

**SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS: THE MALI
WAR AND INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION**

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ABSTRACT

The Mali War began on 16 January 2012 with the Tuareg rebellion. Skirmishes of attack are still ongoing despite the ceasefire agreement that was signed on February 19, 2015 in Algiers. The conflict was majorly between Northern Mali and Southern Mali. The objective of the study is to examine the relationship between the Tuareg rebellion and the Mali War; to assess the role played by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in intensifying the conflict; to evaluate how the intervention of the international community led by France paved the way for peace in Mali. The theoretical framework of the study is a blend of the Power Theory and the Clash of Civilization Theory. The qualitative research methodology was adopted for the study. It consists of content and documentary analysis whereby data was gathered mainly through secondary sources and reviewed. The study found out that the Mali War was caused by the Tuareg rebellion and aggression and the proliferation Small Arms and Lights Weapons aggravated the conflict. The Tuaregs were the major insurgents and aggressors. They declared war against the Malian government in a bid to secede and their grievance was independence for the Azawad or Northern Mali. Conversely the intervention by the international community led by France ameliorated the conflict. The study recommends that more states should be party to the Firearms Protocol which entered into force in July 2005. Firearms production and trade are highly lucrative businesses but this should not be sacrificed in the alters of so much bloodshed from conflicts triggered by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

INTRODUCTION

Small Arms and Lights Weapons have the propensity of aggravating conflicts conversely the intervention of the international community has the potential of ameliorating conflicts. The Mali War also referred to as the Mali Civil War began on 16 January 2012 and sporadic attacks still occur as at 2018 despite the ceasefire agreement that was signed on February 19, 2015 in Algiers. The conflict was majorly between Northern Mali and Southern Mali. The Tuaregs were the major insurgents and aggressors. They declared war against the Malian government in a bid to secede and their grievance was independence for the Azawad or Northern Mali.

The objective of the study is to examine the relationship between the Tuareg rebellion and the Mali War; to assess the role played by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in intensifying the conflict; to evaluate how the intervention of the international community led by France paved the way for peace in Mali.

The theoretical framework of the study is a blend of the Power Theory and the Clash of Civilization Theory. The quest for power was the driving force of the Tuaregs in their insurgence and aggression. They declared war against the Malian government in a bid to secede and their grievance was independence for the Azawad or Northern Mali. The impetus for the 2012 rebellion and aggression was the availability of abundant weapons including Small Arms and Light Weapons made available by Muamar Gaddafi of Libya during its civil war. Tuaregs took advantage of the available heavy weapons at their disposal and the training they got from Libya to successfully invade the Armed Forces of Mali with heavy casualties (Nossiter 2012).

That states are primarily motivated by the struggle and pursuit of power in the international system is indisputably the fundamental worldview of the Power Theory or Realist Theory. Realism has been a prominent theory of international relations from the very beginnings but gained greatest prominence with

the writings of Hans Morgenthau, E. H. Carr, George Kannan, Henry Kissinger etc. These scholars are regarded as the major proponents of realism.

The Clash of Civilization played a major role in Mali War because Islamist Ansar Dine declared war basically for purposes of Islamic fundamentalism and enforcement of Sharia on all the conquered people in a united Republic of Mali. Apparently, the zealous intervention of Western forces was to halt this ambition. The Clash of Civilization is a theory propounded by Samuel Huntington. The theory holds the view that: “The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future” (Huntington 1996). Civilization in this context refers to religion. Invariably, religion would be a major causal factor of future wars.

The qualitative research methodology was adopted for the study. It consists of content and documentary analysis whereby data was gathered mainly through secondary sources and reviewed. The article is divided into five sections. We are already in the first section which is the introduction. The second section would discuss the Tuareg Rebellion and Mali War while the third section would discuss impact of the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons on the Mali War. Section four deals with international intervention on the Mali War while section six is the conclusion and recommendation.

TUAREG REBELLION AND MALI WAR

The Mali War also referred to as the Mali Civil War began on 16 January 2012 and sporadic attacks still occur as at 2018 despite the ceasefire agreement that was signed on February 19, 2015 in Algiers. The conflict was majorly between Northern Mali and Southern Mali. The Tuaregs were the major insurgents and aggressors. They declared war against the Malian government in a bid to secede and their grievance was independence for the Azawad or Northern Mali.

The Tuareg people had over the years desired an independent territory for themselves and had been fighting for it. The ongoing crisis is “not the first Tuareg rebellion in Mali; they have felt for decades that the government was neglecting their needs” (Schall 2012). The first major rebellion was in 1962 and since then Mali has been struggling to maintain its indivisible territory with the Tuaregs. In the early 1990s the Azawad People's Movement (MPA) was formed and war for independence declared but this was aborted by the government forces (Ibrahim 2012).

A peace agreement was signed in 1995 whereby the Tuareg insurgents were integrated into the Military of Mali. Despite the numerous concessions the desire for independence was still the ultimate for the Tuaregs. The defunct MNA eventually metamorphosed into the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) with the same mission of creating an independent state for the Tuareg in Azawad. The Tuareg insurgent that earlier integrated into the Military of Mali, played very active roles in the rebellion and mutiny. They facilitated the elimination of government forces in Northern Mali by January 2012 (Morgan 2012).

The impetus for the 2012 rebellion and aggression was the availability of abundant weapons including Small Arms and Light Weapons made available by Muamar Gaddafi of Libya during its civil war. Tuaregs took advantage of the available heavy weapons at their disposal and the training they got from Libya to successfully invade the Armed Forces of Mali with heavy casualties (Nossiter 2012).

The heavy casualty by the Armed Forces of Mali as caused by the Tuareg invasion instigated a coup d'état led by Amadou Sanogo. The disgruntled Malian military used this as excuse to overthrow the government of President Amadou Toumani Toure on 22 March 2012 (BBC 22 Mar 2012). The junta suspended the constitution but their actions plunged the country into further crisis. “Sanogo cites a lack of support for the military in the fight against the rebels in the north as the reason for the coup” (Sandner 2015). The power vacuum created by the overthrow of President Toure further empowered the Tuaregs. Facilitated by the availability of heavy weapons the Tuaregs conquered Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal which are the three largest northern cities. Eventually Douentza was also conquered.

The offensive led to total victory and control over all of Northern Mali or Azawad. On April 6th the MLNA proclaimed the independence of Azawad from Mali. The misfortune of the Tuaregs on the one hand and saving grace for the Republic of Mali on the other hand that the international community failed to recognize the independence of Azawad. They eventually intervened to restore status quo (Fonbaustier 2012). Also, the Islamist Ansar Dine rebels and their allies were opposed to secession or an independent state of

Azawad but cherished Islamic fundamentalism and enforcement of Sharia on Azawad and all the conquered people in a united Republic of Mali (Sandner 2015).

It has to be noted that MLNA was the major Tuareg rebel movement and they were initially supported by Ansar Dine and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa. However, after the victory there were conflicting visions by the coalition of forces. While MNLA was fighting for the independence of Azawad on the one hand, the Ansar Dine on the other hand wanted the imposition of Islamic law (Sharia) across Mali including the Azawad region (Nossiter 2012).

The vision disparity eventually degenerated into war between the secular MNLA and the Islamists. “Over time, the Ansar Dine turned against the MLNA and, after some violent clashes, managed to overpower them in many of Azawad’s key cities” (Schall 2012). As at July 2012 the Islamist had completely defeated MNLA.

On 18 June 2013 a peace agreement was signed between the government of Mali and the Tuareg rebel. This was very momentary because in less than a year – precisely 26 September 2013 the rebels pulled out of the peace agreement on allegations that the government neither respected the truce nor committed to its terms. The war continued again but a ceasefire agreement was signed in Algiers on 19th February 2015. As at 2018 low-level fighting was still ongoing and incidences of terrorist attacks rampant (Aljazeera 2017, Reliefweb 2017).

IMPACT OF THE PROLIFERATION OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS ON THE MALI WAR

The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in West Africa is a major causal factor of the Mali War. “The scale of the proliferation of SALW in West Africa is a major security concern. It is estimated that of the 639 million SALW circulating globally, 7 million are in West Africa” (Ekiyor 2008, Adedeji 2003).

According to the Royal Military College of Science (RMCS) Handbook on weapons and vehicles as cited by Okoro (1994) Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) are “Man portable, largely shoulder controlled weapon of up to 12.7 millimeter (0.5inches) caliber; such weapons generally have a flat trajectory and an effective operational range of 0 to 800 meters...” In a similar perspective Renner (2006) said that SALW are “Weapons that can be carried by an individual. This includes everything from revolvers and pistols to machine guns, light anti-tank weapons and shoulder fired surface-to-air missiles.”

SALW is a terminology adopted by the arms control protocol to depict two classes of weapons such as hand-held small calibre firearms like rifles, shotguns, handguns, carbines, manual weapons, semi-automatic guns, full automatic guns and man-portable machine guns on the one hand and light weapons such as a wide range of medium-caliber and explosive ordnance such as antitank and antiaircraft rockets, man-portable and vehicle-mounted antipersonnel, grenade launchers, missiles, landmines, rocket launchers, antiaircraft guns, hand grenades, mortars and rocket-propelled grenades. (Ayuba and Okafor 2013, Tarcisio 2014, UNIDIR, 2006) They are portable weapons.

SALW are small and light. Despite this attribute Small arms and light weapons “are in a real sense weapons of mass destruction.” (Vendley and Ali 2013) because they are weapons that have over the years caused colossal death, injury and damage in society. There are several SALW in circulation in the West African subregion for which Mali is a part. “The United Nations estimates that of these 500 million illicit weapons, 100 million are in Sub-Sahara Africa, with eight to ten million concentrated in the West African subregion alone” (Okoro 1994). Most of the SMAW in Africa were supplied by the rival superpowers of the bi-polar world order, that is USA and USSR during the Cold War years especially between 1960 through 1990 for the proxy wars of that period. (Abdel-Fatau, 2011)

At the end of the Cold War, there was still the free flow of greatly subsidized weapons into Africa from various sources such as China, Germany, France, Russia, Iran, Ukraine, Britain and USA (UNIDR). The largest exporters are “Russia, the United States, China, Brazil, Italy, Germany, France, Belgium and the United Kingdom. The most transparent exporters are the United States and Germany, while the least transparent are Bulgaria, Iran, Israel and North Korea.” (Tarcisio 2014)

A couple of factors promote the proliferation of SALW and they include the relatively affordable prices, porous boundaries of Mali and other West African states, SALW can easily be concealed or disguised and imported, very little skill and training is required to operate, inadequate security operatives and weak security institutions to implement prohibition laws, refusal of the super powers to sign conventions prohibiting the proliferation of SALW because of the gains from it as a lucrative business etc. (Stemmet 2001). These factors make small and light weapons easily available and accessible. Thereby making them “the primary tools of violence in almost every conflict where the innocent suffer most” (Vendley and Ali 2013).

The consequences of SALW proliferation are disastrous. The United Nations Security Council is of the view that the intensity and duration of armed conflict is greatly aggravated by the accumulation and massive spread of SALW in different regions of the world. This also weakens the sustainability of peace agreement thereby impeding peace building and frustrating efforts geared towards the prevention of conflict. SALW hinders the provision of humanitarian assistance to a large extent and compromises the efficiency of the Security council in a bid to maintain peace, stability and security in the world (United Nations 2002: 31).

As a matter of fact, the availability of weapons in the hands of combatants and rebels constitutes an impediment to alternative conflict resolutions techniques and increases the volatility of crisis and the vulnerability of people. It has the propensity of frustrating the initiative of peacekeeping operations and challenging peacebuilding efforts (Stemmet, 2001).

The cumulative or multiplier effect of SALW with regard to post conflict security challenges is more alarming because it perpetuates a climate of insecurity through increased crime rates and violence. The availability of weapons weakens alternative conflict resolution mechanism and incites violence thereby making it more lethal at every stage, from violence at the rudimentary stages to full-fledge war in African countries in particular and the world in general.

The 4362 meeting of the United Nations Security Council buttressed this concern and noted that the proliferation of SALW “increases the intensity and duration of armed conflict, undermines the sustainability of peace agreements, impedes the success of peace building, frustrates efforts aimed at the prevention of armed conflict, hinders considerably the provision of humanitarian assistance” (Okoro 1994).

The conflict in Mali is facilitated by the massive proliferation of SALW which instigated the disgruntled Malian military to stage a coup d’etat on 22 March 2012 that toppled President Amadou Toumani. Invariably proliferation of SALW is a major causal factor of conflicts and coups. Almost all the countries in West Africa have witnessed a coup d’etat and/or bloody conflicts orchestrating massive destruction of lives and property as well as colossal displacement.

According to Keili (2008) over 37 successful military coups have taking place in West Africa since 1960. As at the time this data was compiled the coup in Mali and others have not occurred. The proliferation of SMAW tremendously contributed to the overthrow of democratic governments through coups d’états as well as violent conflicts at the inter-communal and intra-state levels of countries in West Africa (Ero and Muvumba 2004). SMAW has caused devastating havoc such that in the last 50 years an estimated 5,994,000 suffered fatalities in Africa. On the average 30,000 people are annually killed in Africa and this is facilitated by the proliferation of SMAW (Renner 2004).

The gloomy picture of the proliferation of small and light weapons in Mali and other parts of Africa for gruesome conflicts is motivating the international community to introduce some control measures. On this premise the United Nations Program of Action (PoA) to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects was instituted in 2001. This program was very timely and comprehensive.

The Firearms Protocol was also adopted in May 2001 and entered into force in July 2005 with more than 60 state as signatories to the protocol. It was designed to regulate the “illicit manufacturing and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition”. To support these protocols Resolution 2117 was passed on 26 September 2016 by the United Nations Security Council. Resolution 2117 urged nations to remain committed to all SALW control protocols and embargoes.

Mali is a member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and this regional organisation has contributed immensely towards the control and proliferation of SALW in the region. The

Declaration of a Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Small Arms and Light Weapons in West Africa by the Conference of Heads of State and Government in Abuja on 31 October 1998 was a major step in this direction.

The Moratorium reiterated the need for compliance by member states with regards to the total ban programme on the importation and exportation of SALWs to the sub-region. These laudable initiatives notwithstanding the proliferation of SALW in West Africa has not been radically checkmated for reasons that border mainly on corruption and ineffective government institutions (Ayuba and Okafor 2013).

INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION ON THE MALI WAR

The Mali War was aggravated by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Conversely the intervention by the international community led by France ameliorated the conflict. The aggression and consequent conflict made both the government of Mali and ECOWAS to seek for international intervention. On this premise, using the instrumentality of Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, United Nations Security Council on 12 October 2012 unanimously passed a resolution approving the support of the army of Mali by an African-led force under the auspices of France. The role to be played by ECOWAS and the African Union was also highlighted in the resolution (Arieff 2013).

This authorization made France to quickly deploy its forces for peace enforcement and launched Operation Serval. The French acted swiftly and quickly because of the strategic importance of Sévaré military airport for its vital operations. Operation Serval was enhanced by the use of Gazell helicopters Mirage 2000-D jets.

This tremendous force of France operating from a Chadian base overwhelmingly weakened the Islamist offensive and compelled them to withdraw from Konna – thence Konna was recaptured by the first quarter of 2012. The intervention of France in Mali halted the rebel advance and rolled back virtually all the gains of the Tuaregs, paving way for the retaking of the northern cities of Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal. The Tuaregs and Islamist rebels were compelled to run back to their remote mountain stronghold (Allison 2013).

Member states of ECOWAS and AU were readily available and deployed shortly after the way was paved by the forces of France. The international coalition for intervention were very comprehensive and contributed immensely in restoring peace. The British government deployed two Royal Force C-17 transport planes, The Royal Canadian Air Force dispatched a C-17 transport plane; The Danish Parliament provided a C-130 transport plane; The Belgian government made available two C-130s, a medical evacuation helicopter and 80 personnel; Spain dispatched one transport aircraft with logistics and training facilities; Germany provided two Transall C-160 transport aircraft; Italy made available air transport-based logistical support (Arieff 2013).

France was a major supporter of the international intervention in the Mali conflict but wanted an African force to be in the battle forefront. However, the massive advance in January 2012, made France to take the lead and no longer solely dependent on the availability of African troops for the forefront battle (BBC Mar 2013). Thereafter the first non-Malian Africa troops comprising troops from Nigeria and Chad moved into Mali. ECOWAS eventually deployed troops numbering more than 3000 from member countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast Niger, Burkina Faso. Chad, though not an ECOWAS country sent enough solders to work under the directive of French troops (BBC Mar 2013). This was sequel to the authorization by the UN Security Council mandating the deployment of peacekeepers by ECOWAS. They agreed to deploy more than 3000 soldiers as part of the AFISMA mission (Sandner 2015).

CONCLUSION

The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons is a major causal factor of wars and coup d'état in West Africa and this manifested greatly in the Mali War. SMAW has caused devastating havoc such that in the last 50 years an estimated 5,994,000 suffered fatalities in Africa. On the average 30,000 people are annually killed in Africa and this is facilitated by the proliferation of SMAW (Renner 2004).

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