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## Challenging Pax Americana: The Commercial Imperative in Chinese Arms Exports to Africa - A Case Study of Uganda and Kenya

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# CHINA★AFRICA RESEARCH INITIATIVE

## Challenging Pax Americana: The Commercial Imperative in Chinese Arms Exports to Africa - A Case Study of Uganda and Kenya

Elijah N. Munyi

**NO. 41 | SEPTEMBER 2020:**

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# ABSTRACT

**SAIS-CARI WORKING PAPER  
NO. 41 | SEPTEMBER 2020:**

“Challenging Pax  
Americana: The  
Commercial Imperative  
in Chinese Arms Exports  
to Africa - A Case Study of  
Uganda and Kenya”

*by* Elijah N. Munyi

Why are African states shifting their military procurement from traditional suppliers (the West and Russia) in preference of Chinese arms? This article seeks to use Kenya and Uganda as case studies to explore their military procurement priorities and to examine whether or not the growing preference for Chinese arms will affect their relations with the US. The research finds that, although these countries view US military hardware as the gold standard, the higher costs associated with comparable US hardware and the protracted and sometimes intrusive US oversight processes make Chinese arms more attractive. In addition, diversification of military suppliers is regarded as strategically important to avoid dependency. Based on this research it would appear that US and China’s military competition in Africa remains only rhetorical thus far.

## INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, Chinese sales of its defense equipment to African states has made significant gains. According to the *Military Balance 2018*, an annual report produced by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 68 percent of African countries now use Chinese made military equipment.<sup>1</sup> Since 2005, at least ten African states, referred to as “emergent customers” —Angola, Algeria, Cape Verde, Chad, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, and Uganda—have become new customers of Chinese made military equipment. Nigeria, Sudan, Tanzania, and Kenya, which have previously purchased Chinese military hardware, have also escalated their total share of Chinese military imports in the past decade. The switch to purchase Chinese arms rather than remain with traditional partners, like the US, European states, and Russia, raises an interesting puzzle. What is precipitating this shift in military procurement among African states?

This question is particularly pertinent to African countries like Uganda, Kenya, and Nigeria who have traditionally relied on the US for military supplies as part of their fight against regional terror groups like Boko Haram and Al Shabaab. Overall, this study seeks to examine three questions. First, does the preponderance of Chinese arms imports influence democratic consolidation or disintegration? This question, in particular, relates to accusations of China’s proclivity to sell arms to so-called rogue states. Second, what motivates African states to switch their defense procurement from traditional Western suppliers (or Russia) to China? Finally, how does this switch in procurement influence an African state’s relationship with traditional defense suppliers (specifically the US) in view of the putative military challenge that China poses to the US’s global military dominance?<sup>2</sup> As the former US National Security Advisor and Ambassador John Bolton put it in 2018 when announcing the Trump administration’s New Africa Strategy, “in Africa, we are already seeing the disturbing effects of China’s quest to obtain more political, economic, and military power.”<sup>3</sup> This policy’s announcement sounded a warning on the likely intensification of military competition in Africa between the US and China. Critical aspects of this competition are likely to be African states’ military diplomacy and procurement conduct. African states’ preferences in military procurement could thus precipitate a shift in relations between the US and specific African states.

While US arms sales have been taken to imply regional security guarantees in volatile regions such as the Middle East or Northeast Asia, Chinese arms sales to African states have often elicited a less favorable comparison.<sup>4</sup> Chinese military sales have been associated with helping the survival of rogue regimes.<sup>5</sup> Is Chinese arms procurement spurred by regime protection assurances for beleaguered and insecure regimes? Or could the increasing preference for Chinese arms also be driven by a soft balance strategy on the part of African states? Whittaker argues that, “some of the United States’ closest allies on the continent have become some of its most vocal challengers while not being ‘highly confrontational’ and continuing to cooperate with the US in many areas.”<sup>6</sup> Could arms procurement be part of such soft balancing?

This paper employs the case studies from Kenya and Uganda to shed light on these questions through both quantitative and qualitative methods. As crucial states in the fight against terrorism,

which in the East African region is mostly propagated by the Somalia-based Al-Shabaab group, both Kenya and Uganda have traditionally been allied with the US. The two states are thus deemed appropriate cases to explain the switch to Chinese arms suppliers. In order to answer the first question—whether or not the preponderance of Chinese arms imports influences democratic consolidation or disintegration—the study investigates the correlation coefficients between a state’s volume of Chinese arms procurement and its shift in Freedom House scores over the past decade.

Regarding the second question, expert interviews in Kenya, Uganda, and Washington, D.C. were used to investigate motivations for the switch in defense procurement by Kenya and Uganda from traditional Western suppliers to China. The final research objective of the study—examining the impact of procurement switch on diplomatic relations—is based entirely on expert interviews.

## ARMS SALES AS TOOLS OF INFLUENCE

Arms exports are an important foreign policy tool. The rise of China in the past two decades to rival the EU, Russia, and the US as a preeminent global power has raised questions about the trends in the balance of military influence, often associated with arms exports, by these powers in Africa. In his influential 1976 paper *The Three Approaches to Measurement of Power in International Relations*, Jeffery Hart identified three approaches to assess one country’s power over another: power as control over resources, power as control over actors, and power as control over events and outcomes.<sup>7</sup> In Hart’s power structure, military sales to a country tend to cut across the three approaches by enhancing the influence of the selling state. Military procurement from state A by state B is likely to enhance state A’s influence on state B’s total military resources, give state A reasonable control over state B’s main defense procurement actors, and ostensibly give state A control over state B’s potential outcomes in war. State A’s influence over state B is what Sislin defines as leverage.<sup>8</sup>

While acknowledging the importance of military sales as a foreign policy tool, Sislin contends that, “one justification for US arms transfers is that the United States can manipulate its arms exports to make the recipient aid comply with American wishes.”<sup>9</sup> Sislin goes on to give two instances in which the US has used its aid and military sales, promises of sales, or threats to withdraw sales to attempt to steer its foreign policy goals. The first was when the US threatened to cut off military aid and sales to Israel if Israel failed to halt its incursion into Egyptian territories during the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Israel complied. In the second case, hoping the move would compel Turkey to return to the negotiation table, President Ford threatened to cut off military assistance to Turkey following its invasion of Cyprus in 1974. However, in this instance Turkey refused to comply.

Keith Krauses supports Sislin’s contentions about the United States’ use of weapons exports as a foreign policy tool. Here, US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance lists the specific goals of the use of military exports or aid:

To support diplomatic efforts to resolve major regional conflicts by maintaining local balances and enhancing our access and influence vis-à-vis the parties; to influence the political orientation of nations which control strategic resources; to help maintain regional balances among nations important to us in order to avert war or political shifts away from us; to enhance the quality and commonality of the capabilities of major allies participating with us in joint defense arrangements; to promote self-sufficiency in deterrence and defense as a stabilizing factor in itself as a means of reducing the level and automaticity of possible American involvement; to strengthen the internal security and stability of recipients; to limit Soviet influence and maintain the balance of conventional terms; to enhance our general access to and influence with government and military elites whose political orientation counts for us on global or regional issues; to provide leverage and influence with individual governments on specific issues; to secure base rights, overseas facilities and transit rights to support the development and operations of our forces and intelligence system.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, there is consensus in literature on the role of arms transfers as tools of foreign policy by the supplying state. The analytical corollary to this consensus on arms transfers as latent power by the supplier state leads to a lurking apprehension among great powers about ‘who is supplying who’ with arms. Exclusive supply by one state to another would mean potential inordinate influence of that supplying state on the purchasing state.

Apprehension on the impact and implication of arms supply by one state to another is best exemplified by the current and ongoing (as of 2019) diplomatic and military tension brought about by Turkey’s insistence on procuring a Russian surface-to-air missile system, which the US had hoped to supply given Turkey’s NATO membership. According to the *New York Times*, such a purchase by Turkey was unpalatable, “because the delivery would be seen as affirming the idea that Turkey was moving away from the NATO alliance into a ‘non-Western alternative’.”<sup>11</sup> While Africa may not be the object of as much immediate international conflict between the great powers in military terms as Turkey is, the case of this procurement underscores arms procurement’s zero-sum undercurrent in international politics.

Therefore, there is a consensus in the literature on the role of arms transfers as a foreign policy tool by the supplying state. The analytical corollary to this consensus holds that arms transfers allows the supplier state to hold latent power and leads to a lurking apprehension among great powers about “who is supplying who” with arms. Exclusive supply by one state to another would mean potential inordinate influence of that supplying state on the purchasing state. Does the growing supply of arms by China to Africa affect existing diplomatic relationships between African states and traditional “Western” suppliers? The other matter to keep in mind regarding the trends in African acquisition of either Chinese or American arms is the strong rhetorical opposition (and zero-sum perspective) between China and the US regarding global military superiority. China’s goal is to achieve military modernization, or a “World-Class” military, by 2049.<sup>12</sup> However, the US has interpreted such growth as a direct threat to American global military pre-eminence. As US Undersecretary for International Security and Non-Proliferation, Dr. Christopher Ford, has put it:

Despite the “win-win” propaganda rhetoric, then, this is no peaceable, benevolent live-and-let-live vision of 21st-Century international engagement. In the scope of its ambitions, the Chinese Communist Party is inescapably revisionist, even revanchist, in its approach to influence the rest of the world. Its self-conceived national mission is to make itself ever more powerful vis-à-vis everyone else—and particularly vis-à-vis the United States—and it has devoted its national security policy to what Beijing’s 2002 Defense White Paper described as a policy of ‘unremittingly enhancing the overall national strength.’ China has adopted a whole-of-system strategy to develop what it calls a ‘world class military’ in order to achieve the so-called ‘Strong Military Dream’ by 2049. By that date—the symbolically potent centennial of the conquest of China by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)—the Party hopes to have legitimized its authoritarian rule by having achieved ‘the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation’ (*Zhonghua minzu weida fuxing*) as China reclaims for itself the geopolitical centrality it sees as its birthright, and of which Chinese nationalists feel their country was robbed in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century by predatory European imperialists.<sup>13</sup>

This message on China’s military ambitions and their impact on the US was amplified by the acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia, Mary Beth Morgan, who asserted that Chinese “World-Class Military” ambitions are:

Designed with a clear purpose in mind: to displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region. The Department views China’s activities as seeking to erode US military advantages. China is working to become the preeminent power in the Indo-Pacific region, while simultaneously undertaking plans to expand its overseas presence and develop capabilities to sustain military operations further from Chinese shores.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, there is agreement, among both the State Department and Department of Defense, that Chinese military modernization and international projection through military sales, among other means, are perceived threats. This suspicion and antagonistic narrative are mutual. As the 2019 *Defense White Paper* from the Chinese Ministry of National Defense states:

International strategic competition is on the rise. The US has adjusted its national security and defense strategies and adopted unilateral policies. It has provoked and intensified competition among major countries, significantly increased its defense expenditure, pushed for additional capacity in nuclear, outer space, cyber and missile defense, and undermined global strategic stability.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, while the US views Chinese military ambitions as an unpalatable, anti-US alternative, China perceives the United States’ pursuit of military unilateralism as a destabilizing force. There is no harmony among the two powers’ interests while both are arming African states.

## REGIONAL SECURITY VS. REGIME GUARANTEES

Arms sales by any state are determined by a range of both supply-side as well as demand-side factors. Of interest here are the perceptions about the supplying state’s foreign policy goals. If arms are tools of influence, what distinct perceptions are specific to China and the US as suppliers



of military hardware to other regions? What kind of influence do the two great powers project to the regions or states to which they export arms?

As asserted by Krause, one of the key functions of US military suppliers is to support diplomatic efforts in the resolution of major regional conflicts by maintaining local balances and enhancing US access and influence vis-à-vis the conflict parties.<sup>16</sup> The predominant view of US arms supply as a source of regional stability is what Hubel, Kaim, and Lembcke have termed *Pax Americana*. *Pax Americana* is “the structure and process of US engagement to promote its interests and values in a region by improving the quality of regional order.”<sup>17</sup> It represents the process by which the US, as the preeminent global power, is engaged in shaping different regions around the globe as it wishes in line with its own values and priorities. *Pax Americana* is illustrated by the role of US arms in the Middle East and Persian Gulf, where US arms ostensibly serve to maintain a restive balance of power in the agitation for supremacy between Saudi Arabia and Iran. As spelled out by Christopher Blanchard, in spite of some congressional opposition, successive US administrations have continued to supply Saudi Arabia with weapons as part of their diplomatic and military objectives, not just for Saudi Arabia itself but for the entire Gulf region. In return, Saudi Arabia looks to the US for, “protection, advice, technology, and armaments from the United States, looking to U.S. partners for assistance in developing their country’s natural and human resources and in facing threats over time from the Soviet Union, regional rivals, Iran, and armed Sunni Islamist extremists.”<sup>18</sup> Whether an objective reality or a rhetorical framework, US military sales are fundamentally justified by *Pax Americana*.

The *Pax Americana* view of American military exports was recently reiterated by Dr. Mark T. Esper, the US Secretary of Defense, who highlighted the US’s ongoing consolidation of military alliances with India as a “regional” goal. As he put it, “our discussions during this year’s ministerial reinforce the strategic interests shared by our two countries and helped us build upon the gains from last year. As democracies, the U.S. and India have an abiding interest in advancing a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.”<sup>19</sup> A specific sale of US military helicopters to the Czech Republic is another example of a sale geared by strategic interests aiming to establish or maintain order in the region where the recipient state is located. A US defense official was quoted describing the procurement of those helicopters as an action that, “supported the National Defense Strategy objectives of strengthening alliances as well as countering Russian influence, highlights consolidated gains made over the past 30 years as the Czech Republic modernizes its armed forces and demonstrates the strength of the U.S. - Czech Republic defense relationship.”<sup>20</sup>

These three examples, each involving different regions, illustrate why securing regional peace is often cited as the foundation upon which *Pax Americana* and US arms sales to third parties exists. However, the *Pax Americana* narrative about creating regional stability has not gone unchallenged. Although it has remained relatively popular, critics have recently pointed to the potential hazards of increasing US arms sales. As Thrall and Dorminey point out:

Washington’s historical faith in arms sales is seriously misplaced. The United States should revise its arms sales policy to improve the risk assessment process, to ban sales to countries

where the risk of negatives consequences is too high, and to limit sales to cases in which they will directly enhance American security.<sup>21</sup>

What are China's motivations for global arms exports? Are they aimed at propping up pariah governments? Chinese arms exports have been on a meteoric increase since the late 2000s. As the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) notes, Chinese arms exports have risen by 195 percent between 2004 and 2008.<sup>22</sup> While the expansion to African countries has been more modest during this timeframe, Africa now accounts for 20 percent of total Chinese arms sales. The combination of China's increased arms exports, along with the perceived threat the sale of those Chinese arms poses to Western powers, has produced a malignant narrative wherein Chinese arms are somehow connected to sustaining undemocratic or illegitimate regimes. While there is older literature to support this line of argument, recent literature has moved away from this narrative.<sup>23</sup> Due to the concentration of Chinese arms exports to ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries, China's overwhelming strategic objective appears to be the build-up of alternative security alliances in Asia away from the US. As a 2019 Center for Strategic International Studies (CSIS) report notes, a "combined 61.3 percent of China's conventional weapons sales since 2008 have found their way to Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar."<sup>24</sup> Outside of Asia, it has been argued that Chinese strategy is almost exclusively commercial. Michael Raska argues that:

China's current arms export strategy reflects varying 'competitive' paths. In the developing countries of Latin America, Africa, and even Central Asia, China is trying to position itself as an alternative to Russian arms exports, while counterbalancing the influence of Western powers. Chinese defense contractors compete on price, while providing greater flexibility when negotiating the financial terms of arms contracts.<sup>25</sup>

Raska suggests that while China does not seek to selectively arm less democratic states, China's strategic objective to "counterbalanc[e] the influence of western powers," who are less likely to arm a state lacking a democratic domestic agenda, means less democratic states can at times become China's natural strategic partner. Raska's emphasis on the commercial motivations (based on domestic fiscal imperatives) are further supported by Nazir Kamal's earlier work, contending that, increasingly, "commercial considerations" were the major motivations for arms exports.<sup>26</sup>

Overall, the picture that emerges shows how China's arms supply to African states is principally an alternative to *Pax Americana*. Thus, Chinese arms supply to African states does not seek to follow or entrench any clear vision of regional stability, as is the case with US arms exports. Commercial considerations, on the other hand, seem to come first. However, arms supply is also key in building what the Chinese have called a "new configuration of military relations" separate from *Pax Americana* alliances. Beyond commercial interests, the build-up of military relations with Africa is important as it contributes to China's, "determination to carve out a new global position for its military that is commensurate with and reflects its expanding economic status and interests on the international stage."<sup>27</sup>

## ANALYSIS

### DO CHINESE ARMS COMPROMISE FREEDOM IN AFRICAN STATES?

The first question of the study sought to examine if the growing supply of Chinese arms to African states could in any way be linked to retrogression in the state of freedom and democratic consolidation in these states. To evaluate the question, we use statistics from SIPRI and Freedom House to examine whether or not there is any correlation between arms imports from China between 2013-2017 and the shifts in freedom rankings between 2014-2019. We use the twenty African states with leading imports from China to examine if their Chinese-sourced arms are associated with either democratic consolidation or retrogression.

Table 1 compares arms procurement expenditures by twenty African states from the three biggest suppliers (China, the US, and Russia) as well as their respective Freedom House ratings on their state of freedom in 2014 and 2019. The two principal questions this exercise seeks to address are:

- (a) Is there a correlation between the volume of Chinese arms procured by a state and the change in its Freedom House scores between 2014 and 2019?
- (b) Do countries with lower Freedom House scores tend to generally buy more arms than those with higher scores?

Freedom House scores are based on a country's compliance with political and civil rights as set out in the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A country is awarded points based on its performance on seven indicators: Electoral processes, political pluralism and participation, government functioning, freedom of expression and belief, association and organizational rights, rule of law, and personal autonomy and individual rights. The Freedom House ranking is out of a possible 100 points.

#### **(a) Correlation between the volume of Chinese arms procured by a state and the change in its Freedom scores between 2014 and 2019**

The study sought to investigate the correlation between the volume of Chinese arms procured by a state and the change in its Freedom scores between 2014 and 2019. The results indicate that there is no significant relationship between arm imports from China (2013-2017) and change in a state's Freedom scores between 2014 and 2019.

**Table 1:** Chinese, US, and Russian Military Exports to Africa (2013 - 2017) and Freedom House Scores (2014 and 2019)

Country	China	US	Russia	Freedom House Scores	
	(Total Value of Arm Imports from each country, 2013-2017 in US\$ millions)			2014	2019
1. Algeria	831	24	3,214	35	34
2. Cameroon	203	3	45	24	19
3. Tanzania	134	-	-	64	45
4. Sudan	129	-	125	7	7
5. Nigeria	115	85	-	46	50
6. Zambia	65	-	14	59	54
7. Ethiopia	51	10	-	19	19
8. Chad	39	8	-	21	17
9. Ghana	35	4	41	84	83
10. Mauritania	34	2	-	34	32
11. Kenya	26	26	-	53	48
12. Senegal	16	4	-	79	72
13. Angola	15	1	313	29	31
14. Djibouti	14	5	-	29	26
15. South Sudan	12	2	22	24	2
16. Egypt	11	1,714	1,391	31	22
17. Seychelles	10	1	-	67	71
18. Namibia	9	-	-	76	75
19. Mali	5	-	-	44	44
20. South Africa	4	-	50	81	79

Source: SIPRI/Freedom House (<https://www.sipri.org/databases/armtransfers/>)

**Table 2:** Chinese Arms Purchased and Freedom Scores

Change in State's FH* Scores Between 2014 and 2019	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	-
	N	20
Arms Imports from China (2013-2017)	Pearson Correlation	-0.068
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.775
	N	20

\*Freedom House (FH)

The findings from this analysis, based on data from the top twenty military procuring African states, suggest two conclusions. First, contrary to the common view that China contributes to the deterioration of freedom in African states, there is no correlation between the shifts in a state's freedom ranking and the propensity of that state to procure arms from China. The analysis suggests arming so-called undemocratic states is not one of China's primary foreign policy objectives. However, as can be seen from Table 1, less democratic states (those with Freedom House scores of less than 31 where states are considered as Not Free) such as Egypt or Angola tend to be big buyers of arms. In addition, they are more likely to prefer procuring arms from China due to the perception of Chinese neutrality in their domestic affairs. As discussed below, this perception of neutrality emerges as one of the strongest determinants of where states procure their military hardware. As such, the lingering association between low freedom states and China is one that is attributable primarily to the preferences of the purchasing state.

Second, regional tensions among African states tend to guide state preferences for either Russian or US arms, at the expense of China. Regional tensions tend to precipitate bandwagoning, where states seek to procure arms more exclusively from one great power. Because of China's reluctance to take sides in regional geopolitical rivalries, bandwagoning states tend to procure from either Russia or the US, who are more likely to supply arms to regional rivals. Up until 2018, when the US issued its new African policy, US and China's arms supply patterns were dictated by their two respective overarching justifications for arms exports, namely regional balancing (for the US) and commercial opportunities (for China). Where no significant inter-state regional rivalries exist, such as in Eastern Africa, China's commercial imperative reigns. Meanwhile, where regional rivalries are rife *Pax Americana* supersedes. Morocco and Algeria's regional tensions serve as an illustrative case. Prior to 2013, Morocco was a top African importer of Chinese arms. However, as regional tensions between Morocco and Algeria intensified in the early to mid-2010s, Morocco reduced its arms imports from China and ratcheted up imports from the US. In 2019, the US State

Department approved a US\$ 209 million acquisition by Morocco of F-16 jets and other ammunition.<sup>28</sup> As the US Defense Security Cooperation Agency observed while seeking congressional approval for the sale: “The proposed sale of this equipment will not alter the basic military balance in the region.”<sup>29</sup> In its sale of weapons to Morocco, the US demonstrates its fixation with the influence of US arms on regional balances of power and affirming the *Pax Americana* imperative. Significantly, Morocco’s main regional rival, Algeria, is primarily armed by Russia.

As suggested by these findings, China’s military sales do not abet democratic retrogression. However, due to China’s non-interventionalist policy, there is a propensity for less democratic African states (without major inter-state rivalries) to purchase arms from China. This propensity raises a lingering image problem for China. If one of the purposes of China’s military diplomacy in Africa is to build itself a favorable “national image,” as Shen argues, it is unlikely their benign blindness to the end use of its arms will be sustainable.<sup>30</sup> While the US seeks to move to a more commercial approach in order to stay competitive, China might seek to improve checks in order to avoid cases of blatant misuse of its weapons for suppressing domestic groups. The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) would be an ideal platform for such regulation and could set up internationally agreed standards for conventional arms exports. However, with the US refusing to ratify the ATT, it is doubtful China can be incentivized to join the treaty.

### **WHAT MOTIVATES SHIFTS IN DEFENSE PROCUREMENT BY AFRICAN STATES? THE CASES OF KENYA AND UGANDA**

The second research question sought to examine why there is a growing preference among African states to procure arms from China. According to SIPRI, China’s share of arms exports going to Africa rose by 55 percent between 2008-2012 and 2013-2017. Likewise, the total share of African arms imports coming from China rose from 8.4 percent to 17 percent.<sup>31</sup> The share of African imports from China has grown between 2009 and 2018 to reach 20 percent (US\$ 3.2 billion) of China’s overall arms exports. This growth in procurement reflects a shift in favor of Chinese arms.

Why is there a growing preference for Chinese arms? This question was posed to military experts in Kenya, Uganda, and the US during interviews and in focus group questionnaires. Procurement Advisory Committees, comprising both defense staff and civilians mostly drawn from treasury departments, are in charge of procurement in both Kenya and Uganda. Military procurement for all arms of the military, specifically, is highly centralized and conducted by a small team of specialized technical staff in both countries. Therefore, due to the confidential and seemingly inscrutable nature of arms procurement processes, the small team of interviewed experts were considered to meet a credible evidentiary threshold for this study. In Uganda, interviews involved nine military officers and two experts. In Kenya, nine military officials were involved in the focus group and four experts were participants of in-depth interviews. Interviews in the US were carried out with officials from the US Congressional Research Service Foreign Affairs Division (Africa), former diplomats to African states, and think-tank scholars.

The focus group interviews for both countries were categorized into three major questions based on Likert scale responses (Very Significant, Modestly Significant, Neutral, and Insignificant) to gauge what the respondents determined as the most important considerations for their state in arms procurement decisions. These three broad questions were designed to appraise the primacy of different factors in states' procurement decisions. The questions were as follows:

1. Is the preponderance of Chinese or US arms exports into Kenya/Uganda a measure of relative influence of these two foreign powers in your country?
2. Would China outpacing the US in preponderance of arms imports by Kenya/ Uganda represent a compromise of US military or political interests in your country?
3. Assuming Kenya/Uganda is purchasing a military product (like arms) that both Chinese and US manufacturers produce, albeit each with their own specificities, what would you regard as the most important determinant when deciding to purchase from the US or China? How would you rank the following considerations in order of their importance? Military relations between the two states, political relations between the two states, relative cost of the arms from the two suppliers, bureaucratic oversight by the supplying state and financial aid/incentives given by supplying state as part of the arms purchase deal.

**Table 4:** Summary of Key Findings from Survey Responses

I.	Perceptions of Arms as Influence		
		Number of respondents who held a given opinion out of the total number of respondents	Totals
	How crucial is the preponderance of arms exports to Uganda by the US or China a measure of relative influence of these two powers in the country?	Uganda (6/9)	13/18 (72%)
		Kenya (7/9)	
II.	Does Preponderance of Chinese Arms Hurt US-Uganda/Kenya Relations		
	Would China outpacing the US in preponderance of arms imports by Uganda/Kenya represent a compromise of US military or political interests in your country?	Uganda (5/9)	9/18 (50%)
		Kenya (4/9)	
III.	Relative Weight of Procurement Factors		
	1. Cost	Uganda (9/9)	18/18 (100%)
		Kenya (9/9)	
	2. Financial Incentives/Aid	Uganda (6/9)	12/18 (67%)
		Kenya (6/9)	
	3. Bureaucratic Oversight	Uganda (6/9)	14/18 (77%)
		Kenya (8/9)	
	4. Political Relations	Uganda (3/9)	8/18 (44%)
		Kenya (5/9)	
	5. Military Relations	Uganda (2/9)	4/18 (22%)
		Kenya (2/9)	



Based on the responses of the focus groups of military procurement staff from the two states, as summarized in table four, these findings suggest two reasons for shifts in procurement. First, technical and procurement staff view the preponderance of arms by any given supplier state as a reflection of the supplier states' power over the purchasing state. 66 percent of respondents in Uganda and 77 percent in Kenya agreed with this view. However, the Kenyan and Ugandan experts interviewed do not perceive the growing share of Chinese-sourced arms as compromising US military interests. The second major finding is that costs and bureaucratic procurement processes represent the two major determinants of who to source arms from. The section below elaborates further on these two findings by incorporating the responses from interviewed experts.

Arms imports in Uganda and Kenya are not primarily driven by strategic geopolitical competition, but instead by the exigencies of cost and counterterrorism threats. Balancing political relations with leading global hegemon remains an important, although distant, consideration. If findings from Kenya and Uganda can be extrapolated to the rest of East Africa, they do not perceive themselves as a significant theatre for the US-China-Russia regional rivalry. As such, even though the experts do concede a theoretical case for military supply as an indicator of latent influence over the importing state, on the ground the US and China's military interests are not seen as directly in competition or zero-sum. As one expert suggested,

Although China may be doing more to sell arms to African states, the United States has demonstrated great interest and commitment to Uganda in issues of mutual security interest, such as fighting terrorism- through various training, military exercises, and counterterrorism.<sup>32</sup>

The findings further suggest that military sales are not seen as a key measure of relative influence. A former US diplomat to Africa collaborated this view by asserting that:

The volume of arms transferred by a hegemon is an important indicator of military influence, *but only one of several indicators*. In some countries, several hegemon transfer large quantities of arms and it is difficult to disentangle their respective influence. Egypt is a case in point with arms from the US, Russia, and China.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, the interviewed experts see the United States' commitment to training and joint military exercises as deeper than China's. One of the military experts noted:

While we send our men all over for training, the US has been very supportive in military training, which is done under the basis of joint counterterrorism. Kenya, for instance, recently signed the Bilateral Strategic Dialogue (BSD) framework which underscores the US commitment to aspects of training and military cooperation. However, as you emphasized by the BSD framework, the emphasis of US military sales and other support tends to be narrowly defined on countering shared threats from terrorism. This is not a focus for the Chinese.<sup>34</sup>

However, as indicated by the military expert's opinion, balancing both present and future political relations with big powers matters. This tendency to balance arms purchases is evidenced by data on Kenya and Uganda's arms purchases over the past five years (see Tables 5a and 5b). States do consider the balance of suppliers as an important bulwark in the case of deteriorating political



relations. In Uganda's case, for instance, the balance stands at exactly fifty-fifty in expenditure volumes on arms between the Russia and China. As for Kenya, the balance is shared between the US (30), China (27), and Serbia (29).

**Table 5a:** Balance of Ugandan Arms Imports by Country 2013-2019

TIV* of Arms Exports to Uganda								
Country	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
France	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	4
Russia	20	-	-	-	-	-	-	20
South Africa	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
US	-	-	4	-	16	-	-	20
Total Uganda Imports	20	1	5	1	21	1	1	50
*TIV stands for Trend Indicator Value which reflects the composite between capability and price of arms brought by a state. SIPRI calls it a "Military Capability Price Index".								

Source: SIPRI data, Importer/Exporter TIV tables.

**Table 5b:** Balance of Kenyan Arms Imports by Country 2013-2019

TIV* of Arms Exports to Kenya								
Country	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
China	-	7	10	11	-	-	-	28
France	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2
Germany	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Jordan	-	-	-	-	9	-	-	9
Serbia	-	10	19	-	-	-	-	29
UAE	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	3
US	-	-	1	19	6	-	4	30
Total Kenyan Imports	1	17	30	30	15	5	4	102
*TIV stands for Trend Indicator Value which reflects the composite between capability and price of arms brought by a state. SIPRI calls it a "Military Capability Price Index".								

Source: SIPRI data, Importer/Exporter TIV tables.

This suggestion of balancing was further confirmed by an officer who observed that:

We decided to diversify our defense procurement so as not to box ourselves in case the politics went bad. What we worry about is the level of interoperability of defense hardware from different sources. We are careful to ensure that any one supplier does not completely lock-us into a technological warp that inhibits our military capabilities. As such, as much as possible, we seek to have interoperability in our hardware between different suppliers.<sup>35</sup>

Interviews show that bureaucratic oversight processes and cost are the two most crucial factors in making procurement decisions. Some of the experts did note that the US remained the “gold standard” in military technology. However, the Chinese were also favored for their competitive pricing, “willingness to sell” equivalent hardware, and their minimal oversight of the hardware’s end use, which was a direct contrast to the Americans’ oversight practices. The importance of cost, among all major considerations, is reflected in a Kenyan officers’ response:

Kenya does not have a separate defense procurement policy apart from the overall national procurement framework under the Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act. According to this framework, defense procurement should be subjected to advertising, bids from as many suppliers as capable of the job and a physical visit to at least ten potential suppliers. *Usually the cheapest provider would be selected.*<sup>36</sup>

This was corroborated by a retired Ugandan military official who noted that:

Unless a military hardware acquisition was initiated by a foreign government as part of their military aid, and if the required equipment is not directly connected to a function initiated by the supplier state, then cost and ease of procurement becomes the most paramount consideration.<sup>37</sup>

The cost issue explains why Kenya, for instance, sources arms from a diverse array of nations, with countries such as Serbia appearing as major suppliers. A US diplomat further confirmed the primacy of cost when he shared that:

The primary determinants for African decision makers in the purchase of arms are cost, financial incentives, absence of political strings, and quality of the equipment. China’s rising market share of arms sales in Africa is primarily a direct reflection of lower price and to some extent improved quality and expanded marketing. US arms sales or reluctance to sell arms are not related to what China and Russia are doing but rather the political/human rights situation in that country.<sup>38</sup>

The United States’ stringent requirements monitoring the end user of procured hardware emerged as one of the most influential aspects of bureaucratic oversight that both Kenya and Uganda had to deal with, and that ultimately led to a preference for Chinese hardware whenever possible. The US was noted as the only major arms exporting state which maintained an active end-user monitoring team from the Department of Defense, referred to as the Security Cooperation Organization (SCO), to oversee end user commitments and possible violations. Officially, the SCO is supposed to:

Advance U.S. national security and foreign policy interests by building the capacity of foreign security forces to respond to shared challenges. That effort involves, among other things,

building and maintaining military-to-military relationships, combined training efforts, and foreign military sales.<sup>39</sup>

As indicated by an interviewed military attaché, however, SCO officials are seen as shrewd military intelligence officials who are intent on containing a procuring state's military capabilities and too invasive when tracking the end use of arms procured from the US. These actions breed frustration and result in a disposition more in favor of procuring from China, who is seen as less exacting on end user requirements. Both Kenyan and Ugandan experts claimed that, due to the exacting processes involving several (sometimes competing) US government agencies, it typically took twice as long to procure equivalent hardware from the US than from China. As a US congressional expert on Africa put it, the United States' military procurement process under the Foreign Military Sales program, which most African states favor, "was not attractive."<sup>40</sup> Similarly, the former diplomat pointed out that cases of "bureaucratic stalling" were not uncommon in the US procurement process.

The analysis finds that defense procurement in Kenya and Uganda are chiefly a function of cost and bureaucratic oversight requirements, and that China has the competitive advantage over the US and Russia in both arenas. Since China is able to provide equivalent hardware and technologies at a fraction of the US or Russian costs, the People's Republic has become an attractive alternative source of arms. Moreover, the protracted acquisition process to import US arms is another major factor leading Kenya and Uganda to choose an alternative, non-American supplier. Finally, the US is the only major exporter with very thorough, in-country oversight offices (SCO) to monitor the use of its arms, constituting another crucial deterrent.

## **RISE IN CHINESE ARMS AND THE FUTURE OF CHINA-AFRICA-US MILITARY DIPLOMACY**

The last part of this research endeavor sought to examine if Kenya and Uganda's preponderance to import Chinese arms had resulted in any actual or potential shift in US-military relations with either respective state. The question regarding shifts in military-diplomatic relations was asked based on the four military diplomacy categories outlined by Zhixiong.<sup>41</sup> These four categories examine the extent to which China and the US are perceived as (a) taking on international military responsibility beyond self-defense, (b) engaging in military relations-building with military attachés, military bases, joint tactics development, and cooperation in confidence building measures, (c) participating in exchanges and communication on any military activities, and (d) collaborating on media management.

Both Ugandan Major P.B and Kenyan Colonel H.K assessed US military diplomacy as being more apparent and eminent for their two states. The US has thirteen active military bases in Africa, with Kenya hosting two and Uganda one, while China's sole overseas military base is in Djibouti. Their opinion was chiefly based on the various US joint exercises with East African countries (Cutlass Express and Justified Accord) as well as the greater number of US military bases in East Africa. While Cutlass Express Operation aims to improve maritime law enforcement capacity specifically, and more generally promote both national and regional security, Justified Accord is a US Africa Command exercise that:

Brings together military partners from East Africa, the U.S. military, Western Allies, and international organizations to practice joint planning and coordination. Justified Accord is a military exercise focusing on African partner capability and interoperability in support of a United Nations/Africa Union peace keeping operations (PKO). The exercise seeks to assess participant abilities in conducting PKO and to enhance positive bilateral and regional relationships in austere environments with coalition partners.<sup>42</sup>

However, as noted by Benabdallah, China is actively playing catch-up in all four areas, as demonstrated by the inaugural China-Africa Defense and Security Forum held in Beijing in 2018. She observed that:

The defense and security forum (organized by China's Ministry of National Defense) is a sign of China's growing military ties with Africa, as is the inauguration of the country's first overseas military base in Djibouti in 2017 and its contribution to U.N. peacekeeping missions.<sup>43</sup>

However, US military diplomacy in Africa is also clearly changing. The US, as emphasized in its new 2018 Africa Strategy, seeks to further its military diplomacy through more selectively targeted Bilateral Defense Forums, as it has done with Kenya. As the new policy proposes:

The United States will no longer provide indiscriminate assistance across the entire continent, without focus or prioritization. And, we will no longer support unproductive, unsuccessful, and unaccountable U.N. peacekeeping missions.... Under our new Africa strategy, we will target U.S. funding toward key countries and particular strategic objectives.<sup>44</sup>

China is making its own inroads in military diplomacy. China's military diplomacy approach in Africa seems inspired by China-Africa economic interactions as practiced through the Forum for China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) where China approaches African states as a continental collective. The China-Africa Defense and Security Forum, for which more than fifty African state representatives converged in Beijing, can be viewed as a "military FOCAC" where military officials are invited to an exhibition of Chinese army and naval sites and technologies. China's continental military diplomacy is best exemplified by President Xi Jinping's 2015 pledge to provide US\$ 100 million of free military assistance to the African Union between 2015 and 2020.

Ultimately, interviewed experts from Africa and the US did not see any great diplomatic friction arising from arms sales. However, execution of the Trump administration's new Africa policy, intent on advancing its commercial interests more aggressively, is likely to accentuate the emergence of political and military rivalries. Since arms constitute a major US export, it is possible that in the foreseeable future the US will be pivoting on arms sales as one of the ways to catch up to China's commercial advantages in Africa.

## CONCLUSION

In 1992, Richard Bitzinger tried to explain the third world's attraction to Chinese arms stating that, "above all, Chinese weapons systems are cheap and readily available with few questions asked. One

can buy many Chinese arms for the price of just one comparable Western or Soviet weapon.”<sup>45</sup> Three decades later, the reasons Chinese weapons remain an attractive option have not changed.

In light of the US and China’s global military competition this study sought to determine what factors were responsible for the shift in preference for Chinese arms, the effects of that rising preference on the consolidation of civil and political liberties, and the status of diplomatic and military relations between Kenya/Uganda and the US given the shift towards Chinese arms procurement. The study found no explicit correlation between a state’s volume of Chinese arms imports and a shift in that state’s freedom ratings between 2013 and 2018. However, China did exhibit a “willingness to sell” that was conveniently apolitical, unconcerned about the end use of its weapons. China’s position stands in stark contrast to the US, which was said to show great restraint and concern about the end use of its weapons.

The two main determinants for states’ shift in preference for Chinese arms were the comparative cost of equivalent hardware and China’s minimal oversight on end-users, in addition to the audit of procurement processes. While the US is admired for having weapons superior in quality and sophistication, its protracted procurement processes, which often require congressional approval, are a significant disincentive to US arms procurement. Financial incentives and associated military aid are also important determinants for choosing a supplier state. In cases where there are unambiguous regional conflicts and rivalries, such as that in North Africa between Morocco and Algeria, there is a tendency for states to privilege political relations and procure arms more exclusively from one hegemon. China benefits most in arms exports to regions where there are no regional rivalries that interest the US, such as in East Africa. Extrapolating from Kenya and Uganda’s cases, China is also benefiting from states that are trying to avoid over-reliance on one major power by strategically balancing arms suppliers. However, as some Asian states like Thailand have already experienced with their arms procurement from China over the past three decades, once a certain share threshold of total arms imports is reached, there is a tendency to shift procurement to other suppliers. It is important to keep this experience in mind as African states begin to balance their own procurement supply.

Finally, according to the experts interviewed, the rise in preference for and import of Chinese military hardware was not likely to change the political and military relations between the United States and Kenya or Uganda. However, this balance could change if the new December 2018 US Africa Strategy, which seeks to entrench greater US commercial success in Africa, is executed. Under the 2018 strategy, the United States’ objective to target “key countries and particular strategic objectives” (as opposed to China’s continental approach) would likely precipitate a more explicit alliance among African states with either China or the US.<sup>46</sup> ★

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