

Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for National Security in Nigeria: Strategic Prospects and Limitations

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Abstract

This paper analyses the relevance of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to national security in the contemporary international political system. It examines the sectoral domains in which AI can be deployed to enhance a state's overall security capacity, with specific focus on Nigeria. The paper argues that Nigeria has yet to holistically integrate and operationalise AI within its national security architecture. It posits that the limited adoption of AI across key sectors, particularly defence and the broader economy, has constrained the country's ability to respond effectively to the multi-modal security threats it faces. To strengthen national resilience, adaptability, and long-term security in the 21st century, the paper recommends the strategic integration of AI into Nigeria's agricultural, defence, military, and financial sectors.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Nigeria, Security, Technology, Defence

Introduction

The creation of machines with in-built capacities to assess situations and make 'autonomous intelligent' decisions is a new phenomenon that

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emerged in the mid-twentieth century. This technological advancement is known as Artificial intelligence (AI). The idea of creating artificial objects that possess intelligence has been since antiquity which can be seen in Greek and Egyptian mythologies (Pamela, 1979). The increased scientific breakthroughs in AI have revealed that AI can address global issues such as climate change, pandemics, droughts, food shortages, insecurity, and energy production. States can leverage high intelligence and data capabilities to get tactical and strategic advantages over their enemies and prevent crimes (Yatsuzuka, 2021). Technologically advanced states have demonstrated this with the integration of AI systems into their national security policies. AI is a predictive security enhancement system that augment national security measures by assisting in early detection of crimes through data management, pattern recognition, prediction, prevention and other complementary roles (Kathleen, 2019; Heather, 2017). Several states such as Israel, USA, UAE, China, Singapore, and Estonia have successfully integrated AI into their security architecture. However, despite the myriad security challenges ravaging Africa, most African states are yet to fully integrate AI systems into their national security systems.

Against this backdrop, this paper will analyse the possible ways that Nigeria can integrate AI into its overall security architecture to ensure that the territorial integrity of the state is not compromised by both state and non-state actors. To achieve this overarching aim, the paper has been divided into six sections which cover AI and state security, AI in Nigeria's civilian sector, AI in Nigeria security sector: specific instances of AI usage by the Nigerian military, the prospect and challenges of AI usage in Nigeria.

AI and States' Security: A Strategic and Theoretical Conspectus

From a realist perspective, the primary obligation of the state remains survival within an anarchic international system. As threats evolve and competition intensifies, states continuously seek technological and doctrinal innovations to preserve strategic advantage. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a critical military innovation shaping contemporary security architectures,

particularly within the context of multi-domain warfare. The integration of AI into national security systems reflects a broader transformation in how states perceive power, deterrence, and operational superiority in the 21st century. Military innovation theory explains that states adopt disruptive technologies when existing doctrines and capabilities become insufficient to address emerging threats (Sadiku, Adekunle & Sadiku, 2024). In this regard, AI enables faster decision-making, enhanced intelligence processing, autonomous operations, and predictive threat assessment capabilities that are essential in increasingly complex and contested security environments. Consequently, leading military powers such as the United States, Russia, China, and Israel have embedded AI within their defence strategies as a means of sustaining operational dominance across land, air, sea, space, and cyberspace.

i. AI in the United States' Military Strategy

The United States' adoption of AI is best understood within the framework of strategic competition and declining unipolar dominance. As the global system shifts toward multipolarity, U.S. defence planners have increasingly relied on AI to offset the erosion of conventional military superiority. The Third Offset Strategy exemplifies this logic, positioning AI, autonomy, and robotics as force multipliers capable of restoring deterrence and operational advantage (Jesse, Lisa and Gabriell, 2017). Programmes such as Project Maven reflect an institutional effort to integrate AI into intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems, thereby reducing decision-making latency and enhancing battlefield awareness (Sydney, 2024). From a theoretical standpoint, U.S. AI integration represents a classic case of innovation-driven adaptation to systemic pressure.

ii. AI in Russia's Military Strategy

Russia's AI strategy aligns with asymmetric warfare and information dominance theories (Nicholas, 2019). Lacking the economic and industrial capacity to match U.S. conventional military power, Russia has prioritised AI-enabled cyber warfare, electronic warfare, and information operations. AI serves as a force equaliser, allowing Russia to exploit cognitive, informational,

and cyber domains where relative power advantages can be generated at lower cost. This approach reflects a realist strategy of compensating for material limitations through technological and doctrinal innovation.

iii. AI in China's Security Architecture

China's integration of AI is embedded within a long-term strategic planning framework aimed at achieving military modernisation and great-power status. Drawing on civil-military fusion theory, China leverages AI to accelerate innovation across all domains of warfare. The deployment of autonomous systems in air, sea, space, and undersea environments illustrates China's pursuit of comprehensive multi-domain superiority (Yatsuzuka, 2021). AI, in this context, functions as both a military tool and a strategic enabler of national power projection.

iv. AI in Israeli Defence Strategy

Israel's use of AI is shaped by persistent low-intensity conflict and continuous security threats from non-state actors. Israel made a robust use of AI in its counterterrorism and counter-insurgency offensives against Hamas, Hezbollah and other affiliated militant groups in the region (Falode et. al, 2021; Lappin, 2021). From an operational security and counterinsurgency perspective, AI enhances intelligence fusion, target identification, and rapid response capabilities. Unlike great powers focused on global competition, Israel employs AI primarily as a tactical and operational instrument for internal security and counterterrorism. This case demonstrates the adaptability of AI across different threat environments and strategic scales.

Brief History of the AI Adoption in Nigeria

The adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Nigeria has followed a sector-driven and incremental trajectory, shaped primarily by private-sector innovation and, more recently, by state-led institutional initiatives. Consistent with technology diffusion theory, early AI adoption in Nigeria emerged within commercially viable sectors, especially financial services, where data availability, profit incentives, and competitive pressures

facilitated experimentation and deployment (Reagan, 2018). The Nigerian financial and technology sectors were among the first to integrate AI-enabled applications, largely through fintech innovations and software development platforms. One of the earliest institutional actors in this process was **Andela**, established in 2014 to connect software engineers in emerging markets with global technology firms (Odeyemi, 2019). The presence of firms such as Andela accelerated the development of algorithm-based systems capable of generating real-time credit scoring and financial risk assessments for Nigerian consumers (Falode et al., 2021). Complementing this development, **Slatecube**, founded by Chris Kwekwe, focused on strengthening domestic human capital by training software developers and supporting talent acquisition within Nigeria's digital economy (Adebayo, 2021; eLearning, 2015). Similarly, the **Co-Creation Hub (CcHub)**, established in 2011 by Bosun Tijani, provided institutional support, mentorship, and funding for technology entrepreneurs, contributing to the growth of Nigeria's innovation ecosystem.

These initiatives coincided with the expansion of fintech and digital services in Nigeria, leading to the emergence of new consumer bases and data-driven business models (Strusani & Hounghonon, 2019; Deloitte, 2019). Although the majority of AI-driven firms remain privately owned, their cumulative impact has been significant, particularly in the deployment of AI applications for anti-money laundering compliance, credit risk assessment, and transaction verification within the banking sector (Ademola, 2019). State engagement with AI development became more pronounced from 2018 onward. The establishment of the **National Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics (NCAIR)** marked a formal institutional commitment to integrating AI into Nigeria's economic and governance structures (Ademola, 2019; NAN, 2023). This commitment was reinforced by the creation of Nigeria's first university-based robotics and AI centre at Yobe State University in 2019. At the subnational level, Lagos State adopted AI-enabled Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) systems to enhance traffic management and regulatory enforcement. In parallel, the federal government secured a \$433 million grant in 2019 to

expand biometric digital identification coverage, a development with significant implications for data governance, security, and service delivery.

While AI adoption within Nigeria's security sector remains limited, declining costs associated with cloud computing, expanded datasets, and improved research infrastructure suggest growing feasibility for future integration (Clark, 2015). Initial steps toward AI-enabled screening and identification in the aviation sector further indicate an emerging state interest in leveraging AI for public safety and security functions (Jake, 2021)

AI in Nigeria's security sector

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into Nigeria's security sector remains at an early stage and is constrained by structural and institutional limitations. The technical complexity of AI and machine learning systems requires specialized expertise that is currently limited within the country (Falode et al., 2021). This skills deficit is further compounded by inadequate data infrastructure, limited military hardware suitable for AI integration, and a shortage of trained security personnel. These challenges have collectively hindered the effective incorporation of AI into Nigeria's national security architecture, despite the growing complexity of the country's security threats, including terrorism, banditry, insurgency and militancy.

Nonetheless, AI possesses considerable potential to enhance intelligence-led security operations in Nigeria. One key application lies in automated data management systems capable of processing large volumes of biometric and operational data, including images, fingerprints, and vehicle registration records (Okwor, 2022). AI-enabled databases can improve information retrieval, inter-agency coordination, and crime tracking for institutions such as the Department of State Services (DSS) and the Security Intelligence Department (SID) (Okwor, 2022).

Globally, AI has become increasingly central to contemporary security and military affairs, influencing domains such as cyber and information warfare, autonomous weapon systems, and advanced surveillance technologies. Scholars argue that AI-driven military innovation may reshape

the global security order in ways comparable to earlier transformative technologies (Szabadföldi, 2021). This trend has contributed to the proliferation of semi-autonomous and autonomous platforms, including unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), which are increasingly employed by both state and non-state actors (Onohwakpor, 2020; Asian, 2023). The ambiguity surrounding UAV deployment often complicates threat assessment and strategic intent (Sprenkel, 2021). Nigeria can leverage on AI to better enhance its military capabilities and operational efficiency. The effectiveness of AI-driven security operations is significantly enhanced through the integration of geospatial intelligence (GEOINT), which combines satellite imagery, remote sensing, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to analyse spatial and temporal patterns of conflict (Emenari et al., 2014). Processed satellite data facilitate the identification of insurgent movements, terrorist camps, and logistical networks, thereby improving situational awareness and early warning capabilities (Aderoju & Hilda, 2013). Given the evolving nature of warfare and heightened security competition, the strategic integration of AI-enabled geospatial intelligence is essential for strengthening Nigeria's capacity to address persistent insecurity and protect national stability (Nnamani, 2021).

Prospective Usage of AI in Nigeria's Sectoral Domains

Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents significant opportunities—and attendant risks—across Nigeria's critical sectoral domains, including national security, agriculture, space, and social governance. Its overall impact will largely depend on the extent to which technological development is effectively aligned with policy frameworks, regulatory oversight, and ethical considerations. When appropriately deployed, AI can automate routine, hazardous, or data-intensive tasks, allowing human actors to concentrate on complex decision-making that requires judgement and contextual awareness. In security studies, scholars broadly agree that autonomous and semi-autonomous systems offer substantial advantages in environments characterised by risk, uncertainty, and operational fatigue (CRS, 2020).

Agriculture

Agriculture remains central to Nigeria's economy, employing approximately 70 per cent of the population and contributing significantly to food security and export earnings (Statista, 2020). Nigeria is a major global producer of commodities such as cocoa, palm oil, rice, and cassava. In response to growing food demand and climate-related pressures, the government has increasingly emphasised technology-driven agricultural transformation (Heldreth et al., 2019). AI applications—such as precision agriculture, drone-based irrigation, and sensor-enabled crop monitoring—have the potential to improve productivity, reduce input costs, enhance resilience, and integrate smallholder farmers into national and global value chains (Rotimi et al., 2022). The deployment of sensors and drones to monitor soil conditions, temperature, and humidity exemplifies how AI can support sustainable agricultural practices in Nigeria (Adekunle, 2020).

Military and Security

Despite sustained counterterrorism efforts by the Armed Forces of Nigeria and the Multinational Joint Task Force, insurgent groups continue to pose security threats, particularly in the North-East (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019). The prospective integration of AI into intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; logistics; cyber operations; command and control; and autonomous systems offers new avenues for enhancing counterinsurgency effectiveness. AI-driven intelligence systems could transform Nigeria's security architecture by improving threat detection, resource allocation, and operational coordination (Nsude, 2022). Additionally, AI can support non-kinetic operations by countering disinformation and misinformation, which are increasingly central to insurgent strategies (Meserole, 2023).

AI also holds promise in crime prevention and military safety. Predictive analytics can assist in identifying criminal patterns, while AI-enabled predictive maintenance could reduce the incidence of military aircraft accidents caused by undetected technical faults (Allen, 2017; Nsude, 2022). Unmanned systems powered by AI can operate in hazardous environments—such as chemical,

biological, radiological, or nuclear zones—thereby offering an economy-of-force advantage and reducing personnel exposure (Nsude, 2022).

Space and Satellite Security

Nigeria's investment in space science and technology reflects recognition of space-based assets as strategic enablers of national security. The establishment of the National Space Research and Development Agency (NASRDA) and the adoption of the National Space Policy created an institutional foundation for satellite development and utilisation (Godstime et al., 2014; NASRDA, 2001). Nigeria's earth observation satellites, developed in collaboration with international partners, have enhanced capabilities in surveillance, communication, and environmental monitoring. AI-enabled satellite systems are expected to improve communication between military and security outposts, particularly in remote regions with limited network coverage. Achieving this objective will require sustained investment in broadband infrastructure, including next-generation mobile and satellite connectivity (Paul et al., 2021).

Social and Digital Governance

Beyond traditional security domains, AI adoption has expanded rapidly within Nigeria's social and digital spaces. AI systems increasingly perform tasks that exceed human endurance, such as long-duration surveillance, anomaly detection, and behavioural pattern recognition (Anderson, 2017). These capabilities offer potential benefits for intelligence gathering and crime prediction through the analysis of communication metadata, financial transactions, travel patterns, and social media activity. At the same time, the growing reliance on cloud computing has enabled individuals and organisations to access large datasets and AI-driven services securely and efficiently (Mohammad et al., 2019). In sectors such as agriculture and public service delivery, the convergence of cloud computing, satellite data, and mobile technologies can significantly reduce losses and expand access to financial and information services (Peter & Felicity, 2020).

Challenges to AI Adoption in Nigeria

Despite growing enthusiasm about the potential applications of Artificial Intelligence (AI), its adoption in Nigeria faces several structural, technical, and socio-political challenges. Scholars argue that AI has the capacity to replace human labour across multiple segments of the value chain by performing tasks more quickly and, in some cases, more accurately than humans (Ukpong et al., 2019). However, the widespread deployment of AI systems also introduces significant risks, particularly the possibility of systemic failures. While human errors tend to be isolated and context-specific, failures in AI systems can occur simultaneously and consistently across platforms, potentially resulting in large-scale and catastrophic consequences (CRS, 2020). Concerns about the reliability and sustainability of AI are not new. Historical skepticism surrounding AI development led to periods commonly referred to as “AI winters,” during which governments, businesses, and researchers lost confidence in AI’s promised capabilities (Osonde & William, 2017). Notably, two major AI winters occurred between the 1970s and the mid-1990s, reflecting cycles of over-expectation followed by technological and financial disillusionment (Amirhosein et al., 2021). These historical experiences continue to shape contemporary caution toward large-scale AI adoption.

In Nigeria, infrastructural deficiencies further complicate AI deployment. Frequent software and hardware failures, coupled with weak data retrieval and system maintenance capacities, undermine confidence in automated systems and often lead to operational frustration and institutional resistance. Beyond technical constraints, socio-cultural factors also influence AI adoption. Deeply rooted ethno-regional identities, educational disparities, and economic inequalities limit the development of a cohesive national innovation ecosystem (Mustapha, 2007). Although language diversity may not directly impede AI development, intergroup mistrust and limited knowledge-sharing across ethnic and religious lines pose significant barriers to collaborative technological advancement (Reagan, 2018).

Data availability represents another critical challenge. Effective AI

systems require a large and high-quality datasets, particularly within security and defence domains. Nigeria's limited access to comprehensive and reliable datasets has hindered the integration of AI into its national security architecture (Fisk et al., 2019). Furthermore, Nigeria's security forces continue to rely predominantly on conventional weapon systems like tanks, small arms, and light weapons that do not incorporate AI capabilities. Advanced military technologies, including drones, autonomous systems, and robotics, which rely heavily on AI, remain underdeveloped within Nigeria's defence sector (Falode et al., 2021).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Artificial Intelligence is increasingly delivering tangible value, particularly through enhanced data processing, predictive analytics, and automation capabilities. It underscores the strategic importance of integrating AI into national security architectures as a means of addressing persistent insecurity in Nigeria and broader security challenges in developing regions. The analysis highlights how AI-enabled technologies like robotics, unmanned aerial vehicles, and automated surveillance systems can enhance threat detection, operational efficiency, and decision-making within the military and security institutions. At the same time, the study emphasises that AI adoption is not without significant risks and constraints, including technical vulnerabilities, socio-cultural resistance, and data limitations. Addressing these challenges through targeted investment, institutional reform, and inclusive governance frameworks is essential if Nigeria is to harness AI effectively for sustainable national security and development.

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