

In and out, and out again: the travails of Brazil as a security provider in Africa

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Abstract

The story of Brazil as a contemporary security actor in Africa can prove a peculiar one. Marked by quick gains and an equally quick recognition over a short period of time, it has also been followed by an equally quick turnaround which has led, as of 2020, to a visible disengagement on the ground. We explore the main travails in this domain, which have compromised much of the gains previously obtained throughout the continent. The chapter begins with a general balance of the progress achieved between 2003 and 2016, followed by the highlights of the recent downturn. We then analyse a specific sub-area, namely the inroads carried out at the defence industry level, in order to showcase the promises and contradictions often associated to what the country has offered across the Atlantic. We conclude by presenting some opportunities for a new pick-up of Brazilian interest in the middle and long run.

Introduction

The external provision of security capabilities to African countries is often characterized by its restriction to a select pool of international stakeholders (Ismail & Skons 2014). Attempting to depict novel actors aiming to break through in such landscape, can thus prove in itself a recurrent, if not difficult, task. However, the story of Brazil as a contemporary security actor in Africa in its own right has taken an even more peculiar turn. Marked by quick gains and an equally quick recognition over a short period of time, it has also been followed by an equally quick turnaround which has led, as of 2020, to a more subdued profile and corresponding disengagement with African security needs. In

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particular, deep economic and political woes in Brazil have exposed the fragilities at the core of what was offered during a previous period of considerable expansion towards Africa. This, in turn, has incited legitimate questions over a supposedly alternative way of providing security capabilities that sought to go beyond traditional partners on the ground. How to frame this fast-paced change in a sectorial niche known for understated gains and painstaking confidence-building steps? And how to pinpoint possible venues of renewed interest?

Drawing on a review of existing scholarly work as well as official diplomatic documentation recently declassified under Brazil's Law for Information Access³, we explore the main travails in this domain, which have compromised much of the gains previously obtained throughout the African continent. The chapter begins by providing a general balance of the progress achieved between 2003 and 2016, followed by the highlights of the recent downturn. We then analyse a specific sub-domain, namely the inroads carried out at the defence industry level, in order to showcase the promises and contradictions often associated to what the country has offered across the Atlantic. We conclude by presenting some opportunities for a new pick-up of Brazilian interest in this area in the middle and long run.

The rise (2003-2016)

From 2003-wards, Brazil embarked on an expansive agenda towards Africa, building upon key political, economic and cooperation modes of engagement, all the while benefiting from high-level political interest for African issues. In this context, other areas were also elevated to new levels of priority and began to receive corresponding focus from Brazilian officials, who identified further opportunities for an increased external profile. A loose combination made up by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence, with the support of the different branches of the Armed Forces, soon followed suit and promptly recognized defence issues as a niche where Brazil had yet to make significant strides, but which held

³ The chapter benefits from access to diplomatic communication exchanged between the Secretary General of Foreign Affairs (SERE – *Secretaria de Estado das Relações Exteriores*) within the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and different Brazilian diplomatic representations in Africa, as well as official documentation produced by the Brazilian Ministry of Defence.

considerable potential for growth. The combination of these actors sought to put into practice a new collective agenda, duly formalized by the country's National Defence Policy (2005), the National Defence Strategy (2008) and the Defence White Book (2012). This triad of documents called for the increase of defence cooperation connections with countries across the Atlantic and into Africa, as part of Brazil's own strategic environment: to invest in this kind of relations was therefore to invest in Brazil's own national security interests.

However, the accomplishment of this agenda required improved coordination between every putative domestic player. The last two years of President Lula's second term, in particular, proved significant in that regard. In 2009, acknowledging the need for increased inter-governmental interactions, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence jointly requested Brazilian embassies in Africa to map the existing defence cooperation outlook in the countries under their responsibility. That request included the size and composition of local Armed Forces, the main external providers of military equipment and training, existing initiatives already involving Brazil as well as any record of prior military cooperation engagement with Brazil⁴. A technical cooperation agreement was then signed in May 2010 between the Ministry of Defence and the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC – *Agência Brasileira de Cooperação*) – itself a unit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – in order to facilitate the analysis, approval and execution of South-South defence cooperation initiatives, including the participation of African military personnel in training opportunities in Brazil.

Ties were also dully promoted through intense shuttle diplomacy. Defence Minister Nelson Jobim (2007-2011), for example, visited Cape Verde, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Namibia during one single trip between May-June 2009⁵. In addition, Foreign Minister and later Defence Minister Celso Amorim (2003-2010, 2011-2015) was actively engaged in a wide range of international visits, seeking to include defence and military cooperation in the bilateral agenda between Brazil and different African countries⁶. Likewise, Foreign Minister Antonio Patriota (2011-2013) used a

⁴ Circular cable 73076, date: 08/07/2009.

⁵ Circular cable 72303, date: 12/05/2009.

⁶ As Defence Minister, Amorim visited Morocco, Cape Verde, Angola, Mozambique, South Africa and the DRC. Information provided by the Brazilian Ministry of Defence.

November 2011 visit to Ghana to suggest that the two countries ought to engage in military cooperation⁷. Even if with some variations, the sharing of agendas and priorities between both Ministries as well as the personal engagement by the holders of such offices played a significant part in substantiating a public perception that strives were indeed being pursued in this area, under a concerted fashion.

Concrete gains were soon in reach. The expansion of the defence attaché network provides a telling example. Prior to 2003, there were only a few Brazilian defence attaché positions in the African continent: Egypt (1975), Angola (1994) and South Africa (1995). The post-2003 period, however, marks the opening of different defence attaché offices, including in Namibia (2004), Mozambique (2004), Nigeria (2005), Senegal (2013) and Ethiopia (2014), with accreditation to other countries⁸. These new posts placed Brazil in a privileged position to foster greater ties with African countries and allowed for greater regular contacts at a military level. The inherent status was also not negligible: in 2011, there were only 25 defence attachés in Nigeria, with Brazil as the only Latin American country represented on the ground⁹.

In addition, this period was marked by the signing of several bilateral defence cooperation agreements, including with Angola (2010), Equatorial Guinea (2010), Guinea-Bissau (2006), Mozambique (2009), Namibia (2009), Nigeria (2010), São Tomé and Príncipe (2010), Senegal (2010), and South Africa (2003). All of these agreements sought to lay forward a common framework while at the same time providing formal guarantees over expenses, confidentiality and formal procedures (Seabra 2014, 87). Nonetheless, contrary to expectations, most were also not immediately implemented. Negotiations towards a bilateral defence cooperation agreement with Algeria, for example, began in 2009 and were completed in 2015 but as of 2020, the document was still under analysis by the Algerian Ministry of Defence. Similar hurdles were found on the Brazilian side, especially after the

⁷ Telegram 321 from BRASEMB ACCRA to SERE, date: 25/07/2012.

⁸ The mandate of Brazil's defence attaché in Nigeria covers Ghana, while attachés in Senegal and Angola are responsible for Togo and Benin, and São Tomé and Príncipe, respectively. Other specific arrangements include, for example, Morocco falling under the purview of the Brazilian defence attaché in Spain.

⁹ Telegram 621 from BRASEMB ABUJA to SERE, date: 13/10/2011.

passing of the 2011 Law for Information Access, which required additional layers of bureaucracy before final ratification by the Brazilian Senate.

In recognition of these formal hindrances, other opportunities were used to showcase potential defence capabilities to African countries. That included stopovers by Brazilian Navy vessels on African ports. In 2013, for example, a Brazilian offshore patrol vessel (OPV) paid port-calls to Nouakchott (Mauritania), Dakar (Senegal), Tema (Ghana), Luanda (Angola) and Walvis Bay (Namibia), before arriving in Brazil. These visits were then used to complete naval exercises and promote greater interactions with local authorities, while at the same time leaving the door open for potential business opportunities down the line¹⁰.

Multilateral frameworks, on the other hand, were routinely used to promote initiatives that Brazil was carrying out in this domain. The South Atlantic geographic purview, for instance, received considerable support through the revitalization of the Zone of Peace and Cooperation in the South Atlantic (ZOPACAS – *Zona de Paz e Cooperação do Atlântico Sul*) (Abdenur & Marcondes de Souza Neto 2014; Abdenur et. al 2016). But the use of the India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) Dialogue Forum for regular naval exercises in the Atlantic as well as the high-level meetings associated to the defence configuration of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP – *Comunidade de Países de Língua Portuguesa*) also helped ensure Brazilian overtures received additional levels of regional clout and recognition by the international community at large.

Yet, what contributed to the receptivity of Brazil's cooperation during this period? Which traits paved the way for its perceived success? According to Brazilian diplomats, in Guinea-Bissau, local authorities emphasized how Brazilian support for the modernization of the country's Armed Forces was helping changing the "local military mentality, still marked by the revolutionary efforts of the independence effort and not by subordination to civilian power" ¹¹. Even if such evaluation cannot be taken at face value, in this case, a common

¹⁰ In this case, when Brazil purchased the three OPV from a UK-based shipyard, it also purchased the building plants and the intellectual property rights to build similar ships; hence regular good-will trips through several potential African buyers. Telegram 159 from BRASEMB ACCRA to SERE, date: 12/04/2013.

¹¹ Official Message 244 from Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Brazilian Ministry of Defence, date: 06/04/2009.

language and shared historical-cultural background evidently assisted the scope and ambition behind such efforts. But even in non-Lusophone African countries, the focus appeared to be set on more practical dividends. After a visit to Brazil, officials from the Ghanaian Navy praised the courses and training opportunities from the Brazilian Navy, especially because they had a more practical nature in comparison with courses offered by other partners, deemed more theoretical¹². In other words, Brazil appeared to have found a niche in terms of security provision that seemingly appealed to the pressing needs of their respective counterparts.

On the other hand, not all Brazilian initiatives began entirely from scratch after 2003; in fact, some can be traced further back in time, in a demonstration of their skilful capitalization in service of a broader, more recent, strategic planning. The naval training operation in Namibia since the late 1990s (Seabra 2016), for example, provided considerable lessons for subsequent attempts to foster similar missions, such as the one in Cape Verde, opened in 2014. In these cases, the *modus operandi* was one and the same: to start small and flexible enough in order to promote further long-term contacts between the respective armed forces. The fact these missions were often combined with a considerable increase in the provision of training opportunities in Brazilian military institutions – in partnership with ABC – only added further appeal to Brazil’s profile across the continent.

It is also important to note that some initiatives originated from the African side, rather than being exclusively devised in Brasília alone. In 2008, it was the Angolan Ministry of the Interior that contacted the Brazilian embassy in Luanda over an agreement on cooperation in security and public order. This was to be a follow-up to an earlier agreement signed almost a decade earlier, the memorandum of understanding (MoU) on Security and Public Order signed by the two countries in 2000¹³. Likewise, in 2012, it was Gabon that first approached Brazil’s Secretariat of Institutional Security (GSI – *Gabinete de Segurança Institucional*) to help with the development of the Gabonese Special Forces as well as

¹² Telegram 52 from BRASEMB ACCRA to SERE, date: 05/02/2015.

¹³ Telegram 615 from BRASEMB LUANDA to SERE, date: 27/05/2008.

intelligence cooperation and institutional cooperation between the GSI and its Gabonese counterpart¹⁴.

This primary interest, in turn, can be explained by the broader goal shared by most African countries of trying to diversify the pool of pre-established cooperation partners. In the case of Angola, initiatives with Brazil were motivated by the desire to reduce foreign dependence in the acquisition of defence equipment¹⁵. Brazil was interpreted as an alternative partner, particularly when compared to both North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and non-NATO actors. When providing an assessment in 2009, the Brazilian embassy in Luanda noted “the costs associated with the existing cooperative initiatives are high and there are indications that the country is looking for alternatives to the Russian and Cuban cooperation, which have their own doctrine, and to the Portuguese cooperation, influenced by NATO”¹⁶. Likewise, in 2009, the Brazilian embassy in Malabo identified the main interests of the Equatorial-Guinean government to involve cooperation for the training of military personnel and the purchase of defence equipment, so as to diversify the number of providers of training and equipment. At the time, the country’s largest partners were Russia and Israel¹⁷.

Overall, by early 2016, Brazil appeared in a rather established position. Having secured a sizeable level of recognition as a brewing security provider in its own right, Brazilian authorities could claim to be able to disburse significant training capabilities for foreign military personnel, on par with a sizeable high-level interest for the security needs of a plethora of African countries.

The downturn (2016-...)

Despite significant inroads over more than a decade, a deep retraction in terms of Brazilian engagement with Africa quickly became apparent from 2016 onwards. We identify three general sets of reasons that contributed to such an outcome. The first derived from the

¹⁴ Telegram 392 from BRASEMB LIBREVILLE to SERE, date: 03/12/2013.

¹⁵ Document 3167/SCO3/SCAI/CAE/EMCFA-MD, date: 19 /03/2013.

¹⁶ Telegram 1340 from BRASEMB LUANDA to SERE, date: 31/07/2009.

¹⁷ Telegram 104 from BRASEMB MALABO to SERE, date: 05/10/2009.

economic climate in Brazil, which dampened national growth expectations. The drop in international commodity prices and the following recession led to far less resources available for any expansive foreign agenda. The most immediate consequences were felt at the budgetary level, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the ABC, the Ministry of Defence, and the Armed Forces not exempted from the austerity drive. Brazil's brewing naval operation in São Tomé and Príncipe, for instance, failed to be elevated to full mission status much like the mission in Cape Verde, as initially envisioned back in 2015. Other offers of training programs made towards African countries were also retracted or failed to be implemented at all. By late 2015, ABC informed the Ministry of Defence that, due to budgetary restrictions, it would not be able to financially support courses for African and American countries in the following year¹⁸.

A second hurdle resided in Brazil's own political class. The tumultuous process of President Dilma Rousseff's impeachment coupled with the swearing-in of Vice-President Michel Temer as the new president in tandem with the Car Wash (*Lava Jato*) anti-corruption operation triggered a new cycle in Brazilian politics, with a corresponding impact on daily managerial tasks and foreign policy priorities. On the one hand, a revolving door in terms of key posts led to the standstill of many initiatives previously approved or announced. Between 2016 and 2018, Brazil witnessed three different Defence Ministers (Jacques Wagner, Aldo Rebelo, and Raul Jungmann) as well as four different Foreign Ministers (Luís Alberto Figueiredo, Mauro Vieira, José Serra, and Aloysio Nunes). The impact on the bureaucratic apparatus was significant. On the other hand, a "new wave of contestation and opposition to South-South cooperation as a priority of Brazil's international engagement" (Abdenur 2018, 191) affected a previous focus on Africa. The inauguration of Jair Bolsonaro on January 2019 further confirmed this trend.

Finally, a third obstacle dealt with previously existing fragilities within the structural model put into place to sustain defence cooperation ties. Even though their root causes preceded this downturn, such fragilities became more difficult to ignore as Brazilian capabilities were stretched to the fullest. This was evidenced at multiple levels. The weak institutionalisation of Brazilian cooperation, for one, had already displayed a lack of

¹⁸ Official Message 890 from Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Brazilian Ministry of Defence, date: 23/09/2015.

cohesiveness and predictability of operations, with effects on the chain of command. For example, when the Director General of Strategic Affairs and Military Cooperation of the Republic of Congo travelled to Brazil in June 2007, the Brazilian embassy in Libreville ended up only being informed of the visit once it had already started and was not aware if there had been any direct conversations between the Congolese official and the Brazilian Ministry of Defence¹⁹. Likewise, irregular funding comprised another issue difficult to resolve that often led to the consideration of out-of-the box alternatives. When in October 2011, Somali pirates attacked the drillship of Brazilian oil company Petrobrás, which was operating in Tanzanian territorial waters (Gozzi 2011), Brazil sought to expand defence cooperation with Tanzania. The Brazilian embassy in Dar es Salaam proposed the creation of a resident defence attaché position, under the responsibility of the Brazilian Navy. However, due to budgetary constraints, the embassy suggested Petrobrás could finance bilateral military cooperation projects in light of its interest in guaranteeing the security of operations in Tanzanian territorial waters²⁰.

Meanwhile, delays in approving and implementing instruments that were expected to support bilateral initiatives continued to take hold. For example, a defence cooperation agreement signed with Nigeria in 2010 had to be adapted to meet the new requirements derived from Brazil's Law for Information Access. After the Brazilian side suggested further alterations, the Nigerian side responded in 2018 by asking for a full renegotiation of the agreement in order to account for changes in their own defence cooperation interests²¹. Such kind of delays in implementing cooperation due to the lack of ratification of defence agreements could have been avoided via specific arrangements. In the case of Angola, for instance, the lack of ratification by Brazil was bypassed with the creation of an interim bilateral committee aimed at meeting annually and providing follow-up to existing initiatives²². The fact such option was not pursued more broadly with regard to other

¹⁹ Telegram 122 from BRASEMB LIBREVILLE, date: 01/06/2007.

²⁰ Telegram 231 from BRASEMB DAR ES SALAM to SERE, date: 15/06/2015.

²¹ Telegraphic dispatch 49 to BRASEMB ABUJA, date: 22/05/2018; Telegram 176 from BRASEMB ABUJA to SERE, date: 05/07/2018; Telegram 280 from BRASEMB ABUJA to SERE, date: 16/10/2018.

²² Telegram 270 from BRASEMB LUANDA to SERE, date: 21/02/2013.

partners attests to a measure of excessive formalism difficult to overcome and impeditive of greater creativity to accomplish proposed goals.

The abovementioned episodes illustrate some of the internal strains present from the start that only became more pronounced and acute as resources dwindled and official priorities shifted away from Africa. However, these tokens also did not preclude occasional developments in recent years. For example, in October 2016, Defence Minister Jungmann represented Brazil during the inauguration of Cape Verde's President Jorge Carlos Fonseca and both countries took the opportunity to sign a new defence cooperation agreement. Moreover, during a 2018 visit to Brazil by Botswana's Defence Minister, the two countries signed a similar formal instrument, thus expanding the number of Brazilian defence partners beyond the South Atlantic. Yet, despite these positive signs, a general sense of unmet expectations still spread across the continent as they failed to match the impetus, both political and resource-wise, of previous years.

At a glance: Brazil's defence industry and Africa

Much like the overall inversions, specific sub-domains of Brazil's defence cooperation drive with Africa underwent a similar pattern of quick expansion followed by a subsequent drawdown. Heralded from the start as one of the linchpins of the newfound relations, investments by Brazil's defence industry did not deviate from this trend. However, they also directly echoed earlier attempts in the 1980s, when Brazil developed a competitive defence industry aimed precisely at expanding its foothold in African and Middle Eastern countries (Franko-Jones 1994; Conca 1997; Moraes 2012). But despite benefiting from these prior experiences, the bulk of outcomes achieved during a period of considerable expansion were not exempted from a corresponding downturn.

Highlights of Brazil's defence industry push towards Africa

The most important industrial partnership that Brazil set up and still maintains with an African country in the defence sector is with South Africa. The two countries began developing the fifth-generation short range air-to-air missile A-DARTER in 2006, through a joint program between South African firm Denel Dynamics and Brazilian firms AVIBRÁS,

Mectron and Opto Eletrônica. The project, managed by a Brazilian Air Force team in South Africa, is often described as a successful partnership between equals, not only because both countries own the intellectual property rights but because it has also contributed to the integration of South Africa and Brazilian technical teams²³. For Brazil, the A-DARTER project was deemed of strategic importance given how its “cutting edge technology can also be applied for civilian use in a wide range of areas such as agriculture, radio communication and oil exploration”, with a potential to encourage different public and private partnerships²⁴.

However, the edge associated to this kind of joint operations remained largely restricted to endeavours with South Africa. For the most part, the remaining initiatives rolled out during the period of outreach to Africa were far more focused in concrete sales opportunities. In this regard, one of the most successful Brazilian products concerned Super Tucano light attack aircraft, designed and produced by the Brazilian Aeronautical Company (EMBRAER – *Empresa Brasileira de Aeronáutica*). For African countries, the Super Tucano proved considerably attractive due to its more affordable price (compared to its competitors), its multipurpose role (for combat training as well as intelligence, surveillance and recognition operations, for example) and its easy maintenance. Three factors allowed Brazil to position such equipment in African markets.

The first comprised the possibility of offering wholesale packages, that combined both the respective products as well as the necessary technical assistance in order to operate and maintain them. For example, in 2009 Ghana began negotiations with EMBRAER, after different options of aircraft were presented to local authorities. At the time, Ghanaian officials stated their expectations that Brazil would provide financial backing to the sale of the aircrafts²⁵. Ghanaian Air Force officials reiterated their interest in purchasing the Super Tucano planes in 2013 and the sale of five Super Tucano, including

²³ Telegram 1203 from BRASEMB PRETORIA to SERE, date: 25/10/2011.

²⁴ Official Message 146 from Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Brazilian Ministry of Defence, date: 05/03/2009.

²⁵ Telegram 273 from BRASEMB ACCRA to SERE, date: 24/04/2009; Telegram 705 from BRASEMB ACRA to SERE, date: 30/09/2011.

logistical support and training, was then completed in 2015²⁶. Likewise, when the head of Mauritania's Air Force visited Brazil in December 2011 to negotiate the sale of two Super Tucano planes, he expressed an interest in setting up a broader defence cooperation agenda that encompassed pilot training and the formation of pilots and technicians, including hosting Brazilian pilots and technicians in Mauritania. The contract signed during the visit was valued at US\$40 million, and included both the planes and the corresponding training package²⁷.

A second key factor that assisted Brazilian defence exports consisted of a cascade effect, i.e. sales to one or to a group of countries raised the attention and interest of other states. When the Malian Minister of Defence visited Brazil in March 2015, for instance, he was introduced to the Super Tucano by EMBRAER officials and Brazilian authorities. At the time, he mentioned the decision to purchase the planes was motivated by the fact Senegal, Burkina Faso and Mauritania had already purchased that very same plane²⁸. Inroads in West Africa thus benefited from a succession of previous deals and from the increased sharing of experiences in the sub-region over the reliability of Brazilian products.

A third factor dealt with the suitability of purpose often associated to Brazilian equipment. Sales to Mali, yet again, illustrate how Brazil was able to supply some of the immediate security needs of African countries, in this case the fighting against Boko Haram – an issue specifically brought up by the Malian Minister of Defence during the abovementioned aircraft purchase²⁹. Likewise, the Angolan Defence Minister mentioned in 2009 his country's interest in purchasing an earlier version of the Super Tucano so as to use the aircraft for surveillance against illegal immigration in the border with the DRC³⁰. Brazilian authorities were also aware of competition from other actors. For example, in

²⁶ Telegram 427 from BRASEMB ACCRA to SERE, date: 09/10/2013.

²⁷ Telegraphic dispatch 4 from SERE to BRASEMB NOUAKCHOTT, date: 2/01/2012, Telegram 13 from BRASEMB NOUAKCHOTT to SERE, date: 18/01/2012.

²⁸ Report 02/SCAI/CAE/EMCFA-MD, Strategic Affairs Division (*Chefia de Assuntos Estratégicos*), Department of International Affairs (SCAI – *Sub-Chefia de Assuntos Internacionais*), 2015.

²⁹ Report 02/SCAI/CAE/EMCFA-MD, Strategic Affairs Division (*Chefia de Assuntos Estratégicos*), Department of International Affairs (SCAI – *Sub-Chefia de Assuntos Internacionais*), 2015.

³⁰ Official Message 414 from Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Brazilian Ministry of Defence, date: 05/06/2009.

2015, Brazil and Cameroun were negotiating the potential sale of six Super Tucano airplanes. Yet, Brazilian diplomats in Yaoundé warned support from the US, France and the European Union in the fight against Boko Haram could mean that other countries would be better placed to present competing proposals, thus undermining negotiations with EMBRAER³¹. Even though the airplane deal with Cameroun did not materialize, 12 Super Tucano planes were authorized for sale to Nigeria in 2018 for the very same purposes, after a two-year negotiation process, which involved EMBRAER's partner, US company Sierra Nevada Corporation, and required authorization by US officials. The planes will be built in EMBRAER's facility in Florida and the first units are expected to be delivered in 2021 (Kelly 2018; Sirota 2019).

However, Brazil-Africa defence cooperation also went beyond the mere sale of defence products and included tailor-made initiatives, aimed at assisting African countries. For example, the Brazilian Army set up a Military Engineering Advisor position with the Senegalese Army in 2015. Even though other countries like Germany and Spain were already present on the ground providing the same type of cooperation, Brazil still perceived it as a useful entry point for future business opportunities³². The same occurred with Angola, where Brazil was identified as capable of providing "political, diplomatic and technical support in the process of marking the country's continental shelf". The Angolan government was particularly keen on obtaining Brazilian expertise in the demarcation of the country's northern maritime frontier, with the Republic of the Congo and the DRC³³. To provide expertise in these sub-domains was seen as paving the way for a more profitable relation down the line. In addition to the provision of expertise, Brazilian companies were also able to seize opportunities related to the infrastructural requirements of different African countries. For example, in 2014, Brazilian infrastructure company Contracta completed the construction of a hangar in the Ghanaian Air Force base in Accra. This was the first Brazilian

³¹ Telegram 56 from BRASEMB YAOUNDÉ to SERE, date: 04/02/2015.

³² Overseas Mission Report, Military Engineering Advisor to the Senegalese Army, 2016-2017.

³³ Telegram 1237 from BRASEMB LUANDA to SERE, date: 13/07/2010.

construction work inaugurated in Ghana and was financed by the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES – *Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social*)³⁴.

Geographically, Brazil's efforts were more focused on traditional partners in the South Atlantic space and within Lusophone Africa. But that did not prevent the expansion of defence industry ties with other African countries over the years. The cooperation with Algeria provides an interesting account of this aim to diversify partnerships. Brazil sold US\$8.6 million worth of small arms to Algeria between 2002 and 2004 (Chade 2007). A Brazilian presidential visit to Algeria in February 2006 included a business delegation with representatives of defence companies³⁵. These efforts were reciprocated by Algerian authorities through a military mission in September 2006. In the same year, Algeria contacted two Brazilian companies, Odebrecht and ATECH, to participate in a bid for the development of a technical report regarding the creation of a local research and technology institute on conventional weapons³⁶. Brazilian defence sales to other North African countries remained significant with Egypt, Algeria and Morocco often found within the ten largest importers of Brazilian military equipment between 2005 and 2014 (Magalhães 2016, 59). The small arms segment occupied a significant share of these sales. In fact, in 2014, "Egypt was the second largest client of [Brazilian small arms company] Taurus, only behind the US" (Magalhães 2016, 77).

Fragilities of Brazil's defence industry push towards Africa

The expansion of Brazil's role as a provider of defence products in Africa was not immune to a changing economic and political context. Four country-cases – Equatorial-Guinea, Senegal, Angola, and Mozambique – illustrate the fragilities of Brazil's designs in this sub-domain, summarized under a common pattern of promising contracts and announcements at first, subsequent backtrack by either Brazilian or African authorities, and followed by the inevitable breakdown of the deal all together.

³⁴ Telegram 454 from BRASEMB ACCRA to SERE, date: 26/11/2014. Contracta signed the contract with the Ghanaian Ministry of Defence in February 2010. An additional clause was signed in September 2011 regarding financing by BNDES. See Telegram 705 from BRASEMB ACCRA to SERE, date: 30/09/2011.

³⁵ Telegram 198 from BRASEMB ARGEL to SERE, date: 22/02/2006.

³⁶ Telegram 702 from BRASEMB ARGEL to SERE, date: 01/08/2006.

In the case of Equatorial-Guinea, the possibility of selling a Brazilian-made corvette amounted to one of the most ambitious attempts to promote Brazil-Africa defence trade. If completed, the sale of a large-scale warship would have been “the Brazilian Navy’s largest overseas sale, valued at US\$450 million”³⁷. President Lula travelled to Malabo in July 2010 at the same time as the Brazilian Navy’s corvette Barroso visited the country, in a concerted move to both display and promote the ship before local authorities. Afterwards, Brazilian naval engineering company Naval Projects Management Company (EMGEPRON – *Empresa Gerencial de Projetos Navais*) invited a delegation from Equatorial Guinea’s Ministry of Defence to Brazil to assess the possible sale of an equivalent vessel³⁸. The process even went as far as Equatoguinean President Teodoro Obiang constituting an official commission, including the country’s Ministers of Defence, Finance and of the Treasury, to examine the possibility of buying the ship³⁹. By 2013, the Brazilian ambassador in Malabo suggested the sale of an OPV as an alternative to a large warship, which would be “smaller, more agile and more economical”⁴⁰. Nonetheless, the sale was consecutively postponed until it was eventually cancelled. In 2014, Equatorial Guinea announced instead the incorporation of a frigate designed in the Ukraine (Nkala 2014).

Negotiations with Senegal followed a similar pattern. In 2013, Brazil and Senegal signed a statement of intentions regarding the acquisition of naval equipment. Both parties agreed to begin negotiations over the future sale of two patrol ships as well as the creation of a professional qualification program for officers and corporals of the Senegalese Navy. The agreement was signed during the 2013 edition of a defence fair held in Rio de Janeiro but as of 2020, neither the purchase nor the qualification program had yet advanced nor been implemented (Ministério da Defesa 2013).

The case of naval cooperation with Angola also proved familiar enough. In 2013, the Brazilian embassy in Luanda noted the navy was the most poorly equipped in terms of the three branches of the Angolan Armed Forces⁴¹. When Defence Minister Amorim visited

³⁷ Telegram 508 from BRASEMB MALABO to SERE, date: 31/12/2012.

³⁸ Telegram 91 from BRASEMB MALABO to SERE, date: 17/03/2011.

³⁹ Telegram 5 from BRASEMB MALABO to SERE, date: 12/01/2011.

⁴⁰ Telegram 330 from BRASEMB MALABO to SERE, date: 12/09/2013.

⁴¹ Telegram 270 from BRASEMB LUANDA to SERE, date: 21/02/2013.

Angola that same year, he was accompanied by representatives from 14 of the main companies supplying the Brazilian military logistical system, with the explicit aim to boost Brazilian defence sales to Angola. The main topic discussed was “Brazilian cooperation for the launch of a defence industry in Angola, able to allow for the substitution of overseas purchases by the Angolan Armed Forces”⁴². The following year, the Angolan and the Brazilian Defence Ministers signed a MoU related to the acquisition of seven offshore patrol vessels (of 500 tons each), with four to be built in Brazil and three to be built in Angola⁴³. As part of the agreement, the Brazilian Navy would provide technical capacitation for Angolan personnel to produce and operate the offshore patrol vessels⁴⁴. However, cooperation endeavours took a different turn when the Angolan government denounced the MoU and suspended its implementation in December 2014, in light of the “changes in circumstances from the date that the agreement had been signed” (Almeida Filho 2015). This sudden halt then led Angola to seek out other potential sellers, including German, Italian and Middle Eastern firms (Seabra & Abdenur 2018, 268).

But this kind of challenges were not restricted to the sale of defence products alone. During his 2009 visit to Mozambique, Defence Minister Jobim announced the donation of three Tucano airplanes, pending approval by the Brazilian Congress⁴⁵. His successor, Defence Minister Amorim promptly noticed that the donation of one type of aircraft could instigate the purchase of other types of aircraft: “you can donate the Tucano and then, who knows, you can sell the Super Tucano. I am not talking about something abstract since we have already sold a considerable number of Super Tucanos to African countries” (Asano & Nascimento 2015, 47). In 2011, as the deliberation process over the donation lingered on, Mozambican Defence Minister Felipe Nyusi confirmed his country’s interest in purchasing Super Tucano planes (Ministério da Defesa 2014). However, these developments coincided

⁴² Telegram 270 from BRASEMB LUANDA to SERE, date: 21/02/2013.

⁴³ The MoU was part of the Program for the Development of Angolan Naval Power (PRONAVAL – *Programa de Desenvolvimento do Poder Naval de Angola*), created to provide Angola with the appropriate means to control its maritime space and which included, in addition to the construction of ships, the construction of a naval ship building facility to be located about 200 km from Luanda.

⁴⁴ Telegram 1164 from BRASEMB LUANDA to SERE, date: 09/09/2014; Telegram 814 from BRASEMB LUANDA to SERE, date: 11/09/2014.

⁴⁵ Telegram 319 from BRASEMB MAPUTO to SERE, date: 27/03/2009.

with a renewed conflict between the opposition (RENAMO) and the government in Mozambique in late 2013. Civil society organizations in Brazil criticized the airplanes could be used in offensive operations, thus increasing tensions on the ground. This led to the inclusion of a clause requiring the equipment in question to only be used for training purposes (Asano & Nascimento 2015). Yet, by 2016, the donation process was still going through legislative analysis. Under the arguments that the Tucanos were needed for instruction training in Brazil after all and that their transportation to Mozambique would generate extra costs, President Temer then opted to rescind the original donation offer (Ramos 2016; Bussotti & Macamo 2018; Marcondes 2019).

The examples above described invite a reflection about the different elements associated to the lack of success of some of the initiatives. For one, the impact of the Brazilian political and economic crisis was felt significantly in terms of export funding lines, which had been previously made available by BNDES as part of a broad political mandate to increase its focus on Africa. Much as they had been central in the past to foment the birth and development of most Brazilian defence firms, those funding lines remained paramount in order to pierce through an extremely competitive market in Africa; as they dried down, a key component of the contemporary outreach also disappeared. The fact they were also contingent on the effective pardon of previous debts to the Brazilian state only reinforced their centrality in this process as an insurmountable obstacle, as evidenced in the case of Côte d'Ivoire⁴⁶.

Secondly, the lack of a more aggressive strategy by Brazilian private actors towards African markets was repeatedly brought up during this period, to no avail. Due to a late internationalization start, most defence firms found few incentives to expand operations beyond the national market or the nearby region; when they did so, their inversions often proved sporadic and structurally dependent of significant governmental support. This kind of assessment had already been noted as early as 2006 by, for instance, the Brazilian embassy in Algeria, yet it continued to prevail in the following years:

⁴⁶ Telegram 10 from BRASEMB ABIDJAN to SERE, date: 08/01/2013.

“(…) there is a certain favourable predisposition about Brazil, that will have been strengthened by the Algerian military mission. However, in order for these efforts to translate into concrete businesses and increase bilateral cooperation, it will be necessary to sensitize Brazilian companies towards a more aggressive commercial promotion. The opportunities in the military area, although concrete, are theoretical and potential. The key to transform these opportunities into tangible business rests in, according to the local culture, the physical presence and in keeping relations up to date”⁴⁷.

However, some of the observed limitations also went beyond Brazil’s control, particularly when associated with issues faced by African countries themselves. Although there was a desire to increase defence cooperation, in some situations, this was not possible due to a number of impediments, of both financial and political nature. For example, in 2009, cuts in the Angolan defence budget due to the international financial crisis, led investments in the Angolan Navy to be prioritized over other branches of the Angolan Armed Forces. At the time, this decision caused a delay in Brazil-Angolan negotiations related to the sale of Brazilian Tucano aircraft⁴⁸.

The international sanctions regime also proved an unexpected obstacle. In 2009, the Brazilian embassy in Abidjan reported the interest of the Ivorian Armed Forces in “Brazilian military expertise” in order to “reinforce the professionalism” of local military personnel⁴⁹. When evaluating the request, however, officials in Brasília advised against it since challenges regarding the process of pacification and stabilization of the country could prove an obstacle to its implementation⁵⁰. The fact that the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) sanctions regime on Côte d’Ivoire, established by UNSC resolution 1572 (2004) and renewed by resolution 1842 in 2008, included a prohibition on the provision of military training was also brought up as another formal impediment⁵¹. Likewise, when EMBRAER

⁴⁷ Telegram 957 from BRASEMB ARGEL to SERE, date: 16/10/2006.

⁴⁸ Official Message 414 from Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Brazilian Ministry of Defence, date: 05/06/2009.

⁴⁹ Telegram 195 from BRASEMB ABIDJAN to SERE, date: 24/06/2009.

⁵⁰ Telegraphic dispatch 169 from SERE to BRASEMB ABIDJAN, date: 31/08/2009.

⁵¹ Telegraphic dispatch 176 from SERE to BRASEMB ABIDJAN, date: 04/09/2009.

tried to sell Super Tucano planes to Côte d'Ivoire in 2012, the deal hit a similar need for approval by the UN Sanctions Committee and subsequently broke down.

Conclusion

After a period of marked and visible expansion, it is legitimate to ask what went wrong in Brazilian defence overtures towards Africa. The answer, however, hardly proves novel. Well-known factors such as “competition with partners from the Global North, the lack of financial resources to materialize aspirations as well as rapidly changing priorities in national capitals” (Marcondes et. al 2017, 212) played a part in halting these particular transatlantic ties, actively promoted between 2003 and 2016. The case of Brazil’s defence industry, in particular, followed an all too familiar route and was also characterized by concrete advancements and occasional success inasmuch as it was bogged down by contradictions and a lack of cohesive official support to achieve the goals of sustainably expanding into Africa.

What to expect ahead? On December 2019, Brazilian Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo embarked on a five-day tour of Africa, including visits to Cape Verde, Senegal, Nigeria, and Angola. The visit emphasized the “security of the South Atlantic” and Brazil’s intention of becoming a full member of the G7++ Friends of the Gulf of Guinea initiative (Romildo 2019). In the meantime, the government’s new publicized initiative to support the Brazilian defence industry, including the exports of defence products, has the potential to maintain the private sector at the very least attentive of new opportunities (Oliveira 2020). Finally, the number of African resident attachés in Brazil remains for all purposes considerable – as of 2020, representatives from Angola, Cameroun, Egypt, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Zambia were stationed in Brasília – proving that key official communication channels are still very much in place if relations were to pick up once more.

Two domains might, however, warrant more dividends in the coming years due to the current national and international contexts. The first comprises peacekeeping. The appointment of Brazilian General Ricardo Augusto Ferreira Santos Neves on December 2019 as Force Commander of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DR Congo (MONUSCO) serves as an indication that the UN continues to count on regular

Brazilian contributions to that specific mission. Santos Neves is the third Brazilian general to occupy the position, after General Elias Rodrigues Martins Filho (2018- 2019) and General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz (2013-2015). In 2019, Brazil sent a team of instructors from the Brazilian Army's Jungle Warfare Training Centre to provide on-site training to MONUSCO blue helmets from the Force Intervention Brigade. If resources are to remain scarce, this option might become an instrument of choice in order to maintain a minimal semblance of engagement with African security predicaments.

The second domain is of a more geographic nature. For all purposes, East Africa remains largely underexplored in its defence cooperation potential. Recent initiatives illustrate how Brazilian actors are beginning to consider new opportunities. In 2017, Brazil's Peacekeeping Training Centre (CCOPAB – *Centro Conjunto de Operações de Paz do Brasil*) signed an agreement with its Ethiopian counterpart (CCOPAB 2017). Meanwhile, with Kenya, the Brazilian Army provided four weeks of training in project management in engineering at the Kenyan Humanitarian Support and Peace Operations School (HPSS) in Nairobi and as part of the United Nations Project for African Rapid Deployment of Engineering Capabilities (ARDEC), a UN Triangular Partnership Project (TPP), involving Brazil, Japan and Switzerland. The course included military personnel from Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda and Zambia. A second edition of the course took place in 2018 with a larger number of African countries, including military personnel from Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia (Exército Brasileiro 2018). The initiative is an example of a South-South cooperation activity funded by Northern actors, which could signal a potentially alternative solution to Brazilian limitations in financing further activities with African countries.

Overall, we expect future developments in terms of Brazil-Africa defence cooperation to focus on less flashy initiatives – which means they will also attract less political interest, given the reduced immediate dividends. At the same time, capacity-building training in areas such as peacekeeping, may allow Brazil to establish bridges and promote trust in the long run. The many challenges and limitations for Brazil-Africa defence cooperation discussed here do not mean that the situation is irreversible or that Brazil's image is irremediably tarnished; rather, that it will require considerable new political and

material impetus in order to be considered once more a worthy alternative in the security domain, as far as African countries are concerned.

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