



**Government Defence  
Integrity Index**



**2020**



Country Brief:

**SINGAPORE**

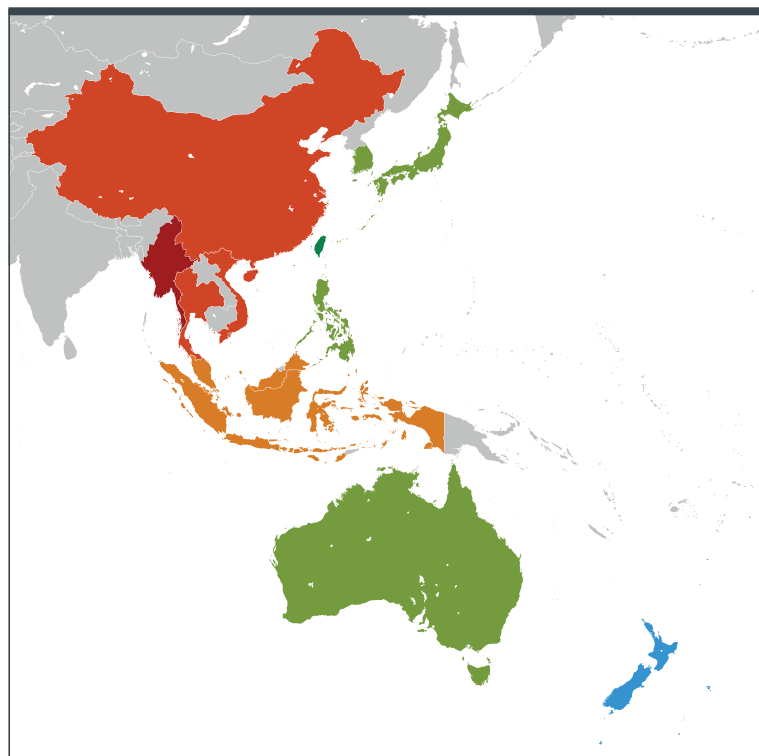


# SINGAPORE

Though smaller than London, the city-state of Singapore punches far above its weight in regional and global affairs. Its enduring political stability, sophisticated and strong economy, and strategic positioning along key shipping lanes make it a major regional player.<sup>1</sup> Singapore's trade-reliant economy makes maintaining regional stability its key foreign policy objective, making it a strong supporter of the United States' security role in Asia, whilst simultaneously cultivating close relations with China in a sometimes precarious balancing act.<sup>2</sup> Even as it develops its military engagement with the United States, Singapore has focussed on building its deterrence capabilities and combatting terrorism and piracy surrounding the Malacca Strait, arguably its greatest security concerns.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, climate change and rising sea levels are likely to pose an existential threat to low-lying Singapore, while the COVID-19 pandemic has battered the economy, leading to economic contraction of up to 7% and applying unprecedented pressure on the ruling People's Action Party, which is facing growing opposition after six decades in power and under accusations of creeping authoritarianism.<sup>4</sup> Singapore has long heavily invested in its defence and security forces, which are seen as key pillars of the country's ability to assert itself regionally. As a result, the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) are one of the most professionalised, well-equipped, and effective forces in the region and are supported by a robust and efficient defence governance architecture. Yet, institutionalised secrecy and a lack of external oversight heighten corruption risk throughout the sector. Weak parliamentary oversight, poor financial transparency, an absence of external scrutiny in procurement processes and nonexistent anti-corruption safeguards on operations undermine the steps that Singapore has taken to fighting corruption in the sector. The absence of access to information and whistleblowing legislation are further obstacles to building integrity and are emblematic of the sector's lack of transparency.

Member of Open Government Partnership	No
UN Convention Against Corruption	Ratified in 2009
Arms Trade Treaty	Has not ratified



## Asia-Pacific

The Asia-Pacific region is home to some of the biggest military and economic powers in the world, as well as critical financial and trade hubs, natural resources and around 60 per cent of the world's population, and the region has become a major area of geopolitical rivalry. The continuing deterioration of Sino-American relations is having widespread implications for countries in the region. Security challenges presented by an increasingly assertive China, the continuing threat posed by North Korea and the protracted insurgencies in Thailand, the Philippines, Myanmar, Indonesia and Malaysia will also remain key concerns moving forward, as will emerging security threats related to cyberwarfare and the impact of climate change. However, Asia-Pacific has huge variations in the quality of defence governance mechanisms, which will determine how well defence institutions can respond to these challenges. It is home to both New Zealand, the highest scorer in the index, and Myanmar, one of the lowest. Though challenges are extremely varied across the sample, corruption risks are particularly pronounced in relation to financial management and procurement, where defence exceptionalism remains pervasive and exempts the sector from standard reporting and publishing standards. Operations too are highly vulnerable to corruption, while personnel management and policymaking are considered significantly more robust.

<sup>1</sup> Ankit Panda, 'Singapore: A Small Asian Heavyweight', *Council on Foreign Relations*, 16 April 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Emma Chanlett-Avery and Ben Dolven, 'Singapore: Background and US Relations', *Congressional Research Service*, R44127, 20 July 2016, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Panda, 'Singapore'.

<sup>4</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI Country Report 2020: Singapore*, Gutersloh, Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020, p. 3.



# SINGAPORE

## Overall scores

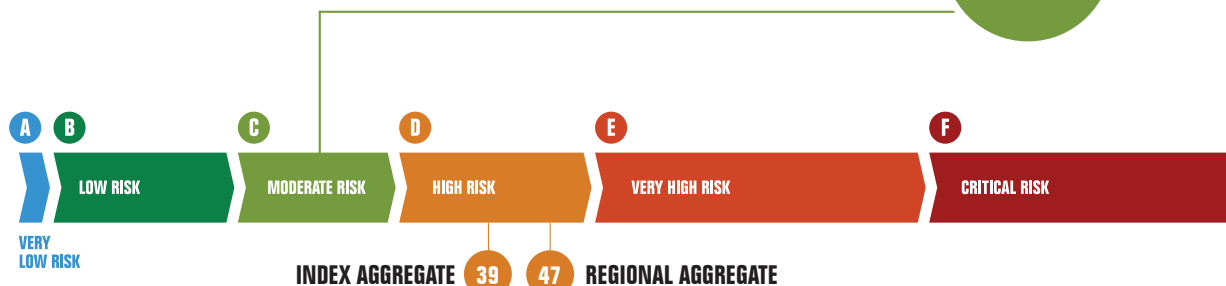
The size of the colour band corresponds to number of countries that fall into that category.

## SINGAPORE SCORE

**MODERATE  
RISK**

**C**

**56**



A > 83-100 VERY LOW

B > 67-82 LOW

C > 50-66 MODERATE

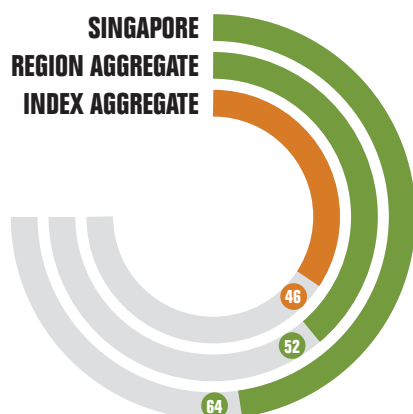
D > 33-49 HIGH

E > 17-32 VERY HIGH

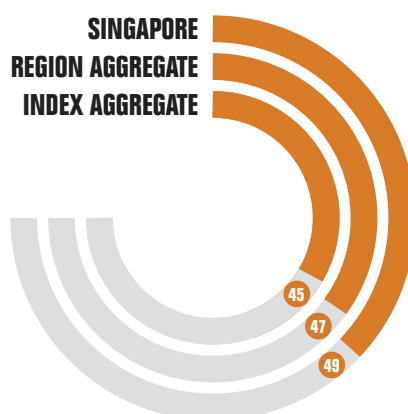
F > 0-16 CRITICAL

## Risk Comparison

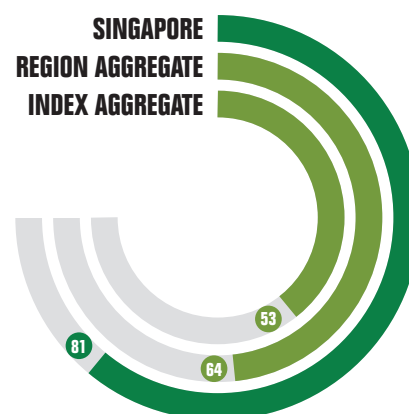
### POLITICAL



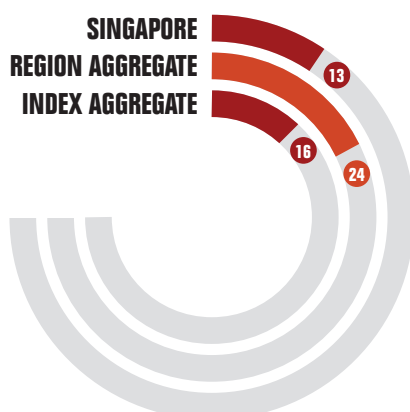
### FINANCIAL



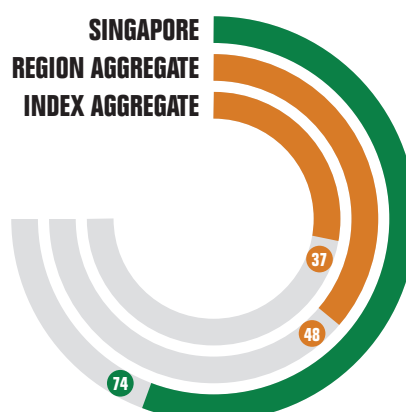
### PERSONNEL



### OPERATIONAL



### PROCUREMENT





# SINGAPORE

## Parliamentary Oversight

Legislative oversight of budget (Open Budget Survey, 2019)	Not ranked.
Military expenditure as share of government spending (SIPRI, 2020)	11.3%
Committee members with defence expertise (%)	Data is not publicly available.
# of meetings/year	Data is not publicly available.
Last review of defence policy/strategy	Data is not publicly available.

Though Singapore's constitution provides a structure for the separation of powers, the People's Action Party (PAP) has been in power since 1959, making it difficult to distinguish between government bodies and the party itself.<sup>5</sup> PAP maintains tight control over both the judiciary and the legislature, winning 83 out of 93 seats in the 2020 general election and essentially blurring the lines between legislative and executive power.<sup>6</sup> As a result, independent parliamentary oversight is virtually non-existent as the ability of the PAP-dominated legislature to monitor is heavily circumscribed and the opposition making only limited use of its ability to challenge.<sup>7</sup> With regards to the defence sector, while policy and budget debates do regularly occur, there is very little scope for opposing viewpoints to influence policy. While the legislature does compel defence institutions to provide details on activities and developments in the sector, the PAP sets the parameters of debate.<sup>8</sup> There is no formal defence oversight committee in parliament, with these functions spread between the Auditor-General, Public Accounts Committee (PAC), the Committee of Supply, and the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau. The PAC examines government and defence expenditure regularly and its findings have led to criminal investigations against military officers.<sup>9</sup> The only defence specific body is the Government Parliamentary Committee on Defence, which is a feedback committee appointed by PAP officials with an extremely limited mandate.<sup>10</sup> The Committee can file questions querying the defence minister on defence issues and visit military facilities, but it has no remit to review or amend policy, scrutinise procurement decisions, or conduct long-term investigations.<sup>11</sup> Financial oversight is provided by internal and external auditing processes for defence expenditure. The Ministry of Defence's (MINDEF) Internal Audit Department performs risk assessments throughout the year along with an annual report.<sup>12</sup> Although it does not publish its reports, there is evidence of MINDEF taking its findings into account in practice.<sup>13</sup> Internal audits are complemented by the Auditor-General's Office (AGO) annual external financial audits that are made available to parliament and there is evidence that MINDEF acknowledges and performs remedial action on irregularities found by the AGO.<sup>14</sup> However, the auditor-general is appointed by the President and reports to the executive, calling into question the independence of its assessments.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, *Singapore*, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Dylan Loh, 'Singapore Election Results Give PAP Supermajority as Rivals Rise', *Nikkei Asia*, 11 July 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, *Singapore*, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Adrian Lim, 'Parliament to Scrutinise NS Deaths, SAF Training Safety', *The Straits Times*, 9 February 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Public Accounts Committee, 'Third Report of the Public Accounts Committee', *Ministry of Communications and Information*, 1 February 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Loh, 'What Purpose do Parliamentary Committees Serve?', *Yahoo News*, 18 July 2019.

<sup>11</sup> People's Action Party, 'Government Parliamentary Committees'.

<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Defence, 'Internal Audit Department'.

<sup>13</sup> Aqil Haziq Mahmud, '70% of SAF Formations Audited, Emphasis on Safety Can be Better Communicated – Inspector-General', *Channel News Asia*, 2 March 2020.

<sup>14</sup> The Strait Times, 'MINDEF Responds to AGO's Report', 3 August 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Republic of Singapore, *Constitution of the Republic of Singapore*, Article 148F, 9 August 1965.

## Financial Transparency

Defence-related access to information response rates	(1) % granted full or partial access: Data is not publicly available. (2) # subject to backlog: Data is not publicly available.
Defence-related complaints to ombudsman/commissioner #	No such body exists.
Does the commissioner have authority over the MoD?	No such body exists.
Audit reports on defence (2018-2020) #	1 (2018); 1 (2019); 1 (2020)
Open Budget Index (IBP, 2019)	Not ranked.
World Press Freedom Index (RSF, 2021)	160th out of 180.

Government transparency is limited in Singapore, owing in part to the electoral dominance of the ruling PAP.<sup>16</sup> Information is tightly controlled and though political pluralism has increased, limits remain on freedoms of expression, assembly, and association.<sup>17</sup> In the defence sector in particular, financial transparency is curtailed by high levels of secrecy and a lack of external oversight over many aspects of defence finances. The defence budget for instance, provides a purely top-line view of projected outlay for the upcoming year. However, while providing some insight on a range of categories, 96% of the total budget spend is aggregated within an opaque grouping titled "Military Expenditure", which includes expenditure on procurement, equipment and camp maintenance, and salaries and allowances.<sup>18</sup> No further explanations are provided for this grouping and increases in its allocations are not justified either. Similarly, there is no transparency in the asset disposal process. In fact, aside from the fact that it is managed by the DTSA, there is almost no information publicly available on the process itself, the associated reporting measures, and the financial results of equipment disposal. Media enquiries on the subject have also failed to elicit accurate responses.<sup>19</sup> A key obstacle to transparency in Singapore is the absence of a Freedom of Information Act. As a result, there is no legal mechanism for media and citizens to request access to defence information. MINDEF does have a Communications Directorate to process such queries, however it has great leeway in rejecting requests or replying superficially, given how extensive the Official Secrets Act and Protection of Secrecy Act have proven to be, with even innocuous information ruled to be a state secret.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, strong controls around off-budget expenditure and military businesses help to limit financial corruption risk. Off-budget spending is prohibited by law and the entirety of military expenditure is covered by the annual budget, which Parliament is required to approve. There is no evidence to suggest that any such spending occurs in practice. Similarly, the MINDEF and SAF do not have beneficial ownership of commercial enterprises and do not derive any revenue from commercial activities. There are also strict regulations in place to prohibit personnel from engaging in unauthorised private enterprise,<sup>21</sup> including annual financial self-declarations and strong financial and judicial penalties for those found guilty.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World – Singapore', 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Reporters Without Borders, *World Press Freedom Index – Singapore*, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Government of Singapore, 'Budget 2021: Head J', pp. 63-64.

<sup>19</sup> Mike Yeo, 'Singapore Wants to Dump its Four Old Boeing Tankers', *DefenceNews*, 18 July 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Kelly Ng, 'Official Secrets Act Covers More Than Just Secret Information', *Today Online*, 14 November 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Republic of Singapore, *Singapore Armed Forces Act*, Chapter 295, Article 50, 30 December 2000.

<sup>22</sup> Shaffiq Idris Alkhatib, 'Jail for Ex-RSAP Engineer Who Cheated Government Over Contracts Worth More Than \$1.8 million', *The Straits Times*, 27 July 2018.



# SINGAPORE

## Personnel Ethics Framework

Whistleblowing legislation	None
# defence-sector whistleblower cases	Data is not publicly available.
# Code of conduct violations	Military: Data is not publicly available.
	Civilian: Data is not publicly available.
Financial disclosure system	# submitted: Data is not publicly available.
	# of violations: Data is not publicly available.

The defence sector's practices to ensure integrity and accountability in personnel management are well established and robust. There are clear codes of conduct in place for military<sup>23</sup> and civilian<sup>24</sup> personnel, which are publicly available and covered in detail during training for new personnel. Moreover, evidence suggests that breaches of the codes are investigated and pursued by both military and civilian courts, with prominent examples widely reported by the media.<sup>25</sup> Alongside this, recruitment and promotion processes are largely formalised and objective, albeit with limited transparency. At senior levels, appointments are made in accordance with job descriptions and objective, meritocratic criteria with clear academic and experience requirements.<sup>26</sup> At lower levels, promotions are decided through a formal appraisal process that considers various factors such as performance and educational credentials and are decided by promotion boards. However, for senior commanders, appointments are not subject to external oversight and are approved by the executive and the outcomes of these processes are not communicated externally. This lack of transparency is also evident in the secrecy surrounding the number of personnel working in the sector. The total figure is not made public by either MINDEF or the SAF and while some insight can be gained from parliamentary debates, there is no definitive figure.<sup>27</sup> Given the sophistication of MINDEF's operations, it is likely this figure is tracked internally, however the fact that personnel numbers are classified is indicative of the lack of transparency in the defence sector. Finally, a major impediment to building integrity within the sector is the absence of whistleblowing legislation. There is no unified protection regime in Singapore, aside from loose provisions in the Prevention of Corruption Act, although these do not appear to cover the military.<sup>28</sup> While MINDEF has established internal mechanisms to manage whistleblowing claims and the defence minister has openly stated that anonymous reporting of serious concerns is encouraged,<sup>29</sup> the lack of legal provisions for defence personnel undermines trust in the system and fear of reprisals remains high.<sup>30</sup>

## Operations

Total armed forces personnel (World Bank, 2018)	59,000
Troops deployed on operations #	Data is not publicly available.

Anti-corruption safeguards in Singapore's military operations are weak and risk critically undermining operational success. Despite recognising the effects of corruption on the military, the SAF have no specific doctrine addressing corruption as a strategic issue during deployments. The absence of an overarching doctrine has a knock-on effect at the operational planning stage. There is no evidence that corruption issues are considered in the forward planning for military operations and no evidence that commanders apply anti-corruption practices in the field. Moreover, there is no evidence of systematic training in corruption issues for commanders, other than participation in occasional seminars delivered by external parties. There is no indication that any of the anti-corruption delivered specifically addresses corruption risk during deployments. Similar observations can be made in relation to corruption monitoring during operations, which does not appear to be common practice, as there is no record of the SAF deploying personnel to monitor and report on corruption risk in the field, either during operations or on peacekeeping missions.

<sup>23</sup> Singapore Army, 'Our Army: Customs and Traditions', April 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Republic of Singapore, 'Acts Supplement', *Government Gazette*, 9 March 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Alkhatib, 'Jail for Ex-RSAF Engineer'.

<sup>26</sup> Republic of Singapore, *Armed Forces Act*, Chapter 295, Section 8(1).

<sup>27</sup> Ministry of Defence, 'Committee of Supply Debate 2020'.

<sup>28</sup> Republic of Singapore, *Prevention of Corruption Act*, Chapter 241, Section 36.

<sup>29</sup> Ministry of Defence, 'No Reprisals Against Whistleblowers', 8 March 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Terrence Lim, 'Reprisals Can Take Form of Unprovable Targeting', *The Straits Times*, 13 March 2019.





# SINGAPORE

## Defence Procurement

Military expenditure (US\$ mil) (SIPRI, 2020)	11,020
Open competition in defence procurement (%)	Data is not publicly available.
Main defence exports – to (SIPRI, 2016-20)	Oman, UAE
Main defence imports – from (SIPRI, 2016-20)	United States, Spain, France, Germany, United Kingdom

Military expenditure has long represented a substantial share of government spending and until 2020, consistently represented in excess of 20 per cent of total government spend.<sup>31</sup> Procurement accounts for a significant chunk of Singapore's overall defence spending. Despite its small size, the city-state ranked as the 17th largest importer of major arms from 2016 to 2020<sup>32</sup> and its ongoing military modernisation drive is fuelling demand for new technologies.<sup>33</sup> Whilst Singapore's procurement processes are well-established, formalised, and based on rigorous technical evaluations, poor transparency and external oversight heighten corruption risk and could undermine the quality and suitability of purchases. The entire procurement process is underpinned by legislation, including the Defence Science and Technology Agency (DTSA) Act<sup>34</sup> and the Prevention of Corruption Act<sup>35</sup>, which outline how procurement works for defence, and guard against

corruption risk in the process. Acquisition planning is based on a stringent assessment process conducted by MINDEF, the SAF and the Defence Science and Technology Agency (DTSA), based on technical studies and cost benefit analyses. Proposed purchases undergo an approval requirements process with endorsements and approvals required from various committees, alongside a segregation of duties between the approval of requirements and the verification of purchases.<sup>36</sup> Independent analysts have noted that procured equipment has been appropriate to meet the stated defence needs, underlining the effectiveness of the planning process.<sup>37</sup> The DTSA manages the tendering process via an online portal for goods exceeding S\$5,000, while opportunities above S\$80,000 must be approved by a tender board.<sup>38</sup> However, an unknown proportion of major acquisitions are single-sourced and exempt from tendering requirements, owing to the secrecy with which these purchases are made. No information is released on the contract or terms and very few details are communicated publicly, with some capabilities remaining undisclosed for years.<sup>39</sup> This secrecy is a common thread throughout the procurement process and major programmes are conducted out of the public's view, with very little visibility surrounding the procedure and tenders. Details such as supplier and product selection, along with development, programme or platform costs are generally not publicly available and procurement spend is highly aggregated in the budget under a vague subsection called 'Military Expenditure', without any further breakdown.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>31</sup> SIPRI, 'Military Expenditure as a Share of Government Spending 1988-2020', *Military Expenditure Database*.

<sup>32</sup> Pieter D. Wezeman, Alexandra Kuimova and Siemon T. Wezeman, 'Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2020', *SIPRI*, March 2021, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Samuel Chan, 'Developing Singapore's Next Generation Military', *East Asia Forum*, 2 January 2021.

<sup>34</sup> Republic of Singapore, *Defence Science and Technology Agency Act*, Chapter 75A, 31 December 2001.

<sup>35</sup> Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau, *Prevention of Corruption Act*, 17 June 1960.

<sup>36</sup> Ministry of Defence, 'MINDEF's Approach to Defence Spending and Oversight'.

<sup>37</sup> Koh Swee Lean Collin, 'Meet the Republic of Singapore Navy's New Poison Shrimp. They Even Call it "Invincible"', *Channel News Asia*, 25 February 2019; Tim Huxley, 'Defence Procurement in Southeast Asia', 5th Workshop of the Inter-Parliamentary Forum on SSG, 12-13 October 2008.

<sup>38</sup> Defence Science and Technology Agency, 'Overview of Defence Procurement'.

<sup>39</sup> Kelvin Wong, 'Singapore's New Stealth Combat Craft Breaks Cover', *Jane's Navy International*, 18 December 2018.

<sup>40</sup> Government of Singapore, 'Budget 2021: Head J – Ministry of Defence', *Budget 2021*, p. 64.

Version 1.0, October 2021

GDI data collection for **Singapore** was conducted July 2019 to November 2020. The narrative discussion in this GDI brief was produced at a later time with the most recent information available for the country, which may not be reflected in the GDI country assessments or scores.



# SINGAPORE 2020 GDI Scorecard

		Grade	Score
<b>Political Risk</b>		<b>C</b>	<b>64</b>
Q1	Legislative Scrutiny	A	83
Q2	Defence Committee	E	17
Q3	Defence Policy Debate	C	63
Q4	CSO Engagement	D	42
Q5	Conventions: UNCAC / OECD	A	100
Q6	Public Debate	C	50
Q7	Anticorruption Policy	A	88
Q8	Compliance and Ethics Units	A	92
Q9	Public Trust in Institutions	NS	
Q10	Risk Assessments	A	92
Q11	Acquisition Planning	B	67
Q12	Budget Transparency & Detail	C	50
Q13	Budget Scrutiny	D	38
Q14	Budget Availability	E	25
Q15	Defence Income	B	67
Q16	Internal Audit	A	88
Q17	External Audit	B	75
Q18	Natural Resources	A	100
Q19	Organised Crime Links	A	100
Q20	Organised Crime Policing	A	92
Q21	Intelligence Services Oversight	NEI	
Q22	Intelligence Services Recruitment	D	38
Q23	Export Controls (ATT)	D	38
Q76	Lobbying	F	0

<b>Financial Risk</b>		<b>D</b>	<b>49</b>
Q24	Asset Disposal Controls	B	67
Q25	Asset Disposal Scrutiny	C	58
Q26	Secret Spending	F	0
Q27	Legislative Access to Information	F	0
Q28	Secret Program Auditing	F	0
Q29	Off-budget Spending	A	100
Q30	Access to Information	F	0
Q31	Beneficial Ownership	A	100
Q32	Military-Owned Business Scrutiny	A	100
Q33	Unauthorised Private Enterprise	A	88
Q77	Defence Spending	E	31

<b>Personnel Risk</b>		<b>B</b>	<b>81</b>
Q34	Public Commitment to Integrity	A	100
Q35	Disciplinary Measures for Personnel	A	100
Q36	Whistleblowing	B	67
Q37	High-risk Positions	B	75
Q38	Numbers of Personnel	D	33
Q39	Pay Rates and Allowances	E	25
Q40	Payment System	A	83
Q41	Objective Appointments	C	50
Q42	Objective Promotions	B	75
Q43	Bribery to Avoid Conscription	A	100
Q44	Bribery for Preferred Postings	A	100
Q45	Chains of Command and Payment	A	100
Q46	Military Code of Conduct	A	100

## OVERALL COUNTRY SCORE

**MODERATE RISK**

**C**

**56**

### RISK GRADE

**A • 83-100 VERY LOW**

**B • 67-82 LOW**

**C • 50-66 MODERATE**

**D • 33-49 HIGH**

**E • 17-32 VERY HIGH**

**F • 0-16 CRITICAL**



<b>Personnel Risk</b>		<b>B</b>	<b>81</b>
Q47	Civilian Code of Conduct	A	100
Q48	Anticorruption Training	A	83
Q49	Corruption Prosecutions	A	92
Q50	Facilitation Payments	A	100

<b>Operational Risk</b>		<b>F</b>	<b>13</b>
Q51	Military Doctrine	F	0
Q52	Operational Training	E	25
Q53	Forward Planning	F	0
Q54	Corruption Monitoring in Operations	E	25
Q55	Controls in Contracting	NEI	
Q56	Private Military Contractors	NS	

<b>Procurement Risk</b>		<b>B</b>	<b>74</b>
Q57	Procurement Legislation	A	100
Q58	Procurement Cycle	C	58
Q59	Procurement Oversight Mechanisms	A	83
Q60	Potential Purchases Disclosed	C	63
Q61	Actual Purchases Disclosed	D	38
Q62	Business Compliance Standards	C	63
Q63	Procurement Requirements	A	100
Q64	Competition in Procurement	C	63
Q65	Tender Board Controls	B	81
Q66	Anti-Collusion Controls	C	63
Q67	Contract Award / Delivery	B	75
Q68	Complaint Mechanisms	A	100
Q69	Supplier Sanctions	A	92
Q70	Offset Contracts	A	100
Q71	Offset Contract Monitoring	NA	
Q72	Offset Competition	NA	
Q73	Agents and Intermediaries	A	88
Q74	Financing Packages	E	25
Q75	Political Pressure in Acquisitions	NS	

### KEY

**NEI** Not enough information to score indicator

**NS** Indicator is not scored for any country

**NA** Not applicable



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[GDI@transparency.org](mailto:GDI@transparency.org)

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Series editor: **Stephanie Trapnell**, *Senior Advisor*  
Author: **Matthew Steadman**, *Research Officer*  
Project Manager: **Michael Ofori-Mensah**, *Head of Research*  
Design: **Arnold and Pearn**



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