China halted weapons sales to South[**Sudan**](http://topics.bloomberg.com/sudan/) after it discovered the state arms manufacturer sold millions of dollars worth of equipment to the war-torn nation, a Chinese Embassy official said.

China North Industries Group Corp., known as Norinco, delivered its first consignment of a $38 million order to South Sudan in June. The Chinese government decided it was “inappropriate to implement” the remainder of the contract after details of the order came to light in July, Lan Kun, an attache at the Chinese Embassy in South Sudan’s capital, Juba, said in a Sept. 21 interview.

“No more weapons are heading to South Sudan,” he said. “There are some media reports that were alleging that the Chinese government was behind this business operation and wants to undermine this peace process. That is totally untrue.”

South Sudan has been wracked by a civil war since mid-December in which thousands of people have died and sparked one of the world’s worst humanitarian crises, according to the United Nations.[**China**](http://topics.bloomberg.com/china/)’s Foreign Ministry has repeatedly called for an end to hostilities, while Chinese Ambassador to the African Union Xie Xiaoyan has worked with U.S., Norwegian and U.K. diplomats to try end the conflict.

U.S. Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan Donald Booth said he raised the issue about the weapons sale with Chinese officials during a visit to Beijing in July.

“I have been told and assured that they have frozen delivery of any further arms that are already sold and they continue to have a policy of no new arms agreements,” he said by phone from New York.

## Oil Buyer

China is one of the biggest buyers of South Sudan’s oil, output of which has fallen by a third to about 160,000 barrels a day since fighting between President Salva Kiir’s government and insurgents loyal to former Vice President Riek Machar started nine months ago, according to the Petroleum Ministry. The violence has displaced 1.8 million people and left 4 million, almost a third of the population, in need of urgent humanitarian assistance, according to the UN.

China National Petroleum Corp. is one of three companies that pump oil in South Sudan. The company evacuated 97 of its staff in December because of the conflict, the state news agency Xinhua reported on Dec. 25.

[**Human Rights Watch**](http://www.hrw.org/), the New York-based advocacy group, has accused South Sudan’s army and rebel forces of crimes against humanity including massacres and rape during the fighting. Civilians had been purposefully targeted and killed, child soldiers recruited and towns pillaged, said HRW South Sudan researcher Skye Wheeler.

## ‘Meaningful Steps’

“Neither side has made any meaningful steps toward ending abuse or holding their forces to account for crimes driving South Sudan deeper into humanitarian crisis and causing terrible levels of suffering,” she said by e-mail.

Since the start of the war, China’s government “has asked all relevant Chinese companies to stop the weapons trade to South Sudan and this stance of the government has not changed,” Yu Ruilin, chief of the political section at the embassy, said in a Sept. 23 interview.

China’s government is committed to restoring peace to the nation, she said. Yu was unaware which shipments by Beijing-based Norinco had been stopped. The deal for the weapons was struck before the war broke out and the embassy had no knowledge of the sale, Lan said.

“China’s support in halting arms flows to all parties in the conflict is critical to reaching a political resolution of the conflict,” Casie Copeland, the Brussels-based International Crisis Group’s South Sudan analyst, said by e-mail.

## ‘No Obligation’

No one was available at Norinco in Juba for comment. The company’s office in Beijing referred questions to a man named Ji, who declined to comment when reached by phone on Sept. 29.

“Norinco observes international laws and the laws and regulations of the Chinese government,” he said. “We are under no obligations to talk about Norinco’s internal business with journalists.”

South Sudan army spokesman Philip Aguer said in a Sept. 21 interview in Juba he was unaware that the Chinese had stopped arms sales.

“We have weapons,” he said. “We are an army. We have no shortage of arms.”

South Sudan’s Army Chief of General Staff Paul Malong declined to be interviewed and two calls to Defense Minister Kuol Manyang Juuk’s mobile phone didn’t connect.

News of the weapons order prompted Amnesty International, the London-based advocacy group, and a coalition of 30 non-governmental organizations to call for an embargo against arms sales to South Sudan. During a visit to Juba last month, U.S. Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power said reports of arms purchases were “very worrying.”

## ‘Convenient’ Cancellation

China’s decision to halt the weapons sale comes “conveniently” after one shipment arrived in South Sudan, said Jonah Leff, director of operations at Brussels-based Conflict Armament Research.

“Nevertheless, it’s indicative of a renewed effort on their part to not play a part in fuelling the conflict with arms,” Leff said in an e-mailed response to questions.

Ambassador Mawien Makol Arik, spokesman for South Sudan’s foreign minister, said he did not understand what the issue was with buying military equipment.

“When it comes to weapons, this is a sovereign country, we can contract anybody who can give us some weapons,” he said. “This is the right of any country not just South Sudan.”