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## **CHINA'S ARMS EXPORTS TO SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

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# Abstract

Chinese arms manufacturers have made inroads on the continent. During the 2016–2020 period, China was the second-biggest supplier of arms to sub-Saharan Africa. Weapons and ammunition of Chinese origin are in the hands of a range of actors, including non-state forces, operating in a number of countries. These are in many cases a result of diversion.

China is hardly alone in transferring arms and ammunition that are eventually used in African conflicts. Most of the African countries that have received arms from China have also been supplied by other exporters who compete to meet African defense demands, while most of the illicit arms in circulation in Africa are being trafficked and transferred within the continent.

Any critical engagement with China needs to reflect a nuanced understanding of the responsibility of all key actors and a willingness to address the problem collectively. As Chinese arms transfer controls are evolving, there is potential for China to take on a more proactive and sustained role in helping to improve conventional and especially small arms management in Africa<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper draws from the briefing paper *Tackling the illicit trade and diversion of arms and ammunition into and within Africa: the role of China-Africa cooperation*, Elizabeth Kirkham and Singo Mwachofi, November 2020 (available at [static1.squarespace.com](https://static1.squarespace.com)), as well as a forthcoming Saferworld research report entitled *Preventing and mitigating the risk of arms diversion in Africa*.

# Résumé

Les fabricants d'armes chinois ont fait une percée notable sur le continent. Au cours de la période 2016-2020, la Chine était le deuxième plus grand fournisseur d'armes en Afrique subsaharienne. Des armes et des munitions d'origine chinoise sont entre les mains d'une série d'acteurs, y compris des forces non étatiques, opérant dans un certain nombre de pays. Elles résultent dans de nombreux cas de détournements.

La Chine n'est guère la seule à transférer des armes et des munitions qui finissent par être utilisées dans des conflits africains. La plupart des pays africains qui ont reçu des armes de la Chine ont également été approvisionnés par d'autres exportateurs qui entrent en concurrence pour répondre aux demandes de défense africaines, tandis que la plupart des armes illicites en circulation en Afrique font l'objet de trafics à l'intérieur du continent.

Toute réflexion critique sur la Chine doit refléter une compréhension nuancée de la responsabilité de tous les acteurs clés et une volonté de s'attaquer au problème de manière collective. Étant donné que les contrôles chinois sur les transferts d'armes évoluent, il est possible que la Chine joue un rôle plus proactif et durable pour aider à améliorer la gestion des armes conventionnelles et surtout des armes légères en Afrique.

# Introduction

At a UN Security Council Meeting on 6 October 2021, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu stated that “the misuse, illicit transfer and destabilizing accumulation of small arms and light weapons,<sup>2</sup> and their ammunition, remain a defining factor in undermining peace and security at the national, regional and global levels and have deeply aggravated situations for vulnerable populations already suffering from conflict.”<sup>3</sup> According to the Secretary-General’s biennial report on small arms and light weapons (SALW), published in September 2021, at least 176,095 civilian deaths were recorded in 12 of the world’s deadliest armed conflicts between 2015 and 2020. Most civilian deaths were caused by SALW (27 percent) or by heavy weapons and explosive munitions (24 percent).<sup>4</sup>

In regions affected by conflict, illicit arms perpetuate a vicious cycle of violence and insecurity, fuelling violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, intra-community tensions, gender-based violence and forced displacement.<sup>5</sup> The African continent has been particularly affected by the proliferation and misuse of SALW, to extreme human cost and with deleterious humanitarian, economic and socio-political impacts. A number of countries, including Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan, continue to experience prolonged conflicts, proxy wars, inter-community strife and large-scale atrocities. These are fuelled by the widespread

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<sup>2</sup> The 2005 United Nations International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (also known as the International Tracing Instrument) describes small arms and light weapons as “any man-portable lethal weapon that expels or launches, is designed to expel or launch, or may be readily converted to expel or launch a shot, bullet or projectile by the action of an explosive, excluding antique small arms and light weapons or their replicas”, available at : [www.unodc.org](http://www.unodc.org)

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, “Rapid Spread of Small Arms, Light Weapons Still Threatening World Peace, Exacerbating Plight of Civilians in Conflict Zones, Disarmament Chief Tells Security Council”, 2021, available at : [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, *Small arms and light weapons, Report of the Secretary-General*, 30 September 2021., available at : [undocs.org](http://undocs.org)

<sup>5</sup> “European security assistance: the search for stability in the Sahel”, Saferworld, September 2021, p. 46, available at : [www.saferworld.org](http://www.saferworld.org)

availability of arms, in particular SALW and ammunition, that often fall into the hands of illicit users.<sup>6</sup>

According to research published in a 2019 Small Arms Survey report, African non-state actors (including civilians, armed groups and business entities) are estimated to hold more than 40 million small arms. – with fewer than 6 million officially registered. By contrast, only 11 million are held by state actors (including military and law enforcement).<sup>7</sup> In June 2020, there were 29 million people in Africa who had been forcibly displaced from their homes.<sup>8</sup> The International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) has also highlighted the gendered impacts of SALW proliferation and misuse, which have facilitated “murder, intimidation, rape, torture, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, threats and humiliation, forced prostitution, and trafficking of women and girls”.<sup>9</sup>

Despite an array of arms transfer control initiatives, at both a continental level<sup>10</sup> and sub-regional levels, arms posing ongoing security and humanitarian challenges continue to be channelled into and around the continent, including through illicit acquisition and transfer, even as the nature of conflict and insecurity changes.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, there is little evidence to suggest that the illicit arms issue will be resolved any time soon, in part due to the scale of the problem and its associated complexities. From the potential for diversion of arms during transfer and also from arms stockpiles and holdings, to the different views that exist among supplier and recipient states as to whether recipient states have the right to retransfer or reassign weapons that have been purchased legally, many issues remain problematic. They could only be addressed through a concerted and sustained response.

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<sup>6</sup> Adesoji, A., *The human cost of uncontrolled arms in Africa*, Oxfam, March 2017, available at : [www-cdn.oxfam.org](http://www-cdn.oxfam.org)

<sup>7</sup> Small Arms Survey, “Weapons Compass: Mapping illicit small arms flows in Africa”, January 2019, available at : [www.smallarmssurvey.org](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org).

<sup>8</sup> This figure represents a 16% increase on 2019. African Center for Strategic Studies, Infographic: “Record 29 Million Africans are Forcibly Displaced”, June 2020, available at : [africacenter.org](http://africacenter.org)

<sup>9</sup> International Action Network on Small Arms (2017), *Gender, Armed Violence, and SALW: Women’s Involvement in the UN Small Arms Process*, IANSA, September 2017, available at : [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)

<sup>10</sup> African Union “Bamako Declaration on an African Common Position on the Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons”, December 2000, available at : [au.int/en/documents](http://au.int/en/documents) ; African Union “Silencing the Guns”, 2017 initiative, available at : [au.int/sites](http://au.int/sites)

<sup>11</sup> Adesoji, A., *The human cost of uncontrolled arms in Africa*, Oxfam, March 2017, available at : [www-cdn.oxfam.org](http://www-cdn.oxfam.org)

China's engagement in African economies is well recognized. But China's actions also have significant implications for African development and security. Furthermore, there is potential for China to take on a more proactive and sustained role in helping to improve conventional and especially small arms management in Africa.

In this context, China's President Xi Jinping's speech to the 2021 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Senegal is potentially significant. The Peace and Security Programme that President Xi announced as part of the *China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035* commits China to "undertake 10 peace and security projects for Africa, continue to deliver military assistance to the African Union, support African countries' efforts to independently maintain regional security and fight terrorism, and conduct joint exercises and on-site training between Chinese and African peacekeeping troops and cooperation on small arms and light weapons control".<sup>12</sup> This speech can be seen as indicative of China's expanding role in Africa as a security actor, as its economic footprint continues to spread across the continent. China's engagement on African peace and security already takes many forms, from arms provision, bilateral military and police exchanges and liaison mechanisms, to participation in UN peacekeeping missions, anti-piracy operations and crisis diplomacy.<sup>13</sup> Building on this, the new Peace and Security Programme's explicit reference to SALW control creates fresh opportunities and merits a conversation as to how China might help to address the types of problems mentioned above.

This paper can serve as an early contribution to that conversation. It reflects on one specific element of China's influence on peace and conflict dynamics in Africa, with insights into arms transfers to sub-Saharan Africa. It outlines the latest policies and regulations that guide China's arms export model. Finally, it analyses prospects for new approaches for regional and international cooperation with China that could help address the illicit or insufficiently controlled trade and diversion of arms and ammunition into and within sub-Saharan Africa, in a more effective way.

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<sup>12</sup> « Keynote speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping at opening ceremony of 8th FOCAC ministerial conference », Xinhua, 29 November 2021, available at : [www.news.cn/english/2021-11/29/c\\_1310341184.htm](http://www.news.cn/english/2021-11/29/c_1310341184.htm).

<sup>13</sup> For example, in South Sudan, China has previously attempted to enable political reconciliation between warring parties. Xinhua, "South Sudan welcomes China's peace mediator role", 27 May 2018, available at : [www.xinhuanet.com](http://www.xinhuanet.com) ; *The Diplomat* (2014), "In South Sudan Conflict, China Tests Its Mediation Skills", Shannon Tiezzi, 6 June 2014, [thediplomat.com](http://thediplomat.com).



# The global arms market

Data compiled by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) shows that from 2016 to 2020, China accounts for 5.2 percent of total arms exports.<sup>14</sup> This makes China the fifth-largest global supplier of major conventional weapons, after the United States, the Russian Federation, France and Germany. In recent years, the United States, France and Germany have increased exports. Both the Russian Federation and China have seen their overall arms exports falling, although they remain major suppliers to countries in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>15</sup> However, compared to the Middle East – the largest market for arms sales<sup>16</sup> – the African continent represents nowhere near as significant a market for arms suppliers. Yet, competition is growing among arms exporters from around the world to meet African defence demands. During the period 2010–2020, 19.1 percent of China’s total arms exports went to African nations.<sup>17</sup>

SIPRI’s Arms Industry Database lists five Chinese companies in the top 25 arms-producing and military services companies in the world. Three companies are ranked in the top 10:

- China North Industries Group Corporation (NORINCO; ranked seventh);
- Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC; ranked eighth);
- China Electronics Technology Group Corporation (CETC; ranked ninth).<sup>18</sup>

The combined revenue of the five Chinese companies in the top 25<sup>19</sup> grew by 4.6 percent between 2019 and 2020.<sup>20</sup> While data is not available for all Chinese arms-producing conglomerates, China’s military spending

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<sup>14</sup> SIPRI, “International arms transfers level off after years of sharp growth; Middle Eastern arms imports grow most”, press release, SIPRI, 15 March 2021.

<sup>15</sup> BBC, “US remains top arms exporter and grows market share”, 15 March 2021, BBC, available at : [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Maryann Xue, “China’s arms trade: which countries does it buy from and sell to?”, *South China Morning Post*, 4 July 2021, available at : [www.scmp.com](http://www.scmp.com)

<sup>18</sup> SIPRI, *Data for the SIPRI Top 100 for 2002-20*, 6 December 2021, available at : [sipri.org](http://sipri.org)

<sup>19</sup> The other two Chinese companies ranked in the top 25 are Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation (CASIC), ranked 12<sup>th</sup>, and China South Industries Group Corporation (CSGC), ranked 20<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

has increased for the past 26 years, the longest uninterrupted, consecutive increase of any country in SIPRI's database.<sup>21</sup> China is now the world's second-largest arms producer after the United States.<sup>22</sup> It is able to offer technologically advanced arms exports. China's augmented defence spending and increased export of military drone technology has led to accusations that the country is fuelling a new arms race. However, when pressed on the matter in February 2021, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying refuted such allegations by referring to "prudent and responsible" arms deals between China and recipient countries. He cited as evidence China's policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of countries to which it exports.<sup>23</sup>

Despite technological advancements, China continues to offer a wide range of equipment with differing capabilities and corresponding price points. Indeed, China wishes to remain the arms supplier of choice for a number of countries where governments and militaries prioritise cost-effectiveness over the latest military technology. This means that China's ability to supply relatively less-sophisticated weaponry remains an attractive option to local buyers. This is especially the case for lower-income countries where arms budgets are smaller, such as many sub-Saharan African nations. In 2020, military expenditure in sub-Saharan Africa increased by 3.4 percent to reach US\$18.5 billion. The biggest increases in spending were made by Chad (+31 percent), Nigeria (+29 percent), Mauritania (+23 percent) and Mali (+22 percent), as well as Uganda (+46 percent).<sup>24</sup>

Over the last decade, Chinese arms manufacturers have forged good connections on the African continent and have acquired a relatively wide market distribution. Yet, some analysts suggest that "the case for China's arms transfers ramping up across the entire continent is, in the main, overblown".<sup>25</sup> China had a 7.5 percent defence market share in Africa over the period 2000–2018, and the same share from 2014 to 2018. Its share of the overall African market has not significantly changed during the last 20 years. In 2020, it ranked fifth, behind the Russian Federation (34 percent),

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<sup>21</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "World military spending rises almost \$2 trillion in 2020", available at : [www.sipri.org](http://www.sipri.org)

<sup>22</sup> China Power, "How Developed is China's Arms Industry?", available at : [chinapower.csis.org](http://chinapower.csis.org).

<sup>23</sup> Bruce Einhorn, "Combat Drones Made in China Are Coming to a Conflict Near You", 17 March 2021, available at : [www.bloomberg.com](http://www.bloomberg.com)

<sup>24</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "World military spending rises almost \$2 trillion in 2020", art. cit.

<sup>25</sup> Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE), Cullen S. Hendrix, "Arms and influence? Chinese arms transfers to Africa in context", 15 July 2020, [www.piie.com](http://www.piie.com)

the United States (19 percent), Germany (17 percent), and France (9 percent).<sup>26</sup>

However, the picture shifts when looking at sub-Saharan Africa separately from the rest of the continent. During the 2016–2020 period, China was the second-biggest supplier of arms to sub-Saharan Africa (20 percent), after the Russian Federation (30 percent), followed by France (9.5 percent) and the United States (5.4 percent). This distinction is important given that – with the exception of Libya – during the past several decades, conflict and instability have affected sub-Saharan Africa more than the northern part of the continent. As of 2019, roughly 30 percent of countries in sub-Saharan Africa were still affected by conflict.<sup>27</sup> Also, SIPRI data focus on major weapons systems and do not include SALW. This is crucial to bear in mind when analysing the data as it is mainly SALW that fuel conflict, instability and criminality in Africa and China has a particularly influential role in sales of SALW and ammunition to sub-Saharan Africa.

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<sup>26</sup> SIPRI, *Arms Transfers Database 2020*, 2020, available at : [www.sipri.org](http://www.sipri.org)

<sup>27</sup> International Monetary Fund, Xiangming Fang, Siddharth Kothari, Cameron McLoughlin and Mustafa Yenice, 2020, *The Economic Consequences of Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa*, available at : [www.imf.org](http://www.imf.org)

# Recent policy developments

China has made incremental but positive progress towards more effective conventional arms transfer controls. Since the reform and opening up period of the late 1970s, China's export control policies towards conventional arms have experienced sweeping changes. These are due to the different stages of social and economic development that China has gone through and the different policies linked to evolving ideological considerations. Since the 1990s, in parallel with China's rapid economic development and the country's increasing role in the international community, China's export controls have undergone significant reorganisation and restructuring.

Up until the early 2010s, China's transition from an administratively based arms export control system to one based in law and official regulations represented the most significant development in the evolution of Chinese arms transfer controls.<sup>28</sup> Since then, however, China has been working to reform its export control legislation to create one overarching national-level legal and policy framework. The purpose of this effort has been to strengthen the government's authority over companies involved in the export of dual-use goods and military technologies. After releasing several drafts for public comment, on 17 October 2020, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) approved a new Export Control Law (ECL). The law came into effect on 1 December 2020, broadening and deepening the legal basis of export controls, increasing the need for robust and reliable outreach to industry and enhanced compliance with regulations, capacities, institutions and implementation. Relevant departments designated by the State Council and the Central Military Commission, such as the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), are responsible for the administration of the ECL.<sup>29</sup> The ECL contains 5

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<sup>28</sup> Saferworld, "The Evolution of EU and Chinese Arms Export Controls", March 2012, [www.saferworld.org](http://www.saferworld.org).

<sup>29</sup> Baker McKenzie, Decoding the New Chinese Export Control Law, 25 June 2021, available at : [www.bakermckenzie.com](http://www.bakermckenzie.com)

chapters and 49 articles, which include rules on export control policies, control lists, control measures, and legal liabilities for non-compliance.<sup>30</sup>

China's arms export policy follows three principles:

- i) ensuring exports are conducive to the legitimate self-defence capability of the recipient country;
- ii) ensuring exports do not undermine peace, security and stability of the region concerned and the world as a whole;
- iii) non-interference in the internal affairs of the recipient country.

Implementing these principles is a series of domestic laws and regulations including the Law on the Administration of Firearms, the Regulation on Administration of Military Products Exports and its annexed Military Products Export Control List.<sup>31</sup> In 2021 MOFCOM released the "Internal Compliance Guidelines on the Export of Dual-Use Items" pursuant to Article 5 of the ECL. The guidelines replaced previous guidance issued by MOFCOM in 2007 on the same topic.<sup>32</sup> However, pre-existing regulations relating to the Administration of Arms Export and their implementing rules remain effective and unchanged until revocation or amendment.

In respect to existing control measures under the ECL, military items can only be exported by export business operators (EBOs) with export monopoly qualifications for military items (Article 23), that is, arms trading companies approved by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) and the Equipment Development Department of the Central Military Commission (EDD). Licences are issued by MOFCOM to EBOs that satisfy certain conditions based on existing regulations.

Beyond the new ECL, on 4 October 2020, China joined the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which contains explicit international obligations concerning strategic trade control which China must now implement. As a State Party to the ATT, China is now legally obliged not to transfer arms where there is a risk that they will be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international human rights or humanitarian law, or that they will be diverted to proscribed users. Although China has not yet

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<sup>30</sup> Jon Cowley, "People's Republic of China enacts new Export Control Law", Sanctions News, 20 October 2020, available at : [sanctionsnews.bakermckenzie.com](https://sanctionsnews.bakermckenzie.com)

<sup>31</sup> «General Statement of the People's Republic of China to the Seventh Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty», Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other international organizations in Switzerland, 30 August 2021, available at : [www.china-un.ch/eng/dbdt/202108/t20210831\\_9103684.htm](http://www.china-un.ch/eng/dbdt/202108/t20210831_9103684.htm).

<sup>32</sup> Jason Wen, Ivy Tan and Weng Keong Kok, "PRC Ministry of Commerce Announce Export Control Internal Compliance Guidelines", Sanctions News, 10 mai 2021, available at : [sanctionsnews.bakermckenzie.com](https://sanctionsnews.bakermckenzie.com)

communicated specific changes in regulations, policies, or practice in light of its adherence to the ATT, in August 2020, Beijing claimed that a “full-fledged policy and legislative system of export control on conventional arms, which is in line with the purpose and objective of the ATT and meets the requirements of the ATT, has been established.”<sup>33</sup> However, despite these claims, China’s current national legal and regulatory framework does not yet guarantee full compliance with the ATT. Following the publication of the ECL, China’s drive to update its national arms export control system presents an opportunity to make progress towards ATT compliance. This brings China further into line with international policy and practice on arms transfer controls.

China’s accession to the ATT also offers a possibility for China to potentially influence and boost the treaty’s progress towards universalisation. This is particularly important, given China’s role as a powerful partner to many governments in the global South – including East Africa, where the ATT has had limited take-up.<sup>34</sup> Crucial to this is how China interprets, implements, and applies the ATT itself, as China’s appreciation of the treaty’s rules is likely to influence that of other nations. With regard to provisions on international humanitarian law and international human rights law, for example, China may have different legal views, policies, and practices to those of other States Parties, which may thus far have led to misinterpretation of the treaty.<sup>35</sup> This cannot counter the treaty text, of course, but can nonetheless be significant as many of the ATT’s provisions require interpretation. As China joined the ATT in 2020, increased dialogue with Chinese government officials, policy experts and defence industry representatives on the transparent application, implementation and universalisation of the ATT is in its early stages. As part of the Seventh Conference of States Parties to the ATT, in August 2021, China submitted an initial report to the ATT Secretariat, which however was not placed in the public domain. In its official statement, China reiterated a commitment to “enhance exchanges and

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<sup>33</sup> Permanent Mission of the People’s Republic of China to the United Nations Office at Geneva and Other International Organizations in Switzerland, “Statement of the People’s Republic of China to the Sixth Conference of States-Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty”, August 17, 2020, available at : [www.china-un.ch](http://www.china-un.ch)

<sup>34</sup> Saferworld, “China’s accession to the ATT: Opportunities and challenges”, 15 July 2020, available at : [www.saferworld.org](http://www.saferworld.org)

<sup>35</sup> Toby Vestner, “The New Geopolitics of the Arms Trade Treaty”, Arms Control Association, December 2020, available at : [www.armscontrol.org](http://www.armscontrol.org)

cooperation with all States Parties with a view to promoting the authority and effectiveness of the treaty”.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Permanent Mission of the People’s Republic of China to the United Nations Office at Geneva, “Statement of the People’s...”, *op. cit.*

# Chinese arms to sub-Saharan Africa

Authorised arms purchasers in Africa, including in sub-Saharan Africa, have historically benefited from China's flexibility on pricing. Costs are seen as comparatively affordable, especially as Beijing has proven willing to facilitate deals through 'friendship pricing' and flexible financing options.<sup>37</sup> A SIPRI report from 2013 also describes China's willingness to provide SALW in instances when other states refused to do so. This report described China's non-interference policy as allowing the sale of arms to sub-Saharan African states, even when there was a known risk that the buyer could potentially use these arms against their citizens.<sup>38</sup> However, following recent policy developments, including China's accession to the ATT, China is now required to adhere to stricter arms export policies than in 2013, in line with international standards. Yet, given recent trends, China is likely to remain the arms supplier of choice for a number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa where cost advantages make relatively less sophisticated Chinese weaponry attractive to local buyers.<sup>39</sup>

Examples of cost-effective Chinese arms include the K-8 jet trainer, which is estimated to make up 80 percent of all jet trainer aircraft in Africa;<sup>40</sup> the Harbin Y-12 transport aircraft, which is operated by air forces in 11 African countries;<sup>41</sup> and the Chengdu F-7 fighter aircraft – a Chinese version of the Cold War-era MiG-21 fighter – which is deployed in six countries, namely Egypt, Namibia, Nigeria, Sudan, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.<sup>42</sup> Chinese exports also comprise more sophisticated weapons systems and equipment, such as the more advanced Chengdu J-10 fighter,

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<sup>37</sup> Bromley, Duchâtel, and Holtom "China's Exports of Small Arms and Light Weapons." SIPRI, October 2013, p. 42, available at : [www.sipri.org](http://www.sipri.org)

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. 42.

<sup>39</sup> Cullen S. Hendrix, "Arms and influence? Chinese arms transfers to Africa in context", Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE), 15 July 2020, [www.piie.com](http://www.piie.com)

<sup>40</sup> China Power, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), *How Dominant is China in the Global Arms Trade?*, available at : [chinapower.csis.org](http://chinapower.csis.org)

<sup>41</sup> Countries include Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Namibia, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, and Zambia. See African Aerospace, *Africa's arms race*, 30 November 2018, available at : [www.timesaerospace.aero](http://www.timesaerospace.aero)

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.



which offer high-performance alternatives while still undercutting the price of American, European, and Russian aircrafts.<sup>43</sup> Unbound by the same export restrictions that apply to other international suppliers,<sup>44</sup> China has also become a major player in the drone market. It has made its unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) available to countries such as Ethiopia, Egypt<sup>45</sup> and Nigeria.<sup>46</sup> The state-owned AVIC has sold and exported into Africa scores of UAVs, including the Wing Loong II drone.<sup>47</sup> China's drone programme, combined with the supply of fighter jets, trainers, transporters, and assault helicopters, has thus driven AVIC into the upper rankings of the global arms trade.

China's ever-evolving and expanding role on the international stage may also lead the country to ensure greater responsibility in respect of arms deals with African countries. China's global reputation has become a major consideration for the Chinese Communist Party, especially as greater exposure and influence has opened the country up to greater scrutiny. Maintaining reputational integrity with prospective countries in sub-Saharan Africa to which China supplies arms is of growing importance.

Despite recent developments, however, transparency remains an issue. A transparent trade in conventional arms is fundamental to fulfilling the object and purpose of the ATT. Yet the scarcity of reliable data and information, both from China and from recipient African states, makes it difficult to provide an accurate and comprehensive picture of the scope of and trends in SALW transfers.<sup>48</sup> In 2020, China ranked as the ninth-least transparent exporter in the Small Arms Trade Transparency Barometer run by the Small Arms Survey.<sup>49</sup> China has fulfilled its initial reporting

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<sup>43</sup> Kenneth Boutin, "Feeding the Lion: China and Defence Development in African States" *Defense & Security Analysis* 34, no. 3, March 2018, pp. 232–48, p. 239. [doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2018.1500755](https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2018.1500755).

<sup>44</sup> China, unlike most other exporters of armed drones, is not a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), nor of the Wassenaar Arrangement on export controls for conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies. As such, it faces fewer sales restrictions in respect of many sensitive technologies.

<sup>45</sup> Scott N. Romaniuk and Tobias Burgers, "China's Drone Selling and Its Consequence on the Security Level", Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), 10 March 2020, available at : [www.ispionline.it](http://www.ispionline.it)

<sup>46</sup> The China-Africa Project, "New Chinese-Made Wing Loong II Attack Drones Arrive in Nigeria", 12 November 2020, available at : [chinaafricaproject.com](http://chinaafricaproject.com); Liu Xuanzun, "Nigeria receives China-made armed reconnaissance drones: reports", *Global Times*, 11 November 2020, available at : [www.globaltimes.cn](http://www.globaltimes.cn)

<sup>47</sup> Bruce Einhorn, "Combat Drones Made in China Are Coming to a Conflict Near You", *Bloomberg*, 17 March 2021, available at : [www.bloomberg.com](http://www.bloomberg.com).

<sup>48</sup> There are no official reports to UNROCA by China or any African state on any transfer of SALW to Africa.

<sup>49</sup> Small Arms Survey, *Trade Update 2020 An Eye on Ammunition Transfers to Africa*, Nicolas Florquin, Elodie Hainard and Benjamin Jongleux, 2020, p. 64.

obligation under Article 13 of the ATT, by submitting an initial report on its national control systems within a year of accession to the treaty (Article 13.1). But the report was not made publicly available. Furthermore, China does not yet provide any official reports documenting either export authorisations or deliveries of SALW. Furthermore, it does not give any information on international transfers of SALW to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA). Moreover, it does not provide the UN Comtrade database – a repository of official international trade statistics<sup>50</sup> – with information on exports of military SALW.<sup>51</sup> China does disclose UN Comtrade with some data on ammunition exports. However, between 2008 and 2017 the value of these exports to Africa that China reported to UN Comtrade was only 3 percent of the amounts reported by the African importing states.<sup>52</sup> China’s first annual report to the ATT, which does oblige notifying SALW exports and imports, is due in May 2022. It is to be hoped that China will meet this obligation and will report publicly on these transfers.

Reporting aside, China has played a pivotal role in multilateral negotiations on preventing illicit and destabilising transfers of arms.<sup>53</sup> It has recognized the negative effects that illicit SALW can have on peace and security, economic development and social stability. It has also stressed its commitment to preventing and combating the illicit trade in SALW. One of the key pillars of China’s arms export control policy is a prohibition on the transfer of arms to non-state actors.<sup>54</sup> However, as occasional UN and media reports<sup>55</sup> demonstrate, Chinese SALW still find their way into various conflict zones in sub-Saharan Africa, where they often fall into the hands of non-state armed groups.

China’s expansive economic interests in the region has implications for Chinese arms exports, as demonstrated by the cases of Sudan and South Sudan. After South Sudan gained independence from Sudan in 2011,

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<sup>50</sup> UN Comtrade Analytics, UN Comtrade Database, United Nations, available at : <https://comtrade.un.org/>

<sup>51</sup> China provides to Comtrade data on exports of shotguns and sporting rifles, as well as shotgun ammunition and parts. But over the past 10 years it has not reported any exports of handguns, military SALW or ammunition for military weapons. Interview with Nicholas Marsh, Senior Researcher, The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), 13 April 2021.

<sup>52</sup> Small Arms Survey 2020, p. 11.

<sup>53</sup> Including the UN Programme of Action on SALW, UNROCA and the Arms Trade Treaty negotiations.

<sup>54</sup> Permanent Mission of the People’s Republic of China to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other International Organizations in Switzerland, “Statement of the People’s Republic of China...”, op. cit.

<sup>55</sup> Colum Lynch, “China’s arms exports flooding sub-Saharan Africa”, *The Washington Post*, 25 August 2012, available at : [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

following decades of civil war, China invested heavily in the oil sector in South Sudan and provided ammunition to the new government.<sup>56</sup> Yet the disputed border drawn between the countries split Chinese investments across two nations: oil reserves in South Sudan, with processing facilities in Sudan.<sup>57</sup> And so, for diplomatic purposes, China provided arms to both Sudan and South Sudan.

According to the UN Panel of Experts on South Sudan, China has been a key source of arms and ammunition for South Sudan. In July 2014, six months since the inception of the civil war, NORINCO delivered a very large shipment of arms, ammunition and related materiel to South Sudan. This included 100 anti-tank guided missile-launching and guidance systems, and 1,200 rounds for these systems; 9,574 type-56 automatic rifles; 2,394 under-barrel 40mm grenade launchers; 20 million rounds of 7.62x39mm ammunition; 319 type-80 general-purpose machine guns; 2 million rounds of 7.62x54 ammunition; and 40,000 rounds of type-69 anti-tank rockets.<sup>58</sup> This particular transfer attracted international condemnation,<sup>59</sup> although it appears that China has since suspended further arms exports to South Sudan.

According to UN Comtrade data, from 2013 to 2017, Sudan spent US\$213 million on Chinese arms. This contrasts with countries such as Uganda, which purchased less than US\$1 million of Chinese arms during the same period.<sup>60</sup> China's military relationship with Sudan has long been considered controversial since China was found to have supplied many of the weapons, alongside SALW from the Russian Federation and Belarus, used by security forces against civilians in Darfur in 2012.<sup>61</sup> China was also reportedly helping Sudan produce SALW and ammunition at Sudan's Giad Industrial Complex, although the details of this arrangement remain

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<sup>56</sup> Austin Bodetti, "How China Came to Dominate South Sudan's Oil", *The Diplomat*, 11 February 2019, <https://thediplomat.com>

<sup>57</sup> James Copnall, "South Sudan in Conflict with Sudan over Disputed Region", BBC News, 12 April 2012, [www.bbc.com/](http://www.bbc.com/).

<sup>58</sup> United Nations Security Council (2015), *Letter dated 21 August 2015 from the Panel of Experts on South Sudan established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2206 (2015) addressed to the President of the Security Council*, 21 August 2015. See: [reliefweb.int](http://reliefweb.int)

<sup>59</sup> Amnesty International (2014), "UN: South Sudan arms embargo crucial after massive Chinese weapons transfer", 17 July 2014, [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org).

<sup>60</sup> Bromley, Duchâtel, and Holtom, "China's Exports of Small Arms and Light Weapons", SIPRI, October 2013, p. 46.

<sup>61</sup> Amnesty International, "Weapons from China, Russia and Belarus fuel violent conflict against civilians in Darfur, Amnesty International Reports", 9 February 2012, available at : [www.amnestyusa.org](http://www.amnestyusa.org).

shrouded in secrecy.<sup>62</sup> Reports by SIPRI have highlighted how Nigeria also began producing a Chinese assault rifle with assistance from Beijing around the same time.<sup>63</sup> The same researchers noted in 2013 that deliveries of Chinese arms not reported to Comtrade had been “widely reported” elsewhere, for example: 20,000 Chinese rifles imported by Zimbabwe in 2011; 50 sub-machine guns, 100 pistols and ammunition exported to Liberia in 2008; and a Chinese artillery battery transferred to Sierra Leone in 2011.<sup>64</sup>

Ethiopia, with which China has longstanding economic ties, is another historically important buyer of Chinese arms. China exported ammunition, light mortars and rifles to Ethiopia during the 1998–2000 armed conflict with Eritrea.<sup>65</sup> Deliveries of military SALW between the two countries picked up pace shortly after a joint Chinese-Ethiopian declaration during the 2000s on the need to enhance cooperation in the fields of military technologies, peacekeeping and military training.<sup>66</sup> In 2006–2007, Ethiopia acquired over US\$16 million worth of SALW from China.<sup>67</sup> In 2013, Ethiopia reportedly purchased additional Chinese arms and ammunition worth US\$50 million, as indicated by UN Comtrade data.<sup>68</sup> Media reports have indicated among arms supplies from China one HQ-64 air defence system delivered in 2013, 30 armoured personnel carriers delivered between 2012 and 2014, as well as four PHL-03 300mm self-propelled multiple rocket launchers that Ethiopia reportedly received in 2018–2019.<sup>69</sup> In 2021, NGO reports provided information on the presence of Chinese Wing Loong armed drones in Ethiopia.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Small Arms Survey (note 202), p. 6. Some suggested that Sudan had been granted a licence to produce Type-56 rifles as well as other systems. Eneka, C., “China’s military presence in Africa: implications for Africa’s wobbling peace”, *Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, May 2011, p. 98.

<sup>63</sup> Bromley, Duchâtel, and Holtom, “China’s Exports of Small Arms and Light Weapons.” SIPRI, p.46

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p.47

<sup>65</sup> Shinn, D. H., “China’s involvement in African conflict zones”, National Press Club, Washington, DC, 20 May 2009, [sites.google.com/site/davidhshinn/china-s-involvement-in-african-conflict-zones](https://sites.google.com/site/davidhshinn/china-s-involvement-in-african-conflict-zones).

<sup>66</sup> Eisenman, J. and Kurlantzick, J., “China’s Africa strategy”, *Current History*, vol. 105, no. 691, May 2006, p. 222.

<sup>67</sup> Bromley, Duchâtel, and Holtom, “China’s Exports of Small Arms and Light Weapons” SIPRI, October 2013, p. 45.

<sup>68</sup> UN Comtrade Analytics, UN Comtrade Database, United Nations, available at : <https://comtrade.un.org/>

<sup>69</sup> Inter Press Service, “Ethiopia’s Civil War Fueled By Weapons From UN’s Big Powers”, accessed 6 December 2021, available at : [allafrica.com](http://allafrica.com)

<sup>70</sup> Pax, “Ethiopia now confirmed to fly Chinese armed drones”, 18 November 2021, 7 December 2021, available at : [paxforpeace.nl](http://paxforpeace.nl)

At the time of writing, civil war rages in Ethiopia. The fighting has left thousands dead, displaced more than 2 million people from their homes, fuelled famine and given rise to a wave of human rights violations and atrocities.<sup>71</sup> Regarding its stance on the conflict, China has emphasised its policy of non-interference. Following a meeting with Ethiopian Foreign Minister Demeke Mekonnen in December 2021, Chinese State Counsellor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated that China was “closely following the situation in Ethiopia and opposes attempts by external forces to impose their political interest in the domestic affairs of Ethiopia”.<sup>72</sup>

According to a 2020 report by the UN Panel of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), between 2015 and 2019, eight arms transfers were made by the People’s Liberation Army, NORINCO, and by private companies producing and/or marketing defence materiel. The arms included heavy and light machine guns, various types of rockets and 300,000 rounds of ammunition.<sup>73</sup> It has been reported that China’s failure to notify the UN Sanctions Committee of such transfers was in violation of the exemption procedures established under the UN arms embargo on the DRC.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, neither China nor the DRC voluntarily reported the ammunition transfers to the UN Comtrade database.<sup>75</sup>

In 2020, citing the unpublished database of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)’s Arms Embargo Cell (AEC), the Small Arms Survey reported that of the 20 types of ammunition most frequently documented in eastern DRC, 18 had markings attributable to Chinese manufacturers. One variety was found at the sites of 181 incidents involving 54 different armed groups.<sup>76</sup> Some of the Chinese ammunition found was reported as having been produced between 2011 and 2014.<sup>77</sup>

In South Africa, Chinese-manufactured firearms – typically more affordable than firearms made in Europe and the United States – are

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<sup>71</sup> BBC, “Ethiopian civil war”, 1 December 2021, available at : [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk).

<sup>72</sup> *The East African*, “China says Ethiopia capable of handling Tigray conflict”, available at : [www.theeastafrican.co.ke](http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke)

<sup>73</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Letter dated 2 June 2020 from the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo addressed to the President of the Security Council*, p. 33, available at : [digitallibrary.un.org](http://digitallibrary.un.org)

<sup>74</sup> Small Arms Survey 2020, p. 14.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

commonplace.<sup>78</sup> Accordingly, due to the high level of loss and theft of licensed firearms, Chinese firearms (especially those manufactured by NORINCO) have featured prominently in police seizures of unlicensed or illegal weapons.<sup>79</sup> In recent years, between 9,000 and 10,000 firearms have been lost by or stolen from licensed civilian firearm owners annually. Between 2000 and 2014, only around 30 percent of the legal firearms reported lost or stolen were recovered by the police.<sup>80</sup>

Weapons and ammunition of Chinese origin have been reported in the possession of a range of actors, including non-state forces, not only in countries such as Sudan and South Sudan (as discussed above), but also in Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire and Mali.<sup>81</sup> These are in many cases a result of diversion. These may occur as a consequence of unauthorised retransfers, the seizure of national stockpiles or battlefield capture by armed groups, poor stockpile management or illegal sales by corrupt officials. However, this phenomenon is not peculiar to Chinese-manufactured arms. There is ample evidence of arms and ammunition originating from other arms exporters also being diverted. For example, according to Conflict Armament Research (CAR), small arms and ammunition exported since 2014 from Bulgaria and Slovakia to Uganda have found their way to European Union-embargoed forces in Sudan and South Sudan. Moreover, in 2015 ammunition transferred from Romania, via Slovakia, to Uganda was discovered in the possession of Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA)-linked non-state actors.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, field research by CAR found that companies in the United States and Uganda controlled by British, Israeli, Ugandan, and United States nationals were able to source a military jet from the United States and a surveillance aircraft manufactured in Austria, which were obtained by the SPLA in 2015 and 2016.<sup>83</sup>

The problem of arms proliferation and diversion is certainly not only due to the behaviour of non-African suppliers, be they from China or

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<sup>78</sup> Saferworld, *Tackling the illicit trade and diversion of arms and ammunition into and within Africa: the role of China-Africa cooperation*, Elizabeth Kirkham and Singo Mwachofi, November 2020, p. 11, [www.saferworld.org](http://www.saferworld.org).

<sup>79</sup> South African Police Service, *Firearm destruction*, 2019, available at : [www.saps.gov](http://www.saps.gov)

<sup>80</sup> Ministry of Police, Pretoria, *Report of the Committee on Firearms Control and Management in South Africa*, Pretoria: Ministry of Police, 2016, available at : [www.policesecretariat.gov](http://www.policesecretariat.gov)

<sup>81</sup> Small Arms Survey 2014, Chapter 7 Signs of Supply, 2014, pp. 212-243.

<sup>82</sup> Conflict Armament Research (CAR), *Weapons Supplies into South Sudan's Civil War : Regional Re-transfers and International Intermediaries*, November 2018, pp. 52-56, [www.conflictarm.com](http://www.conflictarm.com).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11 and pp. 57-65.

elsewhere. We should not ignore the role played by local actors in facilitating diversion or failing to take the necessary measures to mitigate and respond to risks. Action to prevent diversion is therefore needed at national level. But the interconnected nature of the global arms trade means that bilateral, multilateral, and international cooperation and information exchange is also necessary to highlight diversion risks and ensure effective prevention, mitigation and remedial action. It is important, therefore, that all those involved in the transfer of arms are aware of their responsibilities. They should take timely and appropriate action to prevent and address diversion so that progress in one area is not undermined by carelessness or neglect in another.

# New partnerships and approaches to tackle the proliferation of illicit arms in sub-Saharan Africa

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs describes FOCAC as “an important platform for collective dialogue and an effective mechanism for enhancing practical cooperation between China and African countries... and a successful example of South-South cooperation”.<sup>84</sup> Since 2000, FOCAC has provided a mechanism for high-level dialogue and cooperation between China and African countries, particularly in the areas of mutually beneficial economic cooperation and trade. FOCAC has recognized that addressing the many challenges posed by SALW proliferation is essential for advancing economic cooperation and trade agendas. It has incorporated the issue within wider dialogue on political affairs, peace and security, having previously addressed the issue of the illegal trade and circulation of SALW in 2012.<sup>85</sup>

In November 2021, the issue of SALW control once again returned onto the agenda of FOCAC. Included in the Dakar Action Plan of FOCAC announced at the end of the Forum's ministerial conference was commitment by “China and Africa ... to cooperate to fight against the illicit transfer and misuse of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition and to engage in exchanges on policies, experiences and pragmatic cooperation for the identification, tracing and management of end users of small arms & light weapons and their ammunition.”<sup>86</sup> This paves the way for developing practical actions needed to tackle the problem of SALW and ammunition in sub-Saharan Africa. It will also have direct implications for the continuation of dialogue between China and relevant African countries regarding the implementation of effective and long-term regional action

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<sup>84</sup> « FOCAC and China-Africa Relations », Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, [www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cezanew/eng/zfgxss/gk/t942569.htm](http://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cezanew/eng/zfgxss/gk/t942569.htm).

<sup>85</sup> Saferworld, *Tackling the illicit trade and diversion of arms and ammunition into and within Africa: the role of China-Africa cooperation*, Elizabeth Kirkham and Singo Mwachofi, November 2020, p. 4.

<sup>86</sup> The China Africa Project, FOCAC-Dakar Action Plan (2022–2024), section 6.1.10, SlideShare, 2 December 2021, [www.slideshare.net](http://www.slideshare.net)



plans. It is essential that China, as a major supplier of weapons to sub-Saharan Africa, remains a central part of such initiatives for the foreseeable future.

As most of the illicit arms in circulation in Africa are being trafficked and transferred within the continent, responsibility to act also falls to African states. Therefore, any critical engagement with China needs to reflect a nuanced understanding of the responsibility of all key actors and a willingness to address the problem collectively. There are opportunities to engage with the Chinese policy community, as well as African decision makers, on responsible arms transfer controls and on *in situ* arms management. They should also reflect on the actions needed to address the security concerns posed by irresponsible transfers and by the diversion of arms, in particular SALW and ammunition.

As China's engagement in Africa grows, including through its global infrastructure project (the Belt and Road Initiative), which also spans conflict-affected parts of Africa, it encounters a range of risks and challenges. These include the safety of Chinese citizens, the security of its military personnel, financial risk and its reputation on the world stage. In its efforts to ensure the protection of Chinese citizens and the continued flow of natural resources, Chinese officials and commercial actors have started to pay greater attention to how China's engagement in Africa can be made more conflict-sensitive, especially where instability and insecurity threaten China's own interests. There is also increasing understanding that the risks posed by societal dysfunction, political turmoil, instability, conflict and violence in Africa, which are exacerbated by the uncontrolled availability of arms, negatively affect China's long-term interests. This has created greater openness and receptiveness on the part of Chinese authorities to discuss issues related to the distribution and use of arms on the African continent.

Since November 2019, Saferworld has been leading the implementation of an Africa-China-Europe trilogue and cooperation project on preventing the diversion of arms and ammunition in Africa, supported by the European Union under Council Decision CFSP 2019/1298.<sup>87</sup> The project's long-term goal is to strengthen regional and international cooperation in tackling the diversion of arms and ammunition in Africa. Central to the project is a joint non-governmental Africa-China-Europe Expert Working Group (EWG) on conventional arms

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<sup>87</sup> Official journal of the European Union, "COUNCIL DECISION (CFSP) 2019/1298 of 31 July 2019 in support of an Africa-China-Europe dialogue and cooperation on preventing the diversion of arms and ammunition in Africa", 2 August 2019, available at: [eur-lex.europa.eu](http://eur-lex.europa.eu)

control, which is increasing awareness and engagement on issues related to the diversion of arms and ammunition in Africa and promoting joint cooperative responses.<sup>88</sup>

As highlighted in a 2020 report under this project,<sup>89</sup> instead of creating additional political processes and structures, African countries and China should instead concentrate their efforts on supporting the implementation of the existing numerous conventional arms control agreements to which they are already committed. In this regard, following the positive outcome from the FOCAC 2021 ministerial conference, work may progress with renewed energy to facilitate the development of a cooperative programme of work on SALW and ammunition proliferation into and within Africa that draws together supply and demand perspectives and builds on existing agreements and commitments.

Recommendations made in Saferworld's 2020 report remain relevant to China and African states in respect of actions that can help to prevent and reduce the risks of possible diversion of arms and ammunition shipments from authorised trade to the illicit market. In particular, there is a need for China to:

- enhance transparency and accountability in arms and ammunition transfers;
- undertake comprehensive and in-depth pre-export diversion risk assessments. These should be not only for arms and ammunition transfers to countries in conflict, but also to those where theft or leakage from stockpiles is prevalent, or to states that are known to engage in the re-export of imported weapons without first obtaining the consent of the original supplier state;
- require prospective recipients of arms and ammunition shipments to give, on a case-by-case basis, an undertaking to not re-export or reassign arms that are transferred; and
- implement post-shipment controls so as to help ensure that arms importers abide by their end-use commitments.

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<sup>88</sup> A-C-E Project on Arms in Africa, available at : [www.a-c-e-project.eu/](http://www.a-c-e-project.eu/).

<sup>89</sup> Saferworld, *Tackling the illicit trade and diversion of arms and ammunition into and within Africa: the role of China-Africa cooperation*, Elizabeth Kirkham and Singo Mwachofi, November 2020, p. 12.

# Conclusion

China's approach to arms transfer control is evolving, both domestically, through the elevation of national laws, regulations and procedures to bring them in line with global standards, and internationally, through accession to the ATT. Awareness of the potential negative impact of poorly regulated arms transfers on Chinese economic interests is also growing among key government and industry stakeholders in China. The confluence of these agendas holds out the prospect of greater transparency and restraint in China's arms transfers to Africa, and in particular to areas of instability and conflict, including those in countries in sub-Saharan Africa. It also raises the prospect of China becoming more involved in projects and programmes that actively seek to reduce the risk of misuse and diversion of SALW and their ammunition.