CENTRAL ASIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HISTORY

https://cajssh.centralasianstudies.org/index.php/CAJSSH

Volume: 06 Issue: 02 | April 2025 ISSN: 2660-6836

Article

Arms Proliferation and Its Implication: A Case Study of South Sudan

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Abstract: This study posits that a principal obstacle to peace and security in South Sudan is the presence and continuous proliferation of arms, which substantially exacerbates the destruction of lives and property and heightens inter-communal tensions, ultimately leading to widespread conflict. The bulk of South Sudan's borders are porous. Thus, enabling the entry of firearms, drugs, and human trafficking. Furthermore, the widespread corruption in South Sudan intensifies the security challenges confronting both the state and the region. This study examines the spread of weaponry and its ramifications. It assesses the initiatives of the South Sudanese government and the region in tackling the problem, with the objective of offering suggestions for a durable solution to the crisis in South Sudan. This study utilizes conflict theory. The escalation of armaments in South Sudan is mostly ascribed to a debilitated economy, the government's failure to provide fundamental services, insecurity, rising unemployment rates, and, most critically, corruption, which combined obstruct effective strategies to address this problem. It is strongly advocated that comprehensive efforts be deployed at all levels to address the challenges of weapons proliferation in South Sudan, considering the country's critical role in regional, continental, and global security. The government of South Sudan should provide or augment non-military logistical assistance for its citizens. China and Russia need not to, owing to economic interests and investments in South Sudan, persist in endorsing the atrocities committed against individuals with small arms and light weaponry.

Keywords: arms, arms proliferation, implication, insecurity, porous border, crime, inter-communal tension

Citation: Joseph A, O. Arms Proliferation and Its Implication: A Case Study of South Sudan. Central Asian Journal of Social Sciences and History 2025, 6(2), 162-177.

Received: 10th Feb 2025
Revised: 11th Feb 2025
Accepted: 24th Feb 2025
Published: 27th Feb 2025

1. Introduction

The global proliferation of arms is widely regarded as one of the greatest threats to world peace and stability due to its role in escalating civil wars, criminal violence, insurgency, and terrorism. Even minor conflicts have the potential to escalate into full-scale civil wars, destabilizing entire countries or regions. Africa is particularly vulnerable to this trend, as many of its nations struggle with weak governance and instability, leading to inadequate law enforcement. Small arms are frequently used to forcibly displace communities, obstruct humanitarian aid, and delay development projects, thereby undermining peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts. These weapons often remain in circulation long after active hostilities subside, enabling prolonged violence and cross-border conflicts, which result in further suffering and loss of life. In non-conflict areas, small arms contribute to criminal violence, homicides, and suicides. Additionally, terrorist groups exploit these weapons to instigate chaos and deepen societal divisions [1].

The global arms inventory is extensive, comprising both government and privately owned weapons. According to the 2007 Small Arms Survey, at least 875 million firearms exist worldwide. The 2004 Small Arms Survey reported that over 1,200 manufacturers

across 90 countries are involved in small arms production. Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) are considered a "contributory factor to armed conflict, forced displacement, organized crime, and terrorism, thereby undermining peace, security, reconciliation, and sustainable development," with annual fatalities ranging between 500,000 and 700,000 [2]. These weapons are key drivers of insurgencies, empower terrorist groups, and fuel post-conflict instability.

The widespread availability of these arms, combined with escalating violence, raises concerns about the effectiveness and commitment of nations like South Sudan in addressing the threat. The West African sub-region is estimated to hold 7 million SALW, with 77,000 in the possession of major insurgent groups. Several West African nations, including Guinea-Bissau, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo, have experienced increased conflicts primarily due to the use of small arms. Nigeria and Ghana continue to grapple with challenges posed by persistent armed clashes. The accelerating spread of small arms in the region exacerbates human suffering, undermines security, and threatens sustainable development. Building on prior academic research on SALW control, this paper examines the impact of SALW proliferation in West Africa and evaluates the region's response to these challenges.

SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

A. Small Arms

Small weapons have always been essential in warfare, security dilemmas, and global peace initiatives. Their widespread availability and ease of use have contributed to organized crime, human rights violations, and insurgencies. Despite their significance in security studies, academic interpretations of small arms vary, reflecting differences in scope, application, and policy implications. Various definitions emphasize different aspects, including technological, societal, and security dimensions. The United Nations (UN) defines small arms as "guns designed for individual use, including revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles, and light machine guns" [3]. This definition, widely referenced in disarmament discussions, highlights the functionality and impact of specific weapons. However, it does not distinguish between legally owned and illicitly trafficked arms, necessitating a broader perspective.

Expanding on the UN’s definition, the Small Arms Survey (SAS, 2001) describes small arms as "man-portable firearms that are easy to transport, use, and conceal, often contributing to violence in conflict and non-conflict settings" [4]. While emphasizing accessibility and impact, this definition raises legal ambiguities, as it does not explicitly differentiate between civilian and military applications. Furthermore, it does not account for the political economy of arms trafficking, necessitating alternative definitions that consider these dimensions. Karp (2018) defines small arms as "light weapons designed for personal use, including not only conventional firearms but also hand-held anti-personnel and anti-materiel weapons" [5]. This classification includes battlefield weapons, explosives, and non-traditional firearms. While useful for analyzing warfare, it does not fully examine the socio-economic effects of small arms on post-conflict societies, particularly in the hands of terrorists and organized criminals.

Florquin and Berman describe small arms as "devices that play a key role in armed violence, contributing to the majority of global conflict-related deaths and injuries" [6]. Their perspective shifts from technical categorization to the role of small arms in exacerbating violence. However, this definition does not address arms control policies or the involvement of state actors in both legal and illicit arms transfers. A more comprehensive understanding of small arms requires integrating legal and regulatory frameworks. Tulliu and Schmalberger define small arms as "guns primarily used for personal security, self-defense, and military operations, forming a significant part of state arsenals and civilian gun markets" [7]. While acknowledging their dual use in military and civilian contexts, this definition does not consider how technological advancements have increased the accessibility of more lethal variants.

For the purposes of this study, small arms include manually operated weapons such as pistols, rifles, submachine guns, and other portable firearms designed for individual use. Their accessibility makes them central to law enforcement, organized crime, self-defense, and armed conflict. Their widespread availability affects global security by fueling both war and peace. While traditionally examined from a technical standpoint, a comprehensive analysis must also address their social consequences, illicit trade, and legal challenges. Small arms, therefore, serve as dual-purpose weapons, simultaneously contributing to international instability and legitimate security measures.

B. Light Weapons

Light weapons play a pivotal role in modern conflicts, peacekeeping efforts, and arms proliferation control. Typically used by paramilitary or military organizations, they differ from small arms in operational capacity and often require multiple operators. The uncontrolled spread of these weapons has raised significant concerns about their use by terrorist groups, rebel forces, and non-state actors in civil conflicts. Although international regulations aim to curb their trafficking, a universally accepted classification remains elusive.

The United Nations defines light weapons as "portable, crew-served weapons designed for use by several persons serving as a unit, including heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, and mortars of calibers less than 100mm" [8]. While this definition underpins international arms control agreements, it focuses primarily on technical specifications and does not address illicit trafficking and unauthorized use by non-state actors. A more holistic approach is needed to confront modern security challenges. The Small Arms Survey provides a complementary definition, describing light weapons as "tools used in conflict zones that, while portable, require support mechanisms for sustained use and are commonly found among paramilitary forces" [9]. This definition emphasizes strategic utility but overlooks their impact in post-conflict settings, organized crime, and socio-economic consequences. A more detailed framework is necessary, as light weapons often contribute to instability beyond the battlefield.

Boutwell and Klare define light weapons as "conventional weapons that are portable but of greater firepower than small arms, often requiring two or more individuals for operation, and commonly used in insurgencies and asymmetric warfare" [10]. This definition highlights their tactical importance in guerrilla warfare and irregular combat. However, it does not consider technological advancements such as portable drone-based systems, which blur the distinction between small arms and light weapons. Addressing this gap is essential in countering emerging security threats. Florquin and Berman argue that the deployment of light weapons "serves as a force multiplier for armed groups, allowing combatants to inflict damage disproportionate to their numbers, thus extending conflicts beyond their conventional lifespan" [11]. This perspective shifts the focus from weapon characteristics to their strategic impact on conflict dynamics. However, it does not address legal and regulatory measures needed to mitigate their proliferation.

Karp presents a modern view of light weapons, defining them as "mechanized or manually operated weapons that, despite their mobility, possess significant destructive power and are increasingly adapted by non-state actors in modern warfare" [12]. This definition acknowledges the evolving role of light weapons and their adoption by warlords and terrorist groups. However, it fails to differentiate between state-authorized and illicit uses, highlighting the need for clear classifications. Light weapons, used in both conventional and unconventional warfare by state and non-state actors, can be broadly defined as portable firearms and explosive devices requiring multiple operators. Examples include heavy machine guns, recoilless rifles, grenade launchers, and portable anti-aircraft systems. Due to their greater firepower, light weapons are more visible than small arms, making their proliferation a critical global security challenge. Stronger regulations are

essential to curb their impact, as their use by terrorist groups and criminal networks continues to expand.

PROLIFERATION

A proliferation is a sudden and striking increase in the frequency or count of any object. Depending on the circumstances, it might imply fast development, abundance, or multiplication. In the context of SALW, it refers to the exchange of weapons between countries or from one individual to another. The flow of weapons from one society to another is termed "proliferation of weapons." The former refers to the purchase of weapon systems by governments that previously lacked them, while the latter pertains to the expansion of arsenals in nations that already possess such weapons. Obasi distinguishes between horizontal and vertical weapons proliferation.

Some intermediaries facilitate proliferation—that is, the distribution or multiplication of weapons—in response to both official and illegal demands. As the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva noted:

"SALW do not proliferate by themselves. They are sold, resold, perhaps stolen, diverted, and maybe legally or illegally transferred several more times. At each junction in this complex chain of legal and illicit transfer, people—brokers, insurgents, criminals, government officials, and/or organized groups—are active participants in the process." [13]

The United Nations has long acknowledged that a state's capacity to acquire and stockpile weapons may influence its tendency to disseminate them. Conversely, under certain conditions, the accumulation of weapons may become "excessive" or even "destabilizing." According to the 1997 Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms Report,

"The mere accumulation of weapons is not a sufficient criterion by which to define an accumulation of weapons as excessive or destabilizing, since large numbers of weapons that are under the strict and effective control of a responsible state do not necessarily lead to violence. Conversely, a small number of weapons can be destabilizing under certain conditions." [14]. Ogaba defines proliferation as the illegal and excessive accumulation of weapons that may threaten regimes. Legal weapons are those stored in government arsenals for use by security forces in maintaining state security. Ogaba also identifies three major channels of weapon transfers:

1. State-to-state transfers – The movement of military troops and weapons between state actors or their sanctioned representatives through legal agreements.
2. "Gray channels" of transfer – These arise when government officials overlook or enable weapons acquisition by foreign corporations and states for financial or strategic advantages [15].
3. Black market transfers – The illegal sale of weapons by private arms dealers and smugglers.

During the Cold War, there was a massive arms buildup, particularly involving small weapons, which the superpowers provided liberally to their proxy forces, especially in Africa. It was common practice for Cold War powers to covertly supply weapons to foreign rebel groups and freedom fighters. For instance, Lora Lumpe examined the proliferation of weapons in Afghanistan, highlighting how various actors facilitated their spread.

The United Nations Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms defined SALW as follows: Weapons ranging from knives, clubs, and machetes to weapons particularly below the caliber of 100mm—small arms are those weapons manufactured to military specification and designed for use by one person, whereas light weapons are those used by several persons working as a crew." [16]

According to the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, SALW are man-portable weaponry and ammunition primarily intended for use by individual military personnel. Small weapons include, among others, self-loading pistols,

carbines, assault rifles, submachine guns, and light machine guns [17]. Michael defines small arms as weapons an individual can carry. These include light anti-tank weapons, shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles, machine guns, and handguns [18]. Laurence further elaborates that small arms are weapons an infantryman, a small vehicle, or a pack animal can carry.

In 1983, NATO expanded the definition of small arms to include "all crew-portable direct fire weapons of a caliber less than 50mm and which include secondary capability to defeat light armor and helicopters." According to NATO, small arms include automatic assault rifles such as the AK-47 series, U.S. M16, and the Israeli Uzi rifle, machine/sub-machine guns, shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), and RPDs [19].

Some scholars argue that the ECOWAS Small Arms Moratorium failed to properly classify certain weapons as small arms. For instance, local blacksmith-made clubs, often the first weapons used in escalating crimes and disputes, should also be considered in defining SALW [20].

SOURCES OF SMALL ARMS IN THE WEST AFRICAN SUB-REGION

Several factors have contributed to the proliferation of weaponry in South Sudan and the West African sub-region. Among these is the large influx of arms from Central and Eastern Europe, exacerbated by the weakening of armaments industry regulations following the fall of the Soviet Union. Additionally, there was an oversupply of weapons by the Cold War superpowers, which were distributed to proxy factions in various conflicts. Following the Cold War, illicit arms dealers, security entrepreneurs, ethnic militia groups, private military organizations, and local smugglers gained access to these weapons. The availability of these arms fueled existing conflicts and created new ones. These weapons were easily smuggled across porous borders, either legally or illegally, facilitated by the rapid globalization of the period. This increased intra-state conflicts, escalating the demand for arms. Consequently, these weapons were used not only in recent wars but also in non-conflict settings, such as sectarian violence, ethnic and religious disputes, chieftaincy conflicts, homicides, suicides, and organized crime. In addition to international sources, several domestic factors have sustained the proliferation of small arms in West Africa. These include:

1. Theft from state security services – Weapons have been stolen from military and police armories, often due to insider collaboration.
2. Leakage from government arsenals – Corrupt police and military personnel have been known to sell weapons on the black market, contributing to widespread arms circulation.
3. Domestic artisan production – The manufacturing of small arms by local blacksmiths and underground arms producers has increased, with weapons being distributed through established trade routes [21],[23].

The combination of external arms influx and internal supply chains has deepened the security crisis in the region, further destabilizing South Sudan and neighboring countries.

Theoretical Underpinning

This study is fundamentally grounded in Conflict Theory, a sociological framework established by Karl Marx in the mid-19th century. Conflict Theory examines social structures through the lens of inequality and power struggles, asserting that conflicts arise when groups compete for limited resources—particularly when one group seeks to maintain dominance while the other resists oppression [24].

The ongoing arms race in South Sudan exemplifies this theory, as ethnic and political factions vie for government control, resources, and power. The proliferation of weapons exacerbates these tensions, creating a cycle of instability and violence. Tickner argues that postcolonial nations are particularly prone to internal instability, largely due to the adoption of Western security policies that emphasize militarization over stability [25]. This aligns with Marx's assertion that state policies often serve the interests of powerful elites at the expense of marginalized communities.

A. Application of Conflict Theory to South Sudan

The continuous violence in South Sudan reflects key assumptions of Conflict Theory, particularly regarding the distribution of weapons and resources. Marx argued that the ruling class maintains dominance by controlling institutions such as the military and government. This is evident in South Sudan, where both pro-government and opposition militias actively arm themselves to maintain or challenge power structures [26].

Furthermore, Conflict Theory posits that systematic inequality breeds social unrest, which can escalate into violent conflicts [25]. South Sudan's oil wealth has played a major role in fueling armed conflicts, as rival factions utilize weaponry to seize and defend lucrative territories [27]. The theory also asserts that societal change cannot occur without revolutionary movements or large-scale discontent. In South Sudan, rather than institutional reforms, opposition groups have repeatedly resorted to armed conflict, resulting in prolonged civil wars [27]. This suggests that the persistent violence is not an anomaly, but rather an inevitable outcome of deep-rooted socio-economic inequalities.

B. Policy Implications of Conflict Theory

Examining Conflict Theory's application to the issue of weapons proliferation in South Sudan reveals important policy implications. Both domestic actors and foreign arms suppliers contribute to the militarization of the state, thereby undermining peace efforts. According to Brauer and Dunne, developing nations often prioritize military spending over social welfare, perpetuating cycles of violence [27].

Moreover, the war economy and the accessibility of small arms ensure that South Sudan remains trapped in a cycle of armed conflict, rendering peace negotiations fragile and often ineffective. Conflict Theory suggests that addressing structural inequalities, political exclusion, and economic disparities is more critical than simply enforcing arms embargoes.

To achieve lasting peace, efforts must extend beyond disarmament policies. Comprehensive structural reforms should aim to:

- Reduce economic inequalities
- Promote inclusive governance
- Dismantle the political economy of war

Without tackling the core causes of power struggles and socio-economic disparities, any peace-building efforts will remain short-lived, as conflicting interests will persistently resurface.

2. Materials and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, which is both cost-effective and suitable for analyzing secondary data. The qualitative method is employed to gain in-depth knowledge and provide comprehensive explanations of the research subject. According to Biereenu-Nnabugwu, qualitative research is particularly useful for context analysis, as it allows for the extraction, interpretation, and illumination of relevant information, leading to meaningful conclusions [28]. The qualitative approach was chosen because it facilitates access to organizational structures and bureaucratic processes, which can reveal unforeseen patterns or events [28]. This method is well-suited for analyzing textual data, making it an effective tool for this investigation. This study primarily relied on secondary data sources, which were selected based on the research design and the specific types of data needed to support the investigation. Secondary data refers to existing public information, such as:

- Academic books and journals
- Survey results and codebooks
- Government publications
- Conference papers and institutional documents

- Internet-based materials relevant to the study

By utilizing a broad range of secondary sources, this study ensures a well-rounded analysis of arms proliferation in South Sudan. Governmental and institutional publications were cross-referenced with additional sources to enhance the accuracy and reliability of findings.

3. Results and Discussion

A. Causes of Arms Proliferation in South Sudan

1) Dilemma of Adequacy

The appropriate level of armament required for a country is a fundamental security concern. Each sovereign state determines its own military needs, but these decisions often disrupt regional power dynamics and create security dilemmas [29]. As Pearson explains, an arms buildup by one nation forces neighboring states to enhance their military capacity to maintain balance and security [30]. This principle applies to South Sudan, where both the government and rebel groups continue to acquire arms. The government obtains weapons legally through foreign arms deals, while rebels access them via the black market. Between 2012 and 2018, South Sudan's military purchased arms and equipment worth approximately $350 million, with the United States alone contributing $120 million [31]. Other Western and Arab suppliers have also provided military aid. Despite these acquisitions, general mistrust among warring factions perpetuates continuous armament, sustaining the conflict. While the government officially procures weapons, rebel groups arm themselves through illicit networks to counter state forces.

2) The Political Dilemma

The proliferation of arms in South Sudan is not merely a security issue; it is also deeply political and economic. Weapons are instruments of power, allowing factions to seize, maintain, or expand control. As Mao Zedong famously stated, "political power originates from the barrel of a gun" [30].

In South Sudan, political elites rely on military force to consolidate authority. The government uses weapons to suppress opposition and maintain dominance, while rebel factions acquire arms to resist state control. In 2013, rebels captured 1,000 government troops and looted substantial military stockpiles during the Battle of Tuba [31]. To sustain its military efforts, South Sudan has sourced weapons from multiple global suppliers, including:

United States
Soviet Union
Egypt
Saudi Arabia
Iran; (supplier of G-3 rifles, Kalashnikov assault rifles, and medium-range artillery, including 60mm and 82mm mortars). The rebels, on the other hand, depend on black-market arms trafficking to challenge the government's military supremacy. As long as political power remains closely tied to military strength, arms proliferation in South Sudan will continue to escalate.

3) International Meddling

South Sudan's historical conflicts are closely linked to external arms supplies. Firearms were first introduced to the region in the 19th century through the Ottoman Empire's invasion and later by the British-led Anglo-Egyptian forces. The 1955 rebellion and the emergence of the Southern Sudanese independence movement further accelerated the spread of small arms [32]. During the Cold War, global superpowers supplied arms to rival factions, using South Sudan as a proxy battleground. Both the Sudanese government and Southern rebels received foreign military aid, contributing to the continuous circulation of weapons. Over

time, these arms changed hands multiple times, increasing civilian gun ownership and fueling violent confrontations. South Sudan's current instability remains closely tied to these historical patterns of international interference. External actors continue to supply arms, either to support state forces or opposition groups, sustaining the cycle of violence.

East African Neighbours: The spread of arms in South Sudan is partly influenced by foreign liberation movements and regional conflicts. Armed groups from neighboring countries often cross porous borders, using South Sudan as a regrouping and asylum base, thus importing both their conflicts and weaponry. A notable example is the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) of Uganda, which utilized Southern Sudan as an operational base in its fight against the Ugandan government, stockpiling a large arsenal of weapons, many of which eventually fell into civilian hands [33].

Additionally, weapons entered Southern Sudan through geopolitical maneuvering. Some nations armed indigenous rebel factions or financially supported insurgencies to destabilize adversarial regimes. Colonel Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, for example, allegedly provided arms to the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and other opposition groups to undermine Sudanese President Gaafar Nimeiry [34]. The Sudanese government also engaged in regional destabilization, backing insurgencies in neighboring states. However, this strategy sometimes had unintended consequences—as rebel factions were defeated, their arms stockpiles were absorbed by Southern Sudanese militias, further fueling internal conflicts.

For over four decades, South Sudan has hosted various non-governmental groups acquiring small arms and light weapons for their objectives. Countries within the Horn of Africa have played a significant role in arming factions within South Sudan, including:

Ethiopia and Uganda, which provided material support to the SPLA in its fight for independence.

Eritrea, which supplied arms to the Eastern Front rebel alliance in Sudan.

Chad and Libya, which armed various Darfur-based rebel groups.

Even the Sudanese government, which previously opposed the SPLA, later supplied arms and ammunition to groups resisting the South Sudanese government [35].

B. Civilian Armaments and Their Consequences

Since the 1950s, widespread instability in South Sudan has resulted in an overflow of civilian-owned weaponry. Many South Sudanese, particularly nomadic communities, regularly cross borders into Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda in search of firearms and ammunition, often for self-defense and cattle raiding. Despite multiple disarmament initiatives, these efforts have largely failed. Several factors contribute to ongoing civilian rearmament, including:

Inter-communal violence – Armed groups from neighboring regions often attack vulnerable communities, prompting civilians to rearm for self-defense.

Cattle raiding – In pastoralist societies, raiding livestock is a common practice, leading to continuous cycles of retaliation and armament.

Black-market arms sales – Corrupt military officers have facilitated the illicit sale of weapons, either for personal profit or to secure the loyalty of factions [36].

Despite ongoing conflicts, many of South Sudan's weapons stockpiles remain outdated. However, modern arms trafficking networks have made newer, more sophisticated weaponry available, significantly escalating the intensity of violence. By 2011, an estimated 3.2 million guns were in circulation within South Sudan, with two-thirds owned by civilians [37]. The ease of access to firearms is a major driver of the country's prolonged instability. South Sudan has become a hub for global arms

trafficking, contributing to the rapid escalation of violence during the 2013 civil conflict between government forces and rebel factions. The 2015 United Nations Panel of Experts on Sudan found large stockpiles of modern weaponry in South Sudan, many of which were acquired from international sources, further sustaining the ongoing war [38].\ The proliferation of arms in South Sudan has been significantly influenced by international arms suppliers. Various nations, including Ukraine, China, Russia, Sudan, Iran, Canada, and Israel, as well as former Soviet bloc countries, have supplied arms directly or indirectly. Additionally, regional nations like Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda have acted as transit points for weapon shipments, further complicating efforts to regulate arms inflows.

A. Major Suppliers of Arms

Ukraine: Ukraine emerged as a leading supplier of small arms, light weapons, tanks, and conventional military equipment during the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) period (2005–2011). After the 2013 outbreak of civil war, Ukrainian heavy machine guns and grenade launchers were discovered in South Sudan. These arms were legally exported by Ukraine's state arms trader, Ukrspetsexport, and were delivered via Kenya and Uganda [39].

China: China, as the third-largest arms exporter globally (following the United States and Russia), has played a major role in supplying weapons to Sub-Saharan Africa. Its economic interests in South Sudanese oil have driven an increase in arms shipments. According to UN reports, South Sudan's government purchased $20 million in arms from China North Industries Corp. in 2014 [40]. However, many of these weapons later fell into rebel hands through resale, confiscation, or redistribution. China halted arms sales to South Sudan in July 2014, but its previously supplied weapons continue to influence the conflict.

Russia: Rising geopolitical competition between Russia and China has influenced Russia's arms trade with South Sudan. Russia has sought military agreements with South Sudan to expand its influence in Africa. In October 2011, a delegation from Rosoboronexport, Russia's state-owned arms exporter, met with President Salva Kiir to discuss military cooperation. Russia has since remained a key arms supplier to South Sudan [41].

Sudan and Iran: Weapons supplied to rebels fighting President Salva Kiir have been traced to Sudan and Iran. Iranian weapons were first identified in Jonglei and Unity States and were linked to David Yau Yau's rebel faction and the anti-government SPLA [42]. The close military ties between Iran and Sudan have made Iran the second-largest arms supplier to Sudan. While no direct evidence links Iran and Sudan to formal arms sales in South Sudan, their weapons have appeared in the conflict, highlighting the role of illicit arms transfers.

Canada: The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) procured twenty Cougar and thirty Typhoon armed personnel carriers (APCs) from the Streit Group, a Canadian-owned company, between 2012 and 2014. By late 2014, these APCs were spotted in key conflict areas, including Unity State, where heavy fighting took place [43].

Former Soviet Bloc Countries: Countries such as Bulgaria, the former Czechoslovakia, and the former Soviet Union have supplied various arms to South Sudanese factions. These weapons are highly sought after by armed groups, making Eastern Europe a consistent supplier of military-grade firearms [44].

South Africa: In 2012 and 2013, South Sudan acquired armored vehicles from South Africa, further strengthening its military capabilities [45].

Israel: According to UN reports, the South Sudanese military and police forces use Israeli-manufactured automatic rifles, specifically those produced by Israel Military

Industries (IMI). However, Israel has denied any formal arms sales to South Sudan, despite photographic evidence suggesting otherwise [46].

B. Regional Transit Countries

In addition to direct arms suppliers, several East African nations have served as transit hubs for arms shipments to South Sudan:

Kenya: Evidence suggests that Kenya coordinated with Ukraine to conceal military shipments to South Sudan [47].

Ethiopia: Ethiopia has reportedly been a key covert weapons supplier to the SPLA, with at least four major military hardware consignments in 2008.

Uganda: Uganda has functioned as an overland transit route for weapons shipments into South Sudan.

C. Impact of Unregulated Arms Flow

The uncontrolled circulation of arms has worsened South Sudan's conflict, killing thousands annually. With both military and civilian actors gaining access to weapons, arms proliferation has led to:

- Intensified fighting between government and rebel forces
- Widespread human rights abuses
- Increased instability in the region

The continuous supply of small arms and light weapons (SALW) has sustained and escalated South Sudan's civil war, making effective arms control increasingly difficult.

A. An Overview of Arms Proliferation and Its Implications

The primary consequence of weapons acquisition and circulation is an increased risk of armed conflict. Providing weapons encourages aggression rather than facilitating dialogue, leading to severe socio-economic consequences. High levels of armed violence result in:

- Delayed economic growth
- Misallocation of national resources
- Distorted public funding priorities
- The reinforcement of a "Might is Right" ideology

The interconnected nature of security, weapons control, and development suggests that sustainable progress is unattainable in an environment dominated by arms manufacturing and distribution. Additionally, arms proliferation hampers trade and foreign investment, promoting illicit trafficking of timber, minerals, and oil, among other natural resources.

One historical example of conflict escalation due to arms proliferation is the Liberian Civil War (1989–2003). What began with a few hundred rebels in Liberia in 1989 quickly spread into neighboring Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, and Guinea. The international community intervened for over a decade, primarily through weapons embargoes and peacekeeping missions, in an attempt to contain the violence. However, the war resulted in:

Mass refugee migrations

Widespread death and destruction

A severe decline in regional development

The financial cost of the Liberian conflict was immense:

The United States spent over $430 million on food aid to Liberia by 2003.

ECOMOG, the regional peacekeeping force, spent over $4 billion.

The UN Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) spent $104 million between 1993 and 1997.

The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), which peaked at 15,000 personnel, cost several billion dollars from 2003 to 2007 [48].

The Liberian economy collapsed during the war. Key infrastructure was destroyed, with nearly all financial and human resources fleeing the country. Between 1989 and 1995, Liberia's real GDP shrank to one-tenth of its pre-war level. Formal economic activity largely ceased, with most of the population reverting to subsistence living.

The road network was severely damaged.

Railway connections were cut off.

Electricity and potable water supplies collapsed.

Beyond Liberia, West African conflicts have resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths and significant economic underdevelopment [49].

B. Arms Proliferation and Conflict in South Sudan

Over the past decade, South Sudan has experienced intensified violence and increasing arms proliferation. Several key factors have contributed to these conflicts:

Electoral disparities

Ethnic discrimination

Religious intolerance

High poverty and unemployment rates

The availability of small arms has played a central role in aggravating conflicts. Additional conflict triggers include:

A fragmented political system

Elitist power structures

A youth demographic bulge

Foreign-backed local militias

Surplus firearms easily accessible to aggrieved groups

Arms proliferation has complicated peacekeeping efforts, making humanitarian operations increasingly dangerous. The persistent availability of surplus firearms is considered the primary driver of violent conflicts in West Africa.

C. Small Arms Proliferation in Ghana

Domestic gun production plays a major role in the distribution of illicit small arms and light weapons (SALW) in Ghana. The manufacturing of pistols, shotguns, and single-barrel weapons is the main source of arms proliferation in the country.

One notable aspect of Ghanaian arms production is its growing sophistication. Rather than becoming obsolete, locally made firearms are increasingly competitive with imported weapons. Research estimates that Ghanaian blacksmiths are capable of producing over 200,000 weapons annually [50]. The effects of small arms proliferation in Ghana are evident in:

- Rising armed robberies and criminal activities
- Increased ethnic conflicts
- The emergence of land guards—private security groups enforcing land ownership claims
- Armed gangs have expanded operations in urban areas, with a notable rise in violent crimes such as:

Robberies at fuel stations and Forex bureaus

Highway armed attacks

Family disputes escalating into violent clashes

According to the Ghana National Commission on Small Arms, an estimated 230,000 illicit weapons are in circulation, with 100,000 actively in use—56% of all small arms produced in Ghana being unregistered [51].

D. Electoral Violence and Small Arms

Research suggests that elections frequently trigger violent conflicts in West Africa. Between 19% and 25% of African elections involve violent incidents [52]. The prevalence of electoral violence indicates that underlying socio-political tensions

contribute to pre-election instability. Notable instances of election-related violence in West Africa include:

Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, and Niger

Côte d'Ivoire (2010)

Nigeria (2003, 2007, and 2011 elections)

Small arms are the primary weapons used in politically motivated violence, leading to:

- Mass casualties

Significant property destruction

Millions of internally displaced persons

Jones & Hoetu (2012) argue that violence is often used as a means of rejecting election results. Dissatisfied political factions sometimes resort to small arms to express their grievances, escalating localized disputes into full-scale armed conflicts. This pattern was evident in the 2010 Côte d'Ivoire crisis, where electoral dissatisfaction led to widespread violence and instability [53].

Challenges to Effective control of Arms in South Sudan

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in Sub-Saharan Africa is influenced by structural factors, internal dynamics, and the characteristics of these weapons. One significant challenge is the lack of transparency in the arms trade, as many governments consider their weapons strategies confidential, making evaluation and oversight difficult. Arms traffickers exploit corrupt systems, fueling instability through illegal sales, theft, and unregulated transactions. Additionally, the ease of use, affordability, and durability of small arms make them highly attractive to paramilitary groups, irregular militias, and untrained civilians, increasing their demand and circulation. Governments have also escalated their demand for SALW, using them to suppress political insurgencies and eliminate opposition movements. Small arms' ease of operation, even for untrained fighters and child soldiers, explains their widespread use in conflicts across West Africa, including in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Nigeria. The difficulty in controlling SALW proliferation is compounded by structural issues such as poor governance, corruption, porous borders, and globalization.

A. Structural Factors Contributing to Arms Proliferation

1) Governance Failures

When governments fail to provide security, citizens often seek alternative means of protection. Studies show that the lack of trust in security forces, along with weak law enforcement, drives people to arm themselves. For example, in Côte d'Ivoire (2010), research indicated that government security agencies were no more effective than rebel forces in providing protection. This led to the formation of community self-defense groups and vigilante militias, which, in turn, created new security threats [54]. Similarly, Onuoha argues that the absence of basic necessities, unfair resource distribution, and failure to ensure human security in Nigeria have contributed to both small arms proliferation and escalating violence. Public sector mismanagement, corruption, and neglect have worsened poverty, unemployment, and inadequate social services, pushing many individuals toward criminal activities such as piracy, armed robbery, kidnapping, and insurgency—all of which increase arms demand [55].

2) Corruption

A vicious cygcle of low wages and systemic corruption has created an environment where small arms and light weapons spread easily among civilians. Corrupt customs officers accept bribes from arms traffickers, while military and law enforcement officials have been reported selling government-issued firearms to criminal groups [56].

3) Porous Borders

Africa's vast, loosely controlled borders make arms smuggling a significant challenge. Many countries lack the infrastructure and resources to effectively monitor their borders. For example, Nigeria's borders stretch:

750 km with Benin (West)

1,500 km with Niger (North)

1,700 km with Cameroon (East)

90 km with Chad (Northeast)

850 km of Atlantic Ocean coastline

With over 4,910 km of land boundaries, monitoring illegal arms movements is immensely difficult. The Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Chad—some of Africa's largest and most unstable nations—also struggle with uncontrolled arms trafficking, further worsening regional conflicts [57].

4) Globalization

Globalization presents both opportunities and challenges. While it has reduced trade restrictions, it has also facilitated the spread of illicit arms by lowering border controls and customs inspections. According to Malhotra, only a small percentage of cargo containers undergo thorough security checks, allowing arms to be trafficked undetected. Common smuggling techniques include:

- Forged shipping documents
- Bribing officials
- Disguising arms as humanitarian aid shipments [58]

Malhotra (2011) identified several globalization-related factors facilitating illegal arms trade:

(a) Weak Migration Controls:

Political and economic integration has weakened restrictions on migration, allowing arms dealers to expand their operations. Traffickers frequently relocate to minimize risks or establish new networks.

(b) Increased Use of Digital Banking:

The rise of internet banking has complicated efforts to detect illegal financial transactions.

Criminals exploit online money transfers for money laundering and illicit arms financing.

Countries with weak anti-money laundering laws are used to hide and transfer illicit funds [59].

(c) Expansion of the Global Transportation Industry:

The growth of commercial airlines, shipping companies, and supply chains has made illegal arms transportation cheaper and more accessible. The integration of international airlines and cargo firms complicates the monitoring of arms smuggling.

(d) Rapid Technological Advancements:

Over the last two decades, global communications infrastructure has expanded significantly. Arms traffickers use online platforms and encrypted messaging to coordinate illicit sales with minimal detection risk [60].

B. The Need for Comprehensive Arms Control

The unchecked proliferation of small arms remains a major driver of instability across Africa. Without strong governance, anti-corruption measures, border security, and financial oversight, arms trafficking will continue to fuel conflicts and criminal activity. Efforts to curb arms proliferation must include:

- Stronger regulatory frameworks for arms trade transparency
- Enhanced anti-corruption measures within law enforcement agencies
- Improved border surveillance technologies
- Stricter international trade policies to track illicit arms movements

Without such interventions, the regional and global impacts of SALW proliferation will persist, perpetuating violence, insecurity, and economic instability.

4. Conclusion

The difficulties listed are significant and attempts to minimize them are very difficult, more than what member countries, civil society groups, people, or the business sector commit. Most importantly, national, regional, and worldwide organizations taken together need an enormous effort. Many countries stay limited to the signing of treaties or agreements. Some reject the small arms agenda or consider it as a low priority; the policies and agreements suffer poor implementation either because to limited skill or resources, a lack of political will, or both. Significant internal obstacles to efficient attempts in limiting the proliferation of small firearms in South Sudan include the terrible economy, the state's incapacity to provide basic services, security issues, rising unemployment rates, and widespread corruption.

While their main responsibility is to provide social and economic stability and progress for their people, national governments must also show dedication in the actual application of their policies in addition to in their formulation, support of agreements, and codification. Fighting weapons trafficking requires addressing the basic drivers of armed conflict—underdevelopment, insecurity, inequality, and corruption—that underlie everything else. Others include putting aid programs in place to improve armaments storage facilities and stopping weapons transfers to states violating UN arms embargoes and committing violations of human rights.

Finally, more strict policies must be followed to combat corruption as it compromises the success of initiatives aimed at eradicating small firearms, especially in West Africa. Like with democratic systems and military governments, a workable solution has to be sought internationally to guarantee conformity at the regional and national levels.

Recommendations

1. All stakeholders must collaborate at every level to tackle the issue of weapons proliferation in South Sudan, given the country's significant role in the region, the continent, and global security.
2. The government of South Sudan should provide or enhance non-military logistical support for those impacted by the civil conflict.
3. China and Russia should refrain from supporting the crimes perpetrated against people with small guns and light weapons due to their economic interests and investments in South Sudan.
4. The Government of South Sudan should cease the distribution of weaponry and other assistance to the combatant factions inside the country.
5. The Government of South Sudan should mandate that all security sectors refrain from recruiting anyone under the age of eighteen. Disarming militias via explicit involvement of the United Nations peacekeeping operation in South Sudan.
6. The troop-contributing and other United Nations member nations must promptly facilitate the monitoring of weapons flow in South Sudan.

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