



INFORMATION BRIEF

February 2026

Nigeria–U.S. Defence Cooperation and its Implication on Nigeria’s Sovereignty

Authors: *Dr. Ganiyu EJALONIBU,
Samuel UDOFA & Chidinma Charity EZENWAJIOBI*

Executive Summary

Recent developments in early 2026 have marked a significant expansion of defence cooperation between the Nigeria and the United States.¹ This phase includes the deployment of U.S. military advisory personnel, expanded intelligence sharing, technical support, and joint counterterrorism coordination aimed at strengthening Nigeria’s response to insurgency, banditry, and transnational security threats. The deployment marks a significant shift in bilateral defence relations. While framed as a training and advisory mission, the development carries broader strategic implications for Nigeria’s sovereignty, regional leadership, and West Africa’s security architecture.

The Defence Headquarters has clarified that U.S. personnel are operating strictly in advisory and training capacities, under Nigerian command structures, and within the framework of Nigerian law.² The Federal Government maintains that the cooperation was requested by Nigeria and does not constitute foreign combat operations or a permanent military base.

However, the arrangement also raises important sovereignty considerations. Public debate has focused on constitutional oversight, transparency of bilateral agreements, and the long-term implications of hosting foreign military personnel. Concerns include the perception of foreign military footprint, risks of strategic dependency, and the possibility of precedent-setting engagements that could gradually expand beyond advisory roles.

This brief assesses the impact of the Nigeria-US defense cooperation, putting into cognizance the Nigerian sovereignty and proffering areas for legislative intervention which includes among others; that the National Assembly through its Senate and House Committees on Defense may utilize oversight to advise the Federal Government, through the National Security Adviser (NSA) on the need to ensure that the defence cooperation is structured around transparency, technology transfer, indigenous capacity development, and clear legal frameworks governing bilateral military engagements.

1. Introduction

In early 2026, the U.S. deployed approximately 100–200 troops to Nigeria to support training and advisory missions at the request of the Nigerian government³. These personnel are not engaged in

¹ Onje, O. (2026). Nigeria, US step up military cooperation, plan joint actions. *Business Day*. Retrieved from: <https://businessday.ng/news/article/nigeria-us-step-up-military-cooperation-plan-joint-actions/>

² Oyedeyi, I. (2026). 100 US military trainers, equipment arrive to support Nigeria’s counterterrorism efforts. *The Cable*. Retrieved from: <https://www.thecable.ng/100-us-military-trainers-equipment-arrive-to-support-nigerias-counterterrorism-efforts/>

³ Aljazeera. (16 February 2026). US deploys 100 soldiers to Nigeria as attacks by armed groups surge. Aljazeera. Accessed from: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/2/16/us-deploys-100-soldiers-to-nigeria-for-training-mission-nigerian-military>



combat and operate under Nigerian command structures.⁴ The partnership includes professional military education, intelligence sharing, logistical support, strategic dialogue, and proposals to enhance joint counterterrorism efforts. Following earlier periods of strained relations due to human rights concerns and arms procurement restrictions, cooperation resumed more robustly through structured military engagement, training exchanges, and defence equipment approvals coordinated by the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM)⁵. Over time, Nigeria has received training support, logistics assistance, and air platform sales aimed at strengthening counter-insurgency operations.

The arrival of the first batch of United States troops and military aircraft on Nigerian soil marks a consequential moment in the evolving security relationship between Abuja and Washington. According to official statements, the deployment is designed to strengthen Nigeria's counterterrorism capacity through training, intelligence sharing, and logistical coordination⁶. Yet beneath the surface of diplomatic assurances lies a development that demands serious national reflection.

Consequently, the information brief accesses the impact of the US-Nigeria defense cooperation, looking at its implication on Nigeria's sovereignty and proffering areas for legislative intervention.

2. Global Highlight and Nigeria's Performance

The 2026 deployment of US soldiers to Nigeria has generated mixed reactions. While the government emphasizes that cooperation respects Nigeria's sovereignty and was initiated at Nigeria's request, critics have argued that the presence of foreign military personnel even in advisory roles requires robust transparency and parliamentary scrutiny. The central issue arising from the recent expansion of defence cooperation between Nigeria and the United States is how to strengthen Nigeria's security capacity without compromising its constitutional sovereignty, democratic accountability, and strategic autonomy.

The broader geopolitical environment also shapes the debate. As global powers increase their strategic engagement in Africa, Nigeria's defence partnerships carry implications beyond counterterrorism, touching on foreign policy alignment, regional influence in West Africa, and long-term strategic autonomy. Questions have emerged regarding whether the terms of the deployment and broader defence cooperation agreements have received adequate scrutiny by the National Assembly, as required under Nigeria's constitutional framework governing foreign military engagements. Although officially described as advisory and non-combat, the operational boundaries, duration, and rules of engagement for U.S. personnel require clear legal articulation to prevent mandate expansion or ambiguity.

The presence of foreign military personnel on Nigerian soil regardless of function raises symbolic and political concerns about national autonomy, particularly in a country with a strong post-

⁴ Oladeji, F. (2026). Nigeria: Strategic Cooperation and Sovereign Responsibility. *All Africa*. Retrieved from: <https://allafrica.com/stories/202602170313.html>

⁵ United States Africa Command. (2007). Partnership. AFRICOM. <https://www.africom.mil/#:~:text=AFRICOM%20news,Partnerships,Conduct%20Strike%20Targeting%20ISIS%20Somalia>

⁶ Ibid.



colonial sensitivity to external military influence. Over-reliance on foreign intelligence, training, and logistics could undermine long-term domestic capacity building and self-reliance in defence operations. Without clearly defined frameworks, limited advisory cooperation could gradually evolve into deeper operational involvement, setting a precedent that may constrain Nigeria's future policy flexibility.

3. Lessons from History: Selective Engagement and Strategic Withdrawal

The global record of U.S. engagement offers sobering lessons. History offers instructive parallels. The United States has repeatedly demonstrated that its commitment to crises abroad is conditional, selective, and interest-based⁷. This pattern reflects a broader strategic ethos: the U.S. has been tagged to always engage where interests are clear and costs predictable, and retreats where outcomes are uncertain or public support wanes. The Somali⁸ example, where strategic gains remain elusive despite years of involvement, illustrates the limits of a militarised model unsupported by robust political and development frameworks. It serves as a cautionary tale for countries like Nigeria, where public expectations may outstrip diplomatic realities.

In Liberia, despite historical ties, the U.S. response to the early stages of political collapse was hesitant, allowing the crisis to spiral into prolonged civil war before limited intervention occurred⁹. In southern Africa, U.S. policy during the Angolan War¹⁰ of Independence and the apartheid era was shaped less by humanitarian considerations than by Cold War calculations. Support, opposition, or indifference shifted as global strategic priorities changed.

4. Security Assistance and the Price of Dependency

One of the central risks of relying heavily on external military assistance is the gradual erosion of strategic autonomy. When foreign intelligence, logistics, training, or operational capabilities become deeply embedded in a country's security system, decision-making can subtly shift. What begins as assistance can evolve into dependence.

Nigeria's security challenges, terrorism, banditry, separatist agitations, and organised crime are real and severe. Yet history shows that external military solutions rarely resolve fundamentally political and socio-economic problems. Where foreign powers dominate security responses, local institutions often weaken rather than strengthen.

The architecture of Nigeria's security sector must therefore be interrogated: would deeper U.S. involvement enhance indigenous capacity, or would it entrench a model where critical intelligence,

⁷ Oluwadare (2025). What a US.-Nigeria security pact could mean for sovereignty. *ThisDay*. Retrieved from: [https://www.thisdaylive.com/2026/01/15/what-a-u-s-nigeria-security-pact-could-mean-for-sovereignty/#:~:text=Within%](https://www.thisdaylive.com/2026/01/15/what-a-u-s-nigeria-security-pact-could-mean-for-sovereignty/#:~:text=Within%20the)

⁸ Elias, Y. (2023). U.S. Security Assistance to Somalia: Understanding the long history of U.S. military aid to Somalia amidst a surge in fighting. *STIMSON*. Accessed from: <https://www.stimson.org/2023/us-security-cooperation-with-somalia/>

⁹ Abiodun, O. (2026). U.S.-Nigeria pact and political economy of security. *Guardian*. Retrieved from: <https://guardian.ng/opinion/columnists/u-s-nigeria-pact-and-political-economy-of-security/>

¹⁰ Abiodun, O. (2026). U.S.-Nigeria pact and political economy of security. *Guardian*. Retrieved from: <https://guardian.ng/opinion/columnists/u-s-nigeria-pact-and-political-economy-of-security/>



surveillance, and strike capabilities remain externally controlled? The long-term consequences of the latter would be profound.

5. Rationale for National Assembly Intervention

The recent expansion of defence cooperation between Nigeria and the United States—including the deployment of U.S. advisory personnel under the coordination of the Defence Headquarters—raises important constitutional, institutional, and sovereignty considerations that justify active oversight by the National Assembly.

National Assembly intervention is not intended to obstruct security cooperation but to ensure that it is legally grounded, transparent, and aligned with Nigeria's long-term national interests.

Under the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), the National Assembly has authority over defence and security legislation, ratification of treaties and international agreements, oversight of executive actions affecting national sovereignty. Any arrangement involving foreign military personnel operating within Nigeria's territory has sovereignty implications and therefore warrants legislative scrutiny to ensure compliance with constitutional provisions.

The presence of foreign military personnel—even in advisory roles—touches directly on issues of territorial integrity and sovereign authority. Legislative engagement ensures clear definition of operational scope and limits, explicit confirmation that Nigerian command authority remains supreme, safeguards against mandate expansion beyond advisory functions

6. Areas for Legislative Intervention

To safeguard Nigeria's sovereignty, constitutional order, and strategic autonomy in the ongoing United States - Nigeria defence cooperation, the National Assembly through its relevant Committees may kindly consider the following:

- i. Request submission of all Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), Status of Forces arrangements, and operational frameworks governing U.S. personnel in Nigeria.
- ii. Insist on clarity regarding duration, scope, rules of engagement, and termination clauses to prevent ambiguity and protect Nigeria from open-ended commitments.
- iii. Create a Joint Committee (Defence, Foreign Affairs, National Security & Intelligence) dedicated to reviewing foreign security partnerships.
- iv. Mandate periodic classified briefings from the Executive and military leadership.
- v. Scrutinize budgetary implications, including logistics, infrastructure use, and defence procurement.
- vi. Review clauses to Include sunset provisions that terminate arrangements unless actively renewed by the National Assembly.
- vii. Expand domestic training institutions such as the Nigerian Defence Academy and War Colleges to reduce reliance on foreign training programs.
- viii. Enact a law prohibiting foreign military personnel from engaging in, supervising, or influencing activities related to Nigeria's oil, gas, mining, or maritime resource extraction.



Require that all defence cooperation agreements contain a non-interference clause regarding natural resources.

- ix. Prohibit deployment near oil installations in the Niger Delta, solid mineral zones, and major ports unless expressly authorized by the National Assembly.

5. Conclusion

National Assembly intervention is justified not as a challenge to executive authority, but as a constitutional necessity. By exercising its oversight functions, the legislature can ensure that Nigeria–U.S. defence cooperation enhances national security while preserving Nigeria’s sovereignty, democratic accountability, and long-term strategic independence.

While external security cooperation may offer short-term advantages in addressing urgent threats, its long-term implications for sovereignty, democratic accountability, and institutional autonomy are far from neutral. For Nigeria, the challenge lies in navigating these partnerships in a manner that enhances national capacity without reproducing patterns of dependency or undermining the foundational principles of democratic security governance and sovereignty.

Contact

National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies

National Assembly

NILDS Permanent Site, No.2 Abubakar O. Sulaiman Avenue, Piwoyi District, off Umaru Musa Yar`adua Expressway, Airport Road, Abuja.

E-mail: info@nils.gov.ng

Website: <http://nils.gov.ng>

NILDS Liaison Office

Suite 214 Senate Wing

National Assembly Complex

Mobile: +234 807 364 4822