



ARMS PROLIFERATION AND THE CHALLENGES OF INTERNAL SECURITY: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

One of the fundamental obstacles to peace and security in Nigeria today is the presence and continued proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW). The proliferation of small arms constitutes a major source of destruction to lives and properties and exacerbates inter-communal tensions leading to full-fledge insurgency. The main aim of the study is to provide an analysis of arms proliferation and internal security in Nigeria with a view to identifying the root causes. The research design is descriptive and the framework of analysis adopted is Frustration-Aggression Theory and the qualitative research method. Secondary sources of data are used for the study. Some of the causes of arms proliferation include, the borders of Nigeria are porous, thus, making it easy for entry and exit of arms, drugs, as well as traffic of human, rising rates of unemployment, conflicts, struggle for power and more so, the high level of corruption in the country compounds this security challenges faced by Nigeria. Also the internal security challenge include ethnic militia in different geopolitical zone Boko-Haram in the northeast, banditry in the northwest, secessionist agitation led by IPOB in the southeast herdsmen attack in the north central etc .The government should as matter of urgency start addressing the causes of arms proliferation avoid corruption and provide jobs to the teeming youth of the country who are unemployed.

KEYWORDS

Arms proliferation, internal security, Insecurity, Small Arms, Weapons and development.



INTRODUCTION

Small arms and light weapons proliferation is acclaimed to be the major security challenge to people, societies and states globally, fuelling insurgency, human trafficking and drugs, terrorism, organized crimes, internal insurrections and civil wars, posing obstacles to sustenance of stable peace and security. Many a times, little internal insurrection tends to escalate into larger civil wars and could destabilize a region (Kevin, 2007:23). This trend especially in Nigeria is attributed to the weakness and fragile nature of the state and her attendant failure to deliver good governance. Small arms and light weapons are often employed to forcefully displace civilians, prevent development activities, humanitarian assistance, peace-building and peace-keeping endeavours in all sense. At the end of conflicts, small arms and light weapons usually remain in the society, which may cause more violence since crisis can resume or conflicts erupt in neighbouring regions. Also in non-conflict environments, small arms may be used in criminal violence or may be used in suicides, accidents, homicides and others while they are sometimes the fundamental tools used by terrorists for societal annihilation (Holmes, 2014).

According to Omoyibo and Akpomera (2013), security is a concept that is prior to the state, and the state exists in order to provide that concept. Security is the prime responsibility of the state (Thomas Hobbes, 1996). The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria specifically states that “The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government”. Unfortunately, government on this constitutional responsibility has failed to provide a secured and safe environment for lives, properties and the conduct of business and economic activities. Nigeria has in the past decade witness increased violence and small arms circulation, its proliferation was attributed to the existence and stagnation of electoral injustice, ethnic bigotry and religious intolerance coupled with high level of poverty and unemployment. These key elements were viewed as basis upon which conflicts are fuelled. The phenomenon not only encourages terrorists to take up arms against the Nigerian state, it also makes national development very difficult and even dangerous. This is especially nowhere explained better in the case of Nigeria’s north-east and northwest regions where terrorists and bandits appear to have taken over thus causing security problems largely as a result of the volume of small arms reaching and circulating in these regions has seriously undermined Nigeria’s national security in both human and economic terms. The escalation of violence, lost of lives and property and the unabated proliferation of small arms since 2003 have turn the country into a total hopelessness. This Day Newspaper (18th of September, 2013) reported that Nigerian Customs impounded a cargo from United State, which smuggled Arms concealed in house hold cargo. Daily Trust News (13th of April 2013) 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”: Vanguard News Paper (17 March 2013) has this headline: “39,880 Militants’ Firearms, Ammunition Handed Over to Nigerian Army” ENUGU – The 39,880 assorted firearms and ammunition recovered from former militants in the Niger Delta by the inter-agency taskforce set up by the Federal Government have been handed over to the 82 Division of the Nigerian Army. A breakdown of the arms handed over on Saturday at the 82 Division's parade ground included the following: 482 automatic arms, 20,132 ammunition, 295 magazines and 18,971 locally made guns. The General Officer Commanding the 82 Division... (GunPolicy.org) Geneva International Arms Survey (2017) estimates that there are one billion fire arms in the global circulation, 857 million (85 per cent) are in the civilian hands, 133 million (13 per cent), are in military arsenal and 23 million (2 per cent),

are owned by law enforcement agencies. The new study suggests that the global stockpile has increased over the past decades largely due to civilian holdings which grew from 650 million in 2006 to 857 million in 2017. This has escalated conflicts and crimes especially as these weapons can easily be assessed by ethnic militia as is the case in different parts of Nigeria, Boko-Haram in the North-East and Avengers in the South-South, Herdsmen in the North Central and arms banditries in Northwest and other parts of Nigeria. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is adjudged as the most immediate security challenge to individuals, societies, and states worldwide, fuelling civil wars, organized criminal violence, insurgency and terrorist activities posing great obstacles to sustainable security and development. According to Stohl and Hogendoorn (2010) this trend especially in Nigeria is attributed to the weakness and fragile nature of the country and the attendant failure to deliver in governance. Small arms and light weapons are often used to forcibly displace civilians, impede humanitarian assistance, prevent or delay development projects, and hinder peace-keeping and peace-building efforts. When conflicts end or subside, small arms often remain in circulation, which may lead to additional violence and suffering since fighting can resume or conflicts may erupt in neighboring states. In non-conflict areas small arms may be used in criminal violence or may be used in homicides, suicides, and accidents. And they are frequently the primary tools of terrorists bent on sowing chaos and discord. A vast number of weapons are in public and private hands. There are more than 1,200 companies in 90 countries that produce small arms. According to Geneva Declaration Secretariat (2011) SALW kill between 500,000 and 750,000 people annually and are a “contributory factor to armed conflict, the displacement of people, organized crime and terrorism, thereby undermining peace, reconciliation, safety, security, stability and sustainable social and economic development”. It is equally responsible for fueling crime and sustain armed conflicts world over, facilitating terrorism and creating anarchy after civil wars.

Methodology

The work is a qualitative research and the design is descriptive, while documentary method of data collection was adopted this has to do with examination of historical documents, textbooks, magazines/newspapers, journals etc. and content analysis was used as the method of data analysis.

Conceptual Definitions

The following provide operationalisation of some concepts as used in the research:

Small arms: These include, but not limited to revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, assault rifles, submachine guns, and light machine guns.

Light weapons: 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). There are divergent approaches to conceptualizing security which is the antithesis of insecurity. Security need was the basis of the social contract between the people and the state, in which people willingly surrendered their rights to an organ (government) who oversees the survival of all. In this light security embodies the mechanism put in place to avoid, prevent, reduce, or resolve violent conflicts, and threats that originate from other states, non-state actors, or structural socio-political and economic conditions (Stan, 2004). Several attempts have been made since the cold war ended to redefine the concept of security from a state-centric perspective to a broader view that places premium on individuals, in which human security that embodies elements of national security, human rights and national

development remain major barometer for explaining the concept. At the heart of this debate there have been attempts to deepen and widen the concept of security from the level of the states to societies and individuals, and from military to non-military issues. According to Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013) and Kruhmann, (2003) the divergent approaches to the conceptualization of human security in the theoretical literature can be categorized into two major strands. One is a neo-realist theoretical strand that conceptualizes security as primary responsibilities of the state. The second strand, a postmodernist or plural view, conceptualizes security as the responsibilities of non-state actors and displaces the state as a major provider of security. Proponents of this approach argue that the concept of security goes beyond a military determination of threats. They are of the view that government should be more concern with the economic security of individual than the security of the state because the root causes of insecurity are economic in nature. Some scholars in conceptualizing security placed emphasis on the absence of threats to peace, stability, national cohesion, political and socio-economic objectives of a country (Igbuzor, 2011; Oche, 2001; Nwanegbo and Odigbo, 2013). Thus there is a general consensus in the contemporary literature that security is vital for national cohesion, peace and sustainable development. It is therefore apparent that national security is a desideratum, sine qua non for economic growth and development of any country (Oladeji and Folorunso, 2007). In the intelligence community there is a consensus that security is not the absence of threats or security issues, but the existence of a robust mechanism to respond proactively to the challenges posed by these threats with expediency, expertise, and in real time.

Theoretical Framework

The Frustration-Aggression Theory

This Theory which Dollard et al (1939) and his associates initially developed, has been expanded and modified by scholars like Berkowitz (1962), Yates (1962), Anifowose (1982), Gurr (1970) and Lupsha (1971). The thrust of this theory is that aggression is a product of frustration which arises from a gap between what one wants and what one eventually gets. In the words of Davies (1962) frustration is induced by the difference between “expected need satisfaction and actual need satisfaction”. This implies that frustration is inevitable consequences of the chasm between one’s current status and one’s aspirations. The main explanation that Frustration-aggression theory provides is that aggression is not just undertaken as a natural reaction or instinct as realists and biological theorists assume, but it is the outcome of frustration where the legitimate desires of an individual(s) is denied either directly or indirectly (political or economic exclusion) or by the indirect consequences (widening socio-economic and political gap between the rich and the poor) or the way the society is structured, (economic and political elites and the masses) the feeling of disappointment (deprivation) may lead to such a person(s) to express his /their anger through violence (committing crimes) that will be directed at those he/they hold (s) responsible or people who are directly or indirectly related to them hence resort to all manner of criminalities across Nigeria. In situation where feelings of frustration become widespread (as in Nigeria) among the population and the feeling is that the people are getting less than they deserve as a result of corrupt leadership, marginalization, widespread poverty among the people and the situation they found themselves. The communities and the villages in Nigeria are basically endowed with natural resources but the people living in such environments continue to suffer untold hardship as a result of their poverty driven political and economic environment. This kind of environment tends to be useful in the hands of actors- both state and non-state actors to fight the government.

Causes of Arms proliferation and challenges of internal security

Struggle for political power

The struggle for political power in Nigeria often takes violent dimensions, which are underscored by the use of arms in the competition for power. Violence often breaks out when power is manipulated to include or exclude certain individuals, communities, groups, religions or regions. Those excluded resort to extreme measures such as violent protests or armed rebellion with the use of illicit arms. Illicit weapons were used in electoral violence in various parts of the country during the 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 elections in Nigeria.

Governance and development deficit

The worsened economic situation of Nigeria in the past 20 years has further eroded the capacity of the country to address pressing developmental challenges such as poverty, unemployment and poor infrastructure. According to World Bank (2016) African Poverty Report confirms that poverty levels among Africans are higher than in the 1990s. When provided, employment opportunities and infrastructure are mainly concentrated in urban centres or constituencies that are loyal to ruling political parties, thus fuelling or compounding inequality. As such, many deprived or excluded groups express grievances through the use of illicit arms against the state. The widespread poverty and limited economic opportunities in Nigeria's northeast region were exploited by Boko Haram to recruit and radicalize poor, uneducated and vulnerable young people.³⁵ For instance, one of the group's recruitment strategies involved the provision of cash loans to potential recruits.³⁶ The underdevelopment of Nigeria's northeast region, relative to the south, has been identified as a major reason why the Boko-Haram, and armed bandits decided to bear arms against the region.

Natural resources

The control, access and distribution of natural resources has triggered, sustained or exacerbated violence in many resource-rich parts of the country. Illicit arms have contributed to the escalation and deadliness of such violence in recent years. This includes violence over hydrocarbons, mineral deposits or grazing land. For example, illicit arms are a key factor in the militancy and insecurity in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, farmers-herders conflicts in north central and other parts of Nigeria.

Radicalization and violent extremism

The growth and activities of religious groups that espouse radical extremist ideologies have contributed to the spread and use of illicit arms in Nigeria. The existence and possession of SALW by violent extremist groups have negatively impacted security in Northeast and North central and other parts of Nigeria. The open display of SALW is a requisite element in the identity of violent extremist groups, and extremist groups appear deadlier as their access to and quantity of SALW increases. For instance, radical Boko-Haram and Islamic State of West African Province ISWAP in northeast Nigeria initiated and sustained armed insurgencies because of their access to and use of SALW. UNDP (2017) estimates that 24,771 people were killed and 5,507 wounded between 2011 and 2015, with most of the fatalities recorded in northeast, northwest and north central parts of Nigeria.

Organized crime

The flow of uncontrolled arms plays a crucial role in the activities of organized crime networks across Nigeria; they are either the object of illicit trafficking and/or used to protect the infrastructures used for criminal activities. There is a convergence of organized crime, SALW availability and armed conflict, including violent extremism, in places such as the Niger Delta region, northeast, northwest and north central regions of Nigeria. Pirates use illicit arms in the Niger Delta and the Gulf of Guinea regions to attack and seize ships and to kidnap crews for ransom.

What has been the experience in recent time in Nigeria?

Arms proliferation has brought a lot of security challenges to Nigeria as virtually all the six geopolitical zones of the country are experiencing one form of insurgency or the other as illustrated below:-

Northeast geo-political zone

The emergence of militant Islamism in Nigeria has been influenced for decades by radical Islamic teachings from the Arabian Peninsula and by even longer tensions that have pitted different Islamic sects, as well as Muslims and Christians against each other in northern Nigeria. Since the late 1970s some militant Islamist groups have been demanding the establishment of an Islamic theocracy and a return to the 'true' practice and teachings of Islam in Northern Nigeria. One such group was the 'Maitatsine' (the one who curses). The Maitatsine led a five-year (1980–1985) uprising in several states in northern Nigeria, until it was crushed in 1985 by the Nigerian military. Thereafter, northern Nigeria has continued to experience bouts of ethno-religious conflicts, which did not change, as many hoped, with the return to democratic rule in 1999 because shortly after this, some northern state governors made moves to implement

Sharia law in their states. This was received with apprehension by non-Muslims. Eventually, it led to violent clashes between Christians and Muslims in some cities in the region, particularly in Kaduna state. The rise of Boko Haram in the northeast states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states since 2002 is partly a symptom of these historical processes of religious radicalisation, politicisation, and sectarian violence in Nigeria. The group was founded in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf upon the principles of the Khawaarij advocating Sharia law. It turned into a violent extremist group in 2009 and has been responsible for loss of lives in many parts of northeast Nigeria. One of the goals of the Boko Haram group is to champion for the establishment of an Islamic State, ruled by strict sharia law especially in the Northern part of Nigeria where the majority of the populations are Muslims. According to Bartolotta (2011) Boko Haram believes that democracy is too lenient and violates Islam. It also opposes the Westernization of Nigerian society and also the concentration of the wealth of the country among members of small political elite, mainly in the Christian south of the country. Also Adesoji, ((2010)) stated that Boko Haram carried out a prison break (said to have released some 700 prisoners) and thereafter, the group began operations again. According to Ewi (2013) the targeted assassinations are the most revealing, involving political figures, such as Abba Anas bin Umar (killed in May 2011), the brother of the Shehu of Borno, and secular opposition figures (Modu Fannami Godio, killed in January 2011), but also prominent clerics such as Bashir Kashara, a well-known Wahhabi figure (killed in October 2010), Ibrahim Ahmad Abdullahi, a non-violent preacher (killed in March 2011), and Ibrahim Birkuti, a well-known popular preacher who challenged Boko Haram (killed in June 2011). The shootings of these prominent clerics seem to be in accord with Boko

Haram's purificationist agenda with regard to Islam. Boko Haram also adopted suicide attacks as an important tactic in its struggle against government authority.

The Boko Haram splinter group, Islamic State of West African Provinces (ISWAP) has also kidnapped and killed foreign nationals. On 13 March 2011 Ansaru organised the kidnapping of two construction engineers working in Kebbi state (Christopher McManus and Franco Lamolinara). Both were killed in a botched rescue mission by the British and Nigerian Special Forces in Sokoto on 7 May 2012 (International Crisis Group 2014, 27). On 13 February 2013, the group also claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of seven foreigners from a Lebanese construction company Setraco in northern Nigeria's Bauchi state. The seven expatriates were killed as revenge for what the group deemed as 'Western atrocities against the religion of Allah in countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, and Mali' (Cook 2013; Maiangwa 2013; and International Crisis Group 2014).

South east zone

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)

The Igbo of south east geopolitical zone in Nigeria comprised of the five exclusive Igbo states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. The Nigerian Civil War with the hostilities and armed conflict that followed the declaration of the Republic of Biafra out of the defunct eastern region between the Nigerian government and the Biafra forces and lasted between May 30, 1967 and January 15, 1970. The Igbo have perpetually agitated and craved for equity and fairness in recognition and resource allocation and distribution. Some have overtly called for a restoration of the defunct Biafra and have hoped to realise that self-determination motive through peaceful means. Such groups as identified by Thompson, Ojukwu & Nwaorgu (2016) include but not limited to the Igbo Concerned Citizens, Igbo Elders' Forum, Igbo Renaissance Movement, Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM), Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) etc. Depending on the nature and character of their activities, some of the aforementioned groups have been largely ignored by the Nigerian government while others such as MASSOB, BZM and IPOB have attracted even much attention than due. According to Ekpo and Agorye (2018) the IPOB secessionist group was declared a terrorist group by the Nigerian military on September 15, 2017, for according to it, the group "from all intent, plan and purpose...is a militant terrorist organisation". The activities of IPOB's *Radio Biafra* has been placed on the same pedestal with the *Thousand Hills Free Radio and Television* in Rwanda of which hate speeches, *inter alia*, culminated in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. IPOB's demeaning radio propaganda and brazenness is summarised by Thompson, Ojukwu & Nwaorgu (2016, P.8) noted that:

The IPOB, with the radio media being its main tool is alleged to have addressed the Federal Republic of Nigeria as a zoo and president Buhari as terrorist, evil and pedophile in some of its radio messages...In a video message while addressing some Igbo in Diaspora at the World Igbo Congress in the US, Kanu was seen soliciting for weapons from the audience and boasted that the Biafran passports and sovereign status has been recognised by some powerful countries...that he was going to Nigeria to regroup and on a particular date, "something will happen" which he urged the audience to look out for... that the only language the Nigerian state understood was war and he was ready for them.

The effect was that the frustration level of aggrieved people became higher and aggression was implicitly and explicitly justified and promoted by the IPOB leadership. Statistics available reveals that no fewer than 146 people died during clashes between IPOB/MASSOB and security forces in 2016; with 76 deaths in Anambra, 61 deaths in Abia and 9 deaths in Delta. According to Ekpo &

Agorye (2018) the clash between secessionist groups and security personnel at Onitsha/Nkpor axis of Anambra state on May 30, 2016, is known to have resulted in 127 casualties with security personnel constituting 32 of that number. Also Chime-Nganya, Ezeji & Ezegwu (2017) protests between May 30 and 31, 2016 had led to the setting ablaze and vandalism of police and army vehicles by IPOB. Okeke (2016) stated that having been "configured", through propaganda, to see Hausa-Fulani Muslims as the source of their deprivation, IPOB members on December 2, 2015, "burnt down the central mosque in the commercial city of Onitsha, South East Nigeria and destroyed trucks believed to be owned by a notable Nigerian businessman of the Muslim faith". Also Campbell (2017a) stated that between 9 and 15 September, 2017, there were clashes between IPOB members and Hausa communities as well as punctured clashes with security forces which led to the death of 27 IPOB members. According to Adebayo (2017) suspected IPOB members were even fingered in September 14, 2017 burning down of the police station at Ariaria market in Aba, Abia state. IPOB had in 2017, formed a secret/intelligence service which it christened as the Biafran Security Service (BSS now transformed into Eastern Security Network ESN) to gather intelligence and prevent Igbos from being attacked in any non-south eastern state that they occupied in Nigeria. So far the entire south east has been occupied by unknown gun men who unleash mayhem on the whole zone attacking security personnel and burning public infrastructure in the zone.

South -South geo-political zone/Niger Delta

Nigeria continues to face serious challenges. Inter communal violence remains a serious concern. Since the end of military rule in 1999, fighting in several regions of the country has claimed thousands of lives. The oil-rich Niger Delta remains the scene of recurring violence between members of different ethnic groups competing for political and ethnic power and between security and militia groups. This crisis has been aggravated by the theft of crude oil, known as 'illegal bunkering', and the availability of light weapons. Oil companies themselves have been affected by this crisis and at times have contributed to it. Hundreds of people have been killed and thousands displaced by this conflict, which has seen an increasing use of guns. Nigeria's illicit light weapons trade can be traced back to the failure to execute a comprehensive arms collection programme after the 1967-70 civil wars. It has subsequently been fuelled by growing crime, endemic corruption and ethno-religious conflicts. The widespread availability of light weapons in the Delta Region of Nigeria is a particular challenge. The criminalization and political economy of conflicts in the region are establishing a basis for escalated, protracted and entrenched violence. Factors that contribute to the destabilization of the region include illegal oil bunkering, ready availability of weapons, endemic corruption, high youth unemployment and social disintegration. Combined, they contribute the resources, weapons and foot-soldiers for continued conflict. Micro-level conflicts in the Niger Delta are part of a complex conflict system that is issue-based, ethnic and geographic in nature. Hundreds of criminal and politically motivated gangs have sprung up – many with eye-catching names such as Blood Suckers, Gentlemen's Club and the Royal House of Peace. Most of these are linked to well-known politicians. The Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force and the Niger Delta Vigilante Group have attracted international attention because of their public profile in 2004 and threats to disrupt the oil industry – threats sufficient to have an impact on world oil prices for a short period.

North-Northwest geo-political zone

Armed banditry has become a major problem in North-west. This menace have been on the increase in frequency since 2011 after General elections, leading to violent conflict between the

Fulanis and their allies from within and outside the country on one side and the farmers on the other. The outcome of this conflict has claimed thousands of lives and caused destruction of properties worth billions of naira in the state. It could be argued that there is no state zone that has not witnessed the impact of armed banditry. According to Rufai (2017) in Mada district in Gusau local government area, over 12 different attacks by bandits which claimed the lives of over 20 people and 1500 herds of cattle stolen at different times from 2014 to 2016 were witnessed. Notwithstanding other violent crimes such as rape, kidnapping, Abduction, and causing grievous hurt were also recorded with in the period. Hence, incidents of this nature are common occurrence in virtually all the villages in the state with little or no efforts from the security agencies towards preventing it or even countering it. Other zones are faced different security challenge like herdsmen attacks in the north central and ethnic clashes in the south west between the Fulani and their host communities in the Yoruba land.

Conclusion and recommendation

Now doubt arms proliferation has brought a lot of security challenges to Nigeria as demonstrated above. The causes of arms proliferation include struggle for political power, ethnic and religious conflicts, natural resources etc. There is urgent need for the government to start addressing the root causes of arms proliferation. These include but limited to the following:-
Provision of jobs for the teeming youths of Nigeria who are unemployed, avoid ethnic and religious politics by providing a level play ground for all political contestants, engage in dialogue with groups that have different view point, with a view to finding solutions to such conflicts. The government can also try to discover the sources of these arms either block them or acquire them to produce for the various security agents in the country. Peace education and advocacy should be pursued with vigour and the Civil Society Organisations can be of good help in this regard.

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