



POLAC INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF HUMANITIES AND
SECURITY STUDIES

Volume 5, No. 1 January - June 2020

ISSN: 2476 - 8057

A Journal Publication of the Department of History
and International Studies,
Nigeria Police Academy, Wudil
Kano, Nigeria

Arms Proliferation and Terrorism in West African Sub-Region Causes and Implications

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Abstract

The West African sub-region faces a veritable perfect storm of social, economic and security challenges, all of which are exacerbated by armsproliferation, terrorism and the fragility of states in the sub-region. The sub- region has become home to Arms traffickers and terrorist groups in recent times such that numerous protracted civil conflicts and atrocities have been committed against innocent civilians, security forces and government agencies by the various terrorist groups.Armsproliferation and terrorism are detrimental to society(especially West African sub-region) because theycause the loss of lives, health problems and property destruction worth millions of dollars.The main aim of the study is to provide an assessment of arms proliferation and terrorism situation in the West African sub-region with a view to identifying the root causes and implications of arms proliferation and terrorism, providing strategies aimed at addressing the conditions resilient for the spread of arms proliferationand terrorism in the sub- region. The framework of analysis adopted is Systemic Theory and the qualitative research method. Secondary sources of data are used for the study. These sources include textbooks, published articles in peer-reviewed journals, working papers, government reports, newspapers, as well as students' thesis and dissertation etc.The West African sub-region has recorded the highest number of terrorist attacks. The region recorded 544 attacks that resulted in 1,834 deaths. Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger were the countries in which the attacks occurred in the region with Burkina Faso experiencing a rather sharp increase in the number of

attacks. Investments in education, infrastructure, poverty alleviation, family planning, youth engagement etc will ensure stability in the sub-region.

Keywords: Arms Proliferation, Terrorism, Civil Conflict, Insecurity, Violent Extremism

Introduction

Prolonged conflict, proxy wars, and inter-communal strife characterize many states in West African sub-region. This violence has caused untold atrocities, deaths, sexual violence and displacement as well as accelerating poverty and shattering lives and communities across the sub-region, proliferation of arms in West Africa fuel crises and terrorism and increasingly putting lives at immense risk. Terrorism in West Africa is constantly evolving as a result of proliferation of arms. This process is exacerbated by the activities of terrorist groups. The problem of arms proliferation as well as their illicit acquisition and transfer is a recurring security challenge in West Africa sub-region. While they do not directly cause conflict, their concentration in crisis zones often sustains or prolongs them. Arms proliferation also fuel civil wars, empowering armed groups- Boko-Haram, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in Nigeria, Niger, and Chad, Jamaat Nusratal-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM) or the Group for the Support of Islam and Moslems (GSIM) in Mali and Burkina Faso and Ansarul Islam in Burkina Faso to launch attacks against governments and local communities. For instance, in Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger etc terrorism and insecurity are fuelled by the continued inflow of illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). The proliferation and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons in West Africa is facilitated by armed conflicts that have destabilized countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire and Mali. Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) are the main weapons used in rebel activities, terrorism, elections violence, armed insurrections and inter and intra communal feuds throughout the sub-region.

Theoretical Framework

The Systemic Theory

The main thrust of this theory is that reason(s) for any social conflict lie in the social context within which it occurs. Systemic social, cultural, and economic policies or practices may marginalize or discriminate against individuals because of their place of birth or religious (ethno-religious) belief. As Johnson (1966) notes in the case of political violence any

analytical penetration of the behaviour characterised as purposive political violence must utilize as its tool a conception of the social context it occurs, this time around the socio-economic and the political conditions of the citizens of the West African sub-region. This paradigm turns our focus to social factors- poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, social exclusion and the effects of large scale and sudden changes in social, political and economic processes that would usually guide against instability. Also Pye (1966) for instance identifies identity crisis, legitimacy crisis, penetration crisis, participation crisis, integration crisis, and distribution crisis as six key issues within modernization projects that generate conflict.

Conceptual Definition

Small Arms and Light Weapons

According to article (1) of ECOWAS convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons....(2006) is defined as arms used by one person and which include notably firearms and other destructive arms or devices such as an exploding bombs; incendiary bombs; or a gas bomb; a grenade; a rocket launcher; a missile; missile system; landmines; revolvers; pistols without loading; rifles and carbines; machine guns; assault guns; rifles; and light weapons. Light Weapons on the other hand according to the same article are portable arms designed to be used by several persons working together in a team and in which include notably heavy machine guns; portable grenade launcher; or mounted portable anti-aircraft cannon; portable anti-tank cannon; launcher and mortars with a caliber of less than 100 millimeter. Also UN (1997) described small arms and light weapons to include but not limited to revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, assault rifles, submachine guns, and light machine guns. Light weapons: heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank and anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortars of calibers of less than 100mm.

Terrorism

According to Bartolotta (2011) terrorism has become one of the greatest security challenges for many countries in the world and due to the threat it poses to international peace and security, it has attracted a lot of attention globally and yet there is no consensus on the definition of terrorism. However, attempts at arriving at a definition have been made. Organisation

of African Unity (1999) at the 1999 Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) defined an act of terrorism as any act which is a violation of the criminal laws of a State Party and which may endanger the life, physical integrity or freedom of, or cause serious injury or death to, any person, any number or group of persons or causes or may cause damage to public or private property, natural resources, environmental or cultural heritage. Similarly, the Global Terrorism Index (2015) report defines terrorism as the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by non-state actors to attain a political, economic, religious or social goal through fear, coercion or intimidation. In addition Forest and Giroux (2011) define terrorism as a tactic that uses violence or threat of violence as a coercive strategy to cause fear and political intimidation.

Causes of Arms Proliferation and Terrorism

Arms proliferation and terrorism in West Africa could be attributed to a number of factors prominent among them are:

Struggle for Political Power

Since the end of the Cold War, West African-sub region has been characterized by series of conflicts of different dimensions. There are hardly any of the countries in the sub-region which did not experience one form of crisis leading to conflicts. Most of the states have experienced full scaled civil wars; examples are Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Mali, Nigeria and others have also experienced coup d'etat, religious and ethnic clashes. The struggle for political power in West Africa often takes violent dimensions, which are underscored by the use of arms in the competition for power. Political violence in the form of electoral violence, protests against long-term leaders, and constitutional crises, this has occurred in some West African countries including Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Guinea Bissau, Senegal etc. The struggle for political power in West Africa often takes violent dimensions, which are underscored by the use of arms in the competition for power. According to Obi (2009) conflicts often break out when power is manipulated to include or exclude certain individuals, communities, groups, religions or regions. Those excluded resort to extreme measures such as violent protests or armed rebellion with the use of illicit arms. Illicit weapons were used in electoral violence in various parts of the sub-region. According to Bekoe (2010) people are very sensitive to electoral outcomes and that it is one of the biggest triggers of

armed conflict in many countries in West Africa. In recent past West Africa witnessed some of the worst moments of tension in Cote d'Ivoire, in (2010), Nigeria in (2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 and recently 2019 elections), Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, Niger, among others. Also Adele (2012) argues that the use of Small Arms and Light Weapons was responsible for over 800 deaths recorded during the post-election violence that erupted after the 2011 presidential elections in Nigeria

Religious Extremism

Terrorism is a multifaceted phenomenon. Hoffman, Adedire and Olowojolu (2016) have observed that religion has become the key motivator for several terrorist organizations in West Africa. Pratt (2019) noted that among the organizations and individuals who have been religiously inspired to adopt terrorist violence, those who espouse a radical interpretation of Islam are predominantly singled out almost always religion is listed among the causes of terrorism. World Atlas, (2019) avers that religiously inspired terrorism is on the increase and Islamic terrorists and organizations have been the most active and greatest threat in recent years. All the major world religions have extremists that have taken up violence to further their perceived religious goals at some point in time. Mbah, Nwangwu and Edeh (2017) pointed that terrorism has been used throughout history by various religious sects to achieve objectives through the use of violence. The terrorist activities of the Boko Haram group in furtherance of their quest for an Islamic state in Nigeria, aptly exemplifies the relationship between religious extremism and terrorism. The notorious jihadist groups in West Africa such as Boko Haram, Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), the Signatories in Blood, Ansar al-Dine, and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) are all united by their desire to establish an Islamic theocracy. These groups gain access to a global network of support through their affiliation or identification with other global terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq. According to Sulaiman (2016) historically, religious extremism has accounted for a number of violent conflicts the world over and West Africa has suffered its unfair share of this predicament. Some examples of religious conflicts in Nigeria include those of the Kasuwan Magani in 1980, Zango Kataf, Gure-Kafanchan and Lere in 1987, Ilorin and Jere in 1989, Tafawa Balewa in 1991 as well as that of Zango Kataf in 1992. A good example of religious extremism in Nigeria is the Boko Haram terrorist activities. According to Burton (2013) there have been

a series of massacres in Nigeria beginning in 2000 when there were riots between Christians and Muslims over the imposition of Sharia law in Kaduna which led to the death of over 5,000 people.

Poverty

According to Soludu(2008)northern Nigeria has been the most underdeveloped part of the country since Nigeria gained independence in 1960 compared to other parts of the country. Just as poverty and proliferation of small arms have been attributed to some of the factors that fuel insecurity in the North, there is no doubt that this plays a major role too. The violence and conflict that is peculiar to northern Nigeria goes as far back as 30 years ago. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, new forms of political elites have emerged in the northern part of the country. The emergence of these new political actors has done little to transform the lives of the average northerner, leaving some to assert that poverty and underdevelopment is a northern phenomenon.**Annan (2012) indicated that** failed development and poverty create inequalities that underpin many of the grievances that drive terrorism. Such conditions are ample in several West African states and have provided ready recruits for the jihadist groups in the sub-region.

Corruption

Most West African citizens and politicians admit that rampant corruption and bad governance are denying citizens even basic services, including security. In addition, the related lack of development and opportunities provide a ready pool of young and frustrated recruits for militant groups. Moreover, most citizens of West Africa have lost faith in the police and the army's ability to protect the large territories of West Africa. Patronage and corruption drive the sub-region's political economy and leaves many destitute and marginalised, the resulting frustration and alienation felt by many have bred the emergence of numerous militant groups based mainly on ethnic and religious identities.

Globalization

Globalization and the rise of Internet technology have also facilitated arms proliferation as well as terrorism. Online or cyber terrorist sites and social networks such as Craigslist have been under intense scrutiny for being used by terrorists in facilitating terrorist attacks in general.

Terrorists use explicit sites and underground sites (e.g. Craigslist, Backpage, MySpace) to market, recruit, sell, and commit various terrorist acts. Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking sites are suspected for similar uses.

Arms Conflicts

Armed conflict amplifies the risks of terrorism for vulnerable populations by increasing economic desperation, weakening rule of law, decreasing the availability of social services and forcing people to flee for their safety. Armed conflict often results in broken governments, judicial systems, job markets, and community support structures that would normally offer citizens protection from disasters and crime, including terrorism. Many contributing factors such as high unemployment rates, homelessness, limited social services, and weak law enforcement oversight, are amplified in conflict zones and exploited by terrorists. The national and civil disorder caused by such conflict make terrorists' recruitment tactics—including false offers of jobs, shelter, or education—more enticing to vulnerable populations. Women, children, migrants and internally displaced persons are among those most at risk of being subjected to terrorism in conflict zones. The UN (2018) reports that armed conflicts in some regions of West Africa, Middle East and Asia are likely to increase vulnerability to terrorism. The Report also indicates that areas with weak rule of law and lack of resources provides terrorists with “fertile terrain” to carry out operation, adding that armed groups take advantage of people in disparate situation to terrorist victims to sexual exploitation, forced marriage and armed combat and various forms of crime.

Radicalisation and Violent Extremism

It is irrefutable fact that the presence of large concentrations of arms tends to prolong conflicts, increase their lethality and render the process of reconciliation between conflicting groups a much more difficult task. According to Ola (2012) smuggling of arms has largely continued to aid the formation of ethnic armies especially in the north east and Niger-Delta regions of Nigeria and has remained concern to security experts who believed that their supply is through illegal means.. In the same vein (The Nigerian Guardian Newspaper October 9th 2003) asserts that these arms continue to have divesting effects on the West African sub-region considering their capacity to fuel and prolong conflicts. Also Aluko (2011) is

of the view that the rise in the formation of ethnic militias- Boko-Haram, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in Nigeria, Niger, and Chad, Jamaal Nustratal-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM) or the Group for the Support of Islam and Moslems (GSIM) in Mali and Burkina Faso and Ansarul Islam in Burkina Faso and ethnic related violence lend credence to the puzzle that security experts have not been able to unravel. Free-flow of arms into Nigeria generally has contributed both to the increase in number of violent conflicts in the country and also to their intensity. According to Stephen and Leklake (2016) the growth and activities of religious groups-Boko-Haram and Islamic Movement of Nigeria etc that espouse radical extremist ideologies have contributed to the spread and use of illicit arms in West Africa. For instance, radical Tuareg militias and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in northern Mali have initiated and sustained armed insurgencies because of their access to and use of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW).

The Implications of Arms Proliferation and Terrorism in West African Sub-region

The fundamental effect of small arms accumulation and circulation is in its tendency to pave ground for higher risk of armed violence-terrorism. The supply of arms stimulates violence instead of dialogue and has many undesirable implications. For example, high levels of armed violence hinder development, causes diversion of local resources, misuse of public money or imposition of "Might is Right". Other effects include among others:-

Injuries and Fatalities

Underscoring uncontrolled arms proliferation in West Africa is the huge number of human casualties they cause. Many people have had family members, friends, neighbours and close relatives killed by gangs using uncontrolled arms. Data on conflict fatalities in Africa and indeed West Africa are scarce and inconsistent, however, most deaths recorded in conflict and security-challenged environments in the continent and the sub-region are caused by uncontrolled arms. It is safe to state that in the last two decades, millions of lives were lost as a direct result of wars in West Africa. For instance, during the period 1987–2005 in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Coted'Ivoire combined, between 1.3m–2.4m people lost their lives due to armed conflict. For example, an estimated 1,689 to 3,713 were killed between 2012 and 2014 in Mali alone. According to Geneva Declaration Secretariat (2011) Small Arms and Light Weapons –SALW kill between

500,000 and 750,000 people annually and are a contributory factor to armed conflict, the displacement of people, organized crime and terrorism, thereby undermining peace, reconciliation, safety, security, stability and sustainable social and economic development. According to Alli (2014) on May 30, 2014, Boko Haram ambushed and killed the Emir of Gwoza, Alhajidrisa Timta. Adesoji (2010) asserts that in September 2010 Boko Haram carried out a prison break and released 700 prisoners. Ewi, M (2013) stated that the targeted assassinations are the most revealing, involving political figures, such as Abba Anas bin Umar killed in May 2011, and Modu Fannami Godio, also killed in January 2011 others include, Bashir Kashara, (killed in October 2010, Ibrahim Ahmad Abdullahi killed in March 2011 and Ibrahim Birkuti killed in June 2011. Also UNDP (2015) estimates that 24,771 people were killed and 5,507 wounded between 2011 and 2015 with most of the fatalities recorded in Nigeria, Mali and Burkina Faso, the porous borders and swathes of 'ungoverned spaces' in West Africa are exploited for the illicit transfer of arms to extremist groups.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Refugees

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees forced population movements within and across borders are generally motivated by the need to avoid injuries and deaths from uncontrolled arms. Uncontrolled arms also play a significant role in the dislocation of communities. Statistics from UNHCR (2016) show that more than 134,000 Malian refugees are in neighbouring Mauritania, Burkina Faso and Niger, and over 36,000 are internally displaced. Adeyemi (2016) for instance, in Mali, a 35-year-old woman fled Timbuktu with her husband and four children, leaving her elderly parents and other relatives behind when Islamists took control of the ancient city. There is massive displacement of people due to the increased deadliness of armed groups and conflicts. Adeyemi (2016) in Mali, a 32-year-old mother of three has lived as an IDP in the outskirts of Bamako since 2012. She fled to Bamako when her hometown of Timbuktu was occupied by Islamists. She left with her family due to repeated threats from armed men with weapons. Without the militia's possession of high numbers of sophisticated weapons, she believes many people would not have left Timbuktu.

Gender Based Violence (GBV)

According to Instituto da Defesa Nacional (2013) the risk of GBV heightens in conflict situations and it is estimated that about 45.6 percent

of West African women have experienced GBV as a result of armed conflict, compared to 35 percent globally. It is estimated that most West African women and girls will experience a form of GBV in their lifetime. In conflict contexts, GBV is generally associated with armed groups and combatant who use Small Arms and Light Weapons-SALW to humiliate, intimidate, displace and traumatize individuals and communities. In Mali, data from a USAID (2014) Fact Sheet shows 38 percent of women aged 15 and above have experienced physical violence, while more than 10 percent of women between 15 and 49 years have been sexually assaulted. For instance, at the height of violent conflict in 2013, Northern Mali became known as the world's rape capital, with an estimated 48 women raped per hour by rebels and Malian soldiers. Stories from conflict-affected countries such as Mali, North East Nigeria, Liberia, Burkina Faso and Guinea Bissau indicate that the socio-cultural and psychological impacts on victims and relatives are huge, with victims experiencing stigmatization, post-traumatic stress disorders and risk of HIV/AIDS etc.

Erosion of Mutual Trust

The division of people and communities is visible evidence of the erosion of public trust caused by armed violence. The religious divide makes peaceful coexistence difficult, if not impossible. According to Mohammed (2016) the religious divide makes peaceful coexistence difficult, if not impossible. Targeted killings have fragmented Sierra-Leone, Liberia, Coted'Ivoire, Mali and many other countries in West Africa long ethnic and tribal lines. Uncontrolled arms are used to exacerbate religious and tribal tensions in already fragile situations. Uncontrolled arms do not necessarily cause conflict, but they do exacerbate tensions and tip the balance towards violent confrontations. Illicit arms reduce the use and effectiveness of dialogue and negotiated settlement of disputes; uncontrolled arms contribute to the choice of violence to settle disputes. The spread of uncontrolled arms increases mutual suspicion and mistrust, encourages retaliatory measures, and worsens social divides and disagreements among different groups.

Abuse of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law

Human rights, the basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled, is usually the first and most part of the citizens lives that is affected by small arms and light weapons (SALW) proliferation and terrorism. The

groups or persons acquire/seek to acquire weapons in order to exercise their will or control on others. According to Charles (2001) there are so many weapons here that each person makes his own law. There is practically complete impunity. Anyone who holds a weapon has authority over anyone and can threaten anyone. Also Adama (2011) is of the view that the guns that arms dealers sold to Sierra-Leone were not just used to fire bullets, but also to threaten and to allow other human right violations to take place. Amputation might have been carried out with machetes but they took place at gun point. So did rapes, forced displacement from homes and forced conscriptions and child soldiers.

Strengthen Criminals and Criminal Organisations

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) are used by terrorists to intensify their activities. It is not uncommon for even countries that have enjoyed long periods of peace to witness the effect of the Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) proliferation within West African sub-region. As people flee areas of terrorist attacks, Small Arms Light Weapons (SALW), trafficking on a small scale occurs as they travel. In most cases these weapons fall in the hands of criminals who in turn use them to further violate the human rights of citizens. According to Ox research (2017) Violence in northern-Mali has increased as a result of the availability of firearms from several conflicts that bedeviled West African sub-region.

Conclusion

The West African sub-region has recorded many incidences of terrorist attacks. The region recorded 544 attacks that resulted in 1,834 deaths. Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger were the countries in which the attacks occurred in the region with Burkina Faso experiencing a rather sharp increase in the number of attacks. Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), Jama'aNusratul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) and Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS) are the main terrorist groups that operate in the West Africa along the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin corridors. Both the al Qaeda affiliate group Boko Haram and its breakaway IS affiliate group, ISWAP continue to dominate the terrorism landscape in West African sub-region. Their major areas of operation have been in the North-Eastern Nigerian States of Adamawa, Bornu and Yobe. ISWAP also continued to launch attacks in the Diffa region located in the South-East of Niger. JNIM and ISGS are both Salafi-Jihadi terrorist groups affiliated to al

Qaeda and IS respectively and operating in the West African sub-region. While virtually pursuing the ideology of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the two groups continue to operate in Mali and across the border in both Burkina Faso and Niger. They have accomplices in two other violent extremist groups, the Macina Liberation Front and Ansarul Islam which also operate from Mali and Burkina Faso respectively. However, ensuring future stability will require far more than a purely military approach. Investments in education, infrastructure, poverty alleviation, family planning, youth engagement, good governance initiatives, humanitarian relief and climate change adaptation strategies, among others, are critical to alleviating the pressures on states and addressing the broader causes of arms proliferation, insecurity, insurgency, terrorism and violent extremism.

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