

CHINESE ARMS SALES TO AFRICA

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The Problem

China is selling arms and military equipment to Africa using enticements like favorable financing and below-market prices. If Africans succumb to the marketing push, the conflicts between African nations could become more destructive, and military forces from the United States and partner nations in Africa could face more hostile conditions in future conflicts or peace-keeping operations.

The Chinese are now aggressively selling defense and security equipment to African nations. Indeed, a Chinese exhibitor at Airshow China in November 2010 told us that state-sponsored Chinese arms trading companies have three primary marketing targets. One of these is Africa. Selling weapons to African countries is one of many levers the Chinese are using to garner business from African countries rich in mineral and energy resources.

In support of China's arms marketing push in Africa, the Chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army, accompanied by a team of senior generals, visited Namibia, Angola, and Tanzania in May 2010. The purpose of that trip was to promote Chinese military hardware and "exchange views on issues of mutual approval" (Gelfand 2010).

China had the largest contingent of foreign exhibitors at Africa Aerospace and Defence (ADD) 2010 in South Africa, a show that bills itself as the largest defense exhibition in Africa. For the first time, the Chinese had a national pavilion at an ADD show. Representatives from the following 10 Chinese arms import-export corporations filled the 1,200 square-meter national pavilion: (1) China National Electronics Import-Export Corp (CEIEC), (2) China Electronics Technology Corp (CETC) International, (3) China Aviation Industrial Base Corp, (4) China National Aero-Technology Import & Export Corp (CATIC), (5) China Precision Machinery Import-Export Corporation (CPMIEC), (6) North China Industries Corporation (NORINCO), (7) China Overseas Space Development & Investment Corporation, (8) China Xinxing Import-Export Corp, (9) China Shipbuilding & Offshore International, and (10) Poly Technologies Inc. By contrast, Chinese companies had only a few stalls at ADD 2008.

A decade ago, Chinese defense goods were characterized by shoddy workmanship. That is no longer true.

China also had a large presence at the 10th International Defense Exhibition (IDEX) 2011 held in the United Arab Emirates in February 2011. The IDEX trade show is considered one of the preeminent shows for marketing to African countries, with numerous delegations attending from that continent. Chinese exhibitors increased floor space in their national pavilion by about 53 percent compared to IDEX 2009. A total of 26 Chinese companies exhibited at IDEX 2011, a virtually unprecedented number, based on our experience in attending international arms shows over the past 19 years. The Chinese contingent included more than just large state-sponsored arms trading companies. Smaller companies (e.g., Armor China Company), many of which we had never seen exhibit outside China, also had booths.

The Eurosatory 2010 international arms exhibition in France offered still one more sign of the importance that the Chinese attach to the African Market. At Eurosatory 2010 (another show that attracts large numbers of African military delegations), Poly Technologies Inc. distributed two catalogs. One was devoted to military supplies (e.g., uniforms, boots and packs), and the other

featured police supplies (e.g., protective clothing and anti-riot gear). Both catalogs pictured ethnically African models wearing Chinese equipment. In our experience, this was the first time Chinese companies depicted models who were not ethnically Chinese.

Chinese exporters are offering a wide range of weapons and ancillary military equipment. Chinese exhibitors at ADD 2010 and IDEX 2011 distributed brochures featuring (1) small arms, (2) armored vehicles (such as the WMZ551 armored fighting vehicle and VN1 family of 8×8 armored vehicles),



Illustrations in Chinese Arms Catalogs of Ethnic Africans wearing Chinese Military (left) and Police Equipment (right) (“Military Supplies” and “Police Supplies” from Poly Technologies, Inc. 2010)

(3) tactical air defense weapons (including QW-2 and QW-18 man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS)), cruise missiles (such as the C-704, C-705, and C-802AKG anti-ship cruise missiles), (4) naval ships, (5) very short-range tactical ballistic missiles (such as the B11M, BP-12A, and SY400), (6) fighter aircraft (such as FC-1 and JF-17 tactical fighters), (7) precision-guided artillery and mortars, and (8) command, control, communications, computer, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR)

equipment. NORINCO's marketing emphasis at ADD 2010, for example, included the (1) Red Arrow-8 anti-tank guided missile (ATGM), (2) MBT-2000 main battle tank, (3) VN2A wheeled armored personnel carrier, and (4) LD2000 air defense system. At the same show, CPMIEC emphasized equipment such as A-100 long-range artillery rockets, several kinds of anti-ship cruise missiles, and the HQ-9/FD-2000/FT-2000 surface-to-air missile system.



Models of C-705 and C-704 Anti-Ship Cruise Missiles on Display at ADD 2010



A model of the QW-18 Man-Portable Air Defense Missile on Display at ADD 2010



Models of the B611M and BP12A/SY400 Short-Range Tactical Ballistic Missiles on Display at ADD 2010

NORINCO and Poly Technologies are also targeting the African police and paramilitary internal security force markets. Products being displayed and advertised included riot protective gear for individuals, non-lethal weapons and launchers, riot batons, personal restraining devices, and internal security vehicles.

The Chinese approach to selling weapons to African states is based primarily on three factors: non-interference, price structure, and financing options. The official Chinese policy of non-interference, applied to potential arms buyers, means that China will sell weapons and security equipment to a state without regard to its internal political situation or the repressiveness of the regime. Another Chinese strategy for marketing arms to Africa uses price to undercut international competitors, particularly the Russians and Ukrainians. Indeed, some African countries are turning away from their traditionally favored Russian and Ukrainian suppliers in favor of Chinese firms. In some cases, the Chinese are willingly substituting “friendship pricing” to reduce their already low prices to rock bottom. According to a presentation at the National Press Club

by a former US Ambassador to Ethiopia, the relatively low cost of Chinese small arms and ammunition has made China the “provider of choice” in Africa for the generic version of the AK-47 assault rifle (Shinn 2009).

Besides pricing weapons low, the Chinese offer attractive financing options, such as soft loans and convenient payment options. They will accept barter goods (e.g., copper from Zambia) in payment for weapons. Unsubstantiated rumors in Internet articles also suggest that a few African countries have secured military products from China in exchange for mining concessions. These rumors perhaps spring from instances such as NORINCO forming a joint venture with the Zimbabwe Defense Industries in 2006 to explore for chromate in Zimbabwe’s Great Dyke (Brautigam 2010). A South African source from its defense industries also claimed that Zimbabwe might finance the purchase of Chinese FC-1 fighters with zinc and aluminum mining concessions (Dempsey 2010).

Chinese efforts to sell military hardware in Africa are helped by the improved quality and reliability of Chinese weapons. A decade ago, Chinese

defense goods were characterized by shoddy workmanship, but that is no longer true. Our recent conversations with users of Chinese weapons indicate that today's products are of significantly better quality than past ones. According to people with whom we have spoken, some products, such as Chinese aircraft and ships, are of equivalent quality to Western products. A debate about the quality of NORINCO-built small arms versus Western brands on an Armaments Corporation of South Africa (ARMSCOR) blog site elicited somewhat similar opinions from two different posters. One opined that overall NORINCO workmanship was not up to Western standards but that the company no longer has the problems it once did with materials. A second participant in that discussion went somewhat further and said pistols from NORINCO are "durable but cheap firearms" that "perform equally as good" as more expensive Western equivalents (Dino 2011). Based on so few anecdotal sources, it is impossible to draw definitive conclusions about the comparative quality of Chinese versus Western-made weapons. Nevertheless, such data do lend credence to the general notion that the workmanship of Chinese weapons has improved over the last decade. What is still open to debate is how much improvement.

The siren-song of Chinese arms exporters may not have fallen on deaf ears. As one writer observed:

The combination of low costs and few overt political strings may prove an increasingly attractive combination to African countries, particularly if the technological and qualitative improvements in its military equipment continue and the

benefits of a close relationship with an emerging great power become increasingly apparent. ("China Looking to Boost Arms Sales to African Nations" 2010)

China's spotty record of supplying data to the United Nations (UN) Arms Registry makes it difficult to say definitively how many or what types of weapons China has supplied to Africa states (see table on page 29). Nevertheless, it is clear that Chinese marketing efforts have achieved success in Africa. For example, an article in *Defense News*, citing annual reports by the US Department of Defense (DoD) on Chinese military modernization, states that African countries accounted for 11 percent of total Chinese arms export sales from 2005 to 2009 (Minnick 2010). That same article goes on to quote figures from David Shinn, former US Ambassador to Ethiopia and African specialist at George Washington University. These figures show that China transferred 390 artillery pieces, 440 armored personnel carriers and armored cars, 20 supersonic combat aircraft, and 70 other military aircraft (mostly transports) to sub-Saharan African states from 2001 to 2008 (Minnick 2010).

The initial transactions open the door to post-sale opportunities such as supplying spare parts and ammunition, performing maintenance and installing upgrades, and training African personnel. More importantly, military sales offer the opportunity for access. The Chinese provide training to Africans, thereby building personal relationships with up-and-coming African military officers. In 2007, for instance, Rwanda sent 20 officers for training in China following a sale of large-caliber Chinese artillery to

Rwanda. The supplier-customer relationship also provides an excuse for limited Chinese military presence in Africa. In March 2003, *China Military News* (cited by thezimbabwean.

co.uk) reported that the Chinese were building a multi-million-dollar base at Chitamba Farm in Mazowe Valley of Zimbabwe (a long-time Chinese arms customer) as an intelligence training academy (“China Building Spy Centre in Zimbabwe?” 2011).

United Nations Arms Registry of Weapon Transfers by China to African Countries from 1992 to 2009 (data as of March 2011)

Recipient	Delivery Date	Weapon Type
Chad	2007	10 AFV
Congo	2006	4 AFV
	2009	9 armored vehicles
Gabon	2004	4 122mm LRM
	2004	5 106mm recoilless rifle
	2004	4 HM2 105mm howitzer
	2004	10 130mm guns
	2004	16 107mm MRL
	2006	6 AFV
Ghana	2007	4 helicopters
	2009	48 armored vehicles
Kenya	2007	32 AFV
Namibia	2006	6 warplanes
	2009	21 armored vehicles
Niger	2006	6 artillery
Nigeria	2009	15 aircraft
Rwanda	2007	6 artillery
	2008	20 AFV
Sudan	1992	18 artillery
Tanzania	2006	2 AFV
	2007	2 AFV
	2009	2 aircraft
Zimbabwe	2006	6 warplanes

NOTE: This is a compilation of the United Nations Arms Registry data that cover officially acknowledged weapons transfers. The Arms Registry began reporting in 1992 and is issued on an annual basis. In some cases, details of the weapons are provided. In other cases, details are lacking, and a generic description is provided. (“UN Register of Conventional Arms” 2011)

In conclusion, increasing Chinese arms marketing efforts in Africa have several implications:

- Using cost and pricing advantages, China has the potential to grow its arms sales significantly in Africa, copying the model that led to similar success in other industrial sectors such as toys, textiles, and electronics.
- Sales provide the Chinese access to people and resources in Africa.
- Some of the weapons being offered (e.g., MANPADS and short-range tactical ballistic missiles) could seriously destabilize the military balance in Africa, make conflicts between African states more destructive, and increase the risk to military forces of the United States and partner nations operating in Africa or in adjacent littoral areas.
- The Chinese policy of non-interference offers pariah African regimes access to arms and internal security equipment, which could prolong their hold on power—even in the face of condemnation from the international community.
- Finally, the lack of stringent and comprehensive controls of arms stocks by African end-users means that some Chinese weapons could fall into the hands of non-state actors.

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