

Forum: The First General Assembly

Issue: The Question of reducing small arms and light weapons (SALW) trade in Africa

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Introduction

Africa is the second most populated continent on the planet however it accounts for most of the small arms and light weapons (SALW) trade in the world. While several uprisings, civil wars and geopolitical tensions do affect this, the presence of SALW trade in Africa has fueled conflict, contributed to poverty and has stalled development in many emerging economies in the African continent. Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly West Africa, has been the most unstable region on the continent. Since the 1960s, out of the 15 countries in that region, most of them have gone through several military coups, 37 of them being successful. The presence of SALW after the coups has led to increased violence and a lack of stability in the region, hampering the development of the rest of Africa. As the number of coups increase in African nations, the question of uncontrollable SALW proliferation has emerged to become the main point of this debate.

Small arms and light weapons are lightweight, concealable, cheap and widely available and have also been used by child soldiers in many West African conflicts. SALW remain the primary weapons used in feuds in the region and have been heavily misused by both state and non-state actors.

There is also another aspect to the issue here—the cultural significance of the AK-47 to the formerly colonized peoples of southern Africa. After decades of use by

anticolonial and antiapartheid movements, the powerful weapon has come to be associated with liberation. For example, the silhouette of a gun is featured on the Mozambican flag. Freedom songs from the struggles against minority rule in Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Angola often extolled the virtues of the AK-47, and those of the fighters carrying it. Recognizing the problems posed by its proliferation, many countries are involved in coordinated action, mainly within the framework of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

After analysing the current situation in Africa, the UN started a lot of initiatives to control the proliferation of arms and prevent further civilian conflict especially in emerging countries, which lack the resources to protect their citizens at all times. The Arms Trade Treaty is a key example of that vision to eradicate the existence of arms proliferation. It encompasses a set of guidelines and framework to ensure the safe trading of arms across the world. This also avoids SALW reaching the wrong hands especially in the African continent such as smuggling rings, rebel groups as well as non-state actors which could all potentially harm and damage the development and the safety of all citizens of Africa. The lack of proper federal structure capable to keep SALW of their nations, the presence of smuggling rings as well as corrupt officers within the government are some of the reason behind the trade of SALW in Africa.

Definition of Key Terms

Armed insurgencies

A violent rebellion with the use of arms against authority. Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan and Burkina Faso are some countries that have experienced armed insurgencies. Public disapproval towards the government is one of the most common reasons behind an armed insurgency. The easy access of arms acts as a catalyst towards such events.

Arms exporters

Actors of the arms industry that send arms to countries. The United States of America, Russian Federation as well as the State of Israel are some of the biggest arms exporters in the world. Smuggling rings based out of Africa are also huge customers as they have access to the manforce as well as "black money" to construct such transactions.

Arms race

A pattern of competitive acquisition of military capability between two or more countries. The term is often used quite loosely to refer to any military buildup or spending increases by a group of countries. The competitive nature of this buildup often reflects an adversarial relationship. The Cold War is a past instance of the arms race and such competitive behaviors are motivating other African countries to hold possessions of arms in the likely event of a conflict in the region.

Civil wars

A civil war is a war between organized groups within the same state or country. The aim of one side may be to take control of the country or a region, to achieve independence for a region, or to change government policies. Countries such as the USA and Syria have had civil wars and the disputed claims between different group of people have turned out to be violent and the presence of SALW just makes the situation worse.

Forced displacement

Involuntary movement of a person away from their home region. Conflicts especially with arms have forced citizens to flee their country in search of safety and protection of themselves as well as their families

Guerilla force

A violent non-state actor that uses irregular tactics to fight a larger armed force.

Porous borders

Barriers that allow easy passage of citizens as well goods and services in and out of the country. Countries such as Nigeria and Burkina Faso have been reported having weak security around their borders.

Possession of small arms and light weapons

The state of having, owning, or controlling SALW. Instability in the region along with constant conflicts have forced citizens to possess SALW. The increase in demand leads to proliferation of SALW and makes the society dangerous.

Proliferation of arms possession

Arms proliferation is a rapid increase in numbers or rapid growth of demand in arms.

Rebel faction

Group of people who rise in opposition or armed resistance against an established government or leader. This faction has always been involved in armed insurgencies and civil wars and the presence of SALW makes the rebel faction deadly and a force to reckon with.

Targeted Killings

A targeted killing refers to a killing of a specific person that was initiated by another nation through certain motivations. These motivations might consist of evidence of an attack, for the motif of ethnic cleansing, etc.

Key Issues

Increased proliferation of SALW

Vast quantities of arms have flooded the region despite their rampant misuse by state and non-state actors alike. The widespread availability of small arms to abusive actors poses a threat of unprecedented magnitude to West Africa, far greater than that of

HIV/AIDS in terms of its socio-economic and human consequences. Because of this proliferation, the fabric of the subregion itself is rapidly changing, moving toward self-destruction. This is shown as the easy availability and use of SALW is leading to tragic consequences, not only for combatants but also for civilians, who form the majority of casualties—people are losing their lives, their health, their families, their homes and their livelihoods.

Increased proliferation also exposes the chance for the arms to be exploited and be used for more than means to protect for the average person. It also could be used to invoke intentional harm, leading to a full blown conflict which creates a domino effect on the people as well the development of the people and the country.

Lax control on the borders across the continent

Contributing factors include lax arms export controls in supplier countries, subregional allies who provide cover and sometimes financing (for example Burkina Faso facilitated the supply of arms to Liberia, despite a UN embargo), and transnational arms dealers motivated by profit to break the law. Another key factor is the ability of embargoed buyers to use misappropriated funds or trade valuable commodities, such as diamonds or timber concessions, for arms.

Weak borders also allow arms to gain easy access in and out of the country. It is important to understand the advantage of having a strong border. It restricts movement between nations in terms of illegal arms trade and that can give the federal government an advantage and allow them to securely confiscate all SALW present in the country.

Weak borders have led to an influx in arms and that has reportedly made many African nations very unsafe for living and that can lead to skilled workers leaving the nation in search for better opportunities and that can halt the development of the federal economy, leading to a weak and unskilled labor force. This toxic chain reaction is the

result of not having strong borders and this exhibits the damage weak borders can cause apart from a proliferation in SALW.

Presence of arms smuggling rings

The Small Arms Survey notes that Nigeria has porous borders on both its land and sea edges, allowing gun smuggling from a variety of countries. Many of these weapons come from war-torn countries elsewhere in Africa. Others have found that many of the arms smuggling rings operate out of Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and Nigeria. The smugglers use speed-boats to connect to the high seas, and then ferry the arms back to shore.

As mentioned before, arms smuggling rings feed on the failures of the government and the weak border security and that is the main reason behind the influx in supply in such war-torn nations across Africa. As weapons get circulated across the continent, the failures of some countries are affecting all countries in the continent. Arms smuggling rings have maintained a dominant hold over the arms trade within the region and that is illegally regulating the sale of arms.

Governments with an agenda and foreign policy

In mid-2003, while conflict raged in Liberia, the government of Guinea imported mortar rounds and other ammunition from Iran. These were declared on cargo documents as “detergent” and “technical equipment”. From Guinea, the weapons were forwarded to allied rebels inside Liberia who had just launched two offences on the capital, Monrovia. The rebels of Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy used these weapons to fire indiscriminately on civilian areas of Monrovia.

Just as weapons are recycled from conflict to conflict in West Africa, so too are some of the fighters.

Location also plays a role as countries are forced to fortify their borders when neighbouring other conflict ridden countries. For instance, during the Iran-Iraq war in the 20th century, Kuwait was very concerned about their citizens' safety in light of the fact that they share the border with both nations. While no harm was caused in Kuwait due to its excellent relations with both nations, it is important to draw to your attention that location and foreign policy play a huge role in combating conflict and avoiding the use and presence of arms in the territory.

Weak economies prone to civil uprisings and regional crises

There is a thriving trade in mercenaries in West Africa, aiding the circulation and proliferation of small arms in the region. Levels of youth unemployment are high and there are many able-bodied, disgruntled persons available, ready and willing to be trained and armed to fight. As the same ethnic groups live in different states, shared identity can motivate would-be mercenaries further.

The trade in mercenaries is also fuelled by the potential profits to be made in the illicit trafficking of minerals. Large groups of ex-fighters have been attracted to the mineral-rich areas of Sierra Leone and its porous borders, to the potential rewards of illicit mining and criminality. The local oil boom also facilitates proliferation, as rebel groups carry out oil bunkering to arm themselves. Much of West Africa's mineral wealth is being diverted to aid small arms proliferation in West Africa and these arms in turn are ensuring that this diversion of resources persists, to the detriment of development.

The need for SALW by the citizens are raised by civil uprisings, regional crises as well as armed insurgencies. According to various sources, at least 15 conflicts were active in Africa in 2019 and that highlights the recent rise in proliferation of SALW in the conflict ridden region. The current situation makes it imperative for nations to act upon

strengthening the people in support of the government to avoid insurgency and civil unrest amongst the public. Such conflicts severely increase the rate of proliferation as past conflicts have shown that having possession of SALW is the only way to get justice and your rights.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Federal Republic of Nigeria

Nigeria has always recognized the civil unrest within their territories and has worked alongside fellow allies and neighbouring countries to strengthen border protection and crackdown on illicit SALW trade. Nigeria is also part of various global and regional treaties and agreements to reduce the trade of such deadly weapons. Nigeria has closely worked with the UN as well as its Western allies to help control the illicit trade within its borders however the influx of weapons across the African continent has constantly destabilized not only Nigeria, but the whole of Africa.

The Republic of Kenya

Kenya has noticed a drop in SALW trade due to its geography; particularly as it is not present in the Western Africa which includes Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte D'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo.

While SALW trade is extensive and predominantly present in West Africa, hundreds of weapons and fighters from the Sudan civil war are now seen migrating towards Kenya and into various refugee camps across Kenya. In the Dadaab refugee camp in northern Kenya, 75 percent of reported rapes and sexual assaults occurred at the hands of armed assailants. Kenya has always maintained

excellent ties with their allies, regionally and globally. Kenya is present in treaties such as the Arms Trade Treaty.

The Republic of South Africa

While South Africa has a sizable arms manufacturing industry and contributes to the national economy, the influx of arms within the territories has led to an increase in domestic violence and stats have shown that a gun increases the chance of death by 12 times compared to other means of violence. Every six hours in South Africa, a woman is shot dead by her current or former partner. Like all their African allies, South Africa is also involved and are signatories in various arms treaties and agreements.

Russian Federation

Russia is one of the biggest arms exporters in the world and its trademark and world famous AK-47 is a favorite in Africa due to cultural reasons. While Russia is alleged to have some kind of involvement with arms smuggling rings to increase the sales and demand of one of Russia's biggest exports, the Russian government has not commented on this issue. While Russia historically doesn't have any involvement nor presence in the region, it shares similar ideologies with many nations within the African continent and that can also hint towards indirect investment coming in from Russia towards the funding of these conflicts. A similar situation was witnessed during the Syrian Civil War as Russia and the Syrian government shared similar ideologies and as an ally, Russia backed the government and provided support towards the Syrian army. In spite of the fact that the connection is not so direct, Russia's past history with organized crime has raised some eyebrows.

An important point to remember is that after the collapse of the Soviet Union leading to the withdrawal from Eastern Europe had caused a large number of weapons and associated ammunition to be left behind. This resulted in a management problem, as it became very difficult for the government to have inventory control and a fully accurate record of the legal arms. Due to the previous Yugoslav wars, there were already illegal arms in the black market sourced from the wars. The start of the Ukraine war in 2014 worsened the situation as many people began to loot depots and armories in mainly Eastern Ukraine, Western Ukraine, and Crimea. These illegal arms reached terrorist groups and organizations outside of eastern Europe and Russia, especially in Africa through international illegal arms dealers.

United Kingdom of Great Britain and the Northern Ireland

The United Kingdom historically has ties with Africa as it colonized much of Africa during the colonial era and that has an everlasting impact on the United Kingdom's foreign policy. The UK has particularly refrained from involving themselves in every single conflict within Africa because that would involve NATO troops and would make the conflicts significantly larger than it is meant to be. While that is being said, the United Kingdom has involved themselves in large scale conflicts such as the civil unrest in both Libya and Sudan. While the United Kingdom is no longer a colonial power currently controlling the territory in Africa, it continues to be involved in Africa, maintaining a presence.

United States of America

The United States of America is considered the world's only superpower and the American government has constantly showcased that across the world in Japan, Germany, Afghanistan, Iraq and also Libya. The USA had created a power

vacuum in Libya after invading Libya to oust dictator Gaddafi. What led after that incident were power struggles and civil unrest with arms in the forefront. While Libya is one example of the involvement of the USA in Africa, American troops have constantly worked with the UN as well as NATO to deploy troops and peacekeeping forces to maintain peace in the African continent. Libya was one of the first countries to get hit with a conflict within its borders and provided the base for future conflicts as a lot of fighters and arms were circulated across Africa due to an influx in Libya during the civil unrest in Libya. It is also to be noted that due to the Libyan conflict, the influx previously mentioned made its way in the Sudanese Civil War, harming the Sudanese public even more.

People's Republic of China

China has pushed to increase dominance in the African continent and the recent development of China's foreign base in Djibouti is just the highlight. China shares similar ideologies with many countries in Africa such as South Sudan and was one of the few countries that provided South Sudan with the ammunition and weapons it so desperately needed. As the conflict continued, it is not sure whether or not these resources were circulated in other conflicts and impacted other nations within Africa.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is one of the most dominant powers in the Middle East and their excellent relations with many African countries usually get Saudi Arabia involved within the conflicts. The Libyan conflict is one of the most significant conflicts with Saudi Arabia present. It is also to be noted that Saudi Arabia operated in a coalition with its Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) neighbors including the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman. The

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has also been involved in other conflicts within the African continent such as Morocco and Tunisia. Saudi Arabia has allegedly been colluding in providing military, arms as well as intelligence support to its allies across its different allies in the continent. Saudi Arabia has also been involved in a "cold war" as per experts in the region with the Islamic Republic of Iran and that has had a huge impact on the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia in Africa. The conflicts in Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco have all been intensified for the sake of the national interests of other countries, further increasing the supply of weapons in the region and leading to increased trade of such weapons.

United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs

The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) has worked to ensure the implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA). In the instrument, governments agreed to improve national small arms regulations, to strengthen stockpile management, to ensure that weapons are properly and reliably marked, to improve cooperation in weapons tracing, and to engage in regional and international cooperation and assistance. Within the PoA framework, the General Assembly adopted the International Tracing Instrument (ITI) in 2005, a global instrument for cooperation in weapons tracing. Improving weapons tracing is now part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Together, both instruments constitute the normative framework on small arms and light weapons, which all UN Member States have agreed upon. UNODA has played as the main protagonist in the safeguarding of the African continent and has been the liaison between the UN and the African Union, avoiding any communication gaps and a proper implementation of all resolutions

Development of Issue/Timeline

Date	Event	Outcome
1967	The start of the Nigerian Civil War	The Nigerian Civil War was a nationalistic struggle to reunify and reintegrate Nigeria; however, it resulted in different ethnic factions fighting one another, creating chaos and leading to a massive crisis, including the deaths of countless civilians as well as the political redrawing of West Africa.
1987	The Lord's Resistance Army Insurgency	Led by the infamous Joseph Kony, The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is responsible for the longest-running rebel upheaval in Uganda and its neighboring countries, resulting in the displacement of nearly two million people and the deaths of thousands.
1991	The start of the Somali Civil War	In 1991, a coup ousted dictator Mohammed Siad Barre, President of the Somali

		<p>Democratic Republic. This shift in the balance of power sparked a twenty-plus-year civil war that killed as many as one million Somalis via violence, famine or disease. Following Barre's removal from power, the Somali Democratic Republic divided into two opposing parties, the Somali National Movement in the North and the United Somali Congress of the South.</p>
1994	Rwandan Genocide	<p>Between April and July of 1994, the Hutus—a Rwandan ethnic group that comprised roughly 15 percent of the Rwandan population—murdered Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana; this jumpstarted the systematic and brutal genocide of approximately 800,000 Tutsis, the ethnic minority of Rwanda's population.</p>

1998	The start of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War	The two-year war between the neighboring countries of Eritrea and Ethiopia was triggered over a border dispute and claimed approximately 80,000 lives. The war began on May 6, 1998, when military and police from both countries exchanged fire in a rural area near the disputed border, and ended in 2000, between the months of May and June, after the two countries were able to negotiate a cease-fire agreement—called the Algiers Peace Treaty.
June 2006	UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UNPoA)	All African Nations members signed this treaty and governments agreed to improve national small arms laws, import/export controls, and stockpile management – and to engage in cooperation and assistance.
June 2006	Economic Community of West African States Convention on	This stipulates strict controls on the transfer, manufacture,

	Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunition and other Related Materials.	possession and security of small arms and light weapons.
June 2007	Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development	This declaration highlights interrelations between armed violence and development
July 2011	Creation of the Republic of South Sudan	The largest nation in Africa was divided in 2 and South Sudan is made up of the 10 southern-most states of Sudan, South Sudan is one of the most diverse countries in Africa. It is home to over 60 different major ethnic groups, and the majority of its people follow traditional religions
August 2011	Dictator Gaddafi of Libya is overthrown; start of the Libyan Civil War	Libya was left with a power vacuum and became a precedence of the symbol of failed invasions
April 2013	Arms Trade Treaty	It seeks to prevent and eradicate illicit trade and diversion of conventional arms by establishing international

		standards governing arms transfers.
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Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Regional and Global treaties and agreements

As shown in the timeline, the UN as well as various organizations such as the African Union have taken steps to mitigate the impact of smuggling rings as well as tackle the overall increase in proliferation of SALW across Africa. Efforts of various organizations led to the creation of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament (UNREC) which focuses on strategy development as well as dialogue building within the region.

The adoption of the UNPoA as well as the International Tracing Instrument (ITI) alongside the Firearms Protocol and the Arms Trade Treaty has developed the basic framework for nations to reinforce strict anti-proliferation laws as well as address the issue from the root.

All these treaties and agreements helped spread awareness about the issue and brought the world's attention towards the issue of SALW trade across Africa. It also meant that the African governments had a special focus on these issues as they had committed to it publicly while announcing the treaties/agreements. However, there were also many issues with these treaties such as the fact that many countries simply couldn't deliver on what they promised during negotiations. This really set back efforts to curb such illicit trade and the demotivated governments just continued to ignore the issue, leading to an increase in such trade. While these treaties were poised to be really

important and impactful, the lack of support from various areas let down the treaties and just set the stage for the black market to go back to normal.

Possible Solutions

Developing stronger borders

The biggest cause of proliferation and increase of SALW trade in Africa is the lack of proper border security and the overwhelming presence of arms smuggling rings. The requirement of stronger and strict borders has never been more than today. Working with United Nations Peacekeeping Forces (UNPK) as well as neighboring allies to ensure safe borders from both sides is crucial to reduce proliferation of SALW and stop the influx of arms coming in from around the world.

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