

ARMS TRAFFICKING IN NIGERIA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR PEACE AND SECURITY IN THE WEST AFRICA SUB-REGION SINCE 1900

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Abstract

The movement of arms across the world, the threat to security, stability and development, the existence of militant groups, organised criminal gangs and the nexus between them are not new phenomena. It was however not until a few years after the 9/11 Attack in the United States that the question of susceptibility of Nigeria and the West African sub-region began to take the centre stage in policy and academic debates. This article examines the implications of trans-border arms trafficking on the socio-economic development of Nigeria as a country, and the West African sub-region. It argues that trans-border arms trafficking is growing in scale and momentum without a corresponding and clearly coordinated strategy for dealing with this hydra-headed monster, which significantly affects the economy of Nigeria in particular and West African sub-region in general. This growing trend, if uncontrolled, has the potential of undermining and fueling insecurity across the region, which consequently has the likelihood of affecting the joint security, stability, economies and core democratic values of the region. The paper concludes that the extent and magnitude of the problem require a definitive strategy within the broad frame of the sub-region.

Keywords: Peace, Security, Nigeria, Arms, Trafficking, West-African Sub-region

Introduction

The history of the origin of arms trafficking and its proliferation across West African borders are not obscure. They predated the colonial era when the various European powers wanted to outdo one another by means of offering

light weapons and gun powder to the West African chiefs in order to continue to fan the ember of disunity and keep the slave trade going¹. Thus, inter ethnic wars were limitlessly encouraged by the European imperialists as weapons so procured by the chiefs were deployed into the capturing of more slaves and intimidating perceived enemies. This is not unrelated to the challenges in the pursuit of empire building and associated rivalries/conflicts in the pre-colonial and early colonial societies. Peace and security, a *sine qua non* for progress and development, has since become a challenge for Nigeria and the West African sub-region. Everyday experiences have shown that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons remains a catalyst for violent crimes, insecurity and trans-border crimes in Nigeria and the West African sub-region. The skewed border control system and cross border security systems remain the bane of peace, security and socio-economic advancement of entire West Africa.

Definition

Arms' traffic, also known as gunrunning and smuggling of contraband weapons or ammunitions is the illegal importation of guns and ammunitions or other weapons of war into a country. What constitutes legal trade in firearms varies widely depending on local and national law². Small arms, which are designed for personal use, include revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, assault rifles, sub-machine guns and light machine guns. They also comprise weapons designed for use by several persons serving as a crew, which also comprise heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel ... anti-missile systems, and mortars of calibers less than 100mm. Small arms and light weapons are generally light weight, highly portable and devastatingly effective in the hands of young or poorly trained users³.

Arms Permit in Colonial Nigeria

After the end of the 1893 civil war in Yorubaland, the people resolved in Ibadan and other Yoruba speaking areas were to begin to use the hoes and cutlasses they had used in the past wars to till the soil⁴. Thus, farming and hunting became the occupation of the warriors, chiefs and even the Baale, and

they rarely needed to resort to the use of guns during their hunting expeditions. They believed more in locally concocted charms, incantations to stupefy the enemy, and that was why the British colonial authority had very little to do in terms of mopping up arms after the internecine wars. They also made it very clear that those who had any need for arms had to apply for and obtain the license before they can lay claim to any authority to use arms, be it locally fabricated or imported.

The resource poor peasant farmers who were known to have used Dane guns during their hunting expeditions also relied on magical charms to subdue preys, whether human, animal or even supernatural entity. African warriors in the colonial period trusted more, and never disregarded the need to fortify themselves with amulets and other charms, which, they believed, protected them against evil, injury, disease, bad luck and other negative forces. The Ijemo riot of 1914 and Adubi war of 1918 among the Egba in Nigeria were clear instances of African reliance on magical power to fight against perceived injustices in the socio-economic and political arenas. ⁵Records have it that Adubi mobilized the formation of a para-military farmer groups (*Egbe-Agbe*) throughout Egbaland, primarily, to fight the encroaching bureaucracy of the British, and they used guns too⁶. Although 3000 guns were seized by the British authority from the insurgents after the crisis had been crushed, one could still say that relatively very few arms (when compared with the level of proliferation today) were allowed to move except with the permission of the colonial authorities, and the issue of youth radicalization had really not manifested to the extent that it has reached in Nigeria today.

At this time, a list of arms licenses issued by principal collector of Nigeria Customs were normally returned by individuals and groups⁷ from across the country to the Headquarters in Lagos. Arms issued to such individuals and groups, which were used for hunting, security and other purposes, were expected to be returned after about nine months, though subject to renewal. Rifles and such other small arms for which permit had been issued were expected to be returned at the expiration of nine months, after which extension could be sought⁸.

Although issuance of permit was momentarily halted towards the end

of colonial era in Nigeria, permission was generally granted for the renewal of those applications for licenses for small arms in 1955 and 1956, and such permits for the use of licensed guns remained valid only for nine months⁹. However, from 1957, the renewal of licenses was subjected to review and the policy of **automatic renewal after nine months was discontinued. Then, the issue of licenses for small arms such as revolvers was reviewed, and thus, no license was issued for that year except those that were proved to the satisfaction of the officer that the weapon in question was required in the course of the applicant's official duties or in pursuance of his business**¹⁰.

The important fact to note is that arms movement during the colonial period was effectively controlled. Arms that fell into wrong hands as a result of crises such as the 1st and 2nd World Wars were generally well cleaned up while the indigenous resource poor peasant farmers and hunters generally relied on Dane guns and cutlasses, which were mainly used for hunting during the several riots/revolts that were thrown up as a result of the harsh taxation policies pursued by the colonial authority. In fact, economic considerations have generally been identified as being responsible for most of these crises experienced within the Nigeria polity during the days of colonial rule when arms had not really proliferated.

From the early 1960s down to the commencement of the Nigeria Civil War, small arms began to move across Nigeria. In fact, the country's illicit light weapons trade can be traced back to the failure to execute comprehensive arms collection program after the 1967-70 Civil War. In 1968 when peace and security again became elusive in the Western State as a result of the unfriendly economic policy that was pursued by the Western State government, the Agbekoya peasant farmers did not totally rely on their Dane guns to fight battles; they also applied charms, which were non-conventional weapons, such as *Areta*, *Ayeta*, *Okigbe* and *Atidijo* to pursue their issues. During this period, some arms also got into the hands of notorious armed robbers like Ishola Oyenusi, Anini, Babatunde Folonrunsho, Samuel Oliya, Raphael Nsu, Christian Udoh, Okotete Onafemo, to mention a few, and recently, political thugs with acronyms like Elewe Omo, Ogidan, Suger, Ajia, Akaje, etc began to take advantage of

disruptions within the polity, to unleash mayhem on the populace. They generally combined the use of small arms with charms and other locally prepared items, and effectively frustrated, intimidated and subdued opponents who stood between them and their goals¹¹. There is no doubt that some small arms were not returned to the armory after the conclusion of Nigeria Civil War. Some of these weapons infiltrated the villages and were subsequently used by both robbers and thugs in wrecking havoc on the society.

But what the Nigerian populace experienced in the 1960s and early 1970s were just child plays when compared to the horrifying experiences of today. The proliferation of arms, sometimes as a result of widespread leakages from government armories¹², has continued to fuel crimes, corruption and ethno-religious conflicts. Some of the security challenges that Nigeria is currently contending with can also be traced to problems associated with the proliferation of arms.

Arms trafficking and proliferation across West Africa Sub-region

Nigeria was already in her line of natural evolution to state formation when she was forced into a union of convenience as a result of British imperialism. The British colonialist merged diverse culture and tribes, the aftermath of which remains sectarian hatred, tribal conflict and social-antagonism that characterized the eventual independent Nigeria. Coupled with this was the experience of the 2nd World War and the Cold War where the contending powers strove to balance their power through acquisition of extra territories in Africa, which led to inter and intra state conflicts that in turn necessitated the use of small and light weaponry. When the cold war eventually ended the sectarian hatred did not abate.

With the exit of colonialism, the small arms that were employed for the destabilization and undermining of both human and national security made their ways into the hands of criminals, separatists and militia groups through diverse sources. Some have their roots in South Africa's destabilization campaign in Angola and Mozambique during the apartheid era. Others can be traced to the Cold War "Military assistance" programmes that armed several African dictators

heavily. Newer weapons can be traced to supply from the Eastern Bloc and East Asia, the Arab springs in Libya, theft from government sources, licensed owners, black markets and though few in numbers, the work of independent skilled craftsmen¹³.

For years, the movement of weapons was governed by the Cold War and the insurgencies that emerged throughout Latin America. The United States, seeking to hide arms transfers, moved Russian weapons such as the Avtomat Kalashnikov 47 (AK-47) assault rifle, through developing countries like Israel to camouflage their sales to illegal groups... The Soviets, meanwhile, moved weapons through Cuba and later Nicaragua, to various African countries¹⁴. The arms trade flourished and distribution patterns that are still prevalent today were established. The end of the wars in Central America combined with the fall of the Soviet Union opened new doors for the arms trade. Other weapons came via the old Soviet bloc countries, often trafficked through Central America, in particular Panamá, which became a hub for Colombia-bound weapons, to various parts of developing countries, which Africa is the chief recipient¹⁵.

The best way to determine the sources and patterns of fire-arms trafficking is to examine recent seizures, but, given local enforcement capacity, seizures are relatively rare. These seizures indicate that there are essentially five main sources of illicit firearms in West Africa, and these are legacy weapons from past conflicts in the Region, weapons from recent conflicts in neighbouring regions, weapons sold by or rented from corrupt security officials, weapons transferred from sympathetic governments, and a relatively small number of weapons imported from outside Africa.

An example of the first source (legacy weapons) can be seen in recent seizures made in Liberia, which comprised of weapons from the second Liberian Civil War (1999-2003), and ammunition from the war in Sierra Leone (1991-2002). Firearms from conflicts that ended more than a decade ago continue to surface despite efforts to clean up these weapons¹⁶.

The second source from neighbouring sub-regions can be seen in a wide variety of seizures. In addition to Libya, weapons have been transferred from past conflicts in Algeria (1992-1998), Chad (1990-2010), Ethiopia (1974-

1991), and Sudan¹⁷ (1983-2005). Today, most weapons come from Eastern Chad and the Darfur region in Sudan. Sudanese weapons and ammunition have been detected in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Mali - all countries that do not procure from Sudan. The President of Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, **has warned that Libyan weapons are "being disseminated all over the region."**¹⁸

Flows from the third source (corrupt security officials) remain strong because few states in the sub-region have records of all the weapons they possess, and thus, may not even notice when some arms disappear. Accounting for ammunition is even weaker, and sales of odd rounds supplement the meager incomes of police and soldiers in many parts of the sub-region. Where soldiers and police are allowed to hold on to their weapons indefinitely, such arms may be rented out to the very people they are meant to be combating. In Nigeria, for instance, police recently arrested three officers for renting Kalashnikov-pattern weapons and selling 1,200 rounds of ammunition to local criminals¹⁹. A 2008 enquiry by Burkina Faso's National Small Arms Commission found that about half the weapons seized in the country came from the national security forces, while only just over 10% had been smuggled across the border.²⁰ Weapon sales can occur across borders, as can be seen in seizures crossing from Guinea into Mali. Once stolen, the weapons and ammunition were transported in civilian trucks, often secreted under local produce²¹.

The fourth source (sympathetic governments) is probably best exemplified by the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, the only country in West Africa under a UN arms embargo²². Successive UN Groups of Experts on Côte d'Ivoire have presented evidence of weapon flows from the territory of Burkina Faso to the Forces Nouvelles rebel group²³. The 2011 Group of Experts concluded that Burkina Faso had "played an increasingly important role in providing military assistance to the Forces Nouvelles."²⁴ In response to the threat, the government of Côte d'Ivoire armed militia groups and Liberian mercenaries. This, alongside a large number of deserters, spread weapons throughout the society. Fleeing forces loyal to the former government, including returning Liberian mercenaries, moved military weapons across the border into Liberia, and at least three major caches were discovered in 2011²⁵. These

weapons are subject to further trafficking into neighbouring countries, including Burkina Faso down to Nigeria.

Recent seizures coming from the fifth source (outside Africa) are relatively rare and often disputed. The best examples took place in Nigeria. On 26th October, 2010, Nigerian authorities discovered 240 metric tons of ammunition from Iran in 13 shipping containers. The destination of this shipment remains unclear; while in bond, the documented consignee was changed to The Gambia, alleging that the shipment was in transit to a destination outside West Africa. A lesser-known seizure occurred on 17th June, 2009, when Nigerian authorities in Kano seized an aircraft transporting weapons from Croatia to Guinea-Bissau. The aircraft was later released following assurances by the Government of Guinea-Bissau that the cargo was for official use²⁶.

West Africa's regional superpower, Nigeria, began to face serious security challenges even before the conclusion of the civil war. After the Nigerian Civil War, it was found that arms had already fallen into the hands of political thugs and other criminals such as armed robbers and ritualists. The proliferation of arms in the country was recognized as a massive challenge by successive military administrations as efforts to combat this emerging menace was initiated. Attempts at reform continued into 2005 but progress was slow and battle lines were already drawn for the 2007 electoral contest to succeed former President Olusegun Obasanjo. Inter-communal violence remained a serious concern as a result of the wide extent of proliferation.

Since the end of military rule in 1999, fighting in several States of the country has claimed thousands of lives. Plateau State in central Nigeria was particularly badly affected. 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 this unfortunate situation has only been managed, and has remained uncontrollable as a result of the availability of weapons that can no longer be described as 'light'. Oil companies themselves have been affected by these crises in the Niger Delta area, and had, at times, contributed to it. Hundreds of people have been

killed and thousands displaced by these conflicts, which have witnessed an increasing use of guns and other devastatingly effective weapons, particularly in the hands of insurgents.

The Proliferation of Small Arms

Several factors are favourable to the proliferation of small arms in Nigeria and across West African borders. It has been underpinned that the Sompho area is fraught with problems of high unemployment and lack of physical infrastructure²⁷, and this unfortunate situation also obtains in the West African sub-region. The level of criminality in this area has affected community development. The high level of unemployment and poverty provides the basis and excuse for the youth to take to arms and other crimes in the society. Particularly, ignorance and poverty provide fertile grounds for youth radicalization, and that is why it is important for governments at all levels to develop and implement holistic measures aimed at preventing the radicalization of youths (young girls inclusive) through massive education and empowerment programmes²⁸. It is significant to note that the radicalization of even young girls is not a new phenomenon²⁹. It is therefore not to be wondered at that the Boko Haram insurgent group has begun to initiate and incorporate young girls into its suicide squad.

Some scholars have maintained that the growing level of criminality in West Africa may in the future likely discourage investment and stifle long term growth and economic development³⁰. The concern is that there are so many socio-economic problems such as poverty and inequality, corruption and high level of crimes in the society which have the tendency of impacting negatively on West Africa's economy.

Developing countries, especially in Africa, present a peculiar dimension in security demands as a result of poverty, unemployment, hunger, and increased belligerency among component entities that make up the continent. The activities of rebel groups, trans-border criminals, kidnappers, arms-smugglers, cultists and other social misfits add up to the tension that has characterized life on the continent and particularly the West African sub-region. The situation has become

more disturbing when the issue of demented persons such as serial killers, rapists, drug-addicts, kidnappers, prostitutes, ritual killers and paradopiles are taken into consideration. All of these mostly use arms to perpetuate vices. These wide ranges of crimes constitute social nuisance to the West African sub-region, and indeed, arms are generally required in order to carry out illicit activities.

Arising from the argument above, issues of defense and security are salient to sustainable development and national survival. Creating national security awareness has been identified as a new policy initiative to address the diverse nature of instability and insecurity in Nigeria and the West African sub-region and the youths have been identified as persons that are at the centre of criminality in the region. The inauguration of the ECOWAS stakeholders' forum on youth policy is recognized as a step in the right direction as it continues to build the capacity of youth stakeholders, particularly youth organizations on the implementation of the ECOWAS youth policy.

Young people have the potentials which should be channeled more appropriately toward productive ventures instead of engaging in criminal activities. The argument is that a well-equipped, knowledgeable, disciplined and sophisticated crop of young people in our countries and the sub-region will not only guarantee sustained socio-economic development but can also give assurances concerning the objectives of the founders of ECOWAS on the ideals of sub-regional integration, which can be achieved with time. Other factors favouring the proliferation of arms and trafficking in Nigeria and across West Africa are the quest for easy profits, the instinct for self preservation, rise in crime, cultural practices.

Cross-border criminals who may include arms traffickers, generally operate through "networks" by bringing into contact a number of individuals organized into groups, gangs or rings. In larger scale of organized crime, as in South America, these would be cartels, like the Medellin or Cali Cartels in Columbia. Perhaps the most pernicious crime involves arms and diamonds since the proceeds from their sale either permits the purchase of more deadly weapons, which will be turned against the people living in the areas producing them or goes to enrich the exporters, thus, widening the gap between rich and poor in

these impoverished countries, consequently, naturally preparing the way for bloody settlements of accounts in which the state is one of the main victims.

Whatever their sources, small arms inflict great and similar damage on the countries in which they are commonly found. This is particularly so for transitional governments struggling to put in place democratic systems of government, and which have to demonstrate that they respect the freedom of their citizens as the new government system demands. Aside from criminality leading to insecurity of lives and property, the problem of small arms proliferation undermines efforts targeted at ensuring the political stability of such countries and their governments. This is especially the case with a country like Nigeria.

Nigeria lies at the heart of regional arms trafficking networks that include governments and private traders in West Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Developed over many years, this market relies on traditional trade routes, military supply lines and corruptible government actors to provide material support to clansmen, warlords, and militants who purchase or barter for small arms, such as Kalashnikov rifles, rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) and larger weapons systems, such as anti-aircraft guns and armored pick-up trucks with weapons mounted at the back. Currently sustained and developed primarily by a mix of opportunistic businessmen and foreign governments who are strengthening local proxies, the arms trade in and around Africa serves as a reliable, highly adaptable, and readily accessible wellspring of material that feeds regional conflicts.

Gun running and insurgency are currently in the front burner of the challenges confronting the government of President Goodluck Jonathan. This hydra-headed monster continues to threaten human security and development in the history of Nigeria as never before. This is because Nigeria has 770 kilometers of shared land border with the Republic of Benin, around 1,500 kilometers with the Republic of the Niger, 1,700 kilometers with Cameroon and 90 kilometers with Chad. She also has 850 kilometers of maritime border in the Atlantic Ocean. It would consequently be hard to find any state in the world with the capacity to effectively control such extensive borders. Naturally, traffickers make use of these porous borders to smuggle into the country such different and dangerous products such as arms.

The proliferation of small arms in Nigeria has many causes which include the activities of traffickers, local manufacture, and theft of weapons belonging to individuals or the authorities. Other reasons include personal security demand, importation by multinational businesses for their supernumerary police force, effects of conflicts in neighboring countries, leakage from military/police armories, porous borders and international arms smuggling cartels. A little explanation will suffice here:

Porous Borders

The smuggling of arms and ammunition into Nigeria has reached disturbing levels. Sometimes, these arms are imported into Nigeria hidden in clothing, vehicles or kitchen utensils. For instance, during the first week of August 1999, Nigerian customs intercepted six nationals of a West African country in a canoe in Lagos with 75,000 rounds of ammunition and bags containing rifles. Recent hauls by the customs service included 10,000 magazines in Ikeja (31 December 2001), as well as almost equally larger hauls in Seme Border Station (February 2002) and at Tabido/Budo in Kwara State (March 2002). The Nigerian police also intercepted traffickers at Alabata, near Abeokuta, seizing 26,500 cartridges hidden in 106 boxes. The port of Warri in the Niger Delta is also regarded as a centre for arms smuggling and illegal trading. The traffickers operate from ships lying at anchor on the high seas, using faster small boats for transfers. These figures represent only a tiny sample of the total numbers of arms and ammunition which enter Nigeria and circulate illegally.

Local arms production: In the 1970s and early 1980s, local arms production did not receive enough attention in Nigeria. Arms manufactured locally were mostly used for hunting and for traditional rites. However, the rise in the use of firearms for violent crime suggests that locally produced arms have become a sound and cheap alternative to imported weapons.

Unemployment of the youth and the rampant level of corruption have fuelled the arms trafficking business in Africa as could be observed in Somalia, Sierra-Leone, Liberia, Guinea, Nigeria, South Africa and Libya to mention but

a few. Since the late 1980s, the proliferation of weapons has been associated, not only with the pursuit of political power, but also with international terrorism and the protection and furtherance of economic objectives in the Region.

Theft of arms belonging to individuals or to the state

Criminals get the weapons they use from several sources nowadays. They also obtain the arms by means of theft and that is the reason several weapons have remained registered as "lost" by the Nigerian police. The growth in trafficking has been attributed to staff shortage within the Nigerian Customs Service, the lack of modern surveillance equipment, inadequate vehicles and, in most cases, security operatives sabotage. Criminals also obtain the arms they use by means of theft, which are either stolen from individuals or the state. Several weapons had been registered as "lost" by the Nigerian police as was the case some few years back in Owerri when the Customs Service's armoury was broken into and a substantial quantity of arms were removed by unknown persons. Arms belonging to the military have also, occasionally, been registered as "stolen" or "lost".

The killing of 19 soldiers and the theft of their weapons at Zaki Biam, a border town between (Benue) and Taraba, was a case where legally acquired arms subsequently fell into the hands of non-state actors who used them for nefarious purposes. However, it is particularly encouraging that the arms in question in this specific case were found and returned to the armed forces. Aside from theft, there were reports of attempts by civilians to obtain arms and ammunition from the military. Corrupt officials were usually involved in such criminal activities.

Implications of arms trafficking in Nigeria and the West Africa Sub-region

Arms trafficking has continually had profound impact on peace and security in Nigeria and the entire West African sub-region. Over time, it has undermined good governance, affected trading activities, tourism and investments. It jeopardizes economic development and generally puts democracy and development at risk. Illicit small arms movements have also heightened inter-

state conflict and threatened the peace and security of Nigeria and other nation states in West Africa. With armed guerrilla groups proliferating and always dividing into warring factions, internal instabilities provide opportunities for cross border insurgencies which usually resulted in losses of lives, displacements of people and consequential refugee problems.

Additionally, the unending activities of ethnic militias in the Nigeria mineral producing regions were a major reason for arms trafficking and proliferation in Nigeria. The members of these groups remain the main beneficiaries of this mineral wealth which keeps them on the support for the rebels as merchants who are not only too happy to keep the fighters supplied as long as they partake of the proceeds accruing from the activities of the militia.

Significantly, arms' trafficking in Nigeria has implications for Nigeria in the Diaspora as it has won the country new credits in form of criminal rating as the nation has been referred to as a terrorist nation at different times. This has generated derogative remarks and sanctions upon sanctions from international organizations, which have continued to tarnish the integrity, popularity, heritage of the country and given Nigeria noxious nomenclature.

Furthermore, peace and security in Nigeria has received huge dents as a result of rampant extra judicial killings by the security personnel, kidnapping and murder in order to obtain human parts for money rituals, activities of party politicians and the involvement of political thugs. The country is also unfortunately divided along ethnic and political lines while national unity has not also been a top priority in the country, and these have consequently generated confusion and disharmony among the diverse ethnic groups. It could even be argued that Boko Haram insurgency activities, which has claimed thousands of lives was a politically generated problem, which has manifested in the form of assault, rape and mass kidnapping of underage school girls as option for negotiation for the grant of amnesty between the insurgent group and Federal government of Nigeria.

The high rate of unemployment levels and lack of physical infrastructure in the West Africa region and the inability of both national and sub-regional governments to strengthen mechanisms in order to effectively combat the illicit trade have not only raised the level of criminality within Nigeria but have slowed

down community development within the country and the West African sub-region. This has also served as an excuse for the radicalization of the youths, which has continued to fan the ember of disunity. This too, to a large extent, has the potentiality of discouraging investment and stifling long term growth and economic development.

Cross-border crime is currently one of the major threats to peace, stability and regional integration in West Africa. In a context in which criminals attack a particular State and find shelter or protection with its neighbor, it is difficult to imagine peaceful and harmonious relations being established between the two. It is a fact, for example, instances of aggression against Senegal in Lower Casamance have been initiated, prepared and carried out from the territory of neighbouring states as such acts normally pose the problem of straining relations between concerned states.

Militancy in Nigeria has never been an exclusive reserve of the Boko Haram group in Northern Nigeria. Terror groups such as the Egbesu Boys, the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) and other groups in Nigeria have, at different times, commanded respect and awe as a result of their ability to access arms illegally for their nefarious activities under the pretext of serving as human rights campaign groups and defenders of their ethnic groups. The activities of these groups have continued to influence the peace, security, political growth and development of Nigeria and the West African sub-region. Radicalized youths perceive political campaign arenas as forums to demonstrate their might, and that usually result in the use of arms by non military agents such as political thugs and paid political assassin. These unauthorized groups effortlessly acquire, store and distribute arms within the Nigeria political area.

Although Nigeria is not considered a major producer of arms technology but is recognized as a high consumer of high profile war arsenals. A lot of the available arms and light weapons in Nigeria came in as a by-product of warring neighboring countries as well as direct intervention on the parts of the super powers whose interest in Nigeria foreign policy, governance and mineral deposits has remained the major reason why they have supported one group against another in their bid to segment the country. The part played by the major super

powers during the Nigerian Civil War, their roles during the Liberia and Sierra Leone crises and other revelations regarding their activities in Nigeria and the West African sub-region are pointers to the fact that economic considerations have remained their main motivation for coming to Africa.

In addition, proliferation of small arms and light weapons diverts scarce government resources from, say, health and education to public security, discourages investments and economic growth and deprives developing countries of the skills and talents of the victims of small arms and light weapons. As far as gender considerations are concerned, it dangerously exaggerates the association between arms and masculinity that is common to many cultures around the world. Furthermore, small arms and light weapons escalate conflicts, undermine peace agreements, and intensify (the) violence and impact of crimes, all of which hinder the development of social stability, democracy and good governance. Thus, there is a need to reduce their availability (both demand and supply) and use, especially in places where conflicts have ended, being increasingly important obstacles to the reconstruction and development process.

Conclusion

Today, arms proliferation and organized crime have diversified and extended beyond borders, undermining the credibility and effectiveness of institutions, jeopardizing criminal justice systems, violating human rights and corrupting political leaders. Indeed, the proliferation of small arms and (its) negative consequences have become major concerns underlying a number of national, regional and international initiatives. The apprehension is that there are so many socio-economic problems such as poverty, inequality, corruption and high level crimes in the society, which have the tendency of impacting negatively on the economy of Nigeria and fuelling insurgency in the West Africa sub-region. These arms come from many sources, and they include those acquired legally by the armed security forces, which end up in the hands of criminals as a result of theft or illegal sale. Controlling the West African borders effectively is an extremely difficult task, and as a result, combating of arms trafficking cannot be conducted effectively. In a world where most African states do not possess the

capacity to effectively monitor their international boundaries, border zones obey logic other than that of state legality.

Political instability, poverty, mismanagement and corruption divert the state officials responsible for border control from their tasks. Cross-border arms proliferation will continue to be a major preoccupation in the sub-region, and for as long as these scourges persist in Nigeria and the West Africa sub-region, there will always be the urgent need for member states to cooperate in order to exercise efficient control over border areas. Significantly, one should note that good governance and transparency in the management of public affairs can help to eradicate the scourge of small arms proliferation.

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- 5 Schmidt Heike January 1st 2010. (Re) Negotiating Marginality: The Majimaji War and its aftermaths in south-western Tanzania, 1905-1916. The Maji Maji Rebellion, sometimes called the Maji Maji War, was a violent African resistance to colonial rule in the German colony of Tanganyika, an uprising by several African indigenous communities in German East Africa against the German rule in response to a German policy designed to force African peoples to grow cotton for export, lasting from 1905 to 1907. The Majimaji, which translate to 'bullets to drop of water' refers to the rebellion in German East Africa, (1905-07) in the south and centre of present day Tanzania. The African warriors believed that the magic water-maji could give them immunity against bullets. See 'Majimaji' *A Dictionary of World History*. 2000, Encyclopedia.com 10th February, 2011. <http://www.encyclopedia.com>

6 NAI. C. 92/1918. Appointment of Commission of Enquiry into the Abeokuta Disturbances-Re. P. 91 & 132. By the middle of July when the mopping up operation was being conducted, over 3000 guns were seized from the insurgents. The question is: were these locally fabricated Dane guns or were they those ones that were used during the slave trade period when inter tribal wars were limitlessly encouraged by the Europeans in order to sustain the trade?

7 NAI, Comcol I, 5/S. 12, Vol. III, Return of Arms Licenses issued by the Principal Collector of Customs. P. 213-240.

8 NAI, Comcol 1, 5/S. 15, Vol. II, Issue of Gun Permit, p. 345- 383.

9 NAI, Comcol 1, 5/S. 16, Vol. II, Annual Renewal of Arms Licenses, (1953-1956), p. 292.

10 NAI, Comcol 1, 5/S. 16, Vol. I, Annual Renewal of Arms Licenses, p. 137.

11 For instance, the Agbekoya peasant farmers in Western Nigeria demonstrated their absolute disrespect for the military government of the day as they dealt devastating psychological blows on the psyche of the law enforcement agents through the use of charms and other traditional instruments of war. Cutlasses, clubs and charms were mostly relied upon by the peasants to prosecute this 'war'. The Western State law enforcement agents were generally incapable of handling the Agbekoya menace. Police guns were said to be ineffective against the farmers because bullets shots at some farmers were falling off like powder on glass. Apparently, the entire state law enforcement structure had no answer, at least initially, to the 'magical' powers of the peasant farmers.

12 Combating light weapons Proliferation in West Africa, *International Affairs*, 81.

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