

National Security and the Threat of Arms Proliferation: A Case Study of Nigeria's Niger Delta

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Abstract

The implications of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) on Nigeria's national security are mammoth posing an existential threat to the state. The crisis that engulfed the Niger Delta, especially from the 1990s onward was exacerbated by the copious availability of SALWs in the region. Adopting a historical approach, this paper examines the strategic implications of the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) in the delta region for Nigeria's national security. The Social Conflict Theory and Human Needs Theory are adopted as theoretical frameworks for the study. Based on its findings, the paper concludes that the Nigerian governments have not been entirely sincere to the process of curbing the scourge of arms proliferation in the country. It recommends effective regulations and border control as an efficient measure to address the illicit trade in SALWs and its proliferation and asserts that if the problems of proliferation in the Niger Delta region and other parts of Nigeria are not addressed frontally, the non-state armed and warlords operating in the regions will undermine the state and plunge it into a dangerous conflict zone where the gangs will rule at the expense of legitimate authority, development, security and progress of all.

Keywords: National Security, Arms Control, Arms Proliferation, SALW, Militancy, DDR, Amnesty, Niger Delta, MEND

Background and Overview of implications of Arms Proliferation

National security is the security and defence of a state including its citizens, economy and institutions. It is one of the highest duties of government not negotiable on any term. It encompasses the range of measures aimed at the protection of vital interests of the state, its citizens, economy and institutions for the sustainable development of society and

timely detection, prevention and neutralization of real and potential threats to national interests. Today, every sovereign state of the world will employ all means necessary to protect its territorial integrity against external aggressions and internal security menaces. A state will do whatever it takes to suppress threats to its existence, whether within or without. Hence, the national security of a state takes high priority in the affairs of government. Accordingly, a lot of resources is committed to maintaining the security and defence systems of a state.

However, despite the evident aversion for insecurity and the concomitant huge investment in maintaining defence and security systems, most states of the world, especially African countries, are yet faced with security challenges that threaten their continued existence today. A major phenomenon contributing significantly to internal security threats in many African countries has been the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs), a scourge that has seemingly eluded all international, regional and national control measures. In fact, the proliferation of SALWs has been contributory, in no small way, to the rising rate of crime and criminality, outbreaks of violent conflict, rebellion movement, uprisings, insurgencies and terrorism, among others. Hence, the proliferation of small arms has remained a major threat to national security in Africa, with gruesome examples of outbreaks of civil wars in many countries and the development of militant groups that threaten internal security in others (Annan, 2014, p. 3).

Nigeria's grisly civil war experience is an indelible incident that brings to mind the tragic implications of the proliferation of SALWs to national security. The availability of SALWs to the seceding Biafran rebels culminated in a fratricidal war that claimed millions of lives and the destruction of a lot of properties. While the war lasted, Nigeria was precariously placed on the verge of breaking apart until victory changed her fate in favour of indivisibility. Lamentably, however, since the end of the civil war little has been done to curb the proliferation of SALWs in any part of the country seeing its disastrous impact in the outbreak of the war. Rather, attention was turned to politics of intolerance and corruption that further placed the country at national security risk, as socio-political events in the country continued to encourage and contribute to increased proliferation of SALWs across the federation, a phenomenon that in turn exacerbated the security situation in many parts of the country.

The proliferation of SALWs in the country and the attendant security challenges it engendered, especially in the delta region and north of the country has remained a massive testament to the ruinous implications of the availability of SALWs in the hands of unauthorized persons to national security and the overall wellbeing of the society. Particularly, the development of armed splinter groups or militant organisations with unimpeded access to SALWs in the Niger Delta became a threat to national security from the late 1990s. The armed groups developed partly as a response to perceived government injustice and neglect of the region, which produces the crude oil that sustains the nation's economy, and as part of the wider network of illegal bunkering activities in the region, among other reasons (Ojajorotu, 2009, p. 1; Ojajorotu & Okeke-Uzodike, 2006, pp. 92-93).

Essentially, the Ijaw had been the most involved in arms proliferation in the Niger Delta, as evident by the number of militant groups that developed among them. Between the late 1990s and 2013, Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers States became the hotbeds of militant activities in the Niger Delta; particularly, the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa, Warri area of Delta and Port Harcourt in Rivers were the prominent militant hotspot. The militant groups became villainously radical organisations that violently challenged the authority of the Nigerian government in the delta region over evident marginalization of the people in oil wealth distribution and environmental degradation resulting from the activities of oil multinationals. The adverse economic and security implications of the activities of these militant groups not only threatened national security but also affect the wellbeing of the region as the area became hugely militarized (Okumagba, 2009, p. 315).

Since safeguarding the sovereign, independence and territorial integrity of the state has been the central pillar of Nigerian national security policy, the protection of the country from attack or subversion from internal threats posed by the increasing proliferation of SALWs and the disrupting activities of armed groups in the Niger Delta became the priority of successive Nigerian government from the late 1990s (photius.com, 2020). As a matter of national security, the Nigerian government then resorted to the use of military action as part of measures for the protection of resources and rights considered critical to the functioning of the nation (Microsoft Corporation, 2008). It is against this

background that this paper examines from a historical and strategic perspective the implications of the proliferation of SALWs on Nigeria's national security using developments in the Niger Delta as a case study. Among other things, it examines the sources and causes of arms proliferation in the delta, the consequent emergent of militant groups in the delta, the government's response to the state of insecurity in the region and assessed government's Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) effort to curb the proliferation of SALWs in the Niger Delta region.

All over the world, controlling the proliferation of SALWs has been a daunting task. Nonetheless, government has the responsibility to ensure the safety and security of lives and properties of its citizens; these rights are fundamental and are captured in the national security policy of a nation. Hence, there is a need to study how the Nigerian government's preference for economic gains in the Niger Delta over development and poverty alleviation contributed to the proliferation of SALWs and to what extent has the availability of arms in the hands of unauthorised persons threaten the rights and resources of the people of the region. What is Nigeria's conception of national security? Does it include the protection of lives and properties of her citizen or it is narrowly restricted to the protection of the country from attack or subversion from within or without and the protection of resources and rights considered critical to the functioning of the state?

More so, following the catastrophic effect of the civil war on the country, it is expected that the Nigerian government would take stricter measures in controlling arms proliferation within the country to avoid a reoccurrence of such calamitous incidents that could threaten national security. Instead, SALWs had been almost freely proliferated in the country. Indeed, it appears successive Nigerian governments have rather reacted to the effects of arms proliferation rather than address the causes and sources of the widespread proliferation with genuine intentions to curb it. In the delta region, governments have, at various times, employed military actions to suppress the activity of criminalities that threatens national security and immediately go to sleep once it seems victory had been achieved without further effort to trace the sources of arms proliferation to tighten up security. Hence, there is a need to examine what measures did the government put in place to control the

proliferation of arms in the country as well as measures adopted to mop up SALWs in conflict areas. Put simply, is government, by its lack of appropriate action, in any way deliberately encouraging the proliferation of SALWs in the country. Enquiring into the highlighted problems would bring to fore the implications of the proliferation of SALWs on national security in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Theories are useful guidelines for effectively understanding social contradictions and other developments in human society. Whereas many theories provide theoretical groundings for understanding social conflict and threat to national security, two relevant theories – Social Conflict Theory and Human Needs Theory – are adopted as a theoretical framework for this study.

Social Conflict Theory (SCT)

The social conflict theory is a Marxist-based theory that presupposes that the lower class is competing for resources against an upper class that controls the government, courts and industry. It thus envisaged a social revolution that would be occasioned by class struggle. Social conflict is defined by socially unequal groups, such as the rich and the poor, the have and the have-not, competing for money and material goods, until becoming outright rebellion against the wealthy by the numerically superior poor. The social conflict theory provides a theoretical explanation for understanding the inexorable competition that exists among social classes in human society in the pursuit of their selfish interests. The four schools of social conflict theory are *radical criminology*, which based their explanation on class warfare, the *radical feminism* that focuses on discrimination against women, the *left realism* which believes that all most crimes are acts against individuals and not the state, and the *peace-making criminology* who believes that protests against war become worse than war itself (Briggs, 2020). The social conflict theory has its root in the classical work of Karl Marx and Fredric Engel. Both had claimed in the *Communist Manifesto* that “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild -master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant

opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes (Marx & Engels, 1998).

Another version of the social conflict theory states that social structures, such as political institutions, economic organs, legal institutions and traditional authorities etc. are created in every society through conflicts between groups with conflicting ideological interests and diverse means of control over state resources. Individuals and resources, in turn, are influenced by these structures and by the “unequal distribution of power and resources in the society” (Knapp, 1994, p. 232). Both versions of the social conflict theory perceive threats to security as motivated by the struggle among rival social classes or groups in their quest for groups economic interests, relevance and political dominance. In summary, the import of the two strands of social conflict theory is that in a society where exploitation of one class or group by a dominant class or group exists, if the dysfunctional relations is not redressed, it results in armed struggle and full-scale warfare. Social conflict theorists see socialism as a way to end class struggles by eliminating the economic advantages enjoyed by the upper class.

The Human Needs Theory (HNT)

John Burton is the leading human need theorist. He adapted Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs to conflict theory postulating that needs are an emergent collection of human development essentials. The main assumption of the human needs theory is that all humans have basic human needs, which they seek to fulfil, and that the denial and frustration of these needs by other groups or individuals could affect them immediately or later, thereby leading to conflict (Faleti, 2006). Basic human needs in this sense can be categorized under physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs. Deprivation of one or all of these needs could lead to conflict, in some instances violent armed conflict. Human need theorists identified a link between frustration, which forces humans into acts of aggression, and the need on the part of such individuals to satisfy their basic needs (Faleti, 2006). They also recognise the existence of negotiable and non-negotiable issues and conclude that needs, unlike interests, cannot be traded, suppressed or

bargained for (Coate & Rosati, 1988, p. 1; Carroll, Rosati, & Coate, 1988, p. 257).

In most societies in Nigeria, the culture and traditions of the people are tied to their various traditional occupations, since the most common types of traditional occupations are farming and fishing we find out that the livelihoods, culture and identity of most Nigerian traditional communities are tied to the land or rivers within these communities. According to John Burton, individuals cannot be taught to accept practices that destroy their identity and other goals that are attached to their needs and because of this, they are forced to react against the factors, groups and institutions that they see as being responsible for threatening such needs (Burton, 1990, pp. 3-4).

It is clear from both theories adopted for examining the implications of the proliferation of SALWs on national security that the poor socio-economic situation in the Niger Delta provided the platform for continued widespread proliferation of arms in the region to fight for their needs, security and recognition. The Human need theory is perhaps the more apt of the two theories in describing the central theme of this research. Unlike the social conflict theory that emphasises class struggle, the need theory emphasises core issues that are identifiable in the Niger Delta crisis and provide an insight into the factors that encouraged the proliferation of SALWs in the region. However, while the theories may not be perfect based on their general assumptions and presuppositions, they have provided clear insight into the conditions that encouraged the proliferation of SALWs and the resultant implications for national security.

Arms Proliferation and the Threat to National Security in the Niger Delta

The attitude of successive Nigerian governments to the growing state of insecurity in parts of the country since 1999 has raised questions in some quarters about the capacity of government to protect the state and its people against internal threats, especially in the Niger Delta, where a widespread proliferation of SALWs raised the level of insecurity to high priority. A state's readiness to protect itself and its citizens or its security plans against internal and external threats is advanced through a framework called national security policy. The national security policy defines what constitutes a threat to the survival of a state and how the state intends to

respond. Hence, a state's response to threats indicates the thrust of its national security policy. In the case of Nigeria, it appears the protection of resources considered critical to the survival of the state is prioritised over and above human security in the pursuit of national security matters. This approach to national security has incensed the people of the delta region, who have consequently adopted militancy as a strategy to pursue their cause against perceived state injustice.

The Thrust of Nigeria's National Security

The Niger Delta region is highly endowed with abundant resources and activities that are very critical to the nation's survival and development. For instance, the Nigerian oil industry, which is, today, the backbone of the nation's economy operates in this region. Consequently, any form of threat to economic activities in the delta region is deemed a threat to national security and would be resisted with all means necessary, including the use of force. Hence, securing and protecting Nigeria's economic interests in the delta is a matter of national security. The emergence of armed groups to challenge the Nigerian government and oil companies operating in the region, therefore, were deemed a threat to the nation's survival and, thus, a threat to national security.

This perception of national security is statist and emphasises more on the coercive elements of security in the pursuit of national interest. It interprets security from the standpoint of adequate preparedness for military action against threats to the state. This perception of national security evidently stems from the main realist paradigm that views the world as anarchical in nature and that the use of force remains the valid means of guaranteeing security. Essentially, the realist sticks to the classical postulation, which places a lot of emphasis on threats to survival and concentrates on the various form of military response on the management of such threats. Security perception from the emergence of the concept of nation-state in 1648 and sovereignty in 1713 up until the Cold War era sustained this militaristic perception.

A close look at national security perception in Nigeria reveals that security is conceived within a statist perspective. This perception of security reflects a realist paradigm of projecting power within a state-centric system. In the contemporary world, however, this perception is increasingly becoming problematic, because a state-centric perception in

a democratic rule is not only an anachronism but also a contradiction. After all, democracy emphasizes the individual as the centre of governance. In Nigeria, according to Thomas Imobighe, state and dominant class interests eclipse national security (Imobighe, 2003, p. 2). The security thrust is directed towards the interest of the ruling classes and their propertied allies, while most Nigerians are alienated from the security processes that ironically turn on them from time to time (Imobighe, 2003, pp. 2-3). The consequence of this is that national security planners tend to strengthen the coercive apparatus of the government any time the nation is faced with internal security challenges neglecting non-coercive and social welfare approaches. The development in Nigeria's Niger Delta region since the 1990s lends credence to this conclusion.

During the long years of military rule, Nigeria's national security was conceived and defined in military terms. Hence, this perception and operation of national security necessarily created a volatile atmosphere that threatens peace and security in the country. According to Nwoli, Nigeria's conception of security in its military-strategic dimensions, particularly in terms of defending political independence and sovereignty, and by extension the government, has pushed the country towards paying less attention to development issues. Hence, the country's failure to resolve social, economic and political problems has continued to remain the bedrock of her security dilemma.

In 1999, Nigeria transitioned to democracy, but the official paradigm of national security did not change, rather it has retained its statist posture, reflecting the skewed power relations between the ruling class and the ruled. Thus, it appears that successive Nigerian governments tacitly consent to the military conception of national security. This is obvious from the overrating of security and defence over other vital sectors of the economy, i.e. public health, education, agriculture, etc. This is evident from the wide-ranging difference in the budgetary allocation to security and defence when compared with allocations to other sectors. But, fundamentally, the actual security threat in Nigeria has not been external; it has been largely internally generated. Internal security threats have been fuelled largely by problems of underdevelopment, poverty, political instability, and social injustices, to

mention but a few. These threats cannot be reasonably confronted by military preparedness.

Instructively, Dwight D. Eisenhower, the 34th president of the United States, once remarked that “no matter how much we spend for arms, there is no safety in arms alone. Our security is the total product of our economic, intellectual, moral and military strength” (Hammel, 2009, p. 134). This presupposes that overemphasis on military hardware does not necessarily translate to or guarantee national security. The social, economic and political wellbeing of the people must be included in the government’s definition of national security in Nigeria. It is against this background that the Niger Delta youths have become hardened and militant in their response to the government’s improper definition of national security and response to the delta crisis with respect to the activities of oil multinationals in the region.

Arms Proliferation in the Niger Delta

The widespread proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) are nightmares that had not received commensurate attention from Nigerian governments and policymakers at all levels since the end of the civil war. The widespread proliferation of SALWs and its attendant consequences in the Niger Delta is a testament to this costly policy neglect. In the Niger Delta, SALWs and groups misusing them are dangerously out of control. Incidentally, the Niger Delta is the hub of oil and gas production in the country. Crude oil from the region accounts for the largest chunk of revenue accruable to the government. However, despite the oil wealth, the Niger Delta is riddled with abject poverty, a high unemployment rate, social deprivation and injustice, human rights violation, pollution and under-development. Hence, this paradoxical reality inevitably created a breeding ground for armed groups, organized crimes and arms proliferation in the region.

Significantly, the circulation of illegal arms within and across the delta has not only resulted in continued arms confrontation with the government but also increased the proclivity for crime and conflict in the delta communities with attendant retarding effects on development and economic investment (Agbiboa, 2013, p. 2; Naagbantou, 2020; Ero & Ndinga-Muvumba, 2004, pp. 23-24). There is no doubt that Nigeria’s internal security environment has continued to deteriorate deplorably since

the outbreak of the civil war in 1967, when the country became vulnerably opened to the influx of arms and ammunition, especially in the delta region, for the prosecution of the war by secessionist Biafra. Since then not much had been done to mop up arms or control its trafficking in the delta region. From the late 1990s onward, the security situation in the Niger Delta assumed a more worrisome dimension, as the government of Nigeria and the oil multinationals operating in the region continued to appear unwilling to accede to the agitations of the people. With almost unhindered access to SALWs, youth in the region turned to militancy, kidnapping, illegal oil bunkering, communal violence and armed confrontations with the government and one another.

While a number of reasons, including poverty, unemployment, lack of development, environmental degradation, communal conflict, criminal government neglect and the impunity of oil multinationals, understandably, has been advanced, as the most probable causes for militancy and armed violence in the Niger Delta, there is also the need to identify the sources of arms proliferation in the region. Research has shown that weapons in circulation in the delta region come from multiple sources, which include local fabrication, the residue of guns used during the civil war, thefts from government armouries, smuggling, dishonest government-accredited importers, ethnic militias, insurgents from neighbouring countries and some multinational oil corporations operating in the Niger Delta (Igijeh, 2006, p. 18).

Nigeria now features prominently in the three-spot continuum of transnational organized trafficking of SALWs in West Africa, as origin, transit route and destination, especially from the late 1990s. According to Wellington (2007), “the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, home to large oil and gas operations, is awash with dangerous Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)” (p. 18). Thus, giving the magnitude of SALWs proliferation in the Niger Delta region, there is no doubt that violent conflict would be inevitable. Regrettably, however, when and where SALWs are deployed, human security has been the main victim. The carnage that characterized the civil war underpins this assertion.

The Nigeria Civil War contributed to the massive proliferation of SALWs in the Niger Delta. Though the war was a national war, the delta region was a major theatre and its people constituted some of the combat forces. During the war, Britain and the Soviet Union supplied the federal

government with arms, while the French and Portuguese governments also armed secessionist Biafra with dangerous guns. Mercenaries from mostly European countries also engaged in the war and proliferated SALWs. The war ended, but no proper and comprehensive disarmament was done (Naagbantou, 2020, p. 5).

In the region, available land space or fishing grounds are becoming scarce owing to the large-scale environmental damage caused by the activities of oil companies. Often, communities, while trying to lay claims to land or forests, or sometimes claim the location of oil wells in case of compensation, etc. engage one another in armed violence and bloodletting. This is particularly the situation in Bayelsa, Delta and the River States. In fact, community members are levied a certain amount of money, and the money realized is used to procure arms that are used by the community defence groups. Likewise, in some communities where the crime rate is high, the rural village communities set up vigilante groups to provide security services for the area. Most of the vigilante groups in the delta communities are well-armed, especially with AK47 rifles.

From the various police and military raids of armed groups' armouries and hideouts in Bayelsa State, and the state government-initiated disarmament and cash-for-arms programmes in 2007, assorted and sophisticated weapons were recovered in droves. Weapons recovered from the militant groups included AK-47s, Czech SAs, Light Machine guns, Czech model 26s, stem MK 2s, Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG), MAT-49s, MG 36s, Berettas, HK G3s, FN-FALs, home-made guns, pump-action, shotguns and other sophisticated European-made assault rifles and explosives (Wellington, 2007, p. 23). These weapons were brought into the delta from various locations. Most of the assault rifles, such as the Russian AK-47, the German G3, the Belgian FN-FAL, the Czech machine guns and the Serbian RPGs are supplied by illegal dealers and sellers. Some of the illegal gun dealers are, however, Nigerians (Wellington, 2007, pp. 23-25). For instance, in October 2006, the Rivers State Police Command arrested Chris Ndudi Njoku, an arms dealer who specializes in importing prohibited firearms into Nigeria and supplied arms to militants in the delta (Human Rights News, 2006, p. 5). Henry Okah was another arms dealer that supplies SALWs to militants in the delta.

European dealers are also involved in trafficking SALWs into the Niger Delta. Nigeria has very porous borders on both its land and sea edges,

which make such illegal importations of weapons into the country easier. The smugglers use speedboats to connect with ships on the high seas and then ferry the arms back to shore. Asari Dokubo, leader of the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDPVF) confirmed this method in 2005, when he claimed, “we are very close to international waters, and it’s easy to get weapons from ships” (IRIN News, 2020). Essentially, most of the illegal smuggling of weapons into the delta region is done through the sea. According to IANSA and Oxfam (2006), the international trade in SALWs in the Niger Delta is believed to be dominated by ruthless Ukrainian and Russian dealers who swapped thousands of automatic weapons for illegal bunkered oil. It is also believed that weapons from Turkey, Indonesia and South Africa play a crucial role in arms flow into the Niger Delta (pp. 57-58).

Additionally, Nigerian soldiers who served in peacekeeping missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone have also been implicated in arms trafficking. Some of them sold their weapons to militants or gun dealers in the delta (Florquin & Berman, 2005, p. 143). Hence, security operatives are also complicit in the proliferation of SALWs in the region. For instance, on 9 July 2007, a Delta State police team arrested a Warrant Officer (WO2) serving with the Nigerian Air Force 33 Logistic section in Makurdi, Benue State, while transferring arms to a location in the Niger Delta. He was found with 5 assault rifles, 449 rounds of AK47 live ammunition, 4 brand new live jackets and 5 empty magazines, which he claimed were owned by a senator and that the arms were from the Republic of Chad (Human Rights News, 2007, pp. 4-5). Similarly, 15 army officers were court-martialled in Kaduna in 2008 over the disappearance of arms and ammunition from the armoury. The weapons were allegedly removed from the Nigerian Army Central Ordnance Depot in Kaduna and were later traced to militants in the Niger Delta. The weapons include AK-47 rifles, General Purpose Machine Guns (GPMGs) and boxes of ammunition and grenades (Omonobi, 2008, p. 3). One of the affected soldiers eventually confessed to having supplied arms to Henry Okah, a South Africa-based arms dealer and one of the leaders of the Movement for the Emancipations of the Niger Delta (MEND).

Aside from deliberate sabotage by security officers, militants also acquired some of the weapons in their stockpiles through organized attacks on police and military outposts. During such attacks, the militant groups

broke into police or military armouries and cart away arms. Some of the armed groups operating in Bayelsa, Rivers and Delta States conduct well-coordinated attacks on security outposts and killed security officials in many incidents (The Punch, 2006). For instance, in July 2006, MEND combatants killed four naval personnel and injured three soldiers who were escorting a Chevron Oil tanker along Chonomi Creeks in the Warri South-West Local Government Area of Delta State and confiscated their weapons (Wellington, 2007, p. 25). In Bayelsa State, heavily gunmen who were carrying out illegal oil bunkering killed two of the police officers at a duty post and carted away their weapons on 11 May 2008 (Human Rights News, 2008).

Apart from the sophisticated European weapons, militant groups sometimes source weapons locally. Militants in the delta, especially those with limited funds or connections to acquire sophisticated weapons rely on locally fabricated guns called “Akwa” in local parlance as a starting point (J. Dianabassi, personal communication, August 5, 2014).¹ Florquin and Berman’s (2005) findings lend credence to this. They indicated in their work that the local crafting and manufacturing of small arms is done mostly in Akwa, the capital of Anambra State, Southeastern Nigeria, hence the code-name. Thus, those who find it difficult to obtain weapons from external sources resort to the locally made ones called “Akwa-made” (Florquin & Berman, 2005, p. 147). According to Augustine Ikelegbe, while the role of gun-smiths or local gun manufacturers has been acknowledged as a major outlet in the manufacture and distribution of SALWs across the region, there has been little attempts at engaging them in dialogue with the aim of monitoring and regulating their activities (Augustine Ikelegbe, Personal communication, July 14, 2014).²

More so, individuals, communities and armed groups also import or purchase small arms because of the failure of the security forces to provide security. The law enforcement officials in the Niger Delta are overwhelmed by the security situation in the region. The militants fomenting trouble in the region are better armed and with more sophisticated weapons than the police. Hence, individuals and communities resorted to self-help to ensure their security and that of their communities. However, some individuals and groups purchase arms to perpetrate criminalities due to the lure of rich profits obtainable from the

use of small arms in illegal activities, such as kidnapping and oil theft (Prince Igodo, Personal communication, August 5, 2014).³

Also, the do-or-die attitude of politicians in the region is contributory to arms proliferation in the region. Some of the politicians during election years arm idle youths with dangerous weapons, including SALWs, and convert them to political thugs who are used to wreak havoc on opponents and oppositions. According to IANSA and Oxfam, the proliferation of SALWs in the delta has been driven by political ambitions combining with a cross-cutting illegal economy fed by oil bunkering, creating both direct and indirect drivers of violence in the Niger Delta region (IANSA & Oxfam, 2006, p. 58). Thus, the availability of SALWs on an unregulated international market has enabled militant groups, criminal groups and politicians to destabilize the fragile region further (IANSA & Oxfam, 2006, p. 58).

Overall, the proliferation of SALWs has dramatically escalated violence in the Niger Delta, a development that, in turn, has undermined all political, social and economic incentives for economic and social development and medium-term investment in the region. This has had devastating impacts on communities and small businesses in the region, as well as on the nation's economy at large. In the opinion of security experts, these dramatic social and economic impact have created a vast number of idle youth, "ready to take up arms for a deadly cross-cutting mix of short-term ideology, status and wealth" (IANSA & Oxfam, 2006, p. 58).

It must, however, be clearly emphasised here that the widespread proliferation of SALWs is not the factor that led to the emergence of armed groups in the delta region, although it encouraged the development in no small way. Rather, the deplorable socio-economic condition, lack of development, limited economic opportunity and environmental degradation in the delta had been the chief reasons for the emergence of armed groups. Although some of the groups emerged, subsequently, to perpetrate illegal activities to profit from the abundant oil deposit in the region and relied heavily on SALWs.

What is clear is that either for criminal or a just cause, the availability of SALWs gives impetus to the activities of militant groups in the delta, seeing that the non-violent campaign and the pen and paper method of Ken Saro Wiwa and the Ogoni failed to compel the federal government and oil companies to concede to their demand. Nevertheless,

it is rather unfortunate the extent to which small arms have become a symbol of power, dominance and worth among the youth in the region. Regrettably, youth in the region have grown up to believe that violence, especially through the use of small arms, is the only way of “gaining power, obtaining goods and services, and establishing respect, thus perpetuating the culture of violence” (Amoa, 2020). Thus, the widespread proliferation of SALWs in the delta makes it a high-security risk environment and one that presents a constant threat to national security because the mainstay of the nation’s economy is derived there.

Overview of the Effect of the Proliferation of SALW in the Delta

There are multitudes of militia youth as well as regular government and private security personnel who take part in organised crime in the Niger Delta using small arms. The dynamics of the interface between the struggle for power and the struggle for wealth tend to condition the nature, dimensions and magnitude of the proliferation of SALWs (Ebo, 2005, p. 2). While the option of violent confrontation may represent one of how the people have chosen to express their disgust for the unhealthy development, hardship and misery which oil production has brought upon the delta, the Nigerian government’s resort to the use of violence under the bogey of “national security” for the absolute protection of multinational oil companies only worsened the conditions for internal violence, leading to the widespread proliferation of small arms and security concerns (Garuba, 2007).

Among other things, the proliferation of small arms heightened the level of insecurity in the Niger Delta. There is also the question of the human development cost of small arms, especially as they do damage to infrastructure, displace people and cause a decline in economic activity. A notable effect of the proliferation of small arms in the Delta region is its close linkage to high levels of crime and violence. From banditry, armed robbery, hostage-taking and pipeline vandalism to illegal oil bunkering, the Delta region has had more than its fair share of turbulent times. Several unarmed persons have been killed or displaced while abduction or hostage-taking of foreign and local oil workers and attacks on oil platforms have become a recurring phenomenon in the region. Ordinary civilians are caught between a predatory state and ruthless militants, as the perverse culture of gunrunning, killing, maiming,

burning and looting become a permanent feature of life in the delta, in what makes the region more-or-less a Hobbesian state where life is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short (Human Rights Watch, 2005).

Giving the deadly destructive effects of the proliferation of SALWs and the threat it poses to national security, the question that comes to mind is what control measures the Nigerian state put in place to curb the scourge. The Illicit trafficking in SALWs into the country, especially the delta region, is extensive. Firearms of varied categories are illicitly imported into the country by unscrupulous elements almost unhindered because the legal and institutional measures against such illicit activities seemed weak. Nigeria only firearm law is out-of-date and contains weak provisions for regulating the proliferation of SALW. Consequently, the deliberate failure of the successive Nigerian government to review and realign existing laws and institutions with current realities is responsible for the violent conflict that has engulfed different parts of the country, especially the Niger Delta since independence. Indeed, the copious amount of SALW in the Niger Delta alone quarries the attitude of the government towards SALWs control and the effectiveness of existing laws and conventions as well as institutions enacted to control arms and ammunition in the country.

Arms Control Measures and Disarmament Efforts in the Niger Delta

There is no doubt that security is a major prerequisite for sustainable peace and development. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) is however a threat to security, sustainable peace and development. Consequently, the control of SALWs has become a burning issue of global discourse. Nations, governments and peoples across the globe have not only acknowledged this but also making effort to combat it. The predatory effects of SALWs are devastating to the economy, development and growth of nations. The Niger Delta crisis and other pockets of violent conflicts across Nigeria are direct fallouts of SALWs proliferation and misuse.

Significantly, a major reason for the protraction of the crisis in the Niger Delta is largely the copious availability of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) to both authorized and unauthorized persons in the delta. The alarming volume of proliferated SALWs and the puzzling rate of its misuse in the Niger Delta are indeed calamitous. This is so because

the Federal Government of Nigeria has continuously failed in its arms control effort. The failure is not mainly because of weak arms control laws and policies but largely because of government's lack of political will to tackle the proliferation of SALWs in the country. The fact is that the Nigerian government is preoccupied with other things it prioritised more important than curbing the proliferation of SALWs in the country since the end of the civil war in 1970. The half-hearted Disarmament, Demobilization and Re-integration (DDR) exercise after the civil war was not followed up with a comprehensive plan and laws to mop up arms from various parts of the country and, particularly, the Niger Delta and the rest of the Eastern region that served as the theatre of war during the three-year-long civil war. Rather, military action and militarization policies have been preferred over proactive arms control measures. This costly oversight and wrong attitude to arms control provide the ground for the almost unhindered proliferation of SALWs in the country and create a veritable breeding condition for insecurity, militancy, insurgency and terrorism, among others.

Nigeria political and security challenges, manifested by political violence, terrorist attacks, urban criminality, oil bunkering, ethnic conflicts, community conflicts and religious conflicts, underpins an excessive demand for SALWs by various individuals and groups. This situation, combined with considerable logistical and capacity constraints as well as weaknesses in existing legal and institutional mechanisms, are hampering Nigeria's fight against illicit trade in SALWs. In Nigeria, the 1959 Firearms Act is the main legal instrument for combating illicit production, import and export of SALWs. The law was reviewed in 2001 and later in 2004, partly because out of the 12,000 people arrested in relation to arms trafficking or illegal possession of weapons between 1990 and 1999, fewer than 50 were successfully prosecuted. The law regulates the possession and dealings in firearms and ammunition including muzzle-loading firearms and matters ancillary thereto. It further prohibits the possession and use of any firearms by any person in Nigeria (except members of the armed forces or police) unless such persons are granted licenses to possess and use the firearm (LFN, 2004, p. Sections 3 and 9). It also prohibits importation, exportation, and dealing in firearms in Nigeria except with a license granted by appropriate authorities (Section 10). The Act criminalizes the

manufacture or repair of firearms without prior authorization from the appropriate state agency (Section 17 and 18).

Additionally, Nigeria is also a signatory to the ECOWAS Convention on SALWs ratified in 2006, and the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Ammunition, supplementary to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Nigeria is also a signatory to the 2000 United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition; the 1999 International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Financing; and the African Convention against Terrorism. In 2011, the Nigerian National Assembly enacted the Terrorism (Prevention) Act, which provides for the effective implementation of the 1999 Convention as well as the Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism.

The weak link in the enforcement of the laws and conventions is that the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) is the primary state institution responsible for overseeing the implementation of measures against the illicit trade in SALWs. The NPF also issues various categories of licenses authorized under the Firearms Act and prosecutes its violators. The National Commission on SLW (NATCOM) or any other special committee set up on arms control only plays secondary roles in controlling illicit trafficking and proliferation of SALWs. The fact that the NPF has virtually failed in its primary responsibility of protecting lives and properties makes it clear from the point of enactment that the war on SALWs trafficking will never be won with the NPF as the primary enforcer.

That notwithstanding, the Nigerian government, both at federal and state levels, has set up a committee to work on arms control and attempted a number of disarmament exercises in the country over the past several decades. Many of these have taken place in the Delta region, but their implementation was never fully documented. To date, there are no reliable figures on the numbers of weapons collected during any of the disarmament programmes nor accurate data on the amounts paid for weapons submitted to the process. Many claims that the proliferation of small arms in Nigeria began following the end of the civil war due to the lack of an effective disarmament programme at the time (Obasi, 2002, p.

69). This trend has continued, as the impact of these unsuccessful disarmament programmes continues to be felt through the prevalence of armed robbery across the country and the growing role of armed groups.

Between 1997 and 1999 the Delta state government initiated a disarmament programme calling on warring ethnic factions from the Ijaw, Urhobo, and Itsekiri ethnic groups to hand in their weapons. The call went unheeded (Lewis & Davis, 2006, p. 64). Shortly thereafter, the Governor of Delta State offered cash, short-term training and employment to militant youths who gave up their weapons. This call was met with scepticism, and ultimately little success (Lewis & Davis, 2006). These initiatives failed to reduce significantly the number of arms in circulation.

In July 2000, the federal government set up a twelve-member National Committee on the Proliferation and Illicit Trafficking in Small and Light Weapons (NCPTAW) aimed at gathering information on the proliferation of illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons and recommending appropriate measures to deal with this challenge. However, like previous committees on arms control, NCPTAW had limited impact. It never published its findings, although it did publicly destroy 428 rifles, 494 imported pistols, 287 locally made pistols and 48 Dane guns seized by security agencies in July 2001. The exercise was repeated in July 2002 and late 2004, there were particular efforts to reclaim and destroy weapons in the Niger Delta (Dokubo, 2003, pp. 216-217).

Piqued by the activities of various associations and groups, President Obasanjo sought parliamentary approval on 10 April 2002 to outlaw certain armed groups and associations in Nigeria. Among other things, the Bill sought to prohibit any group of persons, an association of individuals or a quasi-military group to retain, organize, train, or equip any person or group of persons for the purpose of enabling the group of persons or association of individuals to use or display physical force or coercion in order to promote any political objective or interest; ethnic or cultural interest; social, occupational or religious interest (Adeyemi, 2005, p. 48). In 2004, President Obasanjo set up another Special Committee on Disarmament but the committee never succeeded. In July the same year, the governor of Rivers State initiated a disarmament programme. The programme provided financial benefits and amnesty to those who turned in their weapons (NDPEHRD, 2005, p. 5). Although some weapons were handed in, the programme failed to deliver sustainable peace. An estimated

324 weapons were submitted during this disarmament programme, but no details are publicly available as to how much the programme cost or how much individuals received for their weapons (NDPEHRD, 2005).

Renewed fighting between the Asari Dokubo-led Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and Tom Ateke-led Niger Delta Vigilante Services (NDVS), as well as a declaration of all-out war by Asari, led to the intervention by the federal government. In September 2004, President Obasanjo invited the leaders of the NDPVF and NDVS, Asari and Tom, to meet with him in Abuja. This initiative for peace negotiations to end the rising violence in Rivers State in the delta was successful, and a peace agreement was signed on 1st October 2004 (Best & Kemedi, 2005, pp. 27-29). This agreement, which provided payments for weapons turned in to authorities, a general amnesty, and promises of employment paved the way for another disarmament programme to take place. The disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programme were established, but it failed to live up to the expectations of the militants. Government had promised 4,000 jobs. Although the training was provided through the reintegration phase for nearly 2,000 youths, the inability of those youths to obtain jobs following the training programme resulted in growing disenchantment with the process (Human Rights Watch, 2005, p. 21; Bekoe, 2005).

Although the disarmament programme collected nearly 3,000 weapons,⁴ observers claim that this was only a small fraction of what was circulating in the Delta, that the weapons turned in were old or unserviceable, and that the process encouraged the purchase of additional weapons to benefit from the high prices being paid for weapons submitted to the disarmament process (NDPEHRD, 2005, pp. 5-8; Amnesty International, 2005, p. 36; Bekoe, 2005; NDPEHRD, 2004). An inventory of weapons destroyed in early November 2004 supports the claim that the weapons were old. Of the 848 recorded weapons, more than one-third of them were AK-47 assault rifles from the late 1960s according to Data provided by SaferAfrica, which oversaw the arms destruction process in November 2004.

The disarmament process failed to secure a sustainable peace. Disputes over levels of disarmament and cash payments received for submitted weapons increased tensions within and between groups. Disagreements overpayments and accusations of leaders keeping the

money for themselves led to a split within the NDPVF, while smaller groups threatened the government with violence unless they were paid (NDPEHRD, 2005, pp. 7-8). By early November 2004, armed groups had broken the ceasefire in a series of clashes and attacks. The peace process continued despite these attacks, but leaders of the groups remained suspicious of the process (Asuni, 2006, p. 82). The Rivers State Governor held a meeting of all factions on 19th November at the end of which another peace agreement was signed, which set the stage for a Peace Ambassadors Camp to be held in January 2005 with more than 700 representatives from armed factions and youth groups attending (Asuni, 2006, pp. 82-83). The camp took place but failed to resolve the remaining contentious issues.

The 2004 disarmament process not only failed to disarm the factions but also reduced confidence in the government, thereby making future disarmament measures more difficult. The key element preventing real progress on the 2004 disarmament process was the lack of attention to reintegration efforts and opportunities for former militants to earn gainful employment. Although over 4,000 jobs were promised, the posts that materialized were temporary, low paying, and oddly located in areas not directly affected by the conflict (Asuni, 2006, p. 83). As a result, the militants felt short-changed by the process. The failure of this disarmament process left armed groups distrustful of the government and its motives, and apprehensive about any future disarmament initiatives. This shadow continued to hang over subsequent government efforts to resolve the crisis in the Delta.

After the failure of the 2004 disarmament efforts, the federal government simply adopted a counter military approach to demobilizing the militants. However, the militarization policy only increased the level of violence and the quantum of SALWs in the delta. The federal government officially drafted a Joint Task Force (JTF) made up of the three arms of the military and security services, under a military campaign code-named “Operation Restore Hope” to curb the restiveness in the oil-rich Niger Delta region. Its mandate among others was to secure oil installations, curb oil community agitation and neutralize any threat to the oil industry. By implication, government was tired of trying out alternative ways of non-violent resolution of the crisis. This shortcut policy of militarization of the delta, however, resorted to the emergence of the meanest of the militant movement, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta

(MEND) in 2006. MEND served as an umbrella body for the militant groups operating in the delta. MEND challenged the Nigerian military and almost brought the oil industry to its knee in its outrage.

While the federal government militarised disarmament and demobilization was doomed to fail or tilt the country towards another civil war, state governments in the delta were stuck to the monetized disarmament process that had not worked from the 1990s. For instance, Bayelsa state was able to buy herself some measure of peace throughout the long-drawn battle between the military and MEND by paying the militants in order to encourage them not to steal or attack pipelines in Bayelsa. According to Dimieari Von Kemedi, “It's not a very neat solution, but what are the options?” (Kemedi, 2008).⁵ This exercise rather provided funding for the militants and increased the proliferation of SALWs in the delta, as previous exercises by the delta states have.

As has been shown, the resort to the military option not only aggravated the problem but also made the military part of the problem. The Federal Government consequently inaugurated a Technical Committee, with broad terms of reference in March 2009. Amongst others, the committee recommended amnesty for militant leaders within a context of comprehensive demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) programme (International Crisis Group, 2009). The amnesty programme for the Niger Delta militants was to be administered through the Presidential Panel on Amnesty and Disarmament of Militants set up on 5th May 2009 (Courson, 2009, pp. 30-31). Under the amnesty scheme announced on Thursday, 25th June 2009, the President of Nigeria would officially pardon ‘militants’ who surrender their weapons and sign up for a reintegration programme (Reuters Africa, 2009). The federal government estimated as many as 20,000 militants could participate in the programme. Under the plan, the screening of gunmen and collecting of weapons was scheduled to begin on August 6 at 15 amnesty camps located in Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers and other southern states in the Niger Delta.

The declaration of the Presidential Amnesty offer was succeeded by a 60-Day window period, requesting all militants who choose to embrace the amnesty programme to surrender their arms and ammunition on or before 4th October 2009. To achieve the policy objectives, an initial sum of 50 billion Naira was released to execute the programme. The cost of the programme was spread among the federal government, state

governments in the Niger Delta, oil companies and international organisations. Like previous DDR programmes, it was not clear how much money was required for the entire exercise (Reuters Africa, 2009). Although the Yar'Adua Amnesty programme succeeded in dousing the tension for a while, it has gradually drifted towards failure.

The Amnesty initiative saw over 15,000 militants surrender arms at the expiration of the DD phase of the Amnesty. Weapons recovered during the disarmament process included 2,760 assorted guns, 287,445 ammunition of different calibre, 18 gunboats, 763 dynamite sticks, 1,090 dynamite caps, 3,155 magazines and several other military accessories, such as dynamite cables, bulletproof jackets and jack-knives. The quantity and sophistication of arms surrendered during the disarmament and demobilization (DD) phase of the Amnesty Programme for the Niger Delta militants in 2009 gave an idea of the quantum of SALWs proliferation in the country. Despite the huge quantity, it was widely believed that militants only surrendered a small fraction of their arms, as most of them doubted the government's genuine commitment to the amnesty (Egungbemi, 2013, p. 48). Only a few of the militants embraced the programme. It was even alleged that the arms and ammunitions surrendered by the militants were bought for submission by some top government officials of the delta states simply to demonstrate the acceptance of amnesty in those States. Bayelsa and Delta States were particularly implicated in this misconduct.

The question has been raised if there was any logic to the federal government's offer of amnesty to armed insurgents in the oil-rich Delta region. It was clear that the hastily put together programme had no concrete post-amnesty plan. Government's amorphous amnesty menu, which offers tripartite rehabilitation jobs, skills acquisition (including education), and private business does not suit all the targeted beneficiaries (Agbo, 2009). As with the previous DDR programme, those trained by the scheme, home and abroad, returned to the delta with no employment. Government continued to pay a monthly stipend to a host of former militants who was not gainfully employed in any sector of the economy. The law of labour requires that wages be paid as a reward of labour, but the federal government flouted this rule and continued to dole out money to able-bodied unemployed youth in the delta. The Amnesty programme is gradually becoming only a stopgap as the militants threaten from time to

time to return the country to the years of 2006 – 2009 when the battle was fiercest.

Overall, it is clear from the foregoing that the Nigerian governments have not been entirely sincere to the process of curbing the scourge of SALWs proliferation in the country, especially in the Niger Delta. The failure of the state to address the socio-economic and development challenges of the people of Nigeria has been largely contributory to the widespread proliferation of SALWs. It is clear from the foregoing, that the federal and state governments in Nigeria had shown only little political will to solve the root of the problems in the delta. Rather, a cosmetic approach that provides room for corruption and sharp practices has always been encouraged. More disturbingly, the prioritization of security of oil multinationals over and above the wellbeing of her citizen demonstrates the wickedness and selfishness of the political elites in Nigeria. The success and failures of the half-hearted DDR programmes have contributed immensely to the increasing proliferation of SALWs in the country, especially in the Niger Delta where it is used to carry out bunkering and other criminalities against the state and the people.

Conclusion

The implications of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) on Nigeria's national security are extensive. The crisis that engulfed the Niger Delta, especially from the 1990s onward was exacerbated by the copious availability of SALWs in the Niger Delta. The proliferation of small arms has heightened the level of insecurity in the Niger Delta. It has raised the question of the human development cost of small arms, especially as they do damage to infrastructure, displace people and cause a decline in economic activity. Its close linkage to high levels of crime and violence is particularly destructive and dwarfing. From banditry, armed robbery, hostage-taking and pipeline vandalism to illegal oil bunkering, the Delta region has been treated to the wrath of the 'god of war' – SALWs. Several unarmed persons have been killed or displaced while abduction or hostage-taking of foreign and local oil workers and attacks on oil platforms have become a recurring phenomenon in the region. Ruthless militants and unbridled soldiers have entrenched a perverse culture of gunrunning, killing, maiming, burning and looting become a permanent feature of life in the delta.

Significantly, the proliferation of SALWs in the Niger Delta threatens and continues to threaten the economic survival of the Nigerian state. This is because the Nigerian economy is heavily dependent on crude oil from the Niger Delta. The emergence of armed groups in the delta to fight for the liberation of the region from the cold grip of the capitalist multinational oil companies who have systematically and deliberately destroyed the delta environment pose a big threat to the economic survival of the Nigerian state.

The failure of government to evolve sustainable disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programme to mop up small arms from the polity has continued to be the bane of Nigeria's development and sustainable peace. The Nigerian government has continued to adopt a similar pattern of DDR, a monetized programme devoid of a concrete post-DDR scheme. This failure of government and the resort to the military option as an alternative to a non-violent DDR programme rather plunged the country further deep into the crisis than solve the delta crisis. It was clear the Nigerian government always pursue a quick fix rather than embarking on a long-term solution to the Delta crisis. Once, there is respite government abandon the resolution process. This has led to the question of what constitutes Nigeria's national security. Does it include the wellbeing and development of the people of the delta region or is it purely the protection of the oil and the oil companies?

In this regard, as the people of the Niger Delta fight for relevance, adequate attention, security and development, the copious availability of SALWs dramatically escalated the crisis in the Niger Delta. The availability of these weapons on an unregulated international market enabled militant groups, criminal groups and political aspirants to further destabilize the fragile region. The proliferation of SALWs has been driven by political ambition combining with a cross-cutting illegal economy, fed by oil bunkering, creating both direct and indirect drivers of violence in the Niger Delta region.

The international trade in SALWs in the Niger Delta trade is dominated by ruthless Ukrainian and Russian dealers and other merchants of terror who, over the past years, have swapped thousands of automatic weapons for illegal bunkered oil. Also, weapons from Turkey, Indonesia and South Africa have played crucial roles in arms flow into the Niger Delta. The domination of violence both as political and economic drivers

undermines the incentives for economic diversification and medium-term investment into the region. There are devastating impacts on communities and small businesses, as well as losses at the federal level of revenue in excess of US\$25m a day. In the region, these dramatic social and economic impact, in turn, create a vast number of idle youths, ready to take up arms for a deadly cross-cutting mix of short-term ideology, status and wealth.

The illicit trade in SALWs and their proliferation can only be addressed through effective regulation. So far, the international community has failed to take the necessary measures to control the international arms trade. At the regional level, the ECOWAS Convention on SALWs has laid a standard but beyond the implementation capacity of member states and at the international level, government must agree on a new international Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). Domestically, there is the need for the Nigerian government to pursue a true and genuine agenda of democratization, justice, stabilize its economy and create opportunities for its citizens in order to divert the attention of its population from gangsterism and violence. The 1959 Fire Arms Act is evidently too weak to address current realities even though it has been reviewed twice in 2001 and 2004. The peculiarity of the Nigerian situation should be well studied to fashion out a befitting law and programmes that would reduce the proliferation of SALWs and spare the country of its devastating consequences. Aside from the laws, it is clear the institutional frameworks to implement the laws and enforce them have been very weak too and have been responsible for the almost unhindered access to SALWs across the country.

If the problems of proliferation in the Niger Delta region and other parts of Nigeria are not addressed, the non-state armed and warlords operating in the region will undermine the region and plunge it into a dangerous conflict zone where the gangs will rule at the expense of legitimate authority, development, security and progress of all. The situation is, however, not hopeless.

Recommendations

Resources are a major factor in the conflicts and threats of war in any society. Limited access and inequitable distribution often create patterns and feelings of marginalisation. For a society that is used to settling even the minor dispute with small arms, it should be expected that natural resources would spawn and sustain major conflicts. This is obvious in the

case of the Niger Delta region where the legal but unjust exploitation of crude oil has generated a problem made worse by unregulated use and easy access to small arms. Sometimes, it makes no sense to call them “small” arms given the scale of devastation the evil they perpetrate.

The following are recommendations aimed at eliminating the implications of the proliferation of SALWs to Nigeria’s national security.

- i). The government should demonstrate genuine commitment to stop the flow of small arms in the Niger Delta. For instance, while it is true that Nigeria has established a national committee on the implementation of the ECOWAS Convention on SALWs, indications are that the efforts made so far lack strategic coordination and consistent implementation. Thus, beyond the mere signing of the ECOWAS principle not to allow importation, exportation and manufacturing of small arms, the government should strengthen its control over arms and work out necessary measures that would guarantee border security with its neighbours.
- ii). As a matter of urgency, there is a need for job creation to guarantee the socio-economic security of the vast army of jobless youth in the Niger Delta. This step, apart from helping to give the desired sense of belonging and partnership to the Nigerian project, would also help to anchor the Niger Delta policy in a political process that stresses human capital development and security rather than the one that attempts to foist dubious law and order upon the population. As the country talks about local content in the oil sector, the principle should be taken to a level that provides training in oil industry-related skills and enables these youth to find relevance in the fight against the proliferation and use of small arms and that finally allows the Niger Delta region to achieve its full potential.
- iii). The government need to build the capacity of security and law enforcement agencies to effectively patrol the land and maritime border posts and detect the smuggling of SALWs across borders. To achieve this, effort must be redoubled to secure effectively all her land, air and maritime borders.

- iv). The government need to develop short-, medium- and long-term strategies for tackling conflicts and criminal activities that drive the demand for SALWs in the country, such as political and inter-communal violence, militant activities, urban criminality, rebel activities, kidnapping, drug trafficking, religious conflicts, land conflicts, smuggling, etc.
- v). In Nigeria, weapons procurement and illicit oil bunkering seem tied to domestic politics. Fundamental political reform, therefore, is key to rid the country of the proliferation of SALWs, rather than dealing simply with the weapons supply chain.
- vi). The Interior Ministry should immediately develop a border security strategy that will complement the country's domestic and national security objectives. To better secure the borders, there are three main components to be employed: technology, infrastructure, and personnel. For our borders to be effectively secured, the federal government must wake up from its slumber and sincerely treat the 'national cancer' of corruption. Government must provide the relevant security agencies, especially the Customs and Immigration, with sophisticated communications gadgets, patrol vehicles and other equipment needed to do their job. Nigerian border security agencies should also collaborate with their counterparts in neighbouring countries.

References

- ¹ Interview with Jonathan Dianabassi (Indigene of Bayelsa State from Ogbia LGA), Yenagoa, 5 August 2014.
 - ² Interview with Augustine Ikelegbe (Professor of Comparative Politics and Public Policy, University of Benin), Victoria Island, Lagos, 14 July 2014).
 - ³ Interview with Prince Igodo (Indigene of Okigbene Community, Southern Ijaw LGA), Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, 5 August 2014.
 - ⁴ The numbers of weapons collected, and from which group they were collected, remains highly disputed. There are no official public numbers of what was turned in, by whom, and for what payment. The Niger Delta Project for Environment, Human Rights, and Development and Amnesty International also reported that roughly 3,000 weapons were submitted during the process.
 - ⁵ Dimiari von Kemedi was a member of government in Bayelsa.
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