



**Government Defence
Integrity Index**



2020

Country Brief:

TUNISIA



TUNISIA

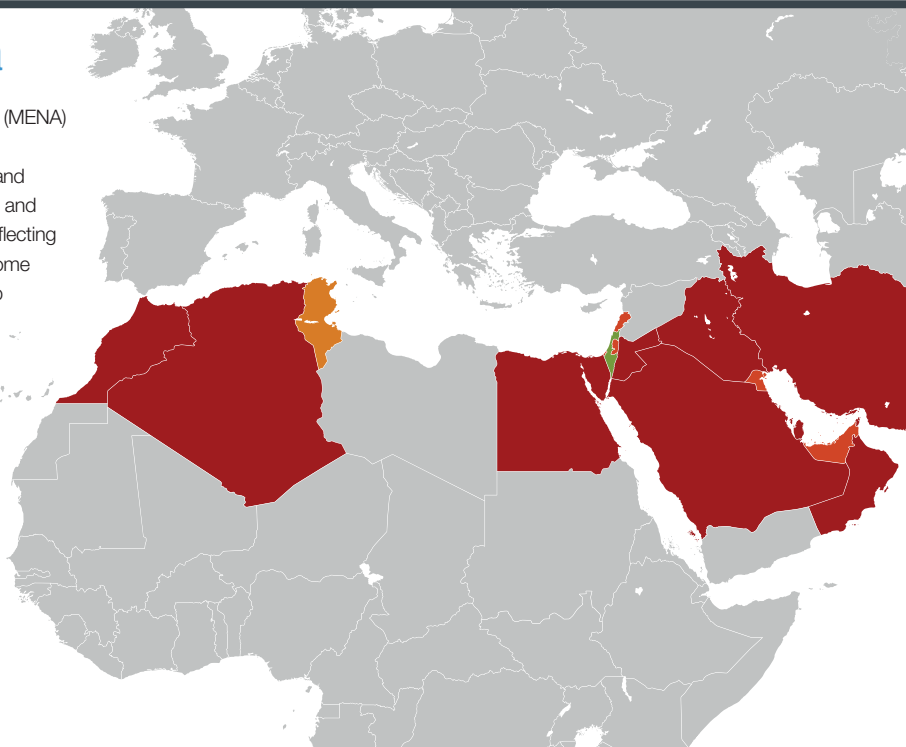
More than any other country, Tunisia has become synonymous with the Arab Spring. Often held up as the lone success story of the movement,¹ the huge wave of protests that forced out authoritarian President Ben Ali in 2011 after decades of kleptocratic rule, was the first of a wave of uprisings that toppled leaders across the Arab world.² Nevertheless, the suspension of parliament in July 2021 could pose an existential threat to Tunisia's fragile democratic gains, in what some have called a coup d'état.³ Up to this point, it should also be noted that democracy has not proved a panacea for the country's deep political, economic, and security issues.⁴ Political deadlock, a dysfunctional economy, high youth unemployment rates, and continuing institutionalised corruption are fuelling further large-scale protests and resentment at the lack of progress since the revolution.⁵

Tellingly, disillusioned Tunisians now make up the majority of boat-borne migrants to Italy and are joining jihadist groups in among the largest numbers per capita in the world.⁶ On the security front, terrorism remains a key threat, while continuing instability in neighbouring Libya exposes Tunisia to dangerous spill-over and heightens the risk of attacks on Tunisian soil.⁷ As such, a stable Tunisia is critical for security in North Africa as a whole and the authorities have invested heavily in the military, with expenditure more than doubling over the last decade.⁸ Although great progress has been made in professionalising the armed forces and bringing them under democratic control, high levels of corruption risk remain. Parliamentary oversight and auditing remain weak in practice, while budgeting and procurement are secretive and exempt from standard oversight and reporting requirements. On the other hand, access to information has improved markedly, beneficial ownership and financial transparency are relatively strong, and whistleblowing systems are operational.

Member of Open Government Partnership	Yes
UN Convention Against Corruption	Ratified in 2008.
Arms Trade Treaty	Has not signed.

Middle East & North Africa

Defence sectors across the Middle East & North Africa (MENA) region continue to face a high risk of corruption. At the same time, protracted armed conflicts in Syria, Libya, and Yemen persist, while public protests against corruption and authoritarianism continue in a number of countries – reflecting an overall context of insecurity and fragility. Although some governments have publically committed to stepping up anti-corruption efforts, there remains a gap between existing legislation and implementation in practice. Military institutions in the region are characterised by a high degree of defence exceptionalism, resulting in a lack of transparency that precludes oversight actors from effectively scrutinising defence budgets and policies at a time when defence spending and arms imports continue to surge. These concerns are further compounded by authoritarian governance systems seen in many MENA countries. Resurgent protests and uprisings in the region after the 2011 Arab Spring demonstrate that corruption is a central and persistent public grievance.



¹ Chiraz Arbi and Maurizio Geri, 'After Sparking the Arab Spring, is Tunisia Still a Success Story?', *Washington Institute*, 22 January 2021.

² Jehan Alfarra, 'Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution', *Middle-East Monitor*, 14 January 2018.

³ Bethan McKernan and Simon Speakman Cordall, 'Tunisia President Accused of Staging Coup After Suspending Parliament', *The Guardian*, 26 July 2021.

⁴ Moncef Slimi, 'Tunisians Are Disappointed, 10 Years After the Arab Spring', *Deutsche Welle*, 18 December 2020.

⁵ Simon Speakman Cordall, '"Things Are Getting Worse": Tunisia Protests Rage on as Latest Victim Named', *The Guardian*, 27 January 2021; Anelise Borges, 'Arab Spring: How Has Tunisia Changed Ten Years on from the Anti-government Uprising?', *EuroNews*, 17 December 2020.

⁶ Michael Safi, '"He Ruined Us": 10 Years On, Tunisians Curse Man Who Sparked Arab Spring', *The Guardian*, 16 December 2020.

⁷ International Crisis Group, 'Tunisia'.

⁸ SIPRI, 'Military Expenditure by Country in constant 2018 (US\$ m), 1988-2019', SIPRI 2020.



TUNISIA

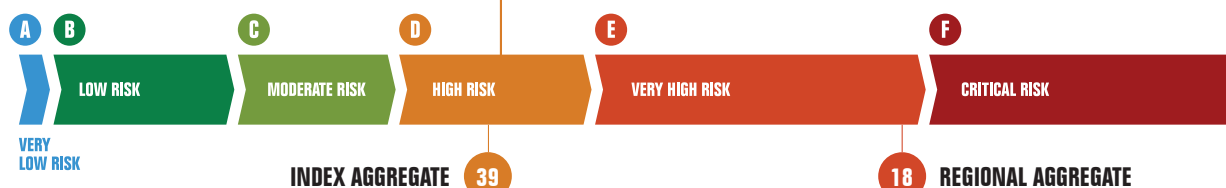
Overall scores

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

TUNISIA SCORE
HIGH RISK

D

40



A > 83-100 VERY LOW

B > 67-82 LOW

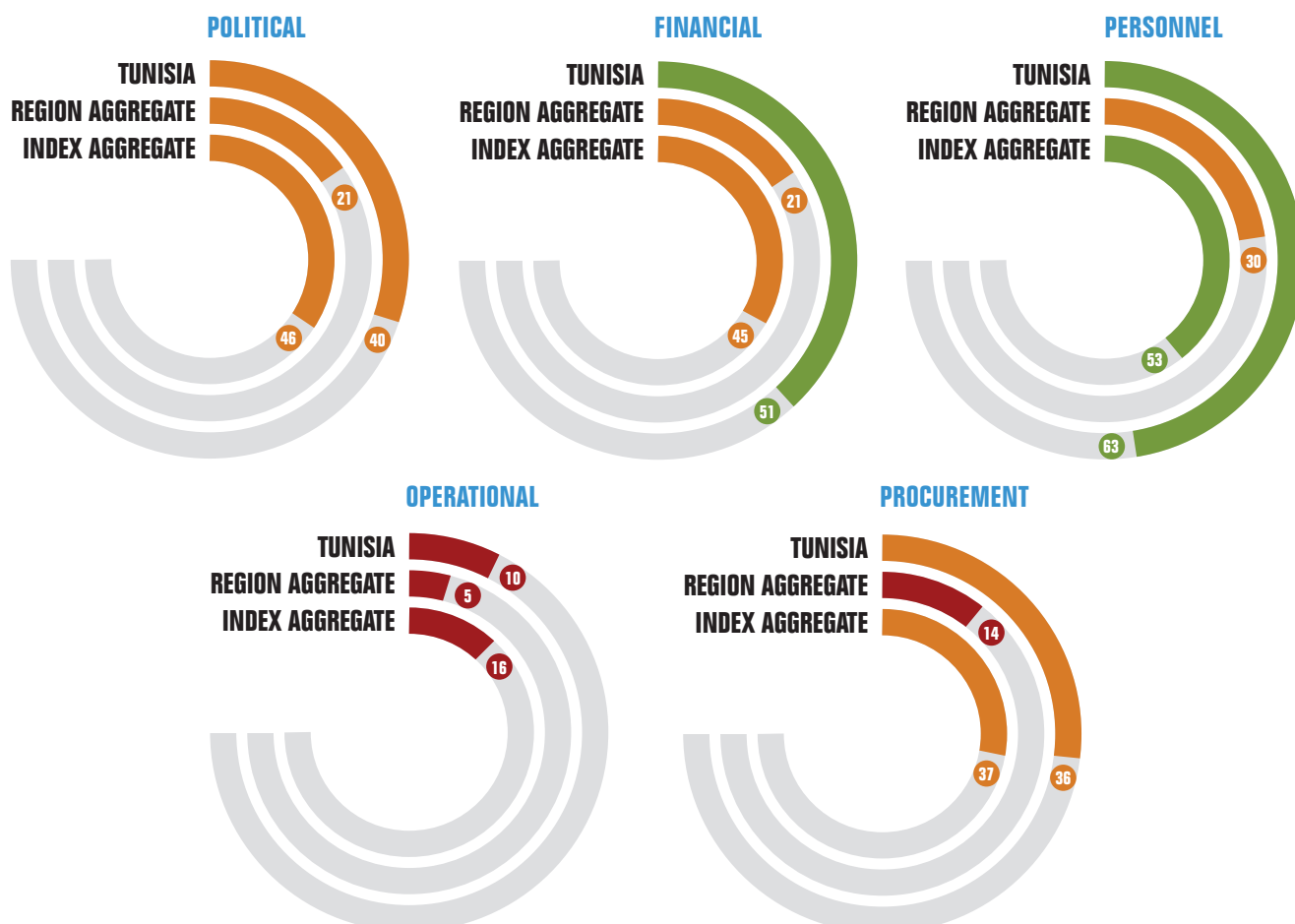
C > 50-66 MODERATE

D > 33-49 HIGH

E > 17-32 VERY HIGH

F > 0-16 CRITICAL

Risk Comparison





TUNISIA

Parliamentary Oversight

Legislative oversight of budget (Open Budget Survey, 2019)	45/100
Military expenditure as a share of government spending (SIPRI, 2020)	8.8%
Committee members with defence expertise (%)	Data is not publicly available.
# of meetings/year	Data is not publicly available.
Last review of defence policy/strategy	The strategy is not publicly available.

Tunisia's post-revolution political institutions operate as part of a complex power-sharing system designed to provide strong checks on presidential power.⁹ However, successive Presidents have sought increasingly to consolidate power, including on defence and security issues,¹⁰ and the limits of parliament's powers were laid bare when it was suspended in July 2021. Parliament's influence over defence has thus been limited in the face of its lack of political power and resources, despite having two committees dedicated to defence, one standing and one special committee, which should theoretically provide for significant oversight. The special committee on defence, which monitors and oversees government activity, has strong formal powers.¹¹ However, a lack of expertise amongst members undermines their ability to fully utilise these powers¹² and a review of activity reports shows it fails to review major defence policies and decisions.¹³ Similarly, despite formal powers to analyse the draft defence budget, no record of such discussions could be found and no reports were produced on budgetary matters, indicating very weak budgetary oversight. Instead, the committee mainly discusses issues, questions ministers, and issues general recommendations, without investigating specific issues or engaging in responsive policymaking. Similar weaknesses undermine relatively strong formal auditing practices. Internal auditing by the Inspector General and General Directorate of Financial Affairs is regular and staff have received capacity-building training in recent years. However, the legislature receives only limited information and audits overwhelmingly focus on administrative and financial aspects, rather than performance assessments. The Court of Audit ensures external auditing, alongside government General Control bodies, although the Court of Audit is the only one to publish reports. Regardless, Ministry of Defence expenditure is not included in its scope of work for security reasons and the Audit body has little authority to challenge this.¹⁴

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 #	Data is not publicly available.
Does the commissioner have authority over the MoD?	Yes
Audit reports on defence (2015-2020) #	None
Open Budget Index (IBP, 2019)	35/100
World Press Freedom Index (RSF, 2021)	73rd out of 180.

After the secrecy and highly centralised nature of decision-making under Ben Ali, recent years have seen marked improvements in government transparency, including the passing of a new freedom of information law and legislation requiring officials to declare financial assets.¹⁵ This progress is also reflected in transparency standards related to the defence sector's finances, which are far superior to Tunisia's neighbours. Defence institutions do not have beneficial ownership of commercial businesses that generate income on a large-scale. No evidence of off-budget expenditure could be found, and the law explicitly prohibits this practice, with the entirety of the expenses of the Ministry of Defence provided by the state budget. There is also no evidence of unauthorised private enterprises and legislation in this area is robust and enforced.¹⁶ As a result, the published state budget provides an accurate figure for the total resources dedicated to defence, reducing the risk of unregistered and unauthorised spending. However, the defence budget itself is not fully detailed and for certain sensitive areas, such as military acquisitions and operational costs, only top-line figures are provided. Though a budget explanation is provided, it is designed for an expert audience; there is no summary for non-experts, reducing budget legibility for the public. Furthermore, though access to information has been strengthened by the 2016 Organic Law, which establishes information rights and appeals processes,¹⁷ its applicability to defence institutions remains questionable. The Ministry of Defence has broad powers to refuse requests on loosely defined 'national security' grounds and the law has been criticised by civil rights groups for its security-related exemptions.¹⁸

⁹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI Country Report 2020 – Tunisia, Gutersloh, Bertelsmann Stiftung, p. 11.

¹⁰ Fadil Aliriza, 'Old Political Habits in Tunisia', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 16 June 2015.

¹¹ Republic of Tunisia, 'Rules of Procedures of the Assembly of People's Representatives', Article 73.

¹² Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of the Armed Forces (DCAF), 'La Commission de la Sécurité et de la Défense de l'Assemblée des Représentants du Peuple', Annexe to the activity report of the Defence and Security Committee, November 2017, p. 87.

¹³ See for instance, Defence and Security Committee, 'Activity Report of the Defence and Security Committee', 2016-2017.

¹⁴ Republic of Tunisia, 'Association des Cadres de Contrôle, d'inspection et d'audit dans les Structures Publiques Tunisiennes'.

¹⁵ Ahmed Nadhif, 'New Transparency Law Enters Into Force in Tunisia', *Al-Monitor*, 26 October 2018.

¹⁶ Republic of Tunisia, 'Law No. 67-20 on General Status of the Military', 31 May 1967.

¹⁷ Republic of Tunisia, 'Organic Law No. 2016-22 on the Right to Access Information', 24 March 2016.

¹⁸ Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World - Tunisia', 2020, C3.



TUNISIA

Personnel Ethics Framework

Whistleblowing legislation	Law on the Denunciation of Corruption and Protection of Whistleblowers (2017)
# defence-sector whistleblower cases	22 (2017)
# Code of conduct violations	Military: Data is not publicly available. Civilian: Data is not publicly available.
Financial disclosure system*	# submitted: Data is not currently available. # of violations: Data is not currently available.

*Website not functioning at time of research (April 2021).

The professionalization of the Tunisian Armed Forces has been noted by many Tunisian and foreign observers,¹⁹ while the creation of the Anti-Corruption Commission (INLUCC) and its working relationship with the Ministry of Defence are positive signs for anti-corruption efforts in the sector.²⁰ Accordingly, the military's personnel management frameworks are relatively robust and provide a positive basis for integrity-building measures. Military and civilian personnel are subject to relatively strong, albeit somewhat vague, codes of conduct.²¹ The military code is available to all units, while the civilian one is publicly available, and breaches are usually investigated, although more so in relation to serious violations. Generally speaking, corruption cases are investigated and prosecuted through formal processes, after being transmitted to the INLUCC by the Ministry of Defence.²² Furthermore, Tunisia has whistleblowing legislation, granting protection of identity, protection against retribution, and waiver of liability.²³ The Anti-Corruption Authority has been heavily involved in promoting the practice and encouraging whistleblowers to come forward, although defence authorities have so far not actively encouraged it, despite complying with the legislation. Although some whistleblowers have come forward, there remains fear of repercussions amongst personnel, especially when reports involve senior officers. Despite progress in other areas, recruitment and promotion processes remain susceptible to corruption. Formal processes are in place,²⁴ but there is still no parliamentary scrutiny of the appointment of senior military personnel. In fact, there is no evidence of any form of external scrutiny, with the decision resting solely with the office of the President, increasing the risk of political factors influencing such appointments. Equally, promotion criteria for officers are extremely vague, and despite formal promotion boards being in place, the lack of objective criteria heighten the risk of non-performance related factors influencing such decisions.

Operations

Total armed forces personnel (World Bank, 2018)	47,800
Troops deployed on operations #	75 in Mali (MINUSMA)

With troops deployed as part of the United Nations stabilisation mission in Mali²⁵ and on counter-terror operations along the Libyan border, Tunisia's military has been building up its operational capabilities and experience.²⁶ However, given Tunisia's important role in regional security and peacekeeping, significant corruption risks pervade its governance of military operations. The military does not have a doctrine that addresses corruption as a strategic issue for operations. Accordingly, corruption is not included in the forward planning of military operations, nor does it receive resources at the strategic level. Though some anti-corruption training has been held, it is largely delivered by international partners,²⁷ is not systematic, and is overwhelmingly attended by personnel from the headquarters based in Tunis with few attendees drawn from rural units. Moreover, the military has no policy of monitoring and evaluating corruption risk in the field and personnel receive no guidelines on how to identify and address corruption-related issues while on deployments.

¹⁹ Wehrey, 'Tunisia's Wake-up Call.'

²⁰ National Anti-Corruption Authority, 'Signature of a Convention Between the Ministry of Defence and the Anticorruption Authority,' 17 September 2018.

²¹ For civilian personnel, 'Code of Conduct for Public Officials,' approved by the decree dated 3 October 2014.

²² National Anti-Corruption Authority, *Annual Report 2018*, Tunis, 2019.

²³ Republic of Tunisia, 'Organic Law no. 10-2017 related to the Denunciation of Corruption and Protection of Whistleblowers', 7 March 2017.

²⁴ As laid out in 'Decree no. 72-830 on Particular Status of Military', 6 December 1972; 'Law no. 67-20, on the General Status of the Military', 31 May 1967.

²⁵ United Nations Peacekeeping, 'Country Contributions by Mission and Personnel Type', February 2021.

²⁶ Wehrey, 'Tunisia's Wake-up Call.'

²⁷ See for instance, DCAF 'Le DCAF Aborde les Questions de la Bonne Gouvernance du Secteur de la Défense et de la Communication de Crise à l'École Supérieure de Guerre (ESG)', 23 June 2018.



TUNISIA

Defence Procurement

Military expenditure (US\$ mil) (SIPRI, 2020)	1,046
Open competition in defence procurement (%)	Data is not publicly available.
Main defence exports – to (SIPRI, 2016-20)	N/A
Main defence imports – from (SIPRI, 2016-20)	United States, Netherlands, Turkey, France, Germany

After decades of neglect under Ben Ali, the Tunisian Armed Forces transformation from a neglected and outdated operation, into a leaner, more agile and responsive outfit has been remarkable.²⁸ Though not without its issues, successful military modernisation has been propelled by the threat from Libya and military cooperation with international partners, most notably the United States.²⁹ A key pillar of the modernisation has been the procurement of new weapons, equipment and technologies, however, lingering opacity throughout the procurement cycle heightens corruption vulnerabilities and risks contributing to the loss of public funds. Though large defence purchases are usually made public, this is by no means systematic, and the authorities often exclude additional details related to contracting terms and bidders. Equally, notification of planned purchases is infrequent and individual purchases are not linked to explicit

strategic objectives, leading to uncertainty around how such decisions are made. Alongside this, efforts to enhance transparency and oversight in the contracting process have had only mixed results. Existing legislation governing purchases of military equipment is vague, especially when pertaining to the acquisition of sensitive equipment. Legislation provides for a special committee to oversee the acquisition of sensitive items, although the committee is highly politicised as it is chaired by the Defence Minister.³⁰ Moreover, its reports are overly vague and exclude significant information, such as justifications, details on the process, and monitoring and evaluation of contract fulfilment. The military appears to be exempt from a procurement initiative aimed at institutionalising open contracting for all government ministries through an online e-procurement platform (TUNEPS). The Ministry of Defence has not yet made use of this platform, benefitting from a vaguely-worded article in the public procurement law allowing for military procurement to be single-sourced for security reasons.

²⁸ Frederic Wehrey, 'Tunisia's Wake-up Call: How Security Challenges from Libya are Shaping Defense Reforms', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 18 March 2020.

²⁹ Alexis Arieff, 'Tunisia: In Brief', *Congressional Research Service*, RS21666, 10 March 2020, pp. 10-13.

³⁰ 'Decree n° 88-36, Special Procedure of Control of Expenditure of the Ministries of Defence and Interior and Structures in Charge of Prisons and Re-education Depending from Ministry of Justice,' 12 January 1988.

Version 1.0, October 2021

GDI data collection for **Tunisia** was conducted July 2018 to September 2019. 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.



TUNISIA 2020 GDI Scorecard

Grade Score

Political Risk		D	40
Q1	Legislative Scrutiny	C	50
Q2	Defence Committee	E	30
Q3	Defence Policy Debate	E	31
Q4	CSO Engagement	E	25
Q5	Conventions: UNCAC / OECD	B	75
Q6	Public Debate	D	38
Q7	Anticorruption Policy	B	75
Q8	Compliance and Ethics Units	C	50
Q9	Public Trust in Institutions	NS	
Q10	Risk Assessments	F	0
Q11	Acquisition Planning	D	42
Q12	Budget Transparency & Detail	C	63
Q13	Budget Scrutiny	C	63
Q14	Budget Availability	C	50
Q15	Defence Income	D	42
Q16	Internal Audit	D	33
Q17	External Audit	E	25
Q18	Natural Resources	A	92
Q19	Organised Crime Links	A	100
Q20	Organised Crime Policing	E	25
Q21	Intelligence Services Oversight	F	0
Q22	Intelligence Services Recruitment	E	17
Q23	Export Controls (ATT)	F	0
Q76	Lobbying	F	0

Financial Risk		C	51
Q24	Asset Disposal Controls	E	17
Q25	Asset Disposal Scrutiny	B	67
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	B	75
Q31	Beneficial Ownership	A	100
Q32	Military-Owned Business Scrutiny	A	100
Q33	Unauthorised Private Enterprise	A	100
Q77	Defence Spending	F	0

Personnel Risk		C	63
Q34	Public Commitment to Integrity	C	50
Q35	Disciplinary Measures for Personnel	A	88
Q36	Whistleblowing	C	50
Q37	High-risk Positions	F	0
Q38	Numbers of Personnel	D	42
Q39	Pay Rates and Allowances	A	100
Q40	Payment System	B	75
Q41	Objective Appointments	E	25
Q42	Objective Promotions	B	69
Q43	Bribery to Avoid Conscription	A	83
Q44	Bribery for Preferred Postings	A	100
Q45	Chains of Command and Payment	A	100
Q46	Military Code of Conduct	C	50

OVERALL COUNTRY SCORE

HIGH RISK



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



Grade Score

Personnel Risk		C	63
Q47	Civilian Code of Conduct	D	44
Q48	Anticorruption Training	C	50
Q49	Corruption Prosecutions	B	67
Q50	Facilitation Payments	A	83

Operational Risk		F	10
Q51	Military Doctrine	F	0
Q52	Operational Training	C	50
Q53	Forward Planning	F	0
Q54	Corruption Monitoring in Operations	F	0
Q55	Controls in Contracting	F	0
Q56	Private Military Contractors	NS	

Procurement Risk		D	36
Q57	Procurement Legislation	A	100
Q58	Procurement Cycle	D	33
Q59	Procurement Oversight Mechanisms	D	42
Q60	Potential Purchases Disclosed	F	13
Q61	Actual Purchases Disclosed	F	13
Q62	Business Compliance Standards	C	63
Q63	Procurement Requirements	D	33
Q64	Competition in Procurement	F	13
Q65	Tender Board Controls	D	38
Q66	Anti-Collusion Controls	E	25
Q67	Contract Award / Delivery	D	44
Q68	Complaint Mechanisms	C	58
Q69	Supplier Sanctions	B	75
Q70	Offset Contracts	F	0
Q71	Offset Contract Monitoring	F	0
Q72	Offset Competition	F	0
Q73	Agents and Intermediaries	A	100
Q74	Financing Packages	F	0
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

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands for their generous financial support of the production of the Government Defence Integrity Index. Thanks are also extended to the many country assessors and peer reviewers who contributed the underlying data for this index.

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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