ENHANCING AFRICAN SECURITY: UNDERSTUDYING THE LINKAGES BETWEEN ILLICIT ARMS, CONFLICTS AND ORGANISED CRIME.

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ABSTRACT
The connectivity between illicit arms, organized crime, and armed conflict can reinforce one another while also escalating, prolonging violence and eroding governance. Financial gains from crime can lengthen or intensify armed conflicts by creating revenue streams for non-state armed groups (NSAGs). Beyond undermining the monopoly of the State on the use of force, armed conflict also creates an environment that can enable organized crime to prosper. In this context, when hostilities cease and parties to a conflict move towards a peaceful resolution, the widespread availability of surplus arms and ammunition can contribute to a situation of criminalized peace' that obstructs sustainable development. Researchers and practitioners have examined the nexus between two of these three security challenges: armed conflict, organized crime, and illicit arms. Yet, there has been limited research examining the linkages between all three of these security challenges. In response to this knowledge gap, this paper explores the different ways in which illicit arms connect armed conflict and organized crime in some parts of Africa and provides suggestions on how to better address these issues and the challenges it poses. This paper tends to inform practitioners and policymakers by framing the conversation for future decision-making and research. The methodology used for this paper is descriptive and analytic in nature. Also, the security challenges are examined based on issues rather than their geo-location. Data for this paper was sourced from secondary sources such as accounts of prominent personalities and expert reports on the nature, patterns, and trends of insecurity in Africa.

Keywords: Arms, Conflict, Crime, Violence, illicit.

INTRODUCTION

The number of active conflicts have grown over the last two decades, and since the mid-1990s more civil conflicts have recurred. Internationalized civil conflicts account for most of the global increase in conflicts in recent years. Intra-state conflicts in this current wave often have characteristics that increase the likelihood of a longer duration, such as fighting factions or external involvement (UNUCPR 2017). NSAGs sometimes engage in illicit economies as a source of funding, including criminal pursuits such as looting, extortion and kidnapping, resource extraction, and the production and sale of other illicit commodities (UNUCPR 2017). This can be viewed as both a cause and consequence of recurring and prolonged armed conflicts.

This paper highlights some of the linkages between organized crime and conflict across conflict phases-including potentially sparking the crisis, lengthening the conflict by providing resources, and threatening the consolidation of peace and development due to political ties or economic incentives. Security Council resolutions have increasingly highlighted the challenging security implications posed by organized crime in the conflict affected and fragile settings, noting the imperative to integrate crime-prevention mandates into United Nations responses at all phases of crises.

The distinction between criminal and conflict actors are often blurred (John Boer, et al.; UNUCPR 2015). OCGs may provide NSAGs with illicit arms, ammunition, explosives and other equipment and commodities to be used in conflict and attacks, thereby becoming a conflict party themselves, or they may purchase conflict goods from NSAGs, such as illicitly mined precious metals or crude oil and and other petroleum products, to introduce them to legal markets. This is the case of Niger Delta boys in South-South Nigeria. NSAGs may engage in illicit economies to help fund an ongoing conflict or to earn profit from a conflict, and access to illicit arms to enable them secure their

criminal side ventures. Political motivations and actions are not mutually exclusive from criminal ones (Nicolas Bares 2017). NSAGs sometimes use revenues generated by criminal activities to fund the acquisition of arms, ammunition, and other material before and during armed conflicts. By engaging in illicit economies, NSAGs can gain the resources to sustain fighting longer than would otherwise be possible. Furthermore, earning a profit may result in NSAGs having an incentive to continue the conflict, posing further challenges to conflict resolution efforts and undermining prospects for lasting peace by fostering an environment conducive to criminalized peace – transitional or post conflict settings characterized by high levels of criminality and inter-communal violence and the proliferation of illicit economic activities (James Cockayne et al.; UNUCPR 2017).

In these contexts, ties to organized crime continue to have a rippling effect. Those who profited from illicit economies and other organized criminal activities during the conflict may also benefit from and further contribute to instability in the post-conflict environment. This includes both OCGs that were bolstered by the conflict and NSAGs that may no longer have a political purpose but still have opportunities for continued criminal activities. In the absence of effective criminal justice responses, criminal networks may flourish or create parallel power structures due to a lack of, or co-opted, government institutions. In some post-conflict societies, OCGs may also have power in transitional political arrangements. If not addressed as part of post-conflict reconstruction and broader peace building efforts, organized crime may become entrenched within a country. The continued operation of criminal networks without accountability may also decrease trust in public institutions, undermining post-conflict governance and development (Louis Bosetti, et al.; UNUCPR 2016). In combination, these factors also increase the likelihood of conflict recurrence.

Nigeria's security challenges have persisted, threatening the country's corporate existence. While some of these difficulties predate the establishment of modern Nigeria, many more have emerged in recent years, exacerbating the country's conflict environment. Many contemporary forms of insecurity are directly related to socio-economic and political inequalities, while others may be traced to ethno-religious crises, perceived marginalization, as well as actual and perceived injustice. Therefore, multiple factors have contributed to the intractable nature of security concerns (Occasional paper ISWAP 2014).

Multiple types of instability exist throughout the six geopolitical zones, jeopardizing the country's stability and widening its fault lines. Bandits continue to rule communities in the rural areas in parts of North-West and North-Central zones, which have the unflattering label "ungoverned spaces", owing to lack of government's presence. Separatist agitation is common in the South-East, manifesting itself in attacks on government institutions and the killing of citizens deemed to be not too sympathetic to the secessionist cause. Because of the Boko Haram insurgency, the North-East has been a battleground for almost a decade. Despite the split of the original group into ISWAP, JAS and Ansaru, lethal activities of the terrorists continue, resulting in abductions, murder, devastation, and grave humanitarian catastrophe (Occassional Paper ISWAP 2014).

The North-Central, also known as the Middle Belt, is home to an avalanche of ethno-religious confrontations, herder-farmer conflict, and growing terrorist acts because of expansionist agenda of some of the terrorist groups. The South-South is still a hotbed for militancy resulting in economic sabotage of the mainstay in Nigeria's economy – crude oil, while the South-West is witnessing a rise in ritual killings, cultism, and increased herder-farmer clashes. The nature, pattern and trend of security challenges confronting Nigeria cannot be dealt with efficiently using military

power alone but a multi dimensional approach of tracking the connectivity of illicit arms, conflict and organized crime.

The armed rebellion in Northern Mali, and the ensuing military coup in 2012, prompted a significant migration crisis. Large number of people fled from north Mali internally to Mali's southern regions as well as into neighboring countries, with impacts evident within Mali, throughout the region and beyond. Violent crime, such as kidnapping and armed robbery, is common in Mali. Attacks against civilians by Islamic armed groups and killing of suspects by pro – government forces during counter terrorism operations have surged.

Since 2003, violence in Darfur-called ethnic cleansing by some and genocide by others – has left a large number of people dead many displaced the opposition and the government has been accused of violent atrocities. Civilians in Sudan have been subjected to extreme violence. Following attacks by armed opposition groups the government has unleashed terror on the citizenry. South Sudan has experienced wide spread attacks against civilians, systematic sexual violence, presence of children in fighting forces and extra judicial killings. Terrorist attacks are indiscriminate including places visited by foreigners.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the many facets of the drivers and manifestations of insecurity in Nigeria and Africa at large as well as make policy recommendations towards finding solutions to the multi-dimensional challenges. Given the exigency of the issue at stake, only the most critical (and broad) issues could be accommodated in a paper of this nature. However, the desired purpose is accomplished through a detailed account of the essential elements of the most critical challenges.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Illicit Arms, Organized Crime, and Armed Conflict

Illicit arms and ammunition are key enablers of armed conflict and organized criminal activities. NSAGs use illicit weapons to engage in a conflict, and sometimes increase a conflict's intensity and duration. OCGs use illicit arms to carry out crimes and, more broadly, to assert and sustain power. OCGs also sometimes participate in arms trafficking to source weapons or earn revenue (UNODC 2012).

Armed conflict and State fragility provide opportunities for the diversion of arms to the illicit market, including through and to criminal groups. Since NSAGs typically seek to diversify their sources of illicit weapons. (Michael Bourne 2012). They may use criminal networks to purchase illicit arms, including from other conflict-affected areas. The large-scale acquisition of illicit arms by NSAGs and OCGs is typically linked to regional economies of armed conflict or other forms of organized crimes. (Nicholas Marsh and Lauren Pinson 2021). Large, interregional arms transfers are rare without government support, though unauthorized re-exports may enable the diversion of arms without the original exporting government's approval, and shipments sometimes move through transit States without their authorization. Illicit arms acquisition within fragile and conflict-affected regions often involves small batches of firearms trafficked across borders. (UNODC, 2020).

Organized crime, armed conflict, and illicit arms trafficking – separately and in combination, undermine political stability, good governance, and sustainable development. Corruption in particular serves as a reinforcing factor for increased connections between OCGs and NSAGs. For instance, corrupt officials – such as those who accept bribes and allow OCGs to operate with impunity – can erode public confidence in governing institutions, which may serve as a motivator of conflict. While underdevelopment, weak

institutions, and a lack of resources tend to drive crime and conflict, illicit arms – whether in the hands of OCGs or NSAGs – have a facilitating function by exacerbating power, undermining State control, and providing an opportunity for violence.

The key terms referenced throughout this paper are defined below for clarity and consistency.

Illicit arms trafficking (UN Issues Brief 2001): This is defined in accordance with the definition used in the United Nations Firearms Protocol, supplementing the United Nations Organized Crime Convention, which is legally binding for States Parties, as: "the import, export, acquisition, sale, delivery, movement or transfer of firearms, their parts and components and ammunition from or across the territory of one state Party to that of another State Party if any one of the State Parties concerned does not authorized it. (UN Resolution 2001). This also extends to small arms and light weapons (SALW), in line with the politically binding Program of Action on small arms, and as defined in the International Tracing Instrument, in sum, illicit arms trafficking encompasses cross-border transfers that have not been authorized by at least one of the States involved, but does not include State-to-state transfers. (UN.Doc.2001)

Diversion encompasses "the rerouting and/or the appropriation of conventional arms or related items contrary to relevant national and/or international law leading to a potential change in the effective control or ownership of the arms. (Brian Wood, UN, ATT, 2001). Diversion can take place at any stage of the transfer chain and life cycle of a weapon, and some of the main types of diversion include looting following state collapse, battlefield capture, leakage from government or civilian stockpiles due to ineffective physical security and stockpile management, arms embargo violations and state-sponsored diversion. (Alfredo Malaret et al., ATT 2001) State-sponsored diversion can involve a

state supporting the direct supply of arms from the manufacturer to an unauthorized end user or the retransfer of legally imported arms to an unauthorized user or for an unauthorized use, sometimes in violation of end-user certificates. (Brian Wood, UN, ATT, 2020).

Non-State armed groups: NSAGs are defined as "armed groups of actors distinct from the armed and security forces of a State, and without authorization from the state in which they are based or operate to possess and use conventional arms". (Alfredo Malaret, et at., ATT 2021). This paper uses NSAG to describe groups armed without state authorization and as a synonym for armed non-state actor. (Heloise Geneva 2013). Specific NSAG subcategories are used in the discussion as a reflection of the source material. In order to distill the relationship between organized crime and armed conflict, organized criminal groups are referenced separately from NSAGs when making such a distinction is possible.

Organized crime: This paper uses the terms organized crime and organized criminal group (OCG) in the context of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime definition of an organized criminal group: "a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit. (UN, Res. Doc.2000). Therefore, in the context of this discourse, organized crime can be understood as any unlawful activity carried out by organized criminal groups.

OVERVIEW OF MAJOR CONNECTION BETWEEN ILLICIT ARMS, ORGANIZED CRIME AND ARMED CONFLICT IN AFRICA.

First, stockpile looting after state collapse and battlefield capture of weapons in conflict affected settings provide opportunities for large scale access to military grade weapons by NSAGs and OCGs. This was the case of Nigeria when Boko Haram insurgents

attacked military location and captured large sum of ammunition of the Nigerian Army.

Second, poorly secured national stockpiles and corrupt government officials provide a source for the diversion of arms into the illicit market, including to other conflict settings.

Third, legacy weapons – arms recycled from prior conflicts – within a population or from NSAGs constitute a source of illicit arms for trafficking into both conflict and non conflict settings.

Fourth, authorized arms transfers to fragile or conflict affected settings may become another source of arms to NSAGs and OCGs if measures to prevent and mitigate their diversion are not put in place.

Escalation through conflict phases increases demand for illicit arms. A de-escalating conflict decreases demand, which sometimes results in an increase in illicit supply. When states fluctuate through conflict phases or resolve conflicts without putting in place a comprehensive disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program or related arms control measures to reduce the number of weapons in circulation, weapons may continue to circulate, even beyond the borders of the state affected by conflict. Conflicts moving between phases –especially lulls in violence – allow for ebbs and flows of illicit weapons out of the conflict zone due to changes in demand. These shifts rarely allow for a viable national DDR program or other sustained arms control measures to be put in place. (IDDRS Module 6 2017). As a result, when the demand for arms within a conflict decreases, criminal networks may take advantage of the potential source of illicit arms. (This is manifestated in the South-East area of Nigeria where armed forces and boys that were armed for the IPOB and anti secessionist activities have diverted arms for organized crimes like kidnapping, banditry and armed robbery.

After a conflict, the diffusion of weapons – whether every former combatant returns home with their weapon or weapons are kept in state-owned storage facilities – creates several opportunities for the diversion of arms. Arms may be dispersed to the community or among former members of an NSAG, or trafficked out of the area when a conflict declines or ends. The higher availability of weapons in a post-conflict society may facilitate their use in criminal activities and allow for a quicker escalation to violence, while insecure government stockpiles may provide a concentrated source of arms and ammunition, including military-grade weapons.

Stockpile Looting after State Collapse or Battlefield Capture.

The capture of weapons from the state during and after an armed conflict provides an opportunity for large-scale diversion into the illicit market. Arms traffickers and OCGs sometimes transport arms acquired in one conflict to other conflict affected areas. During conflict, battlefield capture and raids on government held weapons allow NSAGs to acquire military grade weapons and increase their firepower. In addition, insecure government stockpiles are a potential target of NSAGs, which greatly increases the risk of diversion of arms to the illicit market during any conflict phase, and even more so if a state collapses. Stockpile looting after state collapse can have an impact on conflict dynamics far beyond the immediate conflict zone. Tuareg fighters taking weapons from Libyan government sources to northern Mali exemplifies how the lack of government control over arms created an opportunity for their diversion and then onward-trafficking contributing to the recurrence of another conflict in the region.

Illicit Arms from Conflict-Affected Libya Provided the Opportunity to escalate Conflict in Northern Mali and Beyond

When the Gaddafi regime collapsed in Libya, the security situation in Mali deteriorated due to an increased cross-border influx of weapons as ethnic Tuareg fighters trafficked weapons from Libya to Mali and joined local Tuareg separatists. (Fiona Mangan et al.,

2019) These weapons increased the military capacity of NSAGs operating in Mali and helped reignite the conflict in the country. The initial strength of the 2012 Tuareg rebellion and the increased influx of illicit arms, including heavy weapons, surprised Malian armed forces. Reportedly, arms traffickers and OCGs engaged in other types of smuggling were also involved in smuggling arms from Libya. The smuggling interests of Tuareg NSAGS conflicted with those of northern elites and the allied Malian state, adding to the rebellion's grievances.

As the armed conflict in northern Mali continued, the source of supply changed. NSAGs seized weapons from the Malian army's national stockpiles, and, on a lesser scale, legacy weapons from earlier conflicts in other countries in the region. Within West Africa and the Sahel, Mali has been a destination country for illicit weapons, with arms trafficked through Niger and, less often, Algeria as of 2018. At times, Mali has also been a source country with arms flowing back in to Libya.

Over time, the armed conflict in northern Mali led to the further deterioration of the security situation and to a spread of jihadist groups to the south of the country, while flows of illicit arms into Mali and the number of actors involved in illicit trafficking increased after 2012. The combination of local insecurity spurred by conflict, extractive industries, and criminal incentives resulted in a spiraling demand for illicit weapons. For instance, gold mining in the Mali-Coted'Ivoire-Burkina Faso tri-border sub-region led more miners and community members to arm themselves to protect their goods and deal with instability in the region. As a result, criminals also sought to increase their own firepower. Beyond gold mining, highway bandits targeting regional roads, traditional hunters, and self defense groups added to the interconnected demand for weapons. As the number of armed groups in northern Mali grew, "powerful armed actors" took over traditional trading routes, and smugglers increasingly carried

weapons to protect their goods. This reinforcing cycle of violence and instability continued to increase the demand for illicit weapons in the sub region. In addition, competition over trade routes in the illicit economy also altered the dynamics of conflicts between NSAGs and local communities.

Authorized Arms Transfers as a Potential Source of Diversion

Cross-border movements of arms bear the inherent risk that diversion occurs either somewhere along the route or after the shipment reaches the final recipient. This risk significantly increases in fragile states or regions with ongoing conflicts, where power structures, lines of authorization and competencies can change from one day to the other. The modalities of diversion of authorized arms transfers are multifaceted and include insufficient validation of official procurement and authorization channels, loss or theft en route or upon arrival due to weak security measures, as well as the lack of physical monitoring and post-delivery verification. (Alfred Malaret Baldo *et al*; UNIDIR 2021).

Against this backdrop, Act.11 Parag. 2 of the Arms Trade Treaty requires states parties to seek to prevent diversion of transferred arms, including by assessing the risk of diversion of the export and considering the establishment of mitigation masures. (Brian Wood et al;UNIDIR 2020). Diversion of authorized arms transfers to post-revolution Libya demonstrates how transfers intended to equip security forces may instead provide NSAGs, OCGs, and terrorists with arms and ammunition, if basic security and preventive measures are not in place during the transfer chain and upon arrival or delivery in the recipient state.

Diversion from Authorized Arms Transfers to Libya between 2012 and 2014

Between 2011 and 2018, official arms transfers to Libya that were notified to the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1970 (2011) concerning Libya amounted to more than

65,000 assault rifles, 62,000 pistols, 15,000 submachine guns, 8,000 grenade launchers, 4,000 machine guns and more than 60 million rounds of ammunition. (UN, SC Report 2011). Significant quantities of these authorized transfers of arms and ammunition were diverted. For instance, between October 2013 and May 2014, bypassing the official military procurement channels, the deputy Libyan Minister of defense secured arms deals to provide arms and ammonium to security bodies and militias he favored. Although the Military Procurement Department was the only competent authority for authorizing arms transfers, several authorizations for SALW and related ammonium were signed only by him. The Security Council Committee was notified of such authorizations but did not reject the proposed transfers. In relation to one of these cases, Belarus authorized the export of more than 3,000 tons of SALW ammonium to Libya. Upon arrival at Tripoli international Airport, the Zintani Brigades that controlled the airport took one of the first deliveries. Belarus was not informed and continued to make at least 15 additional shipments. The United Nations Panel of experts mandated to investigate violations for the sanctions regime concluded that several of these additional shipments were likely to have been received by NSAGs as the deliveries were made to airports in regions outside of governmental control. (UN, SC Report 2011). The Zintani Brigades also reportedly stole 23 assault rifles, 70 handguns and more than 42,000 rounds of ammunition that were intended for the protection of the European Union Boarder Assistance Mission. (UN, SC Report 2011).

IMPACT OF ILLICIT ARMS TRAFFICKING ON AFRICAN SECURITY

Increased Firepower and Prolonged Violent Crisis in Africa

Both the quantity and type of illicit weapons and ammunition in a conflict can alter the crime dynamics and the phase of a conflict. Increased firepower and access to more sophisticated weaponry may redefine engagement across the different phases of conflict, potentially escalating the conflict or altering conflict dynamics

with NSAGs claiming more victories or territory. A large weapons seizure or increased interceptions of diverted ammunition by NSAGs can have a significant impact on their fighting capacity, and a sustained influx of arms and ammunition may exacerbate and prolong conflicts. The northern Mali example highlights how arms trafficked from Libya to Mali helped to reignite a conflict, enabled NSAGs to gain initial victories against government forces and increased the demand for arms and ammunition to protect illicit economies and trafficking routes.

A shift in the type of weapons provided to a non-conflict zone can also have significant impact on interactions between criminal organizations and law enforcement, including by escalating arms acquisitions among OCGs and requiring law enforcement to arm themselves with different weapons. In addition, a sustained influx of illicit weapons may lengthen conflicts or contribute to a situation of 'criminalized peace' in post-conflict and fragile environments, especially where the rule of law has been weakened. An increased and continuous influx of illicit weapons derived from national, regional, and transcontinental sources helped to fuel and aggravate farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria.

Illicit Weapons Fueling and Exacerbating Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Nigeria

In north and central Nigeria, escalating farmer-herder clashes fueled by illicit weapons have been cited as the state's gravest security challenge, causing more deaths in 2018 than BokoHaram's insurgency and reportedly displacing over 300,000 people between the end of 2017 and June 2018 alone. (African Report 2018). Although land disputes involving nomadic herding and sedentary farming communities have a long history in Nigeria, the proliferation of illicit arms and ammunition in the region has disrupted balances of power between and within these communities. This has led to increasingly deadly and escalatory cycles of violence.(Madeline Velturo and Shannon Dick 2020).

Groups involved in inter-communal farmer-herder conflicts use not only locally made artisanal weapons, but also factory-produced weapons that were manufactured in Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East. Although many of these weapons and ammunition were lost, stolen, or captured from Nigerian national stockpiles, an equally significant number of weapons appear to have been diverted from state stockpiles in other countries in Africa and beyond. Local groups and communities are acquiring weapons that were smuggled into the country by OCGs through regional trafficking routes, with transcontinental weapon traffickers facilitating the movement of newly-produced Turkish fire-arms to those involved in farmer-herder violence in Nigeria. (CAR 2020).

Illicit arms and Spiral Instability in Africa

Perceived insecurity linked to local crime or conflict often increases the demand for illicit arms within a population or threatened industry, which in turn contributes to higher levels of violence and instability. The presence of NSAGs and OCGs can also affect the nature of smuggling and other criminal activities within a region. For example, when NSAGs disrupt traditional smuggling routes or increase insecurity – including outside of conflict zones – OCGs and even companies and community members may arm (or more heavily arm) themselves to protect their interests. It highlights how insecurity from violent crime and conflict in Papua New Guinea is compounded by a spiraling demand for firearms for self-protection by the local population and extractive industries.

Demand for illegal firearms in Papua New Guinea is driven by a combination of tribal conflict and criminality. (Sinclair Dinnen 2017). Anecdotal reports indicate that small arms have helped to fuel escalating cycles of tribal conflict in the Highlands, increasing the lethality of violence compared to the use of spears and knives. This amplified violence has undercut the customary rules that used to limit tribal conflict in the country. The higher casualty rates

seem to contribute to spirals of inter-communal conflict, as land disputes lead to more violent retributive tribal conflict than in the past.

The government views the illicit proliferation of SALW and ammunition as a major security threat, with increasing firearms trafficking within and into Papua New Guinea adding to the level of insecurity in the country. Conflict, crime, and electoral competition in the Pacific region drive demand for illicit SALW. Homemade firearms are bartered in Papua New Guinea, while many of the machine guns and assault rifles circulating within the country were originally stolen from the police. The police force has also been accused of smuggling firearms into the country. While illicit arms trafficking into Papua New Guinea is regarded as rare, there is evidence in trafficking from Australia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Viet Nam in relation to drug trafficking and resource extraction companies. Elections in Papua New Guinea also increased the demand for arms, with political candidates personally wielding and directly distributing guns to supporters, while civilians stockpile illicit arms to protect themselves in the post-election period shouldtheir supported candidate lose.

Illicit Arms and Financial Sponsorship of Conflict in Africa.

NSAGs operating in illicit economies can finance protracted conflicts, and some may directly engage in criminal pursuits, sometimes altering their strategy as a response to resource needs or conflict cessation. The use of illicit arms to facilitate other illicit revenue generation activities seems to be much more common than the direct involvement of NSAGs in illicit arms trafficking for profit. (ICCT Report 2020). Indeed, illicit arms are often used to protect other forms of illicit trafficking or enable rent-seeking, including taxation, banditry, kidnapping, and extortion. (Tanya Mehra et al; ICCT Report 2021). It shows how some NSAGs in the Central African Republic have used illegal arms to facilitate the extraction and taxation of natural resources, which in turn allowed

them to finance their operations, control territory, and continue to perpetrate violence. This is typical of what is presently happening in North -East Nigeria where the NSAGs have vehemently consolidated their control of Sambisa forest as well as bandit groups that have occupied some territories in Zamfara state to secure illegal mining activities. These economic activities are being sponsored by big wigs in and outside the country.

In the Central African Republic, NSAGs continued to engage in violence and perpetrate attacks against government forces and civilians after the signing of the 2019 peace agreement between the government and 14 NSAGs. (UN.Doc.2021). Many NSAGs continue to collect revenue through illegal taxation, control of territory, and arms trafficking. (Mohamed Diatta, African Report 2021). 3R was originated as a self-defense militia to protect ethnic Fulani herders from reprisal attacks by the Anti-Balaka armed group in the north-west of the country but since a change in leadership in early 2021, however, 3R has increasingly focused on taxing gold miners and cattle herders.

Many other armed groups in the Central African Republic have used illicit arms to facilitate criminal activities, blurring the line between NSAGs and OCGs and fueling further violence in the country. In the border area with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, NSAGs and criminal groups have often exchanged hunting weapons and ammunition for gold and precious minerals. Access to illicit weapons reinforces the ability of NSAGs to generate revenue from illegal mining activities, and challenges over controlling mining sites have led to clashes between and within NSAGs or between NSAGs and local community.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated how illicit arms and ammunition fuel conflict and organized crime actors across different phases of a conflict, highlighting the multiple challenges resulting from these

interconnected threats. This paper explored how the source of illicit arms often in conflict affected or post conflict areas links conflict and organized crime, particularly through stockpile looting or battlefield capture of weapons by NSAGs or OCGs, poorly secured national stockpiles and corrupt practices illicit recirculation of legacy weapons or diversion of authorized arms transfers. It highlighted how the process of illicit arms acquisition connects crime and conflict, namely through OCGs and NSAGs directly trafficking arms, sharing an illicit arms supplier, or controlling territory through which illicit arms are moved. It also detailed how these linkages may affect the dynamics of crime and conflict in ways that increase violence, undermine development, and impede sustainable peace and stability. In particular this paperanalysed how the widespread availability of weapons and ammunition can hinder efforts to manage and resolve conflicts, as well as contribute to a situation of 'criminalized peace' in transitional and post conflict settings. In this regard, further examination of the specific dynamics and conditions leading to criminalized peace is critical to identify appropriate measures to prevent their occurrence and to mitigate their negative effects on post conflict peace-building efforts.

Recommendations

First and foremost, preventing and countering illicit arms and ammunition flows and their connection with organized crime and conflict requires integrated and comprehensive approaches that combine conflict prevention and arms control measures with robust and effective crime prevention and criminal justice responses. Building on the synergies between international and regional arms control instruments related to organized crime and conflict, this paperconcludes by recommending key considerations that may help to inform the adoption of more coherent policy and operational responses to address these interrelated threats.

Integrating WAM (weapons and ammunition management) into conflict prevention and post conflict stabilization strategies: By ensuring the oversight, accountability and management of arms and ammunition throughout their life cycle, comprehensive WAM measures are critical for disrupting the sources of supply of arms and ammunition for both NSAGs and OCGs, contributing to crime and conflict prevention efforts. In line with relevant international instruments, standards and guidelines, the full set of WAM measures includes the establishment of frameworks, processes and practices for safe and secure material production, acquisition, stockpiling, transfers, marking, record keeping, tracing, recovery, and disposal. The concrete measures depend on the security situation of the country and may be linked. Strengthening national legal and regulatory frameworks for WAM is critical to reduce the risk of diversion and the illicit circulation of weapons and can be a key component of security sector reform processes and broader peace-building efforts. International arms transfers, in particular arms supplies to a conflict party, pose heighted diversion risk. Supplying states, in close coordination with the final recipients, should adopt basic accountability measures to track and monitor the transferred arms to support post-conflict recovery and collection campaigns. WAM should be included into the regulatory, operational and technical components of DDR and community violence reduction (CVR) processes with the aim to bring all arms and ammunition present in a country under governmental control.

As part of CVR programmes and other targeted arms control measures, states should also consider ‘guns for development’ as well as weapons collection and management programmes that address weapons in the hands of civilians to prevent their illicit recirculation and to reduce the levels of armed violence within communities. In addressing the diversion of arms and illicit arms and ammunition flows to fragile and conflict affected areas, states should make use of the full potential of criminal justice responses

to combat arms and ammunition trafficking. Customs and law enforcement officers as well as prosecutors in fragile and conflict-affected countries might not be able to carry out their primary functions.

Effective tracing mechanisms are crucial to map and investigate the dynamics of illicit arms and ammunition flows to, from and between theatres of conflict, as well as the involvement of OCGs in such activities. Stats parties to the Arms Trade Treaty are required to assess the risk of diversion before authorizing or denying an application to export arms, as well as to assess the risk of their potential use to commit violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, or be used in the commission of organized crime and terrorist acts. Fragile states and countries emerging from conflict, as well as their neighbouring states, require support through international assistance and cooperation to build their capacities to prevent diversion and to counter illicit arms trafficking and related organized criminal activities.

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