The transfer of small arms and ammunitions among non-state actors within the state has become big merchandise in Africa. The implications of these for national security as well as its cross-border effects have heightened the possibility of many other security challenges and undermined the ability of government to fulfill their constitutional security mandate. Consequently, increased terrorist activities in much of Africa have not been a question of nuclear attacks, rather those of arms and ammunitions.

This study qualitatively interrogated the proliferation of small arms and light weapons as being both the cause and effect of the security situation on the African continent. The paper concludes that the response to proliferation of small arms and light weapons should be more national than regional or international. It also argues that there is a lot more to be done on the part of citizens, and especially law enforcement officers, as well as the government institutions to ensure that the illicit transfer of Small Arms and Light Weapons is reduced to its barest minimum and the security situation in Africa is improved.

**Key Words:** Small Arms, Light Weapons, Ammunition, Proliferation

**INTRODUCTION**

The illicit and indiscriminate proliferation of small arms and light weapons is one of the many challenges that states and governments globally are currently fighting to manage. Since the end of the Second World War and, even more recently, the dawn of the new millennium there seems to be a critical rethinking of the nature and scope of security and other issues of concern. Since the tripod attack on the United States from Al-Qaeda, the international system has continued to grapple with new issues of security concern, and such issues have remained front burners at the United Nations, European Union among other regional organizations, including African Union, as well as national committees.

Ultimately, it can be argued that the scope of security research and concern has drastically changed. There seems to have been a fundamental shift in the paradigm of security concerns since the end of the Cold War in the 1990. The conventional issues and concerns of security prior to the Cold War period stand at a distance; on one side of the continuum from the issues that characterize the contemporary concerns of security on the other. The conventional or traditional security issues largely bordered on territorial sovereignty of the state, inter-state relations, war and peace, balance of power, the policy and practice of deterrence, including strategies for achieving and maximizing the objectives and interests of the state, among others. On the other hand, the new and contemporary concerns of security border on a lot
more dynamic issues. The UNDP (1994) Human Development Index Report on Human Security identified some of the new security concerns to include environmental degradation; large scale refugee movements and migrations; widespread destructive epidemic, including HIV/AIDS and even more recently, malaria; growth of religious fundamentalism; increased cases of intra-state violence, armed conflicts and increasing civil wars, with resultant incidents of state collapse. Still others are, rising unemployment; deepening poverty; gross human rights violations and increased cases of genocide and ethnic cleansing; massive trade and transfer of illegal surplus arms and their cross-border implications; globalization and its resultant discontents; terrorism; sales of drugs and persons across borders (drug and human trafficking); economic and financial crimes and adverse consequences on good governance; among many others.

On the African continent however, these issues have taken a more devastating nature and had more significant effects on the states and individuals in Africa, arguably perhaps, as a result of the very nature of the existence of Africa, coupled with the long years of intra and interstate wars and other conflicts which have largely undermined the continent. The United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) in December 2005, highlighting data from the US Library of Congress, reported that during the last two decades of the 20th century, 28 sub-Saharan African countries engaged in violent conflicts. In Rwanda, alone, approximately 800,000 people died as a result of genocide in 1994; and an estimated 4.7 million died during the last decade of the 20th century in the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Millions of non-combatants – women, children, the elderly, the disabled, and the poor – died due to other African conflicts, directly or as a result of hunger, injuries and disease. OSAA further reports that most of the world’s armed conflicts now take place in sub-Saharan Africa. At the turn of the 21st century more people were being killed in wars in this region than in the rest of the world combined.

The arguably irreconcilable conflict in Rwanda and Burundi between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnicities, the crisis in Sudan, the conflicts in Uganda and Ethiopia, attempted secession of the Republic of Biafra from Nigeria in the late 1960s and the resultant civil war with the Federal Republic of Nigeria and severe economic consequences, are some of the conflict events that have occurred in Africa. The violent conflicts in South Africa over the apartheid regime, the conflicts in Mali and the revolutions in North Africa’s Tunisia, Egypt and Libya are some even more recent conflicts that have occurred on the continent in the recent past. These conflict experiences have badly weakened the institutions and governments in Africa, making them easily prone to conflict. Osaghae (1994) tolled this same line of thought when he asserted that “several ‘nation-threatening’ conflicts have occurred and certain clear patterns had emerged which prompted the conclusion among academics and others individuals and groups or organizations, that Africa was ‘conflict-endemic’”.

Proliferation of small arms and light weapons, is one of the so many such threats that currently plague several African states. This challenge has become a dreaded monster and has remained deep seated despite the mounting support from international, regional and even local efforts to mitigate it, resulting in the loss of many lives and destruction of physical infrastructure within several states on the continent. These contemporary security challenges, including small arms proliferation, and the consequences that they precede are obviously detrimental to the development of the African continent. Kofi Annan, the former UN Secretary-General, during his speech to African heads of state and government in Lusaka, July 2001, clearly stated that “Africa must reject the ways of the past, and commit itself to building a future of democratic governance subject to the rule of law. Such a future is only achievable on the condition that we end Africa’s conflicts, without which no amount of aid or
trade, assistance or advice will make the difference”. He also stated clearly that the conflicts in Africa, like everywhere else in the world, “is caused by human action and can be ended by human action”. The 2013 Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre (NOREF) report acknowledges the potential of Africa to meet its development objectives; given all the regional and international development coalitions. The report, however, describes the continent as “being at a crossroad”, stating that despite these opportunities, “the continent is also confronted with significant security challenges that could have severe ramifications across several countries and regions”.

Laurance (1998), concurred to the above views with the assertion that “it has been established that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons on the continent is one of the major factors that are directly responsible for the frequency and intensity of the conflicts in Africa and its high number of insurgents the world which has been experiencing over the last two decades”. The other side of the coin is also worth interrogation; how did we get to where we are? Have small arms always been a challenge of the Africa continent? What factors encourage the continued manufacture and proliferation of these weapons? These are very important questions that must be interrogated to determine if small arms proliferation is a cause or effect of the declining nature of African states.

THEORETICAL DISCOURSE
The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is principally a consequence of conflicts at whatever levels and in whatever magnitude. Warring groups require arms to protect themselves from the enemy, likewise rebel and other criminal elements require arms to protect their interests while carrying out their activities. Hence it is safe to submit that conflicts are a major vehicle for the both legal and illegal transfer of small arms and light weapons. Ganesan and Vines, in a 2004 Human Rights Watch World report observed that human right violations are a major cause of internal armed conflict in resource-rich countries around the world, and that ‘greed, rather than grievance alone’ (that is greed and grievance), impels peoples toward internal armed conflict.

Although it is important to study how recourses impact on the behavior of rebels and other groups in conflict, it is equally important to pay attention to how government mismanagement of resources and revenues fuels conflict and small arms proliferation, and ultimately lead to human rights abuses. Ganesan and Vines (2004) argue that “if the international community (and in fact, any regional or national government) is serious about curbing conflict and related rights abuses in resource-rich countries, it should insist on greater transparency in government revenues and expenditures and more rigorous enforcement of punitive measures against governments that seek to profit from conflict”.

Killings, maiming, forced conscription, the use of child soldiers, sexual abuse, proliferation of small arms and light weapons and other atrocities characterize numerous past and ongoing conflicts, especially in Africa. Paul Collier, a former head of the World Bank’s development research group, and one of the strongest proponents of the greed and grievance theory asserts that, “[e]thnic tensions and ancient political feuds are not starting civil wars around the world. A groundbreaking new study of civil conflict over the last 40 years reveals that economic forces such as entrenched poverty and the trades in natural resources are the true culprits. The solution? Curb rebel financing, jump-start economic growth in vulnerable regions, and provide a robust military presence in nations emerging from conflict” (Collier, 2003). However, Ganesan and Vines (2004) conclude that the greed of governments (in and out of Africa) being factored into the debates on the ‘greed versus grievance’, does not excuse the
violent activities of rebel and other groups across the continent, but it highlights the need to ensure that governments too are transparent and accountable.

AN OVERVIEW OF SECURITY IN AFRICA

The pattern of security issues in Africa have continued to change over the years, throwing up new and more dynamic challenges for policy formulation and implementation at both regional and national levels, and sometimes requiring international response and relief efforts. The nature of security in Africa today stands at one end of the continuum from the traditional nature of security; which was centred on the state charged with the fundamental responsibility of protecting its citizens. Describing this significant shift in security concern, Axworthy (2001) asserts “Hobbled by economic adversity, outrun by globalization, and undermined from within by bad governance, the capacity of some states to provide this protection has increasingly come into question”. States in Africa have since lost the capacity to protect her citizens, judging from the several conflicts that have badly weakened the capacity of the state. Axworthy argues further that “The state has, at times, come to be a major threat to its population’s rights and welfare – or has been incapable of restraining the warlords or paramilitaries – rather than serving as the protector of its people. This drives us to broaden the focus of security beyond the level of the state and toward individual human beings, as well as to consider appropriate roles for the international system to compensate for state failure”.

A brief retrospect on the historical experience of the African continent, and in fact, on the configuration of states and regions in Africa may prove useful in explaining some of the conflict trends and security concerns that have come to characterise the continent. Africa, arguably appears the only continent in the world that significantly went through several decades of colonial rule from the ‘west’ (1880s – 1950s), and even though victorious to an extent, the legacies and consequences of such rule have led to several negative trends that would not go away. Prior to the Berlin Conference of 1884, several European nations seemed to have already begun colonial activities in several parts of Africa, and had almost started fighting themselves over portions of the continent, which was in fact the crux of the conference at Berlin, Germany in 1884.

As a result of the conference and the Convention, signed by John Kasson in 1885 (Schraeder, 2004), as well as the colonial policies of European nations, Africa’s rich pre-colonial mosaic of cultures, customs, traditions, languages, religions, peoples, practices and institutions, had been badly adulterated by these economically motivated colonial efforts. Schraeder (2004) reported some of the negative impacts of colonial policies as follows;

1. Imposition of the European nation-state system on Africa’s extremely rich and varied political systems, creating several ‘artificial’ states in Africa.
2. Several erstwhile independent African nations were divided among numerous colonial states, which led to irredentism (political desire of nationalists to reunite their separate peoples in one nation-state).
3. Incorporation of previously separate and highly diverse African peoples in one colonial state.

Other equally significant impacts of these decades of colonial rule in Africa include; destruction of traditional checks and balance mechanisms, reinforcement of male-dominated (patriarchal) forms of governance, preservation of authoritarian political legacies, as well as other political and economic consequences.

These consequences have created tensions and agitations in most Africans, and have arguably led to the various conflicts that have continued to occur on the continent. It may not be out of
place to mention that most of the security challenges that plague many states in Africa are fall outs of these impacts mentioned above; in form of civil wars and/or secessionist movements, or consequences of these wars; diseases, migration, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, among others. Hence it is safe to describe the configuration of the African continent as having the capacity to induce conflicts, as we can observe in the conflict situations of several African states.

Beyond this largely Afro-centric historical perspective, several other trends have occurred globally, which have also impacted negatively on the nature of security on the continent. Globalization, despite its positive outcomes on the state, has arguably continued to throw up far-reaching concerns for several states in Africa in particular and around the world in general, hence security policies have taken a more dynamic and inclusive international perspective. The current nature of security in Africa, and in fact globally reflects to a large extent this change in security policy and research; security discuss is no longer limited to the rights of states and sovereignty, rather issues that border on protecting the citizen (civilians), managing the environment and ecosystem, combating infectious diseases’. (Axworthy, 2001)

Security globally, as reflected in the documents of the United Nations Charter, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Geneva conventions and other related international treaties and conventions, borders on human security; protection and empowerment of humans at individual and community levels. Specific human security concerns include inter-ethnic conflicts, regional instability, terrorist attacks, poverty and disease, political and social inclusion, involuntary and voluntary movements of people, protection and empowerment of women, food security, health security, education and skills, among several others.

The Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre (NOREF) 2013 security report on Africa titled; *African Security in 2013: A Year of Disequilibrium*, provides an insight into the most recent security trends and situations on the continent. The report spotted Mali, Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire and Liberia as the countries currently with the most precarious security situations in West Africa. The intervention of the French military in Northern Mali in January 2013, along with the joint Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) - African Union (AU) force and the Malian army, may not have ended the conflict in the region, as the rebels may only have been suppressed. In Nigeria, the re-emergence of Boko Haram may be connected to what NOREF (2013) describes as “the main fault line in Nigerian politics – the north-south divide and the increasingly bitter conflict over positions, power and money that this cleavage creates”. The sentiments arising from the last elections in Côte d’Ivoire between Gbagbo’s loyalist and President Allassane Ouattara’s administration, poses as potentially threat to security in the region with possible repercussions in Liberia.

The security challenge in “the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) eastern border areas (i.e. the Kivus), and in particular the province of North Kivu”, according to the NOREF (2013) report, is the major security challenge in Central Africa. The March 2013 elections in Kenya is one major event that needs to be closely monitored to sustain security in East Africa; the elections which mark the beginning of a new system of government happen to be the first under the 2010 constitution, as well as the next election since the 2007 elections that led to a wave of violent conflicts which saw more than 1,000 people dead and more than 250,000 displaced.

In South Africa, the 40-year civil war in Angola (since 1975) has been the major conflict in the region, which ended in 2002 with the killing of Jonas Savimbi. Zimbabwe is however
regarded as the most likely potential spoiler in the region; Robert Mugabe has been the only president in the country since its independence from white minority rule in 1980, and this has very significantly affected the economy negatively; ‘what was once the second most developed economy in the region has collapsed’.

NATURE OF SMALL ARMS PROLIFERATION IN AFRICA
The proliferation of small arms and light weapons across the globe in general and in Africa in particular has come gradually developed over the years to a rate that is currently quiet alarming and has put the security and stability of the entire African continent in the balance. Small arms and light weapons have very evidently become useful instruments in the hands of terrorist groups and other criminal groups and non-state actors to inflict considerable damage on the state and more importantly on the individuals of whom the state has a responsibility to protect, reducing the capacity of the state to fulfil its security mandate. The United Nations Security Council took a similar position by asserting that “the destabilizing accumulation and uncontrolled spread of small arms and light weapons in many regions of the world increases the intensity and duration of armed conflict, undermines the sustainability of peace agreements, impedes the success of peace building, frustrates efforts aimed at the prevention of armed conflict, hinders considerably the provision of humanitarian assistance and compromises the effectiveness of the Security Council discharging its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security” (United Nations 2002).

Estimating the growth and impact of small arms globally, Renner (2008) asserted that, “guns outnumber passenger vehicles by 253 million or 29 per cent”. The International Action Network on Small Arms (2006) and the Geneva Declaration in (2008) reported further that small arms are used to kill as many as 1,000 people each day around the world. Batchelor (2001); Batchelor (2003) and Fahrenthold and Kunkle (2009), also emphasizing the danger of availability and use of small arms, asserted that “each year about eight million new small arms, plus 10 to 15 billion rounds of ammunition are manufactured — enough bullets to shoot every person in the world not once, but twice”.

Salopek (2001) reported that there is an estimated over 100 million small arms and light weapons circulating in Africa, a figure which is derived from the over 550 million (SAS, 2001) to over 875 million (Karp, 2007) small arms and firearms in circulation globally. Counting the cost of these high levels of proliferation, a small arms commentator, Michael Renner, reported that Africa alone has suffered about 5,994,000 fatalities in the last 50 years due mostly to SALW (Renner, 2006). Ero and Ndinga-Muvumba (2004) argued further that in West Africa alone, “…while there are no official figures, an estimated 30,000 people have been killed by SALW in conflict each year since the end of the Cold War”. This largely illegal proliferation has been facilitated by, among other factors, issues related to border control; poorly border policing, inefficient border control strategies, insincere and corruption customs officers and other border patrol agencies. The table below shows the trends in the supply of arms to the continent;
### Table 1: Number of Weapons Delivered by Suppliers to Africa from 2008 - 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEAPONS CATEGORY</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Russia</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Major West European</th>
<th>All Other European</th>
<th>All Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tanks and Self-Propelled Guns</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APCs and Armored Cars</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Surface Combatants</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Surface Combatants</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided Missile Boats</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submarines</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supersonic Combat Aircraft</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsonic Combat Aircraft</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Aircraft</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helicopters</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface-to-Air Missiles</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface-to-Surface Missiles</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Ship Missiles</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. government in Grimmett & Kerr (2012: 68)

Note: *Major West European includes France, United Kingdom, Germany, and Italy totals as an aggregate figure.

According to a SIPRI 2013 report on Trends in International Arms Transfer, arms import by states in Africa increased by 53 per cent between 2004–2008 and 2009–13. The report states that the three largest importers of arms in Africa in 2009–13 were Algeria (with 36% of imports), Morocco (with 22%) and Sudan (with 9%), and sub-Saharan African states accounted for 41% of the imports to Africa. Of the sub-Saharan states, Sudan was the largest, with 17% import and Uganda followed with 16%. Beyond imports, several states in Africa have begun to produce arms, although not as sophisticated as those imported from the ‘west’, but also potent with capacity to inflict untold damage on an individual. Arguing further, the Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN) in a 2010 report confirmed that States in Africa are also largely involved in arms transfers to Non-State Actors. On the weapon manufacturing capacity of African states, the Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN) report asserts that: “Only a few African countries have the capacity to manufacture arms and ammunition with South Africa topping the list, followed by Nigeria, and other states, like Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Zimbabwe”. South Africa ranked 17th among the largest arms exporter globally in the period from 2004 to 2008, especially as a result of its sales contracts with several armed forces in Africa, some of these exports include; 4 armored cars to Burkina Faso, 8 mine-protected and 47 armored vehicles to Senegal, and 4 mine-protected vehicles to Ghana in 2006; and sales of anti-tank missiles to Algeria in 2007 (AEFJN, 2010). Despite this large arms industry, South Africa continues to depend on imports for most of its military equipment. The table below shows other countries in Africa with weapon manufacturing capacity;
Table 2: Countries with Weapon Manufacturing Capacity in Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa in particular

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Weapon Manufacturing Capacity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Africa</td>
<td>Unknown Manufacturer on 7.62mm NATO cartridge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>Ethiopia currently has small military industries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>With assistance from FN Herstal of Belgium (1996), Kenya has domestic capacity to produce small arms and ammunition. The bullet factory’s capacity is 20,000-60,000 bullets per day, while local consumption is about two million bullets per year. Kenya refuses to open up its factories for independent verification of their facilities despite ratifying the UN Arms Trade Treaty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Nigeria has the domestic capacity to manufacture small arms which are similar to the AK-47 and the requisite ammunition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>With assistance from the Chinese, Sudan has built at least three weapons factories outside of Khartoum. There are news that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), designated as a terrorist organization, is operating a secret weapons factory in Sudan to funnel weapons to terrorist organizations in Africa and the Middle East.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>Tanzania has small arms ammunition factories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>Uganda also has small arms ammunition factories. It justifies it by the long-running war with rebels in the north and hostility with Sudan. Uganda refuses to open up its factories for independent verification of their facilities despite ratifying the UN Arms Trade Treaty. There are three weapons manufacturers in Uganda; the largest, Nakasongola Arms Factory, is owned by Chinese (government and private sector) interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Zimbabwe has small arms ammunition factories since the days of the Munitions Production Board of the Second World War. In 1985 ZANU (PF) government established the Zimbabwe Defence Industry (ZDI) which erected two arms production factories with a dual status of being both a private company and a state enterprise. In 1986 NORINCO of China was awarded the contract to build a small arms ammunition factory in Zimbabwe for the ZDI. By 1990, only the Explosives Filling Plant, the Small Arms Ammunition project were built. In 1987 the French Government offered a financial package to the ZDI.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network – AEFJN (2010: 5)

Small arms and light weapons, no doubt, have almost completely replaced the use of nuclear weapons and ammunitions in contemporary conflict and security discuss, and the reasons for this, coupled with the fact that non-state actors (who are the major users of small arms) are, to a large extent, not interested in colossal damage – annihilation, rather with quest for inclusion in socio-economic and political policies and a share in the development process, is that, according to Boutwell and Klare (2000), Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) are “widely available, very cheap, deadly, easy to use and easy to transport and smuggle, unlike heavy conventional arms, such as artillery pieces and tanks, which are typically acquired by government forces, police, soldiers and civil populations”. Jekada (2005), argues further that, “the low price and the technical plainness of small arms; easy in delivery and concealment as well as maintenance capabilities; tactical considerations – use in killing and intimidation of people; and their highly effective nature from a combat point of view, make SALW attractive to non-State actors who significantly lack the capacity to procure and operate more sophisticated heavy weapons.
Small arms have continued to constitute a very serious challenge for development in Africa and have also led to the loss of several lives which would have formed the manpower needed to drive the development of the continent. The unfortunate thing is that this trend is likely to remain for the foreseeable future, unless there is a dynamic change in the several global, regional, sub-regional and national arms control and non-proliferation strategies and treaties that have arguably continued to exist without very significant impact in solving the problem of arms proliferation. The next section will interrogate whether the proliferation of small arms is the cause or an effect of the declining nature of the states in Africa.

PROLIFERATION OF SMALL ARMS: CAUSE OR EFFECT?
The continued proliferation of small arms in Africa have most definitely resulted in several consequences, some of which have been devastating and highly detrimental to the growth and development of continent and in fact threatened the existence of several states in it. Small arms, of themselves, are not capable of causing conflicts, although Jekada (2005) argues that they are not ‘merely symptoms of violence’ because they also contribute to the intensity, duration and destructiveness of internal conflicts. However, the debate, acknowledged by Jekada (2005), borders on whether the ‘proliferation, accumulation and easy availability of weapons should be viewed as a sufficient factor in triggering violent behavior’. Although small arms in most cases are as important as other root causes (permissive factors) in instigating internal conflicts, it is more accurate to include small arms as part of the “approximate causes” of internal conflicts. The difference between the two types of factors, Jekada (2005) explains, is that “while the existence of permissive conditions makes violence more likely, it is the approximate causes that transform potentially violent situations into full-scale confrontations”. Again, small arms, in addition to playing a role in the initiation of internal conflicts, have arguably had more detrimental effects on ongoing conflicts and on post conflict peace-building and reconstruction.

The availability of small arms may prolong fighting, increase human and material loses, reduce willingness of conflicting parties to find negotiated solutions to their disagreements, prevent international and non-governmental organizations from engaging in conflict prevention as well as management and resolution efforts, cause serious problems for the countries surrounding the conflict area, and even trigger interstate violence within regions, and much more, but it must also be mentioned that there are factors that overtime have led to the consequences which small arms have unfortunately sustained (Jekada, 2005; Strohmeyer, 1999; Louise, 1995 and Pirseyedi, 2000).

Small arms are arguably, obviously, the cause of several protracted and prolonged conflict situations across the continent, but could they also be an effect of a continent founded on conflict and violence? The sources of small arms and light weapons (SALW) proliferation in Africa are varied and dynamic. Edeko (2011) observes that they range from the manufacture and supply of new weapons both inside and outside the continent, to the remnants of weapons shipped into Africa in the 1970s and 1980s by the former Soviet Union, the United States, and their allies to facilitate different interstate and intra-state proxy wars.

The violent protests and struggles against colonial rule as well as the acts of pacification and suppression of these protests with the use of weapons; the years following the independence of the African continent and the continued efforts of Europe to remain relevant in the politics and economy of Africa has greatly propelled the transfer of illegal arms across time and space in Africa. Through efforts of military aid and interventions, peacekeeping operations, as well as other similar conditionalities, non-estimated small arms and light weapons, have
gained access into several states on the continent and have continued to proliferate among individuals, especially rebel groups, terrorists and other non-State actors, and have continued to inflict untold harm on other civilian population, especially women and children, as well as the state in particular and the continent in general.

The long years of colonial rule and the authoritarian nature of rule promoted by these colonial administrations in Africa have left a political legacy of authoritarian rule on the continent; the psyche of Africans have been negatively confined to a trend of independent authoritarian regimes and leadership styles across the continent, Zimbabwe, Egypt, Libya, Côte d’Ivoire, until recently, are all cases in point. The corruption, unaccountability, non-representativeness and the other ills that characterized colonial rule have remained for several decades after independence. The several years of defective military regimes across Africa have also adversely affected the nature of leadership on the continent. These leadership trends have led to wide oppositions and resistances from the African people, resulting from gross exclusion of groups from development processes, declining standards of living and poorer wage levels, increasing unemployment rates, increasing poverty, among others; insurgent groups have resorted to arms in order to be heard, and have been infiltrated by other criminal and terrorist groups, unleashing mayhem and insecurity on both the government and citizens of several nations on the continent. The small arms problem is not connected only with the wider problem of violent political disputes within States, small arms are also the main tools of violence for criminals operating either on a national or transnational basis. (Pirseyedi, 2000)

The United Nations Security Council in 2003 also captured the position above in the assertion that “the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and the phenomenon of mercenaries pose complex challenges to West Africa, involving security, humanitarian and development dimensions. The upsurge in intra-state conflicts and violence has created a staggering demand for small arms, and has contributed to the continued proliferation of bandits, rebel groups, mercenaries, uncontrolled police and militia in the entire sub-region (and in fact the continent at large)”. Hence, it is safe to conclude that proliferation of small arms and light weapons is both a cause and the effect of insecurity and declining state capacity in Africa.

WHICH WAY FORWARD?

Having submitted that small arms proliferation is both a cause and effect of the challenge(s) faced by individuals and states in Africa, the question then is, where do we go from here? Abdel-Fatau (2011) identified the following as the reasons for small arms and light weapons proliferation; the breakdown of state structures, lax controls over national armouries and poor service conditions for security personnel. Generally, the continued nature of challenge of small arms proliferation hinges on the nature of leadership and good governance in Africa. Governance is adjudged good or bad depending on the performance of such a government and the attention it pays to the provision of the basic goods and services needed for both collective and individual development of its citizens and the state.

African leaders must sincerely rise to the challenge of security on the continent, including the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and the other security issues brought to the fore by such proliferation. Small arms non-proliferation policies such as the Arms Trade Treaty, ECOWAS Moratorium on Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Light Weapons in West Africa, ECOWAS Small Arms Control Programme (ECOSAP), Small Arms Transparency and Control Regime in Africa (SATCRA), West Africa Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA), among other national policies, must be re-examined to ascertain that these policies are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound, and would
prove useful in controlling to a large extent the level of proliferation of these small arms. It is also important that machineries for the sincere and effective implementation of these policies are also put in place. Much of the challenge, however, isn’t the absence of arms control policies, but lack of, or weak implementation mechanisms whose capacities have been largely undermined by corruption and other economic realities in the state.

Credible regional and national research and training institutions must be built and maintained with qualified personnel that are well remunerated. The availability of sound analytical and empirical research on arms proliferation will better equip the leadership with adequate information on rational decisions that would effectively control the spread of such deadly weapons. Some of the popular arms research institutions that largely conduct research and provide information on arms are; United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) (International), Norwegian Initiative on Small Arms Transfers (NISAT) (Norway), Small Arms Survey (Switzerland), Center for Arms Control, Energy and Environmental Studies (Russia), Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) (UK), Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) (Germany), Arms Security Initiative (USA), Arms Control Association (ACA) (USA), among many others. There is the need for African leaders to establish institutions or revamp the existing ones, as well as fund research on small arms proliferation and control strategies which would better inform policy formulation and actions.

There must also be a shift in the paradigm of education. While emphasizing the non-negotiable importance of education, leaders of states in Africa must promote a new orientation in education which is based on vocational training, skill acquisition and mentoring. This is necessary because the old paradigm of education; getting good grades and subsequently good jobs, have long become unrealistic in Africa as African states have continued to battle with the challenge of increasing unemployment. In addition, the government in Africa must create an atmosphere that encourages private sector initiatives and that would encourage small scale businesses to survive, since this will arguably reduce the number of individuals involved in small arms proliferation.

Security agencies in most of the states in Africa have become an ‘enemy of the citizen’ owing to the several hostilities of such security officers on the citizen. In most cases, criminal elements have disguised as security officers and successfully carried out serious crimes without being noticed. This unfortunate trend, which has led to a lack of confidence in these agencies, has largely undermined the capacity of these agencies to function effectively as regards crime control and internal security management. African leaders address this situation by adequate recruitment (based on merit), training and equipped of security officers to maintain intra-state peace and safety. There must also be provision of robust welfare packages that satisfy the ‘natural greed’ of these officers and take care of their families in case of any unfortunate situation. The task of small arms and light weapons control is both enormous, and non-negotiable if sanity and relative peace will be restored on the continent.

CONCLUSION

Security challenges, including the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, would remain a global concern for a very long time to come, however the negative impacts of this and other security challenges can be largely minimized, and their effects on both individuals and the state also largely reduced.
The war against illegal manufacture, sale and transfer of small arms and light weapons can only be close to victorious when sincere and responsible leadership, reasonable followship, coupled with realistic policies and strategies that reflect the needs and aspirations of the individuals and states on the continent become a characteristic of the continent. It will be near impossible, if not completely impossible to entirely eradicate the illegal proliferation of arms and light weapons in Africa, especially because of the very nature of the continent itself with regards to conflict. However, such proliferation can be tremendously curtailed if the welfare and safety needs of Africans are met.

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