

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY / November 2020

# Tackling the illicit trade and diversion of arms and ammunition into and within Africa: the role of China-Africa cooperation





## Executive summary

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This briefing is the first of a series under a project on 'Africa-China-Europe dialogue and cooperation on preventing the diversion of arms and ammunition in Africa' which is funded by the European Union under Council Decision CFSP 2019/1298.

The premise of this briefing is that, despite a variety of national, regional and international initiatives in recent years, the proliferation and misuse of arms and ammunition into and within Africa have continued at alarming levels, fuelling conflict, armed violence and instability, and severely impacting civilian populations. There is an urgent need for practical initiatives that bring together officials involved in arms and ammunition control and transfers in Africa, China and Europe to explore new avenues and better coordinate efforts to reduce the proliferation and misuse of arms, in particular small arms and light weapons (SALW), and ammunition into and within Africa.

Launched in 2000, the triennial Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) has developed an extensive remit covering economic, political, cultural and security cooperation. Over the past two decades, FOCAC has also, from time to time, concerned itself with the proliferation of SALW and ammunition. At the first FOCAC ministerial conference in 2000, the final declaration saw both sides pledge to 'enhance cooperation in stopping the illicit proliferation, circulation and trafficking of SALW'; this was reinforced by additional commitments in 2003, 2006 and 2012. Most recently, at the FOCAC 2018 Beijing Ministerial Conference, China pledged to support the pan-African initiative to 'Silence the Guns in Africa by Year 2020', to which China had, in 2017, provided over USD\$1.4 million in support through the UN Peace and Development Trust Fund.<sup>1</sup>

As the 2021 FOCAC Summit approaches, China's increasing concerns around terrorism, 'violent extremism' and regionalised conflicts in Africa provide a strong justification for it to once again prioritise the SALW issue in cooperation arrangements with Africa. To this end, in order to demonstrate the wide-ranging impacts of SALW and ammunition proliferation and misuse upon the economic prospects and lives of affected people this briefing explores three different scenarios from specific national contexts across Africa – in Burkina Faso, South Sudan and South Africa. While the proliferation and misuse of SALW and ammunition is only one challenge faced by African countries, the instability and insecurity that this creates means that tackling this issue is key to unlocking economic potential and bringing security, development and prosperity to people, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>2</sup> The 2021 FOCAC Summit will provide an opportune moment for Chinese and African partners to consolidate their joint commitment to tackling the proliferation and misuse of SALW and ammunition in Africa, by establishing a sustainable programme of action that creates synergies with existing national, regional and continent-wide initiatives.

The main recommendations of this paper are:

1. **FOCAC should create a comprehensive, practical, sustainable and transparent programme of work on preventing the illicit trade and diversion of SALW and ammunition, which is grounded in the needs and perspectives of affected communities.**

The multifaceted and varied nature of the SALW and ammunition challenges across Africa are such that while overarching aims and parameters for engagement should be established, the precise nature of the national, or localised, response should be context specific, with programmes tailored to local realities and legal frameworks.

2. **The UN and China should provide greater public information on past, current, and future-planned China-Africa initiatives to address the proliferation of arms – in particular SALW – and ammunition.**

While China's support for the ambitious African Union 'Silencing the Guns by 2020' initiative and the pledging of more than \$1.4 million in support is laudable, the specific focus and expected results of this funding is not widely understood. More information on this from both the UN and China could provide a better understanding of the impact of these programmes while opening the door to potential synergies with assistance provided by other international and African regional organisations.

3. **Taking into account their obligations under a variety of international instruments, China and African countries should explore suitable approaches for cooperative action that will tackle both the demand for and the supply of arms and ammunition, particularly in contexts where the risks of misuse and violence are high.**

As sovereign UN member states China and all African countries are encouraged to implement a number of international agreements that seek to tackle the illicit trade and proliferation of arms – including SALW – and ammunition including: the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UN PoA); the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (ITI); and the UN Firearms Protocol.<sup>3</sup> In addition, China and 27 African countries are also States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and are therefore required to implement a range of treaty provisions that establish high standards for the international transfer of conventional arms. The ATT Voluntary Trust Fund also provides a vehicle for supporting African countries in the development and strengthening of their arms transfer control systems, helping to prevent illicit transfers and diversion of SALW and ammunition into and within Africa.

4. **China – along with other major exporters<sup>4</sup> – has an important role to play in helping to prevent and reduce the risks of possible diversion of arms and ammunition shipments from the authorised trade to the illicit market. This could be achieved in a number of ways, for example by:**

- enhancing transparency and accountability in arms and ammunition transfers
- ensuring that pre-export diversion risk assessments are in-depth and comprehensive
- requiring prospective recipients of arms and ammunition shipments to give, on a case by case basis, an undertaking to not re-export or re-assign arms that are transferred
- implementing post-shipment controls so as to help ensure that arms importers abide by their end-use commitments

5. **For their part, African countries should take steps to help reduce the stock of the illicit trade through:**

- careful management of state stockpiles
- developing and implementing programmes and initiatives to remove illicit weapons from circulation and destroying obsolete and surplus ammunition within their stockpiles;
- improving transparency and accountability in their own arms and ammunition transfers while committing to refrain from diverting imported arms and ammunition;
- ensuring that security forces act in accordance with international rules and standards on the use of force and are held accountable for transgressions, thereby helping to reduce the motivation for acquiring SALW and decreasing the demand for them

6. **The international agreements mentioned above (such as UNPoA, ITI and ATT, among others) highlight a number of important priority areas for the development of joint programmes for practical SALW and ammunition control including:**

- **the development and enhancement of arms and ammunition transfer control systems:** including national legislation, regulations, procedures, internal coordination and training
- **arms and ammunition transfer risk assessments:** including the risk that arms for export might be used in contravention of international law or diverted to an unauthorised recipient
- **end-use certification:** the adoption of model end-use certifications including comprehensive provisions, a ‘no re-export clause’, and verification of authenticity
- **post-shipment verification:** ensuring that steps are taken to check that exported arms and ammunition remain with their authorised end-user and are used for authorised purposes

- **weapons and ammunition – physical security and stockpile management:** improving infrastructure, facilities and training for the management of state-owned stocks and ensuring accountability of those entrusted with SALW and ammunition
- **marking and record-keeping of SALW and ammunition:** building capacity through the provision of appropriate technology, equipment and training on marking and record-keeping procedures
- **transparent implementation of the ITI:** including timely, accurate and comprehensive responses to tracing requests
- **border controls:** building capacity through support for the development of border infrastructure and training of personnel
- **weapons and ammunition collection and destruction:** supporting amnesties, buy-back initiatives (as appropriate) and other schemes for removing illicit weapons and ammunition from circulation, along with the provision of infrastructure to enable the destruction of illicit SALW and ammunition
- **public awareness-raising programmes:** enhancing public understanding of the dangers of SALW and ammunition

## Conclusion

It is time for a demonstration of political will and renewed focus by FOCAC on the issue of SALW and ammunition proliferation. The forum is uniquely placed to step up and play a key role in supporting the existing efforts of African countries to respond to the problem. The complexity and the severity of the illicit proliferation and misuse of arms and ammunition, together with the dire consequences for human security, point unequivocally to the need for swift, practical responses. At the same time, it is clear that the focus should not be on creating additional political processes and structures; African countries and China should instead concentrate their efforts on supporting the implementation of the myriad existing conventional arms control agreements to which they are already subscribed.

By drawing together supply and demand perspectives, building on existing agreements and commitments and taking account of context-specific criteria, FOCAC could facilitate the development of a cooperative programme of work which would have a significant and sustained impact on SALW and ammunition proliferation into and within Africa – helping to advance the cause of peace, security and development across the continent. The current joint project by Saferworld, the Security Research & Information Centre and the China Arms Control and Disarmament Association – which focuses on tackling the diversion and illicit trade of weapons and ammunition in Africa – also presents a crucial opportunity to raise the profile of such an agenda internationally, and to support and promote its implementation.

## Notes

- 1 United Nations Peace and Development Trust Fund, 'The Secretary-General's Peace and Security Sub-Fund: List of 2017' (<https://www.un.org/en/unpdf/peace2017.shtml>)
- 2 There are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including: Goal 1 – end poverty in all its forms everywhere; Goal 6 – ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all; Goal 8 – promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; and Goal 16 – promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. See: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 'Sustainable Development' (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>)
- 3 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 'The Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime' (<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/the-firearms-protocol.html>)
- 4 According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 'China was the fifth-largest arms exporter in 2015–19 and significantly increased the number of recipients of its major arms: from 40 in 2010–14 to 53 in 2015–19'. Other exporting countries listed in the top five arms exporters in 2015–2019 were the US, Russia, France and Germany. See: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2020), 'USA and France dramatically increase major arms exports; Saudi Arabia is largest arms importer, says SIPRI', 9 March (<https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2020/usa-and-france-dramatically-increase-major-arms-exports-saudi-arabia-largest-arms-importer-says>)

## About the project

The project aims to promote three-way dialogue and cooperation between people, organisations and institutions in Africa, China and the EU on tackling the illicit trade and diversion of arms – in particular small arms and light weapons and ammunition – into and within conflict-affected contexts in Africa.

The project raises awareness in Africa, China and the EU on how the illicit flow of arms – particularly SALW and ammunition – to unauthorised entities in Africa exacerbates insecurity and violence and undermines public security, socio-economic development and the effective functioning of state institutions. The project also promotes accountability and responsibility with regards to the legal arms trade, by demonstrating how effective arms export control can contribute to mitigating the risk of arms and ammunition being diverted into the illicit market.

A non-governmental Africa-China-Europe Expert Working Group (EWG) has been set up to: increase awareness and engagement on issues related to the illicit trade and diversion of arms and ammunition into and inside Africa; promote compliance with existing commitments and recommend new policies where necessary; and increase cooperation and action between policymakers in Africa, China and the EU to tackle diversion and reduce arms-related violence. The EWG is made up of nine experts – three each from Africa, China and the EU – who have been drawn from think tanks, research centres and academic institutions.

To read more about the EWG members and keep up to date on their work, visit the official project website: [www.a-c-eproject.eu](http://www.a-c-eproject.eu)

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Cover photo credit: A herdsman patrols the area around Nakukulas, Turkana, northern Kenya, which has been subject to frequent raids by groups from neighbouring areas. © Sven Torfinn/Saferworld

### **Saferworld**

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace.

### **The China Arms Control and Disarmament Association (CACDA)**

CACDA is a non-profit NGO founded in 2001 that focuses on arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. Its main activities include the coordination and organisation of research, education and advocacy on issues of arms control and international security. In addition, CACDA has hosted and sponsored seminars and workshops on similar issues in China. Within the context of this project, CACDA has been established as an official partner and will be leading on the implementation of the project in China and contributing to overall project implementation in Europe and Africa. CACDA previously contributed to the implementation of EU-China-Africa dialogue and cooperation on conventional arms controls back in 2012–2014.

### **Security Research & Information Centre (SRIC)**

SRIC is an independent non-profit think tank which is committed to providing data and information on human security and security sector dynamics in Kenya and the sub-region of the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa. Within these regions, SRIC aims to influence and contribute to positive change in the security sector dynamics as a research-based organisation. Within the context of this project, SRIC has been established as an official partner in the EU Council Decision to lead on the implementation of the project in Africa.

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