

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A ROBUST MILITARY INDUSTRIAL BASE IN NIGERIA

Worldwide, economic and military developments are central to evaluating a nation's strength. Countries with stable economies are deemed developed, while those with unstable economies are classified as developing. A key indicator of development is military strength, which is crucial for economic growth and societal improvement. Military strength of a nation is dependent on its military technological development. Military technology, integrated with private defence industries, forms the Military Industrial Complex (MIC), which strengthens defence, creates jobs, and boosts economic growth. Nations like China, Japan, and South Korea have become economic leaders through technological development. Countries such as Taiwan, Israel, South Africa, and Egypt have adopted MICs to foster industrialization and sustain national economic development.

On the domestic scene, to be self-reliant, we must build capacity to develop our own technology and equipment. This will completely bridge the gap of dictatorship from and over-dependency on foreign nations. When we build capacity to manufacture our own equipment and integrate other technologies, we can design solutions that will meet specific requirements of the end user and also provide satisfactory understanding for easy maintenance and upgrade of the systems. In view of this, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) has tried to address the problems by establishing core industries with aim of developing robust military industrial bases. These include; the Ajaokuta Steel Complex, Defence Industrial Cooperation of Nigeria (DICON) and Special Vehicle Plant (SVP).

These industries are essential not only for the development of a diversified capital goods industry but also for defence production. Ironically, the country is yet to develop its Robust Military Industrial Base. Hence, she is still heavily dependent on importation to meet most of her military equipment requirement. The implications of this could severely disrupt her economic and technological development thereby undermining her National Security objectives. It is against this background that this lecture seeks to discuss the role of public and private sectors in the development of a strong military industrial base in Nigeria as a crucial tool for ensuring national security, self-reliance, and economic development.

AIM

The aim of this presentation is to highlight the role of public and private sectors in the development of a robust military industrial base in Nigeria with a view to making recommendations

PUBLIC SECTOR'S ROLE

The government represents the public sector and plays a fundamental role in the establishment and support of a strong military-industrial complex. The major responsibilities placed on the shoulder of government are formulating tailored policies, regulation, standardisation, marketing, funding and strategic oversight functions.

The following are key roles of the public sector:

1. Policy Formulation, Regulation and Direction

The first responsibility of the government is creating a conducive environment through policies and regulations that guide defence production, procurement, industrial activities and collaboration with in-country and international partners. These policies will crystallise the framework upon which local production will be ensured in alignment with national security interests.

2. Defence Budget Allocation and Funding

A significant role of the public sector is the allocation of funds for the development of defence infrastructure, research and development (R&D) and the acquisition of necessary equipment. The government's defence budget provides the financial backbone for military projects and ensures stable funding for local defence industries such as the Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON).

3. Intentional Investment in Joint Research and Development (R&D)

The role of research and development is to operate many years ahead of an existing trend in matters of technology and innovations. Nigeria is not bereft of ideas and the human resources required for these tasks. Governments, all over the world, through their defence ministries, invest heavily in R&D programs to spur technological innovation in defence and security. There is no need re-inventing the wheel. R&D can adopt different approach through backward integration, reverse engineering or otherwise.

In the current year running – 2024, the United States is the leading country worldwide in terms of spending on research and development with R&D expenditure exceeding USD760 billion purchasing power parity. China also invested about 620 billion U.S. dollars into R&D.

A typical unit that can coordinate a national defence research drive is the DRDB. The Defence Research and Development Bureau (DRDB) can foster innovation by coordinating massive collaborations with private organisations and universities to stimulate the development of advanced weaponry, military vehicles and surveillance systems.

4. Regulatory Oversight and Quality Assurance

Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON), as it were should assume the role of Regulation, Standardisation, Marketing and Oversight functions just like in other climes of the world. There is no need for DICON to compete with other Defence Related Industry (DRIs) players. The essence of this is to make sure that defence productions are of high quality and of international standard. This will stimulate expansion and exportation of defence products, firstly across Africa and then, the rest of the world.

Nigeria must realise it's political, economic and defence status in Africa. Africa is waiting for Nigeria. The public sector plays a critical role in setting standards and regulations to ensure that military products and services meet in-country minimum standard and need. It also provides oversight to ensure transparency, accountability and compliance within the defence industry.

5. Strategic Partnerships and Diplomacy

Nigeria's participation in defence agreements with other countries enables the acquisition of defence equipment and technological expertise that can be transferred to local industries. The government engages in international defence collaborations and alliances through diplomatic channels, creating opportunities for Nigeria's military-industrial complex to access advanced technologies and training. Naturally, this approach will encourage technology transfer, joint ventures and access to international markets. These partnerships help local industries grow by leveraging foreign expertise and capital.

6. Security and Intelligence Support:

The government provides critical intelligence and security infrastructure needed to protect defence companies and their operations. This is essential for ensuring that sensitive defence information is safeguarded from external threats and cyber espionage.

7. Government Procurement and Demand Creation:

As the primary consumer of defence products, the Nigerian government drives demand for military hardware, software and services. The establishment of clear procurement policies allows private companies to access government contracts and thrive. This also speaks to initiatives from the government to give tasks to DRIs for the production of tailored solutions within a period of time. This will enhance productivity and innovations.

PRIVATE SECTOR'S ROLE

The private sector plays a complementary role by leveraging innovation, entrepreneurship, and operational efficiency to accelerate the growth of Nigeria's military-industrial complex. The following outlines key areas where the private sector contributes:

1. Manufacturing and Production Capacity

Private companies can enhance Nigeria's defence production capabilities by engaging in the manufacturing of military hardware, such as armoured vehicles, firearms, drones, and surveillance technologies. Firms like Proforce Limited have been critical in advancing the local production of military vehicles and equipment, reducing reliance on foreign imports.

2. Innovation and Technological Advancement

The private sector brings agility and innovative approaches to defence-related R&D. Private firms often have access to cutting-edge technologies and are more capable of rapidly developing and commercializing new defence solutions. By integrating technologies such as advanced manufacturing processes, artificial intelligence (AI), cybersecurity and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), private companies can boost the military's operational capabilities.

Private enterprises can invest in specialized research and development, often more efficiently than public institutions. This allows for the rapid development of niche products that meet specific military needs.

By fostering competition, the private sector contributes to increased innovation, reducing dependency on foreign suppliers and enhancing Nigeria's self-sufficiency in defence production. Collaboration between private companies and academic institutions can also

drive innovation in defence technologies, creating new opportunities for research and product development.

3. Skills Development and Capacity Building

The private sector can help address the skills gap in the defence industry by providing specialized training, apprenticeship programs, and workforce development initiatives. This collaboration is crucial for creating a workforce that is adept at handling complex defence technologies and engineering challenges.

The private sector's inherent flexibility allows it to react quickly to changing military needs, technological advancements and global defence trends. This complements the often slower-moving public sector and ensures timely solutions to national security challenges.

4. Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) can be instrumental in bridging the gap between government resources and private sector innovation. Through PPPs, the government can outsource certain defence manufacturing or R&D projects to private companies, creating a synergy that benefits both parties. For example, government contracts can be awarded to private firms to design and manufacture defence equipment while adhering to government regulations and standards.

5. Export Market Development

The private sector can play a role in promoting Nigeria's defence products in international markets. By expanding their reach into export markets, private defence companies can contribute to foreign exchange earnings and elevate Nigeria's profile as a global player in defence manufacturing.

The private sector can enhance Nigeria's global competitiveness by producing military equipment not only for domestic consumption but also for export. Nigerian companies that succeed in exporting defence products improve the country's international standing.

6. Technology Transfer and Local Content Development

The private sector can drive local content development by fostering technology transfer through joint ventures with foreign defence contractors. This not only strengthens local manufacturing capacity but also accelerates the development of indigenous technologies suited to Nigeria's unique defence needs.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS

The successful development of Nigeria's military-industrial complex hinges on the collaboration between the public and private sectors. Key areas of collaboration include:

1. Joint Ventures and Strategic Alliances

By fostering joint ventures between government-owned enterprises like DICON and private defence firms, both sectors can share expertise, capital and resources to enhance Nigeria's defence capabilities. These partnerships can also involve international players, leading to technology transfer and industrial growth.

The public and private sectors must collaborate on research and development to combine government oversight with private sector efficiency and innovation. Shared R&D initiatives can result in more effective and timely development of defence products.

Both sectors should work together in developing specialized training programs for the workforce. By ensuring access to cutting-edge training and technology, Nigeria can develop a pool of skilled personnel essential to the growth of the defence industry.

2. Defence Contracting

The government can allocate defence contracts to private companies to fulfill specific defence needs. This approach allows the private sector to take on the manufacturing of defence equipment and support services, freeing up government resources for other strategic initiatives.

3. Innovation Clusters and Defence Ecosystems

The government can create defence innovation hubs where private companies, research institutions, and government agencies collaborate on R&D initiatives. These clusters can act as breeding grounds for cutting-edge defence technologies.

4. Financing and Investment

The government can incentivize private sector participation in defence by offering tax breaks, subsidies or access to government funds for defence-related projects. Conversely, the private sector can attract investment for large-scale defence projects through venture capital and private equity funding.

Government policies should incentivize local production by requiring a certain percentage of local content in defence contracts. This will push private companies to contribute more significantly to the military industrial complex.

Challenges:

- **Limited Private Investment:**
The defence industry often requires significant upfront investment, which may deter private companies from entering the market without clear government incentives.
- **Bureaucracy and Regulatory Barriers:**
Excessive bureaucracy in government processes can hinder the ability of private companies to access government contracts or form partnerships.
- **Security Concerns and Technology Transfer Restrictions:**
International technology transfers and partnerships may be restricted due to national security concerns, which can limit the growth of domestic industries.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Full implementation of the DICON ACT which will give DICON a supervisory role over the Defence and Related Industries
2. Joint R&D efforts among the academia, armed forces and DRIs
3. Establishment of a national defence agenda that will accommodate the efforts of the DRIs and the Academia
4. Massive drive for indigenisation of specific military hardware

CONCLUSION

The development of a robust military-industrial base in Nigeria requires a balanced partnership between the public and private sectors. The public sector sets the strategic direction, provides funding, and ensures regulatory oversight, while the private sector brings innovation, manufacturing expertise, and operational efficiency.

Collaboration between these sectors, through PPPs, joint ventures, and strategic alliances, is essential to achieving a self-reliant defence industry that can meet Nigeria's security needs and contribute to its economic growth.

By building a strong, innovative, and resilient defence sector, Nigeria can reduce dependence on foreign military imports, enhance national security and create opportunities for technological advancement and economic development.