

EFCC'S TROUBLES AND THE ARMY'S RESURGENCE

By Emmanuel Onwubiko



Two major social evils threaten Nigeria's stability, security, and economic progress: rampant insecurity fueled by terrorism and widespread corruption, particularly among high-profile politicians and the so-called Yahoo Yahoo fraudsters. To combat these twin challenges, Nigeria relies on two key institutions: the armed forces, tasked with national security, and anti-corruption agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). While these institutions are meant to uphold justice, the EFCC has increasingly faced internal corruption scandals that undermine its credibility.

The EFCC has, over the years, been plagued by cases of internal sabotage. One recent example is the Kaduna Zonal Office scandal, where an officer in charge of exhibits allegedly absconded with over \$30,000 and other valuables. Earlier in January, the commission detained 10 officers in Lagos for theft of operational items. Investigative reports later revealed that these officials had stolen gold bars worth over ₦1 billion, along with \$180,000 and £140,000.

In contrast, Nigeria's armed forces have demonstrated resilience and are currently experiencing a resurgence in their fight against terrorism and criminal elements threatening the nation's stability. In the latest scandal, a staff member of the EFCC, identified only as Polycarp, reportedly vanished without a trace after failing to account for over \$30,000. These alarming incidents demand urgent intervention from the federal government, given the EFCC's crucial role in Nigeria's anti-corruption efforts. To fully grasp the extent of corruption's impact, consider the staggering statistics that highlight its damage to Nigeria's economy and international

reputation.

Victoria Oladipo, a researcher, wrote in June 2023 that corruption has significantly hindered Nigeria's infrastructural development. With a Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index score of 25, Nigeria ranked 145 out of 180 countries. The country's chronic infrastructure deficit can be directly traced to a history of systemic corruption. In 2012, Dr. Oby Ezekwesili, a former World Bank Vice President for Africa, revealed that Nigeria had lost up to \$400 billion in oil revenue since independence due to corrupt practices. Despite oil exports accounting for 90% of Nigeria's export earnings, 80% of the generated revenue ended up in the hands of just 1% of the population. Political corruption remains a major obstacle to Nigeria's infrastructural development. Many government-led projects are either poorly executed or outright scams, enriching a few at the expense of national progress. The situation is even worse than

these reports suggest. For instance, in 2015, the newly inaugurated administration exposed a shocking corruption scandal in Nigeria's defense sector, involving the alleged diversion of over \$2 billion by the National Security Adviser under former President Goodluck Jonathan. The EFCC launched extensive investigations, arresting several retired and serving military generals accused of embezzling nearly \$1 billion. Numerous service chiefs from the Jonathan era were implicated, and properties worth billions were confiscated.

One of Buhari's ministers—though not widely regarded for credibility—claimed that over \$6 billion had been looted from the defense sector under the previous administration. Tragically, under that same administration, many recovered assets and cash reserves were later re-looted by government officials. In one case, over \$1 billion was found stashed in a private residence belonging to a suspected defense contractor. Shockingly, a court later ruled that the funds be returned to the claimant, who insisted they were proceeds of legitimate business—a highly questionable claim. Despite Buhari's anti-corruption rhetoric, his presidency was marred by unchecked looting. Many of his close allies, particularly those appointed through nepotism, enriched themselves at the expense of the nation. While the EFCC aggressively pursued low-level offenders and politically unprotected individuals, it turned a blind eye to members of Buhari's inner circle who engaged in large-scale corruption. An investigative report by an online news platform exposed a jaw-dropping level of graft under Buhari's government. According to a report from the Joint Senate Committee on Banking, Insurance, Finance, National Planning, Agriculture, and Appropriation, over ₦30 trillion went unaccounted for under the previous

administration.

A significant portion of this missing money was tied to the controversial Ways and Means overdraft, a financial mechanism through which the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) provided emergency loans to cover government budget shortfalls. These funds, meant for short-term fiscal emergencies, were grossly mismanaged and remain largely unaccounted for. Former Senate President Ahmed Lawan has stated that the 9th National Assembly approved N22.8 trillion in Ways and Means loans during the Buhari administration. "What the 9th National Assembly approved or ratified in terms of Ways and Means was not N29 trillion or N30 trillion; it was N22 trillion. However, there was an additional N819 billion allocated to address severe infrastructural dilapidations across the country," Lawan told Senate President Godswill Akpabio as the investigation began. "If we have a Ways and Means total of N30 trillion today, that means something happened between then and now, and it is the responsibility of the National Assembly to find out what transpired. "If there were expenditures made unlawfully, in violation of constitutional provisions, the National Assembly must scrutinize them. If sanctions are warranted for unauthorized, illegal, or improper expenditures, the National Assembly has the power to impose them."

Despite being aware of the fund at the time, the National Assembly could not account for how most of it was spent. The current Senate claims it has no knowledge of where the money went. "What the Senate approved was N819 billion, yet the actual expenditure ballooned to about N23 trillion. To this day, no detailed explanation has been provided," said Senate Chief Whip Mohammed Ali Ndume. "This committee must uncover what happened to the money. People must be held accountable, or they should appear before the Senate to explain what they did with the funds." Additionally, under the Buhari administration, the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation falsely claimed that the ministry spent nearly half a billion naira feeding schoolchildren during the COVID-19 lockdown—raising the question: Did the minister feed ghost pupils? Former Minister Akpabio, who served under Buhari, further revealed that the N22.8 trillion borrowed from the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) through Ways and Means skyrocketed to N30 trillion due to accrued interest. He stated that the Senate was informed of an additional N7 trillion in interest charges. These revelations of corruption and their devastating effects on Nigeria's economy underscore the urgent need for the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) to remain vigilant. However, the disturbing reports of corruption within the EFCC itself are deeply troubling.

The Nigerian government must immediately implement measures tasking the Department of State Services (DSS) with thoroughly investigating the EFCC's recruitment process to determine how corrupt individuals infiltrated the agency. More thieves are undoubtedly embedded within the EFCC, and the DSS must identify, remove, prosecute, and imprison them. The EFCC is far too critical an institution to be compromised by corruption. Moreover, the DSS itself requires scrutiny for allegedly recruiting unqualified personnel under Buhari's

administration. Encouragingly, there has been a resurgence of enthusiasm among Nigerian soldiers engaged in counterterrorism operations. Recent encounters between soldiers and terrorists have resulted in heavy casualties on both sides. While many soldiers have made the ultimate sacrifice, there is undeniable evidence of renewed commitment and optimism within the military ranks.

The National Assembly and the President must ensure that all necessary resources—both in personnel and weaponry—are made available promptly. Additionally, an efficient monitoring mechanism must be put in place to prevent corruption in military procurement. Funds allocated and disbursed for personnel wages must not be diverted. Likewise, money set aside for arms and equipment must never be stolen. The embezzlement of defense funds should be classified as a capital offense punishable by the death penalty. Encouragingly, the international community remains committed to supporting Nigeria's war on terror.

The United States has reaffirmed its commitment to aiding Nigeria in combating terrorism and has pledged to assist survivors and their families in accordance with shared values and mutual objectives. Aishah Gambari, spokesperson for the U.S. Embassy, made these remarks as Nigeria marked the 10th anniversary of the abduction of 276 schoolgirls by terrorists in



Chibok, Borno State. Additionally, the Borno State Government has expressed optimism that 89 of the schoolgirls still held captive by Boko Haram since April 14, 2014, will be rescued. Perhaps recognizing the shift in morale among frontline troops, Nigeria's Chief of Defence Staff, General Christopher Musa, has made ambitious claims about the military's future capabilities. General Musa stated—without providing empirical evidence—that Nigeria's 16-year counterterrorism campaign has enhanced local armament production. He further claimed that military engineers and mechanics can now salvage and restore completely burnt Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles for reuse. In a televised interview, General Musa asserted that, within a few years, Nigeria would become a global powerhouse in military hardware production. However, this claim appears overly optimistic—if not outright utopian. Nigeria must first establish a sustainable, corruption-free defense procurement process before making such bold claims. The reality remains that unless significant reforms are made, the country will continue relying on foreign nations for critical military supplies.