NIGERIAN AIRFORCE STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY IN THE FOURTH REPUBLIC, 2019-2023

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ABSTRACT
This study examines the strategic development and capacity of Nigerian Airforce (NAF) in the Fourth Republic, with particular focus from 2015 to 2023. In recent years, the nation has had to contend with threats from armed banditry, kidnapping, separatist armed organizations, and other forms of criminality in addition to terrorism in the Northeast. This situation has preoccupied the national security forces, including the Airforce which has carried out several operations to address these threats. Whereas extant literature on the Nigerian Airforce has documented the history and assessed the challenges of the force, this paper contributes to the literature by examining the trajectory of the force, in terms of strategic development and capacity, during President Buhari's administration (2015-2023) which was characterized by humongous spending on the security sector amid alarming insecurity. The paper adopted the documentary design. Data was collected from secondary sources and analyzed using the descriptive method. Findings showed that there had been monumental progress during the period under study as government effectively supported the NAF by acquiring more platforms and supervising innovation and advancement in virtually every area of the service. A strategic approach to acquisition and reactivation had allowed the NAF to accrue a substantial number of aircraft and platforms in multiple fleets, quite unmatched in previous years.

Introduction

It is undeniable that Nigeria has experienced significant unrest throughout its existence as a country, particularly in recent years. Over the past ten years, the nation has had to contend with threats from armed banditry, kidnapping, separatist armed organizations, and other forms of criminality in addition to the threat of terrorism in the North East. Throughout all of these times, the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) and other security agencies have diligently demonstrated determination to maintain the nation's sovereignty and indivisibility.A parliamentary Act in 1964 created the Nigerian Air Force (NAF), which represents the country's air division. It "exists to deter, and if deterrence fails defend the country against external and physical attack," (Dokubo in Bassey and Dokubo, 2011: 342). The NAF's cornerstone is an offensive response to counter-air operations, despite its defensive orientation. To live up to billing, therefore, it needs the necessary and sufficient troops and firepower.

Since a democracy's political leadership is responsible for overseeing its armed forces, the way it does so will undoubtedly determine the armed forces' capabilities and effectiveness. One of the most difficult and unsolvable area of public policy in Nigeria since the Civil War is the establishment of a professional defense establishment capable of meeting the challenges posed by the changing parameters of our security environment, as stated by Bassey in Bassey&Dokubo (2011:147). With its turbulent past, the NAF has seen several political figures attempt in various ways to advance and modernize it.

Several studies have been carried out in relation to the Nigerian Airforce. For instance, Yahaya (2018) appraised NAF's effective employment of airpower in asymmetric warfare operations. Blossom (2008) examined Nigerian Airforce's history, organization and roles. Omeni (2022) labouriously analyzed how the tumultuous politics of the 1960s in Nigeria, ethnicism and Army influence, shaped the formative years of the NAF. This paper in adding to extant literature primarily looks at the NAF's capabilities and strategic development in the years of President Muhammadu Buhari-led administration, 2015-2023. A brief conceptual explanation of capacity and strategic development comes first, then the evolution and development of NAF. This will be followed by NAF's situation prior to 2015, and a discussion on the strategic development and capability of the NAF under President Buhari, before the paper concludes.

Conceptual Explication

i. Strategic development

Before discussing strategic development as a whole, it is important to clarify that "development" refers to something's gradual formation or growth, whereas "strategic" implies relating to the most salient, overall aspects of something, such as a public policy, especially when it is thought through beforehand (Collins dictionary, 2022). Many authors have developed and analyzed the idea in different ways. It is, for example, "a process that organizations use to analyze their internal and external environments to determine the resources and actions they require to stay competitive and successful," according to Indeed Editorial Team (2022). It is a procedure used by an organization to decide how resources will be distributed to maximize the impact from its workforce in order to achieve its predefined goals (The Cascade team, 2022). Throughout this research, "strategic development" will refer to the considerable efforts the NAF has made to stay productive and competitive.

ii. Capacity

According to UNDP (2002), capacity is defined as "the ability to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve objectives." It is primarily constructed by strengthening organizational structures, improving procedures, and upgrading skill sets (Berg, 1993). In order to improve people's competency and problem-solving skills, capacity development involves optimizing people's and institutions' capacities, abilities, and performance in a sustainable way (The World Bank Group, 2003). In this study, "enhancement of capacity" refers to improving NAF's performance and capacities in order to meet its predetermined goals and objectives.

Evolution and development of NAF

The Nigerian Air Force is the air component of the country's armed forces. It takes pride in having one of Africa's most sizable and well-known air forces at the moment. In retrospect, after Nigeria participated in peacekeeping operations in the Congo and Tanganyika (now Tanzania), the idea of establishing an air force was first put forth in 1961 since the Nigerian Army Regiment was transported to and from the

operations by aircraft of foreign air forces (NAF, 2022). It appears that the Nigerian government realized at the time how critical it was to establish an air force that would strengthen the nation's military posture by actively supporting contemporary infrastructure and serving as a full complement to other armed services.In 1962, the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) was given the nod to be formed and cadet recruitment began in the same year. Eventually, as pointed out by Nigerian Finder (2020) the NAF was formally created by a statutory Act of parliament (Air Force Act of 1964) to realize four core objectives as follows:

- To achieve a full complement of the military defence system of the Federal Republic of Nigeria both in the air and on the ground.
- To ensure a fast-versatile mobility of the Armed Forces.
- To provide close support for the ground-based and sea borne forces in all phases of operations and to ensure the territorial integrity of a united Nigeria.
- To give the country the deserved prestige that is invaluable in international matters (NAF, 2022).

The Nigeria Air Force is ideally a defence-oriented force and in that regard not a strategic but a tactical air force. Its roles include the following:

a. **Air defence:** This is achieved by maintaining superiority over the air space of Nigeria through combat air patrol, point defence and interception.

b. **Counter air operations**: This is performed through retaliatory or preventive attacks against targets and installations of the adversary.

c. **Interdiction**: This is targeted against hostile forces and battlefield supply activities.

d. **Close air support**: This is carried out through concentrated air attacks against hostile forces within the Forward End of Battle Area as requested by friendly forces.

e. **Air Transport**: This gives tactical mobility for equipment and troops. It encompasses medical evacuation, movement of dignitaries, search and rescue and air combat support.

f. **Maritime operations**: This entails aerial patrol of our maritime territory for information gathering and security purposes.

g. **Air Recce**: This has to do with aerial reconnaissance mission embarked on for air intelligence gathering (Dokubo in Adams, Edet&Itam, 2021:307).

Originally, the NAF was a transport unit. The government was in talks with many friendly nations over the possibility of training Nigerian Air Force personnel in a range of specialized areas in an effort to meet the Force's manpower requirements. In 1962, the first group of cadets was enrolled to start training with the Ethiopian Air Force. While the second batch of sixteen cadets enlisted in 1963 to train with the Royal Canadian Air Force, six of them were sent to serve in the Indian Air Force. In 1963, the German Air Force was selected to provide technical support for the training of NAF troops locally, despite other countries being contacted. The German Air Force Assistance Group's admirable plans were prematurely tested by the eruption of the Nigerian civil war, just three years after it was engaged, when the NAF was still in its infancy as a fighting force. To effectively carry out the war in close cooperation with sister Services, the newly formed Air Force took on the mantle of an existing Air Force. There were not many aircraft in the NAF at this time. The war ended sooner partly because of the procurement of fighter aircraft such as the MIG 15 and 17.

After the Nigerian Civil War ended in 1970, 'the Air Force remained for a long time underdeveloped in relation to the two other Services' (Dokubo, 2008). It was necessary to reorganize NAF and modernize its equipment. NAF (2022) states that in an attempt to bolster itself, the NAF purchased further advanced aircraft types between 1981 and 1990. The purchase of new armament platforms led to the requirement for troops to receive training in the operation and maintenance of new aircraft types. The NAF rearranged the training components for all NAF trade specialities as a result. In response to the NAF's expansion over time and the requirement to execute all

international laws and treaties relating to space operations in Nigerian airspace, the Federal Government issued Decree 105 (Armed Forces Amendment Decree) on August 23, 1994.The expanded tasks included:

- Enforcing and assisting in coordinating the enforcement of international law, conventions, practices and customs ascribed and acceded to by Nigeria relating to aerial or space activities in the Nigerian airspace.
- Coordinating and enforcing all national and international air laws acceded or ascribed to by Nigeria and
- De-lineating, demarcating and coordinating all aerial surveys and security zones of the Nigerian airspace (NAF, 2022).

The Nigerian Air Force Headquarters, which formulates policy, is composed of ten staff branches. Aircraft engineering, logistics, communications and information systems, administration, standards and evaluations, air secretary, accounts and budgets, training and operations, and medical services are among them. Every Staff Branch is supervised by a Branch Chief who answers directly to the Chief of Air Staff. The Branch Chiefs have the backing of several directors and staff members. The Chief of Air Staff's office includes the Nigerian Air Force Procurement and Plans, Finance & Account, and the Coordinator Project Implementation and Monitoring Team (NAF, 2022).

According to Dawson (2017), the Policy and Plans Branch of the NAF develops, creates, and carries out its strategic policies and plans. In order to enable the prompt, accurate, and efficient employment of air power as instructed by the Chief of Air Staff to fulfill NAF mission, the Branch also creates long-term plans and policies in close collaboration with other air staff branches and commands. The Training and Operations Branch is in charge of the NAF's daily operating policies and directives. The branch is also responsible for managing all flight crew and ground training. The Logistics and Communications Staff Branch, on the other hand, is in charge of the NAF's policies on the provisioning, acquisition, and upkeep of all infrastructure and equipment. The NAF's Aircraft Engineering Branch is in charge of all matters pertaining to the design, manufacture, and maintenance of aircraft and armaments. The Administration Staff Branch is the focal point of most NAF personnel and administrative matters. It also guarantees that the NAF is run in accordance with operational policy's rules and specifications. The Standards and Evaluation Staff Branch is also responsible for promoting full-time investigation into certain areas of the Service and supervising the proper maintenance of standards in the NAF, with the goal of minimizing waste of human and material resources. The Air Secretary Branch is responsible for developing hiring, career management, and maintaining a balanced force structure for the NAF (NAF, 2022).

Undoubtedly, the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) has grown throughout time into one of the continent's most formidable and renowned professional air forces. It has actively protected Nigeria's interests, values, people, and resources from dangers both domestic and foreign. The nation has seen remarkable success in the battle against insurgency, armed robbery, kidnapping, and other criminal organizations because of the utilization of NAF's platforms. Recently, members of Boko Haram and ISWAP, along with a few of their commanders and families, surrendered to the brave soldiers of the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN) in the northeast. Many terrorists and armed bandits have also been eliminated as a result of the air component and surface forces' combined superior firepower and reliable airstrikes during joint operations, especially in the North West and North Central in recent years.

Pre Buhari-Era: focus on Goodluck Jonathan's government

Notably, the political administration of Goodluck Jonathan was uneasy due to the threat of terrorism in northern Nigeria, which was being led by the Islamist group, Boko Haram. The terrorist organization Boko Haram operated in both big and small cities in the northeast of the nation. To curb the rebels' ongoing activities, a variety of tactics were employed, one of which called for the provision of adequate funding for the purchase of military hardware and supplies. Then there was a sharp increase in the funds for the Ministries of Interior and Defense. Auge (2015) claims that throughout his tenure as leader, expenditures totaled approximately 4.62 trillion naira, or almost 20.7 billion euros. But, actual results didn't start to look promising until a few months before his term ended, in February 2015. Until then, there was no chance of winning because of a number of factors, including a lack

of fighting spirit among the soldiers and a lack of equipment.

Millions of dollars that were meant to go to security instead ended up in the wallets of army generals, president's allies, and other government officials, shocking everyone. This was carried out at the price of the wellbeing of military troops and the deterioration of battlefield equipment. Renowned military leaders embezzled funds from public coffers to fund their lavish lifestyles, driven by greed and a desire to amass fortune through any means necessary. Millions of money were found when the homes and accounts of the military leaders were seized.

According to Ladan-Bakin's (2016) documentation, the NAF lost a great number of its young and skilled pilots when the shoddy aircraft that the senior air force commanders had purchased began to crash because they were simply not suited for flight. Additional revelations included the discovery that money meant for the acquisition of armaments, military hardware, and the welfare of the men and women serving in the armed forces had found its way into private accounts. These funds were transferred from the account of Colonel Sambo Dasuki (rtd), the then National Security Adviser (NSA), following the EFCC's investigation and subsequent arrests. Col. Sambo Dasuki [Rtd], the office of the National Security Adviser [NSA], was given $2.1 billion to buy military hardware to combat Boko Haram's operations in the country. It appears that the funds were allocated to purchase arms and ammunition for Nigerian forces engaged in combating the insurgency in the country's unrest-plagued northeastern states.

After President Goodluck Jonathan was defeated in the 2015 presidential election, President Muhammadu Buhari took office and immediately supported an investigation of the funds allotted for military acquisition and defense spending during the previous administration.The problem first surfaced in November 2015 when President Buhari appointed a committee tasked with auditing armaments procurement since 2007 released its report detailing mismanagement and widespread fraud in the general operations of the military coordinated by the former National Security Adviser (NSA), Colonel Sambo Dasuki (Rtd). The committee's report revealed widespread fraud and mismanagement in the military's general operations. According to the report, of the 513 contracts that the Office of the NSA awarded, 53—worth an estimated $2.1 billion—were delivered without any supporting documentation. These contracts included the procurement of bombs, ammunition, and 12 helicopters, among other items. The assessment states that at the time the exercise was carried out, the purchase was not essential. The audit also established that the air force had maintained Mi-24 V/35P helicopters, C-130H aircraft, and Alpha Jets for about $75 million between September 2009 and May 2015. Widespread fraud and other irregularities in the defense procurement process were also discovered. It was found that around $22 million had been allocated for unfulfilled contracts (Ladan-Bakin, 2016).

This was achieved by skillfully using the Boko Haram crisis to disguise the request for funding for the purchase of weapons. However, the true objective was to convince the Nigerian Senate to approve the funds after deceiving the then-president Goodluck Jonathan with false information, and then to distribute the billions of dollars among a small group of people. News of Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor's plane, the then-leader of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), and everyone on board being imprisoned in South Africa when it was discovered they were in possession of $9 million, had once leaked around Nigeria (Ladan-Bakin, 2016). Nigerians were told when the story initially broke that the money would be used to buy weapons to combat the threat that Boko Haram presented.

Following President Buhari's inauguration on May 29, 2015, the anti-corruption agencies promptly launched an investigation, concentrating on the suspects on the watch list of the most corrupt Nigerians, whose detention was carried out. According to investigations, the NSA office—which was more of an advisory than an operational office—was complicit in the overstatement of invoices related to the acquisition of reconditioned military aircraft that were misrepresented as being brand-new. Sadly, admirable young pilots lost their lives when the planes began to crash one after another.

This explains why there were no noticeable outcomes from military efforts against terrorists, as in the northeast, for example, terrorists controlled up to four local government areas.

Strategic development and capacity of NAF under Buhari-led administration (2015-2023)

When Buhari became Nigeria's president in 2015, the country was experiencing extreme levels of insecurity, particularly in the northeast, which was creating havoc and causing significant damage to people's lives and property. The majority of Nigerians believed that the military's response, particularly that of the NAF, fell well short of their expectations. Before President Muhammadu Buhari's administration took office in 2015, the Airman (2021) observed that the NAF was in a terrible state of disrepair due to neglect, with the bulk of its platforms grounded or in need of repair. Buhari "promised to equip and re-professionalize our armed forces to perform their constitutional responsibilities more effectively," (Usigbe, 2020).

During Buhari's tenure, the NAF had seen considerable improvements. In keeping with his promise to arm and equip the NAF and the entire AFN in order to combat terrorism, insurgency, armed banditry, and other threats, the government showed unprecedented efforts and support for the NAF by obtaining additional platforms.The Chief of Air Staff (CAS), Air Marshal OladayoAmao even pointed out that"asides former President Shagari, President Buhari is the President who has bought the most platforms for the Nigerian Air Force," (The Cable, 2023). In response, the NAF had become more driven than ever to ensure that the country regained peace and stability by collaborating with other security organizations. The NAF's acquisition and reactivation policy resulted in a substantial rise in the number of aircraft it possessed across multiple fleets. According to the latest recent count, the NAF had acquired more than 40 brand-new aircraft since 2015. Ten Super Mushshak trainers, thirteen rotary-wing combat platforms, three multirole fighter/ground attack aircraft, two Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) unmanned aerial vehicles, and six A-29 Super Tucano light attack aircraft are among these aircraft. Six A-29 Super Tucano planes and six more unmanned aerial vehicles were purchased in 2021. The Service flew over 41,500 hours in combat and combat support roles during operations across the country thanks to the use of these aircraft. This is on top of the about 9,500 hours flown between August 2015 and August 2021 on non-traditional tasks such as support to Civil Authority and duties pertaining to international security (The Airman, 2022).In order to establish a safe and secure environment, the President had been highly supportive and had given the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN), especially the NAF, top priority.

Apart from the noticeable rise in the NAF's aircraft acquisitions throughout the period, there has been a complete transformation in terms of fleet modernization, acquisition, and reactivation. The NAF can better train its pilots and address a number of security issues thanks to the new aircraft. One of the most recent additions to the list is the A-29 Super Tucano aircraft, which was inducted into the NAF Order of Battle. By September 2021, the NAF's serviceability status of operable aircraft had increased from approximately 35% (35%) in 2015 to approximately 72% (72%) as a result of purchases, reactivations, and the establishment of a robust logistical support organization.

Additionally, the NAF was able to revive a significant number of previously grounded aircraft due to the government's dedication and unrelenting commitment. It's the best time ever for the NAF to buy and reactivate aircraft. Even more rewarding is the increased firepower these new platforms have provided to NAF operations, which have improved the force against criminal elements disrupting the peace and tranquility of Nigerians, including armed bandits, terrorists, and insurgents. It is therefore an understatement to say that the President's unusual leadership style has given the NAF more clout, enabling it to continue serving as a key enabler and decision-maker in the nation's ongoing fight against insurgency and other types of criminality. Several operating theaters across the country are currently using these platforms. The installation of these platforms has brought some sanity and normalcy to regions in the North- East and North- West that were previously devastated by terrorists and bandits. As a result, thousands of terrorists affiliated with Boko Haram and their families had handed themselves in to security services.

In 2021, NAF hired 40 additional pilots, including Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) and fixed and rotary wing aircraft pilots, to augment the Service's manpower capacity. The overall number of pilots trained over the past six years is now 173, with 155 more student pilots enrolled in flight training programs at various training facilities both nationally and abroad. Furthermore, the NAF has about 2,500 people enrolled in different training programs covering a variety of professions and occupations both domestically and outside. Along with increasing air transport commitments to internal security

operations like Operations HADIN KAI in the North East, HADARIN DAJI in the North West, DELTA SAFE in the South, WHIRL STROKE in the North Central, THUNDER STRIKE in the Kaduna-Abuja Road, and SAFE HAVEN in Jos and parts of Kaduna, the Service has also increased air interdiction, close air support, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) (The Airman, 2022).

Additional support equipment, such as ISR sensors, specialized weapons, and vehicles, were bought to aid in the implementation of the NAF Strategic Plan. The Service also improved human capacities necessary for the effective operation of the equipment and platforms. According to The Airman (2022), there had been a 33 percent improvement in aircraft serviceability in the last six years as a result of the corresponding rise in technical skills. Overall, the enhanced capabilities have allowed the Service to win significant tactical wins against terrorists and bandits, which is consistent with the NAF's strategic objective.

HQ NAF staff branches and Commands remain functionally organized, notwithstanding the reorganization of certain directorates and the availability of resources like the Imagery Analysis and Intelligence Fusion Centre. In addition, a brand-new Office of the Ombudsman had been set up to carry out an impartial and independent assessment of the way NAF employees' service complaints—particularly those pertaining to issues of gender—have been addressed. Additionally, the Air Warfare Center is being revived and tasked with creating and evaluating employment concepts and doctrine (The Airman, 2022).

Before 2015, the NAF's force organization consisted of just 4 Commands and 8 Headquarters Staff Branches. However, the Service fundamentally reorganized itself in order to pursue the implementation of the National Defense Policy and NAF Plan in order to successfully address internal security issues in Nigeria and to address broader national defense objectives, as mandated by the Buhari administration. In order to improve and diversify the activities of the Service, several specialist units, three Staff Branches, and two new Commands had been established in the previous few years. These strategic adjustments have left the NAF with 109 Units, 6 Commands, and 11 Staff Branches in its current force organization.

The NAF notes that the current level of funding for the force is still far below the requirement to maintain a balanced force capable of carrying out its roles effectively, but it has acknowledged that the Buhari-led government had made a conscious effort to increase budgetary allocations, which is quite remarkable compared to previous governments. In the last six years, the extra allocation of funds has allowed for the purchase of forty-three aircraft and the revival of twenty platforms that had been inactive. In order to enhance operational effectiveness, more platforms are required for the appropriate implementation of government and service policies.

Under Buhari's leadership, the NAF had persisted in retraining and training personnel across all specializations both domestically and abroad. Since February 2021, the NAF has actually flown 63 new pilots who have successfully completed a range of domestic and international pilot training programmes. Along the same line, a great deal of officers, airmen, and airwomen are finishing their training in other countries, such as South Africa, India, Belgium, Egypt, and Pakistan. Furthermore, hundreds of employees in various professions are receiving local training in spite of severe financial limitations. In a similar vein, by increasing training and equipment, the NAF has significantly enhanced the operational capabilities of its Regiment and SF. There have also been significant capacity increases in the fields of education, administration, information and communication technology (ICT), aviation engineering and technical education, and medical professional training.

The NAF has stepped up its recruitment drive in an effort to address the many problems with the country's internal security. Over the course of the preceding year, the Service graduated 2,530 more recruits from the Military Training Centre in Kaduna. In an additional effort to enhance military welfare for effective and efficient service delivery, the NAF sent ten Senior Non-Commissioned Officers, ranking Air Warrant Officer and Master Warrant Officer, to the United Kingdom for a special four-part international pre-retirement training. The annual range classification exercise was recently brought back by the NAF to all of its units around the country in an attempt to raise its soldiers' proficiency with weapons, professionalism, and marksmanship.

The Aircraft Engineering Branch has worked hard under Buhari's leadership to secure many foreign training places for NAF engineers. After completing the training, the aviation maintenance staff's proficiency grew, improving the NAF platforms' aircraft serviceability status. According to Airman (2022), in-house maintenance and training on aircraft batteries at 107 Air Maritime Group, training for aircraft engineers on PT-6A engine rigging for King Air 350 aircraft in the United States, training for five NAF aircraft engineers on DO-228 aircraft engine rigging in Germany, and the establishment of a "Train the Trainer Course" for thirteen engineers at the Nigerian College of Aviation Technology, Zaria, were among the trainings undertaken by the Branch. Other accomplishments include running the Master Technician Course at Flight Safety International in Wichita, USA, training with Ukrainian Technical Team in Advance Maintenance on the Mi-35P Helicopter at 115 Special Operations Group in Port Huron, conducting the Avionics Components Repair Course at Central Avionics Overhaul and Calibration Centre, and running the NAF Type-rating Course training of 453 aircraft engineering personnel on 13 aircraft types in the NAF.

Furthermore, as The Airman(2022) points out, major advancements in the upkeep of platform and equipment reliability were also made possible by creative maintenance approaches and logistics support systems. ATR 42 Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) (NAF 930) was successfully brought back into service after an air accident damaged its engine, propeller, and flaps. Another was the C-130H aircraft (NAF 918) that had 55% of its in-country Periodic Depot Maintenance (PDM) completed, 3 x L39 ZA at Aerovodochody Czech that had 95% of its overhaul/avionics upgrade completed, and the ongoing PDM of ATR. Other examples include maintaining the NAF fleet's average daily aircraft serviceability at 75 and successfully repairing the King Air 350i (NAF 202) and CH-3A RPA (NAF 104) aircraft, as well as assembling two Wing Loong II Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles at the 109 Combat Reconnaissance Group, Yola. The NAF platforms were certainly better equipped to support and maintain counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations—including those that were part of Operations HadarinDajji, Thunder Strike, Hadin Kai, and Gama Aiki, among others—thanks to these initiatives.

The NAF had prioritized meeting the health and well-being needs of its employees and their dependents while President Buhari was in office. This is because the NAF understands that people are its most significant resource and that keeping a healthy workforce is essential for combat readiness. In the light of the COVID19 pandemic, which had significantly caused a reduction in the amount of time that patients and doctors spent in person, the NAF leadership took into consideration the potential of Information Communication Technology and established a NAF Telemedicine portal in an effort to reduce the significant amount of foreign exchange spent on medical tourism. The site, the first of its kind created by the Armed Forces of Nigeria, removes barriers to healthcare provided by distance, enabling everyone to obtain affordable and efficient medical treatment without having to see a doctor in person. The West African College of Physicians granted permission to the NAF to operate a family medicine residency training program at the 661 NAF Hospital in Ikeja. This remarkable achievement took place eighteen years after the Hospital was granted authorization by the Nigerian Medical and Dental Council to train house officers. The Hospital became the first and only in the NAF to be accredited for postgraduate medical professional training.

Furthermore, the first successful minimally invasive procedure, or laparoscopic surgery, at the 063 NAF Hospital in Abuja was performed on a 54-year-old patient who had gall bladder stones. The National Board for Technical Education authorized the commencement of the National Diploma in Nursing Training program at the NAF College of Nursing Sciences (NAFCONS), Kaduna. Consequently, candidates for admission to NAFCONS may now be eligible to enroll in ND General Nursing by passing the JAMB-administered University Matriculation Examination. The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 15189:2012 awarded the 661 NAF Hospital Laboratory inIkeja a certificate of accreditation in recognition of their excellent service delivery and quality management systems (The Airman, 2022).

In reaction to the distinct coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, the NAF flew several government officials, apparatus, and medical supplies. The Service also ensured that its liquefied oxygen (LOX) factory was running twenty-four hours a day to sustain uninterrupted production and supply to Isolation Centers across the country. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and other donor partners like Team Europe, the German Government, United Nations Development Programme &Deutsche

GesellschaftFurInternationaleZusammenarbeit (GIZ)supplied around 4000 kilograms of COVID-19 medical relief supplies in 2021, which were airlifted by the NAF. The emergency supplies were airlifted from NnamdiAzikiwe International Airport to the 14 member countries of ECOWAS.

The NAF has made significant investments in research and development over the past year in order to build previously unheard-of capabilities to address both ongoing and potential future security concerns and to improve its operational viability. These efforts had been made possible by increased funding made available by the Buhari administration. These breakthroughs were enabled by the Air Force Research and Development Center. Among the R&D innovations documented were the production and deployment of 30.1mm rocket to 271 NAF Detachment, Birnin-Gwari for operational use, the refurbishment of unserviceable rocket launchers and BMGs backloaded from operations, and the test- firing of locally produced 18-tube rocket launchers for A-jet aircraft. Other modifications include putting an electrical firing system on a Geisha 23mm pintle mount, converting a PUS 38DM into an intervalometer, rearranging electrical flanges on a DEFA gun that are incompatible, and mounting a 6-tube 68mm SNEB rocket launcher on an Agusta 109 Power Helicopter to boost firepower (The Airman, 2022).

Improvements were also made to the Tsaigumi UAV's generating system installation, the C130H nose radome repair, and the PGM prototype fabrication. Furthermore, during this period, the Tsaigumi engine exhaust system modification, flight testing, the modification of the Tsaigumi UAV wing, the 2,000 MATRA 155 rocket launcher heat shields, the blank shooting adaptor for the CAK 103 rifle, and the prototype 57mm C-5 rocket were all being worked on (The Airman, 2022). Without a doubt, these developments have enhanced NAF operations and significantly decreased the organization's over-reliance on external sources, allowing the nation to save money on foreign exchange.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the NAF had advanced and upgraded significantly during Buhari's administration. Buhari's government showed enormous commitment to acquire platforms and other necessary equipment for the NAF. With a record forty platforms acquired since 2015 and counting, the NAF is now much more confident than ever to take on terrorists and outlaws head-on. The NAF has been more proactive than ever under the Buhari government, even though there is still much to be done to bring about the desired peace, security, and stability in the nation.

Conclusion

This paper examined NAF strategic development and capacity during President Muhammadu Buhari's government, which lasted from 2015 to 2023. This period had seen a major improvement in the NAF's fortunes, which is a stark contrast to the previous situation where most of the funds intended for the purchase of brand-new platforms and other logistics were wantonly diverted. In keeping with its promise to arm and equip the NAF and the entire AFN to combat terrorism, insurgency, armed banditry, and other threats, the government had shown its support for the NAF by acquiring more platforms and supervising innovation and advancement in nearly every area of the service. A strategic approach to acquisition and reactivation had allowed the NAF to acquire a substantial number of aircraft in multiple fleets. In response, the NAF showed greater resolve and commitment towards ensuring that the country regains peace and stability while collaborating with other security organizations.

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