

China and African politics – from non-interference to reluctant engagement?

Elling N. Tjønneland

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Elling N. Tjønneland

Senior researcher, Chr. Michelsen Institute, Norway

Summary

China has a strong commercial and corporate profile to its current expanding engagement with Africa. This is also evident in the more recent expansion in telecommunications and media. Historically, its foreign policy and political engagement have been guided by the principle of “non-interference” in domestic affairs of other countries. However, China is now on course to become much more deeply involved in African politics and the African security landscape.

This paper seeks to analyse these emerging and evolving approaches and examine the main manifestations with a focus on China’s evolving engagement with the African peace and security agenda.

The paper will also draw upon comparative perspectives from other rising powers – India, Brazil and South Africa in particular. The Latin American and Asian powers now expanding in Africa have also strongly emphasized non-interventionism, but are gradually becoming more involved in African politics. They are increasingly concerned about their image and reputations and the security of their citizens and business interests. They are also becoming more prepared to act multilaterally and to work with others in facilitating security and stability. As an African power, South Africa plays a more direct role and has emerged as a major architect of the continent’s evolving peace and security architecture.

Finally, the paper summarises the findings and identifies major challenges for China in its policy engagement in Africa and its use of public diplomacy.

Introduction

The rapid rise of emerging powers has left a strong mark on Africa's economic development. China has been particularly important through its trade expansion and the extent of its engagement, but has been followed by India, Brazil and South Africa, who have all become more prominent on the African continent in recent years. A number of other emerging economies such as Turkey and several Arab states are also becoming more visible and engaged. This is leading to a situation where traditional Western economies, financial institutions, and development aid agencies may see their role and influence being weakened. It has also posed new challenges for the Western approach to political development and the use of political conditionality. What are the implications of these developments for political developments in Africa? And in particular how may this impact upon the African peace and security agenda? How do the rising powers approach these issues?

Rising powers in Africa

The rising powers have become very visible in Africa in a short period of time, primarily through commercial and corporate expansion. China is by far the largest and most important mover in the economic sphere. The country is now Africa's largest trading partner with total trade being nearly \$200 billion in 2012 – up from \$10 billion 12 years earlier. Direct investments from China are still relatively small – although growing – compared to traditional Western investments, but China has provided significant development finance through export credits and loans, some on concessional or soft terms. This in turn has become an important platform for the expanding establishment of Chinese companies – state owned as well as private – in Africa, through which China has become a significant player in the development of the continent's infrastructure – energy, roads, railways, ports, and more.

Media and telecommunications are one of the most recent frontiers of the Chinese engagement. It is partly very similar to Chinese engagement in other sectors with its underpinning in China's global strategy ("going out") from the 1990s with its encouragement of Chinese companies to expand overseas, improve competitiveness and so on. Various Chinese incentives (primarily loans and credits, and political support) are in place to support this. The media expansion also taps into China's public diplomacy and its efforts to strengthen its "soft power".

A similar pattern is evident linking Africa and the other emerging powers. India and Brazil have similarly expanded trade with the continent from a low level in 2000 to reach, respectively, \$50 billion and \$30 billion in 2011. South Africa's trade with the rest of Africa

reached \$30 billion in 2011. However, South Africa's trade figures are ahead of India's if we exclude trade between India and South Africa. In a similar pattern to that of China, these countries are relatively minor investors, but – especially India and then Brazil – are providing other types of finance for development, mainly through commercial loans and export credits. This has reached a scale where they have made a significant difference. Most importantly, they have become dominant funders of infrastructure development in Africa. These mechanisms have also been important for companies from these countries: it has not only supplied such companies with contracts, but also provided a platform for further expansion in Africa (Tjønneland, 2012).

There are, however, important geographical variations in these countries' engagement with Africa. China has a strong and expanding presence in nearly all African countries; all but eight of these countries have increased their trade with China in the past five years. However, trade and other types of Chinese presence are dominated by a handful of countries. Five African countries account for most Chinese imports and a similar number for Chinese exports. India has a similar pattern. Typically the dominant trading partners are African oil exporters and larger African economies. Brazil displays a similar picture, but its historical and cultural links to Portuguese-speaking African countries make these countries much more important to it. Angola is Brazil's largest economic partner in Africa.

South Africa has a similar focus on a small group of countries. Its presence is overwhelmingly concentrated in Southern Africa, with a minor additional presence in Nigeria and Ghana in West Africa and Kenya and Uganda in East Africa. Ninety per cent of its trade with the rest of Africa is with the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) countries in Southern Africa. Investments follow the same pattern.

The trade and investment pattern of other new powers such as Turkey or Saudi Arabia is also expanding significantly, most visible in north-east Africa. South Korea has also emerged as an important African trading partner. However, the volume and size of these countries' expansion are still far behind that of China, India, Brazil and South Africa. The final member of BRICS – Russia – is also expanding its commercial ties with Africa, but the volume is still modest to the other BRICS members. Significantly, there is so far also limited state support and public resources provided to stimulate Russia's economic engagement in Africa. It is primarily driven by Russian companies, particular in mining.

The rising powers have different approaches to political development and peace and security issues on the continent. China has a strong emphasis on “non-interference” as a guiding principle for engaging with Africa. South Africa, as an African country itself, is a key player in the evolving security policies on the continent. India and Brazil are much closer to China's position. Political alliances and commitments to South-South cooperation have facilitated close ties between governments, but it has also been coupled with a reluctance to address internal African conflicts. However, these rising powers' expanding commercial engagement on the continent and the pressure to demonstrate that they are undertaking

global responsibilities, coupled with Africa's own attempts to address internal conflicts, have led to increasing changes. This is perhaps most clearly evident in relation to peace and security issues.

The African Peace and Security Architecture

Historically, African governments have been very reluctant to intervene in domestic politics in other African countries. This is now changing and is perhaps most dramatically illustrated with the shift from the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU) in 2002. During its first ten year of existence the AU suspended nine countries from its membership for violent changes of governments. It has also launched nine peace support operations. This alone illustrates the broader scope of the organisation compared to that of its predecessor – the OAU. The AU incorporated a wide divergence of member countries in terms of both democratic ideals and economic performance. The development of the AU was also driven more by a political than an economic agenda. In the peace and security field the AU has adopted an official policy that permits intervention in member states in “grave circumstances” (Vines, 2013).

The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) provides the framework for the AU's engagement and is the structure that seeks to provide for peace and security on the continent. It makes available a political decision-making body – the Peace and Security Council; an analysis centre – the Continental Early Warning Centre; an external mediation and advisory body – the Panel of the Wise; a multidimensional standby force comprising military, police and civilian components – the African Standby Force; and a special fund to cover costs – the African Peace Fund. Notably, each of these structures is replicated at the subregional level in each of AU's official regions – West Africa, Southern Africa, North Africa, Central Africa and East Africa. The role of the AU within APSA is also to drive the process, to provide guidance and policy directions, to act as a legitimising institution, and to provide coordination (Engel & Gomez Porto, 2010).

The AU's achievements since 2002 have in many respects been remarkable. The problems and challenges inherent in moving from policies to implementation are, however, significant and have caused severe delays. There are major difficulties in operationalising APSA (Dersso, 2014). This is illustrated by the fate of the African Standby Force, which is supposed to comprise regional standby forces from each of the AU's five regions. The deadline for achieving operational readiness has been regularly extended. According to the most recent and third “road map”, it is now set for 2016. This deadline is once again unlikely to be met. There are several reasons for the delays. They are partly linked to technical deficiencies, weak institutions and poor funding. More importantly, there are also political obstacles, with member states being reluctant and sometimes unwilling to commit themselves to implement policies and norms being developed at the regional or continental level. In particular, there is reluctance to put limits national sovereignty. Internal political dynamics in the regions, rivalries between members and different geopolitical interests also constrain the implementation of APSA.

Financially, APSA remains heavily dependent on Western donors – mainly the European Union (EU), certain EU member states and the U.S. The United Nations (UN) is also an important contributor to the AU's ongoing operations such as the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). The new building housing the AU's Peace and Security Department is a gift from Germany (while the main AU building and the conference centre is a gift from China).

However, despite many shortcomings the revitalised AU and APSA are being consolidated. The AU and its sub regional partners in each of the Africa's regions are developing common approaches to peace and security issues that are increasingly becoming the accepted norms for engagement. APSA is a bold effort to develop a holistic approach to peace and security that recognises the importance of prevention and mediation as much as peacekeeping. The AU's ability to further develop APSA and its institutions will depend on the organisation's ability to work with the sub regional organisations and how it manages the self-interest of many of its powerful members. It will also depend on its ability to work with international partners, including the rising powers. How, then, do China, India, Brazil and South Africa relate to the evolving AU/APSA agenda?

China

The principle of "non-interference" is a keystone of China's foreign policy. Internal stability and territorial integrity have been the mainstay of China's own domestic policy and have been extended to foreign policies and bilateral relations with African countries. China also invokes a historical "South-South solidarity" involving a shared sense of unjust treatment and a history of colonialism by the West. This was first and most clearly articulated at the 1955 Bandung conference that led to the founding of the Non-Aligned Movement and was reinforced by Chinese premier Zhou Enlai's visit to Africa in 1963, when he outlined the eight principles for cooperation between Africa and China based on non-interference and peaceful coexistence.

However, these principles have come under pressure and are leading to emerging changes in China's approach. This is partly linked to China's global position and expectation that it must take a stand on critical political issues affecting African countries. The changing position on the conflicts in Sudan is a good illustration of this: China originally maintained a non-intervention approach and vetoed efforts to impose sanctions and pressure on the regime in Khartoum, but gradually it became a key actor facilitating the deployment of peacekeeping missions in Sudan. China has also become a contributor of troops to the various UN peacekeeping missions; in fact, it has more peacekeepers in UN missions than any of the other permanent members of the UN Security Council (Jiaxiang Hu 2014). China has tended to stay away from contributing combat troops and engagement in robust peacekeeping, but this may also be changing with the Chinese 2012 contribution of infantry troops to provide mission protection to the UN Mission in South Sudan and the similar 2013 contributions to the UN Mission in Mali and – from mid-2014 – the deployment South Sudan of several hundred soldiers to provide military protection of workers in the oil industry (Lynch 2014).

China's expanding commercial engagement has contributed to new pressures and challenges to foreign policy principles. The Arab Spring and the collapse of the Qaddafi regime in Libya were important illustrations of the challenges that China now faces. While China had limited trade with and investment in Libya, 35,000 Chinese citizens were working in the country and Chinese companies had huge contracts with Libya. The Chinese in Libya had to be evacuated and billions of dollars were lost in contracts. Further south, in Zambia, strong opposition parties made criticism of the role of China in the country a strong mobilising card in the elections. In Angola – where China plays a more dominant role than in any other African country – Chinese companies have been denied important government contracts. The protection of business interests, concerns about the safety of Chinese workers and citizens, and growing worries about reputational risks have all contributed to an emerging rethink of Chinese policies (Anthony & Grimm 2013, Alden 2014).

This is perhaps most evident in peace and security policies. China has found it relatively easy to engage more actively in peacekeeping issues and reconcile this with its traditional foreign policy imperatives. Chinese troops are deployed in UN missions in Africa. On a small but expanding scale China is also offering training to African peacekeepers. At the fifth ministerial meeting of the Forum for China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2012 China also unveiled the new *Initiative on China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security*. This seeks to deepen cooperation with the AU and African countries in areas related to peace and security in Africa, provide financial support for AU peacekeeping missions in Africa and the development for the African Standby Force, and train more AU peacekeepers and officials in peace and security affairs. China is now providing financial support – on a modest scale – to, among others, AMISOM, the AU peace support operation in Somalia. Furthermore, there is a growing interaction between China and several of the sub regional organisations in Africa – the building blocks of APSA. This was also reaffirmed by the first visit of the new Chinese Premier Li Keqiang to the AU headquarters in May 2014.

However, most of China's gradualist engagement with these issues takes place through UN channels. This includes support to the UN Peacebuilding Fund, but most importantly involvement in the UN Security Council. While China is an important contributor of peacekeepers to UN missions in Africa, it has played a peripheral and cautious role in the reform of international peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations (De Carvalho & de Coning, 2013). The evolving Chinese reflections and positions on post-conflict reconstruction and the Responsibility to Protect are in their early stages and may go in several directions. China is still grappling with reconciling the complexities of managing an expansive role in multilateral institutions and an accelerating economic presence in Africa (Alden 2014).

India

Compared to China, India has a much longer history of engagement with Africa on peace and security issues (Beri 2008 and Beri 2014). Together with its South Asian neighbours Pakistan and Bangladesh, India is the largest contributor of peacekeepers to UN missions in Africa. Over the past decades thousands of African military officers have received professional

training from India. India also has maritime security interests in the Indian Ocean, which has led to the emergence of defence agreements and joint naval training programmes with several countries in East Africa and Indian Ocean island states. This also includes defence assistance through the deployment of Indian naval vessels patrolling territorial waters and providing support to African coastguards, as well as an Indian radar surveillance and listening post in East Africa (Jamadhagni, 2013).

India's parallel to China's FOCAC is the Africa-India Summit, which has been held twice – in 2008 (Delhi) and 2011 (Addis Ababa). It is on a much smaller scale than FOCAC and with fewer participating African countries, but it is significant that peace and security (and governance) issues are highlighted in the communiqués and the frameworks adopted for cooperation. This includes support for the African peace and security agenda and highlighting the police and civilian dimension of peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction.

However, there has been limited practical engagement with Africa on peace and security issues. India's Africa engagement is primarily motivated by commercial interests and energy security and is largely driven by the private sector, although with strong government support. India's approach to politics, peace and security in Africa is guided by a number of fundamental principles in its foreign policy. This includes respect for the sovereignty of other states, which informs the country's default position of not intervening in the internal affairs of other countries. The principle of South-South cooperation is mainly manifested through its aid programmes. India's alliance with Brazil and South Africa through the IBSA (India-Brazil-South Africa) Forum has served to highlight the democratic credentials of these three countries, but this has barely been used to promote a model for political development or post-conflict reconstruction (Dupas 2006; Soule-Kohndou 2013).

The main manifestation of India's efforts to grapple with reconciling its foreign policy objectives and commercial interests in the African context can be found in its participation in relevant UN agencies and its financial contributions to UN funds. India has generally tended to pursue a risk-averse approach to African conflicts, although its strong commercial engagement in Sudan and South Sudan forced it to appoint a special envoy to help mediate in conflicts there (Saferworld, 2013).

Brazil

“Non-intervention”, “respect for sovereignty” and “South-South cooperation” are key pillars of Brazil's foreign policy. Development assistance and political dialogue have accompanied the country's rapid commercial and private sector-driven expansion in Africa. And similar to the cases of China and India, there has been a gradual engagement with African peace and security issues. Security concerns and challenges arising from operating in fragile and post-conflict environments are contributing to evolving approaches. Political dialogue with African leaders, imperatives from Brazil's efforts to play a global role and engagement with African issues in international organisations have also contributed to this process.

Brazil's engagement with African peace and security issues is, however, still modest and limited (Abdenur and de Souza Neto, 2014). The one potential exception may be the country's experiences with peacekeeping operations. Its newfound role as a rising power has led it to play an important role in Haiti and the UN mission there (Kenkel, 2010). In Africa this has been repeated on a more modest scale in the case of Guinea-Bissau. In these contexts Brazil has moved beyond traditional peacekeeping and sought – at least partially – to link security and development objectives in addressing post-conflict reconstruction, but it is yet to bring lessons from this to discussions in Africa.

Brazil has, however, taken a strong interest in maritime security in the South Atlantic, where the current Brazilian defence doctrine explicitly addresses cooperation with Africa as necessary for ensuring Brazil's interests. As a result, the country has embarked on an extensive campaign to strengthen bilateral military cooperation ties with African states on the South Atlantic coast. Expanding cooperation in this area covers, among other things, training programmes for officers and cadets, the provision of military vessels and equipment, and capacity-building. Brazil has revitalised the South Atlantic Peace and Cooperation Zone and is pursuing security issues in the South Atlantic through the IBSA Forum and other multilateral forums (Abdenur & de Souza Neto, 2013).

Brazil's most active engagement related to peace and security issues has been at the level of the UN. The most significant contribution may have been Brazil's position on the UN's Responsibility to Protect doctrine. Brazil has resisted this doctrine, since it can easily lead to a licence for military intervention, particularly when undertaken outside the framework of the UN. In 2011 Brazil introduced the concept Responsibility while Protecting, which endorses key aspects of the Responsibility to Protect, but also highlights a number of related principles and rules of international humanitarian law that focus on prevention, proportionate response, the imperative to do no harm and the use of force as a last resort (Muggah et al., 2013).

South Africa

South Africa is an African economic and political power and is thus in a different position to that of the rising powers from Asia and Latin America. Since the fall of apartheid and the country's political reintegration with Africa after 1994, South Africa has been a significant actor in the evolving APSA. It has also been a mediator and peacemaker in several conflicts on the continent and it has a key player in evolving African approaches to governance and democracy issues, not least through the NEPAD-initiative (Alden & le Pere, 2004).

South Africa has also been a prominent participant in several multilateral forums at the global level. It played an important role, for example, in the renegotiation of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, the ban on anti-personnel landmines, support for the Arms Trade Treaty and more. South Africa was also – through the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development initiative – a key actor in the processes that led to the commitments from the

G-8, the EU and other major donors to increase development aid to Africa from 2003 onwards.

South Africa's main focus and its main contribution to African peace and security were the replacement of the OAU with the AU and the adoption of APSA (van Nieuwkerk, 2014). South Africa was a major architect behind the shift from the old non-intervention approach to internal conflicts in member states towards a policy enabling engagement and providing guidelines for conflict prevention and intervention. The main AU policies and instruments were provided through the AU Charter and APSA. South Africa was also instrumental in similar developments in Southern Africa through SADC; the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation; and associated policy documents and instruments.

South Africa was also instrumental in facilitating the AU's 2013 decision to set up a military rapid reaction force known as the African Capacity for the Immediate Response to Crises – partly a response to the delays in getting the African Standby Force off the ground. South Africa has been a strong contributor to UN peacekeeping missions in Africa, including a contributor of combat troops to missions with enforcement mandates such as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2013. However, South Africa has a preference for non-violent modes of conflict resolution and has been involved in a series of mediations throughout Africa.

These mediation efforts have often been characterised by persistence, patience and comprehensive approaches. However, South African mediation efforts and “quiet diplomacy” have also sometimes been perceived to be biased against opposition parties and in favour of the government of the country in conflict such as in Côte d'Ivoire in 2005 and Zimbabwe in 2007-08. Procedurally, South African mediations appear little different from those of the UN, while the contents of the negotiated agreements are also little different from those favoured by Western mediators. South Africa does, however, have a tendency to encourage power-sharing arrangements, perhaps a result of its experiences in negotiating the end of apartheid (Nathan, 2013).

However, South Africa has had to grapple with several challenges and complexities in devising and implementing its foreign policy objectives. One is the tension between the strong corporate/commercial profiles of its Africa engagement and the policies of the African National Congress government. The role and behaviour of South African companies are generally not very different from those of any other foreign company operating in African countries. These companies pursue their own commercial agenda, which in many instances will pose reputational risks for South African government policies. This is a dilemma that South Africa also shares with the other rising powers moving into Africa on a large scale.

Secondly, South Africa is also very conscious of the implications of its apartheid past. This has led to a noticeable reluctance to impose or put pressure on other African governments and it has tended to pursue a very consensus-focused approach. An important turning point

and lessons-learned experience was South Africa's efforts to isolate the Abacha regime in Nigeria after the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995. This intervention isolated South Africa from the rest of the continent and marked the end of unilateralism in South Africa's Africa policies. Ever since, South Africa has sought to seek African consensus on interventions, most evidently in its "own" region of Southern Africa. South Africa's diplomacy in relation to the crisis in Zimbabwe is a major illustration here.

Thirdly, while South Africa remains committed to conflict prevention and interventions to secure peace, it is also heavily influenced by the weight of its own history. These historical experiences have provided the country with a special moral legitimacy that led to great expectations – especially in the Global North and West. However, this historical legacy also has another dimension with a strong focus on anti-imperialism, South-South cooperation, and the protection of national sovereignty that has tended to undermine human rights principles and Responsibility to Protect approaches (Nathan, 2009).

Fourthly, 20 years of foreign policymaking after apartheid have also highlighted that South Africa's foreign policy machinery suffers from capacity constraints (insufficient trained staff) and inexperience in dealing with many of the continent's challenges and the intricacies of regional and continental policymaking.

These factors combine to explain the rather mixed record of South Africa's contribution to peacemaking and APSA (Van Nieuwkerk, 2012). While the role of China, India and Brazil can be summarised as gradual engagement that of South Africa may be termed that of a "hesitant hegemon".

South-South cooperation and Africa

Northern and Western foreign policy departments, defence establishments, and development aid agencies are still the main external political and financial supporters of the evolving APSA and the main peace support operations implemented by the African Union. The new and rising powers from Asia and Latin America have primarily expanded their position in Africa through commercial and corporate power. While emphasising South-South cooperation and political dialogue, these powers have also approached Africa's security challenges through the prism of non-intervention and have until now remained rather marginal in the evolving African policy discussions on these issues.

The BRICS alliance – bringing together the four rising powers discussed here with Russia – has not really attempted to address political development or governance issues, but are addressing social and economic development issues on the African continent. This is expected to increase with the 2014 decision to establish a BRICS development bank (with head office in China and a second African head office located in South Africa). The IBSA Forum – which brings together India, Brazil and South Africa – was formed with a profile as an alliance of democracies, but it has not attempted to make this a focus for IBSA

engagement in Africa. The role of IBSA may also be reduced followed the emergence of BRICS.

However, China and the other rising powers are also consciousness of their image in Africa, and as they increase their economic engagement, they also become more sensitive to insecurity and volatility. They are also becoming more prepared to act multilaterally, primarily under the auspices of the UN and through various UN channels. Direct engagement with the AU and African sub regional organisations is far more limited, but expanding. On the ground in Africa and in conflict-affected countries, the role of companies and commercial actors from the rising powers will often be very similar to that of companies from Western countries – they are equally concerned about the need for “stability”. This is well illustrated in a recent study of the Chinese engagement in the DRC (Curtis, 2013).

UN politics is critical to understanding where the rising powers are moving in relation to African security challenges. In 2011 all four powers discussed in this paper were members of the UN Security Council. In this period they – and particular the three IBSA countries – developed a number of joint positions on critical issues affecting Africa. They are sceptical of and even opposed to key elements of what is perceived as a Western peace model for Africa. This is illustrated in the discussion of the Responsibility to Protect and efforts to modify this through, for example, Brazil’s policy of Responsibility while Protecting. This was illustrated when the 2011 UN Security Council Resolution on Libya authorising a “no-fly” zone provided a mandate to NATO to take the necessary steps to protect civilians. China, India and Brazil abstained. South Africa voted in favour, but later de facto regretted this when it realised that the resolution implied support for regime change and not just the protection of civilians.

The discussion of the Libya resolution and other interventions in this period also revealed another important trend: the non-African rising powers are increasingly taking the lead from Africa and the AU. They are far more prepared to approve interventions if they are requested by and emanate from African regional organisations. The deepening of working relations between the UN and AU in peacekeeping and post-conflict resolutions in recent years is also likely to further stimulate direct engagement with the AU on these issues on the part of the rising powers. South Africa can potentially play an important role in this process. It has been instrumental in developing the AU’s normative policies and new approach to interventions in conflicts, as well as facilitating closer relations between the AU and the UN. It has emerged as a major political and economic ally in Africa for China and India, as well as for Brazil. South Africa’s and the AU’s approach to security challenges and post-conflict reconstruction on the continent tends to be far more proactive and engaged than those of the Asian and Latin American powers. South Africa’s and Africa’s response to these rising powers will therefore also be important in shaping the future trajectory of the rising powers in terms of their approach to African security challenges (Tjønneland 2014).

Conclusion: diplomacy, influence and African politics

These examples and case study of evolving approaches to peace and security issues in the African continent also serve to illustrate general features of the Chinese approach to political development in Africa. While the dominant feature of Chinese engagement is commercial and corporate with many similarities to those of other BRICS countries, it has also a very active diplomacy to support the commercial engagement and to pursue Chinese interests. This is perhaps most clearly visible with the very frequent high-level visits by Chinese leaders to Africa and in the FOCAC machinery. China has also signed strategic partnership agreements with a few African countries – South Africa (2004, expanded 2011), Nigeria (2005), Angola (2010, expanded 2014) and Algeria (2014) – as well as with the African Union (2006) (Feng Zhongping and Huan Jing 2014). The diplomacy has also been extended to include a public diplomacy engagement where China seeks to influence public attitude by communicating values, culture and ideology through a range of mechanisms from the establishment of Confucius Institutes, cultural exports and educational and training programmes to major media initiatives (King 2013).

These new public diplomacy efforts should probably not be classified as “soft power” in the sense that it seeks to convert others to the Chinese policies and positions. It can perhaps best be described as efforts to get others to better understand and appreciate and understand China and its values. This has been reinforced by a widespread Chinese perception that the West and its media is portraying China’s engagement in Africa in very negative light. While “soft power” is a widely used term in China and its discussion of cultural diplomacy, it is highly unevenly used in Chinese official documents and hardly mentioned at all in China’s official documents on development aid and in policy documents on Africa.

China is still a small power in Africa in terms of its engagement in cultural and public diplomacy - although some its programmes such as short-term training courses in China for Africans are very large by any standards. Its influence through language and culture is limited compared to former colonial powers and the US. The other rising powers discussed here – India, Brazil and South Africa – are also more significant in certain areas. One important outcome of the role of these rising powers, however, is to increase the bargaining power of African states. It has led to increased political space for many African governments in their dealings with Western countries and the traditional powers.

China’s strength and perhaps the strongest source of its power and influence is the sheer size of economic and commercial engagement. But this also represents China’s biggest challenge. It is an engagement which is fragmented and multifaceted. It is also sometimes met with resistance from Africans protesting against certain Chinese companies and in non-compliance from African institutions. And in some cases – most dramatically illustrated with Libya and South Sudan – internal upheavals and riots pose severe threats to Chinese commercial interests and even to the security of Chinese business people and workers. We may see growing tensions between the Chinese economic/corporate profile and China’s

political interests, and greater calls for China to play a role in providing stability and security in Africa.

The evolving Chinese approach to the African peace and security agenda is also a history of a rapid move from non-interference to reluctant engagement. This is a move where China de facto has taken the lead from African positions in multilateral institutions – from the UN to the African Union.

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