



Determinants of African States Arms Procurement Preferences, from Strategic to Commercial Imperative

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Abstract

What drives the arms procurement practices of African states? Why are African states shifting their military procurement from traditional suppliers (the West and Russia) in preference for Chinese arms? This paper sought to use the case of Uganda and Kenya to find out and examine if the growing preference for Chinese arms is driven by primarily commercial motives or by higher-order strategic objectives of counterbalancing the West's military influence. The research finds that, although countries view US military hardware as the gold standard in quality, the higher cost of comparable US hardware and the protracted or intrusive US oversight processes make Chinese arms more attractive. In addition, diversification of military suppliers is seen as strategically important to avoid dependency. The paper thus highlights the growing commercial imperative in military procurement and argues that this commercial bent favors China with longer term strategic implications for great power competition in Africa.

Key Words: *Great Power Competition, Military Procurement, China, US relations*

Introduction

According to a 2024 study from the Centre for Naval Analysis, Africa has become the leading testing ground for the People's Republic of China's Military and Security involvement outside of China (Ditter, Haney, Tsai, & Reid, 2024). As an extension of this assertion a 2024 report from the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), shows that China has overtaken Russia as the largest supplier of arms to Africa (IISS, 2024). The rapid development of the Chinese military and defence exports to Africa is not only a reflection of Chinese success at a global level but also reflects an underlying expansion of Chinese influence as more African countries become users of its military hardware. Among African states, the switch to purchase Chinese arms rather than stick with traditional partners (USA, European states and Russia) raises an interesting puzzle. What precipitates this shift in military procurement among African states? This question is particularly pertinent to African countries such as Uganda, Kenya and

Nigeria which has traditionally relied on the United States (US henceforth) for military supplies as part of their fight against regional terror groups such as Boko Haram and Al Shabab.

Statement of the Problem

Overall, this study sought to examine three questions: One, does the preponderance of Chinese arms imports systematically influence democratic consolidation or disintegration? Two, what motivates African states to switch their defense procurement from traditional Western suppliers (or Russia) to China, and three, how does this switch in procurement influence an African state's relations with traditional defense suppliers [specifically the USs] given the putative military challenge (Garamone, 2019; Rogin, 2018; Ashine, 2018; Suzuki, 2018) that China poses on the USs' global military dominance. As the then US National Security Advisor, Ambassador John Bolton, put it in 2018 when he announced President 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" (Bolton, 2018, para. 19). Even if only incipient, the rhetoric of the US's new Africa Policy sounded an ominous warning on the likely intensification of the military competition in Africa between the US and China. The growing trends of African states' procurement of Chinese arms may therefore not remain innocuous to relations between the US and specific African states.

Methodology

This was a mixed-method case study that used both quantitative and qualitative methods. The study sought to examine and explain why African states switch their defense and military procurement between different suppliers and the consequences of such switches. This study focused on Kenya and Uganda, which are traditionally allied with the US in its Global War on Terrorism (GWT) in the East African region. The two states are thus deemed appropriate case studies to explain the switch. Concerning the first question – does the preponderance of Chinese arms imports systematically influence democratic consolidation or disintegration? – the study uses quantitative correlation to enquire on the correlation coefficients between the volume of Chinese arms procurement to a state's shift in *Freedom House Scores* over the past decade. The correlation is done to examine the veracity of the contention on the role of Chinese arms in perpetuating or abetting systematic retrogression in democratic gains and civil liberties in a given state.

Question two sought to find what motivates African states to switch their defense procurement from traditional Western suppliers to China. Here, this study used in-depth expert interviews with military procurement officials in Uganda and Kenya, and defense procurement experts and academics in Washington DC. These interviews sought to broach the military view of soft balancing or band wagoning. This concerns how important it is for African states such as Uganda to be seen as militarily 'non-aligned' to either the US or China and hence the balancing of military procurement.

The second objective of the study was examining the comparative strength of US and Chinese military diplomacy in Uganda and Kenya - utilizes four categories of military diplomacy as outlined by Zhixiong (2018) to calibrate the relative strength of the two powers' military diplomacy. These four categories include: International responsibility, Relations building, exchanges and Communication and Media management. The final research objective of the study – examining the impact of procurement switch on diplomatic relations is based entirely

on interviews with Ugandan, Kenyan and US government officials both in Kampala, Uganda and Washington respectively. The main objective is to examine two questions; does a state's (Uganda) increasing acquisition of Chinese military affect (i) US willingness to support the Ugandan military upgrades and (ii) Ongoing US Africa Command Joint exercises such as *Cutlass Express* or *Justified Accord*?

Significance of Source of Arms: Regional Security vs. Regime Guarantees

A range of Supply-side and demand-side factors influence arms sales by any state. Of interest here as the perceptions about the supply-side foreign policy goals of a supplying state. So, if arms are perceived as tools of influence, what are the distinct perceptions 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 they export arms?

As intimated by Krause (1991), one of the key functions of US military supply is seen as the support of diplomatic efforts to “resolve major regional conflicts by maintaining local balances and enhancing our access and influence *vis-à-vis* the parties” (p.315). This is the predominant view of US arms supply as a source of regional stability or what Hubel, Kaim and Lembcke (2001) have termed as *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” (p.596). It represents the process by which the US, as the preeminent global power, is engaged in shaping different global regions – Europe, Africa, Asia, the Middle East and so on - as it wishes in line with its values and priorities.

The Pax Americana perspective shapes the understanding of U.S. arms sales in the Middle East, particularly in maintaining the balance of power between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Christopher Blanchard (2019) notes, “Successive US administrations have referred to the Saudi government as an important partner and US arms sales and related security cooperation have continued with congressional oversight and some congressional opposition” (p.5). The Al Saud monarchy relies on the U.S. “for protection, advice, technology and armaments... in facing threats from the Soviet Union, regional rivals Iran and armed Sunni extremists” (Blanchard 2019, p.8). Pax Americana serves as a key justification for U.S. military sales. Similarly, U.S. Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper emphasized the U.S.-India alliance, stating, “As democracies, the U.S. and India have an abiding interest in advancing a free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific region” (Lopez, 2019, para. 1).

Additionally, in the event, where the US Secretary of Defense was witnessing the sale of military helicopters to the Czech Republic, a US Defense official, hinted at the underlying thread of strategic interests. He stated that the procurement of those helicopters ‘supported the National Defense Strategy objectives of *strengthening alliances as well as countering Russian influence*, highlighting 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,’ (Roulo, 2019, para.3). As can be seen from these three examples involving different global regions, securing of *regional peace* is often cited as the core the foundational narrative of the Pax Americana *raison d'être* for US arms sales to third parties.

Although it has remained relatively popular, the Pax Americana narrative about creating regional stability is however not one that is objectively unchallenged. Recently, critics have pointed to the potential hazards brought about by increasing US arms sales. For instance, Thrall and Dorminey (2018) argue that the U.S. should reform arms sales by strengthening risk assessments, banning high-risk sales, and limiting them to cases benefiting American security. The narrative of Pax Americana has also been questioned by Conge and Okruhlik (2009).

Chinese arms exports have been on a meteoric increase since the late 2000s. As SIPRI notes, Chinese arms exports ‘rose by 195% between 2004- 2008’ (SIPRI, 2019) While the expansion has been modest in the years 2014-2018, Africa now comprised 20% of Chinese arms sales. This expansion in arms exports by China as well as the perceived threat of Chinese arms to Western powers has produced a malign narrative of Chinese arms as somehow connected to sustaining undemocratic or illegitimate regimes. As detailed at length by Spiegel and Billon (2009) Chinese involvement in arms exports to African states such as Zimbabwe, Sudan, and Angola during periods when the governments of these states were involved in domestic suppression of rebels or civil wars has been seen as damaging and eliciting this narrative of Chinese arms having as guarantees of despotic regimes.

As a Rand Corporation report by Daniel Byman and Roger Cliff (1999) on the motivations and implications of Chinese Arms sales put it, “China’s arms sales are a significant though manageable problem for the US. Beijing’s transfers have increased the strength and autonomy of pariah states...” (p.45). Due to the concentration of arms exports to the ASEAN region, the overwhelming strategic objective of China’s arms exports seems to be the build-up of alternative security alliances in Asia away from the US. As China Power notes, a “combined 61.3 per cent of China’s conventional weapons sales since 2008 have found their way to Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar” (para.14). Outside of Asia, it has been argued that Chinese strategy is almost indifferently commercial. As Michael Raska argues, “China’s current arms export strategy reflects varying ‘competitive’ paths. In the developing countries of Latin America, Africa, and even Central Asia, China seeks to position itself as an alternative to Russian arms exports while counterbalancing the influence of Western powers” (p.2).

Chinese defense contractors compete on price while providing greater flexibility when negotiating the financial terms of arms contracts’ (Raska, 2017). Raska makes an important point which suggests that while China does not seek to arm less democratic states selectively, it may do so with a strategic objective of ‘counterbalancing the influence of Western powers’ who may refuse to arm a given state seen as perpetrating undemocratic domestic agenda. Raska’s, emphasis on commercial motivations (domestic fiscal imperatives) is further supported by earlier work such as that of Nazir Kamal who contended that ‘commercial considerations’ were increasingly the major motivations of arms exports (Kamal, 1992, p.131).

For African states, the overall picture that emerges on the principal *raison d’être* for China’s arms supply can vaguely be described as simply being an *alternative* to Pax Americana. Arms supply to African states does not seek to procure or entrench any clear vision of regional stability as is the case with the US. Commercial considerations seem to come first. However, for China, arms supply is also key in building what the Chinese have called a ‘new configuration of military relations’ alliances. Beyond commercial interests, the build-up of military relations with Africa is important for China as it contributes to its ‘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’ as observed by Alden and Yixiao (2018).

Study Findings

The findings from this analysis and the general data on military procurements by the top 20 procuring states in Africa suggest two things. First, contrary to a putative view of China as systematically contributing to the deterioration of freedom in African states, there is no correlation between the shifts in freedom ranking and the propensity of a state to procure arms from China. The analyses here suggest that it is not primarily a question of China’s foreign policy objectives to arm so-called ‘undemocratic’ states. However, less democratic states are likely to prefer to procure arms from China due to the perceptions of Chinese neutrality in their

domestic affairs. As discussed below this 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 likely to become even more pronounced. As can be seen from Table 1, the big arms purchasers – Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Cameroon and Nigeria tend to be oil states that also tend to diversify their sources of arms beyond one major supplier. As the Centre for Strategic International Studies (CSIS) notes in *its China Power Project* for instance, ‘Of the \$5.6 billion of US arms exported to Africa over the last decade, roughly 88 per cent were purchased by Egypt and Morocco. Similarly, Algeria and Egypt accounted for 86.6 per cent of Russian arms transfers in Africa over the same period (CSIS, 2018.) In this diversification strategy, major African arms importers seem to be carrying out *soft-balancing* in ensuring that they do not over-depend on one single supplier – Russia, the US or China- as dependency could affect the functionality of their military. This diversification can be seen in Figure 1 where states such as Algeria, Sudan, Ghana and Egypt where the is an almost equal amount spent in procuring hardware from at least two different suppliers.

Figure 1

Top African Arms importers from China 2008-2018

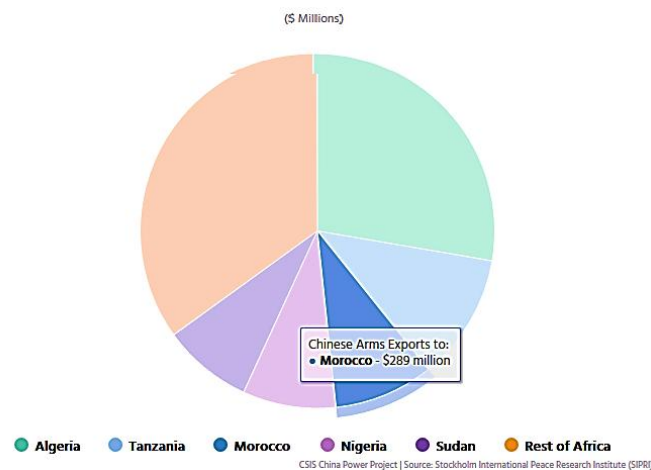


Figure 1: Top African Arms importers from China 2008-2018; Source: CSIS (2018)

Second, regional tensions among African states tend to fuel preference for either Russian or US arms at the expense of China. Regional tensions tend to precipitate band wagoning where states seek to procure arms more exclusively from one great power. Because of China’s putative reluctance to take sides in regional geopolitical rivalries, the band wagoning states tend to procure more from either Russia or the US who are more brazen in taking sides in regional rivalries. At least until 2018 when the US issued its new African policy, the patterns of arms supply by the two great powers – China and the US - seemed to be dictated by the 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. Where regional rivalries are rife or smoldering, the *Pax American imperative* reigns. The case of Morocco is highlighted (in Figure 1 above) because despite it being listed as a top importer of Chinese arms over the past ten years (2008-2018), these imports happened before 2013. As a regional arms race between Morocco and Algeria continues to shoulder into the late 2010s, Morocco has reduced its arms imports from China and ratcheted up imports from the US. In 2019, the State Department of the US approved a USD 209 million acquisition by Morocco of F-16 jets and other ammunition. (DSCA, 2019).

As the US Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) observes in seeking approval of the sale by the US Congress ‘The proposed sale of this equipment *will not alter the basic military*

balance in the region’ (DSCA, 2019). This US fixation with the influence of US arms on the regional balance of power affirms US Pax Americana's imperative in its sale of weapons to Morocco. Significantly, Morocco’s main regional rival Algeria is primarily armed by Russia.

China does not abet democratic retrogression through its military sales. However, the propensity of less democratic African states (without major inter-state rivalries) to purchase arms from China due to its perceived non-interventionism raises a lingering image problem for China. Can the commercial imperative of China in arms supply absolve itself from concerns about how its arms are used domestically? If one of the purposes of China’s military diplomacy in Africa is to build itself a favorable ‘national image’ as Zhixiong (2018) argues, it seems unlikely that a benign blindness to the end use of its arms will be sustainable. While the US seeks to move to a more commercial approach to stay competitive, China might seek to have better checks to avoid cases of blatant misuse of its weapons in suppression of intra-state domestic groups. The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) would be an ideal platform for regulation and set up of internationally agreed standards for conventional arms exports. But with the US refusing to ratify its entry, it’s a big question if China can be incentivized to join the treaty.

Figure 2

What Motivates Shifts in Defense Procurement-the Case of Kenya and Uganda

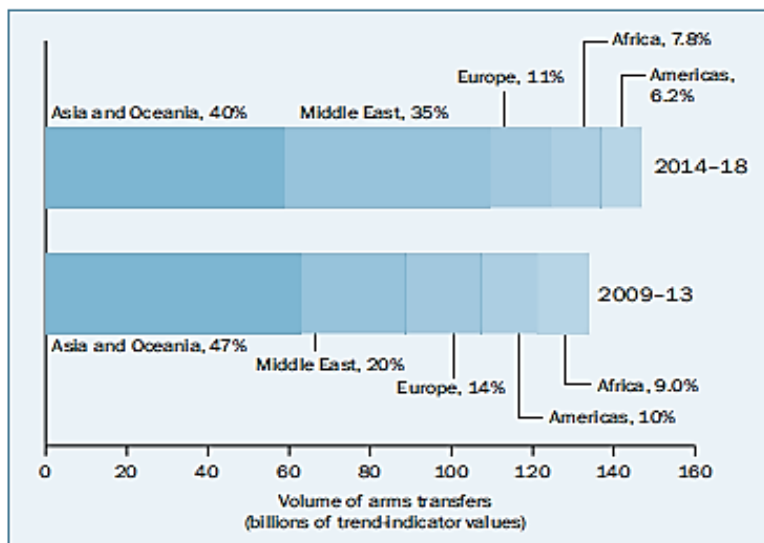


Figure 5. The importers of major arms, by region, 2014–18 and 2009–13, per cent of global share

Note: The SIPRI trend-indicator value (TIV) is a measure of the volume of international transfers of major weapons. The method used to calculate the SIPRI TIV is described on the Arms Transfers Database web page.

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, Mar. 2019.

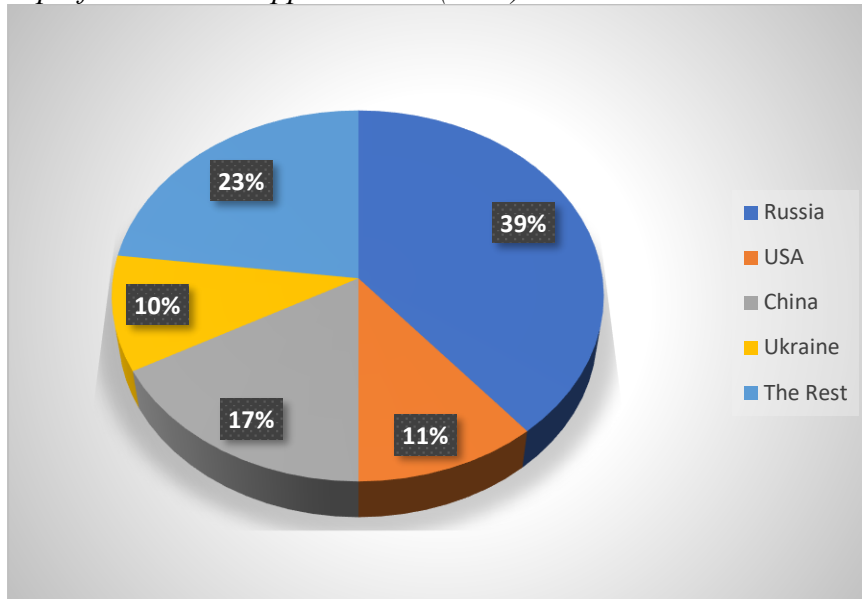
The second major research question of the study sought to examine why there is a growing preference for arms procurement from China by African states.

According to SIPRI, the share of China’s arms exports to Africa ‘rose by 55% between 2008-2012 and 2013- 2017, and its total share of African arms imports rose from 8.4% to 17 per cent’ (Wazeman, et al, 2018, SIPRI). Although the overall share of African global arms imports has

declined from 9 per cent in the 2009-2013 period to 7.8 per cent in the period 2013-2018, (as indicated in the above graph) the share of African imports from China has grown. Having been below 15 per cent in the 1990s and early 2000s, 'since 2008, countries in Africa collectively purchased around 20 per cent (\$3.2 billion) of China's overall arms exports' (CSIS, 2019). The import of all this is that African states are procuring more from China. This growing procurement does reflect a shift in favour of procuring from China. So why is there a growing preference for arms procurement from China?

Figure 2

Top African Arms Supplier states (2018)



Source: SIPRI data

Through 31 expert interviews and focus group questionnaires, this question was posed to military experts in Uganda, Kenya and the US with some involvement or knowledge of procurement decisions and processes. Military procurement in both Uganda and Kenya is conducted by a Procurement Advisory Committee that comprises both defense staff and civilians mostly drawn from the Treasury Departments. Military procurement in both countries is also very centralized for all arms of the military and conducted by a small team of specialized technical staff. Therefore, due to the esoteric and confidentiality of arms procurement processes the small teams of experts were considered of credible evidentiary threshold. Focus group interviews in Uganda involved nine military officers and two expert interviews while the interviews in Kenya involved, nine military officials for the focus group and four in-depth expert interviews. Interviews in the US were carried out with officials of 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 a Likert scale response to determine what the respondents determined as the most important considerations for their state in arms procurement decisions.

The findings from this analysis on the perception of arms as influence and chief motivations for arms procurement suggest two aspects of the East African states' possible explanations for the shifts toward China. One, technical and procurement staff do perceive the preponderance of arms by any given supplier state as a reflection of that state's power over the importing state. From the findings, however, experts from the two East African states do not seem to perceive the growing share of Chinese-sourced arms as compromising US military interests. The second major finding is that costs and bureaucratic processes of procurement represent the two major

determinants of where to source arms. This section seeks to make sense of these findings and why the Chinese possess an advantage in the provision of arms to many sub-Saharan states.

Arms imports in East Africa are not primarily driven by strategic geopolitical competitions but by the exigencies of counterterrorism threats and costs. Balancing political relations remains important though a distant consideration. Overall, China has risen as a favored balancer of Russia and the US as a major arms supplier. Unlike in North Africa where tensions between Algeria and Morocco have produced military procurements tending towards exclusivity (Morocco from the US and Algeria from Russia and China) both East African states do not seem to perceive themselves as significant competitive theatre for US-China-Russia regional rivalries. As such, even though the experts do concede a theoretical case of military supply as an indicator of latent influence over the importing state, the military interests of the two great powers are not seen as directly competitive or zero-sum. As one expert suggested, ‘although China may be doing more to sell arms to African states, The US 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’ (Officer RU, personal interview). This view was collaborated by a former US diplomat in Africa who asserted 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. (D.S Washington, DC. Personal interview.)”

Since the stability of the East African region and countering terrorism are issues that would be in China's interests too, there was an affirmation of insignificant military conflict between the two powers- and thus according to the experts, the US seemed unconcerned about the balance of military exports by either China or Russia.

Similarly, the US commitment is seen as deeper in training and joint military exercises compared to China. As a military Attaché in Washington D.C, noted

“While we send our men all over for training, the US has been very supportive in military training, which is done under the bases of joint counterterrorism. Kenya for instance recently signed the Bilateral Strategic Dialogue 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’ (Colonel H.B Kip, Personal interview).”

The US military sales as being too narrowly linked to counterterrorism was however emphasized by a US expert on US international security who stated that ‘I do think the US has been far too focused on counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations rather than traditional state-based conflict’ (Z. Cooper, Personal interview)

However, as affirmed by the military attaché in Washington, balancing perceptions of present and future political relations matters. This suggestion of balancing was further affirmed by this 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 (Colonel H.B Kip, personal interview). ”

This balancing tendency in arms purchases is evidenced by data on arms purchases by the two case states in the past five years as shown in table three below. States do take considerations of balancing suppliers as an important bulwark in case political relations were to deteriorate. In Uganda’s case, for instance, the balance stands at exactly fifty-fifty in the volume of expenditure on arms between the US and China. In Kenya’s case, the balance is between the US, China and Serbia.

As divulged by the interviews, beyond political balancing, costs and bureaucratic oversight processes are however the two most crucial factors in procurement. While it was noted by some of the experts that the US remained the ‘Gold standard’ in military technology, the Chinese were mostly favored for their price competitiveness and ‘willingness to sell’ (N. Cook, US congressional service personal Interview) for equivalent hardware as well as their nonchalant oversight on the end use of the hardware, unlike the Americans. The primacy of costs and other financial incentives was generally agreed upon by both East African as well as US officials. As one Kenyan military officer privy to the procurement process observed,

“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. (Major R, Kenya personal interview). ”

This was collaborated 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 become the most paramount consideration. (Retired Major P.B, Uganda, Personal Interview). ”

The issue of costs explains why for instance Kenya has a more diverse source of arms with such countries as Serbia and Jordan appearing as major suppliers This view of the primacy of costs was also agreed to by the retired US diplomat who said 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’ (D.S Washington, DC. Personal interview)

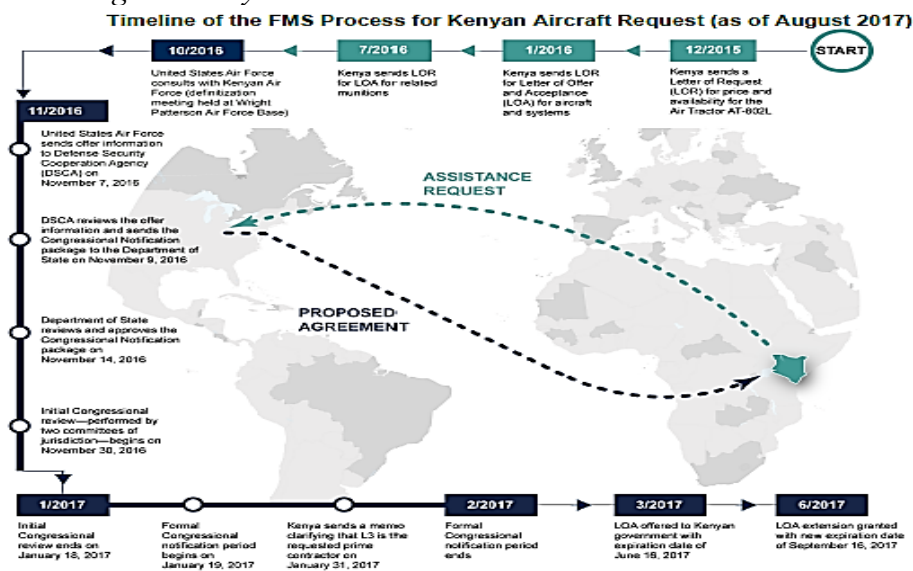
The US’s stringent requirements for monitoring the end user for procured hardware emerged as one of the most influential aspects of bureaucratic oversight that both East African states have to contend with- unhappily – and thus a preference for Chinese hardware whenever possible. The US was noted as the only major arms-exporting state which maintained an active end-user monitoring team referred to as the Security Cooperation Organization (SCO). Any end-user issues and violations are overseen by this special diplomatic team from the Department of Defense. 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 (US DOD, 2019).

As was revealed by the Military attaché however, SCO officials are seen as canny military intelligence officials who are often intent on containing a procuring state's military capabilities as well as prying about the end use of US-procured arms. This creates a discomfort and a predisposition towards procuring from China which is seen as less exacting on end-user requirements.

As informed by both Ugandan and Kenyan experts, typically it takes twice as much time to procure an equivalent hardware from the US as it takes from China due to the exacting processes involving several (sometimes competing) US government agencies in procurement. As a US Congressional expert on Africa put it, the process of military procurement from the US under the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program which most African states favor 'was not attractive' (LPB, Washington, DC. Personal Interview). Similarly, the former diplomat pointed out cases of 'bureaucratic stalling' in the US procurement process as not uncommon. This protracted process is reflected in Kenya's more than two-year process in the procurement of 12 AT-802L aircraft.

Figure 4

The Foreign Military Sales Process in the US



Source: Government Accountability Office, (2017)

In conclusion, the analysis finds that the defence procurement actions of the two states are chiefly a function of costs and bureaucratic oversight and China has the competitive advantage in both areas. Since China can provide equivalent hardware and technologies at a fraction of the US and Russian costs, it (China) has become an attractive alternative to US arms. The protracted process of acquisition of US arms is another major deterrent to a preference for the US. In addition, the US is the only major export with very thorough in-country oversight offices (SCO) for use of its arms. This is also a major deterrent.

Conclusion:

African states have, in the past two decades, become enthusiastic importers of Chinese-made arms. This study sought to find out what accounts for this enthusiasm in procurement of Chinese arms and the effects of this rising preference for Chinese arms; first on a state's consolidation in civil and political liberties, and second, on the impact of rising Chinese imports on diplomatic and military relations between the case states (Uganda and Kenya) and the US given the two great powers military competition across the globe. The study found that there is

no explicit correlation between a state's volume of Chinese arms imports and the shifts in its freedom ratings between 2013 and 2018. However, it was noted that China exhibited a 'willingness to sell' that was too conveniently apolitical and nonchalant about the end use of its weapons as opposed to the US which showed great restraint and concern about the end use of its weapons.

The two main factors for states' shifts and preference for Chinese arms are due to the comparative cost of equivalent hardware compared to hardware from the US as well as China's minimal oversight of end-users and audit of procurement processes. While the US is admired as the Gold Standard in quality and sophistication of military hardware, its protracted procurement process which often requires congressional approval is a significant disincentive for procurement from the US. Financial incentives and associated military aid are also important determinants of the choice of the 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 in regions where there are no regional rivalries that interest the US such as in East Africa. Inferring from the case of the two African states examined, China is also benefiting from the general strategic balancing in arms suppliers to avoid overreliance on one major power. However, as has already been experienced in some Asian states (Thailand in particular), about their arms procurement from China in the past three decades, the balancing imperative by states in Africa, suggests that once a certain threshold of share of total arms imports is reached, these countries will opt to shift procurement to other suppliers. The balancing imperative suggests a diminishing demand for a supplier's arms as its arms supply nearly 40-50 per cent of a state's overall arms imports.

Finally, the rise in preference for and importation of Chinese military hardware was not thought likely to change the political and military relations of the US with Uganda or Kenya. This could however change if the new US Africa Strategy of December 2018 – which seeks to entrench greater US commercial success in Africa- is executed. Under this strategy, the US's 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.

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