



U.S. AIRSTRIKES AND NIGERIA'S CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOVEREIGNTY, DEMOCRATIC OVERSIGHT, AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Executive Summary

Recent reports concerning United States airstrikes targeting terrorist elements within Nigerian territory have brought into sharp focus a set of constitutional, security, and governance questions that Nigeria can no longer afford to treat as peripheral. While international security cooperation has long been part of Nigeria's counter-terrorism architecture, the execution of foreign kinetic military operations on Nigerian soil - without clear, publicly articulated constitutional grounding or visible democratic oversight - raises issues that go beyond the immediate imperatives of counter-terrorism. At stake are the integrity of Nigeria's constitutional order, the coherence of its national security strategy, the credibility of its sovereignty, and the sustainability of public trust in the state.

This Policy Brief proceeds from a foundational premise: national security effectiveness, constitutional legitimacy, and democratic accountability are not competing values, but mutually reinforcing pillars of a stable republic. The brief neither disputes the reality of Nigeria's grave security challenges nor presumes illegality in the reported actions. Rather, it interrogates the governance framework within which such actions occur and the precedents they establish. The central concern is not whether terrorism must be confronted - there is no ambiguity on that - but whether the manner of confrontation strengthens or weakens the constitutional and institutional foundations of the Nigerian state.

From a constitutional standpoint, the brief situates the issue squarely within Nigeria's 1999 Constitution, which vests command of the armed forces in the President while embedding that authority within a system of legislative oversight, civilian supremacy, and accountability. The deployment of force, especially when it involves foreign military participation, is among the most consequential expressions of state power. In constitutional democracies, such actions are ordinarily governed by clearly defined legal instruments - such as treaties, security cooperation agreements, or emergency authorizations - subject to legislative scrutiny. Where such frameworks are opaque or absent from the public record, constitutional balance is strained, even if executive coordination occurred. The brief, therefore, identifies a

constitutional clarity deficit, not as an accusation, but as a governance vulnerability that demands corrective action.

The security analysis cautions against conflating tactical outcomes with strategic effectiveness. While externally supported kinetic operations may deliver short-term operational advantages - particularly in intelligence integration or strike capability - sustainable counter-terrorism depends on nationally owned command structures, institutional learning, and strategic coherence. Security partnerships are most effective when they enhance domestic capacity rather than substitute for it. The brief warns that reliance on externally executed force, if not firmly anchored within Nigerian command authority and oversight mechanisms, risks eroding institutional confidence and creating dependency patterns that undermine long-term security resilience.

On the question of sovereignty, the brief adopts a nuanced and modern understanding. Sovereignty is not merely the absence of foreign presence; it is the capacity of the state to author, control, and account for the use of force within its territory. Even where consent is given, the absence of transparent legal and institutional articulation risks creating ambiguity about who ultimately governs security decisions. For Nigeria - a regional power with historic leadership responsibilities within ECOWAS and the African Union - such ambiguity carries diplomatic and normative consequences. It shapes regional expectations, affects Nigeria's standing in African-led security initiatives, and influences how international partners perceive Nigeria's strategic autonomy.

The brief further examines the human security and civilian protection dimensions of foreign kinetic operations. In conflict-affected regions already burdened by displacement, trauma, and economic dislocation, airstrikes carry inherent risks that extend beyond immediate casualties. Civilian harm includes psychological trauma, disruption of livelihoods, displacement, and the erosion of trust between communities and the state. Where foreign forces are involved, accountability pathways become less visible, increasing the risk of an accountability vacuum. The brief underscores that counter-terrorism operations that fail to incorporate transparent civilian-harm mitigation, community engagement, and grievance-redress mechanisms risk deepening alienation and inadvertently reinforcing the conditions that sustain insurgency.

Beyond operational concerns, the brief situates the airstrikes within Nigeria's broader domestic political and governance context. Security actions of this magnitude shape civil-military relations, influence public trust, and affect national cohesion. In a plural and politically sensitive society, opacity in security governance creates fertile ground for misinformation, sectarian narratives, and extremist propaganda. Silence or institutional ambiguity cedes narrative control to non-state actors. Democratic resilience, the brief argues, requires not only operational

success but visible adherence to constitutional norms and credible communication with citizens.

Against this analytical backdrop, the brief advances a set of policy-oriented recommendations structured across immediate, medium-term, and long-term horizons. In the immediate term, it calls for formal constitutional clarification of the legal basis and limits of foreign kinetic cooperation; structured post-operation briefings to relevant committees of the National Assembly; explicit public affirmation of Nigerian command authority over all military actions conducted on its territory; and the establishment of civilian-harm assurance mechanisms in affected regions. These measures are designed not to inhibit security operations, but to reinforce their legitimacy and public acceptance.

In the medium term, the brief recommends institutional safeguards to prevent the recurrence of ambiguity. These include the adoption of a National Security Cooperation Framework or Act to codify authorization, oversight, accountability, and civilian-protection standards; the institutionalization of parliamentary security oversight procedures; the creation of a dedicated civilian-harm mitigation and accountability unit; and the integration of strategic communication protocols across defense, intelligence, and information institutions.

Over the long term, the brief urges a recalibration of Nigeria's security partnerships toward capacity-centred cooperation that strengthens domestic autonomy. This includes deepening intelligence sovereignty, reinforcing institutional learning systems within the armed forces, reasserting Nigeria's leadership in African-led security mechanisms, and embedding human security principles at the core of counter-terrorism doctrine. Such reforms are essential to ensure that security cooperation enhances, rather than dilutes, Nigeria's constitutional and strategic agency.

The overarching policy message is unambiguous: ambiguity is itself a strategic risk. While reform delays may be inconvenient, unresolved opacity in the governance of force undermines constitutional legitimacy, erodes public trust, and weakens security outcomes more severely than transparent institutional correction ever could. Nigeria's security challenges cannot be addressed sustainably through force alone; they require governance structures that command public confidence and withstand constitutional scrutiny.

Ultimately, the reported U.S. airstrikes represent a defining governance moment. They test whether Nigeria can confront violent threats while remaining faithful to the constitutional principles that define it as a democratic republic. This Policy Brief concludes that lasting security is inseparable from legitimacy. Power exercised without visible constitutional discipline may impose temporary order, but only power anchored in law, oversight, and public trust can secure enduring peace and national cohesion.

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**An Interim Policy Brief Paper by:
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Introduction and Context

Nigeria's security environment has, over the past decades, been shaped by a complex and evolving mix of insurgency, banditry, communal violence, and transnational criminal networks. These threats have imposed severe human, economic, and institutional costs, particularly in the country's northern regions, and have stretched the capacities of domestic security agencies. In response, successive governments have pursued a combination of internal military operations, intelligence reforms, and international cooperation aimed at degrading violent non-state actors and restoring state authority.

Within this context, reports of United States airstrikes against terrorist targets in north-western Nigeria represent a qualitatively significant development. Unlike advisory support, training missions, or intelligence cooperation, foreign-executed kinetic action carries heightened legal, political, and strategic implications. Such actions intersect directly with constitutional governance, civil-military relations, and Nigeria's long-standing sensitivities around sovereignty and external intervention.

This Policy Brief is motivated by the recognition that security emergencies often create pressure for expedient action, but that expediency, when untethered from institutional discipline, can produce unintended and enduring consequences. The objective here is not to second-guess operational judgments or to speculate on classified arrangements. Rather, it is to interrogate the governance architecture within which such actions occur, and to assess whether that architecture adequately protects constitutional norms, public trust, and long-term security effectiveness.

Importantly, ARDP distinguishes between confirmed information and open questions. Public reporting indicates that foreign airstrikes were conducted in coordination with Nigerian security authorities. At the same time, there is no publicly available record of formal National Assembly notification, debate, or post-operation briefing, nor is there public clarity regarding the legal instrument - if any - governing such operations. These gaps do not, in themselves, establish wrongdoing; they do, however, constitute governance risks that merit careful policy scrutiny.

The brief, therefore, proceeds from a precautionary and institutional perspective. It assumes good faith on the part of Nigerian authorities while insisting that democratic systems are strengthened, not weakened, by

transparency, oversight, and clear rules. In a deeply plural and politically sensitive society, ambiguity in security governance can be as destabilizing as insecurity itself.

By examining the reported strikes through legal, strategic, sovereignty, and civilian protection lenses, this brief seeks to contribute constructively to the national dialogue. Its purpose is to help policymakers, legislators, security professionals, and international partners reflect on how Nigeria can confront terrorism effectively while preserving constitutional order, democratic accountability, and sovereign agency.

Legality and Constitutional Mandate

The legality of foreign military action on Nigerian territory cannot be assessed solely by reference to operational necessity or executive discretion. It must be situated within Nigeria's constitutional framework, which deliberately balances executive authority with legislative oversight in matters of defense, security, and the use of force. This section, therefore, examines not alleged illegality, but the adequacy and visibility of constitutional authorization and democratic control in relation to the reported foreign airstrikes.

Under the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), the President is designated as the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and vested with authority over national security operations. This power, however, is not absolute. It exists within a constitutional architecture that assigns the National Assembly critical roles in approving defense expenditure, overseeing military deployments, and safeguarding the principles of accountability and civilian control over the use of force. The Constitution does not contemplate security policy as an exclusively executive domain insulated from democratic scrutiny.

Foreign kinetic military operations introduce an additional layer of constitutional sensitivity. While international cooperation in security matters is well established in Nigerian practice - ranging from training and intelligence sharing to joint task force operations - direct foreign use of force on Nigerian soil raises distinct legal questions. These include the basis of consent, the scope of operational control, and the mechanisms through which Nigerian institutions retain ownership and responsibility for actions undertaken within their territory.

In democratic systems, such actions are typically grounded in one or more of the following: a formal treaty or status-of-forces arrangement ratified in accordance with constitutional procedures; a clearly articulated executive agreement subjected to legislative notification or approval; or an emergency framework followed by prompt legislative briefing and review. The absence of publicly available information indicating which of these mechanisms applies in the present case creates constitutional ambiguity, even if operational coordination occurred in practice.

This ambiguity matters because constitutional governance depends not only on substantive authority but also on procedural clarity. Section 58 of the Constitution establishes the legislative process for making law, while broader constitutional practice affirms that actions with far-reaching national implications - particularly those involving foreign armed forces - should not rest solely on opaque executive arrangements. Where constitutional processes are bypassed or rendered invisible, the risk is not merely legal challenge but erosion of institutional trust.

Equally important is the distinction between executive assent and legislative consent. While the executive may invite or approve cooperation, sustained or precedent-setting foreign military action engages questions of national policy that properly belong within the legislature's oversight function. Without structured briefings, post-operation reporting, or formal notification, the National Assembly is effectively deprived of its constitutional role as guardian of democratic accountability in security affairs.

It must be emphasized that constitutional scrutiny does not weaken national security. On the contrary, it strengthens it. Clear legal mandates protect Nigerian authorities from future disputes, prevent politicization of security cooperation, and provide a stable framework within which international partners operate. Ambiguity, by contrast, exposes the state to domestic litigation, international misinterpretation, and internal legitimacy deficits.

This Policy Brief, therefore, identifies a governance gap, not a finding of constitutional violation. The issue is not whether the President possesses authority to cooperate with international partners, but whether Nigeria has sufficiently institutionalized the legal and oversight mechanisms necessary to ensure that such cooperation remains firmly anchored in constitutional order. Closing this gap is essential if security policy is to command public confidence and withstand legal and political scrutiny.

II

Security Strategy, Operational Doctrine, and Institutional Effectiveness

Nigeria's counter-terrorism challenge is fundamentally an operational and institutional one. Armed groups operating in the north-west and other theatres have demonstrated high adaptability, exploiting terrain, intelligence gaps, local grievances, and institutional fragmentation. In response, Nigeria's security doctrine over the past decade has increasingly emphasized joint operations, intelligence fusion, inter-agency coordination, and the gradual professionalization of counter-insurgency practice.

Within this doctrinal framework, kinetic military action - particularly air power - serves a specific operational purpose: disrupting armed formations, degrading leadership nodes, and denying adversaries freedom of movement. However, airstrikes are not self-executing solutions. Their effectiveness depends on the quality of intelligence, clarity of command authority, integration with ground operations, and post-strike assessment mechanisms. When any of these elements are weakened, tactical action risks producing diminishing returns.

Externally executed kinetic operations introduce additional doctrinal complexity. While they may offer superior strike precision or intelligence capabilities, they also raise questions about command integration, operational ownership, and institutional learning. Effective military doctrine requires that all kinetic actions feed back into national command structures, allowing domestic forces to refine tactics, improve intelligence cycles, and build operational confidence. Where foreign actors execute strikes independently - even if coordinated - there is a risk that Nigerian institutions become operational consumers rather than doctrinal authors.

This concern is not theoretical. Modern counter-insurgency literature consistently shows that sustainable success depends on locally owned doctrine, not episodic tactical interventions. When external force substitutes for domestic execution, it can unintentionally weaken the incentive to develop indigenous capabilities, especially in intelligence processing, target validation, and battle-damage assessment. Over time, this erodes institutional confidence and creates dependency dynamics that are difficult to reverse.

Furthermore, operational clarity is essential for accountability within the military chain of command. Soldiers and commanders must know who authorized an operation, under what rules of engagement, and how responsibility is allocated for outcomes. Ambiguity in operational authorship complicates after-action review, professional discipline, and doctrinal refinement. It also undermines the principle of civilian supremacy, which relies on clear command accountability.

From a purely operational standpoint, therefore, the issue is not whether foreign assistance can be useful - it can - but whether such assistance strengthens or weakens Nigeria's own security institutions. A sound counter-terrorism doctrine demands that all kinetic actions on Nigerian territory be firmly embedded within Nigerian command authority, doctrinal control, and institutional learning systems. Without this, short-term operational gains risk long-term degradation of military effectiveness.

Beyond operational doctrine lies a broader set of political-strategic and diplomatic implications that directly affect Nigeria's sovereignty and international standing. Sovereignty in contemporary international relations is not merely territorial control; it is the recognized authority of the state to

determine, regulate, and account for the use of force within its jurisdiction. How that authority is exercised - and perceived - matters deeply.

Foreign kinetic military action on Nigerian soil, even when undertaken with consent, carries symbolic and precedential weight. It raises questions about authorship: whose strategy is being executed, whose priorities are being advanced, and who ultimately bears responsibility for outcomes. Where these questions are not publicly and institutionally clarified, ambiguity emerges - not only domestically, but internationally.

Nigeria's strategic posture has historically been defined by a strong commitment to sovereign agency and African-led security solutions. As a leading actor within ECOWAS and the African Union, Nigeria has consistently resisted externalization of African security challenges. This posture has given Nigeria moral authority and diplomatic leverage in regional peacekeeping, mediation, and collective security initiatives.

Ambiguity surrounding foreign kinetic action risks weakening this strategic narrative. It creates space for the perception - whether accurate or not - that Nigeria has ceded aspects of its security decision-making to external actors. Such perceptions can have concrete diplomatic consequences: they influence how regional partners engage Nigeria, how international actors negotiate security cooperation, and how norms of intervention are interpreted across West Africa.

There is also a precedent risk. Exceptional security arrangements, if left unarticulated and unbounded, can gradually normalize practices that bypass domestic institutions. What begins as an ad hoc response to a pressing threat can evolve into an informal template for future action. This is particularly dangerous in fragile democratic contexts, where extraordinary security measures often outlive the emergencies that justified them.

Diplomatically, the absence of transparent frameworks complicates Nigeria's ability to set the terms of engagement with international partners. Strategic autonomy is not expressed through rejection of cooperation, but through the capacity to define its scope, limits, and accountability mechanisms. Without clearly articulated national frameworks, Nigeria risks being positioned as a security theatre rather than a strategic partner.

Finally, sovereignty is inseparable from legitimacy at home. Citizens' confidence in the state depends on the belief that national institutions - not external actors - ultimately govern the use of force. Where this confidence is weakened, political trust erodes, and space opens for radical narratives that portray the state as compromised or externally controlled.

From a political-strategic perspective, therefore, the central issue is not operational effectiveness but authority, precedent, and narrative control. Nigeria's long-term security and diplomatic credibility depend on ensuring

that all foreign security cooperation is visibly anchored in national sovereignty, constitutional order, and strategic authorship.

III

Civilian Protection and Human Security

At the heart of any credible counter-terrorism strategy lies the protection of civilians. Military effectiveness that is not grounded in human security ultimately defeats its own purpose, as civilian harm, displacement, and trauma tend to reproduce the very conditions that armed groups exploit. The reported foreign airstrikes in north-western Nigeria, therefore, raise urgent questions not only about operational success, but about civilian protection frameworks, accountability mechanisms, and the broader social consequences of kinetic security responses.

North-western Nigeria is already characterised by fragile civilian conditions. Years of banditry, insurgency, mass abductions, and communal violence have produced widespread displacement, disrupted livelihoods, and eroded trust between communities and the state. In such environments, even highly targeted military action carries heightened risks. Civilian populations often live in proximity to non-state armed groups, either through coercion, survival strategies, or lack of alternatives. Precision, while essential, is not sufficient on its own to prevent harm or fear.

One of the central governance concerns arising from the reported strikes is the absence of publicly articulated civilian harm mitigation protocols. In modern military doctrine, especially where air power is employed, responsible operations are typically accompanied by clear standards for target verification, proportionality assessment, post-strike damage evaluation, and avenues for civilian complaints or redress. Where these processes are not visible, public confidence erodes - even in cases where actual harm may be limited.

Civilian harm is not only measured in casualties. It includes displacement, destruction of livelihoods, psychological trauma, and the deepening of fear and mistrust. Communities subjected to opaque military actions may interpret silence as indifference, reinforcing perceptions that civilian lives are secondary to strategic objectives. Such perceptions are strategically damaging, as they weaken intelligence cooperation, undermine early warning systems, and reduce community willingness to engage with state institutions.

The involvement of foreign forces further complicates accountability. When operations are externally executed, citizens may be uncertain about which authority bears responsibility for investigating incidents, acknowledging harm, or providing remedies. This diffusion of responsibility creates what is often described as an “accountability vacuum,” where grievances accumulate without institutional resolution. Over time, unresolved

grievances become fertile ground for radicalization and recruitment by armed groups who position themselves as defenders against perceived injustice.

International best practice increasingly recognizes civilian protection as a core element of counter-terrorism, not a peripheral concern. Human security approaches emphasize that enduring stability depends on safeguarding dignity, access to justice, and social cohesion alongside physical security. In contexts like Nigeria's north-west, where the state's presence is already contested, failure to prioritize these dimensions risks further alienating populations whose cooperation is indispensable to long-term peace.

This brief, therefore, underscores the need for Nigeria to embed civilian protection at the centre of any security cooperation arrangement. This includes the establishment of transparent civilian harm mitigation and assessment mechanisms, clear public communication following operations, and accessible channels for community engagement and redress. Such measures are not concessions to critics; they are strategic investments in legitimacy and effectiveness.

Ultimately, the success of counter-terrorism efforts is measured not only by the elimination of armed actors but by the restoration of safe, dignified civilian life. Operations that degrade threats while deepening civilian insecurity are self-defeating. A security strategy anchored in human security strengthens public trust, enhances intelligence flows, and aligns military action with the broader objective of national stability.

IV

Domestic Political and Governance Implications

Security policy does not operate in a political vacuum. The manner in which force is authorized, exercised, and communicated has profound implications for civil-military relations, public trust in institutions, and the management of national narratives in a plural and sensitive polity such as Nigeria. The reported foreign airstrikes, therefore, carry domestic governance consequences that extend beyond their immediate operational context.

Civil-Military Relations

Nigeria's democratic trajectory since 1999 has rested, in part, on the gradual consolidation of civilian supremacy over the armed forces. This equilibrium depends not only on formal constitutional provisions, but on public perception that military action is firmly embedded within civilian-led, accountable decision-making structures. Where security operations - especially high-profile kinetic action - appear opaque or externally driven, they risk unsettling this balance.

Externally executed strikes, if insufficiently contextualized within Nigerian command authority, may inadvertently weaken the symbolic and practical centrality of domestic security institutions. Over time, this can affect civil-military relations by blurring lines of responsibility and diluting the visibility of civilian oversight. For the armed forces themselves, perceived marginalization in critical operations may affect morale and professional confidence, particularly if public narratives emphasize foreign capability over national agency.

Sustaining healthy civil-military relations, therefore, requires clarity: clarity about who authorizes action, who commands operations, and who accounts for outcomes. Transparent governance reinforces the principle that the military serves the republic under civilian direction, even when international partners are involved.

Public Trust and Institutional Legitimacy

Public trust is a strategic asset. In Nigeria's security environment, trust influences intelligence flows, community cooperation, and the legitimacy of state authority in contested spaces. Actions that are poorly explained or insufficiently anchored in visible institutional processes risk eroding this trust, regardless of their tactical intent.

The absence of clear public communication surrounding the reported strikes creates informational vacuums that are quickly filled by speculation, misinformation, and competing narratives. In regions already marked by historical grievances and marginalization, silence can be interpreted as exclusion or disregard. This perception undermines the social contract between citizens and the state, weakening the very foundations upon which security depends.

Trust is also eroded when citizens perceive inconsistency in governance standards - where domestic institutions are bound by procedure, but exceptional actions appear to operate beyond scrutiny. Restoring and maintaining trust necessitates that exceptional security measures be complemented by exceptional transparency, rather than reduced accountability.

Narrative Management and Sectarian Risk

Nigeria's internal security challenges intersect with complex identity dynamics, including ethnic, religious, and regional sensitivities. Armed groups frequently exploit these fault lines, framing state action as targeted, biased, or externally imposed. In such contexts, narrative management is not a public relations exercise; it is a core security function.

Foreign military involvement, if not carefully framed, can be weaponized rhetorically by extremist and criminal actors. Narratives portraying the state

as dependent, compromised, or aligned with external interests may resonate with local grievances, particularly in communities that already feel politically or economically excluded. This risk is amplified in the absence of proactive, inclusive communication from trusted national institutions.

Effective narrative management requires coherence and ownership. Nigerian authorities must be seen to speak with one voice, situating any international cooperation firmly within national strategy and constitutional authority. Communication should emphasize protection of civilians, national leadership of operations, and alignment with broader efforts to restore security and dignity to affected communities.

Failure to manage narratives does not merely invite criticism; it creates strategic openings for destabilization. Conversely, clear, consistent, and nationally grounded messaging strengthens resilience against sectarian manipulation and reinforces a shared sense of national purpose.

V

Policy Options and Recommendations

The preceding analysis demonstrates that the core challenge confronting Nigeria is not the existence of security cooperation with international partners, but the absence of a coherent, institutionalized framework governing such cooperation. The reported foreign airstrikes have exposed structural weaknesses in constitutional oversight, strategic coordination, civilian protection, and narrative control. Left unaddressed, these weaknesses risk hardening into precedents that undermine democratic legitimacy and long-term security effectiveness.

This section, therefore, advances a set of corrective and forward-looking policy measures, organized across three-time horizons. Each recommendation is designed to directly remedy specific deficiencies identified in Sections I–V, and to reposition Nigeria’s security policy on firmer constitutional, strategic, and human-security foundations.

A. Immediate Corrective Actions

(Stabilizing legitimacy and restoring institutional clarity)

1. Formal Constitutional Clarification of Foreign Kinetic Operations:

The Presidency, in coordination with the Office of the Attorney-General of the Federation, should issue a formal legal clarification outlining the constitutional basis, limits, and oversight arrangements governing any foreign kinetic military activity on Nigerian territory. This responds directly to the constitutional ambiguity identified in Section I and is essential to prevent the normalization of executive-only security authorizations.

2. Mandatory Post-Operation Legislative Briefings:

Any foreign-supported kinetic operation should trigger a mandatory, time-bound briefing to designated National Assembly committees on defense and national security. This is not a concession but a constitutional necessity, restoring the legislature's role as an oversight institution rather than a passive observer, as highlighted in Sections I and V.

3. Public Assertion of National Command Authority:

Nigerian authorities must explicitly affirm that all military actions conducted within Nigeria - regardless of partner involvement - operate under Nigerian command authority and strategic direction. This is critical to addressing the sovereignty and narrative vulnerabilities outlined in Section III and to maintaining public confidence in national ownership of security policy.

4. Immediate Civilian Harm Assurance Mechanism:

A rapid civilian harm assessment and communication mechanism should be activated for any significant kinetic operation. Even in the absence of confirmed casualties, public reassurance and engagement are necessary to counter fear, misinformation, and grievance accumulation, as established in Section IV.

B. Medium-Term Institutional Reforms

(Closing governance gaps and preventing recurrence)

1. Enactment of a National Security Cooperation Framework:

Nigeria should develop and adopt a formal National Security Cooperation Framework—preferably through legislation or a legislatively endorsed executive instrument—governing all foreign military assistance and operations. This framework should specify:

- a) Conditions of consent and authorization
- b) Command and control arrangements
- c) Oversight and reporting obligations
- d) Civilian protection and accountability standards

This reform directly addresses the systemic weaknesses identified in Sections I, III, and V.

2. Institutionalization of Parliamentary Security Oversight:

Beyond ad hoc briefings, Nigeria must institutionalize structured legislative oversight of security cooperation. This includes regular classified sessions, post-operation reviews, and budgetary scrutiny linked to cooperation agreements. Such institutionalization strengthens civil-military relations and democratic control, as discussed in Section V.

3. Creation of a Civilian Harm Mitigation and Accountability Unit:

A standing unit should be established within Nigeria's security architecture to track civilian harm, manage complaints, coordinate remedies, and liaise with affected communities. This reform operationalizes the human-security imperative identified in Section IV and reduces the risk of radicalization and community alienation.

- 4. Integrated Strategic Communication and Narrative Governance:**
Nigeria must treat security communication as a strategic function. A cross-government protocol should ensure that all messaging related to security cooperation is coherent, nationally authored, and sensitive to sectarian and regional dynamics. This responds directly to the narrative risks outlined in Section V.

C. Long-Term Strategic Reorientation

(Reclaiming autonomy and institutional resilience)

- 1. Rebalancing Security Partnerships toward Capacity Sovereignty:**
Nigeria should progressively shift from externally executed kinetic actions to partnerships centred on intelligence development, training, logistics, and technology transfer. This reorientation responds to the strategic dependency risks identified in Section II and strengthens domestic operational self-reliance.
- 2. Deepening Intelligence Sovereignty and National Learning Systems:**
Sustainable security requires control over the full intelligence cycle. Long-term investment in domestic intelligence capabilities, data integration, and analytic capacity will reduce reliance on external actors and enhance strategic autonomy, as argued in Sections II and III.
- 3. Reassertion of Regional Security Leadership:**
Nigeria should recommit to African-led security solutions through ECOWAS and African Union mechanisms, ensuring that external partnerships complement rather than displace regional frameworks. This reinforces Nigeria's diplomatic credibility and mitigates precedent-setting risks highlighted in Section III.
- 4. Embedding Human Security into National Counter-Terrorism Doctrine:**
Civilian protection, community trust, and post-conflict stabilization should be formally integrated into Nigeria's security doctrine. This ensures that counter-terrorism is aligned with social cohesion and democratic legitimacy, completing the analytical arc from Section IV through Section V.

The Cost of Inaction: Why Ambiguity is a Strategic Liability

If the governance gaps identified in this brief are left unaddressed, the most immediate casualty will be constitutional discipline itself. When extraordinary security actions occur without visible legal articulation or institutional oversight, ambiguity gradually replaces law as the operative standard. Over time, this corrodes the separation of powers, reducing legislative oversight to ritual and normalizing executive discretion beyond its constitutional limits. Such erosion rarely announces itself dramatically; it advances quietly, through precedent and repetition, until constitutional norms become optional rather than obligatory. In this sense, inaction does

not preserve stability - it incrementally redefines the constitutional order in ways that future administrations may exploit with far less restraint.

Beyond constitutional implications, sustained opacity carries serious institutional and operational costs for Nigeria's security architecture. Military effectiveness depends not only on firepower but on clarity of command, ownership of doctrine, and institutional learning. Where foreign-executed kinetic actions are not firmly embedded within Nigerian command structures and post-operation review systems, domestic forces are deprived of the full learning cycle that underpins professionalization. Over time, this risks creating a two-tier security system in which Nigerian institutions become operationally reactive rather than doctrinally generative. The result is not enhanced security capacity, but latent dependency - an outcome fundamentally incompatible with long-term national resilience.

The sovereignty costs of inaction are equally profound. Sovereignty is sustained as much by perception as by formal authority. When the state does not clearly articulate the terms under which force is exercised on its territory, it weakens its ability to define the narrative of its own security policy. This invites external interpretation - by allies, adversaries, and regional partners - about the extent of Nigeria's strategic autonomy. Over time, such ambiguity risks repositioning Nigeria from a security actor to a security theatre, diminishing its diplomatic leverage within ECOWAS and the African Union, and weakening its ability to shape regional security norms.

Perhaps the most destabilizing consequence of inaction lies in the realm of public trust and social cohesion. In conflict-affected regions, communities already experience the state through the lens of force, displacement, and uncertainty. When security actions - particularly those involving air power and foreign actors - occur without visible accountability or civilian engagement, fear and suspicion deepen. Silence is interpreted as indifference, opacity as concealment. This erodes cooperation between civilians and security agencies, undermines intelligence gathering, and strengthens the narratives of armed groups that portray the state as distant, compromised, or externally controlled. In such environments, every unaddressed grievance becomes a recruitment opportunity for violent actors.

Finally, inaction carries a long-term democratic cost that extends beyond the immediate security context. Democracies rarely collapse because of a single decision; they erode when exceptional measures become routine, and accountability mechanisms fall into disuse. Allowing ambiguity in the authorization and governance of force sets a precedent that future crises - whether security, economic, or political - may invoke. Once institutional shortcuts are normalized, reclaiming democratic oversight becomes increasingly difficult. The cumulative effect is a state that retains the form of constitutional governance while hollowing out its substance.

For these reasons, inaction is not a neutral option. It is a strategic choice with predictable consequences. Addressing the governance gaps identified in this brief is not about constraining the state's ability to defend itself; it is about ensuring that defense is exercised in a manner that strengthens, rather than weakens, Nigeria's constitutional republic.

Conclusion

The reported U.S. airstrikes on Nigerian territory have exposed not only the severity of Nigeria's contemporary security challenges but also the fragility of the governance frameworks that must regulate the use of force in a constitutional republic. This Policy Brief has demonstrated that the central risk confronting Nigeria is not international cooperation itself, nor the necessity of decisive counter-terrorism action, but the normalization of ambiguity in the authorization, oversight, and accountability of such actions. In a democratic state, ambiguity is not neutral. It is corrosive.

Nigeria's constitutional order does not collapse through dramatic rupture; it erodes when extraordinary measures quietly become routine and institutional checks fall into disuse. The unchecked expansion of executive discretion in security matters, the marginalization of legislative oversight, and the absence of visible civilian accountability mechanisms together weaken the moral and legal authority of the state. Over time, this undermines public trust, distorts civil-military relations, and diminishes the strategic autonomy Nigeria requires to act as a regional leader.

For this reason, the moment demands an institutional response, not rhetorical reassurance. The National Assembly must reassert its constitutional role in matters of defense and national security. This requires immediate structured briefings on the scope and governance of foreign security cooperation, followed by the initiation of a clear legislative or procedural framework that defines the conditions, limits, and oversight mechanisms for any foreign kinetic military involvement on Nigerian soil. Parliamentary silence in the face of such developments risks setting a precedent that weakens democratic accountability in the gravest sphere of state power.

The Executive, for its part, must initiate a deliberate process of constitutional clarification and institutional consolidation. This includes publicly affirming Nigerian command authority over all military operations conducted within its territory; articulating the legal basis and boundaries of foreign security cooperation; and institutionalizing civilian harm mitigation, assessment, and redress mechanisms. These steps are not concessions to critics; they are investments in legitimacy, operational effectiveness, and long-term stability. A state that governs the use of force transparently governs it more effectively.

Nigeria's security partners should also draw clear lessons from this moment. Going forward, cooperation must be firmly anchored in Nigeria's constitutional framework, national command structures, and strategic priorities. External assistance should strengthen domestic capacity, institutional learning, and doctrinal ownership - not substitute for them. Partnerships that respect Nigeria's democratic processes and sovereignty will endure; those that rely on opacity and exceptionalism will ultimately weaken both sides.

This Policy Brief, therefore, concludes with a clear institutional imperative: Nigeria must discipline power through law, not accommodate ambiguity through silence. Counter-terrorism effectiveness, democratic legitimacy, and sovereign authority are not competing objectives. They are mutually reinforcing conditions of a stable republic. The test before Nigeria is not whether it can deploy force, but whether it can do so in a manner that strengthens constitutional governance, preserves public trust, and secures its future as a democratic state.

The choices made now - by the legislature, the executive, and Nigeria's security partners - will shape not only the outcome of current security operations, but the character of the Nigerian republic in the years ahead. History will judge this moment not by the immediacy of tactical success, but by whether Nigeria chose institutional clarity over expediency, and constitutional discipline over dangerous precedent.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE:

This Policy Brief relies exclusively on publicly available information and does not speculate on classified operational arrangements. Where information gaps exist, they are treated as governance risks rather than evidence of wrongdoing.