

SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS PROLIFERATION AND THE SCOURGE OF BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY IN BORNO STATE



By

¹Bukar Babakura & ²Mudi Bashir

¹Centre for Peace, Diplomatic and Development Studies,
University of Maiduguri

²Department of Public Administration, University of Maiduguri



ABSTRACT

One of the reasons Boko Haram has remained unabated is the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Borno State. This is further exacerbated by the inability of the government to genuinely address the menace thereby re-enforcing the activities of Boko Haram group, thus, leading to loss of thousands of lives, properties worth trillions of Naira, Inhabitant rendered displaced while some flee to neighbouring countries as refugees, economic activities distorted making life unbearable for the inhabitant. Most disturbingly is that the insurgent always seem to have their way, as the government have not been able to halt their supply line(of arms and fund).Therefore, the thrust of this paper dwell on the role played by proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapon in aggravating the scourge of Boko Haram Insurgency in Borno State. The paper is a qualitative study that rely primarily on existing literature. The study has identified sources of funding of Boko Haram insurgency as well as the implication for continuous proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Borno State. The paper found that government's efforts is yet not sufficient as the activities of the insurgent group have devastating effect on the people of the Borno State. More and more people are killed at every passage of the day. The paper recommended among others that the Federal government should ensure better policing of the country's porous land borders in order to intercept the deadly weapons brought in through the Sahara Desert. Also, there is need for synergy between and among the Government at the local,

regional and international level against money laundering and terrorism financing to track and intercept such illicit financial flows.

Keywords: *Boko Haram, Small Arms and Light Weapons*

Introduction

It is undisputable that the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapon in Nigeria more especially in Borno State has destabilizing effect. Small Arms and Light Weapons proliferation is acclaimed to be the major security challenge fuelling insurgency, human trafficking and drugs, terrorism, organized crimes, internal insurrections and civil wars, posing obstacles to sustenance of stable peace and security to people/states such as the Niger Delta, Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Zamfara, Sokoto States among others and countries like Somalia, Zaire, Uganda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Rwanda, Afghanistan, Haiti, Mali, Syria, Burundi just to mention but few, (Abiodun, Ayo-Adeyekun, Onafowora & Nwannenaya 2018).

Globally, there are more than 100 to 500 million Small Arms and Light Weapons in circulation aside the other millions designed for formal security use and civilian utilisation. These weapon are manufactured by more than 70 countries who usually involve direct sales as a principal source of supply to foreign governments and private companies. Though, some of the manufacturers do manufacture and distribute these weapon covertly (Sule & Mikail, 2020).

Today, almost all the 19 States in the northern Nigeria represents a main landing base for illegal Small Arms and Light Weapon which are being trafficked through the Cameroon, Niger and Chad borders into the Northern parts of the country for illicit activities (Sule, Daribe & Ahmad, 2020). The wide availability, accumulation and illicit flows of such weapons tend to escalate conflicts; undermine peace agreements; intensify violence and impact on crime; impede economic and social development; and hinder the development of social stability, democracy and good governance (Soetan, 2017). This has been the major explanation behind the proliferation of protracted conflicts such as the Boko Haram across the length and breadth of Borno State in recent years.

Borno State suffered the impact of Boko Haram murderous activities for quite some time, due to the growing number of sophisticated arms and weapons used by the militants in attacks. The group now possesses an unknown number of assault rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, mortars and improvised bombs, shells as well as large number of pickup trucks, tanks,

armoured personnel carriers and a limited anti-aircraft capability (Raheem, 2015). It is against this background that this paper assesses Small Arms and Light Weapons proliferation and the scourge of Boko Haram Insurgency in Borno State.

Conceptual Clarification

Concept of Small arms and Light Weapons

Small Arms and Light Weapons are any harmful weapon ranging from clubs, knives and machetes to Mortars below the calibre of 100 mm. To do justice to this study a distinctive description of both concept for better assimilation are made: Small arms are any form of harmful weapons used to repel or attack, or easily transformed to ward off attack or launch one, bullet or projectile by the activation of an explosive. Raheem (2015) describes Small Arms to include, but not limited to revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, assault rifles, submachine guns, and light machine guns. In a similar manner, Meek & Stott, 2004 cited in (Suleet al, 2020) conceive Small Arms to include revolvers, automatic pistols, AK47, carbines, mini-machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns. As a corollary to the above, The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Convention of 2006 sees Small Arms as those arms used by one person, and which include firearms and other destructive arms or devices such as exploding bombs, incendiary bombs or gas bombs, grenades, rocket launchers, missiles, missiles systems or land mines; revolvers and pistols with automatic loading, rifles and carbines, machine guns, assault rifles, and light machine guns.

Light weapons on the other hand are weapons designed for use by more than one person, serving as a crew, even though some may be carried and used by a single person. Moses and Ngomba (2017) describe Light weapons to include heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of antitank missile and rocket systems, portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortars of a calibre of less than 100 mm. Similarly, Suleet al., (2020) conceive Light Weapons as sophisticated automated guns, mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, rocket system launcher, portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems and mortars of calibres of less than 100 mm.

This goes to mean that small arms are those weapons created for personal use and light weapons are those made for use by two or more persons servicing as a crew. It is discernable from the above, that Small Arms and Light

Weapons comprises of firearms and other destructive arms or devices, which are both small and large, of calibres of less than 100 mm.

Brief History Background of Boko Haram

The name Boko Haram was a media coinage to reflect the insurgent's strong opposition to western education. Boko is a Hausa word meaning western education while Haram is an Arabic word meaning forbidden, therefore, joining them together will give Boko Haram the term "Western education is forbidden". The insurgent group later changed its name to Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awatiwal - Jihad which translates into 'People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad (Usman, 2019).

The sect was founded by late Mohammed Yusuf in Maiduguri in 2002. Prior to this time, the Boko Haram group started as Sahaba group in 1995 with Abubakar Lawan as the main leader, who latter left to study in university of Medina. Thus, the leadership of the group was conceded to Mohammed Yusuf who was young and versatile. Immediately Yusuf took over, the doctrine of the sect changed to an extremist Boko Haram doctrine (Shehu 2012 cited in Duada, 2014).

Boko Haram are used to bombing Churches, Mosques, Police Stations, Schools; Universities inclusive and other Government owned Properties in prosecuting their objectives. Adetiloye (2014) views that the group attacked and destroyed churches, mosques, schools, police station and private and public owned facilities. Hence, concluded that Boko Haram is the most dangerous terrorist group in Nigeria.

Boko Haram's Arms Sources

Boko Haram obtains arms by breaking into the armoury of police stations, improvised or purchased on the black market. The group's primary source of weaponry is the looting of police stations and military bases within Nigeria. Major General John Enenche once said that it was not correct to say that the weapons being showcased by the terrorists are anything different from those procured for us" (Daily Trust, July 3rd, 2020). Most of the vehicles, armour tanks and other military hardware were stolen from military bases in North East.

Due to the porosity of the country's borders, the Boko Haram insurgents have exploited such avenue to smuggle illegal weapons from Niger, Cameroon and Chad to the group (Udounwa, 2013). With the inability of the Federal Government to effectively control the Nigerian borders, the insurgent

group has continually exploited such avenue to connive with the radical Islamic Sects in the Islamic Magreb to get a caches of arms and ammunition (Adisa, 2019).

Sources of Financing Boko Haram

Insurgency by its nature involve preying at others because it requires a lot of funds for recruitment, equipment, and other critical resources. Secure funds to wage war is a serious challenge of an insurgents without which the insurgent group wither away. Hence, Insurgent group resort to levying protection charges, extraction of donations, extortion, armed robbery, and kidnapping for ransom. Aghedo (2018) cited in Nwokolo & Aghedo (2020) Identifies five main sources of funds of Boko Haram, namely, dues or contributions by sect members; donations by wealthy individuals and companies; ransoms from kidnap operations; loots from robberies; and external funding.

At the initial stage of the insurgency, Mohammed Yusuf who was the leader of the insurgent, levied members some amounts payable daily as a religious obligation. Revenues were also sourced from the sales of agricultural products from farms and fishing activities mainly from the Borno Rivers as well as some private fish ponds (Ayoade, 2014 cited in Nwokolo & Aghedo, 2020). Wealthy members of the group and some politicians sympathetic to or threatened by the insurgents supported them in cash and logistics such as motorcycles, vehicles, and loudspeakers for evangelism (Oyewole, 2013; Ayoade, 2014). Contemporarily, Boko Haram gets most of its funds from kidnap ransoms.

It has also been alleged that Boko Haram get a considerable amount of money paid by the government for the release of some of the Chibok schoolgirls. In addition, Boko Haram generates funds from bank raids. In 2011 alone, Boko Haram raided almost 100 branches of banks and carted away several million (Agbibo, 2017 cited in Nwokolo & Aghedo (2020). Boko Haram also rob traders of their money and food items on market days. The group has also relied on cattle rustling for food and sale through middle-men in Gamboru cattle market (Nwokolo & Aghedo, 2020).

Aside from these internal sources of funds, Boko Haram relies on donations from external radical charities in the United Kingdom and Middle East. For instance, during the recently concluded summit on Constitutional Term Limits organised by National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Niamey, Niger Republic, the former President of Benin Republic, Mr. Nicephore Soglo claimed that “Boko Haram is funded by our friends from Saudi Arabia and our

friends from Qatar”(Nwokolo&Aghedo, 2020). The Boko Haram group were able to procure arms, fund their logistics and operations from the proceeds coming from the various sources.

Implication of Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation in Borno State

The possession of Small Arms and Light Weapons by arm groups in Borno has negative implications on all aspects of life of the inhabitants. It has resulted to one of the worst kinds of humanitarian crises in Borno state as Boko Haram attacks are estimated in hundreds numerically. The most recent being the senseless killings of 43 farmers in Zabarmari Community in Jere Local Government Area, which is just 20km from the State Capital, Maiduguri (BBC News, November 29th 2020).

According to the former Governor of Borno State and a now Senator (Kashim Shettima) about 2,813 attacks were made by Boko Haram group since inception, leading to loss of lives and heavy ammunitions to the insurgents. One of such heavy losses was recorded in Baga in 2014. A conservative estimate of over 100,000 people have been killed by the sect since 2009, aside from damage to private and public properties with over 250,000 of people who were made homeless, fleeing to Cameroon, Chad and Niger for refuge while other becomes internally displaced in Borno. The group have carried mass abductions including the kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok in April 2014 and the abductions of humanitarian workers, arm forces among others(Raheem, 2015).

The Boko Haram scourge as exacerbated by proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons has led to the distortion of economic activities in Borno State, thereby discouraging investments, and led to misallocation of economic resources to security instead of development as funds meant for development projects are wasted on security as against development. For example, due to the insurgency, large hectares of farmland has been abandoned, and many markets were either destroyed or abandoned because the inhabitant have fled the area. Commercial activities such as farming and agriculture have been restricted. A typical example is the farming activities in and around the Chibok community which could not be continue, similarly, fishermen could not continue their fishing activities in the Lake Chad area and Baga community due to the activities of the Boko Haram group (Peterside, 2018). Many business have wind up and many persons have lose their jobs. All these have negatively impacted on the economic development of the Borno State.

The activities of the Boko Haram have rendered majority of the children in the rural areas out of schools especially those in the primary and secondary schools. The reason being that most of those schools have been destroyed, thereby making the areas inhabitable. Similarly, Boko Haram insurgents have attacked numerous health facilities and health workers. The sect has destroyed health care centres and facilities that are needed for proper health of citizens. Health workers themselves who also are targets have fled from their various health Institutions. Large areas of Borno State health facilities barely function: as of March 2014, only 37% of facilities in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States were functional (Amalu, 2018). These conditions have encouraged high prevalence cases of both infant and adult diseases such as measles, diarrhea, tuberculosis, cardio vascular diseases and other respiratory infections.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the activities of Boko Haram in Borno State has caused human, material and financial losses. The losses ranges from senseless killings of people, distortion of economic activities to destruction of health facilities. These were possible due to the government's inability to halt their supply line as the insurgent still purchased weapons in the black market or loot police stations and military bases during raids or even connive with the radical Islamic Sects to get arms and ammunition by taking advantage of the country's porous borders. In view of these, one is force to question the efficacy and total commitment of the Nigerian government in combating this menace considering the level of sophistication and the new emergent trend in Boko Haram attacks which has enabled the insurgent to continually mount deadly attacks on the people of Borno State.

Recommendations

This study has recommended the following measures as possible solution to the menace of the proliferations of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Borno State:

1. The need for synergy between and among the Government at the local, regional and international level against money laundering and terrorism financing to track and intercept such illicit financial flows. The Nigerian Government could fast-track her cashless economy program in the pilot states like Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Zamfara, and Kastina for effective monitoring and tracking large withdrawals or deposits.
2. The need to address corruption among government officials, security officers, regulatory agents, and other failed structural architecture by

structural patterns and workable legislation without prejudice. Corruption still remain one main factor responsible for the triumph of arms proliferation in Borno State. Hence, anyone alleged to be involved in anyway possible, such terror gangs should be thoroughly investigated and prosecuted if found guilty.

3. The need for the Federal government to ensure better policing of our porous land borders especially in the North-East in order to intercept the deadly weapons brought in through the Sahara Desert. These could be achieved by posting more immigration, customs, and police officials with state-of-the-art gadgets to the areas to man both legal and illegal entry routes. These agencies should seek to win hearts and minds of the people to gain access to vital intelligence.
4. Nigerian government should strengthen institutions and processes of governance in order to address the issue of governance failure, which has culminated into poverty and other socioeconomic problems. Citizens are becoming increasingly frustrated over governance failure which resort to violent crimes thereby increasing demand for Small Arms and Light Weapons.

REFERENCES

- Abiodun, T. F., Ayo-Adeyekun, I., Onafowora, O. and Nwannenaya, C. (2018) Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation and its threats to Nigeria's Internal Security. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research*. 6(3): 34-45.
- Adisa, W. (2019) *Arms Proliferation, Boko Haram Extremism and Insecurity in Nigeria. Internal Security Management in Nigeria*. Palgrave Macmillan. pp 307-326 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8215-4_15
- Amalu, N. S. (2015) Impact of Boko Haram Insurgency on Human Security in Nigeria. *Global Journal of Social Sciences*. 14: 35-42
- BBC News (2020, Nov. 29). Dozens of Farm workers killed in 'insane' Nigeria attack.
- Moses, J. M. and Ngomba J. L. (2017). Small arms and light weapons proliferation in the early 21st century: The Nigerian case. *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*. 6 (11): 1638-1652
- Mutum, R., Ibrahim H., and Omirin O. (2020, July 3). *Nigeria: How Boko Haram Fighters are getting Weapons*. Daily Trust
- Nwokolo, N. and Aghedo I. (2020). *Insurgent Financing: How Can the Government Cut Off Boko Haram's Funding Lifeline*. Nextier SPD. 1(2): 1-3

- Oyewole, S. (2013), Boko Haram and the Challenges of Nigeria's War on Terror. *Defense and Security Analysis*, 29 (3), 253-262
- Patrick, K. B. and Syed Sopi S. R. (2019).The Implication of Boko Haram Insurgency in Rural Development in Nigeria. *International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering*. 8 (2S): 543-549.
- Peterside, Z. B. (2018).The Impacts of Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons on the Quest for National Security in Nigeria. *Saudi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. 3(7): 852-860
- Raheem, S. O. (2015).Boko Haram: The Menace of Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation in Nigeria. *International Academic Journal of Educational Research*. 1(1):16-33
- Soetan, S. O. (2017). Proliferation of Arms and Security Challenges in Nigeria. *International Journal of History and Cultural Studies*. 3(3):33-38
- Sule, B. and Mikail I. K. (2020). The Role of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in Exacerbating Armed Groups Conflicts in Borno and Yobe States of Northeastern Nigeria. *International Academic Journal of Law*; 1(1): 14-23
- Sule, U. S. B., Deribe A. U. and Ahmed A. (2020). The Impact of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in the Proliferation of Armed Group Conflicts in North eastern Nigeria: Interrogating the Boko Haram Phenomenon. *International Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*. 6(4): 151-161.
- Udounwa, S. F., (2013). *Boko Haram: Developing New Strategies to Combat Terrorism in Nigeria*. *Strategic Research Project International Fellow*. pg 1-36.
- Usman, A. (2019). Effects of Boko Haram on Farm Output in Biu Local Government Area, Borno State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*. 2(11): 6-11.