

## **PAKISTAN'S DEFENCE INDUSTRY: AN EMERGING PLAYER**

Few countries in the world possess as much economic potential as Pakistan does. Be it natural resources, a young population with an above average intellect, Pakistan has a great chance to achieve economic prosperity and development in a short period of time if these resources are used wisely and intelligently. Although our economic development has not been up to the mark since 1990s, with the advent of new technologies and rapidly changing geo-political environment, new opportunities are on the horizon which if given proper attention can be easily exploited. As a result of changing times, some areas have shown serious future potential; and among them is the Pakistan's defense industry, which can become a leading player in the international market. In the geo-politics of cold war at the time of its creation, Pakistan preferred to be a partner of the U.S. led capitalist bloc at the expense of its alternative option i.e., communism. However, the U.S. and Western arming of India in 1962 Sino-Indian war, economic and military embargos imposed after 1965, 1971 and Soviet Afghan wars led to formation of an idea based on two points. Number one; China will be a far more reliable and trustworthy partner as compared to West. Number two; Pakistan has to achieve self-sufficiency in defense production if it wants to effectively mitigate the Indian threat from the Eastern border. As a result, Pakistan has now reached a level that according to the statement of the then Vice of Chief of Staff of Indian army (Lt. Gen. Sharath Chand) on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2017, Pakistan's defense industry has overtaken Indian defense industry by quite a margin. With a foe like India having six times more defense budget as compared to Pakistan, this by no means a small achievement. Pakistan's defense exports stood at a meagre \$60 million in 2014, but these figures rose \$210 million in 2019, indicating an increase of more than three times in five years. According to estimates, these numbers can rise to \$1 billion in the next five to seven years. Although Pakistan is now making strides in arms exports, it has been largely able to achieve the primary objective of what was required; self-sufficiency for the armed forces so that no foreign power uses Pakistan's dependency on it to compromise its national security and military capabilities. With current pace and some extra initiatives, Pakistan can almost achieve complete indigenization of weapons and can also become a major weapons exporter. For any person aware with the military and defense matters, the air force is the premier and the most important arm of the armed forces, particularly in the context of currently evolving warfare. Pakistan, since 1960s, has a very strong air force with an outstanding record against its adversaries (Indian, Soviet and Communist Afghan Air Forces). With Pakistan's main strength being its air power, Pakistan Air Force (PAF) was hit hardest by military embargos, particularly by Pressler's amendment after Soviet Afghan war. As a result, PAF has been in the forefront for achieving the aim of reducing its dependance on foreign powers. With Chinese help, it managed to make now combat proven JF-17 Thunder and now, PAF has embarked on Project Azm, with the aim of making stealth 5<sup>th</sup> Generation Aircraft and advanced combat drones. Apart from this, Pakistan is now self-sufficient as far as training jets, surveillance drones and low technology combat drones are concerned. JF-17 Thunder has been a huge success story, as it turned out to be a low cost but effective replacement of its cold war era fighter jets. By 2022, PAF's 50% air fleet will be composed of indigenously manufactured JF-17 Thunder fighter jets. Along with Pakistan Airforce (PAF), Pakistan Army's journey towards achieving self-sufficiency is also commendable. Pakistan Army's

weapons are supplied by Pakistan Ordnance Factory (POF) and Heavy Industries Taxila (HIT), with the former responsible for the production and supply of small arms and the latter responsible for supply and maintenance of heavy armor i.e., tanks, artillery, Armed Personal Carriers (APCs) etc. While POF has been predominantly supplying small arms to Pakistan Army since 1960s, the progress of Heavy Industries Taxila (HIT) deserves a huge round of applause. With modest achievements till 1980s, HIT started to show progress in 1990s, when it started the production of the internationally recognized Al-Khalid Tank with Chinese assistance. Initially copied from a Chinese tank, HIT has been successful in integrating the requirements of Pakistan Army with the initial version. Despite budgetary constraints, Pakistan Army now possesses 600+ Al Khalid Tanks manufactured by HIT. HIT has also managed to produce 500 Al Zarrar tanks without any foreign assistance. It has also been successful in the manufacturing and supply of Armed Personal Carriers (APCs) through joint ventures with private sector.

As compared to Army and Air Force, Pakistan Navy's journey towards achieving indigenization a bit late (in early 2000s as compared to 1990s of Pakistan Air Force and Army). However, this has not impeded the progress of Pakistan Navy in these aspects as compared to the other two services. Pakistan Navy possess a decent number of locally manufactured combat ships (produced with French and Turkish assistance) and submarines. According to the statement of the then Pakistan Naval Chief Admiral Zafar Mahmood Abbasi on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2020, Pakistan Navy is investing the production of high technology combat drones, which will be a huge boost to its capabilities as compared to its adversary, India. The progress of Pakistan's defense industry is commendable in the past few years. It is quite clear that Pakistan has now progressed beyond its humble origins of small arms production to a producer of major weapons which are imperative in today's warfare. However, the growth of private sector in this industry has almost been nil, with all the progress is being made by the armed forces. The major driver of growth and job production in any industry is the private sector; and if the private industry is given incentives and proper opportunities, then our defense production will increase many folds and this will result in the creation of thousands of new jobs as well as self-sufficiency. With a strong collaboration of government sector with private sector, tax breaks and laxing of restrictions for private companies as well as encouraging and incentivizing cottage weapons production (e.g., gun makers in Darra Adam Khel etc.), Pakistan's defense industry can easily compete with the Western countries.