

NIGERIAN MINISTRY OF DEFENCE: TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND CORRUPTION RISK ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

The Nigerian Ministry of Defence (MoD) occupies a central position in Nigeria's security architecture, with constitutional responsibility for safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity. It supervises the Nigerian Army, Navy, Air Force, defence intelligence structures, and key defence-industrial institutions. In the context of persistent and evolving asymmetric security threats, including insurgency in the North-East, banditry in the North-West, and separatist agitations in the South-East, the effectiveness, transparency, and institutional integrity of the Ministry have become critical to national stability and democratic governance. This Transparency and Corruption Risk Assessment report examines the governance, fiscal accountability, procurement systems, and human rights compliance of the Ministry of Defence through a multi-dimensional institutional assessment. Drawing on empirical evidence from legislative investigations, budgetary allocations, civil society reports, and international defence integrity indices, the study

Introduction

In contemporary democratic governance, the defence sector occupies a uniquely complex position at the intersection of national sovereignty, state coercive power, fiscal concentration, and institutional secrecy. Unlike most sectors of public administration, defence governance is often shielded by legitimate concerns relating to national security, operational confidentiality, intelligence protection, and strategic military preparedness. However, international governance literature increasingly demonstrates that excessive secrecy within defence institutions frequently extends beyond operational necessity and becomes a structural mechanism for shielding corruption, procurement fraud,

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evaluates the Ministry's adherence to statutory obligations and principles of public accountability. Findings reveal a significant institutional contradiction. On one hand, the Ministry is undergoing notable structural reforms, including the implementation of the Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON) Act 2023, increased defence budget allocations, and strategic international defence partnerships aimed at strengthening local military production and operational coordination. Leadership initiatives also reflect an emerging whole-of-society approach to national security and institutional modernisation. On the other hand, these reforms are undermined by persistent weaknesses in financial transparency, procurement integrity, and personnel administration. Nigeria's defence sector is classified as operating in a high-risk environment for corruption, particularly due to opaque procurement systems, weak compliance with the Freedom of Information Act, and off-budget expenditures shielded from public oversight. High-profile corruption investigations involving defence contractors further expose systemic procurement irregularities. In addition, allegations of violations of the Federal Character principle in recruitment, cases of human rights abuses, and internal sexual harassment scandals continue to weaken institutional legitimacy and public trust. These governance failures carry significant international implications, including strained defence cooperation and threats to strategic bilateral arms agreements. The report concludes that sustainable defence reform in Nigeria requires stronger procurement oversight, improved fiscal transparency, enforcement of constitutional equity principles, and greater democratic accountability. Strengthening institutional integrity within the Ministry of Defence is essential not only for operational effectiveness but also for the legitimacy of national security and international credibility.

Keywords: Ministry of Defence, transparency, corruption risk assessment, procurement integrity, defence governance, Nigeria, institutional reform, public accountability

abuse of office, and institutional inefficiency (Transparency International Defence and Security, 2021; OECD, 2020). This tension between security confidentiality and democratic accountability has become one of the most contested governance questions in developing democracies, particularly in fragile and conflict-prone states such as Nigeria.

Nigeria is one of the most strategically significant states in Africa due to its population size, economic influence, military capacity, and geopolitical role in West Africa and the Sahel. As Africa's most populous country and one of its largest economies, Nigeria serves as a regional security anchor in counterterrorism operations, peacekeeping missions, and transnational security cooperation (World Bank, 2023; United States Department of State, 2024). The Nigerian Ministry of Defence (MoD), therefore, functions not merely as

an administrative institution but as a critical national security apparatus responsible for safeguarding territorial integrity, maintaining internal stability, and projecting regional defence cooperation. The Ministry supervises the Nigerian Army, Nigerian Navy, Nigerian Air Force, Defence Headquarters, Defence Intelligence Agency, and several strategic defence-related parastatals, including the Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON) (Federal Ministry of Defence, 2024).

Historically, the Nigerian Ministry of Defence was formally established on 1 October 1958 during the transitional period leading up to Nigeria's independence from British colonial rule. According to Akinyemi (2019), this marked the formal transfer of military command and administrative control from the British War Office to the Nigerian government, laying the institutional foundation for sovereign defence administration. The Ministry initially assumed responsibility for the Army and Navy, while the Nigerian Air Force was later established in 1964, completing the tri-service structure of the armed forces (Omede, 2020). This post-colonial military transition was expected to create a professional and nationally accountable defence institution rooted in constitutional civilian oversight. However, the military's subsequent dominance in Nigeria's political history, particularly during prolonged periods of military rule between 1966 and 1999, significantly shaped the institutional culture of opacity, hierarchical secrecy, and weak civilian oversight that continues to affect defence governance today (Aiyede, 2018).

The constitutional mandate of the Ministry of Defence is anchored in Sections 217 to 220 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), which empowers the armed forces to defend Nigeria from external aggression, maintain territorial integrity, suppress insurrection, and support civil authorities in restoring public order when called upon to do so (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Beyond constitutional defence obligations, the Ministry is also responsible for force readiness, personnel welfare, defence policy formulation, military procurement, strategic partnerships, and peacekeeping coordination within the frameworks of the African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the United Nations (UN) (Ministry of Defence, 2024). Its strategic vision emphasises the development of a modern, professional, technologically advanced, and operationally efficient military establishment capable of responding to contemporary multidimensional threats.

These responsibilities have become increasingly urgent due to Nigeria's worsening security environment. Since 2009, the country has faced prolonged insurgency from Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in the North-East, large-scale banditry and kidnapping in the North-West, farmer-herder conflicts in the North-Central region, pipeline vandalism and militancy in the Niger Delta, and separatist agitations in the South-East (International Crisis Group, 2024). These threats have

placed extraordinary operational and financial pressure on the Ministry of Defence. According to SIPRI (2024), Nigeria consistently ranks among the highest military spenders in Africa, with defence budgets increasing significantly in response to escalating insecurity. The 2026 fiscal appropriation reportedly allocated over ₦3 trillion to the Ministry of Defence, representing one of the largest sectoral allocations in the national budget (Budget Office of the Federation, 2026).

Despite these enormous financial commitments, insecurity persists at alarming levels, raising serious concerns regarding the efficiency, transparency, and accountability of defence expenditure. Scholars such as Ebo (2018) and Onuoha (2021) argue that increased defence spending in Nigeria has not translated into proportionate improvements in security outcomes due to systemic corruption, procurement inefficiencies, and weak institutional oversight. The defence sector has repeatedly been associated with large-scale corruption scandals involving inflated contracts, ghost procurement, off-budget expenditures, and diversion of funds intended for military operations. One of the most notable examples remains the “Dasukigate” arms procurement scandal, in which billions of dollars intended for weapons procurement were allegedly diverted to political patronage and personal enrichment (ICPC, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2017). This scandal exposed the dangerous consequences of procurement opacity, where corruption directly translated into battlefield disadvantages for frontline troops.

Transparency International Defence and Security (2021), through its Government Defence Integrity Index (GDI), classified Nigeria’s defence sector as operating under a “critical risk” category for corruption. The report identified major vulnerabilities in political oversight, financial management, procurement systems, military operations, and personnel administration. Specifically, the absence of effective parliamentary scrutiny, weak audit mechanisms, limited procurement transparency, and poor compliance with access-to-information laws were highlighted as major institutional weaknesses. Similarly, the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC) and Transparency International Nigeria have repeatedly emphasised that the overclassification of defence information often extends far beyond legitimate security concerns and instead serves to protect illicit financial flows and patronage networks (CISLAC, 2023).

Procurement remains one of the most corruption-prone dimensions of defence governance globally due to its high-value contracts, technical complexity, urgency-based exemptions, and limited public disclosure (Guay, 2020). In Nigeria, defence procurement is frequently conducted under emergency frameworks that bypass standard public procurement procedures established by the Public Procurement Act 2007. According to Okechukwu and Yusuf (2022), the abuse of “national security exceptions” has created an

accountability vacuum in which contract inflation, phantom suppliers, and non-delivery of military assets are difficult to detect. Legislative investigations and anti-corruption agency reports have further revealed recurring patterns of contractor collusion, procurement monopolies, and weak contract enforcement across defence institutions (EFCC, 2023).

Beyond financial corruption, the Ministry of Defence also faces serious challenges to its institutional legitimacy related to personnel administration, constitutional equity, and human rights compliance. Allegations of violations of the Federal Character Principle in military recruitment and promotion have generated sustained controversy regarding regional imbalance, elite favouritism, and exclusionary personnel practices (Senate Committee on Federal Character, 2025). Scholars such as Suberu (2021) argue that unequal representation within strategic security institutions undermines national cohesion and fuels perceptions of state bias, particularly in ethnically plural societies such as Nigeria. Furthermore, reports of sexual harassment within the armed forces, unlawful detentions, civilian abuses during counterinsurgency operations, and excessive use of force continue to damage both domestic legitimacy and international military cooperation (Amnesty International, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2023).

These governance failures have significant international implications. Nigeria's defence partnerships with countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Türkiye increasingly depend not only on strategic security interests but also on governance credibility, human rights compliance, and procurement accountability. For instance, congressional opposition in the United States to proposed arms sales to Nigeria has repeatedly cited concerns about human rights abuses and failures of defence sector accountability (Congressional Research Service, 2024). Such developments threaten Nigeria's access to strategic military technologies, intelligence-sharing arrangements, and defence-diplomacy opportunities essential to national security.

Recent reforms suggest some institutional efforts toward modernisation. The operationalisation of the Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON) Act 2023 reflects a renewed commitment to indigenous military production, defence industrialisation, and reduced dependence on foreign military imports (DICON Act, 2023). Leadership under the current defence administration has also emphasised joint-force coordination, strategic local partnerships, and a whole-of-society approach to security governance. However, scholars caution that structural reform without transparency reform merely modernises existing inefficiencies rather than resolving them (Adeosun, 2024).

The central problem, therefore, is not merely insufficient defence funding but weak institutional integrity within defence governance structures. The coexistence of rising defence budgets and worsening insecurity suggests that governance failure, rather than

resource scarcity alone, constitutes the principal challenge. Where procurement systems lack transparency, where audit institutions are weak, where recruitment violates constitutional fairness, and where secrecy is weaponised against accountability, defence effectiveness becomes fundamentally compromised. Corruption in the defence sector is uniquely dangerous because its consequences are measured not only in financial losses but in battlefield deaths, civilian insecurity, and national instability.

It is within this context that this study becomes necessary. An assessment of the Nigerian Ministry of Defence provides an important institutional lens for examining the structural vulnerabilities that undermine accountability, operational efficiency, and democratic oversight. Understanding how corruption risks are embedded in procurement architecture, fiscal management, personnel administration, and institutional secrecy is essential for designing evidence-based reforms that strengthen both national security and public trust. The study therefore contributes to the broader scholarship on defence governance, anti-corruption reform, and public sector accountability in fragile democracies, while offering policy-relevant insights for strengthening institutional resilience within Nigeria's security architecture.

Transparency and Accountability Indicators

The administrative health of any public institution is best measured through the strength of its transparency mechanisms, accountability systems, and responsiveness to both internal and external oversight. In the defence sector, these indicators are particularly significant because governance failures not only result in financial losses but also produce direct consequences for national security, operational effectiveness, troop welfare, and civilian protection. For the Nigerian Ministry of Defence (MoD), both international and domestic governance indicators reveal deep institutional weaknesses that have fostered opacity, procurement abuse, weak civilian oversight, and entrenched corruption risks.

The Government Defence Integrity Index (GDI)

One of the most authoritative global instruments for assessing integrity within defence institutions is Transparency International's Government Defence Integrity Index (GDI). The GDI evaluates corruption vulnerabilities across five institutional risk areas: political governance, financial management, personnel administration, military operations, and procurement systems (Transparency International Defence and Security, 2021). Unlike general governance indices, the GDI specifically focuses on how defence institutions manage secrecy, procurement discretion, classified spending, and military command structures, making it highly relevant for assessing Nigeria's Ministry of Defence.

Nigeria's performance in the most recent GDI assessments reveals severe institutional fragility across nearly all risk dimensions. Transparency International Defence and Security (2021) assigned Nigeria a score of 37 out of 100 for political risk, placing it within the high-risk category. Personnel risk scored 50 out of 100, indicating moderate safeguards but continued vulnerabilities in recruitment, promotion, and troop welfare systems. More alarming were the scores for procurement, financial governance, and military operations. Procurement risk scored only 23 out of 100, classified as very high risk. In contrast, financial risk received 16 out of 100 and operational risk scored a critically low 12 out of 100, both falling within the critical risk category.

Table 1: Nigeria's Government Defence Integrity Index (GDI) Scores

<i>GDI Risk Category</i>	<i>Score (Out of 100)</i>	<i>Risk Band</i>	<i>Assessment Level</i>
Political Risk	37	Band D	High Risk
Personnel Risk	50	Band C	Moderate Risk
Procurement Risk	23	Band E	Very High Risk
Financial Risk	16	Band F	Critical Risk
Operational Risk	12	Band F	Critical Risk

Source: Transparency International Government Defence Integrity Index (2021)

These findings demonstrate that financial and operational scrutiny within Nigeria's defence sector is exceptionally weak. Transparency International (2021) notes that unpublished defence budgets, opaque arms procurement systems, and weak legislative oversight create opportunities for illicit financial flows and abuse of classified expenditure frameworks. Defence officials often invoke national security confidentiality to shield procurement decisions from legislative and public examination, thereby facilitating inflated contracts, phantom suppliers, and off-budget expenditures. In the Nigerian context, this opacity has repeatedly enabled the laundering of public funds under the justification of counterinsurgency operations against Boko Haram and other armed groups (CISLAC, 2023).

The critically low operational risk score is particularly significant because it indicates a failure to institutionalise anti-corruption safeguards within military operations. According to Transparency International Defence and Security (2021), corruption in operational theatres manifests through diversion of logistics, inadequate troop welfare, manipulation of supply chains, and compromised command structures. This means corruption directly affects battlefield effectiveness, troop morale, casualty rates, and the overall success of security operations.

Domestic Metrics: TACRA and the Transparency and Integrity Index (TII)

At the domestic level, civil society organizations such as the Centre for Fiscal Transparency and Public Integrity (CeFTPI) apply the Transparency and Integrity Index (TII) and the Transparency and Corruption Risk Assessment (TACRA) framework to assess Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) across dimensions such as fiscal transparency, procurement openness, citizen engagement, human resource management, and corruption control (CeFTPI, 2024). These frameworks are particularly useful because they assess practical institutional compliance rather than relying solely on formal statutory declarations.

The 2024 Transparency and Integrity Index revealed significant disparities across Nigerian public institutions. Agencies such as the Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission (NIPC) and the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) ranked among the highest performers, recording compliance scores above 70 per cent, which indicate stronger public disclosure systems and administrative transparency (CeFTPI, 2024). In contrast, institutions connected to the defence and security architecture demonstrated severe inconsistency.

While the central civilian Ministry of Defence recorded a moderate compliance score of approximately 71 per cent on administrative indicators, operational agencies closely tied to defence administration, including the Nigerian Defence Academy and several paramilitary institutions, recorded extremely low scores ranging from 0.31 per cent to 8 per cent. This disparity suggests administrative formalism rather than substantive transparency.

Table 2: Comparative TII Performance of Selected Public Institutions (2024)

Institution	TII Score (%)	Performance Category
Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission (NIPC)	77	Excellent
National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA)	71+	Very Good
Ministry of Defence (Civilian Component)	71	Moderate
Nigerian Defence Academy	0.31 – 8.00	Very Poor
Selected Security/Paramilitary Agencies	0.31 – 8.00	Very Poor

Source: CeFTPI Transparency and Integrity Index Report (2024)

Aiyede (2020) argues that many Nigerian public institutions comply with the procedural appearance of transparency by publishing organisational charts, statutory mandates,

and generic policy statements while withholding substantive financial and procurement data necessary for real accountability. In the Ministry of Defence, this means that compliance scores may reflect website functionality and formal disclosure obligations rather than genuine openness regarding classified expenditures, military contracts, and contractor accountability.

Freedom of Information (FOI) Compliance

The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2011 was enacted to strengthen citizens' access to public records by requiring government institutions to disclose information proactively and to respond to formal requests within 7 days (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2011). The Act was intended to reduce administrative secrecy and improve public accountability across all sectors, including defence. However, security institutions in Nigeria have consistently remained among the least compliant under the FOI regime. Annual FOI compliance rankings conducted by the Public and Private Development Centre (PPDC), the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), Media Rights Agenda (MRA), and BudgIT consistently identify defence and security agencies as the most opaque institutions in the Nigerian public sector (PPDC, 2024; ICIR, 2024). The 2024 national FOI compliance report revealed widespread institutional failure across MDAs.

Table 3: National FOI Compliance Metrics (2024 Assessment of 245 MDAs)

FOI Compliance Metric	Percentage of MDAs
Fully Proactive in Disclosing Information	1.22%
Partially Proactive in Disclosing Information	6.94%
Entirely Non-Proactive in Disclosing Information	91.84%
Responded within the statutory 7 days	20.00%
Responded within 8–14 days	7.80%
Responded after 14 days / Ignored completely	72.20%
Fully Disclosed Requested Information	9.39%
Failed to Disclose Requested Information	84.90%

Source: 2024 National FOI Compliance Ranking by PPDC, ICIR, and MRA

Within this already poor national context, the Ministry of Defence, the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), and the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) consistently rank among the least responsive institutions. FOI requests relating to procurement details, infrastructure contracts, budget releases, and defence loan agreements are frequently denied or ignored. Investigative journalists and civil society

advocates report that requests involving even non-operational expenditure data are often rejected under broad national security exemptions (ICIR, 2024).

The Institutional Conflict: Official Secrets Act versus FOI Act

A major cause of persistent non-compliance is the unresolved legal conflict between the Freedom of Information Act and the Official Secrets Act of 1962. The Official Secrets Act, inherited from the colonial period, allows institutions to classify official information broadly, often without clear definitional boundaries. Defence administrators frequently rely on this law to deny access to procurement records, contract details, and audit findings that may not genuinely threaten national security (Ojo, 2022).

This legal ambiguity allows secrecy to become an instrument of administrative protection rather than legitimate operational security. When outright refusal becomes difficult, institutions often deploy bureaucratic deterrence strategies. According to ICIR (2024), defence agencies sometimes impose excessive processing fees, prolonged delays, or vague procedural requirements that make FOI requests practically inaccessible to journalists and civil society organisations.

CISLAC (2023) argues that this deliberate weaponisation of administrative procedure violates both the spirit of the FOI Act and international standards such as the Tshwane Principles on National Security and the Right to Information, which emphasise that financial and procurement information should not automatically be classified under security exemptions.

Implications for Defence Governance

The cumulative effect of weak GDI performance, superficial domestic compliance, and chronic FOI resistance is the institutionalisation of a shadow accountability system. In this system, large segments of defence expenditure remain beyond effective civilian scrutiny, while parliamentary committees, audit institutions, and anti-corruption agencies struggle to enforce meaningful oversight.

The problem, therefore, is not simply the presence of corruption risks but the normalisation of institutional opacity within the Ministry of Defence's administrative culture. When secrecy becomes routine, procurement becomes untouchable, and audit findings produce no sanctions, accountability mechanisms lose their deterrent value. For a sector as financially significant and strategically sensitive as defence, this creates profound consequences for both national security and democratic legitimacy.

Understanding these transparency and accountability indicators is therefore essential for evaluating the true institutional health of the Nigerian Ministry of Defence. They reveal that beyond operational challenges and rising security threats, the deeper crisis lies in governance architecture itself. Without stronger audit enforcement, legislative

scrutiny, openness in procurement, and legal clarity on public disclosure obligations, defence reform will remain largely symbolic. Institutional transparency is not secondary to national security; it is one of its most necessary foundations.

International Repercussions, Civil Society Concerns, Personnel Management, and Institutional Oversight

The consequences of weak governance within the Nigerian Ministry of Defence extend far beyond domestic financial losses and administrative inefficiencies. Corruption, procurement opacity, human rights violations, weak personnel management, and limited legislative oversight have significant international consequences that directly affect Nigeria's strategic defence partnerships, military credibility, and the legitimacy of its national security. In modern defence diplomacy, military effectiveness is assessed not only by battlefield capability but also by compliance with international human rights norms, procurement accountability, institutional discipline, and democratic civilian control. Where these standards are weak, strategic cooperation with international partners becomes increasingly difficult.

International Repercussions: The U.S. \$1 Billion Arms Deal Crisis

A major example of how internal governance failures generate international consequences emerged in relation to Nigeria's defence procurement relationship with the United States. In 2022, the administration of President Joe Biden approved a major arms sale to Nigeria valued at approximately \$997 million, involving the acquisition of 24 Bell AH-1Z Viper attack helicopters, precision-guided weapon systems, night vision targeting platforms, logistical support equipment, and operational training packages designed to strengthen Nigeria's counterinsurgency operations against Boko Haram and ISWAP (U.S. Department of Defense, 2022). This procurement was strategically important because it represented one of the most significant bilateral military transactions between Nigeria and the United States in recent years and was expected to improve Nigeria's air combat capacity in asymmetric warfare environments.

However, the transaction generated intense resistance within the United States Congress due to longstanding concerns regarding human rights abuses by Nigerian security forces. The principal legal framework shaping this opposition was the Leahy Law, which prohibits the United States government from providing military assistance to foreign security forces that are credibly implicated in gross violations of human rights (Congressional Research Service, 2023). Congressional opposition intensified following a widely circulated Reuters investigation, which alleged that the Nigerian military had operated a secret forced abortion programme in the North-East since 2013. According to the report, thousands of pregnancies involving women rescued from insurgent

captivity were allegedly terminated under military supervision. At the same time, additional allegations included unlawful killings of children suspected of potential insurgent affiliation (Reuters, 2022).

These revelations generated significant diplomatic tension. U.S. Representatives Sara Jacobs and Chris Smith formally petitioned President Biden to suspend the proposed arms transfer and demanded an independent review of U.S. security cooperation with Nigeria. Their request emphasised the need for rigorous assessment of civilian-casualty risks, operational accountability, and compliance with international humanitarian law (U.S. House of Representatives, 2022). Human Rights Watch (2025) similarly argued that inadequate investigations and little institutional accountability had often followed repeated Nigerian military airstrikes resulting in civilian casualties. The organisation called for enforceable safeguards and stronger transparency conditions before the release of military hardware.

The broader implication of this crisis is that corruption and operational impunity within the Ministry of Defence can directly undermine access to strategic military partnerships. When internal accountability mechanisms fail, international partners increasingly view defence cooperation as politically and legally risky. This weakens Nigeria's access to advanced military technology, intelligence-sharing arrangements, and defence diplomacy opportunities. In practical terms, weak governance creates a paradox: the same institutional failures that undermine military effectiveness also prevent the acquisition of equipment needed to strengthen security capacity. As Adeosun (2024) argues, defence corruption therefore produces both operational weakness and diplomatic isolation.

Civil Society Concerns and the Whistleblower Deficit

In the face of weak executive oversight and limited legislative enforcement, civil society organisations have increasingly assumed a critical role in demanding transparency within Nigeria's defence sector. Organisations such as the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC), Transparency International Nigeria, the African Centre for Media and Information Literacy (AFRICMIL), and BudgIT have consistently advocated for stronger procurement openness, improved public access to defence budgets, and the declassification of non-operational military expenditure information (CISLAC, 2023).

A central concern repeatedly raised by these organisations is the absence of effective whistleblower protection mechanisms. Whistleblowing remains one of the most effective anti-corruption tools in high-secrecy institutions because insiders often possess the only credible evidence of procurement fraud, contractor collusion, and abuse of classified spending frameworks. Nigeria's 2016 Presidential Initiative on Continuous Audit initially encouraged whistleblowing and led to the recovery of significant amounts

of stolen public funds (ICIR, 2023). However, public confidence in the programme declined substantially due to the absence of strong legal protections for informants. Without a comprehensive Whistleblower Protection Act, individuals within the military or defence contracting ecosystem who expose corruption face severe personal risks, including career sabotage, professional blacklisting, court-martial proceedings, forced retirement, intimidation, and, in extreme cases, threats to personal safety (AFRICMIL, 2024). Legal scholars such as Ojo (2022) argue that the absence of statutory protection effectively transforms silence into a rational survival strategy for insiders, thereby sustaining systemic corruption. Despite nearly a decade of advocacy by civil society actors, successive National Assemblies have failed to pass the Whistleblower Protection Bill, leaving the defence sector particularly insulated from internal accountability. This whistleblower deficit is especially dangerous in the defence environment because many procurement abuses are structurally invisible to external auditors and public institutions. Where formal audit mechanisms are weak and institutional secrecy is high, whistleblower systems become indispensable. Their absence guarantees that corruption remains deeply embedded and difficult to prosecute.

Recruitment Issues, Federal Character, and Personnel Management

The operational cohesion and institutional legitimacy of the Armed Forces depend heavily on equitable, merit-based, and professionally managed personnel systems. Recruitment, promotion, deployment, and welfare administration are not merely human resource functions; they are central determinants of military discipline, morale, and national legitimacy. In Nigeria, however, personnel management within the defence sector has been repeatedly undermined by allegations of lopsided recruitment, abuse of constitutional principles, promotion irregularities, and poor welfare for veterans.

Abuse of the Federal Character Principle

The Federal Character Principle remains one of the most important constitutional mechanisms for preserving national unity in Nigeria's plural society. Section 14(3) of the 1999 Constitution requires that appointments to federal institutions reflect the linguistic, ethnic, religious, and geographical diversity of the country to prevent the dominance of any particular region or group (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). In security institutions such as the armed forces, compliance with this principle is particularly important because perceptions of exclusion or regional favouritism can undermine both internal cohesion and public trust.

In 2025, the Nigerian Senate initiated a broad investigation into alleged systemic violations of the Federal Character Principle across federal MDAs, with particular attention directed toward military and paramilitary institutions (Senate Committee on

Federal Character, 2025). Senator Osita Ngwu, who sponsored the motion, argued that senior-level recruitment and promotion processes had increasingly been shaped by nepotism, internal patronage, and institutional preferences rather than merit or constitutional fairness. According to Suberu (2021), when strategic national security institutions are perceived as regionally captured, they cease to function as neutral national institutions and instead become politically contested structures.

A notable public controversy emerged during a House of Representatives investigation into a Nigerian Navy recruitment exercise. Lawmakers raised concerns about a supplementary list of 44 successful candidates who are directed to report for training at the Nigerian Navy Basic Training School in Onne, Rivers State. Parliamentary review revealed that all 44 candidates reportedly came from a single geopolitical region, raising serious concerns regarding constitutional violations and regional imbalance (House of Representatives Committee on Navy, 2025). The House subsequently demanded the suspension of the exercise and directed a broader review of naval recruitment patterns from 2014 onward.

Such recruitment patterns create serious institutional risks. Lopsided recruitment breeds resentment within the ranks, weakens esprit de corps, and undermines the perception of military neutrality. In a country where security institutions are expected to manage highly sensitive intercommunal conflicts, unequal representation can significantly weaken operational legitimacy.

Internal Justice, Human Rights, and the Veterans' Crisis

The weaknesses in personnel management extend beyond recruitment into the broader areas of internal justice, institutional discipline, gender protection, and post-service welfare. These failures significantly affect troop morale and the long-term credibility of military service. One of the most widely publicised cases involving internal justice was the Ruth Ogunleye scandal. Former Private Ruth Ogunleye publicly accused a senior military officer of sexual harassment, intimidation, and institutional abuse, alleging that efforts were made to suppress her complaints through coercive measures and administrative retaliation. The Nigerian Army subsequently launched an internal investigation through the Corps of Military Police. It was later announced that the accused officer had been cleared of wrongdoing, while Ogunleye herself was discharged from service on medical grounds (Nigerian Army, 2024).

The handling of the case generated widespread public criticism regarding the absence of independent mechanisms for investigating gender-based violence within the armed forces. Amnesty International (2024) and several civil society groups argued that internal military investigations are often structurally biased toward protecting senior officers and preserving institutional reputation rather than ensuring justice for

vulnerable personnel. The absence of an independent civilian ombudsman for military sexual misconduct leaves lower-ranking female personnel with little confidence in institutional redress mechanisms and reinforces a culture of silence.

Veterans' welfare represents another major area of institutional failure. The Military Pension Board is statutorily responsible for ensuring the timely and transparent payment of retirement and death benefits to retired personnel and their families (Military Pension Board, 2024). However, repeated administrative failures, delayed pension payments, and allegations of corruption have produced widespread frustration among military retirees. In 2024, retired soldiers staged sustained protests in Abuja over unpaid benefits, including Security Debarment Allowances, pension discrepancies, and delayed implementation of revised wage structures. While Defence Headquarters attributed the crisis to administrative adjustments related to wage harmonisation, the protesting veterans alleged deliberate diversion of funds and prolonged institutional neglect (Daily Trust, 2024).

This issue carries serious national security implications. Security Debarment Allowances exist partly to discourage highly trained former soldiers from using their combat expertise for criminal or insurgent activities after retirement. Scholars such as Ebo (2018) argue that the economic marginalisation of ex-servicemen creates a dangerous recruitment pool for kidnapping networks, armed militias, and insurgent groups. Beyond security risks, the public spectacle of impoverished veterans protesting for basic entitlements damages the prestige of military service and discourages future recruitment.

Legislative Oversight and National Assembly Probes

The National Assembly possesses constitutional authority to appropriate defence funds, approve military deployments, and conduct oversight of executive institutions, including the Ministry of Defence. In principle, parliamentary committees on Defence, Army, Navy, Air Force, and National Security are expected to serve as major accountability institutions capable of scrutinising military spending and enforcing procurement discipline.

In practice, however, legislative oversight of the defence sector has often been criticised as weak, inconsistent, and politically compromised. Transparency International Defence and Security (2021) notes that allegations of political collusion, contractor influence, and financial entanglement between lawmakers and senior defence officials frequently undermine independent scrutiny. Parliamentary hearings often generate media attention but rarely result in prosecution or structural reform.

Nevertheless, there have been notable interventions. Following the Metele attack in Borno State, where Boko Haram insurgents reportedly killed over 100 soldiers, the

House of Representatives launched an investigation into the use of appropriated defence funds, focusing on the gap between budgetary allocations and frontline operational readiness (PLAC, 2019). Similar probes were initiated into the utilisation of donor funds received from international development partners and into the failed Federal Capital Territory CCTV surveillance project, in which large-scale public borrowing produced little measurable improvement in security.

These investigations reflect the importance of legislative oversight but also reveal its limitations. Without enforcement power, prosecution follow-through, and institutional independence, parliamentary investigations risk becoming symbolic responses to public outrage rather than meaningful accountability mechanisms.

Strategic Modernisation, Innovation, and Current Leadership

Despite these longstanding governance challenges, recent leadership within the Ministry of Defence has initiated several modernisation efforts to strengthen indigenous defence capacity and reduce dependence on foreign military supply chains. The implementation of the Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON) Act 2023 represents one of the most significant recent reforms, with renewed emphasis on local military production, defence industrialisation, and technology transfer (DICON Act, 2023).

Current defence leadership has also emphasised stronger joint-force operations, modernisation of command structures, and a whole-of-society approach to national security. Defence Minister and senior military leadership have articulated a strategic vision focused on force modernisation, domestic defence manufacturing, and improved regional security partnerships. International partnerships with countries such as Türkiye and the United Kingdom also reflect efforts to strengthen operational capabilities through technology transfer and military cooperation.

However, scholars caution that modernisation without accountability reform risks merely expanding inefficient systems rather than transforming them. As Onuoha (2022) notes, institutional reform in defence governance must go beyond hardware acquisition and organisational restructuring to include transparency, procurement integrity, and civilian oversight. Without governance reform, strategic modernisation may reproduce existing patterns of corruption on a larger scale.

The Nigerian Ministry of Defence, therefore, stands at a critical institutional crossroads. Its future effectiveness depends not only on military capacity but also on whether transparency, fairness, and accountability can be embedded within the very structures responsible for defending the state.

Strategic Modernisation, the DICON Renaissance, and Defence Industrial Transformation One of the most significant developments within Nigeria's contemporary defence governance landscape is the renewed effort to achieve military self-reliance through

domestic defence industrialisation. For decades, Nigeria's defence architecture has remained heavily dependent on foreign military procurement for weapons systems, surveillance technology, aviation assets, naval equipment, and tactical support infrastructure. This dependency has exposed the country to severe strategic vulnerabilities, including procurement delays, foreign-exchange pressures, diplomatic conditionalities, and international restrictions linked to human-rights concerns and governance deficits (SIPRI, 2024; Onuoha, 2022). In response, recent reforms within the Ministry of Defence have increasingly focused on rebuilding Nigeria's domestic military-industrial base, with the revitalisation of the Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON) emerging as the centrepiece of this transformation.

The DICON Renaissance and Domestic Military Industrialisation

The Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON), originally established in 1964, was created to serve as the country's primary military production institution responsible for manufacturing arms, ammunition, and defence support equipment for the Nigerian Armed Forces. However, decades of underfunding, weak institutional management, technological stagnation, and inconsistent political commitment significantly limited its effectiveness, leaving Nigeria heavily reliant on external defence suppliers (Akinyemi, 2021). Successive administrations acknowledged the strategic necessity of local defence production, but meaningful structural transformation remained limited until the recent enactment of the DICON Act 2023.

On 23 November 2023, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu signed the Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON) Act 2023 into law, creating a new legal, financial, and regulatory framework intended to reposition DICON as the nucleus of Nigeria's modern military-industrial complex (DICON Act, 2023). The legislation significantly expanded DICON's institutional powers beyond traditional ammunition production to encompass broader defence technology development, licensing of private defence manufacturers, coordination of research and development, regulation of arms exports, and strategic defence partnerships. According to Matawalle (2024), the Act was designed to transition Nigeria from being a predominantly import-dependent military consumer to a producer capable of meeting substantial portions of its domestic defence needs.

Under the leadership of Major General B.I. As Director-General, Alaya, and in line with the policy direction of the Minister of State for Defence, Dr Bello Mohammed Matawalle, DICON has aggressively pursued public-private partnerships to close Nigeria's long-standing technological deficits in military production. One of the most significant of these initiatives is the Memorandum of Understanding signed with the private engineering firm D7G to establish a 160,000-square-meter defence production facility (D7G, 2024).

This facility is expected to support the domestic assembly and manufacturing of NATO-

standard military hardware, including DG 103 assault rifles, ammunition, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), ground surveillance radars, anti-drone jamming systems, night vision equipment, and armoured tactical vehicles.

This development is particularly important because procurement delays in foreign arms acquisition have historically weakened Nigeria's operational response to insurgency and asymmetric warfare. Scholars such as Ebo (2018) and Adeosun (2024) argue that local production of tactical equipment improves not only military readiness but also strategic autonomy by reducing dependence on external suppliers whose political decisions may disrupt urgent procurement timelines. Domestic production also reduces vulnerability to foreign embargoes and diplomatic restrictions that often arise during periods of human rights controversy.

In addition to manufacturing tactical weapons, DICON has pursued strategic industrial collaboration across multiple sectors of the Nigerian economy. A notable example is its partnership with the Ministry of Steel Development to utilise the Ajaokuta Steel Complex for the domestic production of foundational military materials, such as ballistic vests, protective helmets, bullets, and other armament support infrastructure (Ministry of Steel Development, 2024). This partnership reflects a broader understanding that defence industrialisation cannot succeed in isolation from wider industrial policy and national manufacturing capacity.

From a maritime security perspective, DICON also entered into a strategic agreement with TAIS Shipyard of Türkiye for the domestic construction of military naval vessels ranging from 10 to 100 meters in size. This initiative is particularly relevant given Nigeria's ongoing security challenges in the Gulf of Guinea, including piracy, oil theft, illegal bunkering, and maritime terrorism. According to Onuoha (2022), maritime insecurity remains one of Nigeria's most economically damaging security challenges due to its direct impact on oil exports, foreign investment, and regional shipping routes. Local shipbuilding, therefore, represents both a defence reform and an economic security strategy.

These initiatives collectively represent a deliberate shift toward import substitution, technology transfer, and the conservation of scarce foreign exchange reserves. Nigeria spends enormous amounts annually on defence imports, placing significant pressure on fiscal sustainability and foreign reserve management (Budget Office of the Federation, 2025). By strengthening local military production capacity, the Ministry of Defence seeks to reduce these external dependencies while simultaneously stimulating industrial employment, engineering development, and defence-sector innovation.

Perhaps most importantly, localising the military supply chain provides strategic insulation against international procurement disruptions stemming from governance failures. Nigeria's past experiences with delayed arms sales from Western partners,

particularly under the constraints of the U.S. Leahy Law and other human rights-based restrictions, demonstrated how foreign dependence can directly undermine operational readiness. DICON's revitalisation is therefore not merely an industrial policy but also a sovereignty strategy designed to ensure that national security is not excessively dependent on external political approval.

Doctrinal Shifts and Sovereign International Partnerships

Beyond military hardware and industrialisation, recent leadership within the Ministry of Defence has also emphasised doctrinal transformation in how security itself is understood and managed. Traditional Nigerian defence strategy has often relied heavily on kinetic operations—troop deployment, offensive combat operations, and force-based suppression of armed threats. However, the persistence of insurgency despite sustained military expenditure has increasingly demonstrated the limitations of force-only approaches.

Former Chief of Defence Staff General Christopher Gwabin Musa has been a leading advocate for what he describes as a “whole-of-society” approach to national security, emphasising that terrorism, insurgency, and violent extremism are not purely military problems but deeply rooted socio-economic, political, and ideological challenges requiring broad institutional collaboration (Musa, 2026). This approach recognises that military force alone cannot sustainably resolve insecurity where poverty, youth unemployment, weak governance, and local grievances continue to generate recruitment pools for violent non-state actors.

This doctrinal shift has encouraged stronger civil-military cooperation involving local communities, intelligence-sharing structures, social intervention programmes, and coordinated responses involving multiple state institutions beyond the armed forces. Scholars, including the International Crisis Group (2024), have similarly argued that counterinsurgency success in Nigeria requires stronger integration of security operations with civilian governance reforms rather than reliance on battlefield suppression alone. At the operational level, this new doctrine has also strengthened joint-force coordination among the Nigerian Army, Navy, and Air Force. Historically, inter-service rivalry, fragmented command structures, and poor intelligence-sharing weakened military effectiveness. Under current reforms, the establishment of the Joint Defence Warfare Centre (JDWC) aims to improve interoperability, joint planning, tri-service training, and strategic operational coordination across the armed forces. According to Omede (2023), modern asymmetric warfare requires integrated command structures rather than isolated service operations, making such reforms critical for contemporary military effectiveness.

International defence partnerships have also evolved beyond traditional procurement relationships toward broader strategic technology cooperation. In March 2026, the Ministry of Defence secured a major \$190 million Memorandum of Understanding with the United Kingdom-based global security technology firm MARSS. The agreement aims to provide Nigeria with its first fully integrated national defence technological architecture, significantly improving border surveillance, maritime monitoring, automated threat detection, and real-time situational awareness across strategic security zones (PR Nigeria, 2026).

This agreement reflects an important transition from hardware acquisition toward systems integration and defence intelligence modernisation. In modern warfare, surveillance architecture, data integration, and predictive threat analysis often determine operational success more than conventional weapons alone. Improved technological integration strengthens both internal security operations and regional defence coordination. At the same time, the growing presence of foreign military support has raised domestic concerns about sovereignty and foreign influence. Responding to these concerns, General Musa publicly clarified that while U.S. AFRICOM and other foreign military partners provide training, advisory support, and surveillance assistance, Nigerian Armed Forces retain full operational command over all domestic missions (Vanguard, 2026). This assurance is politically significant because defence cooperation in post-colonial states often raises public anxieties about foreign military dependence and external control. Maintaining this balance between strategic international cooperation and sovereign operational control remains essential. Effective defence diplomacy requires external partnerships, but legitimacy depends on ensuring that these partnerships strengthen, rather than compromise, national autonomy.

Strategic Reform Beyond Hardware

Despite these promising modernisation efforts, scholars caution that military modernisation without governance reform risks merely expanding inefficient systems rather than resolving them. Onuoha (2022) argues that defence transformation must move beyond weapons acquisition and industrial expansion to include procurement transparency, fiscal accountability, legislative oversight, and stronger civilian control. Without institutional integrity, even advanced technology can become another avenue for elite capture and procurement corruption.

The revitalisation of DICON and broader modernisation efforts, therefore, represent both an opportunity and a test. If accompanied by transparency, effective procurement governance, and stronger institutional accountability, these reforms could fundamentally reposition Nigeria's defence architecture toward greater self-reliance and operational credibility. If not, modernisation may reproduce older patterns of

opacity within larger, more expensive structures. The future of Nigeria's defence sector, therefore, depends not only on what equipment is acquired or manufactured but also on whether the institutions managing those resources can operate with integrity, discipline, and democratic accountability. True strategic modernisation requires both military capability and institutional trust.

Conclusion

The Nigerian Ministry of Defence occupies a central position in the country's security architecture and remains indispensable to national stability, territorial integrity, and regional security cooperation. This study reveals a profound institutional contradiction within the Ministry. On one hand, significant progress is being made through strategic modernisation efforts, particularly the revitalisation of DICON, joint-force coordination, and increased investment in domestic defence industrialisation. On the other hand, these gains are persistently undermined by deep-rooted governance failures, including procurement opacity, weak financial oversight, poor Freedom of Information compliance, violations of the Federal Character Principle, inadequate whistleblower protection, and recurring human rights concerns.

The assessment demonstrates that corruption and weak accountability within the defence sector are not merely administrative problems but direct threats to operational effectiveness and national security. When defence resources are diverted, frontline troops are weakened, public trust declines, and international defence partnerships become increasingly fragile. Sustainable military reform, therefore, requires more than increased budgetary allocations or hardware acquisition; it demands institutional integrity, democratic oversight, and transparent governance. Without urgent structural reforms, the Ministry risks continuing cycles of inefficiency, public distrust, and strategic vulnerability.

Recommendations

Harmonise the Official Secrets Act and the FOI Act: The National Assembly should amend the Official Secrets Act of 1962 to clearly define legitimate national security exemptions and prevent the blanket classification of routine administrative and procurement records. Non-operational expenditures, personnel welfare budgets, and procurement contracts should be subjected to mandatory disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2011 to strengthen public accountability and legislative oversight.

Rebalance Defence Budget Priorities: The Ministry of Defence should reduce excessive recurrent expenditure by conducting a comprehensive biometric audit to eliminate ghost personnel and payroll leakages. Recovered resources should be redirected toward capital expenditure, particularly force multipliers such as surveillance systems, aviation

assets, armoured vehicles, and intelligence infrastructure required for modern asymmetric warfare.

Enact a Whistleblower Protection Law: The National Assembly should urgently pass a comprehensive Whistleblower Protection Act to provide legal, financial, and physical safeguards for military personnel, contractors, and civil servants who expose corruption and procurement fraud. Effective whistleblower protection is essential for strengthening internal accountability in a highly secretive defence environment.

Establish an Independent Military Ombudsman: An independent civilian-led ombudsman should be created to investigate complaints relating to sexual harassment, human rights violations, abuse of authority, and recruitment irregularities within the armed forces. This would improve institutional trust and ensure impartial investigations beyond those conducted by internal military tribunals.

Enforce the Federal Character Principle: The Senate and House Committees on Defence should conduct regular audits of military recruitment and promotion processes to ensure compliance with Section 14(3) of the 1999 Constitution. Any service branch found violating federal character requirements should face administrative sanctions and stricter budgetary scrutiny.

Audit Defence Commercial Ventures: Military-owned enterprises and defence commercial ventures should be subjected to annual independent audits by the Office of the Auditor-General for the Federation. All off-budget revenues should be publicly reported to prevent financial opacity and ensure that proceeds are reinvested into troop welfare and operational infrastructure.

Reform Veterans' Welfare Administration: The Ministry of Defence should prioritise the immediate payment of outstanding pensions, Security Debarment Allowances, and retirement benefits. A digitised and transparent pension management system should be introduced to eliminate delays, reduce corruption, and restore confidence in post-service welfare administration.

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