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## **Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and Its Security Implication in North-East Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is one of the major security problems in North-East Nigeria. The trafficking and circulation of small arms and light weapons(SALW) in the hands of non- state actors fuel violent conflict in the region. The trust of this paper is to establish a possible link between the proliferation of SALW and its security implication. The paper argues that the inability of the Nigerian government to address and curtailed demand and supply factors of SALW propelled the proliferation, and the direction of this paper is to provide a deeper understanding of the circulation of the weapons in the hands of criminals and unauthorized persons. Literature is review from relevant views of security scholars. The methodology adopted for this study is based on the use of secondary sources of data generated from textbooks, academic journals and related materials from the internet. Neo Marxist political economy approach is the theoretical framework to be used to empirically and critically analyze and justify the study. Causes, sources, transit, and destinations of SALW and its security implications will be discussed. The study will be relevant to government officials, security personnel, civil society groups, scholars, students, and policymakers and it is also a contribution to knowledge to close up the existing gap in the literature and to explore and spark up deeper research in the field and finally, the conclusion is made.

**Keywords:** Proliferation, Small Arms, Light Weapons, Security Implication, North-East Nigeria

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## 1. Introduction

This study entitles “proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and its security implications in North-East Nigeria” will examine the relationship between small arms and insecurity and it has been a subject of debate among security scholars and students of strategies studies. Some group of scholars argues that circulation of small arms in the hands of unauthorized persons are the direct cause of insecurity in the region while the other camp of the debate argue that circulation of small arms are merely triggered the insecurity and pose a serious security threat to Nigeria, both scholars agreed that the proliferation of SALW influence the escalation of insecurity in the region most especially the “Boko Haram” insurgency.

The North East region is one of the three security concerned areas of the international organized trafficking of SALW due to the criminal activities of the insurgency. The Nigeria internal security community has been abused; old security threat remained, took a different dimension and direction, new security threat emerged which includes; armed robbery, ethno religious conflict, insurgency, assassination, human trafficking, abduction and kidnapping of Chibok school girls(Badmus and onuoha,2012). The outbreak of the “Boko Haram” insurgency in the North East is considered new phenomena in security thinking and therefore a dangerous threat to the West African sub-region. Nigeria is a country that is diverse, pluralistic and heterogeneous, multi-ethnic and multi-religious in nature, with over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups and two major religious groups, Islam and Christianity. The amalgamation of Northern and southern Nigeria in 1914 is also a problem that is dividing the country based on ethno religious divide which resulted in persistent ethno religious conflict.

Adele, Kriten, *et al*; (2008:10). These ethno religious conflicts constitute part of the demand factors for the proliferation of SALW in the country particularly the North East region. The circulation and proliferation of SALW are as a result of poor or bad leadership of the country since independence in 1960. Since there are willing buyers and sellers of SALW in the country this means that violent, and armed conflict is inevitable. The objectives of the study are to assess the inability of the Nigerian state to deal with the demand factors that have worsened the proliferation of SALW in the North East region and also to assess whether the inability of the security agents to control the supply factors of SALW worsened the security situation.

## **2. Conceptual Clarification of Terms:**

### **2.1 The Concept of Small Arms**

Small arms can be “refers to arms used by only one person or an individual which includes; grenade, rocket launchers, landmines, revolver, pistol, rifle, and light machine guns” (ECOWAS 2006)

### **2.2 The Concept of Light Weapons**

Light weapons are referred to as “weapons used by many people or persons or in groups which include; machine guns, mobile and mounted portable anti-aircraft cannons, portable anti-tank” (ECOWAS 2006)

### **2.3 The Concept of Security**

Security, according to Paul, D. Williams, (2008:5) is concerned with the “alleviation of threats to cherished values; especially those that, if left unchecked, threaten the survival of a particular referent object in the near future. Barry, Buzan. (2009:10) explains that “security is about something that needs to be secured: the nation, the state, the individual, the ethnic group, the environment or the planet” in which we lived. The same author further explained that “security means the accumulation of more power”. “It is also concerned with justice and the provision of human rights”. “Security is about the absence of threats internally or externally”. David, A. Balding (1997:1) stated that “security is an essentially contested concept; therefore it deals with issues like human rights, economics, the environment, drug trafficking, epidemics, crime or social injustice, in addition to the traditional concern with security from external military threats”. This article is specifically concerned with internal security threats posed by the proliferation and circulation of SALW.

The United Nations Development Program Report (UNDP) (2004) in 1994 identified “seven elements of human security concept which include; Economic security, Food security, Health security, Environmental security, Personal security, Community security, and Political security. Two important elements of human security are identified in the report; one is safety from hunger, diseases and repression and two protection from destruction of life, property, home, jobs, and community or the environment in which we live, these are categorized as dangerous threats to the existence of human beings”. “Human security is freedom from dangerous threats to life that may arise as a result of human actions or inactions or from a disaster like a flood, earthquake, hunger, famine, drought, diseases”.

### **3. Methodology**

The method of data collection for this study is content analysis, using secondary sources which include; books, academic journals and other publications or materials related to the subject under study.

#### **3.1 Theoretical Framework**

This study adopted the theory of relative autonomy of the state and failed state theory. The state relative autonomy theory explains the level in which the state failed to perform its constitutional duties such as negotiating and mediating inter-class and intraclass conflict or competition. The theory explained that in a state or political community, there are two contradicting forces as opposing rivals, the primary and secondary contradictions, the primary contradiction explain the struggles between the rich people and the poor people or between leaders and the followers in the society and their relationship is always in opposition to each class. Secondary contradictions are about intraclass conflict or struggle within the ruling class or leaders in the society or between different opposing groups of the ruling class.

Karl Marx (1977:2) in his writing titled “Communist Manifestoes” explained that “the history of all known existing society is the history of class struggle”. This explains that the state can exhibit low or high relative autonomy when there is a high accumulation of capital in the hands of few people in society while the majority of the people have nothing. The state does not intervene in the productive activities in the domestic economy; therefore, the few rich appropriate the profit when they enter into the social relationship of production base on the exploitation of the working class. The function of the state is to regulate as an impartial and unbiased arbiter reconcile inter-class and intraclass rivalry through harmonization of the class interest. The Nigerian state is the only means in which fund is appropriated by the leaders. The implication of the low performance of the Nigerian state is that it is also involved in the class rivalry more than performing its constitutional roles or duties. A breakdown of law and order in North-East Nigeria was caused by the proliferation and circulation of SALW in the region.

### **4. Literature review**

Related literature is a review so that to identify the gap and offer the opportunity to discover new problems or limitations that will be further investigated. In reviewing literature that is related to the study, views or opinions or contributions of scholars concerning the causes, sources, transit and destinations of SALW and its security implications in North-East Nigeria will be discussed critically.

Nigeria is a source, transit, and destination of small arms and light weapons(SALW). The causes of the circulation of SALW is well written in the literatures e.g. crime, revolts, subversion, sabotage, ethno religious crisis, social agitation, terrorism, insurgency, riots, militancy, post-election violence, cross-national border smuggling, porous borders, black marketeering, local manufacturers, insecurity, poverty, economic crisis, unemployment, some scholars focus on the supply factors SALW like those who are willing to sell illegally to the illegal buyers, as a lucrative business venture and porous borders, while other scholars concentrate on demand factors like crime, armed violence, ethno religious conflict, riot and political violence. The proliferation and use of small arms and light weapons(SALW) in ethno religious clashes, post-election violence, insurgency, and armed robbery have killed many innocent Nigerians and rendered many as homeless victims in their own country. The majority of the affected people were the victims of Small and light weapons (SALW), as a result, some sustain permanent injuries or disabilities.

Nte. (2011:5), explained that “there is a direct link between the possession of weapons like SALW and escalation of violent conflict” in North-East Nigeria. Nigeria severally experienced direct and indirect consequences and security challenges of proliferation and circulation of SALW, which has retarded development in the region. The same author further defined national security “as an absence of threats to life that may inflict injuries, death or discomfort as a result of human action or inactions or from a natural disaster such as flood, earthquake, famine, drought, hunger, diseases, or war”. The emphasis on national security derives from three key issues, sanctity and inviolability of human life, the universality, and dignity of human rights and the existence of individual safety in more than one threat. Christopher (2011:34)defined security “as activities that ensure the protection of a country from internal and external threat, individual safety and properties of the community against threats, danger and any negative mishaps”.

Badmus. (2012:12)opined that, National security, “as physical protection and defense of a country citizenry and territory from threats, and also the promotion of economic activities and prosperity of Nigerians in a peaceful and secure environment that encourage the attainment of National goals and those of its neighbors”.Ngang (2012:5) stated that “security means protection from dangerous and harmful disruptions in the patterns of day to day activities in homes, working place and our environments” therefore, security is related to positive and negative peace, development and safety of life and property, happiness and absence of threats to human life”.

## **5. History of Proliferation and Circulation of small and light Weapon(SALW) in Nigeria**

SALW was introduced in Nigeria by the Europeans before colonialism and during the time of slave trade between African Natives and Europeans, later, SALW was used by Europeans after they realized that their imperial power and ambition were being threatened, they used force to suppress any resistance, revolt by the native Africans. The British force traditional African chiefs/rulers to enter into signed treaties called gunboat diplomacy. The West African Frontier force was introduced (WAFF) by the British to execute the British-Aro war of 1901-1902. United African Company (UAC) backed by the British government in using force to suppress resistance from the local natives or communities. (Chuma; 2011:3). These arms or guns SALW were being circulated in the hands of Africans during the slave trade and colonialism and subsequently used in hunting in the rural areas. In those days SALW becomes a symbol of power, authority, and strength in the local community, and later SALW was used and displayed during the traditional festival or ceremonies like funerals/burials, wedding or naming ceremony and later became part of their culture or tradition. They also became symbols of individuals and ethnic identity, and for determining aggressors and invaders.

Today SALW are no longer just ornaments of prestige, hunting or ceremonial purposes, SALW was used in terms of functionally, dangerous, sophistication and motive the of ownership. They have become weapons of criminality and instruments of violence, fear, and of the men of the underworld. The same author argued that the 1959 firearms act was enacted to check the increasing circulation rate of SALW proliferation in Nigeria before independence. The inability of the Nigerian government to execute disarmament of arms reduction and destruction program after the Nigerian civil war, 1967-1970, increase the proliferation of small and light weapons(SALW) trafficking. As of 2002, the quantity of SALW in circulation in Nigeria was estimated by different reports and committees at between 1-3 million including arms in lawful possession of members of the security forces and those in the hands of civilians. The 80% of SALW in civilian possession were illegally acquired because of the stiff and strict regulations. There is fear that a larger percentage of the small and light weapons(SALW) in circulation in Nigeria are illegal. Some of this illegal SALW were used in violent armed conflicts such as ethno religious conflicts or crises, communal conflicts, sectarian violence, cultism, political violence or post-election violence, insurgency, militancy, and criminal activities like kidnapping, armed robbery, and abduction.

From the foregoing, SALW does not just move every corner of Nigerian society, but they are demanded by the people who use them to achieve their personal and selfish ambition.

Therefore there are demand factors in the proliferation and circulation of small and light weapons(SALW). The Nigerian government has made attempts to checkmate or control the circulation and proliferation of small and light weapons(SALW) in the country but not from the demand side of the root and immediate causes. In order to control the circulation and proliferation of SALW, the Nigerian government constituted a Commission for the control of the proliferation and illegal circulation of SALW (NATCOM) for the implementation of the ECOWAS agreement in July 2000 less than two years after the agreement and the signing which was politically binding agreement on the importation, exportation, and manufacture of SALW, later on legally binding in 2006. A year later in July 2001, the NATCOM publicly destroy a stockpile of small and light weapons(SALW) confiscated by the Nigerian security personnel. In September 2001, a request by the NATCOM for the termination of the approval of a license to carry weapons by civilian escort was accepted, according to Aderinwale (2005:2)

The Nigerian authorities played a significant role in the acceptance of the principles of an agreement on implementation, exportation, and manufacture of SALW signed on October 31, 1998, in Abuja. The Nigerian government has also entered into bilateral cooperation with neighboring countries. They have been taken a number of steps to boost cross border cooperation and improve security presence at the entry points.

### **5. Proliferation of Small and Light Weapons (SALW) in North-East Nigeria**

The security implication of small and light weapons (SALW) in circulation can pave the way for higher risk of armed violent conflict. The supply and circulation of SALW in the hands of unauthorized persons in society promote violence instead of peaceful coexistence and negotiations and has many security implications. Conflict and violence hamper peace and development, lean government resources are misused or mismanaged in the name of security vote, which is not accounted for any reason and imposition of might is a right syndrome or survival of the fittest in the society. The North East region in Nigeria is the most backward and underdeveloped because there are violent conflicts as a result of the circulation of small and light weapons(SALW) in non- state actors. The insecurity in the area prevents people from their daily business activities which causes a reduction in agricultural production, trade, and investment. Despite the fact that there is a mechanism put in place by the government to control illegal possession and use of SALW in the region, still, the proliferation is expanding vertically and horizontally. The mechanisms that are put in place to control the proliferation and circulation of small and light weapons(SALW) are;

- The ECOWAS convention of SALW. Their ammunition and other related weapons or materials.



- The Bamako Declaration on the same African position on the proliferation, circulation and illegal trade in SALW.
- The United Nations (UN) program to prevent and eliminate illegal buying and selling of SALW in all aspects, it is very difficult to determine the exact quantity of illegal arms and weapons in circulation within or penetrating into the region. Nigeria is both a producer and consumer of SALW because most of the arms and ammunition in circulation illegally are in the hands of non-state actors.

The pattern of Nigerian politics and behaviors of politicians contributed to the process of small and light weapons(SALW) proliferation and circulation in the wrong hands. Politics in Nigeria is characterized by violence and do or die affair, politicians are desperate to win elective positions, as a result, they have to recruit or hire thugs and gangs giving them weapons to intimidate and terrorize innocent citizens so that to attain their positions, therefore, SALW as an instrument of violence and intimidation is necessary. Proliferation and circulation of small and light weapons(SALW) in the society are also contributed by the inability or failure of government institutions to protect life and property due to a high level of corruption, mismanagement, or embezzlement of public scarce resources. Due to the frustration, unemployment, and poverty, many youths have engaged themselves in criminal activities using dangerous weapons to perpetrate criminal activities in the society. The high circulation of small and light weapons(SALW) in North-East Nigeria is as a result of interplay and interconnected socio-economic and political reasons couple with the effect of the globalization process that is taking place in the world.

The situation, therefore, demand for more dangerous of small and light weapons(SALW) by government and non-state actors like individuals, ethnic groups, communities and the increase in stock through importation and local fabrication in the country. As a result of globalization, “it is easier for ideas, information, persons, products, goods, and services to move across borders more easily and with fewer restrictions” Hazen, et al (2007:2). These situations help and increase the activities of criminal groups. Corruption also creates security problems due to the poverty and low wages of security personnel, some security personnel can easily be influenced by bribe and incentive by transnational arms dealers to aid importation and concealing of small and light weapons(SALW) in North-East Nigeria. The supply factors are the causes of (SALW) proliferation that have to do with the sources, transit of small and light weapons SALW or arms trafficking which means Nigeria manufactures, imports and exports small and light weapons SALW, this study concentrates on importation of (SALW) through illegal way or means by criminals and non- state actors to illegally used it to achieve their personal selfish ambition in Nigeria.



Therefore, sources of illegal (SALW) in Nigeria include; “cross border smuggling, security black marketeering and rentals, local fabrication or manufacturing, organized crime and gun running, air transportation agent, arms broker and local blacksmith”. Adele, *et al* (2008:12) The same author further explained that the causes of the proliferation of SALW or illegal arms trafficking in Nigeria include; “smuggling and trafficking in small arms and ammunition, local arms production, arms theft”. Some of the factors that contribute to proliferation of small and light weapons(SALW) include; “poverty, the gap between the rich and poor is very wide, selfish and primitive possessions of ill-gotten wealth, porous borders and of border patrol and protection, security presence at the border, ethno religious armed violent conflict, to make easy or blood money, self - defense, rise in daily crime rate”. The motivation for SALW possession and proliferation includes “military activities, conflicts, politician’s personal security arrangement and insecurity” according to Hazen, et al (2007:2)<sup>16</sup>.

## **6. The Role of Security Personnel in Combating Proliferation of Small arms and Light Weapons(SALW) in North-East Nigeria**

The Nigerian security agencies which include the police, customs service, the immigration service, the Civil Defense Corps and the Vigilante group are charged with the responsibility of checking illegal arms trafficking, circulation, and proliferation of SALW. Illegal arms were confiscated and offenders are prosecuted in a court of law. Despite the fact that a large amount of small and light weapons( SALW) were confiscated by these law enforcement agents, still illegal arms trafficking are on the increase on daily basis due to the activities of “Boko Haram” insurgency. The security could not control or reduce the armed conflict and to ensure law and order and proliferation of (SALW). The situation has worsened, law and order are almost absent in some places in the North East region of Nigeria. Provision of security to the citizens is not adequate, some of the security personnel are not competent due to lack of training and modern equipment to combat criminals, and therefore, there is a security gap and lapses and the use of private, volunteers and vigilante to be introduced to close this gap. The use of vigilante, civilian volunteers have compounded the existing problem of circulation and proliferation of (SALW).

In North-East Nigeria, because of the porous nature of the border with Cameroun, Chad, Niger, the border may be crossed at any time by various means of transportation, land, air, and land. The border surveillance and control are poor and security personnel are not enough and coupled with the fact that there is no modern equipment’s to track down criminals and their activities at the border. The inability of the law enforcement agencies, the police, customs, and immigration to checkmate the inflow of small and light

weapons(SALW) into Nigeria through the border has worsened the security situation in the Country.

## **7. Security Implications for Proliferation of Small arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in North-East Nigeria**

The circulation and proliferation of small and light weapons(SALW) in North-East Nigeria has contributed to the “Boko Haram” conflict in the region, and criminal activities like ethno religious conflicts, cross border banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery, and other violent crimes. Accumulation of illegal arms or build-up has contributed to violence, ethno religious crises, insurgency leading to the death of thousands of people and destruction of properties. The small and light weapons(SALW) assist to prolong civil conflict, displacement of population, peace, law, and order has been undermined, economic activities of individuals and communities have been devastated, the “BokoHaram” conflict has caused a lot of difficulties to the affected communities in the region by rendering them to Internally Displaced Persons (IDP). The IDP is vulnerable to violent conflict like robbery, rape and is prone to affecting with contagious diseases due to poor sanitary conditions at the resettlement camp. The security implication of (SALW) on human security is evident in financial losses caused by the conflict.

Apart from the huge cost of government spending on security, the individual also loses property and family members as a result of violent armed conflict. The loss of property compounded the problem of poverty, frustration, and deprivation of the affected community. Many children have been left without parents. Wives without husbands, when a family unit is dismantled, children suffered and their future is bleak and they denied decent and good parental background or care, many may end up as juvenile delinquency or as a social problem to the society and involved themselves in violent criminal activities, any person killed or injured in violent armed conflict as a result of small and light weapons(SALW), they are psychologically and physically retarded and economically affected in the aftermath. Women, children and the aged people were the most affected or hit because they are the most vulnerable to violent conflict.SALW proliferation has led to an increase in violent crimes that undermine human security, such as rape, cultism, armed robbery, kidnapping, the insurgency in the North-East region of Nigeria.

## **8. Conclusion**

From the foregoing analysis on circulation and proliferation of small and light weapons(SALW) in North-East Nigeria, the article observed that due to the fact that the Nigerian government does not live up to its expectations to tackle the high level of demand

of small and light weapons(SALW) by non- state actors propelled the circulation and proliferation of small and light weapons(SALW), while the security operatives due to numerous difficulties mentioned at the beginning of the article could not control the supply or inflow of illegal arms and ammunition into the country and this ugly situation has worsened the security situation. This demand and supply factors of small and light weapons(SALW) have become a serious security threat to the corporate existence and development of the political entity of Nigeria as a country. Therefore, there is a need for the Nigerian government to come up with a master plan of action and strategy to stop and clean up the circulation of illegal arms in the society by adoption and implementing serious reforms agenda on good governance, security and diplomacy with neighboring countries.

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