

COMBATING SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS SMUGGLING IN NIGERIA: AN ANALYSIS OF INTELLIGENCE INFORMATION SOURCES WITHIN THE NIGERIA CUSTOMS SERVICE

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Abstract

This study investigates the sources of intelligence information utilized by the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) to combat the smuggling of arms and ammunition across the nation's borders. Utilizing the Intelligence Cycle Model as a framework, the research identifies key intelligence sources, including the NCS intelligence team, informants, special agents, other border agencies, and international databases such as INTERPOL. Findings revealed that while these sources play a significant role in intelligence collection, there is a notable deficiency in intelligence obtained from border communities, import clearing agents, and local databases like the Single Window database. This gap suggests missed opportunities for enhancing intelligence operations and underscores the necessity for improved engagement with local stakeholders. The study concludes with recommendations aimed at strengthening the NCS's intelligence-gathering capabilities, fostering community collaboration, and ultimately bolstering national security against the backdrop of ongoing challenges related to arms smuggling.

Keywords: Small Arms and Light Weapons, Intelligence Cycle Model, Intelligence Information, Intelligence Sources, Smuggling

Introduction

The widespread availability of small arms and ammunition is a significant global concern, contributing to loss of life and impeding socio-economic development (Alimba, 2017). Small arms, defined as weapons for individual use,

include revolvers, self-loading pistols, rifles, carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles, and light machine guns (UN, 2006 Small Arms Review Conference). When these arms evade border controls and enter illegal markets, they exacerbate issues such as armed robbery, kidnappings, political assassinations, trans-border crimes, espionage, smuggling, insurgency, oil bunkering, and the ongoing destruction of public infrastructure in Nigeria. The unregulated cross-border movement of these weapons poses serious threats to national security, highlighting the essential role of customs agencies in enforcing border controls.

Globally, customs services are central to securing national borders, as effective border management is a key to national security. Spencer (2007) underscores this, stating that “the border is the first line of defence against terrorism and the last line of a nation’s territorial integrity.” Established in 1891, the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) has three main functions: first, to generate and account for revenue by collecting import, export, and excise duties, along with other taxes, which are vital to Nigeria’s financial health; second, to perform security functions; and third, to work alongside other agencies to combat smuggling (Jatau, Adeniyi & Anyanwu, 2012). The NCS’s anti-smuggling efforts are crucial for Nigeria’s economic stability, as smuggling not only harms the economy but also threatens the growth of new industries critical to industrialization. Recognizing these harms, a proactive government seeks to combat smuggling to safeguard the economy.

In its role, the NCS actively monitors and curbs illegal activities conducted by unscrupulous traders at Nigeria's borders, while also ensuring that trade facilitation remains efficient and unobstructed by unnecessary barriers. This dual function highlights the NCS's critical role in balancing security enforcement with trade facilitation, thereby contributing to both national security and economic growth. Murtala (2020) reported that from 2010 to 2017, the NCS seized a total of 26,797 Small Arms and Light Weapons and 1,025,948 rounds of ammunition. However, this represents only a fraction of the illicit arms in circulation across Nigeria, as reflected by the seizure data that indicates what was intercepted relative to the volume of illegally trafficked arms. Former President and Commander-in-Chief General Abdulsalami Abubakar reported that over six million illegal arms are currently in circulation in Nigeria (Daka, Akubo, Abeku, & Sunday, 2021). This disparity between seized arms and those still circulating has contributed to severe security challenges. The European Crime Prevention Network (2017) reports that Boko Haram alone was responsible for 35,000 fatalities by 2011. Additionally, between 2006 and 2015, there were over 2,363 cult-related deaths across 28 Nigerian states. The proliferation of arms has also fueled unrest in the South-South region, significantly impacting Nigeria’s

economy; an estimated 400,000 barrels of oil are stolen daily through armed theft, resulting in a loss of approximately 4.8 billion Naira daily. In 2018 alone, Nigeria lost over one trillion Naira due to oil theft. Furthermore, the alarming rise in kidnappings has led to school closures in some states and a halt in various economic activities.

To curb the menace of Small Arms and Light Weapons smuggling in Nigeria, which contributes to numerous criminal activities, intelligence gathering is essential. Effective intelligence gathering is crucial to crime control, as it provides early warnings of potential threats that must be processed promptly. However, successfully gathering intelligence requires identifying and analyzing the sources of this information to ensure its reliability and relevance.

Statement of the Problem

Intelligence agencies are responsible for preventing and detecting crimes that threaten Nigeria's security, leading to the apprehension of offenders to uphold law and order. They also work to ensure the general security of matters concerning Nigeria. These agencies are expected to maintain a reliable intelligence network to remain vigilant, guaranteeing public safety and providing early warnings of potential threats. They should be prepared to address national security challenges promptly, reporting situations that could escalate or contribute to conflict. Intelligence operations rely on the sourcing, gathering, and processing of critical information to fulfil these objectives. One such agency is the Nigeria Customs Service.

Despite the presence of the Nigeria Customs Service at many of Nigeria's borders, the activities of kidnapers and terrorists—particularly in Northern Nigeria—indicate the ongoing proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the country. These firearms have been utilized in armed robberies, kidnappings, political assassinations, cross-border crimes, espionage, smuggling, insurgency, oil bunkering, and the continuous destruction of public infrastructure throughout Nigeria. Salau (2017) reported the interception of 661 pump-action guns after they had left the Apapa seaport. Additionally, Usman and Oritse (2017) highlighted that Nigeria Customs Operatives at the Tin-Can Island Command, in collaboration with partner agencies, dismantled a syndicate involved in smuggling weapons into the nation. These incidents highlight the persistent problem of small arms and light weapons smuggling in Nigeria.

To mitigate the prevalence of these crimes and the proliferation of weapons, it is essential to gather and utilize intelligence information effectively. However, the quality of this intelligence is dependent on the sources from which it originates. This study identifies the sources of intelligence available to the

Nigeria Customs Service for combating the smuggling of small arms and light weapons, using the Intelligence Cycle Model as a framework.

Objectives of the Study;

1. To find out the sources of intelligence information which aid in the curbing of smuggling of arms and ammunition through the border.

Literature Review

Sources of intelligent information are also called INTs and they are generally referred to as intelligence collection. Literature in this section has identified five types of these sources. They include Human Intelligence (HUMINT), Geospatial Intelligence (GEOINT), Signals Intelligence (SIGINT), Measurement and Signature Intelligence (MASINT), and Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT).

Kamiński (2019) investigated the fundamental nature of intelligence sources and examined their practical application within the agencies and departments comprising the U.S. Intelligence Community. The author categorized the primary forms of intelligence sources—Human Intelligence (HUMINT), Geospatial Intelligence (GEOINT), Signals Intelligence (SIGINT), Measurement and Signature Intelligence (MASINT), and Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT)—while delineating the respective responsibilities of U.S. intelligence agencies in their utilization. Additionally, the author highlighted challenges inherent in employing intelligence sources within the U.S. Intelligence Community. The research findings suggest that optimal outcomes in intelligence operations are attainable by implementing "all-source intelligence," also known as fusion intelligence. This approach entails leveraging a diverse array of sources to compile a comprehensive final intelligence product.

Similarly, Sani, Paki and Umar (2015) examined sources of intelligence gathering for minimizing terrorism in Nigeria. Secondary data from journals, book sections, periodicals, websites, and electronic sources were used to collect data. Nigeria, as of February 2014, has recorded the total number of cell phone users to be One hundred and sixty-seven million, three hundred and seventy-one thousand, nine hundred and forty-five (167,371,945). This study found that the sources of intelligence gathering included wiretapping and imagery intelligence, this number or even more will be on surveillance over some time to pinpoint suspects through location information.

Ziółkowska (2018) also examined the use of open-source intelligence (OSINT) as an element of military recon. OSINT is important not only for the institution itself but also for citizens. OSINT is one of how security is provided to

the internal and external states. The study found that Open-source information is one of the agents of economic, political, military, etc. Books, periodicals, statistical yearbooks, social networking sites and daily newspapers belong to the basic, verified sources. In a globalized world, OSINT has particular importance because, due to the obtained information, the state can take defensive action. In this article, the author pointed out the use of OSINT in the military diagnosis.

Olukayode, Folasade, and David (2018) examined the various sources of intelligence services, the mode of analysis and the implications on national security. The study adopted the descriptive design and relied on secondary sources of data such as relevant books, Internet sources, journals and periodic articles. It was found that human intelligence (HUMINT) was the major source in use by the NCS, as it is time-consuming, expensive and susceptible to manipulation. From the conclusion of this study, it could be surmised that other sources of intelligence are available to the NCS for deployment such as; images (IMINT), Signals (SGINT), Communication (COMINT) and electronic (ELINT) which can complement in the short run and possibly replace HUMINT as sources of intelligence in the long run.

Methodology

The research methodology adopted for the study is quantitative research. The cross-sectional descriptive survey design was employed for the study. The total population is 638 staff comprising 426 staff from Borno/Yobe Command and 212 staff from Katsina Command.

The researcher used a 30% portion of the population of each stratum or each of the Area commands totaling 212 staff. This sample is sufficient according to Neuman (2007) who stated that “a researcher will have equal accuracy by selecting 10% of population above 1000 and 30% of population below 1000 as sample size”. A self-developed questionnaire was used to collect the data for the study.

Results and Discussion

The study sought to find out the sources of intelligence information which aided in the curbing of smuggling of arms and ammunition through the border. The responses are shown in the table overleaf:

S/No	Sources of intelligence	Borno/Yobe Area		Katsina Area		Overall	
		Command		Command			
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Border communities	7	5.00%	4	5.71%	11	5.20%
2	Intelligence communities	123	87.86%	51	72.86%	174	82.90%
3	Other border agencies not in intelligence community	133	95.00%	65	92.86%	198	94.30%
4	International Organizations databases e.g. INTERPOL	127	90.71%	59	84.29%	186	88.60%
5	Local Databases e.g. SINGLE WINDOW database	8	5.71%	1	1.43%	9	4.30%
6	Informants	135	96.43%	68	97.14%	203	96.70%
7	Import clearing agents	4	2.86%	0	0.00%	4	1.90%
8	Transporters or Freight forwarders	7	5.00%	3	4.29%	10	4.80%
9	NCS intelligence team	131	93.57%	70	100.00%	201	95.70%
10	Gadgets for audio and video recordings	82	58.57%	57	81.43%	139	66.20%
11	Computer intelligence specialist that intercept messages	9	6.43%	2	2.86%	11	5.20%
12	Interviews	19	13.57%	4	5.71%	23	11.00%
13	Special Agents	134	95.71%	67	95.71%	201	95.70%

An average response of 3.0 was employed as the acceptability criterion. This implied that items with an average response equal to or greater than 3.00 meant that the respondents agreed with that item while items with an average response less than 3.0 meant that the respondents disagreed with that item. An inspection of the results revealed that the respondents agreed that the sources of intelligence information used to curb the smuggling of arms and ammunition across the border included the NCS intelligence team, informants, special agents, other border agencies and international organizations' databases (such as the INTERPOL). However, the respondents reported that they rarely get intelligence information from border communities, import clearing agents and local databases (such as Single Window database). This finding is similar to reports by Bodunde et al., (2019) who listed sources of intelligence information for the NCS to include

informants, special agents and intelligence teams. Ifeanyi-Aneke et al, (2021) further included local communities and databases as sources of such intelligence information for the NCS. The implication of this finding is not farfetched as arms smuggling often involves transnational criminal networks that operate across multiple countries and regions. These networks may have extensive resources, connections, and expertise in evading law enforcement efforts, making it difficult to disrupt their operations solely through domestic intelligence gathering and enforcement measures. Similarly, despite the involvement of various sources of intelligence information, effective coordination and collaboration among relevant agencies, both domestically and internationally, are crucial for combating arms smuggling comprehensively. Inadequate coordination, communication gaps, and jurisdictional issues may impede efforts to share intelligence, conduct joint operations, and address smuggling networks effectively.

Theoretical Insight

The second stage of the intelligence cycle model is “The collection Stage”, which focuses on gathering information from various sources to support decision-making and operational effectiveness. Analyzing the findings through this lens reveals both the strengths and weaknesses of the current intelligence collection efforts by the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) in combating the smuggling of arms and ammunition across borders.

Strengths in Intelligence Collection

1. **Diverse Sources:** The findings indicate that the NCS utilizes a variety of intelligence sources, including its intelligence team, informants, special agents, other border agencies, and international databases like INTERPOL. This diversity enhances the robustness of the intelligence collected, as it allows for a comprehensive view of potential threats and smuggling activities.
2. **Collaboration with Agencies:** Engaging with other border agencies and international organizations fosters cooperation and information sharing, which is essential for effective intelligence operations. This collaboration can lead to timely interventions and proactive measures against smuggling activities.
3. **Specialized Teams and Informants:** The inclusion of special agents and informants signifies a proactive approach to intelligence gathering. These individuals often have insider knowledge and can provide critical insights that enhance the NCS’s operational capabilities.

Weaknesses in Intelligence Collection

1. **Underutilization of Local Sources:** The finding that the NCS rarely receives intelligence from border communities, import clearing agents, and local databases (such as the Single Window database) highlights a significant gap in the collection process. Local stakeholders often have firsthand knowledge of activities in their areas and can provide valuable intelligence that may not be accessible through formal channels.
2. **Limited Engagement with Communities:** The lack of intelligence from border communities suggests insufficient engagement and relationship-building efforts. Residents may be reluctant to share information if they do not trust the authorities or believe their input will be valued. This disconnect can hinder the collection of actionable intelligence.
3. **Potential for Data Silos:** The infrequent use of local databases indicates a possible issue with data integration and sharing. Without a systematic approach to incorporate information from local sources, the NCS may be missing critical intelligence that could inform its operations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings indicate that the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) relies on various intelligence sources to combat the smuggling of arms and ammunition across its borders. Respondents highlighted the importance of the NCS intelligence team, informants, special agents, other border agencies, and international organizations' databases, such as INTERPOL, in their efforts. However, it is noteworthy that intelligence from border communities, import clearing agents, and local databases, such as the Single Window database, is seldom utilized. This gap suggests an opportunity for enhancing intelligence-gathering strategies by fostering stronger relationships with local stakeholders and communities. By leveraging these underutilized sources, the NCS could improve its effectiveness in curbing arms smuggling and strengthening national security.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the intelligence-gathering capabilities of the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) in combating arms smuggling:

1. **Strengthen Community Engagement:** The NCS should establish initiatives to engage border communities actively. By fostering trust and collaboration, the NCS can encourage residents to report suspicious activities and provide valuable intelligence.

2. Enhance Training for Informants and Agents: Providing targeted training for informants, special agents, and local clearing agents can improve their ability to gather and report intelligence effectively. This training should emphasize the importance of accuracy, confidentiality, and the timely sharing of information.
3. Utilize Local Databases: The NCS should explore ways to integrate local databases, such as the Single Window database, into their intelligence operations. This could involve improving data sharing and collaboration with relevant agencies to enhance the overall intelligence picture.
4. Develop Strategic Partnerships: Forming partnerships with other law enforcement agencies and international organizations can facilitate information exchange and collaborative efforts. This could also include joint training programs and intelligence-sharing agreements to strengthen overall security measures.
5. Increase Resources for Intelligence Operations: Allocating additional resources, including personnel and technology, to intelligence operations can enhance the NCS's capacity to gather, analyze, and act on intelligence related to arms smuggling.

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