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# Falling short or rising above the fray?

## Rising powers and security force assistance to Africa

Pedro Seabra

Despite an increase in rising powers providing security force assistance (SFA) to Africa, the content of the expertise and the capabilities made available by these countries remain insufficiently explored. What different solutions, if any, are provided? And how does their overall record fare against previous experiences across the continent? By exploring Brazilian and Chinese efforts in Namibia as well as Chinese and Indian overtures towards Mozambique, I argue that rising powers tend to be more invested in a long-term socializing agenda than in immediate capacitation results. This, in turn, justifies their inroads in sectorial niches, as gateways for durable outcomes over time.

**Keywords:** South-South relations; military aid; socialization; Namibia; Mozambique

### **Introduction**

The provision of external assistance to reinforce African security capabilities has warranted considerable scholarly interest over the years (e.g. Jowell 2018; Williams 2020; Tull 2019; Reno 2018; Neads 2019). Examples abound of initiatives led by outside partners aiming to support, re-size, rebrand or re-create from scratch entirely new security apparatuses, often with mixed results. However, most research has also tended to overlook similar efforts by other non-traditional players, namely rising powers, which have made inroads of their own in this field.

Despite its recurrent conceptual stretching (Larson 2018), ‘rising power’ is a category attributed to several countries, often to Brazil, China and India, who have garnered attention for their claims to recognition and redistribution of power within the international order, with varying degrees of success. As part of their external agendas, they have also stepped up their provision of

military capabilities in fragile African security sectors. However, these efforts have largely gone unnoticed, if not uncredited, in the wider canvas of international security force assistance (SFA). The few studies of rising powers as SFA providers in Africa focus on either limited dimensions or on *ad hoc* efforts (e.g. Tjønneland 2014). For all purposes, the content of the expertise and the capabilities made available to recipient countries still remain insufficiently explored. What different solutions, if any, have been provided thus far? And how does the overall record of rising powers fare against previous experiences across the continent? Answers to these queries can assist in broadening the debate over the traditional pool of SFA actors and expand our understanding of the motives behind such programs in the first place.

Theoretically, recent literature has treated SFA as a Principal-Agent (PA) issue, in which provider and recipient have conflicting interests and goals, thus compromising the effectiveness of the intended assistance. In this model, principals are forced either to rely on a mix of substantial oversight, rewards and conditionality, or to acknowledge that they will invariably reap less successful outcomes (Biddle 2017; Biddle, Macdonald and Baker 2018; Rittinger 2017). However, as outlined in the introduction to this special issue, other obstacles also emerge in contexts marked by competing SFA programmes, with principals not necessarily aligned with each another in terms of expected results (Rolandsen, Dwyer and Reno 2021). It is therefore crucial to distinguish between providers invested in effective changes of local security forces and those more in tune with lesser tangible gains.

Rising powers are more likely to be found in the latter category because opportunities and entry points for newcomers in this domain are fewer. Hence, they tend to perceive their efforts through a prospective socialized lens – in which interactions with other states’ military structures are “one likely channel whereby politically relevant individuals might learn new ideas and have

the capability to reform existing institutional structures” (Atkinson 2006, 512; see also Gheciu 2005; Frazier and Hutto 2017) – rather than effecting immediate change on the ground. Adding this nuance to the PA equation allows us to perceive rising powers as more invested in a longer-term socializing agenda, trying to imprint their own principles of external conduit to potential partners by means of a lighter footprint, than in immediate capacitation results. This, in turn, justifies their inroads in sectorial niches, as gateways for more durable professional outcomes over time.

Previous research on SFA has also privileged crises or post-conflict contexts in Africa as blank slates for testing external reform efforts, often meshed with broader state-building initiatives. This has led to neglect other transitional cases, in which countries warranted related initiatives nonetheless. Likewise, recent work has overwhelmingly emphasised the Sahel or the Horn (e.g. Reno 2018; Tull 2019; Williams 2020). I focus instead on Southern Africa and specifically on Namibia and Mozambique, as a small n-selection, less studied in the literature but still attracting considerable public engagement by rising powers, in order to hypothesise on the overall performance of Brazil, China and India throughout the continent. The two case studies display one key similarity: both have fragile security sectors, which have received considerable overtures from the international community, including the abovementioned rising powers. Still, Mozambique experienced a post-independence conflict whereas Namibia did not, which allows us to account for cases with different historical baselines.

The core argument is anchored by academic literature, official documentation and field research carried out in January-February 2020, including interviews with Namibian and Mozambican military officers who benefitted from SFA programs provided by Brazil, China, and India. I argue that these initiatives serve as long-term opportunities for rising powers to socialize

incipient security sectors and instil further alignment with their own worldviews. Meanwhile they incur the same challenges as other previously established actors. However, despite claims of demand-driven assistance, rising powers do not necessarily provide innovative or more successful contributions; they focus instead on untapped niches, left available or disregarded by other partners, with the aim of maximizing their impact in the long run.

The article proceeds as follows. I begin by briefly revisiting the main lessons of past SFA initiatives in Africa, and how rising powers broadly perceive security issues on the continent. I then explore in greater detail Brazilian and Chinese efforts in Namibia as well as Chinese and Indian overtures towards Mozambique. Based on those experiences, I take stock of key similarities and distinctions, pinpoint the preferred SFA modes of engagement and entry points, and compare them with obstacles faced by other actors. I conclude by indicating possible avenues for further research.

### **Lessons from SFA in Africa**

Most scholarship on SFA in Africa swings between measuring “‘African’ armies and political orders against ‘supposedly universal’ (but often deeply ‘western’) standards”, and “fore-grounding ‘African’ particularism by demonstrating its deviance and primitivism” (Baaz and Verweijen 2018, 61). Yet the need of African armies for greater external assistance has also varied over the years according to the decolonization and regime formation of the country in question (Warner and Thaler 2016). As the Cold War ended, two main trends emerged. On the one hand, African countries became more adept at participating in and contributing to peacekeeping missions, both on the continent and worldwide. However, these missions also remained dependent on external

support for the military training needed to take on such responsibilities. On the other hand, the post-9/11 context witnessed changes in the reasoning behind external engagement, with an increased meshing of security and development agendas in order to legitimize humanitarian interventions and the fight against violent extremism. Securitization of poverty and state fragility in the name of domestic and regional stability thus became the norm.

Amid these developments, efforts to create or reform armed forces throughout the continent displayed four overall trends. First, most SFA emphasised quantitative rather than qualitative results, often adhering excessively to Western conceptual models, donor-driven agendas, and technical management issues (Jowell 2018). Second, the colonial legacy remained prominent in most African states, as evidenced in adherence to codes of conduct, doctrines and organizations previously designed by former metropolises. Countries such as the UK, France, or Portugal remained heavily invested in the outcome of army-building processes (e.g. Wyss 2018; Luckham 1982; Bernardino 2015), even though this also led to dependence on funding cycles and vetting processes that hamstrung original goals. Third, overlapping initiatives of Western partners became the norm: “Every so often I get a call from my colleagues at NDU [National Defense University, in Washington D.C.]”, a British official wrote, “saying, ‘I’ve got one of your students again’” (Briggs 2013, 12). Fourth, multiplication of competing training reflected the inability of African officials to turn down any opportunity of the sort, “even when the offers” were “repetitious”, particularly because in “the absence of alternatives, free training is better than no training” at all (Ibid, 13).

These lessons notwithstanding, emphasis on the creation or reform of national armed forces kept on being brought to the forefront amid conflict-ridden contexts. However, more recent attempts also continued to evidence how the lack of coordination between providers leads to

duplication of efforts and waste of resources (Marsh and Rolandsen 2021; Ansorg and Gordon 2019). When considering the Somalian case, for instance, Williams noted how the multiplicity of training programs – offered in several languages – left trainees with diverse, but unstandardized, military skills (Williams 2020, 379-380). Likewise, misperception and misrepresentation of assistance priorities, and misalignment of interests between providers and recipients, often stand in the way of successful reform (e.g. Tull 2019; Reno 2018). Success seems to occur only when providers adapt their approaches to the cultural preferences and political agendas that underpin local knowledge, participation and agency (e.g. Neads 2019). A final common thread permeates this series of assessments: they all derive from experiences designed and led by Western partners. Whether other providers beyond the West are meaningful in this domain and whether they proceeded any differently remains unaccounted.

### **Rising powers and security in Africa**

The goals of rising powers in the global order no longer appear to hold any mysteries. Considered ‘spoilers, supporters or shirkers’, countries such as Brazil, China or India have generally followed a similar trend of craving greater international prominence (Schweller 2011). Even if their identification with such category might vary due to fluctuations in material capabilities and uneven integration into global economic chains, redistribution of power and international recognition as legitimate players still make up most of their agenda abroad (Nel 2011; Gray and Murphy 2014). But while there is increasing consensus over what they want, the same cannot be said of how they go about achieving it. Implicit in much of the literature is the notion that ‘being a great power has never been solely about the possession of large amounts of crude material power’, and that the use of ‘softer’ approaches can also pay dividends (Hurrell 2006, 4).

In this context, Africa stands out as a key geopolitical stage where rising powers have sought influence, resources and votes (Shaw *et al.* 2009; Vickers 2013). While their presence has been driven primarily by commerce and energy, their interests have become more strategic, and the visibility of these so-called rising powers in the continent has also increased. They have therefore become more sensitive to security issues in Africa and have invested in conflict prevention by contributing to peacekeeping, mediation, and security sector reform (SSR).

However, these overtures have not been entirely novel. China, for instance, rebuilt the Tanzanian armed forces from the ground up in the mid-1960s (Shinn 2008, 158; Einseman 2018). In 1975 the Brazilian dictatorship discreetly sent a team of military experts to help the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) during the early stages of the Angolan civil war (Lobato 2015). India's first major involvement in peacekeeping came with the UN Operation in the Congo (ONUC) from 1960 to 1964, where it incurred heavy casualties (Bullioin 1997, 101-102). Despite repeatedly heralded as new actors in this domain, all three countries thus display previous extensive experience in the African security realm.

China's involvement has lately attracted the most scholarly and public interest. Having coined its own concept of 'military operations other than war' (MOOTW), China's security profile in Africa is characterized by its growing contribution to peacekeeping missions and its sale of weaponry to African buyers. Its first foreign military base was established in 2017 in Djibouti, and the first China-Africa Defence and Security Forum was held in 2018. (Alden *et. al* 2018; Hodzi 2019). Until 2014 Brazil also invested considerably in military contacts with African counterparts through multiple defence cooperation agreements and the sale or donation of military equipment, primarily to countries bordering the South Atlantic (Seabra 2014; Abdenur *et. al* 2016). Meanwhile, India built upon its economic interests in East Africa by seeking to increase regional



coast guard and naval capabilities through joint exercises and patrolling, technical and intelligence cooperation, and defence equipment deliveries (e.g. Beri 2008; Mwangiri and Biswas 2013).

However, even though a similar interest in ramping up security entanglements with Africa does not necessarily equal to a similar operational playbook, parallels have also emerged among these powers at the normative-rhetorical level. Official guidelines and strategies highlight the role of military cooperation.<sup>1</sup> While seeking to promote their role as security providers, they often invoke concepts such as solidarity and horizontality as linchpins of their outreach. Official discourse stresses how their presence is devoid of the historical baggage of former colonial powers, therefore constituting a more compatible alternative. Indeed, their external stances are very much grounded in a narrative diametrically constructed in opposition to other Western SFA providers on the ground. Finally, the principles of respect for national sovereignty and the non-imposition of conditionalities on the provision of cooperation, coupled with the promotion of routine network exchanges, are also frequently brought up as additional advantages (Seabra and Abdenur 2018; Benabdallah 2020). These broad strokes do not, however, sufficiently depict the content or reach of their initiatives on the ground; a more detailed assessment of SFA engagements by these countries is warranted. The cases of Namibia and Mozambique provide insights into preferred modes of engagement and entry points for security-related efforts.

### **Brazilian and Chinese SFA in Namibia**

Challenges abounded for Namibia at its independence in 1991. Reflecting the “hallmarks of a new, as well as of a small, state”, officials sought to juggle a nascent foreign policy with the need for outside assistance in order to plan and create a security sector apparatus (Pisani 1991, 25). A British

Military Advisory Training Team (BMATT) took the lead in providing initial training and assisting in setting up the internal command structure for the Namibian Defence Forces (NDF) and Ministry of Defence (Nathan 1991). Reliance on external partners would continue in the coming years as similar non-exclusive agreements were signed with Canada, France, Germany, the US, Zimbabwe and Russia, for air surveillance support, training of Namibian military abroad, secondment of advisers, and supply of military equipment.

Amid these developments, the roots of Brazil's assistance can be traced to the mid-80s, when it toyed unsuccessfully with the idea of providing peacekeepers to a potential UN transition mission in Namibia. Brazil did, however, provide technical support to the main movement pushing for independence, the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) (Seabra 2016, 93-94). China, on the other hand, made its own inroads by providing some military training, but was constrained by geopolitical rivalry with the USSR for influence in Africa (Taylor 1997). It nonetheless sent twenty Chinese civilian officials to the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) entrusted with handling the independence process. All in all, such prior contacts laid the groundwork for more intensive relations.

Brazil came out ahead at first. Following South Africa's return of the Walvis Bay port to Namibia in 1994, the Brazilian Naval Mission to Namibia (MNBN) was formally launched to create a local navy. Training soon became the crux of the partnership. Between 2002 and 2013 over two thousand positions were made available to Namibian military personnel at Brazilian military institutions, including the Naval College, the Admiral Wandenkolk Instruction Centre, and the Admiral Alexandrino Instruction Centre, all in Rio de Janeiro (Seabra 2016, 95-99). The long-term centrality of Brazil in Namibian military training can be summed up accordingly: "you

may have someone who went to South Africa, to Greece, to Germany, to China...but then you still go to Brazil”.<sup>2</sup>

Building upon this experience, in 2009 Brazil set up the Naval Marines Technical Support Group (GAT-FN), to train Namibian marines. In 2014 Brazil also began to assign army advisors to train Namibian soldiers before they took up training slots at Brazilian military institutions. By then, some forty Brazilian military personnel were stationed in Walvis Bay. These programmes were accompanied by multiple equipment offers and corresponding training packages. In 2004 Brazil donated a corvette, the *Purus*, later renamed after General Dimo Hamaambo. But the main contribution came in 2009, with the delivery of a newly launched naval patrol ship, the NS *Brendan Simbwaye* worth US\$23.7 million, followed two years later by two smaller patrol boats, the *Terrace Bay* and *Möwe Bay*, at a cost of US\$6 million each. Summing up this key bilateral relationship, former Namibian President Hifikepunye Pohamba pointedly noted: “Brazil is a partner that not only gives the bread, but also teaches you how to make it” (Amorim 2013, 151).

The status of Brazil as a SFA partner, however, soon encountered competition from other countries, notably China. During the early post-independence years, Namibia had already procured Chinese military equipment in the form of light fighter aircraft (K-8s). Senior NDF officers had also undergone advanced professional training at a military academy in Shanghai; in 2007 alone, some thirty Namibian military personnel attended such courses (Pisani 2014, 125). As China began to ramp up its overall strategy towards Africa, ties with Namibia strengthened. In 2011, Namibia contracted with Chinese-owned Poly Technologies the multi-purposed patrol vessel NS *Elephant*, built in Wuhan and handed over in July 2012. Its first crew of 65 Namibian sailors received six months of training in China. Three years later, a further donation of military hardware worth US\$4.6 million was announced as part of the overall effort to press forward with military

cooperation. Most recently, in 2017 the Namibian Navy accepted two former Chinese patrol vessels, the NS *Daures* and NS *Brukkaros*, refurbished and overhauled by Poly Technologies.

Meanwhile, Chinese firms finished construction in 2014 of the Okahandja Military Academy, for training NDF junior and senior officers as well as Southern African Development Community (SADC) personnel, with the attendance of Chinese instructors (Stupart 2014). In the same year, the 16th Escort Task Force of the Chinese navy, comprising two missile frigates and a supply ship anchored in Walvis Bay for the first time. Prior to this port call, the two countries held their first-ever joint naval drills, focusing on formation movement, communication and rescue operations. Two years later, media reports claimed that China had negotiated use of Walvis Bay as a potential naval base, a claim that the government repeatedly denied. Regardless, in 2018 Presidents Xi Jinping and Hage Geingob agreed to a new comprehensive strategic partnership to facilitate cooperation, including in the defence sector. Facing criticism of the influence China could have over his country, Geingob's reply was unconcerned: "We are mature, we can choose our friends, we can choose what we want ..., and what's good for us" (Yang and Zhang 2018).

### **Indian and Chinese SFA in Mozambique**

Mozambique's case differs from Namibia's owing to its post-conflict situation. Not only did it engage in an independence war against the colonial power, Portugal, but it also became embroiled in a lengthy civil war between two liberation movements, FRELIMO and RENAMO, at the height of the Cold War. After the Rome peace accords in 1992 ended the civil war, the Mozambican Armed Forces (FADM) were formed in order to integrate the People's Forces of Liberation of Mozambique (FPLM) from FRELIMO with the military wing of RENAMO (Young 1996;

Malache, Macarigue and Borges Coelho 2005). However, despite considerable assistance during the early years, the lack of stable financial support, proper equipment, and lingering civil-military tensions between the national forces and RENAMO holdovers, resulted in a fragile national security sector. The legacy of the civil war remains quintessential to this day in explaining the continuing diversity of external partners in assisting with the reform of the armed forces.

In this context, China and India opted for different paths of engagement. The former had taken an active role in the first years of the colonial war, providing training in Tanzania for FRELIMO fighters, who received weapons from China and adopted Chinese tactics of guerrilla warfare. Multiple official delegations were also sent to China for further training (Shinn 2008, 156; see also Taylor 2006, 94-95). India's direct involvement in the country, on the other hand, began with participation in the UN Operation in Mozambique (ONUMOZ) between 1992 and 1994, following the Rome peace accords.

The modes of engagement by both countries remained thereafter somewhat apart. China continued to provide specialized training in its own national institutions – by 2016 the Nanjing Military Academy had trained a total of 94 Mozambican officers – but invested particularly in small donations in cash and kind. In 2001 China supported a US\$150,000-worth de-mining program, and in 2002 gave military vehicles, medical material, diving equipment, boots, and cloth for the manufacture of uniforms valued at US\$1.8 million. In 2009, US\$3 million was donated to purchase logistical equipment, followed in 2010 by US\$4.7 million-worth of material to the FADM production logistics programme and to train soldiers in agricultural and livestock skills (including trucks, tractors, agricultural implements, and mowers), and US\$1.2 million for further training and logistics. In 2011, nonlethal equipment (including material for making uniforms, boots, blankets, rucksacks, and raincoats), valued at US\$1.5 million, was also donated. Four years

later China provided vehicles for the FADM's Peace Support Unit as well as equipment for the military band, topped in 2016 by an additional agreement to supply training, uniforms and other military accessories worth US\$11.5 million.

Meanwhile, significant headway was made in terms of infrastructure. In 2001 China financed the construction of housing for Mozambican soldiers in Albasine, Maputo, reportedly costing US\$7 million (Chichava 2008, 8; Alden and Chichava 2014). In 2007 another military assistance protocol granted US\$1.5 million for refurbishment of several facilities of the FADM (Roque 2009, 4). In 2010 agreement was reached to equip the Maputo military hospital and FADM barracks, at a cost of US\$3 million. Two years later, China undertook further modernization of the military hospital, and in 2017 US\$18 million was granted to build new barracks in Maputo province. More recently, China has also used its military capabilities for 'softer' activities. The naval hospital ship *Peace Ark*, on its 'Harmonious Mission-2017', carried out an eight-day humanitarian visit to Mozambique, providing free consultation and treatment for almost 10,000 people. In the same year, a Chinese military medical team was sent for a two-month stay, providing medical guidance to local military hospitals and helping them carry out medical and epidemic prevention tasks.

India pursued a different approach during the same timeframe. In July 2003, at the request of Mozambique, the Indian Navy deployed two ships to provide coastal security during the African Union (AU) summit in Maputo. The role was repeated twice during the World Economic Forum's African Economic Summit and the Fourth EU-ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States) Summit in 2004. Subsequently, the two countries signed a comprehensive Memorandum of Understanding, in March 2006, on military technical cooperation, logistic support and training, followed by two meetings of a Joint Defence Working Group in 2008 and 2010 (Naidu 2013).

Cooperation increased more significantly in 2011, after a resurgence of piracy from the Gulf of Aden. That was made particularly evident when the Indian Navy liberated the Mozambican fishing vessel *Vega 5*, rescuing thirteen crewmen. As a direct result, the two countries signed a new agreement allowing joint maritime patrols along the Mozambican coast. President Armando Guebuza was quick to point out that his country wanted to “share and learn” from India in order to “make our ocean peaceful and safe” (“Mozambique, India” 2010). But the agreement also covered the other branches of the armed forces and envisaged cooperation over training in military institutes, supply of defence equipment and services, rehabilitation of military infrastructure, and transfer of know-how and technology for assembling and repair of vehicles, aircraft and ships (Panda 2019).

These goals were complemented by the donation of two interceptor boats to the Mozambican Navy, coupled with the training in India of some 28 Mozambican officers. Training cooperation also increased after the 2019 Indian Africa Field Training Exercise (IAFTX), conducted at the Aundh Military Station and College of Military Engineering in Pune, which focused on synergising humanitarian mine action with UN peace operations. Ten military personnel from twelve African countries, including Mozambique, participated. Finally, India also used its military capabilities for public outreach. After cyclone Idai struck Mozambique in 2019, three ships from the Indian Navy’s First Training Squadron were diverted to render assistance. They were the first to arrive on the scene and became closely involved in humanitarian aid and disaster relief (HADR) and search and rescue (SAR) operations, in collaboration with local authorities.

**What do rising powers bring to the table?**

The record of Brazil and China in Namibia, and of China and India in Mozambique exemplifies the temporal dimension of SFA in interstate relations. Neither a colonial legacy nor external patronage necessarily provides an advantage over other potential actors. Rising powers were already willing to contribute at the moment these countries became independent, through a combination of training and technical support made available either locally or in institutions abroad. Military exchanges between countries so far apart – geographically and in other ways - began far earlier than many would assume.

Mere presence when capacity predicaments emerged, however, did not necessarily mean that rising powers would pursue a wholesome results-driven approach. Relations have been more consistently characterized by a light footprint in supporting local reform efforts. A reason for this course of action can be found in the inexperience of rising powers in sending large contingents abroad for SFA missions. But the disappearing necessity throughout Africa for large-scale efforts to create or reform entire security structures also played an important role. Such ambitious programmes were increasingly relegated to conflict-ridden countries and broad stabilization missions, usually under regional-international mandates. The fact greater opportunities for SFA tend to be the ones most pressing, means they are more quickly addressed by those partners already present in-country. It might thus be, with their late positioning within the international system, that rising powers will always arrive last or find it harder to contribute in already-occupied niches of SFA, where capacity needs are more glaring and demanding.

Their SFA toolbox of choice mirrors this late positioning. First and foremost, training slots in specialized military institutions abroad are clearly favoured by both sides in the relationship. Under extensive assistance programmes multiple courses are offered either in the language of the donor, or in English with the assistance of translators. That said, even though “it is cheaper to send



African officers to China than to send Chinese officers to Africa”, small train-and-equip teams are occasionally deployed on the ground.<sup>3</sup> Second, the sale or donation of military equipment has proven instrumental. There is widespread acknowledgement that “those who build the equipment, are the ones who know how to use it”.<sup>4</sup> Given how most of the security sectors under consideration have remained fragile over the years, their hardware needs have also continued to expand, which means filling those needs allows improving their operability capacity. Third, rising powers have become skilful in identifying entry points as key niche opportunities. Assistance to local military bands and provision of ceremonial paraphernalia are good examples in that regard, with Brazilian and Chinese efforts attesting to the different routes available to improve professionalization of Namibian and Mozambican forces, respectively (Quero 2013; “Mozambique: China Donates Material” 2015). Finally, support for reform or creation of military infrastructure, such as barracks or military hospitals – something at which China has become particularly adept – has gone a long way towards abating sectorial grievances and improving living and working conditions for local personnel.

However, even if SFA entry points have required only minimal engagement from rising powers thus far, particularly when compared with other comprehensive reform efforts throughout the continent, the issue of effectiveness still arises. Indeed, investment of fewer resources is not incompatible with the achievement of concrete changes on the ground. But under those circumstances most of the activities undertaken by rising powers ought to be assessed through a long-term lens rather than a search for immediate dividends. This implies acknowledging that rising powers may be aiming to socialize their counterparts when focusing on organizing, training, and equipping. Particularly when considering the care assigned to ensure such programs fall in line with the overall mandates of rising powers in engaging abroad in the first place: e.g. solidarity,

horizontality, respect for national sovereignty, and non-imposition of conditionalities. Hence also why the rationale is often set on providing technical expertise rather than lethal training *per se*. China, for example, professes to “not train to take you to a battlefield; it is not about indoctrination, it is about technical specialization”.<sup>5</sup> To dispense SFA otherwise would contradict the very premises that justify their claims to alternative provision, in stark contrast with other Western partners. Prioritizing technical input or infrastructure over combat capabilities can be thus depicted as an assertion of recipients’ more nuanced needs while simultaneously substantiating the principals’ world view by exchanging shared techniques, ideas, and practices in this domain.

The careers of officers who received training from rising powers illustrate the kind of opportunities that such training can open up down the line. Air Vice Marshal Martin Kambulu Pineha, for example, completed the Qualified Flight Instructor Course in China in 1997 and currently serves as Namibia’s Air Force Commander. For his part, Rear-Admiral Sinsy Ndeshi Bamba Nghipandua attended the Naval Officers Formative Course at the Brazilian Naval College in 1995-1998 and went on to serve as Namibia’s Navy Commander until 2020.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Mozambican defence minister Aguiar Mazula (1994-1998) was trained at the Nanjing Military Academy in China. Their similar experience does not imply that such officials necessarily adopted codes of conduct or even operational procedures from their overseas training, but it does allow to open up the discussion over the long-term impact and influence of such training on military organization and hierarchy. Still, focusing their SFA assistance on gradual socialized change does not exempt rising powers from constraints similar to those faced by other providers.

### **How do rising powers fare against other SFA providers?**

Having pinpointed tools and approaches, we still need to contrast the SFA track record of rising powers against the main lessons learned from other providers in Africa. Even if a long-term goal of socializing underpins most of their initiatives, their overall performance thus far can already be tentatively assessed. As mentioned, conflating or changing mandates midway through specific engagements has often been identified as an obstacle to effective SFA in Africa. Similar difficulties can be observed in the experience of rising powers. In the case of Mozambique, for example, even though maritime security concerns drove most of India's initial SFA support, a new premium has been placed on counterterrorism as the main driver for further defence and security relations. This resulted from a shared acknowledgement of terrorism impact in both India (through Kashmir) and Mozambique (through Cape Delgado). Accordingly, the former began providing training and equipment to the latter's intelligence service (Chaudhuri 2016). As international involvement with anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden is expected to decrease in the years ahead, this revision of priorities raises questions over a trade-off of previous commitments to scale-up Mozambican naval capabilities. But an inverse dynamic can also be found of not properly adjusting to local needs. In Namibia, "training slots in China are offered even if we do not need them. How many parachuting instructors do you need?"<sup>7</sup> This problem reveals recipients unable or unwilling to communicate their actual needs, but also a continuing investment from principals keener on maintaining previous entry points than on segueing to more pressing demands.

Another frequent sore point for SFA in Africa is found in clashes between local and external actors. Even though no overt disagreements have been made public, occasional backlashes have nonetheless emerged over the role of rising powers. In Namibia, despite China's best efforts, bilateral ties have not been without controversy. In 2009, Poly Technologies – the same company responsible for all major Chinese hardware deals – was allegedly involved in a fraudulent payment

of US\$ 250.000 to a former-NDF Commander, Lieutenant-General Martin Shalli (Grobler 2014). Even though this episode did not impact purchases of military hardware, it fuelled grassroots views of how local elites might perceive SFA as rent-seeking opportunities rather than meeting actual equipment and training needs.

The limits of available SFA also tend to lead to a scramble of competing potential recipients. This problem – where one partner occupies a space that could be hypothetically filled by other equally willing partners – can be identified in the approach of rising powers towards SFA in Africa. In some cases, it leads to adjustments in continuing cooperation. Brazilians, for instance, “do not have ownership of the truth...if the [Namibian] military go to China, to South Africa or any other country and learn something new or different, they will tell us and we will adapt.”<sup>8</sup> But more often than not, contradictory agendas emerge. India, for one, considered China’s expanded overtures in the Indian Ocean and in the Mozambique Channel, when deciding to pay renewed attention to SFA in the region. Reasons to step up security outreach were as much about India’s fear of unchecked Chinese consolidation in Eastern Africa and its own interest in Mozambican coal reserves (Mwagiru and Biswas 2013; Naidu 2013; Zhu 2018; Brewster 2018). In other words, India’s decision to increase its SFA engagement was as much about withholding a geo-strategic advantage from a direct competitor as it was about gaining a strategic advantage for oneself. Likewise Brazil was caught off guard when Namibian authorities opted to pursue Chinese hardware instead of falling back on its decades-old naval partnership across the Atlantic. At the time, reactions swung between puzzlement and denial: “Namibia turned to China, bought a Chinese product and must now be profoundly disappointed; that is why they always come back to Brazil”.<sup>9</sup> But this turn of events also exemplified how even well-established ties can be impacted by more competitive, and significantly cheaper, counteroffers.

## **Conclusion**

What do rising powers provide differently in terms of SFA, and can they avoid the pitfalls that have dogged previous providers in Africa? These two questions permeate this article and dominate much of the current debate. As some countries face political-economic turbulence at home affecting their projection abroad – Brazil’s rising power status, for instance, can be considered increasingly on the line (Seabra and Marcondes 2021) – their SFA efforts in Africa are bound to remain controversial. Moreover, the resources assigned to each SFA initiative by these three countries pale in comparison to the financial and material means of more well-established actors, making claims of supplanting their predecessors seem unrealistic.

However, it is worth considering whether such primacy has ever been their goal in the first place. Initiatives carried out in both Namibia and Mozambique provide tentative clues about how to rethink the increased proactivity of rising powers in recent years. By building upon past connections, key niches are often identified that allow for contributions to the professionalization of local armed forces, ultimately making them more capable. In this context, rising powers have focused on specialized training, particularly through opportunities at their own national institutions. Training packages associated with equipment deals are also increasingly brought forward with the purpose of achieving full operability and laying the ground for future exchanges. Finally, the provision of key infrastructure has proven an additional entry point. These selected gateways do not mean rising powers are immune to the predicaments faced by other SFA actors. But they do, at the very least, point to the need to go beyond straightforward PA understandings of SFA and entertain the pursuit of a more socialized endgame, more focused on subscribing to shared international principles such as respect for national sovereignty and non-imposition of

conditionalities, among others, and less so on short-term effectiveness. Adhering to such long-term designs should not be conceived as unique to rising powers alone, given how other Western actors invest in similar training opportunities with the purpose of reaping benefits at a later stage. Yet, given the limited opportunities for new SFA providers to break through and the emphasis on avoiding any semblance of interventionist approaches, rising powers will invariably perceive such entry-points with far more interest and utility.

The topic evidently calls for further research. First, if socialization indeed provides the required lens for understanding efforts by rising powers, what are the consequences of African officers receiving potentially non-conforming training from multiple sources? At some point, “when everyone puts salt in the food, it turns into a salt mine; you need to know when to cook”.<sup>10</sup> Do these multiple efforts benefit or hinder the overall goal of improving the professionalization of local armed forces? Second, how to best deal with elite rent-seeking behaviour in recipient countries? A premium on socializing the military does not pre-empt misperceptions or misalignment of interests locally that require settlement. Third, possible reactions from traditional partners on the ground also require more attention. Has the West attempted to keep a foothold when confronted, for instance, with the onslaught of Chinese security assistance? More concrete data over the content of training would allow a better assessment of the degree of underlying innovation in comparison to other providers and to better situate any clashes amid broader geopolitical confrontations.

Two final issues merit consideration. The first involves recognizing that African countries chose to partner with rising powers for a reason – namely, because they have something to offer that addresses their concrete capacity-building needs. Whether technical expertise or specific military training, certain areas were evidently not covered by traditional SFA suppliers in ways or

to the extent their recipient partners desired, thus causing African countries to look elsewhere. Overlooking the intricacies of these supply-and-demand dynamics can prove counterproductive if the goal is to provide a complete picture of SFA disbursed in the continent. The second issue involves acknowledging and understanding the reasons for the long-standing presence of these countries in Africa. Although still often dismissed as out-of-their league, Southern-led initiatives are increasingly competing for the same space as Western ventures. To explicitly ignore their inroads only adds fuel to the imaginary divide that has permeated external engagement with Africa. Perhaps more problematic, it defeats the purpose of capacitating local security sectors and addressing shared security problems.

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<sup>1</sup> For China, see the most recent defence white paper, State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China 2019, 31-34. For Brazil, see the latest version of the white defense book, still pending final publication, Governo do Brasil 2016, 24-25. For India, see the latest overall inventory, Government of India 2019, 6-7.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Namibian military officer #1, Walvis Bay (Namibia), 29 January 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Mozambican military officer #1, Maputo (Mozambique), 17 January 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Mozambican military officer #2, Maputo (Mozambique), 21 January 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Between 2000 and 2002 he was also assigned to the Brazilian Navy as a ship captain under instruction. His predecessor, Rear-Admiral Peter Hafeni Vilho, received similar training in Brazil, complemented by the Advanced Course on Politics and Strategy at the Brazilian National War College in 2005. Vilho was also appointed Minister of Defence on March 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Namibian military officer #2, Windhoek (Namibia), 6 February 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Brazilian military instructor, Walvis Bay (Namibia), 30 January 2020

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with representative from Brazilian lobby defence group, São Paulo (Brazil), 28 May 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Mozambican military officer #3, Maputo (Mozambique), 23 January 2020.