

PROLIFERATION OF ILLEGAL ARMS AND AMMUNITION INTO NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS AND THREATS TO NATIONAL SECURITY

Vincent Chi Ezinwa

General Studies Division

*Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Agbani,
Enugu State.*

And

Rev. Fr. Joseph C. Inmpey

General Studies Division,

*Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Agbani,
Enugu State.*

Abstract

This paper tried to examine how associated killer weapons imported have put Nigeria on gun powder. This has made Nigeria to be a nation shuddered by crime and criminals. The re-current seizure of arms and ammunition by custom officials (2017) in the recent history of Nigeria appears to have heightened the sense of insecurity in the country. Deceptively, some of the arms imported illegal are packaged on lethal items, were they are concealed and declared as goods. The ploy was meant to cause confusion and aid clearing of the prohibited goods. The question this paper seems to ask is, who are those behind this illicit arms trade, and what are their intentions? These are the fulcrum of this research paper which is to be analyzed and evaluated so that the Nigerian government and custom officials will gain additional knowledge on how to intercept guns and rifles concealed with pop cement at their land borders, sea and air ports.

Keywords: Illegal arms importation, a nation on gun powder, threat to national security, security alert to check the proliferation of arms.

The recurrent illicit arms and ammunition importation into Nigeria express worry in the recent history of the country. This development has now become a threat to national security. Thus, a called on the relevant security agencies to step up

intelligence and surveillance, with a view to mopping up illegal arms across the nation is necessary.

In this direction, this paper tried to examine the proliferation of illicit arms and ammunition importation into Nigeria in the 21st century and the security implications to the country. In the course of the discourse the paper tried to unfold the sources of the illegal arms and ammunition imported into the country and those behind the illicit arms and ammunition trade-so that we can identify their reasons and intention behind this illicit trade in arms. Another aspect of the paper examined the security implications of proliferation of arms and ammunition into the country. The paper also outlined the strategies to curb illicit arms importation into Nigeria. The last aspect of the paper consisted of conclusion and recommendations to ensure a tight control on fire arms to deter others to engage in trade with associated killer weapons.

Sources of Illegal Arms and Ammunition into Nigeria

There are two sources of proliferation of illegal arms and ammunition into Nigeria. One is through domestic -production of arms by local blacksmiths; they manufacture small arms and sell to their local hunters, criminals and dubious politicians. Gun blacksmith are found in rural areas of Nigeria e.g. Awka smithers. Agulu Umana smithers, etc. Two, is the importation of arms and ammunition from North Africa, Europe, America, Middle East and the Asian Tigers countries. Some of these arms are smuggled into the country through our porous borders in the North and through the sea ports and air ports. Deceptively, the lethal items are sealed and declared as goods. The ploy is meant to cause confusion and aid clearing of the prohibited goods.

According to Isioma (2017) the recent interception of a container-load of 440 pump action rifles and other assorted weapons at the Tin Can Island Port, Lagos, was not entirely surprising. It happened on February 5, 2017, when a vessel bearing 661 rifles evaded scanning at the same port before officials on tip off rounded up the criminals. The latest seizure came barely four months after the February incident. The zonal coordinator zone "A", Nigeria Custom Services, an Assistant Controller-General Monday Abue (2017) disclosed during a press conference that the guns were concealed in a 20-foot container marked PONU210024 (1)22gi. For deception reason, the weapons were declared by the importers as antisera and cannula (chemical formula). The seizure was made possible through intelligence which necessitated the segregation of the 1x20ft container to the Enforcement unit for physical examination.

Abue (2017) gave the details of the seizure as follows:

- 100 pieces of Black Tornado Single Barrel Rifles
- 75 pieces Silver Magnum Single Barrel Rifles
- 50 pieces of Atter Pump Action Rifles
- 215 pieces of Black Single Barrel Rifles
- 164 pieces of Rifle Nozzle

- 103 pieces of Arms Grips
- 110 pieces of Trigger
- 113 pieces of Arm Gurad
- 107 piece of bridge Block
- 122 piece of Allen Keys
- 117 pieces of Assemble Butt
- 516 50kg bags of POP Cement

As Isioma (2017) pointed out, some of the guns were manufactured in the United States and Italy, but allegedly imported from Turkey to Nigeria. Apart from the 440 pieces of the pump action magnum brand, other accessories of the guns were found concealed in the container. They were Completely Knocked Down (CKD) of the pump action arranged in the consignment.

Those Behind Illicit Arms and Ammunition Trade in Nigeria.

There are many dubious Nigerians and groups that are behind the illicit arms and ammunition trade in Nigeria which include:

(1) Arms and Ammunition Smugglers

There are dubious Nigerian businessmen and women who collaborate with their foreign partners to smuggle small arms and ammunition in Nigeria through our porous land border in the North and porous sea ports in the South. These smugglers also partners with some of the dubious custom officers in the anti-smuggling unit who declined to check the containers under their custody. Hence, this gives vent to genuine concern that some arms and weapons escape security at the ports. The porous security equally contributed to making Nigeria a fertile end point for illegal arms and ammunition. According to Ejiofor (2017) “the inability of the security operatives to properly identify and prosecute the arms dealers is the brain behind the previous illegal importations that gave a kind of impetus to others to try their luck”. Many of the arms and ammunition that are imported into Nigeria is master minded by arm dealers. They are illegal importations, that is the reason most of the seized arms and ammunition in the ports nobody could claim ownership of them.

All the security agencies of government must bear direct responsibilities for protecting our border and people; pay particular attention to the smuggling of arms into the country by whatever route; it should be taken seriously because the fight against crime and criminality could possibly start from the prevention of the proliferation of arms into the country.

(2) Subversive Elements or Dubious Politicians

Most of the arms and ammunition imported illegally in Nigeria through our porous land border and porous sea ports and air ports are likely by subversive elements or

dubious politicians who are desperate to grab or secure political power during elections. Dubious and pervasive Nigerian politicians need these arms and ammunition to cause instability and havoc in the camps of opposition. It is unfortunate, many high profile politicians are arrested in connection of arms deals, but we do not hear anything serious after that. According to Isioma (2017) “such attitudes encourages others to go into small illegal arm activities. So, there is the need for the security agencies, especially the police to prosecute perpetrators and bring them to answer for their misdeeds”.

The weapons trade is a highly sophisticated, cosmopolitan and intricate business. It is often conducted in utmost secrecy, known only into a gang, clique, or a coterie. It belongs to the elite club of the society. Poor people not get involved in arms importation. It is therefore very clear that very powerful persons are involved in the illegal importation. In Nigeria, the wealthy and powerful tend to escape the arms of the law. They use millions of naira to do the dirty jobs and like the proverbial godfather; stay behind the scenes to manipulate things. Arms and ammunition cases should not be “swept under the carpet; the highly people involve in such deals must be brought to book. Nigeria’s collective security is threatened when weapons are in the hands of ruthless, aggressive and unscrupulous politicians who are not authorized to have them. It keeps the citizenry under siege, physically and psychologically the common person in the street is in bondage and at the mercy of armed politicians.

(3) **Crime and Criminality by the Fulani herdsmen and Boko Haram**

Since the Fulani headsmen have stopped carrying sticks as they now bear dangerous AK45 rifles, some of the arms and ammunition imported in the country might be the herdsmen and their sponsor. Security experts in recent times also advised the security agencies to look at all the incidence of crime and criminality by the Fulani headsmen and crop farmers all over the country. Especially the long porous land borders we have in the North might be a source of entry of arms and ammunition into the country from North Africa and Middle East that are experiencing civil war and dumping ground of arms and ammunition from Europe and Asia. The porous long land borders in Northern Nigeria could have equally contributed to making the country a fertile end point for illegal arms and ammunition used by terror groups like Boko Haram. Sometimes, other terror groups in North Africa and the Middle East like ISIS and Al - Shaba may have links with Boko Haram by supplying them with arms to continue to fight the cause of the “Holy War” in Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad. According to Adeniyi (2017), “Today in Nigeria, the greatest challenge to national security is the brutal and brutish barbarism of the Fulani herdsmen whose madness does not have rhyme or rhythm. All they know is to use arms to spread grief, anguish and dreadful pain wherever they choose to display their unbridled cruelty and impunity. They have wreaked havoc in Adamawa, they have raped and killed in Taraba, they have massacred thousands of innocent Agatus in Benue, they have wreaked havoc in Niger,

they have continually butchered thousands in southern kaduna, Kogi State under their hammer and Plateau is under their occupation, the list is endless”. These are the dangers a nation suffers when illicit arms and ammunition are in the hands of criminals.

(4) Militant Groups in the Niger Delta

It is important to note that the arms and ammunition that comes into Nigeria do not come from the thin air. They come through certain ports in the country. So, when you look at all of these: the Niger Delta agitation by militants, the support of Indigenous people of Biafra to the Niger Delta struggle and the militants engaging security agencies in the country. The arms and ammunition used by the militants are illegally imported from Europe and America. Some of the weapons are exchanged with crude oil. Some experts aptly point out that the sufferings of the Niger Delta people on issues of relative deprivation, poverty, unemployment and environmental degradation in the midst of plenty crude oil on their land, gives room for their importation of arms and ammunition into the oil rich region to fight for resource control and true federalism by the criminally minded Niger Delta Militants against the false federal system in Nigeria.

(5) Criminals

Criminals who find it difficult to own guns through the legal process from the government might decide to import illegal arms through our porous borders to cause trouble to the Nigerian state and the citizenry. Isioma (2017) was not far from the point when he explained that “criminals may have accumulated considerable weaponry and the security agencies appear impotent” Criminals are always comfortable when they have secret illegal arms at their control to oppress their opponents. It gives them more courage and strength to commit atrocity in the society as dubious Nigerians can use them to assassinate their rivals. Organize hire assassins is a lucrative business that earns them millions and billions of naira from their wealthy client. These hired assassins make use of illicit arms and ammunition imported into Nigeria to eliminate their opponents.

Security Implications for Proliferation of Illegal Arms and Ammunition in Nigeria

The influx of arms and ammunition into the country are ominous because it raises a lot of security concern. Isioma (2017) believed that the inability of the security operatives to properly identify and prosecute the brains behind the previous and present illegal importation of arms in the country gives a kind of impetus to others to commit the crime of importing their own arms and ammunition illegally. The Nigerian Customs Service has continued to celebrate seizure of arms without telling the citizenry what happened with the previous ones seized. Sometimes, it is

helpless when customs intercepted a truck with arms and nobody could claim ownership of those arms. If this security gaps continues, then these is hen to be more trouble for the nation; because some of these arms are imported by subversive elements or politicians preparing to rig an election with their dubious hoodlums. Nigeria is therefore in trouble, as individuals or groups of people continue to illegally import arms into the country such arms and ammunition are definitely meant to cause instability and havoc in some parts of the country no doubt.

According to former Defense Information Office to the Nigeria Army, Brigadier General G.I Igbo (Rtd) (2017), on the security of the state, “it is definitely a worrisome situation and the government should not condole this illegality of arms importation. If you ask me I would say that these discoveries portend a lot of danger. The objective is the same which is to cause conflict and crisis in different parts of Nigeria. Our security agencies should remain vigilant so that they could discover more of these illegal arms and ammunition that are being brought into the country”.

Furthermore, another former Director of Public Relations and Information (DOPRI), the Nigerian Air force, Air Commodore Yusuf Anas (Rtd) (2017), see it as worrying also because any illegality of arm importation that is not limited by sanctions, certainly will continue and that is the challenges we are having in the areas of crisis and conflicts in the country. Many people are arrested, high profile arrest of economic saboteurs, but we not hear anything serious after that, such attitude encourage others to go into the same illegal activities. So, there is the need for the security agencies, especially the police to prosecute those perpetrators and bring them to answer for their misdeeds.

For Akhimien (2017) security expert and Managing Director at D-autofixas Hi-tech Company, explains that it is always a negative implication for the proliferation of small arms into any country, especially when the country is not at war. There are implications for national security as different groups; particularly ethnic militias are more likely to obtain arms to prosecute their agendas. With the proliferation of arms and ammunition in Nigeria today there are also implications. For the current war against Boko Haram terrorist that dangerous weapons will be at their beck and call and this will aid in sustaining their campaign against the Nigeria state. Furthermore, coup plotters may also use the proliferations of arms and ammunition in the country to plot military coup, if the national security is weak and unstable.

The security implication for the proliferation of arms and ammunition in Nigeria calls for concern as the Fulani herdsmen have stopped carrying sticks as they now bear dangerous rifles like AK47. The questions many Nigerians are asking is that who gave these young men such sophisticated weapons? This raise concern over the criminal blood-letting between the Fulani herdsmen and crop farmer across the six geo-political zones of Nigeria, the weapons carried by the Fulani herdsmen entered the country through the porous borders in northern Nigeria.

It is important to note that the current indices of criminality witnessed today in Nigeria is because of the huge importations of arms and ammunition into the country by dubious minded Nigeria who are desperate to grab power and wealth for themselves and immediate families. This proliferation of arms and ammunition in Nigeria weakens democratic institutions and principles in Nigeria for the citizens to follows as human rights and the abuse of it is witnessed all over the country. This makes Nigeria to became a blood soaked country as blood-letting is common. Furthermore, the shortage of requisite technology equipment to assist custom officers to check the importation of illicit arms into the country threatens the national security of the country; especially as Nigeria is referred the “Giant of Africa”.

According to Adeniyi (2017) the greatest threat to national security of Nigeria is the brutal and brutish barbarism of the Fulani herdsmen whose madness does not have rhyme or rhythm. All the people across Nigeria being ruthlessly assaulted by the Fulani herdsmen have relations and families in the military, the police, the SSS, the immigration and customs as well as in other armed security outfits in the land. This attitude of the Fulani herdsmen weakens the stronghold and the cohesive military, and other armed security outfits in Nigeria. The unscrupulous attitude of the herdsmen to crop farmers in Nigeria weakens the moral of other ethnic groups to have a rethink of the national security of the country, it affect the unity that exist in the Nigerian military.

In Nigeria today, the unwanted proliferation of arms and ammunition in the hands of Boko Haram often witness the prosecution and unabashed persecution of Christians in the Northern region. Leaders in the North who imports illicit arms and condoning the slaughtering of innocent Christian in the North have their ears put to the ground to know the degree of anger the persecuted groups nurse against the power blocs in the North and Nigeria at large. To that extent, therefore, the one North and the visionary leadership given by Sir Ahmadu Bello is weakened. Bello never imported arms in the North to massacre the Christians. He was not self-seeking, he did not amass wealth, and he was the man of the people. The continuous importation of illicit arms and ammunition in Nigeria is the result of undue and mindless bloodshed experienced in Nigeria in our recent history; which invariably results to ethnic conflict and the internally colonized contraption of the false federal system and forced marriage and that is part of the reason the Igbo and other ethnic groups in Nigeria wishes to opt out of the yoked and bandaged marriage of Lord Lugard’s amalgamation of 1914.

When politicians, who want to win elections by all means, import arms and ammunition, they release them to hoodlums and thugs who in turn use the weapon on innocent citizens after every election cycle. They are also gladly available to militants, terrorists, and bandits. To further put it clear, Franas et al (2017) aptly pointed out that, the policemen trying to rescue the six abducted students of Lagos State Model College, Igbonla, Epe, in the heat of the attack Marine Police called their

Ogun State counterpart they said they did not have ammunition. These points to the dangers of arms and ammunition in the hands of criminals to overwhelm that of the nation's security agencies. Cases of policemen running out of ammunition during gun duel with militants, criminals and bandit with superior arms are common occurrences in the recent history of the nation as rescue missions could turn bloody.

A situation where the country frequently loss it security operations to criminal elements with superior weapons imported through our porous borders and ports is not acceptable. There is need to step up our security to combat militancy, insurgency and crime because it is not going to go away anytime soon, by people who are doing the business of kidnapping to collect fat ransom. We need to increase our special weapons, and tactics, and we need to equip the nation's security outfits with modern crime fighting technologies as a way of reducing deaths among our security operatives because we have lost a lot of security personnel to hoodlums. We have had a lot of orphans and widows arising from this saddling situation. (Oji & Olakunle, 2017:47)

It is also important to point out that why Boko Haram always succeeded in their attack on targets is because they always carry superior arms imported through our porous borders, while the nation's security agencies are blamed for their defeat on carrying inferior arms and not keeping and adopting tenets of new base defense concept. (Erunke, 2017:9). With the proliferation of arms imported into the country through our porous borders and ports, former President, Olusegun Obasanjo (2017) has warned that the country might be consumed by anger of the youths as a result of neglect in the scheme of things. We have the Boko Haram in the North, the MASSOB and IPOB in the South East, the militants in the Niger Delta and the Oodua people Congress in the South West. All of these are the expressions of anger and frustrations. Security experts have warned that if the proliferation of arms and ammunition imported in Nigeria enter the hands of angered and frustrated youths it may consume the country.

Strategies to Curb Illicit Arms and Ammunition Importation in Nigeria

The following strategies have been considered to curb illicit arms importation in Nigeria.

1. Customs officials should go a step further to find out the sources and owners of the illicit arms and ammunition imported into Nigeria. They should know who ordered them, and then arrest and prosecution should follow immediately to deter others from importing arms into the country.
2. Customs officials should have a data base about previous illicit arms importation, so that investigation about such route of arms importation could be curbed from the root diplomatically through dialogue.
3. The law enforcement agencies should place their search light at the direction of dubious politicians who are desperate to grab political power by all means with

imported arms and ammunition to share to their thugs and hoodlums, who in turn use the weapons on innocent citizens after every election cycle.

4. The Federal Government should not condole this illegality of their close aid and ally to engage in the crime of illicit arms importation into the country.

5. The government should employ the service of security experts and retired officers who are well experience to help curb the importation of arms and ammunition into the country.

6. The customs and other security agencies of government must bear direct responsibilities for protecting our borders and people. They should pay particular attention to the smuggling of arms into the country by whatever route-through

7. The long land borders in North and through the sea ports and airports in the South. This should be taken seriously because the fight against crime and criminality could possibly start from the prevention of the proliferation of arms into the country. Our security agencies speedy and good stand to fight crime is encouraging and all efforts should be sustained to curb arms proliferation in the country.

8. Our security agencies should keep an “eagle eye watch” over the activities of militants in the Niger Delta region. Boo Haram and herdsmen activities in the North East and other ethnic militia groups in the country that can be tempted o import arms and ammunition to achieve their selfish agendas.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that in Nigeria today smugglers, militants, terrorists, militia groups, dubious politicians and their thugs may have accumulated considerable weaponry and the security agencies in our borders by land, sea ports and airports are impotent. When small arms and ammunition are into the hands of these criminals they usually turn and use them on the innocent citizens. It is, indeed, worrying also because any illegality that is not limited by sanctions, certainly it will continue and that is the challenges we are having in the areas of crisis and conflict in Nigeria. Many smugglers of arms are arrested, but nothing heard again after that. Such attitudes encourage other Nigerians to engage in the business of illicit arms importation. So, there is the need for the security agencies, especially the custom and police to partner to prosecute these perpetrators and bring them to answer for their crime against humanity.

Recommendations

This paper has come forth with the following recommendations to curb illicit arms and ammunition importation in Nigeria.

1. Before any Nigerian should be in possession of arms, democratic principle must be followed and human right laws observed. Otherwise, anyone caught with illicit arms and ammunition importation and proven guilty should be severely punished for such a criminal act.

2. The government should endeavour to provide in our sea ports, airports and land borders requisite technology and logistical equipment to support and assist work at different customs points to fight the menace of illicit arms and ammunition importation into the country.

3. The security agencies in Nigeria should also use their search light and “eagle eyes” to look at all the incidence of crime and criminality by the Fulani herdsmen all over the country. For example, the Fulani herdsmen have stopped carrying sticks as they now carry dangerous rifles. Security agencies should question the source and funding of the arms they are carrying.

4. The Federal Government should partner with relevant security agencies to stop their intelligence and surveillance, with the aim of mopping up illegal arms across the six-geo political zones in the country. Otherwise, dubious politicians will use them to cause mayhem in the country. Such mop up of illegal arms may come through granting of criminals, terrorist and militants’ groups’ amnesty for them to surrender their aims to the government for reintegrated into the society. For example, the Presidential Amnesty Programme given to the Niger Delta militants helped to curb youths restiveness in the oil rich region.

5. The Federal Government and security agencies in Nigeria should ensure a tight control measure on fire arms to deter the proliferation of arms and ammunition into the country. Since guns cannot be owned without a license in Nigeria, security experts suggest and recommend that, there must be a national architecture to mop up the weapons in the hands of criminals and politicians. Such weapons should be destroyed to prevent criminals from gaining access to them again.

6. It is the duty of the Federal Government to protect all the ethnic groups and their properties in Nigeria without bias. The security agencies should be formed and operating without bias. One ethnic group should not have influence over the army than the other ethnic groups. Otherwise, such ethnic groups may consider importing illicit arms and ammunition to protect themselves and their properties.

References

An Editorial Education (2017), *Smuggling Weapons into Nigeria: Matters Arising*, Lagos: *The Guardian*, June 1:18

Erunke, J (2017), *Why Boko Haram Succeeded in Recent Attack*, Kaduna: *Vanguard*, May 29:9

Isioma, M (2017), *Assorted Killer Weapons: A Nation on Gun Powder*, Lagos: *Saturday Telegraph*, May 27:5

Isioma, M, (2017) *Illegal Arms, Threat to National security – Experts*, Lagos: *Saturday Telegraph*, May 27; 6-7

Juliana, F. et al (2017) *Traditional Ruler held for Supplying Kidnapper Food*, Lagos: *New Telegraph*, May 29:5

Oji, C and Olakunle, O (2017) *Kidnapped Lagos Students: Rescue Mission turns Bloody Lagos*: *Sunday Sun*, May 28:47

Olatunji, D (2017) *Youths' Anger May Consume Us-Obasanjo Warns*, Abeokuta: *Vanguard*, May 29:5

Tola, A (2017) *The North, Which North?* Lagos: *Sunday Sun*, May 28:26