Transatlantic tensions, cooperation and the Africa policies of the United States and the European Union

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Introduction

Donald Trump's entry into the White House in January 2017 led to the launch of a new foreign policy of the United States. Dan Hamilton describes it as 'Jacksonian' (Hamilton 2017) with its strong emphasis on American interests and priorities under the headline 'America First'. The Jacksonian foreign policy has a highly skeptical attitude towards the European Union and towards transatlantic cooperation. The Jacksonian inspired foreign policy of Donald Trump did also manifest itself in a remarkable limited interest for Africa. The lack of attention to the continent was clearly emphasized by the postponement of the appointment of an assistant secretary of State for Africa until September 2018 as well as the lack of filling of important ambassador positions like South Africa after two years in office.

It is not the first time, the transatlantic relationship has been severely strained as it has been under President Trump. The relations between Washington and Brussels, including individual European capitals were characterized by deep divisions and disagreements under George W. Bush, not least in the wake of the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The paper asks if the strong disagreements across the Atlantic have affected the Africa policies of the two actors and if it has affected their inclination to cooperate on Africa. The 'Africa policies' of the US and the EU mainly refer to security interventions. Only to a limited degree, it refers to their development aid policies leaving humanitarian aid out for the analysis.

It is the argument that the Africa policies of the two Western powers and the cooperation on Africa are not affected by the policies of the shifting administrations in Washington and neither by the possible straining of the transatlantic relationship. It implies that the paper argues that the determinants of the policies and of the cooperation on Africa related issues have very little to do with the ups and downs in the relationship between the US and the EU. Using the terminology of historical institutionalism, the Africa polices of the US and the EU including their cooperation on

African issues are assumed to be "path dependent" implying they are basically determined by domestic circumstances and not by changing transatlantic relations.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section presents the analytical framework. It is followed by a brief presentation of the Africa policies of the United States and the European Union during the period covered by the presidencies of George W. Bush (2001-2008), Barack Obama (2009-2016) and Donald Trump (2017ff). After the overview of the Africa policies, a section follows that looks into the potential impact of leadership perceptions and into the possible impact of the strategic culture on policies and cooperation between the US and the EU. The last two sections deal with state-society relations and with the role and impact of government institutions on policy-making and implementation of policies on Africa in Washington and Brussels.

The analytical framework

The paper focuses on the possible consequences of the changeable relations between the United States and the EU on their Africa policies and on the possible consequences for the cooperation between the two powers on Africa related issues. The analysis focuses on the domestic determinants of the Africa policies of the US and the EU. The explanatory variables related to the Africa polices of the United States and the European Union as well as to their possible cooperation on Africa related issues are the following. First, the perceptions among leading decision-makers of the transatlantic relationship and of Africa's position in international politics are assumed to be of importance. Closely linked to the question of perceptions, it is assumed that the position of Africa in the strategic cultures of the US and the European Union may have an impact on the Africa policies. Second, the relations between state and society are assumed to have an impact when it comes to African issues and to transatlantic relations. Third, domestic government institutions involved in decision-making and in policy implementation are important explanatory variables.

Briefly, the Africa policies and the cooperation between Washington and Brussels are the dependent variables whereas the independent variables are perceptions, state-society relations and domestic institutions. The research focuses on identifying indicators that can help explaining the Africa policies and/or cooperation or lack of cooperation between the US and the EU. In the following analysis, a number of explanatory hypotheses are attached to the independent variables.

The Africa policies of the United States and the European Union

The terrorist attacks on New York in 2001 radically changed the strategic perception of Africa among decision-makers in Washington and increasingly, they emphasized that the US had national security interests in Africa. In particular, it was argued there was a need to fight Islamist radicalization and terrorism on the continent (White House 2002; Schraeder 2006). The priority to fighting terrorism and radicalization led to the launch of a number of anti-terrorism programs covering both the Horn of Africa/East Africa and West Africa/the Sahel. Military training programs and funding of African armed forces became important components in the Africa policy following September 2001 (Olsen 2014).

With the growing priority of Africa followed significant increases in the American military infrastructure on the continent. The establishment of a permanent base in Djibouti in 2002 was followed by a number of outposts such as camps, port facilities and fuel bunkers in no less than 34 African countries. In addition to the establishment of such more or less permanent bases, US Special Operations Command launched two military training programs for the region: 'Operation Enduring Freedom-Trans Sahara' aimed at training African forces and 'Operation Flintlock' to jointly exercise US troops with African forces (Burgess, 2015: 211). Not only have the US and states in West Africa participated in these exercises, also France and other European countries have joined the training (Cochi, 2016).

When Donald Trump took over power in January 2017, it soon became clear that not only Africa in general but specifically development aid to the continent had low priority for the new administration. The Trump administration did not appoint ambassadors to a number of African countries and the request for foreign aid from Congress for the fiscal year 2018 reflected a 35% decrease from the 2015 aid levels. The reduced aid was to be focused on countries that had the strongest strategic significance to the United States amplifying the ongoing militarization of American foreign aid policy (Signé & Allen, 2018). In the wake of the killings of four American soldiers in Niger in late 2017, it was estimated that between 6.000 and 7.000 military personnel were assigned to Africa (Savitsky 2018).

The launch of the Trump administration's Africa Strategy in December 2018 signaled a change from the strong focus on fighting terrorism towards a focus on countering Chinese and Russian influence on the continent. The Africa Strategy also indicated a more unobtrusive approach to Africa violent conflicts as well as to the development challenges of the continent. Most importantly, the Pentagon stated it planned to reduce the number of US troops in Africa by 10% by the end of 2020 (Schmitt 2019). The Africa policy of the Trump administration seemed to send a signal that the US would reduce its involvement on the continent. Nevertheless, during 2018 and the first months of 2019, the US armed forces stepped up their attacks on terrorists in Somalia alongside it strengthened American focus on the alleged rise in piracy in the waters around the Horn of Africa (Schmitt & Savage 2019).

As far as the European Union and Africa is concerned, until the end of the 1990s relations between the two continents were mainly conceived in development terms within the framework of the EU-ACP relations. Maurizio Carbone argues that the close relationship based on development assistance can be interpreted in two different ways. Either, it can be seen as an example of successful cooperation between the two parties based on mutual cooperation and equality. Or it may be perceived as a system maintaining the inequality between the two parties where Africa supplies raw materials and Africa is a market for manufactured products from Europe (Carbone 2013: 8).

In the current century, the European Union's development aid policy towards Africa has been framed by the Contonou agreement signed in 2000. The new agreement led to comprehensive reforms of the collaboration arrangement (Carbone 2017: 293ff). Among the new areas of cooperation were peace, security, migration and good governance (ibid: 300f). The adoption of these new policy areas reflected the strong European focus on violent conflicts in Africa that started to influence the EU's Africa policy in the 1990s. The terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001 made a huge impact on decision-makers in Europe and in the European Union and contributed to prioritizing security issues.

The strong attention to security promotion and to fighting terrorism reflected the European Union was increasingly preoccupied with defending the interests of 'Europe' (Carbone 2017: 312; 308). The European Union's 'Global Strategy' launched in 2016 stressed the importance of the security linkages between Africa and the European Union. It was stated, "we will continue to support peace and security efforts in African Organizations' work on conflict

prevention, counterterrorism and organized crime, migration and border management" (EU 2016: 36).

The attention to security promotion in Africa manifested itself most clearly in the EU's military involvement on the continent and in the launch of a number of military training missions starting with Somalia and following by Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR). The take-over of power in Northern Mali by radical Islamist groups in 2012 led to a comprehensive European Union involvement together with bilateral European engagements in the country. The deployment in January 2013 of 4.000 French soldiers to fight the Islamists opened the way for an extended EU involvement in Mali within the framework of the EU's comprehensive approach to crisis management (Furness & Olsen 2016: 5-6).

When a violent crisis broke out in the Central African Republic (CAR) in late 2012, the EU gave high priority to solving the crisis. The EU became the largest donor of humanitarian emergency assistance and together with the member states, the EU supported financially an African led UN peace mission aimed at restoring security in the CAR. The most conspicuous EU initiative was the commitment to deploy a significant number of European troops in a mission (EUFOR-RCA) aimed at contributing to the stability in the country (Furness & Olsen 2016: 10-12).

With the increased military involvement by the European Union, the 'migration crisis' in 2015 turned the EU's attention to migration and to migration from Africa to Europe in particular. The EU launched a number of initiatives aimed at significantly reducing the flow of people from Africa seeking to enter the European Union. By July 2016, the EU had established a permanent mission in Agadez in Niger which should assist building Niger's capacity to prevent migration. The changes in the EU's policy in Niger were in line with the EU's broader responses to the migration crisis which gave increasing emphasis to security and capacity building to prevent the movement of people (Lebovich 2018: 7; 5-10).

In sum, the above description showed an increasing American military involvement in Africa in the years following September 2001. The continent was important as a component in the United States' global war on terror and for Washington training and cooperation with local security forces was crucial policy instrument. In the same period, the European Union became increasingly involved militarily on the continent. In spite both the United States and the European Union shared the same security goals in Africa apparently, it only led to limited cooperation between the two

actors. Interestingly, the cooperation between the US and the EU was most pronounced when it came to fighting piracy around the Horn of Africa and in the Gulf of Guinea

On the other hand, it is not to be overlooked that the violent crises in the Sahel led to cooperation between the armed forces of the United States and the French military (Olsen 2018).

Perceptions of Africa among foreign policy makers and the strategic culture in the US and the EU

Perceptions of core foreign policy decision-makers are important. It is the hypothesis that such perceptions may lead to decisions that may or may not be implemented. Perceptions are reflected in public statements, speeches and declarations by relevant decision-makers and are important for understanding policy decisions. When it comes to foreign policy decisions, the strategic culture of a country is assumed to contribute to framing and influencing decisions on foreign and security politics. In particular, the strategic culture is expected to constrain a state's foreign policy behavior (Ripsman et al. 2016: 67). As far as Africa is concerned, the continent has never been central to American security and thereby to American strategic culture (Keller 2014: 62; Schraeder 1995: 12, 16, 37; Woodward 2015: 4). In comparison, Richard Whitman and Toni Haastrup argue that within the strategic culture of the EU, Africa is much more important in relation to impacting European Union decisions towards Africa. The impact is indicated by three factors namely the security-development nexus, the human security imperative and the preference for local enforcement i.e. a preference for using African troops to perform military operations (Whitman & Haastrup 2013: 61ff).

Donald Trump's idea of 'America First' reflects a strongly isolationist vision for US foreign policy. The vision is against the United States committing itself to obligations abroad like in Africa, the Paris Climate Accord or giving development aid etc. (Hamilton 2017: 3-4). When Donald Trump entered the White House as the 45th US president, it was clear from the beginning that Africa was not among the top priorities of the new administration. Not only did the new president refer to Africa as 'shithole countries' (Vitali 2018). It took more than a year and a half year to appoint a new assistant secretary for Africa (Gavin 2018). Likewise, it took almost two years to appoint ambassadors to important African countries like South Africa.

After two years in office, the Trump administration in December 2018 issued its Africa Strategy that emphasized the importance of countering the rapidly expanding financial and political influence of China and Russia on the continent (White House 2018). Instead of prioritizing the war on terror and Islamist radicalization, great power competition became a core focus of the Trump administration's Africa policy. In spite of the announcement of a 10% cut in the number of US military forces on the ground in Africa, the administration maintained that the fight against terrorism was crucial and cooperation with African armed forces was still important to Washington (Bolton 2018).

In this context, it is important that the new President did not believe in maintaining old alliances or friendships (Brands 2017-18: 16ff) implying that the US should not bother about other nations, their interests or their points of view. As far as the transatlantic relationship and in particular the relationship between the US and the European Union is concerned, the EU was hardly mentioned in the 2018 'National Security Strategy' (Smith & Rizzo 2018: 1-2). If the signals from the National Security Strategy concerning the transatlantic relationship can be characterized as mixed, the policy signals sent by Donald Trump were much clearer as far as he described the European Union a 'foe' of the United States.

Since the 2000 Africa- EU Cairo summit, there has been the 'Africa-EU process' where the two regions have met on a regular basis to discuss issues of common interest. The perceptions of the policy-makers in Brussels are reflected in a number of official EU documents and strategies following the start of the process. At the second Africa-EU summit held in Lisbon in 2007, it was decided to launch the 'Joint Africa-EU Strategy' (JAES) stressing the importance of Security. The priorities in the JAES were specified in two regional strategies, one for the Horn of Africa and one for the Sahel respectively. The Horn of Africa strategy identified migration, terrorism and criminalization including piracy as threats to European security (EU Council 2009). The Sahel Strategy stated its aim was to improve "security and development (which) has an obvious and direct impact on protecting European citizens and interests…" (EEAS 2011). In 2016 was launched the 'EU Global Strategy" stressing the EU's preoccupation with conflict prevention, counterterrorism and organized crime, migration and border management (EU 2016: 36).

Summing up, the Trump administration did not consider Africa important to the interests of the United States and therefore, cooperation with the European Union on African issues was not important to American Africa policy. The low priority was illustrated by the lack of

appointments of persons to important policy-making positions related to Africa. In contrast to these perceptions, Africa was perceived a major challenge to the European Union. In recent years the continent had not been considered a development issue. Rather, violent conflicts, migration and terrorism had become main concerns that called for action by the Europeans. In principle, these issues called for cooperation with the Americans as could have been the case in relation to the crises in Mali and the CAR. On the other hand, it is not to be neglected that there was some kind of cooperation between the US and the EU when it came to fighting piracy off the coasts of Africa.

Africa and state-society relations in the US and in the EU

The character of the relationship between the government and the surrounding society is supposed to be important because it may influence decision-making as well as implementation of government policy decisions. Harmony or polarization are two keywords for understanding the relationship between government and society. As a start, there has not been much public debate on American's policies towards Africa and therefore not much disagreement. To the contrary, the Africa policy has been a bi-partisan issue. It has been helped along because there has not been a big constituency for Africa in the US which has set clear limits for the constituency to influence American policy-making on the continent. The so-called black voice has historically been very weak and non-influential largely to be explained by the absence of an organized constituency capable of working within the American policy-making establishment (Schraeder 1995: 43ff).

In the wake of 9/11, evangelical Christians showed a growing interest in the foreign affairs of the USA leading to attempts to launch initiatives aimed at fighting global poverty especially in Africa (Huliaras 2008-2009: 163ff). From the start of his presidency, George W. Bush was under great influence from religious groups that were well represented in and around Washington DC (Woodward 2015: 114ff). It is one thing that the President was committed to evangelical Christianity, but approximately 40% of the Republican Presidential vote in 2000 came from white evangelical Christians (ibid 113), stressing that there was a domestic constituency for an active American policy towards Africa including violent conflicts like for example Southern Sudan and Darfur in Sudan (Budabin, 2014: 170).

A number of evangelical Non-Government Organizations were putting pressure on the White House often in alliance with Catholics and the Congressional Black Caucus. These different groups came together in a loose grouping known as the 'Freedom House Coalition' (Woodward 144ff). The advocacy groups were successful in influencing Congress on issues related to Africa. The increase in the development aid budget under George W. Bush was partly a response to evangelist demands and the content in the US program on AIDS was heavily influenced by the President's evangelical backers (Huliaras 2008-09: 165f). Also, many congress members were open to act on issues based on moral values and therefore, they were willing to react to African topics and issues based on a sense of "we can make a difference" (Huliaras 2008-09: 174, personal interview Washington 19 March 2015). Apparently, the influence of faith-based groups did not weaken during the years of the Obama administration; on the contrary, these groups and their attitudes were gaining influence "increasingly within the US foreign policy apparatus" (Marsden 2012: 953ff, 965f).

In contrast to the Africa policy field, the American political system in general has been characterized by polarization and has for several decades affected foreign policy-making as legislators in the center have disappeared leading to the elimination of any overlap between liberal republicans and conservative democrats (Schultz 2017: 8-9). According to Nathaniel Persily, the most important consequence of the polarization of the American political system is that it has led to 'gridlock' which refers to "the inability of the system to perform basic policy-making functions and that the political polarization discourages compromise and fosters mistrust (Persily 2015: 4; Thurber & Yoshinaka 2015: 1ff). As indicated, the gridlock has not hit the American Africa policy probably due to its bipartisan nature but also due to the remarkable influence of the evangelical groups. The lack of policy initiatives towards Africa under President Trump is thus not an expression of gridlock or that the evangelical groups did not support Donald Trump at the election in 2016. Rather, it is a reflection of a remarkably limited Presidential interest in the continent.

As far as state-society relations within the European Union are concerned, in a number of European countries there has been some political attention to Africa and to development issues and thus to development assistance in Africa. It has been particularly clear in France, the UK and in a limited number of countries in North and North-Western Europe (Hoebink & Stokke 2005). With the increasing merger of policy-making on development assistance and general foreign policy and security issues, it became clear that the common European policy initiatives towards Africa were largely elite driven (Olsen 2005: 603-605; 577ff). Moreover, the split between the member states

and Brussels and the two-level institutional decision-making structure within the European Union have complicated and inhibited the influence of civil society organizations on EU decision-making. The separation between the two levels and the general political polarization within the European Union known as 'Euro-skepticism' directed towards policy-making in Brussels makes it difficult to demonstrate the kind and degree of influence from the civil society.

Summing up, it appears quite clear that the faith-based organizations influenced American Africa policy. Apparently, these organizations did not pay attention to the European Union or to the prospects of cooperation between the US and the EU. As far as the European Union and its Africa policy is concerned, decision-making is largely elite driven. In these processes, there are no indications that the participants paid special attention to the United States or to the possibility of cooperating with Washington on African issues.

Africa and the domestic government institutions

Government institutions are important as they may affect both decision-making and implementation of policy decisions. Inspired by the theory of 'bureaucratic politics', it is the hypothesis that decision-making processes and implementation in Washington as well as in Brussels may be influenced by institutional interests and not only by general policy directives. In the case of the United States, the Pentagon tended to argue in favor of initiatives that relied heavily on military instruments whereas the Department of State has preferred soft and diplomatic means in its policy advice (Schraeder 1995). Historically, American Africa policy has been characterized by limited input from the President and from the White House (Schraeder 1995: 12-15; Woodward 2015: 3) and therefore much policy input had to come from government bureaucracies illustrating the possible relevance of the hypothesis that bureaucratic and institutional interests may influence decision-making in Washington. In particular, the State Department and the Pentagon have been prominent in policy-making and for that reason, the American Africa policy has been described as the result of 'bureaucratic incrementalism' (Schraeder 1995).

When Donald Trump came into power in January 2017, his first Secretary of State Rex Tillerson started making dramatic cuts in the number of employees leading to significant reductions in the number of experienced insightful experts and advisors. Data from the American

Foreign Service Association showed that 60% of the State Department's highest-ranking career officers quit during Trumps first year. Fewer than half of all top-level positions that need confirmation by the Senate were filled by April 2018. Vital posts as ambassadors in Egypt and South Africa were not filled. The State Department was in a situation where it was described as "dysfunctional" and "brought to the brink of ruin by Trump and Tillerson in equal parts" (Beauchamp 2018; Farrow 2018, 295ff).

The appointment of Mike Pompeo in March 2018 did nothing to change the situation, rather to the contrary. By the time, Pompeo came into the State Department, Ronan Farrow concluded "the State Department is simply wiped out……." (Pesca 2018, Farrow 2018). The result of the dramatic reductions in the State Department was that it was increasingly difficult for its staff to access the President and in general to influence the policy processes in this case towards Africa. The Trump administration's general lack of interest in Africa left the Pentagon in a position where it was forced to take responsibility for policy-making. The pressure on the Pentagon to lead policy-making on Africa was supported by the increasing funding the Department received under Trump (Ward 2018).

Apparently, bureaucratic policy-making continued during the first two years of the Trump administration but, importantly without the traditional input from the State Department. This demonstration was backed by the sudden increase in the US air war in Somalia during the last four months of 2018 and continuing into 2019. On the face of it, it seems difficult to explain the surge considering the signal of the Africa Strategy to change of focus of the American Africa policy from fighting terrorism in Africa towards countering China and Russia (Schmitt & Savage 2019). On the other hand, the increase in attacks on terrorists in Somalia indicated the independent decision-making influence of the Pentagon continued under the leadership of James Mattis. The strong praise of the G5 Sahel alliance by the NSA's John Bolon as "a great example of the enormous potential of African joint security cooperation". Also Bolton had a remarkable influence on the funding of the G5 Sahel force when the US blocked the Security Council resolution that would have given the force under the UN Charter's Chapter VII. Such a mandate would have shifted the financial burden from France and the EU onto the United States (Fernandez 2019).

The European foreign policy policy-making system appears complex in comparison to the American one. On the one hand, there are the Brussels based institutions the Council of Ministers, the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) each

supposed to have their specific institutional interests. No doubt, the Commission and the EEAS try to promote common 'European' notions and interests whereas the Council of Ministers due to its nature is paying more attention to the concerns of the member states. As far as the member states are concerned they generally prefer decisions on foreign and security policy to remain the prerogative of the national capitals. In recent years, there has been dramatic changes and developments in these configurations involving not only individual and prominent member states like France. Also the European Commission have increasingly been involved in European Union decision-making on Africa. The same has been the case for the Secretariat in the Council of Ministers and the EEAS in relation to foreign policy-making on African issues (Riddervold & Trondal 2017; Riddervold 2016; Riddervold 2014).

The involvement of these institutional actors may contribute to explain the EU decision to get involved in Somalia back in 2006-07. The support to AMISOM on land and the launch of the naval operation 'Atalanta' suggested that a number of EU member states and increasingly the Commission (Riddervold 2016; Riddervold 2014) shared to the ambition to enhance the visibility of the European Union as a niche security provider in Africa (Oksamytna 2012: 12). On the other hand, the extended EU involvement in Mali following the unilateral French intervention in January 2013 illustrates that not only the institutions located in Brussels but a number of prominent member states like France and Germany articulated common European security concerns in Africa.

The ambition of the EU to take responsibility as a security provider in Africa was emphasized by the launch of an EU military training mission in Mali and another one in Niger clearly reflecting the depth of the concerns over the growing threat from Islamic militancy in the Sahel. This new and proactive role manifested itself in relation to solving the crisis in the CAR that broke out in late 2012. The protracted EU decision-making process related to the crisis in the CAR illustrates the challenges involved in the two-level decision-making system of the EU. It is worth noting that the decision to deploy European troops in the CAR was different from the situation in Mali. In the CAR case, the decision only came after the involvement of some member states and in particular after heavy political pressure from France supported by Germany (Furness & Olsen 2016: 115f).

Summing up, the statement of Peter Schraeder that American Africa policy generally is the result of 'bureaucratic incrementalism' seems to be confirmed by the developments in the

current century not least the heavy military involvement on the continent that lasted until the Trump administration came into power. On the other hand, the lack of interest in and priority of Africa from the Presidency of Donald Trump has resulted in a general lack of policy initiatives towards the continent including absence of cooperation with the European Union. The Africa policy of the European Union can also but, to a lesser extent than the American policy be explained with reference to bureaucratic and institutional interests as well as political interests in establishing international visibility for the European Union. Neither the bureaucratic interests in the US nor the mix of 'European', bureaucratic and national interests in European Union seem to have argued in favor of cooperation with the United States on Africa related issues.

Conclusion

The paper asked if the recurring conflicts and crises in the transatlantic relationship have affected the Africa policies of the United States and the European Union. The paper also asked if these tensions in the transatlantic relationship affected the cooperation between the US and the EU on African issues. The conclusion to both questions is identical, namely that the transatlantic relationship has not affected neither the Africa policies of the two Western powers nor the cooperation between them. The analysis indicated that the absence of an impact from the changeable transatlantic relationship in both respects has to be explained with reference to domestic circumstances.

Among these circumstances, it has to be emphasized that the perceptions of Africa in Washington and in Brussels have been that the continent is of limited importance and therefore, the perception of the value of cooperation between the actors is that it is equally limited. Looking at state-society relations in the US and within the European Union as possible explanations to the Africa policies and to the lack of cooperation between the two actors, the analysis suggests that this element does only contributes much to answering the two questions. Finally, the domestic government institutions and their institutional interests do not supply the explanations asked for. In brief, all three explanatory elements points towards domestic circumstances as explanations to the Africa policies as well as to the limited cooperation between the United States and the EU on

Africa. Thereby, the three elements buttress the conclusion that the transatlantic relationship has had no strong impact on the two issues discussed here.

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