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SMALL ARMS PROLIFERATION AND ITS NATIONAL SECURITY IMPLICATIONS IN NIGERIA, 1985 – 2016

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Abstract

This work examines the implications of small arms proliferation and its security challenges in Nigeria. The growing trends of small arms abuse and misuse pose a lot of challenges to Nigerian people and must be tackled to halt the blistering reign of destructive culture and impunity from gaining deeper root in Nigeria. The availability of small arms fuels communal conflicts, terrorism, Fulani herdsmen crisis, armed robbery, kidnapping, extra-judicial killings and other vices. Using the survey research method, the findings reveals that the availability of small arms is the major contributory factor to the alarming rate of criminal activities in Nigeria and that the inability of the Nigerian government and law enforcement agencies to checkmate the activities of these evil perpetrators and the sources of small arms supply in Nigeria has heightened and worsened the security architecture in Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: **Small arms, proliferation, national security, terrorist activities, Nigeria.**

Introduction

The contemporary Nigerian society has been transformed into a milieu of violence where human insecurity ranging from hunger, poverty, armed robbery, communal conflicts, kidnapping, extra-judicial killings, ethno-religious violence to Fulani herdsmen crisis and terrorism have become the society's syndrome of existence. This is apparently a paradigm of the Nigerian society where one cannot walk into the middle of the town square and express his/her view without fear of attack from evil perpetrators of these vices who awash the society with small arms.

Small arms proliferation refers to the propensity of arms in Nigeria that have found their ways into public and private hands. According to Ero and Ndinga-Muvumba (2004:224), small arms and light weapons do not, of course, cause conflicts but they become part of the conflict equation by fuelling and exacerbating underlying tensions, generating more insecurity, deepening the sense of crisis and adding to the number of casualties. The easy availability of small arms has increased the lethality of armed conflicts, as well as extending the duration of conflicts in many communities in Nigeria (Okoro, 2007). The insecurity and uncertainty incited by the prevalence of the weapons led to more gun ownership, increasing the recourse of armed violence as a means to resolve conflicts.

Most of these sophisticated small arms used by the various groups for prosecution or commission of crimes surpassed the ones available to law enforcement agents in Nigeria. They have made insecurity widespread and rendered peaceful coexistence unfriendly. In fact, Nigerian society appears to be a classic case of Robert Kaplan's note that West Africa is

becoming a symbol of worldwide demographic, environmental and societal stress in which criminal anarchy emerges as the real strategic danger (Kaplan, 2000). This becomes evident especially in societies that are polarized along ethnic, religious, linguistic and ideological lines where each struggles for survival, and uses every legitimate and illegitimate means available to pursue their course.

The proliferation of small arms has undermined personal, social and economic security in Nigeria. Unemployment and deprivation from natural inheritance couple with the inordinate ambition for political power have increased the spate of demand for small arms. The increasing unrest has triggered arms race between communities, attempting to stockpile more and more arms for protection. This, in turn, has fueled mutual suspicion and insecurity. Again, insecurity occasioned by the level of criminality not only hampers the prospects of the local population but invariably leads to migration and brain drain. The global trotting of many regimes in Nigeria yielded little or no dividend because of the level of insecurity in the country that scared away foreign investors. Therefore, the paper sets out essentially to establish the fundamental problems associated with small arms, the massive inflow of small arms and the increasing incidences of crisis coupled with its security implications in Nigeria.

Social Contract Theory

In examining the role of the proliferation of small arms in relation to national security in Nigeria, the research adopts the social contract theory of Thomas Hobbes which states the State is supposed to maintain a monopoly on the instrument of violence on behalf of the citizens and guarantees security to the citizens in return. The theory posits that 'citizens accept to give up their rights to protect themselves to the State on the understanding that it will provide adequate physical and social security for them (Obasi, 2006). In doing so, people transfer possession of arms to the State and its coercive agencies and, however, retain social ownership of the weapons. This enables them to reclaim their rights to self-help whenever the State failed to fulfill its part of the social contract. Small arms proliferation in Nigeria is partly a reflection of this general failure of the social contract. In as much as the three levels of government--local, state and federal are perceived not to meet their obligations to the people, their legitimacy is widely contested by a majority of Nigerians. The government, on its part, will continue to contest the right of the State and its apparatuses to monopolize society's instrument of violence. The proliferation of small arms is a strong indication that people are increasingly repossessing their rights to bear arms in order to protect themselves and make a living whether legally or illegally.

The failure of the Nigerian State to provide social and economic security legitimatized illegal possession and abuse of small arms in Nigeria for two reasons. The first reason is the inadequacy of the existing security system to offer protection to society. Secondly, Nigeria's security system is subject to manipulation by a few individuals and ethnic groups. Within this context, it does seem that successive governments failed in their responsibility to provide adequate security for the people save oil companies and indirectly Fulani herdsmen where the government provided armed security for oil installations and cows at the detriment of human beings. Consequently, myriads of conflicts fueled by the activities of transnational oil corporation and Fulani herdsmen brought about the suppression of legitimate agitations and perpetration of violence against many communities.

Small Arms Proliferation: An Overview

Scholars have no universally acceptable definition of small arms. Closest to a global definition is that provided in the report of the United Nations Panel of Expert on small arms and light weapons. Rather than providing a single definition, the experts made 'a distinction between small arms which are designed for personal use and light-weapons which are designed for use by several persons(Sesay, A. and Simbine, A., 2006). Thus, small arms include revolvers, self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, assault rifles, machine guns and light machine guns. While light weapons include 'portable grenade launchers - mobile or mounted, portable anti-aircraft cannons, portable anti-tank cannons; non-recoil guns; portable anti-tank missile launchers or rocket launchers; portable anti-aircraft missile launchers; and mortars with a calibre of less than 100mm (ECOWAS Convention, 2006).Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) provided no single definition, rather it referred to small arms as arms used by one person and which include notably, firearms and other destructive arms or devices such as exploding bomb, a grenade, a rocket launcher, a missile system or land mine, revolvers and pistols with automatic loading rifles and carbines, machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns.

In the United States military circle, small arms are defined as small infantry weapons such as firearms that a soldier or civilian can carry. They are usually limited to revolvers, pistols, sub-machine guns, shotguns, carbines, assault rifles, rifles, snipers, squad, light machine guns and general purpose machine guns. US military also referred to small arms as guns or firearms that have less than 20mm. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) definitions of small arms extend to all crew –portable direct fire weapons of a calibre less than 50mm. Based on NATO's definition, most of the weapons referred to, by ECOWAS are included; even the heavy machine guns. Not only that, almost all the weapons used in some conflict areas, especially Nigeria are more of small arms since they have no massive capacity to destroy life and property within the moment of detonation. Unless the contents dictate otherwise, there is no difference between commercial firearms like hunting rifles and small arms designed for military use such as assault rifles. While the UN's definition is used as a baseline, the analysis in this work is broader, allowing consideration of weapons such as home-made (crafts) firearms that might be overlooked using the United Nations definitions.

In line with this view, Alaku (2012) defines small arms as 'man-portable, inexpensive and easy-to-use weapons of lethal barreled quality from which any shot, bullet or missile can be discharged. These categories of weapons are produced both locally and externally under license or based on indigenous designs. The nomenclature "small arms" which appears deceptive in the ears of some people in our society refers to guns or arms of various sizes that never exceed 50 millimetres. Examples include a pistol, den-gun, AK47, hand grenade, assault rifle, light machine gun, general purpose machine gun, land mine, automatic loading rifle, carbine, gun, sport rifle, air-gun and rocket rifle.

Arms manufacturing has been on the increase since the 1980s as 300 companies in 52 countries were into it (Brown & Dhanapala, 2000). More significantly, there was also an increase in the number of countries with facilities to manufacture small arms because 22 developing countries had joined the group of small arms and light weapons manufacturers (Stohl, 2004). The statistical data of arms production and distribution trends, Arehshot Tom, articulated recently shows that there are an estimated 1734 companies in 198 countries worldwide

involved in arms production (Okibe, 2016:16). Over 875 million small arms in circulation worldwide with many of them illegally in the hands of non-state actors and civilians and about 100 million small arms are in circulation in Africa causing huge problems for the continent and its people (Ndawana, Hove, Chuliku, 2018:49). In other words, the developed countries; USA, Britain, France, Russia and China account for the 88% of the world conventional weapons exports (Kings, 1985:86).

This seemed to have confirmed the alarm raised by Anslem Yabouri, UN Director on Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament that out of the 500 million small arms in sub-Sahara Africa, 350 million are in circulation in Nigeria(Yabouri,2017). There is a rough estimation of one to three million small arms in circulation in Nigeria mostly in civilian possession that is obtained illegally (Moses and Ngomba, 2017:1641). In other words, the estimated rate of private gun ownership in Nigeria is 1.5 firearms for 100 persons and Nigeria ranked at No. 133rdposition in comparison with the rate of private gun ownership in 178 countries. This development cast doubts on the essence of the regulatory and prohibition laws, including the enforcement strategy put in place by the Nigerian government to prevent arms proliferation, abuse and misuse. Again, needless doubting the unhidden posturing of the Western world over arms production and distribution for economic interest at the expense of sanctity of human lives. This shows that the issues of arms prohibition acts and other related acts of opposition were more of lip-service since it has its financial inputs to the nations' gross domestic product.

The link between Small Arms Proliferation and National Security

The concept of security has become increasingly clear that the successful attainments of national security through the stockpile of military hardware do not necessarily bring security to people. Rather people continue to suffer and die from insecurity with the attendant crimes and conflict-related effects. However, the concept of security is predicated upon a vision of a fairer arrangement of society in which the State assumes a general responsibility to ensure that individual is secured by organized collective action against the risk of social and economic life (Nwabueze,1993:168). According to Amitai Etzioni, security is defined as 'the condition under which most people, most of the time, are able to go about their lives, venture onto the street, work, study and participate in public life… without acute fear of being killed or injured' (Etizoni, A., 2007:2). Security rest not merely on guns and corps but also on a shared moral culture, one that makes most people behave appropriately most of the time because they believe this is what they ought to do. Put differently, security evolves from the culture of the society as the major driving force of people and general development.

Security to scholars, policy-makers, opinion moulders, politicians refers to military protection. Traditionally, insecurity is generally considered to be aggression across national frontiers and the fomenting of internal rebellion, revolt or insurrection by external forces. Conflicts and rivalries between states and deep involvement of outside states in regional animosity as well constituted potent threats to national security. Even the overall militarization of society and its introduction of destabilizing armaments also created a pervasive sense of insecurity. This concept is based on the assumption that the explanation of traditional security dilemmas is inadequate for the understanding and appreciation of contemporary security problems because it places too much emphasis on external military threat and military build-up as the appropriate response.

It is now generally accepted by many people in the society that military capabilities alone do not guarantee security, and nations can reach a point at which acquisition of additional military power would not necessarily provide adequate security. In a nutshell, security no longer refers to the size of arms and the strength of a nation's military to safeguard national values. Robert McNamara, the United States Secretary of Defense under John Kennedy noted that security is 'development' (Olarenfemi, 2006:142). He averred that any society that seeks to achieve military security against the background of acute food shortage, population explosion, poverty, hunger, disease, low technological development, inadequate and inefficient public utilities, and chronic problem of unemployment, has a false sense of security. Based on the assertion of Robert McNamara, every nation in the world needs and deserves not only economic security but to work hard to achieve and protect it. Nigeria, on the contrary, is endangered by the above vices since the crime, sectarian violence, ethno-communal conflicts, corruption, Fulani herdsmen, terrorism and other vices are bywords that encourage small arms proliferation, abuse and misuse. The inability of the police or law enforcement agents to provide adequate security led to the rise of private security outfits for the protection of individuals, corporation, organizations and diplomatic mission (Yorom, 2005:185). Similarly, the general populace that has not been given adequate protection resorted to raising vigilante groups, militias to guard, protect and defend their political, ethnic, religious and social interests. Even the law enforcement agents abuse the system with siege mentality which is manifested through extra-judicial killings ((Yorom, 2005:185)

Issues of Small Arms Proliferation

Generally, capitalism is exploitative and survives only on its ability to subjugate the poor. At the base of small arms proliferation in Nigeria is widespread poverty despite Nigeria's status as a major oil exporting country. A sharp contradiction, therefore, exists between the fact that Nigeria is the world 6th largest exporter of oil and Africa's largest economy while the living standard in Nigeria is the 36th lowest in the world in terms of Human Development Index (HDI). According to the 2002 United Nations Human Development Index Report, life expectancy at birth is below 50 years for both men and women. Nigeria's Human Development Index (HDI) is 0.462 placing it in the 148th position, out of a total of 178 countries (Ebo, 2002:18). Nigeria falls below Ghana (0.548), Zimbabwe (0.551), Kenya (0.513), and Togo (0.493). As a result, individuals living in poverty are more vulnerable to manipulations coupled with theft and violent crime involving the use of arms.

The 2016 World Bank poverty report confirmed that poverty levels among Nigerians were higher in 2016 than in the 1990s (World Bank Report,2016). Employment opportunities and infrastructures are mainly concentrated in urban centres or constituencies that are loyal to the ruling political parties. This fuels crisis and inequality as these deprived or excluded groups express their grievances through the use of small arms against the State. The widespread poverty and limited economic opportunities in Nigeria were exploited by the Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen, Niger Delta militants and the non-violent Indigenous People of Biafra to recruit and radicalize the poor, uneducated and vulnerable people through cash distribution. The rural-urban migration created the leeway for the Fulani settlement and claim of ownership, and at the same time, wreaks havoc on many communities resulting in the killings of innocent Nigerians.

Inadequate Border Control:

Nigeria is a vast country covering 923,768sq kilometres with more than 36450 kilometres of land and maritime borders. Nigeria shares its land borders with four countries: Benin (773km), Cameroun (1690km), Niger (1049km) and Chad (87km). Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) confirmed that there are 1487 illegal routes to Nigeria through the borders (Abayomi, 2013). The surveillance of these vast routes poses problems. In Borno State, for example, owing to the porous nature of the border with Cameroon, the border area is easily accessible at any point by various means of transport during the dry season, thus rendering all the government's efforts to curb the illegal aliens, bandits and smugglers of small arms and light weapons ineffective. In 2013, Cameroonian security forces arrested a man who was transporting 655 guns to Nigeria and another 5400 AK47 were also intercepted in Marona in Northern region of Cameroon for the same destination (Adeniyi, 2017:12).

In this connection, Akpor (2012:3), affirms that 'most of the weapons of Boko Haram sect enter the country through the Apapa Wharf and Northern borders of Chad, Mali and Niger republics. The implication of this is that the small arms were evacuated into tankers with the assistance of some members of the authorized security agencies who are members of the group at the borders. The tankers sometimes manoeuvred all checking points until they get to their destination where the contents are again evacuated into the designated areas. In addition, officers on a peace mission to the Libyan and Malian crises compounded the nature of small arms circulation, abuse and misuse in the whole of Africa (Chinweokwu,2017:35). Based on the small arms survey assessment of Libya's illicit arms market- small arms and light weapons such as heavy machine guns, man-portable air defence systems, shoulder fire recoilless weapons, rocket launchers, antitank guided missiles, grenades launchers, and different types of rifles can be bought online (Small Arms Survey, 2016). This became detrimental to the whole of West Africa especially Nigeria as these large numbers of arms exported to West African sub-region encouraged the abuse of human rights and promoted a high degree of violent conflicts and mortality rates.

Small arms proliferation in West Africa is linked to structural breakdown of institutions that have longstanding pervasive political and social ills. Police officers and soldiers' illegal sales of weapons were the major sources of arms supply. These, President Olusegun Obasanjo, in his monthly chat with the National Television Authority of 2nd December 2001, summed it up thus:

> most of the ammunition, we have…come from security agencies …Police…the military. Only recently, we found that 3000 rounds of ammunition were sold here in Abuja by the police and in Jos by the military (NTA Interview, 2001).

The miserable living and working conditions meted on the populace by the rulers are the factors of these ugly developments. This situation not only generates corruption but also encourages the agents themselves to turn to crime. Obasanjo's statement implies that these security agents hired out their weapons to criminal to enable the perpetrators to engage in law-breaking in order to shore up most of their unattained needs. This was evident in February 2016 when some Nigerian soldiers were arrested for selling small arms illegally to Boko Haram insurgents (Okibe, 2016:16). These arms supplied consisted of I smoke grenade, 2136 live rounds of 7.62mm ammunition, 50 live round of 7.6mm ammunition, 5 magazines of AK47 and 2 Browning machine gun live rounds of ammunition.

Relics of Colonialism and Small Arms Proliferation

The changing pattern of the environment caused by the negative impact of colonialism created room for conflict in Nigeria. Colonialism had been fastened on Africa like a steel grid of which the debit outweighed the credit. Of all the colonial legacies established in Nigeria, the worst of it all was the amalgamation of two strange bedfellows of Northern and Southern Protectorates which appeared to be the hallmark of ethnic cleansing and religious violence. The European colonialists sowed the seed of discord and conflict by forcing two incompatible groups of divergent ethnic shades and colours to live together. The seed of discord sown by the colonialists germinated with a lot of economic and socio-political insecurity, which the benefactors used at their whims and caprices against the indigenous people.

Besides, the granting of independence by the colonialists had a corrupt tinge to it. The colonialists created a misbegotten political arrangement in which a pragmatic political power lay in the hands of a Prime Minister from the North and a figure-head called President from the South in order to safeguard their interest (Adeoye, 2014:1). This implies that the departing colonialist, for some intent skewed the Nigerian configuration in favour of the North to guarantee their electoral representation in the federal legislature. Against this background, it is observed that subtle efforts were not made by the colonialists to encourage unity or integration; rather they fanned the ember of ethnic rivalries and conflicts. This seemed to be the origin of the tragic flaws in our endeavours to protect ourselves. Fashun (2009) notes that the land mine was well laid out for foreseeable political crises. These colonial misadventures, among others, spurred people of different ethnic groups to be at daggers-drawn and set the environment for small arms acquisition, abuse and misuse.

Implications of Small Arms to Nigerian National Security

Small arms not only escalated the intensity of armed conflicts in Nigeria but also were responsible for the majority of the deaths, massive internal displacement of local populations and socio-economic cum political insecurity. During the indigenes/settlers crisis in Jos (2003), the Fulani population in Langtang North and South Local Government Areas was totally sacked, and only pockets of Muslim settlements remained (Florquin, N. and Berman, E., 2005:33). Similarly; non-Muslim population fled Shendam, Quanan Pan, Wuse and Langtang Local Government Areas. According to Global Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) project, at least 10,000 people have been killed and 800,000 people displaced by outbreaks of communal violence across the country (Florquin, N. and Berman, E., 2005:35). Between, late December 2003-January 2004, at least 10,000 inhabitants of the towns of Babangida, Dankalawar, Geidam and Kanamma in Yobe state fled their homes owing to fighting between Al-Sunna Wal-Jamma also known as Boko Haram and government forces. In 2003, violence between security forces and federated Niger Delta Ijaw communities resulted in the displacement of an estimated 4000 people (Yorom, 2005:184).

Between 2006-2014 statistics from Nigerian Match Data Base indicate that the country recorded a total of 615 violent deaths traceable to Fulani herdsmen in addition to 61,314 violent fatalities by the same group (Olayokun, 2014:3). In the same vein, the British Broadcasting Corporations report on the farmers and Fulani herdsmen violence claims that between 2001-2014 the crises caused the death of 50,000 people of which women and children accounted for almost 35000 people (BBC Report, 2017). Based on UNDP estimates, 24,771 people were killed and 5,507 wounded between 2011 -2015 with most of the fatalities in

Nigeria (UNDP, 2017). In July 2014, Nigeria was estimated to have had the highest number of terrorist killings in the world with the recorded number of 3477 in addition to 6600 people killed in 146 attacks. Since the insurgency started in 2009, the terrorist groups have killed 20,000 people and displaced 2.3 million people from their home(Silverstein,2015). The import of these reports portrays Nigeria as one of the killing fields of innocent citizens in full glare of the state coercive agencies.

The brazenness with which Fulani herdsmen sometimes referred to as the Boko Haram foot soldiers, slaughtered settled communities and razed down villages are not only a sad reminder but also a crude reminder of enormous security challenges in Nigeria. Therefore, it is plausibly believed that the terrorist group has at its disposal some weapons, vehicles, bombs and ammunition that it uses to kill with unfathomable wantonness. The activities of Fulani herdsmen, Boko Haram and government inaction have increased food insecurity, hardship and underdevelopment as many farmers have abandoned their farmlands and migrated to the urban centres for their safety (Chinweokwu, 2017:9). Research carried out by the British Department for International Development between 2013-2016 shows that the crises have caused the country an estimated loss of $14 billion within 3 years. Also, States affected by herdsmen/farmers conflicts lost an average of 47% of taxes (internally generated revenue) during the attacks (DFID, 2017).

Other tragic flaws of our nationhood were the clamour for cattle colony which the federal government of Buhari appeared to have turned a blind eye against the statements of the Miyetti cattle herders that tried to coerce communities to release their natural inheritance (land) for cows at the detriment of food crops and farmers' source of livelihood. The north has a vast land mass which stretches over 80% of the land in Nigeria but the poor management of the land space has put pastoralists into a violent struggle for land in the South. These attacks and deliberate destruction of farmlands in Southern Nigeria for grazing is a time bomb that will determine the future of Nigeria when it eventually explodes.

The propensity of small arms in Nigeria threatens not only the existence of the state but also the livelihoods of millions of people across the country. The situation cast doubt on the essence of government and its security or primary function. Arms recovered of unauthorized persons are alarming and apart from some seizures occasionally made, the resupply network seems to fill the gap and made the recovered ones unnoticed. In October 2016, the Rivers State Police Command arrested a Nigerian importer and dealer on prohibited firearms and recovered hundreds of G3, AK47 rifles, and Berretta automatic rifles (Wellington, 2017:20). In Anambra State, weapons found in the amour of a kidnap kingpin created in the psyche of well-informed Nigerians that the nation is not only sitting on the keg of gun powder but could sink in armed violence if proliferation in small arms and light weapons were not checked. These weapons include 27AK47 rifles, 1K2 rifle, 2 types of 06 rifles, one general purpose machine gun, one rocket launcher, 17 rocket rifles, six pump action guns, 3dane guns, Beretta pistol and 13 rocket grenades. Also included were 12800 rounds of Ak47 live ammunition, 530 rounds of LAR ammunition, 95 rounds of general purpose machine gun live ammunition and 143 magazines (Madu, 2012:33).

Between 2012 and 2016, on 17 different occasions at various points of entry, the Nigerian Custom impounded over 60,000 rounds of the ammunition imported into the country from

the United States and Europe. Over 288 rifles, 35 rocket-propelled guns and imposed explosive devices (IEDs) including pistols, mortar bombs, sub-machine guns, the various calibre of ammunition, 50 Cameroonian passports and a Toyota jeep were recovered by the Cameroonian security forces from two suspected armed dealers (Adeniyi,2016:25). Another arrest of a terrorist in a green Peugeot vehicle led to the recovery of 15AK47 rifles, 12 magazines, and various unassembled rifles (Ibe, 2016:25). In 2015, over 5078 arms and 11,917 ammunitions were recovered from armed robbers, kidnappers, cultists by the Rivers State Police Command. In addition, 243 armed robbers and kidnappers were killed in various gun battles with security agents across the state. On April 19, 2016, the Police recovered from Delta State 20AK47 rifles, 70 den guns, 30 double barrel guns and over 1000 live ammunition mostly from Fulani herdsmen (Ugbudu,2017:3). Even the arms-in-flame programme carried out by the federal government to destroy small arms recovered from criminals in various states like" Zamfara 5000 guns, Benue 600 guns, Katsina 425 guns were all more of scratching the surface compared to the weapons in circulation (Adepegba,2018).

Therefore, looking at the magnitude of weapons in individual and collective possessions, it elicits questions as to whether they are solely for acts related to robbery and kidnapping or there are ulterior motives to levy war on Nigeria. Heavy caches of sophisticated weapons were paraded and publicly displayed by the militants, insurgents, terrorists, cattle rustlers and Fulani herdsmen. The rate at which these illegal rifles freely circulate, questions the commitment of the government towards the security of the nation. Moreover, the proliferation of small arms is gradually eroding State sovereignty which resulted in the increased calling into question the idea of whether the State has full and exclusive control over its destiny. These groups have made borders porous and state vulnerable to external pressures or challenges from her neighbours.

The faltering Nigeria economy coupled with concomitant socio-economic upheaval and a weakened Nigerian State increase the government reliance on coercion as opposed to dialogue, to quell unrest. The repeated failures of security agencies to protect lives and property during revolts spurred the demand for weapons among citizens and communities either as deterrence against their opponents or for human right abuses. In most ethno-communal conflicts, non-state actors who have currently graduated into ethnic militias or community vigilantes, with agenda of protecting various ethnic groups or communities used small arms to wreak havoc, maim or torture and kill innocent Nigerians. These regimes that conferred status on these atrocities had become helpless over the activities of these armed bandits, hired assassins, cultists, political thugs, terrorist groups, Fulani herdsmen and Boko Haram who carried out widespread and dynamic human rights abuses. In fact, more than a half million Nigerians passed through these unofficial and unrecorded data from 1985-2016. And many of them suffered disabilities and sometimes died of untreated injuries inflicted by small arms. The lives of those affected by small arms-related violence are often changed forever due to long-term disability and on-going psychological trauma.

Conclusion

The work has examined the concept of small arms proliferation and its implications for national security. Small arms not only pose a great challenge to the constituted authority whose duty it is to regulate the flow of arms but also threaten the corporate existence of Nigeria as well as lives and properties. The widespread availability of small arms to public

and private hands have become potent sources of criminal activities such as ethnic clashes, communal conflicts, activities of Fulani herdsmen, terrorism and other vices being committed against humanity. This drama of violence has caused untold atrocities, high mortality rate, displacement, and sexual violence, as well as poverty, psychological trauma, shattering lives, cultism and proliferation of ethnic warlords or militias. These have become relatively a common occurrence in all Nigerian communities.

The increased incidence of armed conflicts in Nigeria, particularly since the 1990s, fueled the proliferation of small arms, abuse and misuse. The economic hardship that emanated from institutional inadequacies of all the regimes aggravated poverty, youth restiveness, facilitate ethnic communal conflicts, terrorism, Fulani herdsmen and undoubtedly stimulated small arms acquisition and misuse. Conflict over oil, grazing of cattle, political power, chieftaincy, land, and resource control have involved different non-state actors in the small arms acquisition and misuse. The entire scenario plunged the society into psychological trauma of insecurity and there is no room for a healthy air of life in such a precarious situation.

Recommendations

The government should set up and enact an act of parliament for community-based security organization in the form of vigilante. This organization will serve as the eye of the federal and state governments, and provide door-to-door security checks and balances of criminal activities taking place in the suburbs since the criminals use the suburbs as their hideouts. It will not only create employment but primarily enable the government to pin-up the perpetrators of human rights abuses, armed robbery, kidnapping, Fulani herdsmen, terrorism, militancy, illicit dealers and fabricators of small arms, and bring them to justice.

There is the need for the restructuring of the Nigerian political system so that each region will manage its own affair politically, economically and socially with a view to achieving a strong security architecture. Governments should exercise political and administrative power to manage the country's resources, in a manner that is rational, open, transparent, accountable, equitable and responsive to the people's needs.

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