-herders clashes more pronounced in the Middle Belt and North-Eastern Region, southern Kaduna killings, armed banditry in Zamfara, cattle rustling to mention but a few. While this trend is not peculiar to Nigeria as rightly observed by Horowitz (1985) who claims virtually every modern nation-state is to a greater or lesser extent ethnically divided. This frequently implies a potential for various forms of conflict-from armed conflicts to autonomist movements and political segregation along ethnic lines.

In Nigeria for instance, Okeke *et al.*, (2014, p. 416) claim that 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 internal displacement of women and children. 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 John et al (2011). Based on the foregoing it will suffice to assume that the prevalence and relative access to which non-state actors can access small arms and light weapons have fueled the spates of ethnic-conflicts characterized by the use of arms.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework is used by scientists when carrying out research in their bid to explain a phenomenon on certain assumptions or laws. Furthermore, it is what the scientists have brainstormed about a subject and wants the study to answer. It is a way of describing, analysis, interpreting and predicting phenomena. Obasi (1999) contend a theory to mean a device or scheme for adopting or applying the assumptions, postulations and principles of a theory in the description and analysis of a research problem. In lieu, the ongoing literary endeavor hinges on the **failed state theory** in its bid to account the use of small arms and light weapons by non-state actors. The exponents of the theory hold that a state can exhibit either low or high relative autonomy, in the sense that it can monopolize the legitimate use of force as espoused by Max Weber.

A state exhibits high autonomy when there is high commodification of capital or excessive penetration of capital into the economy such that the bourgeois class indulges in accumulation of capital through direct exploitation of the working class or appropriation of surplus value when they enter into social relationships of production (Okeke *et al.*, 2014). As such, the state is relatively an impartial umpire meditating inter-class and intra-class struggles

through harmonization and reconciliation of class interests. The developed capitalist states of the West are, therefore, considered to exemplify this high relative autonomy, and as a result, exhibit high level of human rights observance and protection (Ake, 1985; Alavi, 1972). Conversely, a state exhibits low autonomy when there is low commodification of capital or low penetration of (private) capital into the economy in such a way that the ruling class is constantly engaged in primitive accumulation of capital through embezzlement of public fund. The state becomes the only avenue for capital accumulation. The state is thus, interventionist for engaging in productive activities of means of productive activities (i.e. public corporation) by nationalization of major means of production. This state does not limit itself to regulatory rule and is hence compromised, such that instead of rising above class struggle it is deeply immersed in it (Ake, 1976).

The Nigerian state like other developing state exhibits a low level of the autonomy of the state as a result of low commodification of capital. According to Patrick (1999) the term failed state is often used to describe a state perceived as having failed at some of basic conditions and responsibilities of a sovereign government. A failed state is one that has shattered social and political structures. It is characterized by social, political and economic failure. Common characteristics of a failing state is when a central government is so weak or ineffective that it has little practical control over much of its territory, non-provision of public utilities or services, widespread corruption and criminality; refugees and involuntary movement of populations, and sharp economic decline. (Clarke, 2015) notes that failing states are invariably the product of a collapse of the power structures providing political supports for law and order, a process generally triggered and accompanied by anarchic forms of internal violence. It is the collapse of state institutions, especially the police and judiciary with resulting paralysis of governance, a breakdown of law and order, and general banditry and chaos.

In extreme cases as in that of Libya, the functions of government are suspended, its assets are destroyed or looted; and experienced officials are killed or flee the country. Anyanwu (2017) concludes by a failed state we mean a state that is unable to meet the needs and aspirations of its masses, a failed state as opposed to capable state is a state which has failed to provide for its citizen such basics needs like adequate security, food, water, electricity, health care, good roads, etc. Nigeria is by all indications or indices a failed state-a state where nothing works.

In lieu, of the foregoing it will suffice to claim that the inability of the Nigerian state to monopolize the use of coercion legitimately, and exert control over its borders as well as arrest the ugly incidence of usage of arms and weapons by non-state actors overtime has contributed to the prevalence of armed confrontations in the country. Furthermore, the wanton disregard for constitutional pronouncements, failure to implement numerous treaties on the subject matter of SALW as well as the lack of political will to fight corruption have also played central roles in sustaining the prevalence of armed ethnic conflicts in recent times. Haven attempted to theoretically justify the prevalence of armed ethnic conflict in Nigeria, the next section of the study will look at contextual determinants of SALW in Nigeria.

Determinants of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria

Nigeria has in the past decade witness increased violence and small arms circulation, its proliferation can be attributed to the existence and stagnation of weak state capacity, porous borders, ethnic bigotry, religious intolerance coupled with high level of poverty and spill-over effect of armed instabilities in the Sub-Saharan Africa.

These key elements in the opinion of this study are conceived as major factors that fuel armed conflicts in Nigeria. For Mallam (2014, p. 262) fractionalized political system, elite system, youth bulge, external support for local militia, and easy access of aggrieved groups to surplus small arms and light weapons serves as triggers. Historically, the mass proliferation of SALW in Nigeria can be traced to the Civil War of 1967. Relatedly, it was argued that the failure of the Nigerian government to implement a comprehensive disarmament and arms destruction programme after the civil war (1967-1970) aggravated the proliferation of guns and illicit arms trafficking. As at 2002, the number of SALW in Nigeria was estimated by various reports and studies at between 1 and 3 million including arms in lawful possession of members of the armed forces and the police and those (majority) in the hands of civilians.

The 80% of SALW in civilian possession were illegally acquired because of the strict regulations. There is fear that a larger percentage of the SALW in circulation in Nigeria are illicit or illegal. Some of these illicit SALW were used in armed violence such as ethnic-religious conflicts, communal clashes, sectarian violence, cultism, political violence, electoral violence, vigilantism, militancy and criminality. Between November 2006 and February 2007, 212 cases of violent crime were reported, 189 of these were carried out with firearms, 34 with other tools and two involved bombs (Chuma-Okoro, 2011). Furthermore, the escalation of violence, loss of lives and property and the unabated proliferation of small arms since 2003 have turn the country into a total hopelessness. Recently, on the 18th of September, 2013, This Day Newspaper reported that Nigerian Customs impounded a cargo from United State, which smuggled Arms concealed in house hold cargo. It arrived on the 16th /09/2013.

Prior to this incidence on the 13th of April 2013 to be precise Daily Trust Newspaper reported that Nigeria Police detectives from Anambra and Delta States have uncovered arms factories in three communities in Delta State. Similarly, Daily Newswatch (Nigeria) 9 May 2013 has this headline: Police Confirm 1 Million Illegal Guns in Nigeria. In addition to the aforementioned factors, locally fabrication of SALW in certain parts of Nigeria has also contributed to the prevalence of SALW which are been used by ethnic-militias and other non-state actors to perpetuate violence. The table below depicts a breakdown of prices of arms and other light weapons produced in Awka in the Eastern part of Nigeria.

Table 1, Craft Producing Small Arms in Awka. Source, (Hazen and Horner, 2007).

Weapon	Feature	Ammunition	Cost
Pocket single-shotgun	Approximately 13cm long, steel muzzle to wooden stock, extremely rudimentary hammer requiring cocking, effective only at a distance of 1-2m, uses single shotgun cartridge	Various calibers shotgun cartridge	N4000/\$32
Four-shot revolver	Available in manual and automatic configurations.	9mm, 7.5mm or 8.5 mm	N8000/\$64
Single barrel shotgun	Breech-loading, safety cocking mechanism	Various calibers of shotgun cartridge	N10,000- N11,000/\$80- \$88
Horizontal double-barrel shotgun	Breech-loading, one trigger for each barrel, safety cocking mechanism	Various calibres of shotgun cartridge	N25,000- N30,000/\$200- \$240

The relative affordability of small arms in Nigeria as depicted in Table 1, gives an insight into the unregulated nature of the local arms manufacturing industry. It is also important to note that arms are produced in other regions of Nigeria as well. Therefore, sources of illicit and illegal SALW in Nigeria include cross border smuggling, security sector black marketeering and rentals, local manufacturing, organized crime and gun-running, air transportation agent, land transportation agent, arms broker and blacksmith (Vines, 2005).

Role of United Nations in Combating Small Arms Light Weapons

In lieu of the magnanimity of the volume of SALWs in circulation globally, the United Nations (UN) amongst other institutions have taken certain measures, enacted numerous treaties and protocols to address the ugly trend. Amongst other factors, it is the opinion of this study that complex nature of the phenomena necessitated a global approach spearheaded by the UN. For low capacity states like Nigeria, the role of UN in addressing the proliferation of SALWs is central to addressing the issue. This is thought to be so because, Nigeria continues to rely primarily on the National Firearms Act of 1959 as the legal instrument governing small arms possession, manufacture and the use in the country as amended even though the Robbery and Firearms (Special Provisions) Decree No.5 was promulgated in 1984 and later the Robbery and Firearms (Special Provisions) Act. Proposals were made that the laws be revised but to date there have been no efforts to overhaul the national legislation on small arms. President Obasanjo initiated a number of committees aimed at addressing the issues of proliferation, disarmament and related matters, but to date these committees have made little progress in tackling these issues (Hazen and Horner, 2007).

Relatedly, the United Nations overtime has adopted a number of conventions and protocols with a view to countering armed conflicts facilitated by the increase of illegal arms trafficking across the globe. Notable amongst them include; 1997 Convention on the Proliferation of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (entered into force in 1999). In the year 2000 United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (entered into force in 2003). While in 2001, United Nations (UN) Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects (Programme of Action). 2001 Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition (entered into force in 2005). In 2005 International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (Hazen and Horner, 2007). Despite these transnational-efforts, the rate of accumulation of SALW is increasing and becoming endemic as various forms of violence and casualties are in the recent times recorded in the Northern part of Nigeria.

Accordingly, it is the opinion of this literary endeavor that, numerous UN efforts has largely failed to make significant strides in addressing the proliferation of SALWs in Nigeria. This is thought to be so because the UN has done little or nothing to prevent the spate of armed interventions carried out by the Western superpowers. More pronounced is the invasion of Libya that led to the death of the then leader. Preceding the invasion by United States and its allies, weapons of different sizes and capacity have remained in the hands of non-state actors; this singular act is thought to be responsible for the increase in proliferation of SALWs in Sub-Saharan Africa. Activities of the likes of Boko Haram, Bandits, and alleged armed herders have significantly increased in recent time; arguably this can be tied to the influx of SALWs into the Sub-Saharan African region. To address this trend, the United Nation must as a matter of urgency rise above conventions and protocols, and must assume a central role in deterring armed invasion on the basis of fighting terrorism or ideological imposition of

Western forms of liberal democracy on non-Western societies. Furthermore, the UN should rise above partisan politics and should seize to be a tool for propagating and furthering the interest of the West. Regrettably, Nigeria and a better part of the developing world have failed to enforce legislation that will counter proliferation of SALWs as it has also failed to prosecute the countless seizure of arms at its Ports. Hence, the baton falls of Inter-Governmental Bodies such as the UN to curtail the spread of militarization and regulate the activities of legitimate and illegitimate manufacturers of fire arms globally.

Recommendations/Conclusion

In lieu of the ongoing literary debate, this research is of the view that, the proliferation of SALW in Nigeria has a destabilizing effect. There is lack of capacity and strong legal or effective institutional frameworks to regulate SALW and combat the phenomenon of SALW proliferation in Nigeria, particularly Northern part of Nigeria. More fundamentally, the Nigerian state is yet to deal with the demand factors of SALW proliferation preferring to dwell on the symptoms rather than the root causes. The demand factors are the root causes of SALW proliferation, because if there is no demand there will be no supply. Nigeria is the source, transit and destination of SALW, and therefore the demand factors include mass unemployment, poverty, corruption, excessive militarization, failure of political leadership, mal-administration, bad leadership, poor governance, state violence, among others. There is indeed excess politicization, state-sponsored violence and state proliferation of SALW leading to political violence, electoral violence and other forms of violence.

Furthermore, the Nigerian government need to demonstrate commitments not only in policy formulation, endorsement of agreements and codification, but also practical effort at implementation need be put in place, and to also, meet their primary responsibility to provide social and economic security and development for their citizens. It is the bases to addressing arms trade, by tackling the roots causes of armed violence namely, underdevelopment, insecurity, inequality and corruption. Conclusively, Workable solution must be sought for at the international level so that it would compel adherence at the regional and national levels just as it was the case with democratic system and military dictatorship.

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