



# Small arms and light weapons proliferation in the early 21st century: The Nigerian case

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## Abstract

A major security threat confronting Nigeria in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Despite the industrial level of human loss of lives and properties across space and time, and the heap of publications link to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, the scourge has not received the needed attention it deserves and this explain the need to do more. This paper is qualitative study on small arms and light weapons proliferation, using the Nigerian state as a microcosm to examine the emerging and changing trend of small arms and light weapons proliferation in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The study reveals that the internet especially the dark net is a game changer and has redefined the nomenclature of small arms and light weapons proliferation in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the inability of the security operatives to effectively infiltrate such internet spaces to keep abreast and track these activities is a serious setback. The paper concludes that the calamities associated with small arms and light weapon proliferation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria has ascended terrifyingly and the continued proliferation is a drain on political, economic, and socio-cultural development of the Nigerian state and unless a robust intelligence gathering through community policing is established, Nigeria will continue to suffer great loss from the yoke of small arms and light weapons proliferation.

**Keywords:** Light Weapons; Nigeria; Proliferation; Small Arms

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## **1. Introduction**

The sharp decline in Nigeria's peace and security milieu in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a factor playing against her appeal as a preferred investment destination on one hand while limiting her political and economic influence on regional, continental and global affairs on other hand. The pragmatic increase in armed violence across the Nigerian state is no doubt the function of the availability of small arms and light weapons playing an undeniable role in perpetuating violence from criminal related activities to full-blown war.

Nigeria is located in West Africa and has boundaries with the Republic of Niger to the North, Chad to the Northeast, Cameroon to the East and Southeast, Benin to the West, and the Gulf of Guinea to the south, all totaling 4910km of boarder outstretch ( Stohl and Tuttle, 2009; Nte, 2011; Okeke, Oji and Richards, 2014).

The international security outlook continues to change at an unsettling pace (Paul, 2012; Alan, 2010). This explains why security today is the most sought after not just to the state and its citizens but to the entire global system. The securitization of small arms and light weapons proliferation expressed by the 4362 meeting of the UN Security Council succinctly captures the devastating impact of small arms and light weapons proliferation on international peace and security.

The development also compelled the European Union (EU) as early as 2002 to adopt a Joint Action (2002/589/CFSP) with a mandate to tackle the threat of small arms and light weapons trafficking in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Balkans with the mission of combating, reducing and solving the issues caused by the excessive proliferation and availability of SALW (Carmen-Cristina, 2009).

It is unfortunate to understand that African states spent over \$300 billion dollar on arm conflict from 1990 to 2005 to the point of equalling the amount of foreign aid that was given to Africa in the same period, with an approximation of 79% of small arms in the hands of civilians across Africa states (Stohl and Tuttle, 2009). The phenomena is facilitated and sustained by the existence of large stock piles of arms from previous conflicts, weak arms control mechanisms, long and porous national borders, established smuggling roads, inadequate cooperation among national border security officials, the informal modes of trades and easy movement of cash across borders. Exacerbates armed conflict, this endangers peace and development in Nigeria.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics a total of 32,70 billion barrels of Nigerian crude oil valued at approximately \$330 billion has been produced between 1961 and 2014, but it is unfortunate that such gains has fail to improve the lives of its citizens, neither has it been properly utilized to develop the economy (Ndubuisi and Chineme, 2017).

These are, of course, threatening the national stability and security of the country. One of the greatest problems in Nigeria is that there is no longer 'trust' between the people and the government as well between and among ethnic groups. This is a big problem because without mutual trust and understanding the government may operate in a completely legal and technically efficient manner yet find it viewed by segments of its publics as cold, greedy and heedless of cherished social values.

A recent studies on small arms and light weapons indicates that underpinning these proliferation were bad governance, high levels of poverty, struggle for scarce resources, and the competition for economic

and/or political power among the elites, oil theft, money laundering, corruption, exploitation, terrorism, militancy, ethno-religious violence, scrambling for resource control, and other premeditated violence (Ibrahim, 2015: 5; Small Arms Survey, 2015; Abiodun, 2014: 190-192; Okeke and Oji, 2014; Alimi, 2011: 76; Christopher, 2011; Edeko, 2011: 67; Onuoha, 2013; Onuoha, 2011; Olufemi, 2010: 17; Yoroms, 2010: 282; Thom-Otuya, 2009; Jennifer and Jonas, 2007: 3; Ayissi and Sall, 2005; Fall, 2005; Aderinwale, 2005).

Upon other concerns, small arms and light weapons proliferation have, despite their notoriety and destructive reputation over time and space; they have failed to attract the needed degree of attention from the international commitment they deserve.

Therefore, the problem for this study is to identify the fundamental problems associated with small arms and light weapons, from misconceptions, to their magnitude, modes of acquisition, consequences and challenges of controlling small arms and light weapons proliferations, critique and examine how they are conceived and eventually assumed in the 21 century across the Nigerian state. And that is the point of departure of our study from other existing studies.

### 1.1. Conceptual clarification of terms

This paper adopts the definition used in United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (2006: 1).

*Small Arms:* The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research highlighted small arms to include: revolvers and self-loading pistols; rifles and carbines; sub-machine guns; assault rifles; light machine-guns, heavy machine-guns; portable anti-tank guns; recoilless rifles; portable launchers of anti-tank guns, and rocket systems, anti-aircraft missiles systems; and mortars of calibers less than 100mm.

*Light Weapons:* are weapons designed for use by two or three persons serving as a crew, although some may be carried and used by a single person. Light weapons include heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of antitank missile and rocket systems, portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortars of a calibre of less than 100 mm.

### 1.2. Objectives of the study

The objective of this study is divided into broad objective and specific objectives:

- 1- The broad objective of this study is to unpack the extent of small arms and light weapons proliferation in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- 2- The specific objective includes the followings:
  - a. To investigate the magnitude, modes of acquisition and challenges of containing and controlling SALW in Nigeria.
  - b. To identify the changing trend and prevailing issues associated with SALW proliferation in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

- c. To find an achievable people oriented solution to the impasse of SALW proliferation in Nigeria.

### 1.3. Methodology

The purpose of research methodology is to discuss the methods which are utilized by the study, for its data collection and analysis.

The source of data include books, journals, newspapers and news magazines, published gazettes, unpublished thesis, research projects, and the internet. The data were sourced through intense library search, diplomatic communications, the media (traditional and new media) and internet browsing. The study was achieved through information and textual analysis of the available data.

## 2. Discussions

### 2.1. The magnitude of SALWs proliferation in Nigeria

Big arms and heavy weapons are super expensive and have high economic shrinking ability that takes a big toll on national income and development. This reality makes SALW not only cost effective but desirable by state and non-state actors. Other features that make SALW proliferation attractive ranges from simplicity, durability, low cost, wide availability, portability, ease of control, and ability to cause lethal impact.

The magnitude SALWs proliferation in Nigeria cannot be accurately quantified, as so many of the effects is hard to measure such as fear and want. However, there is no dispute that small arms have had a devastating effect on development, governance and everyday life for the citizens of the Nigeria. There is rough estimation of one to three million SALW in circulation in Nigeria, mostly in civilian possession that is obtained illegally (Obasi, 2002; Servant, 2006).

Nigerian state is at crossroad on security concerns and the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons has had a dramatic impact on peace and security in Nigeria, threatening not only the existence of the state, but also the livelihoods of millions of people across the 36 states of the federation. Across the country, even cultists in Nigerian tertiary institutions are now using fire arms in their rival conflicts and political groups in their quest to influence their election results. Even Nigerian security agencies have been victims of illicit weapon trade because armed robbers in recent times have confronted them in gun battle.

The porous nature of Nigeria's borders with its neighbors plays a significant role in the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Unmanned border crossing point and widespread corruption facilitates illicit trafficking of small arms (Ibrahim, 2015; Onuoha, 2013; Keile, 2008; Thom-Otuya, 2009). Despite the ending of many conflicts in the sub-region, Cote d'voire, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Liberia Chad etc, smuggling and the illicit trade of small arms are reported to be on the increase.

## 2.2. Modes of acquisition

Obviously, today's means of acquiring weapons are much greater and different from those of the Cold War period. The reason is that the Cold War arms trading system was more strictly controlled than the one that exist today, especially in the case of small arms and light weapons (Laurence, 2010). Today the Nigerian state is a theater of transnational organized crime, which also means that Nigeria is a source, transit and a destination for SAWL proliferation (Yoroms, 2010).

The lengthy and porous borders, across Nigeria makes the country both an entry and exit routes of small arms and light weapons proliferation including countries like Benin, Cameroun, Chad, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Togo etc. are often mentioned (Osimen and Akintunde, 2015; Bashir, 2014; Ojudu, 2007; Adejo, 2005; Florquin and Berman, (2005) Olori, 2004; Agboton-Johnson, Ebo, and Mazal, 2004).

The manufacturing process is either at the industrial level or local level, and the critical actors who are involved in gun making process according to Aning (2005) ranges from the 'guild' who coordinate the whole process, set rules and apply sanctions, 'lock and blacksmith' who manufacture, assemble, repair and service the accessories, 'carpenter' who are engage in shaping the stock, 'machinist' who engrave the stock and the barrel, 'mechanic' who arrange the spring to the 'middleman' who's role is to identify potential buyers, sale products and introducing actors.

Small arms and light weapons proliferation as put forward by Onuoha (2013) are measured under two broad dimensions to include transnational and national trafficking. The former refers to movement across borders of sovereign states, while the later refers to movement or smuggling of small arms and light weapons within a national territory (state).

Several major changes have taken place since the Cold War ended that resulted in much of the trade in small arms and light weapons not conforming to the definition of legal trade:

- i. Light weapons has shifted to newly produced ones that many countries are now capable of producing light weaponry. This is made possible due to the diffusion of arms producing technology during the Cold War.
- ii. Arms manufacturing countries outside the regions of intrastate conflict have less needs for the weapons in their arsenals, and have down-sized their armed forces. Economic necessity forces them to export the surplus, not new production.
- iii. Another major change in the proliferation of arms trading system is the relative rise in illicit or illegal trade. This is mainly due to the characteristics of the class of weapons now dominating the world's armed conflicts that is, light, portable, inexpensive, easily concealed and transported, etc (Laurence, 2010). Illicit acquisition is usually perpetrated through a covert or secret transfer of arms to a government or non-state actor from another government.
- iv. The increasing number of embargoes imposed by the United Nations on SALW has made the black market suppliers becoming the only source of arms and ammunition for such countries under embargo. Equally, underground political organizations, and criminal organizations such as drug cartels, are also forced to rely on this means of acquisition.

### 2.3. Consequences of small arms and light weapons in the 21st century Nigeria

The epileptic crisis in the Niger delta makes arm race between militant groups likes Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Coalition for Militant Action in the Niger Delta (COMA), Joint Revolutionary Council (JRC), Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) inevitable, leaving violence in a roller coaster state of affairs, that is besides increasing level of kidnapping, reduction in national oil production, loss of oil revenue, resource and environmental degradation (Odili, 2007; Tayo, 2007; Sunday, 2011).

Many Nigerians today, especially from the North-eastern part are internally displaced from their homes due to SALW proliferation resulting either from communal clash, ethno-religious violence, terrorism, militancy, or electoral violence in many parts of the country leading to loss of lives and properties, while facilitating criminal conducts such as kidnapping, bank robbery, oil bunkering and illicit mining.

According to the Borno state government while signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the state government, Fadama III and the World Bank, the real victim's boko haram insurgency are women and children. So far the results of such activities have generated 54, 911 widows and 52, 311 orphan. The crux of the matter is that the lifeline of boko haram insurgency is the availability of small arms and light weapons proliferation (Premium times, 2017).

Proliferation and misuse of SALW has pernicious effects on the rule of law in the broadest sense and human rights, and manifest in more ways than one. Though firearms are not the root cause of crime, it is generally agreed that the deployment of illicit small arms in conflicts and crimes aggravates their gruesomeness and impact not only on the victims but also on the wider society (Alimi, 2011; Olufemi, 2010; IDMC, 2010; Vanessa et al, 2009).

Owed to small arms and light weapons proliferation in Nigeria, an estimated 30,000 barrels of oil are stolen daily. It is reported that Nigeria has lost about \$100 billion to oil theft between 2003 and 2008, and at least 50% percent of the stolen oil and funds were exchanged for arms and ammunitions ( Asumi, 2009).

The link between corruption or ill-gotten money and small arms and light weapons proliferation can be unpacked within the environment of such criminal activities it supports, as many traffickers or kidnapers who fund criminal activities and proliferation of arms simply do so as business, and mysteriously such ill-gotten money are also smuggled into the mainstream economy.

Indeed the fact that weapons are available in the hands of rebels and combatants, impedes the alternative conflict resolution strategies and increase insecurity and further protracted conflict in the country as well as frustrates efforts of peacekeeping peace building operations in building and reconstructing of the societies that have been devastated by conflict (Fotini, 2012; Marten, 2012; UNIDR 2005).

Another area that is affected by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the tourism industry that was booming in many part of the country in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as foreign tourist have become the most desired target in the kidnapping industry.

In brief, the proliferation of SALW in 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed the increase use of these available small arms by terrorist, militants, killer herdsmen, and criminal gangs to engage in political, economic and socio-

cultural benefits. Besides the high level loss of lives and properties, it also witnessed an increase in sexual violence from raping of innocent victims, sexual slavery to forced marriage. SALW proliferation in Nigeria today, creates a negative perception of security, preventing foreign direct investments, puncturing the notion of ease of doing business, while increasing lack of confidence in government and its security apparatus.

#### 2.4. Challenges to the fight on small arms and light weapons proliferation in the 21st century

It is important we note quickly here that some of the causes of SAWL proliferation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century turn out to be some of the key bottlenecks or challenges in the fight against such proliferation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The need to wield power seems to top many reasons behind SALW proliferations and a major factor militating against the efforts by states and international community to manage SALW proliferations. Politicians usually during election employ the services of thugs, militants or Insurgents to manipulate votes either in support of their political party or against their opposition using small arms and light weapons as tool to disperse or dismantle any perceive resistance during election periods creating a sense of uncivilized and unhealthy political competition (Sunday, 2011; Okoro, 2008; Bebebiafiai, 2007; HRW, 2007; BBC, 2007; Lubeck, Watts, and Lipschutz, 2007; Tayler, 2006; Ebo, 2006; Ake, 2001).

The rise and swift advancement of what is known today as the internet being a platform for economic, political and socio-cultural exchanges presents states with string of challenges in their fight against SALW proliferation especially in Nigeria, as it has become an additional space for illicit activities to thrive. The internet to be put simply is a network system that enables computers to exchange content to each other in a borderless space

Strong views regarding the effect of internet on both public and personal behavior and space as it offers wide range of choices on how the citizens and the government goes about their daily activities. The internet offers place for altruist and scoundrels just as there are in everyday life (Dahlgren, 2005; Uslander, 2004).

The terrorist for example use the expanded platform provided by the internet as a means of brainwashing, radicalization, recruiting, controlling and moving targets of interest and their logistics (including SALW) from one location to a desired place to achieve a targeted mission, this is confirmed by the numbers of successful operations/attacks by terrorist using SALW around the world including Nigeria.

The fluid nature of the internet seems to leave the government, security and intelligent communities lagging behind in all of these borderless interactions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century especially in the dark web. To be effective in this area the government can employ the services of hackers who seem to be on top of their game to track and reveal or expose such activities (Rodrigo, 2016; Jay, 2014).

The internet is not the challenge per se but the problem is that it provides space or a safe haven, and the possibility of smugglers and traffickers to engage in their nefarious act without being trace or having their encrypted information flow being decrypted, especially in the dark web. It is safe to say that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a digital world where many activities are often untraceable owing thanks to the availability of dark websites and other encrypted technologies and social platforms.

Poor stockpile security is another factor challenging the control of SAWL proliferation, as several sources alleges that security personnel securing states arms stockpile do sell or giveaway such ammunitions unduly and these are pointers to inadequate control of states own stockpiles (Ibrahim, 2015; Keile, 2008; Isumonah, Tantua, and James, 2006; Bah, 2004).

The financial rake in from underground trade of small arms and light weapons proliferation ranges from \$2 billion in an unprofitable year to \$10 billion in a profitable one, that's besides the erosion of state authority and the legitimacy of the use of force (Krause, 2007).

The gross benefits accrued from organized crime, bribery, money laundering, oil theft/oil bunkering coupled with the underfunding of security operatives, suffocates the incentive to effectively engage in the fight against the proliferation of small arms and light weapons especially by corrupt security personal as they are offered irresistible amount that makes their salary a peanut by smugglers/traffickers (Bashir, 2014; GIABA, (2013); Aning, 2009; Onuoha, 2009; Watts, 2007; Ibeanu, 2000).

Bribery and corruption pose a great threat to the fight against small arms and light weapons proliferation in the Nigerian state, because it creates a favorable environment in which conflict occur, nurtured and nourished existing armed struggles, as well as weakening peace management across the Nigerian state. In other words, financial gain is an important driver pulling and pushing small arms and light weapons proliferation in Nigeria.

Weak legal system, legislations, traditions, undermine efforts in controlling cross border crimes such as illegal proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Effective control of small arms and large weapons proliferation will therefore depends largely upon states capacity and the willingness to design and implement appropriate legislation, regulatory procedures and policies (Small Arms Survey, 2013; Mueller, 2001).

### 3. Findings

Some of the major takeaway from this study includes:

- 1- The internet especially the dark web is a game changer and has provided an additional space and logistics for such proliferation to continue to be a booming business. The internet has aided SALW proliferation to an attending height that makes Nigeria to be one of the most dangerous place to be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as it has created a great many evils, mayhem's, and miseries regardless of gender, religion or ethnic affiliation.
- 2- The 21<sup>st</sup> Century so far has experienced an increase in sexual violence targeting mainly the female gender ranging from raping, sex slavery to forced marriage.
- 3- Unlike some of the Western countries like France, UK, USA, etc. where we have seen the rise in vehicular attack by terrorists plowing into pedestrians in public places, in Nigeria the use of SALW is still rampant.



- 4- The underfunding of security operative is still a challenge carried over from the 20<sup>th</sup> century in fighting or controlling small arms and light proliferation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria. This has made the security personal susceptible to engage in bribe and corruption either within their rank and files or between them and the smugglers.
- 5- The current mechanism put in place by the Nigerian government needs to be reviewed as it ignorant of some of the unfolding practices in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is a need, to develop a strife and pragmatic roadmap to tackle the issue of proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the country, to address the issue of corrupt security officials, strengthening awareness of the dangers posed by these weapons, updating legislative provisions and transparency of Nigeria arms deal, without these measures, Nigeria's effort would be fruitless.
- 6- The inability of the Nigerian state to check its population explosion in pari-passu to its economic growth makes idle citizens to fall victims used in fueling the underground economy of small arms and light weapons proliferation.
- 7- The increasing number of embargoes imposed by the United Nations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century on SALW has made the black market suppliers more appealing because they are becoming the only source of arms and ammunition for such countries under embargo. Equally, underground political organizations, and criminal organizations such as drug cartels, are also forced to rely on the black market as the means of acquisition.

#### **4. Summary**

The subject, definition and the operationalization of conceptual frameworks under the lens of this study were highlighted. Current relevant literatures covering issues related with the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the 21<sup>st</sup> century were reviewed.

We introduced and discussed the background to the study, magnitude of small arms and light weapons proliferation in Nigeria, modes of acquisition, consequences of small arms and light weapons proliferation in Nigeria, the challenges to the fight against small arms and light weapons in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the findings from the study which serves as a takeaway. The paper presented policy options as recommendations using the conclusion to serve as the foundation.

#### **5. Conclusion**

It is imperative to bring to light that the security terrain in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed changing trends in the behaviors and approaches of security issues and according to this study SALW proliferation is not an exception. SALW proliferation has metamorphosed and evolved over the years into sophistication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The internet and information technology proliferation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought forth its merits and demerits. Despite the many benefits that come along with communicating through the internet there is also its potentials of fueling the underground economy as well as other ruinous consequence to both the government and its citizens. Its potentials for political, economic, social, and cultural development cannot be underestimated and so its potentials to destroy.

The emergence of new conflicts and the resurgence of the unresolved conflict between and among communities and other major conflicts scenario in West African sub-region has been the key factor fingered by majority of previous studies occurring as a result of greed, grievances, revenge, and revolt in either in offence or defense pretext. The crux of the matter is that every violent conflict today is enabled by one trend, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

This study concludes that the inability of the Nigerian state to ensure its swelling population go in paripassu with its national economic growth is partly to be blame as it makes idle employable but unemployed as well as the uneducated segment of the population vulnerable of being used in fueling the underground economy of SALW proliferation. Therefore, a successful resolution of the SALW conundrum in Nigeria requires a holistic approach that addresses the underlying factors creating the demand for SALW and the sources of supply, rather than treating the SALW problem as an independent or a compartmentalized issue.

## **6. Recommendations**

- i. The Nigerian government should encapsulate, strengthen institutions and processes of governance to enhance social provisioning for its citizens, who are becoming increasingly frustrated over governance failure.
- ii. Whistle blowing policy that is yielding fruits in the fight against corruption should be immediately extended to the fight against illegal SAWL proliferation in Nigeria.
- iii. There should be strategic media to enlightenment and orientation campaigns on the consequences of SALW proliferation in Nigeria.
- iv. Adoption of a national arms control strategy (NACS) to guide the clean-up and prevention of SALWs circulation. The proposed establishment of a National Commission on the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (NATCOM) should be fast-tracked to lead this effort, involving collaboration with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), National Taskforce (NATFORCE) and other stakeholders.
- v. The Nigerian security establishments should conduct regular and comprehensive verification exercises to ensure that government arms are not being stolen.
- vi. There should private and public partnership between security and non-security actors to fill in the security gap

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