

# NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA: ASSESSING THE ROLE OF INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION IN PROTECTING OIL INFRASTRUCTURE AGAINST TERRORISM AND INSURGENCY.

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## Abstract

Nigeria's oil infrastructure is a vital component and backbone of Nigerian economy, along with its energy security, has faced enduring threats from terrorism, insurgency, pipeline vandalism, and oil theft, particularly in the Niger Delta and surrounding regions. This paper employs a qualitative secondary documentary analysis to assess how inter-agency collaboration assists in safeguarding crucial oil assets against asymmetric threats. It selects publicly available policy documents, official reports, inter-agency memoranda, white papers, academic articles, legislative records, and security statements from 2000 to 2024 to explore how security institutions either collaborate or fail in the protection of oil infrastructure. The study focuses on themes such as institutional coordination, intelligence sharing, operational cooperation, legal frameworks, and obstacles to collaboration among key actors, including the Nigerian Army, Navy, Police, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Department of State Services (DSS), and the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL) Security Division. Although mechanisms like the Joint Task Force (JTF) and Operation Delta Safe are established to promote cooperation, their effectiveness is hindered by bureaucratic divisions, agency rivalries, inconsistent political backing, and overlapping roles. The research uncovers a lack of standard procedures for joint operations, underutilization of surveillance technologies, and limited joint training, which has weakened the overall response to insurgency and sabotage of oil infrastructure. These weaknesses exacerbate threats to Nigeria's economic stability and sovereignty. Employing a theoretical approach that combines institutionalism and security governance, the paper critically analyses the limitations of current inter-agency strategies. It advocates for a new collaborative model, including legal reforms to clearly define roles, establishing an integrated command and control centre, and developing joint protocols for real-time intelligence sharing. The paper, among others, recommends the adoption of a proactive, intelligence-led, and unified approach for tackling Nigeria's oil infrastructure against emerging threats amid persistent terrorism and insurgency.

**Keywords:** Inter-agency collaboration, Insurgency, Oil infrastructure, National Security, and Terrorism.

## Introduction

Nigeria's oil infrastructure has long been central to her political economy, serving as the backbone of the Nigerian state revenues since the discovery of crude oil in 1956. What began as a modest contribution to export revenues for the country in the 1960s quickly expanded so much that by the 1970s, oil exploration in Nigeria had accounted for over

80% of government income. The oil boom of the 1970s, as noted by Ayadi et al. (2018), funded diverse development projects and entrenched a mono-product economy that has weakened agriculture and other productive sectors of the economy to date. At one time, Nigeria became one of the world's most oil-dependent state, with crude oil revenues forming the backbone of fiscal stability, foreign exchange earnings, and the state's distributive capacity.

However, the oil sector trajectory has been marred by recurring crises. The Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) underscored the strategic importance of oil in national survival, as both federal and secessionist forces sought control over oilfields (Uwagboe, 2023; Okpanachi, 2018). From the 1980s onward, declining oil prices triggered economic crises, fueled corruption, engineered resource mismanagement, and propelled socio-political instability. In the Niger Delta, environmental degradation, unemployment, and perceptions of marginalization generated cycles of resistance, culminating in militant insurgency in the 1990s and 2000s. Groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) attacked pipelines, kidnapped expatriate workers, and disrupted production, reducing national output by nearly half at the height of the conflict.

The aftermath effect of oil resource wealth has been paradoxically linked with persistent insecurity, particularly in the Niger Delta and other oil-producing zones. Incidentally, the oil sector has attracted militant agitations, criminal sabotage, insurgent attacks, and transnational terrorism, each threatening not only economic stability but also national security. The Niger Delta crisis of the late 1990s and early 2000s, marked by militant groups such as MEND, the Egbesu Boys, and others, exposed the vulnerability of oil installations and the inadequacy of the Nigerian state fragmented security responses. More recently, the expansion of Boko Haram and other insurgent movements in northern Nigeria, as well as maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, has further revealed the interconnectedness of insurgency, terrorism, and oil infrastructure sabotage.

Despite decades of securitization and militarization of the oil sector, the sector witnessed continued attacks and theft that cost Nigeria billions of dollars annually. The problem lies not only in the intensity of external threats but also in the institutional weaknesses of inter-agency collaboration. The oil installations remain highly vulnerable to terrorism, insurgency, piracy, and sabotage. The challenges in securing the oil sector is founded in the institutional weaknesses and lack of capacity to deal with the threats as Nigeria continues to face unprecedented economic crises. Between 2009 and 2020, Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) estimated that Nigeria lost 619.7 million barrels of crude oil, valued at \$46.2 billion (approximately ₦16.25 trillion) due to theft and vandalism. Similarly, between 2017 and 2021, pipeline breakages and deliberate vandalism accounted for the loss of 208.6 million barrels, which was valued at \$12.7 billion or ₦4.3 trillion, and required ₦471.5 billion in repairing costs. Though the oil's centrality to Nigeria's economy and survival cannot be underestimated, persistent insecurity that undermines the sector's relevance to the economy is meant to be tackled by the multiple security agencies and joint task forces, with overlapping mandates to protect oil assets. Coordination failures, inter-agency rivalries, and poor intelligence-sharing have always weakened collective effectiveness.

Nigeria's security structural design has increasingly shifted toward inter-agency collaboration, involving the military, police, Department of State Services (DSS), Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), and other specialized task forces. While these efforts aim to harmonize intelligence, strengthen operational synergy, and close institutional gaps, questions remain regarding their efficiency, coordination mechanisms, and long-term sustainability. This paper presents a qualitative and historical insight into how Nigeria's trajectory of resource-driven conflicts and institutional reforms has shaped contemporary inter-agency security practices.

By integrating historical context from 1956 to date with quantitative data leveraging on institutional theoretical understanding, this study explicates how oil's developmental promise has coexisted with structural fragility. Insights from this paper can guide different reforms to strengthen inter-agency collaboration for safeguarding critical infrastructure of the oil sector in fragile states like Nigeria in the sub-Saharan region. This paper covers the period 1956–2023, tracing the historical trajectory of the oil sector and its securitization, but with emphasis on the Fourth Republic (1999–2023) when democratic governance coincided with heightened militancy, terrorism, and inter-agency security reforms. Geographically, it focuses on the Niger Delta, while also connecting threats from northern insurgency and Gulf of Guinea piracy as part of Nigeria's broader oil security environment.

Against this backdrop, this paper seeks to interrogate the aspects of inter-agency collaboration in protecting oil infrastructure against terrorism and insurgency. Specifically, it addresses the questions of how Nigeria's historical experience with resource-related conflicts and insurgency has shaped the evolution of inter-agency collaboration in safeguarding oil infrastructure; and what is the extent of inter-agency cooperation in enhancing national security outcomes; and what institutional challenges continue to undermine its effectiveness in the face of terrorism and insurgency?

### **The Political Economy of Nigeria's Oil Sector**

The security of Nigeria's oil infrastructure cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the political economy surrounding resource governance conundrum. Recent scholarship emphasizes how Nigeria's oil sector remains deeply embedded in international market dynamics, regional political tensions, and elite-driven institutional capture (Osawe & Osimen, 2023; Ogugbuaja & Willies, 2024). This politicized structure means that threats to infrastructure, such as pipeline sabotage, cyber disruption, or oil theft, are rarely isolated incidents but rather, they are manifestations of hybrid dynamics involving political patronage, criminal enterprise, and digital sabotage. Energy politics literature warns that resource dependency breeds institutional fragility, reinforcing capture by entrenched elites and weakening regulatory oversight (Osawe & Osimen, 2023; Akadiri & Olasehinde-Williams, 2025). In the Niger Delta, ecological degradation and socio-economic marginalization fuel contestation and criminality; these issues transcend local protest to reflect broader tensions in Nigeria's Petro-state governance (Ogugbuaja & Willies, 2024). These dynamics frequently produce ambiguous policy mandates and overlapping agency responsibility, a symptom of institutional fragmentation and patronage structures. This complicates coordination across entities like NNPC, DSS,

regulatory agencies, and private operators that make energy security in Nigeria both a political and operational challenge.

Network Theory scholars provide an analytical framework to assess how institutions link, share information, and build trust (Borgatti & Foster, 2003). It has been widely applied in organizational studies, emergency response planning, and public administration. In security studies, network approaches help illuminate how non-hierarchical relationships, such as those among military, intelligence, and cybersecurity bodies, function under pressure (Kapucu et al., 2010). In Nigeria, where vertical command structures often dominate, a network perspective enables a rethinking of coordination strategies that are less dependent on formal hierarchy and more on horizontal linkages and trust-based relationships.

### **Historical Antecedents of Inter-Agency Security Collaboration in Nigeria's Oil Sector**

Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, successive administrations have recognized the centrality of oil to national survival. As the sector evolved into the backbone of the economy by contributing over 90% of foreign exchange earnings in the 1970s, the imperative to protect oil infrastructure became a national security priority (Omeje, 2006). However, the approaches adopted by different regimes reveal shifting patterns of inter-agency collaboration, ranging from militarized command structures to more coordinated institutional frameworks in subsequent years.

The Military administrations (1966–1979 & 1983–1999) adopted centralized and heavily militarized approaches to security. The inter-agency collaboration was primarily based on hierarchy, with the armed forces dominating oil sector protection. For instance, during the civil war (1967–1970), federal forces were deployed to secure oil installations in the Niger Delta, but the absence of structured collaboration with civil agencies limited intelligence flow and community relations (Obi, 2009). In subsequent decades, task forces such as the Nigerian Navy-led patrols of the 1980s focused on maritime oil theft, but rivalry with customs and police units weakened their operational outcomes (Ukeje, 2001).

The early civilian administration of the Second Republic (Alhaji Shehu Shagari's government) struggled to manage the rise of oil bunkering and economic sabotage that loomed large in the country. Security agencies such as the Police and Customs Service were mandated to protect oil pipelines and terminals, but weak institutional coordination and pervasive corruption hindered their results (Osaghae, 1998). Nevertheless, this period highlights the vulnerability of civilian institutions in the absence of clear-cut inter-agency command structures, which became one of the justifications for the return of military rule in December 1984 by General Muhammadu Buhari. The return of democracy in 1999 marked a shift towards more formalized inter-agency security structures. President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999 -2007) established the Joint Task Force (JTF) in the Niger Delta in the early 2000s, combining the Army, Navy, Air Force, Police, and Department of State Services (DSS) under a unified command to combat militancy and oil theft (Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014). Although criticized for heavy-handedness, the JTF

demonstrated the institutionalization of inter-agency collaboration as a core strategy in oil sector security.

However, President Goodluck Jonathan's (2010–2015) administration introduced the Presidential Amnesty Program, aimed to complement inter-agency efforts by integrating disarmament with socio-economic reintegration. During his regime, agencies such as the Navy, NSCDC, and DSS continued to collaborate in surveillance, but allegations of corruption and sabotage within the ranks and files of security operatives persisted (Akinola, 2019). The Buhari administration (2015–2023) also sought to deepen the inter-agency collaboration by launching the Deep Blue Project in 2021, a partnership between the Nigerian Navy and the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA). This initiative contributed to a significant decline in piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, with reported incidents falling by over 50% between 2021 and 2022 (International Maritime Bureau, 2022). Nonetheless, these advances did not prevent oil theft and pipeline vandalism as losses escalated, with estimation of about \$3.6 billion as of 2022 (NEITI, 2022).

Similarly, the inter-agency security collaboration under the present administration of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu (2023 till date) has emphasized the necessity of strengthening inter-agency coordination within Nigeria's security structure. In June 2023, the president appointed a new set of service chiefs and Mr. Nuhu Ribadu as National Security Adviser, with a clear-cut directive to 'maintain teamwork' among the Armed Forces, Police, DSS, and other relevant agencies (State House, 2023; Channels Television, 2023). This gesture marked an explicit top-down call to consolidate fragmented security efforts, particularly in oil-rich zones that are vulnerable to theft and sabotage. The Tinubu government thus far has reinforced the Deep Blue Project by integrating NIMASA, the Navy, and land/air assets for coordinated surveillance. The administration set up the Federal Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy in August 2023, meant to provide a policy hub that would enhance security collaboration across NIMASA, the Navy, the Nigerian Ports Authority, and Customs.

As of the end of 2024, this Ministry stressed through a communiqué that inter-agency partnership is a cornerstone of maritime security (NIMASA, 2024). The administration in 2025 declared that the incidences of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea remained at historically low ebbs, with Nigerian officials actively clarifying jurisdictional issues (NIMASA, 2025). The administration also maintained that the 'Operation Delta Safe' (OPDS), which integrates the Army, Navy, Air Force, DSS, Police, and NSCDC coordinated crackdowns against illegal refineries and bunkering by reporting that between 2024 and 2025, there was the destruction of hundreds of illegal refining sites and the seizure of millions of liters of stolen crude (Voice of Nigeria, 2025). A novel feature of Tinubu's inter-agency approach can be seen with the formal recognition of private security contractors, notably Tantita Security Services, to work in tandem with the Navy and NSCDC in providing onshore and offshore security. This blended model has been recorded to have produced high-profile vessel seizures and pipeline protection outcomes (Vanguard, 2024; Independent, 2024).

In summary, Tinubu's civilian administration has introduced clearer reforms with hierarchical leadership of the institutions for inter-agency security performance through

the creation of a dedicated Blue Economy ministry, expansion of blended state–private patrols, and more data-driven enforcement. For instance, the joint operations such as the Navy’s Operation Delta Sanity in December 2024, that featuring expanded intelligence sharing, drones, and helicopters. Reuters in 2024 remarks that these measures recorded success by increasing the country’s crude oil production from roughly 1.4 million barrels per day in mid-2023 to about 1.8 million barrels by late 2024. The weekly OPDS briefings in 2025 also report that interdictions on oil lifting worth billions of naira were truncated, alongside the successful rescue of kidnap victims, underscoring more systematic inter-agency coordination (The Guardian Nigeria, 2025). Additionally, the release of the NEITI 2022–2023 oil and gas audit report provided transparent data to support enforcement targeting by the present administration (EITI/NEITI, 2024).

### **Evolution of Inter-Agency Collaboration in Protecting Nigeria’s Oil Infrastructure (1967-2025)**

From the militarized centralization of the late 1960s to today’s hybridized, technologically advanced collaborations, Nigeria’s inter-agency security design has been shaped by its historical experience with insurgencies and oil-related conflicts. Each phase has expanded the circle of collaboration, moving from a purely military structure to a multi-stakeholder framework that increasingly emphasizes coordination, intelligence, and technology. These are discussed in five phases below:

#### **i. Civil War–Era Centralization (1967–1970s)**

This period coincidentally showed Nigeria's existence as a nation being riddled with the civil war occasioned between July 6, 1967, and January 13, 1970. The Nigerian Civil War marked the earliest moment when oil infrastructure became directly tied to national security. Then, the control of oil fields in the Niger Delta was central to both federal and secessionist strategies. During this period, security was monopolized by the military, with little to no inter-agency collaboration. The oil sector’s protection was perceived strictly through the spectrum of armed force, leaving no institutional framework for multi-agency cooperation (Watts, 2008).

#### **ii. Militant Insurgency and Institutional Realignment Phase (1990s–2009)**

The 1990s era depicted a period of underdevelopment, environmental degradation, and resource marginalization had intensified grievances in the Niger Delta. This period marked the rise of militant groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) that threatened and challenged the security of the oil sector in Nigeria. Between 2006 and 2009, Nigeria lost about one million barrels of oil per day to sabotage and theft, translating into billions in revenue losses (Obi, 2010). To address this, the federal government established the Joint Task Force (JTF), integrating the Army, Navy, Air Force, Police, and Department of State Services (DSS) to tackle general insecurity in the Niger-Delta oil zones. This was the first institutionalized attempt at inter-agency collaboration in protecting oil installations in the country.

#### **iii. Post-Amnesty Hybridization Phase (2009–2015)**

In 2009, the Presidential Amnesty Programme initiative was embarked upon by Goodluck Jonathan, which provided a temporary reduction in violence in the Niger-Delta oil zones, while oil theft and illegal refining persisted. Recognizing the limits of militarization, the federal government expanded inter-agency collaboration to include the NSCDC, NNPC, NIMASA, and community-based security initiatives. In the following year, these hybrid arrangements that incorporated private contractors and local surveillance groups became central to the protection of pipelines and offshore facilities (Akinola, 2020).

#### **iv. Contemporary Counter-Insurgency Phase (2015–2023)**

The resurgence of violent extremism in the northeast through Boko Haram and Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) reshaped Nigeria's national security doctrine. Lessons from counter-insurgency groups, especially around intelligence-sharing, surveillance, and joint operations, were extended to oil infrastructure protection. Under President Buhari, emphasis was placed on satellite monitoring, naval patrols, and inter-agency intelligence coordination. Yet, coordination challenges and overlapping mandates frequently undermined efficiency (Oluwaniyi, 2011).

#### **v. Tinubu's Reform Era and the Up-Coming Trends (2023– Future)**

Since assuming office in 2023, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has directed reforms that enhanced the roles of the NSCDC and DSS in critical infrastructure protection. His administration has also promoted expanded maritime collaboration through the Navy and NIMASA, alongside deploying drone surveillance and digital tracking systems for pipelines (Adebajo, 2023). Looking at the mounting insecurity challenges in the past, and the inseparable upheavals of oil as an unalloyed blessing to the Nigerian economy, the course of the future inter-agency collaboration may point towards the development of technology-driven security approaches, the incorporation of artificial intelligence mechanics like drones, and big-data analytical measures for preemptive threat detection.

#### **Impacts of Inter-Agency Collaboration in Protecting Oil Infrastructure in Nigeria**

The oil industry remains the lifeline of Nigeria's political economy, accounting for over 60% of government revenue and 90% of foreign exchange earnings (NEITI, 2023). Yet, the sector has consistently been plagued by security threats ranging from oil theft and pipeline vandalism to piracy and insurgent attacks. These challenges not only undermine national revenue but also pose severe threats to Nigeria's overall security and stability. Given the strategic importance of oil infrastructure, Nigeria's security strategy has increasingly centered on inter-agency collaboration, bringing together the military, paramilitary, and intelligence agencies in joint efforts. However, the outcomes of these collaborations remain mixed, reflecting both significant achievements and recurring institutional failures.

One of the most notable achievements of inter-agency cooperation has been the creation of Joint Task Forces (JTFs). These task forces bring together the Nigerian Army, Navy, Air Force, Police, Department of State Services (DSS), and other security agencies to

synergize security in the oil sector. For example, Operation Pulo Shield (2012–2016) and its successor Operation Delta Safe were credited with dismantling militant camps in the Niger Delta and reducing kidnappings and large-scale attacks on oil facilities (Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014). At sea, the Deep Blue Project, launched in 2021 as a collaboration between the Nigerian Navy and the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), significantly reduced piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. According to the International Maritime Bureau (2022), piracy incidents dropped by more than 50% between 2021 and 2022, showcasing the potential of coordinated maritime security operations.

Over the years, collaborative intelligence sharing among the security agencies has yielded positive outcomes. The oil industry has witnessed coordinated operations between the DSS, military, and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), which have led to the destruction of illegal refineries and the interception of crude oil theft syndicates within and across Nigerian territorial waters. Also, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps' (NSCDC) community-based surveillance programs, though limited, have complemented these efforts by providing localized intelligence (Akinola, 2019).

Despite these successes recorded, inter-agency collaboration in Nigeria suffers setbacks and breakdowns due to bureaucratic rivalries, corruption, and weak institutional integration. For instance, conflicts frequently arise between the Nigerian Navy (responsible for offshore security), the NSCDC responsible for pipeline protection, and the Nigerian Police (law enforcement agents), with cases of withholding intelligence from one another, undermining security coordination. Similarly, the security network between these agencies has witnessed overlapping connectivity. Such overlaps have led to duplication of efforts and delayed responses (Osumah, 2013).

Besides, corruption among the security agencies has further complicated collaboration between them. Transparency International (TI) in 2020 reports how some security personnel collude with oil theft syndicates, sabotaging the very infrastructure they are tasked to protect. A stark example occurred during the 2016 Forcados pipeline bombing by a group of militants known as Niger Delta Avengers, where lapses in surveillance and alleged insider involvement resulted in production losses of about 30% of national output (Akinola, 2019). During the height of militancy in the mid-2000s, the JTF faced accusations of human rights abuses, which weakened community cooperation and impeded the flow of local intelligence that is critical for protecting oil infrastructure (Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014). Moreover, some joint operations have alienated host communities through heavy-handed tactics to perpetuate corrupt security network outfits.

Viewing from the institutionalist perspective, therefore, the intra-agency Nigerian security collaborative approach has demonstrated systemic corruption, weak intelligence integration, and bureaucratic rivalries with weak governance structures preventing effective coordination in a securitized environment. Nigeria's experience ultimately reveals that militarization alone cannot protect vital oil infrastructure without institutional reforms that foster genuine collaboration and accountability.

### **Cyber-Security as a Recent Panacea against Oil Infrastructure and Insecurity in Nigeria**

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Inter-agency collaboration has long been recognized as essential in responding to complex, cross-cutting security challenges (O’Leary & Vij, 2012). However, literature shows that collaboration is often hampered by bureaucratic bottlenecks, competition over mandates, and a lack of shared communication infrastructure (Comfort, 2007; Christensen & Lægheid, 2007). In fragile states like Nigeria, these problems are amplified by weak institutional trust, political interference, and capacity disparities across agencies. Although empirical work remains limited in Nigeria, Adelani (2024) highlights how overlapping jurisdictions and poor interoperability among agencies contribute to ineffective responses to security incidents. Therefore, a proactive, intelligence-driven, but unified approach to defend Nigeria’s oil infrastructure from emerging cyber threats is conceived by this paper to counter the persistent terrorism and insurgency of Nigeria’s oil facilities.

The notion of cyber sovereignty has emerged lately as states seek to defend both physical and digital borders from foreign intrusion and domestic sabotage. The integration of cybersecurity into broader national security agendas has become a central concern in both academic and policy discourse. Scholars such as Singer and Friedman (2014) and Perlroth (2021) argue that modern security threats are increasingly digital, targeting critical infrastructure, government systems, and private networks. Studies by Dawson (2020) and Ige et al. (2024) further illustrate the rise of hybrid threats, where cyber-attacks are used to weaken infrastructure just as physical assaults are carried out, hence in energy-producing states like Nigeria, the risk is not only economic disruption but also destabilization of national legitimacy when governments fail to protect strategic assets (Basak, 2024). Findings suggest that while institutional awareness and regulatory efforts exist, such as the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act, 2015, inter-agency coordination remains fragmented due to overlapping mandates, poor information-sharing systems, and insufficient technical capacities.

Nevertheless, the absence of a unified cyber response strategy specifically designed to protect energy infrastructure requires a coordinated cybersecurity ecosystem approach in countering terrorism and insurgency in the digital age in Nigeria. Succinctly, it is the integration of a centralized threat intelligence platform, joint simulation exercises, and capacity-building mechanisms.

## **Conclusion**

While the collaborative initiatives of JTFs and the Deep Blue Project demonstrate the potential of inter-agency synergy, systemic corruption, weak intelligence integration, and bureaucratic rivalries continue to undermine the long-term success of the security outfits. The Nigerian oil sector demonstrates that inter-agency collaboration is necessary but insufficient for protecting oil infrastructure. This shows an institutionalist perspective, where weak governance structures prevent effective coordination even in a securitized environment.

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