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CHANGING US FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS CHINA AND AFRICA¹

“More than 150 years ago, Alexis de Tocqueville famously predicted that the relationship between Russia and America would shape the destiny of the world. I suspect, if he had returned to earth as the new millennium dawned, he wouldn’t ignore Russia, but he would write first about China.” (Madeleine Albright)

ABSTRACT: *The present-day international arena has been witnessing the rise of China as the leading emerging economy. This offers several policy-related challenges to the lone super-power, the United States of America. Not long ago, the “birth of a Pacific World Order”² was heralded, especially as the Chinese and American economies are heavily intertwined, forming a unique ‘Chimerican’ conglomerate of interests.³ Today, President Trump’s ‘America First’ approach, however, seems to put this option aside with a clear accent on American national interests. This study will compare US and Chinese approaches, interests and involvement in African development up until the incumbent president’s administration. It will look at what the motives of the two powers were on African soil until the end of President Obama’s second term, and to what extent they were acting differently in developing and managing bi- and multilateral relations. Is it merely their current foreign policy rhetoric that the US and China want to cooperate (also) in African development, or can we imagine a realistic scenario of their joint efforts and involvement resulting in positive and long-lasting, “society-wide repercussions”⁴ across African countries? Related to this question, the paper offers a focus on US foreign policy towards China and Africa up until 2017.*

KEYWORDS: *Africa, China, foreign policy, USA*

INTRODUCTORY THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS – REALISM MATTERS BUT THE WORLD HAS BEEN CHANGING

John Mearsheimer’s critical stance on the ‘(tragic) nature of international politics’ has been underpinned by two factors: systemic anarchy and “uncertainty about the intentions of other

¹ Most of this study was written by the author as Fulbright Visiting Research Scholar (2013–2014) at the Center for African Studies of the University of Florida in Gainesville, FL. It is based upon the article “Chimerican Interests, Africa Policies and Changing US-China Relations”. *BizPol Affairs* 1/1. 2013. 11–28.

² Mendis, P. “Birth of a Pacific World Order: America’s First Pacific President and Sino-US Relations”. *Harvard International Review* 34/4. 2013. 22–27.

³ Ferguson, N. and Schularick, M. “‘Chimerica’ and the Global Asset Market Boom”. *International Finance* 10/3. 2017. 215–239. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1468-2362.2007.00210.x>, Accessed on 12 Apr 2013.

⁴ Hyden, G. “Local Governance and Economic-Demographic Transition in Rural Africa”. *Population and Development Review* 15. Supplement: Rural Development and Population: Institutions and Policy. 1989. 193–211.

states”⁵. In an age of global uncertainties it is not only the intention of others, but the nature of the global processes which overarch and intertwine all the various actors that contribute to even more uncertainties. Furthermore, it is not only the states that matter in terms of behaviour, action and intent, but the abundance of non-state entities and their complex interactions with others that challenge the state system in the international arena. The world has been changing as far as relations of its players are concerned, and still, realism matters.

In an interconnected transnational system “globalization is transforming rather than superseding the state”⁶. Although the ‘network state’⁷ differs from the nation-state of the Westphalian order as it needs to position itself in a setting with a multitude of various other types of power-holding entities (or those aspiring to gain power) – the international policy-making arena has become crowded –, its tasks “have not changed. [States] still have to manage, with respect to their domestic constituencies, the dual relationship between domination and legitimation, and between development and redistribution.”⁸ If survival is still the greatest task – though not in a purely ‘self-help world’ as thought by the realists but rather in a more complex and interdependent one – to be able to survive states “have no choice but to compete for power”⁹. Is it, however, only competition and seeking “to gain advantage at each other’s expense” (Ibid), or is there any motivation to cooperate for the sake of the betterment of all parties involved in a ‘collaborative project’? As “globalization makes us more vulnerable because we are more interdependent with one another”¹⁰, and as – in particular – “great powers are rational actors”¹¹, collaboration is encoded in the world. Simply because in certain issues and instances there is no other way but to cooperate so that states do not ‘get hurt’, which is their ultimate national goal at the same time. Having said that, national survival, and consequently national interest, will determine state behaviour, strategy and action – both for cooperation and competition.

⁵ “Conversations in International Relations: Interview with John J. Mearsheimer: Part I”. *International Relations* 20/1. 2006. 105–124. <http://mearsheimer.uchicago.edu/pdfs/A0039.pdf>, Accessed on 12 Apr 2013.

⁶ Lawson, S. *International Relations*. Second Edition. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012. 142.

⁷ Castells, M. *The Power of Identity: The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture: Volume II*. Malden: Blackwell, 1997.

⁸ Stalder, F. *Manuel Castells and the Theory of the Network Society*. Polity Press, 2006. 122.

⁹ “Conversations in International Relations: Interview with John J. Mearsheimer: Part II”. *International Relations* 20/2 2006. 231–243. <http://mearsheimer.uchicago.edu/pdfs/A0041.pdf>, Accessed on 12 Apr 2013.

¹⁰ Li, Y. et al. “Democracy, Globalization and the Future of History: A Chinese Interview with Francis Fukuyama”. *International Journal of China Studies* 3/1. 2012. 104.

¹¹ Lieber, R. J. “The Tragedy of Great Power Politics by Jonh J. Mearsheimer”. *Political Science Quarterly* 117/2. 2002. 321. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.2307/798192>, Accessed on 12 Apr 2013.

In terms of power, in recent times, the rise of emerging actors has caught the attention of numerous scholars and policy-makers. Not as hegemon¹² any longer, but the “United States is [still] by far the most powerful state on the face of the earth”¹³, and if we are cautious enough with “today’s multipolar mania”, as William Wohlforth¹⁴ warns us in his clear power analysis, we can profoundly relate the position of the ‘new actors’ to that of the US and foresee the potential redistribution of power in the international system in a gradually more multipolar environment. There are scholars who argue that in such an arena “many nations will possess military and economic might sufficient to be recognized as great-power states”¹⁵. Yet “multipolarity’s *rapid*”¹⁶ return”¹⁷ after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in the post-Cold War era, is not a realistic scenario in the short term, however, and time is needed before great power status is achieved by some of the emerging entities.

Different actors may possess different types of power, ranging from economic to military might, and cultural to political influence. “The United States [...] is the sole state with pre-eminence in every domain of power – economic, military, diplomatic, ideological, technological, and cultural – with the reach and capabilities to promote its interests in virtually every part of the world.”¹⁸ However, from an economic-financial point of view, the US is certainly not the only ‘super influence’, as long as it is rivalled by the second largest economy of the world, continuously rising China. In addition, the European Union of yet 28 member states (the United Kingdom will leave the community in 2017–18 after the so-called Brexit referendum in June 2016) with all its internal challenges as well as potential, too, together with Japan, Brazil and the BRICS¹⁹ states, possesses major capabilities and strengths. All of them “would prefer a multipolar system in which they could pursue their interests, unilaterally and collectively, without being subject to constraints, coercion, and pressure by the stronger superpower.”²⁰ A complex economic rivalry is inevitable, especially if we think of ‘Chimerica’, “the combination of the Chinese and American economies, which together

¹² The Greek word *hegemon* means leader, paramount power, dominant actor. According to the realist ‘hegemonic stability theory’, “stability results not from a balance among the great powers, but from unipolarity, in which one state is clearly more powerful and able to act to ensure some degree of order in the system.” D’Anieri, P. *International Politics. Power and Purpose in Global Affairs*. Belmont: Wadsworth, 2010. 69. According to Huntington, the “hegemon in a unipolar system, lacking any major powers challenging it, is normally able to maintain its dominance [...] The United States would clearly prefer a unipolar system in which it would be the hegemon”. Huntington, S. P. “The lonely superpower”. *Foreign Affairs* 78/2. 1999. 36. Mearsheimer, however, underlines that being the most powerful state in the world, the US is “not the only great power in the system, which is by definition what is necessary to have unipolarity or global hegemony.” He thinks that “we live in a multipolar world that has three great powers – China, Russia, and the United States, the mightiest of them all.” “Conversations in International Relations...: Part I.”. 113. Today, there is a debate over if the US is a hegemonic superpower or not, or at least, a number of scholars still attribute hegemony to the US. I prefer Mearsheimer’s stance on this.

¹³ “Conversations in International Relations...: Part I.”. 105–124.

¹⁴ Wohlforth, W. “Unipolar Stability: The Rules of Power Analysis”. *Harvard International Review* 29/1. 2007. 44–48.

¹⁵ Yeisley, M. O. “Bipolarity, Proxy Wars, and the Rise of China”. *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 5/4. 2011. 75.

¹⁶ Italics added by the author.

¹⁷ Wohlforth. “Unipolar Stability...”. 44.

¹⁸ Huntington. “The lonely superpower...”. 35.

¹⁹ Acronym standing for the intercontinental group of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

²⁰ Huntington. “The lonely superpower...”. 36.

had become the key driver of the global economy”²¹. In this way a new type of bipolarity may configure between the West and the Far East. From other angles – except for American military dominance, which cannot at this point be superseded – major powers pierce into the centre of gravity, and so the international system today may reflect “a mixture of both unipolar and multipolar system in which [more] powers [...] dominate international affairs.”²²

China is the likely the number one challenger of the ‘lonely superpower’. Since Deng Xiaoping’s policy of opening at the end of the 1970s China has become more assertive on the international stage. “Beijing has demonstrated an impressive capacity to learn and adapt”²³, and with her pragmatic foreign policy this “reflects a new flexibility and sophistication”²⁴ in the management of her relations across the globe. Reflecting her national interests (as in the case of any of the states in the system), China has been diligent in developing an understanding of both the external context and her internal set of issues to deal with in the long run. Strategic thinking about both has always been embedded in Chinese policy-making to “defend [Chinese] national development interests while also maintaining [sufficient] openness to the outside world”²⁵. China wants to succeed in both dimensions, and therefore her objective is a relaxed geopolitical context – this has become its priority. As former US Secretary of State Madeline Albright pointed out, “Beijing’s leaders seek a stable international environment so that they can concentrate on addressing their domestic needs”²⁶, and as a consequence of this ‘peaceful’ approach, but also deriving from how deeply the US and China are interconnected in the economic domain, a future military conflict between the two is highly unlikely. Nevertheless, there is potential for competition as well, especially for resources that can feed their respective national economies. At the heart of future competition “access to strategic resources rather than ideology” is more likely to lie, and “the new »great game« will most likely be played in Africa”²⁷.

ANY POSSIBILITY FOR A PACIFIC WORLD ORDER?

It is not surprising that “Asia’s economy is becoming ever more important for that of the United States and the world”²⁸, as the American economy has become more interdependent. This may turn detrimental or at least disadvantageous for the sovereignty and ‘action independence’ of the US²⁹. Drawing upon the work of Paul Kennedy³⁰, it is of strategic importance for the US to understand what America’s strengths and weaknesses are, and how well the country

²¹ Ferguson, N. “The G-2: Are America and China Headed for Divoce?”. *New Perspectives Quarterly* 27/1. 2010. 35–38. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1540-5842.2010.01130.x>, Accessed on 12 Apr 2013.

²² Yilmaz, M. E. “The New World Order: An Outline of the Post-Cold War Era”. *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations* 7/4. 2008. 46.

²³ Chin, G. and Thakur R. “Will China Change the Rules of Global Order?”. *The Washington Quarterly* 33/4. 2010. 119.

²⁴ Medeiros, E. S. and Fravel, M. T. “China’s New Diplomacy”. *Foreign Affairs* 82/6. 2003. 25.

²⁵ Chin and Thakur. “Will China...”. 121.

²⁶ Albright, M. *Madam Secretary*. New York: Miramax Books, 2003. 435–436.

²⁷ Yeisley. “Bipolarity...”. 83.

²⁸ Kissinger, H. *Does American Need a Foreign Policy? Toward a Diplomacy for the 21st Century*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001. 111.

²⁹ Magyarics, T. “Állandóság és változás az Egyesült Államok külpolitikai identitásában és eszköztárában”. *MKI-Tanulmányok* 3. 2012. 16. http://kki.hu/assets/upload/Tanulmányok_2012_03_ellandeseg_ees_veltozes_az_.pdf, Accessed on 12 Apr 2013.

³⁰ Kennedy, P. *Preparing for the Twenty-first Century*. New York: Random House, 1993.

is prepared to meet the global challenges, in general, and the political ‘pressure’ from the emerging countries, coupled with the above-mentioned economic interconnectedness that ties the US to China, in particular. The ‘Chimerican symbiosis’³¹ also offers “an opportune moment for the two Pacific nations to initiate steps to frame a new »Pacific« order through trade and commerce”³². Who is in need of this transformation more? If finding sufficient mutual interests in the formation of such an order, can the new global arena be accentuated along this Pacific alliance? How will other actors of regional weight in East Asia react upon such developments?

In a sharp analysis of the relations of a rising China and the West, John Ikenberry makes us think about the hardest issue: security; “as China’s military power grows – which is inevitably the most salient domain for the US and the rest of the world – it will better be able to contest the American security presence in the region. Countries in the region that are growing more economically dependent on China will discover incentives to tie their security to China”³³. From this perspective it re-affirms our view that it was not surprising at all that the US seemed to encourage a new “Pacific Century” with enhanced Sino–US relations in its center prior to the beginning of the administration of Donald Trump. In a short memo – as part of his article in *The Washington Post* – Ferguson urged then President-elect Barack Obama not to “wait until April [2009] for the next G-20 summit [in London],” but to “call a meeting of the Chimerican G-2 for the day after [his] inaugural.”³⁴ As he continued with his warning, he addressed directly President Obama, “Don’t wait for China to call its own meeting of a new »G-1« in Beijing.”³⁵ But what about Japan in this envisioned new setting? Can we think of an already frustrated Japan not reacting by getting her claws out? Both the US and China (or other states in the region) most probably underestimate the strength of Japanese frustration – not to mention the capability of her Self Defence Forces (SDF) which, as far as its equipment is concerned, may be the most modern military force in Asia.

“China is not rising in a vacuum. It is rising on a continent in which there are many, many competitors.”³⁶ In a pragmatic and strategic way China fosters a “peaceful rise”, and her “economic integration into East Asia has [already] contributed to the shaping of an East Asian community that may rise in peace as a whole. And it would not be in China’s interest to exclude the United States from the process.”³⁷ From both sides of the Pacific Ocean there seems to be a mutually shared target: to jointly build a peaceful (pacific in this respect, too) framework of collaborative behaviour and relations. On the US side the preference is clearly not to see a rising China with her old-new allies in her direct vicinity (an important sphere of American influence at the same time) forming an alternative set of relations along an alternative set of values. We can agree with Ikenberry in saying that there are clear implica-

³¹ Ferguson. “The G-2...”. 35–38.

³² Mendis. “Birth of a...”. 24.

³³ Ikenberry, G. J. “The Rise of China: Power, Institutions, and the Western Order”. In Ross, R. S. and Feng, Z. (eds), *China’s Ascent. Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics*. Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2008. 107.

³⁴ Ferguson, N. “Team ‘Chimerica’”. *The Washington Post*, 17 Nov 2008. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>, Accessed on 8 May 2013.

³⁵ Ferguson. “Team ‘Chimerica’”.

³⁶ Griffiths, R. and Luciani, P. (eds), *Does the 21st Century Belong to China? Kissinger and Zakaria vs. Ferguson and Li*. Toronto: Anasi, 2011. 14.

³⁷ Zheng, B. “China’s “Peaceful Rise” to Great-Power Status”. *Foreign Affairs* 84/5. 2005. 24. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/issues/2005/84/5>, Accessed on 12 Apr 2013.

tions for the US, as “the more deeply institutionalized the Western order is, the greater the likelihood that China will rise up inside this order”³⁸. The US therefore needs to work along a strategy which attempts to avoid the rise of an ‘alternative or even rival order’ driven by China, and thus to “continue to uphold its multilateral commitments, maintain and even expand its alliance partnerships [...] to perpetuate the existing international order”³⁹.

Together with many foreign policy experts and scholars, Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote that the US “can find ways of living together [with China],” but much depends on how the US approaches the rising Asian giant; “how we deal with the Chinese,” said the late the former National Security Advisor of President Carter⁴⁰. It cannot be a successful method to “lecture the Chinese about the Tibetans and tell them what to do”⁴¹, but to contribute to a shared “new focus on international relations in which China is looking for peace and collaboration”⁴², as much as the US herself. “As a global nation, the United States must be humble [...] and patient”⁴³, and learn more about the Chinese way of thinking and rise, especially because the US “has few precedents in its national experience of relating to a country of comparable size, self-confidence, economic achievement, and international scope and of such a different culture and political system as China.”⁴⁴ The Middle Kingdom is also challenged greatly to be able to “accommodate itself to a world in which it is not hegemonial as it has been for eighteen of the last twenty centuries”⁴⁵, coupled with the ‘new’ situation in her ‘own’ region, in which there is a “fellow great power with a permanent presence [...] representing] a vision of universal ideals not geared toward Chinese conceptions and alliances with several of China’s neighbors.”⁴⁶ How far can the reality of the concept of a “Pacific Community” or “Pacific World Order” be stretched in such a region and beyond? How can cooperation, or any closer form of coexistence, or at least – as mentioned by Kissinger⁴⁷ – “coevolution of two societies progressing on parallel tracks” be imagined during the coming decades of the twenty-first century? Is there a real likelihood of a ‘new bipolar international regime’, as suggested by Yeisley⁴⁸, or the momentum arises so that the two great powers push the arena towards multipolarity with their leading positions secured? What is easy to recognize at present is that energy hunger and energy security are major driving forces behind geopolitico-strategic intentions. From this perspective one ought to direct one’s attention to the African continent, where both powers foster their respective plans to succeed. Collaboration may be a possibility, but seems to be improbable for a while (and for some time).

³⁸ Ikenberry. “The Rise of China...”. 114.

³⁹ Ikenberry. “The Rise of China...”. 114.

⁴⁰ Brzezinski Z. and Scowcroft B., moderated by Ignatius, D. *America and the World. Conversations on the Future of American Foreign Policy*. New York: Basic Books. 2008. 121.

⁴¹ Brzezinski and Scowcroft. *America and the World...* 121.

⁴² Griffiths and Luciani. *Does the 21st Century...* 17.

⁴³ Mendis. “Birth of a...”. 27.

⁴⁴ Kissinger, H. *On China*. London: Penguin Books, 2012. 539.

⁴⁵ Griffiths and Luciani. *Does the 21st Century...* 19.

⁴⁶ Griffiths and Luciani. *Does the 21st Century...* 540.

⁴⁷ Griffiths and Luciani. *Does the 21st Century...*

⁴⁸ Yeisley. “Bipolarity...”.

AFRICA IN POLICIES SEEN FROM THE TWO SIDES OF THE PACIFIC OCEAN – ANY CHANCE FOR COOPERATION?

Deriving from differences in philosophies, the United States and China have been articulating and communicating different approaches towards sub-Saharan Africa. However, regardless of how much they have “emphasized different policies for their engagement” (GAO, 2013), looking at the composition of trade figures, the basic underlying similarity is evident: in the case of both China and the U.S. it is all about natural resources.

According to a Report to Congressional Requesters by the United States Government Accountability Office, “petroleum imports constitute the majority of U.S. and Chinese imports from sub-Saharan Africa, [and] both the United States and China chiefly import natural resources from [the region]”.⁴⁹ Crude oil is certainly a ‘centrepiece’ of any relations with the continent in general terms. The rapidly increasing trade and investment trends from both great powers are indication of strategies that “have moved Africa to the center stage in global oil and security politics”⁵⁰. Securing such resources has been a top priority issue for both countries: as part of national security considerations for the US and as the basis of energy security considerations for China. In his speech on national security on May 23, 2013, when talking about how foreign aid has been seen as “one of the least popular expenditures” by basically everybody in the US – even as it does not exceed 1 percent of the total federal budget – President Obama made it explicitly clear that “foreign assistance cannot be viewed as charity. It is fundamental to our national security, and it’s fundamental to any sensible long-term strategy [and so] *has to be part of our strategy*.”⁵¹ Any American engagement on the continent, therefore, needs to serve national security, and at the same time, promote global values America believes in.

The scholarly community seems to share the view that not only China pushes development in Africa along a strategy based on self-interest. “As far as the West was concerned, there was no sign that the politics of self-interest was going to give way to something more altruistic. In 2003, the administration of George W. Bush courted a number of governments in Africa with extremely poor track records, such as Cameroun and Equatorial Guinea, with a view to protecting American oil interests.”⁵² China is explicit about mutually economic benefits, and the results of Chinese African projects and involvement in general have factually been contributing to African development. Ferguson is right, and I share this view myself, that “it’s a really big misrepresentation to suggest that [all] this is a rerun of 19th-century colonialism”⁵³. As far as the Chinese state has created a long-term geo-economic strategy for basically all corners of the world, it possesses a long-term vision, coupled with a concrete policy scheme along such lines for Africa separately. One of the major tools to execute her Africa policy is the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) established

⁴⁹ “Sub-Saharan Africa: Trends in U.S. and Chinese Economic Engagement: Report to Congressional Requesters”. U.S. Government Accountability Office. Febr 2013. <https://www.gao.gov>, Accessed on 25 May 2013.

⁵⁰ Carmody, P. R. and Owusu, F. Y. “Competing hegemon? Chinese versus American geo-economic strategies in Africa”. *Political Geography* 26. 2007. 505.

⁵¹ Obama, B. “Text of President Obama’s May 23 speech on national security”. Speech delivered at National Defense University in Washington D.C. <https://www.washingtonpost.com>, Accessed on 25 May 2013. Italics added by the author.

⁵² Nugent, P. *Africa Since Independence: A Comparative History*. Houndmills, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. 433.

⁵³ Griffiths and Luciani. *Does the 21st Century...* 31.

in 2000 – most probably “encouraged by” the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) of Japan first held in 1993, and the latest version, TICAD VI hosted by Kenya at the end of August 2016 – and some additional decisive soft power ‘agents’, including frequent high-level visits, regular bi- and multilateral meetings, together with an efficient apparatus in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Beijing, in charge of a constant flow of information and coherent communication back and forth. In contrast to this highly successful ‘machinery’, having been built and continuously refined since the 1990s, for much of the same decade “the United States favoured a policy of benign neglect towards Africa,”⁵⁴. This changed with 9/11 which also brought along the “imperative [...] to find an alternative to Middle Eastern oil which was potentially at risk from so-called Muslim fundamentalism”⁵⁵. Since the first Clinton administration starting in 1993, Africa has been “important” for the US – exactly how much is something many experts have debated. The second Obama administration is “committed to Africa’s future” and “prioritized” Africa among the “top foreign policy concerns.” However, Nicolas van de Walle’s 2009 critical remarks do hold, as an “overall strategic framework for the region” still needs to be defined or refined, together with sufficient and “significant organizational reform” in the administration to be able to “implement an effective strategy in Africa”⁵⁶. This view was confirmed by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington in its 2009 publication pointing out the “powerful legacy of the Bush era” in a number of domains and sectors, and suggesting to the Obama administration that to be successful “a strategic approach” will be required, and the administration “must give highest priority to selecting the very best, the most competent and respected policy leadership both in Washington and in U.S. missions in Africa”⁵⁷. *The U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa* document of June 14, 2012 intends to signal that the administration *has* a strategy needed for further steps.

To continue with our line of thoughts and be able to come to a summary of arguments, it may be better to reformulate our question posed in the title of this part of the study: instead of ‘chance’ perhaps we should ask if there is any *need* for cooperation? Who wants collaboration with the other on African soil bearing in mind the context of competition for agreements and contracts, and especially influence and presence? Is it China or rather the US that may wish to foster cooperation – perhaps in a triangular way, as the Japanese do, for instance in the case of the Nacala Corridor Project involving Brazil and Mozambique?

The word ‘competition’ in diplomatic rhetoric seems something to be avoided by both parties. However, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was strongly pointing out before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the United States is in “a competition for influence with China. Let’s put aside humanitarian, do-good side of what we believe in. Let’s just talk straight realpolitik. We are in competition with China.” As Matthew Pennington reported for the Associated Press on March 2, 2011, “Clinton [also] said that the U.S. would pursue »positive, cooperative, and comprehensive relationship,« and she welcomed China as

⁵⁴ Carmody and Owusu. “Competing...”. 515.

⁵⁵ Nugent. *Africa Since Independence...* 433.

⁵⁶ Van de Walle, N. “US Policy Toward Africa: The Bush Legacy and the Obama Administration”. *African Affairs* 109/434. 2009. 18–19.

⁵⁷ Cooke, J. G. and Morrison, J. S. “A Smarter U.S. Approach to Africa”. In Cooke, J. G. and Morrison, J. S. (eds), *U.S. Africa Policy beyond the Bush Years: Critical Challenges for the Obama Administration*. Washington, D.C.: The CSIS Press, 2009. 5.

a rising power”⁵⁸. Some analysts in the US reject this approach. Morgan Roach, for instance, at the Heritage Foundation, said, “the Obama administration largely continued the Africa strategy of the past administration,” and stressed that “there is a common misperception that the US and China are in competition in Africa,” as that suggests “that they have the same interests.” “They don’t,” she stated firmly⁵⁹. Others, such as Reginald Ntomba, were arguing for just the opposite, echoing what Mrs. Clinton said, namely that the US government did not see “the Chinese interest as inherently incompatible” with the American interest. Ntomba underlines that the “real anxiety [for the US] is about economic supremacy.” The two powers are in a ‘fight’ (not competition) for such economic supremacy in Africa⁶⁰.

Given a competition, which is intrinsically part of the system of power politics, the question arises: how to compete in a more creative way? Also, how to work together with your competitor? Hillary Clinton was clear about this, too: “We want to work more closely with China and other countries to make sure that, when we are engaged with Africa, we are doing it in a sustainable manner that will benefit the nations and people of Africa. And therefore we have begun a dialogue with China about its activities in Africa.”⁶¹

There is no need to (over)emphasize how extensive strategic ambitions Beijing has for Africa – it is one of the most vivid phenomena in the global arena. Africa has become one of the focus areas of pragmatic Chinese foreign policy, opposed to which, as an editorial in *Allafrica.com* of January 16, 2013 points out, “US strategy for Africa has not changed as much as [President Obama’s] rhetoric might have suggested”⁶². Obviously, to stay fair in our analysis, former deputy assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Witney Schneidman got the point saying that “the environment Obama inherited – such as unwinding the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and facing the worst financial situation since the Great Depression in the 1930s – mitigated against undertaking a lot of initiatives which were not first tier”⁶³. However, until August 2014 it seemed that Africa as a continent – an entity in political terms as a whole already for the European Union – did not grow in “weight” within the United States, as far as policies are concerned. China in the meantime surpassed the US in trade terms, and “overtook America as the world’s largest net importer of oil”⁶⁴ a huge part of which comes from Africa. But it is a myth to state that it is only about the natural resources that matter for China. “Sino-African links have broadened in the past years [and the] relationship is now almost as diverse as Africa itself.”⁶⁵ “Where others only see discomfort or chaos, the Chinese see opportunities. They are willing to make long-term investments in infrastructure projects and industry where Western investors would want quick returns. China has a lasting vision for Africa”⁶⁶.

⁵⁸ Pennington, M. “Clinton says US in direct competition with China”. *The Washington Post*, 2 March 2011. <https://www.washingtonpost.com>, Accessed on 15 March 2013.

⁵⁹ Cheng, G. and Yingzi, T. “Clinton’s Africa visit fuels debate on competition between US and China”. *China Daily USA*, 13 Aug 2012. <https://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/>, Accessed on 15 March 2013.

⁶⁰ Ntomba, R. “US and China: The fight for economic supremacy in Africa”. *African Business* 2011. 72–73.

⁶¹ Ntomba. “US and China...”. 73.

⁶² “Africa: Where Next? U.S.–Africa Relations Under a Second Term”. All Africa. 16 Jan 2013. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201301161369.html>, Accessed on 26 May 2013.

⁶³ “Africa: Where Next?...”.

⁶⁴ “Africa and China: More than minerals”. *The Economist*, 23 March 2013. <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2013/03/23/more-than-minerals>, Accessed on 26 May 2013.

⁶⁵ “Africa and China...”.

⁶⁶ Michel, S. and Beuret, M. *China Safari. On the Trail of Beijing’s Expansion in Africa*. New York: Nation Books, 2009. 7.

Why the picture has been changing in such a dramatic way is not only to do with the “no-strings-attached policy” of the Chinese government when it comes to aid or any kind of assistance. China is less interested in the aid industry as policy approach, but rather focuses on business, which – if managed well enough, strategically speaking, on the African side – can be mutually productive. As Deborah Brautigam underlines, first of all, the US needs to make an effort to get “behind the headlines and see what China is actually doing. [They] have six decades of experience with aid in Africa. They’ve spent time analyzing their own past failed aid projects, and they’ve come up with a different model of engagement, much of which does not actually involve official development aid”⁶⁷. This is the first step to be taken to be able to improve cooperation with China. This seems to be at least useful for the US, which has been “losing the economic ground” – “and not just to China”⁶⁸. Other emerging actors, such as the other BRICS countries, and certainly Turkey, Indonesia and South Korea also push into the direction of a long-term refined American strategic approach toward Africa.

CAN THE US ALSO HAVE A ‘CHARM OFFENSIVE’?

The idea that the *president* pays a visit is undoubtedly an important element of any successful strategy toward Africa (or any other corner of the world) – be that the Chinese or the American top leader. The Chinese have been applying this ‘tool’ for decades in a very convincing way. The visit of President Obama at the end of June 2013 will be needed to catch up, and can turn out to affirm a re-emerging American engagement across the continent. It is definitely a “positive step in the right direction for America in Africa, [and] it is time for Obama to [...] set foot on the continent.”⁶⁹ To be able to do this, the US can start thinking of how to develop innovative means of soft power to become more convincing. With her “economic miracle” “Beijing began to realize [at the right moment] that China has an image it can sell to the world. At the same time, America’s international image was slipping”⁷⁰. Since the early 2000s China’s grand “charm strategy” has been decisively contributing to the country’s “Peaceful Rise”⁷¹.

We can agree with Mearsheimer that “states seek to maximize their power”⁷², and we may argue that they do not only look for hard, but increasingly soft power strategies to become more sophisticated about how to behave more assertively in the system. It is always a privilege to meet the president of the United States, and we know that in diplomatic terms, an official lunch with the president is important; however, in such a competitive environment to dine with African leaders at the United Nations may not be sufficiently convincing. The presidential lunch held in September 2009 was “designed to broaden and expand the vision for US partnership with the continent”, and was said to be a “start of a dialogue between

⁶⁷ Brautigam, D. “China’s Role in Africa: Implications for U.S. Policy” Hearing before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate. 1 Nov 2011. <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/>, Accessed on 15 March 2013.

⁶⁸ Firsing, S. “Obama’s 2013 Africa Visit: Commentary”. *International Policy Digest*. 10 April 2013. <https://intpolicydigest.org/>, Accessed on 28 May 2013.

⁶⁹ Firsing. “Obama’s 2013 Africa Visit...”.

⁷⁰ Kurlantzick, J. *Charm Offensive: How China’s Soft Power Is Transforming the World*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2007. 32.

⁷¹ Kurlantzick. *Charm Offensive...* 37.

⁷² “Conversations in International Relations...: Part II.”. 239.

[the first Obama] administration and African leaders.”⁷³ Then senior White House adviser for African Affairs Michelle Gavin said at a press briefing that the US was “trying to think about how to move this partnership forward and achieve some real transformation in terms of the nature of opportunity available to Africans.”⁷⁴ A very intensive dialogue has been going on and managed basically on a daily basis on the Chinese side. FOCAC is not (only) a ‘diplomatic festival’, but rather a major soft power tool to maintain and develop Sino-African cooperation. China has done much more since 2000 to engage with Africa in a deep and continuous dialogue and in a Confucian pragmatic style which has been achieving transformation all across Africa. How can the US catch up at all, especially when we talk about winning the ‘hearts and minds’ of the populations, so that other policies are implemented?

The United States should also establish a summit, which it holds every three-four years. Japan has such a ‘tradition’ since the launch of TICAD in 1993, held every five years, India holds her Africa–India Forum, Singapore has her business summit with Africa, Turkey organizes the Turkey - Africa Cooperation Summit, and each and every emerging entity comes up with a similar method to “get hold of Africa”.⁷⁵ Even Hungary, a middle-sized Central European country initiated such an event under the name “Budapest Africa Forum” (BAF). Organized the third time in June 2018, the BAF seems worth the attempt to draw (more) attention to potentially competitive advantages of the host country. The United States had been lacking this foreign policy tool for some time. Naturally, not only the event itself is important, but also what must come in the aftermath: follow-up meetings at ministerial/departmental level, civil society activities, business fora (for example, partnership building or investment opportunity workshops), and many more. The tenth biennial US - Africa Business Summit was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, between 1 and 4 February, 2016, which is a good sign of commitment, but for a long time a strategic umbrella or framework was missing. After the twelfth event in May 2018, however, a re-affirmed economic engagement looks evident.

US–AFRICA LEADERS SUMMIT: CREATING A NEW IMAGE OF AFRICA?

Finally, the first ever summit with African leaders on American soil came into reality: President Obama invited most of the African countries to Washington, D.C., between August 4 and 6, 2014. This summit certainly had the potential to make the international community think about the African continent yet again as the place where abundant opportunities may rise if mutual (African and other) interests are met. At the same time, for obvious reasons, which had always been connected to its own national interests, the US wanted heavy security-related issues to be discussed during the high-level meeting.

The US commitment to human security including civil society, women, food, education and health has always been high on any US concept/strategy toward Africa for decades. In

⁷³ Tarrósy I. “‘Chimerican’ Interests...”. 11–28.

⁷⁴ Tarrósy I. “‘Chimerican’ Interests...”. 11–28.

⁷⁵ Some American experts (for example, Scott Firsing – see in References) have already recognized the opportunity such an event may offer. However, not much of political discourse has been devoted to it – maybe because policy-makers do not think it is relevant for the US. At the time of writing this paper, the author has been conducting a series of interviews, and some questions he asks experts and scholars are focussed on the issue: “Can you imagine the relevance of an American-African Forum Summit, held every 3-4 years, similarly to Japan’s TICAD, China’s FOCAC? Does the US need such a diplomatic tool to strengthen its positions in Africa?”

addition, American national security does not only focus on military involvement in terms of reducing terrorist threats, but also energy security both for the US and increasingly, within African countries – as Power Africa, one of the programs announced by President Obama after his 2013 Africa Tour wishes to address.

From a global aspect, the summit had the chance to create a new image of Africa advocating that the continent can also be an integral part of the interdependent world order in terms of trade and investments abound. According to Paul O. Folorunso, lecturer of Philosophy at Ekiti State University in Nigeria, with the Washington event “the US could initiate a re-branding of Africa, which also defines the future of the continent with the outside world. However, positive change can only occur if genuine and mutually beneficial cooperation is ensured.”⁷⁶

Whether or not the US tries to (or should) “copy” China as far as such summits are concerned, many agree that with the event and its follow-up actions the US wants to reduce the influence of China over Africa.

Former Tanzanian Ambassador to the US Liberata Mulamula emphasized in an interview that the “unique part of the Summit was the engagement of the business sector from both the US and Africa with the full participation of the Heads of State and President Obama himself.”⁷⁷ The summit also gave Tanzania the rare platform to promote its business and investment opportunities by organizing a country-specific business forum as signature event. The “Doing Business in Tanzania” forum attracted more than 500 participants from various US businesses. The sectors that attracted many on doing business in Tanzania were offering agriculture, energy, infrastructure and tourism opportunities.

Some of the major Tanzanian sectors that easily attract Foreign Direct Investment include agriculture (in need of modernization), the gas and oil industries, as well as health infrastructure and services. Tanzania has the great momentum to make use of the recently discovered fields off its shores. According to an official announcement of October 14, 2014 by Statoil and its co-venturer Exxon Mobil, a new exploration (the so-called Giligiliani-1) resulted in a new natural gas discovery of “an additional 1.2 trillion cubic feet (tcf) of natural gas in place in the Giligiliani-1 well bringing the total of in-place volumes up to approximately 21 tcf in block 2.”⁷⁸

Ambassador Mulamula was determined that her country needed to “keep up the momentum generated by the Summit and to effectively follow up on the commitments made.” Tanzania is among the few countries of Africa, which has been selected as beneficiaries of such presidential initiatives as the Millennium Challenge Compact (MCC), which was created by the US Congress in January 2004 with strong bipartisan support. “These programs have helped Tanzania significantly in terms of development of the country’s infrastructure and implementing the rural electrification program.” In all, with the Summit there have been good prospects for scaling up US investments in Tanzania and promote trade through President Obama’s initiatives on Trade Africa and Power Africa, as well AGOA, the African Growth and Opportunity Act, which was renewed 2015. “AGOA has had a considerable impact on sub-Saharan Africa’s clothing industry and is a key part of the reason that

⁷⁶ Interview by the author in July 2014.

⁷⁷ Interview by the author in August 2014.

⁷⁸ See “Statoil makes seventh discovery offshore Tanzania”. Statoil. http://www.statoil.com/en/NewsAndMedia/News/2014/Pages/14Oct_Tanzania.aspx

textile plants have popped up across the region. It also explains why the trousers Americans buy at Walmart are increasingly from countries such as Ghana.”⁷⁹

As part of the ‘charm offensive’ the range of activities can also be extended. Although China has taken enormous steps to come up with the best offer – in most of the cases as part of complex ‘packages’⁸⁰ – the US “can compete with China in supporting higher education for Africans through scholarships and assistance to African universities. [America] can win friends at the grass roots by fulfilling [her] promise to eliminate trade barriers [...], scale up legislative, technical and medical exchanges and support infrastructure projects where there would be direct benefit to Africa’s poor”⁸¹. In courting Africa these days by strengthening this soft ‘package’ of the strategy the US stands a better chance of regaining the momentum.

In this process, the brand new (since July 2018) Assistant Secretary of State for Africa in the Trump Administration, Hungarian-born Tibor P. Nagy emphasizes that young people and especially possible young leaders stay important for the continent – and the US involvement there. As AllAfrica reported: “*In one of his first public engagements as the Trump administration's top State Department person on Africa policy, Tibor Nagy addressed the African Diaspora Youth Leaders Summit. The gathering joined Mandela Washinton Fellows – a centerpiece of the Young African Leaders Initiative (Yali) – with counterparts from the Diaspora. Yali was launched by President Obama in 2010. The Mandela fellowship includes six weeks at a U.S. academic or training institute and networking with American leaders in the public and private sector.*”⁸²

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Perhaps, as Ferguson, the mastermind behind the concept, says, “the Chimerican era is drawing to a close,”⁸³ and perhaps a new chapter of Sino-American relations may be imagined at a certain point in the foreseeable future in under a Pacific World Order or in a different framework. Closely connected actors and notions are inevitable – with or without their strive for more emphasis on national interests. The Chinese in Africa are not worse than the Americans or the Europeans – they are different, and have a unique and seemingly highly successful approach toward the continent, which others, including the ‘lonely superpower’ can and should learn from. As managing director for Tata Africa, Raman Dhawan said in an interview, “the China model is appropriate because Africa needs investment”⁸⁴. The opportune moment for enhancing cooperation in Africa is there. Both the US and China needs a politically stable and economically reliable environment, and seeking more of this

⁷⁹ See Hinshaw, D. “US-Africa Trade Gets a Boost With Renewal of AGOA”. The *Wall Street Journal*, 25 June 2015. <http://blogs.wsj.com/frontiers/2015/06/25/us-africa-trade-gets-a-boost-with-renewal-of-agoa/>, Accessed on 25 June 2015.

⁸⁰ See more about this from the interview made by Péter Galambos for origo.hu with the author on July 1, 2011. Galambos, P. “Tipikus kínai csomagot kapott Magyarország”. *origo.hu*. 1 July 2011. <http://origo.hu/>, Accessed on 28 May 2013.

⁸¹ Copson, R. W. “China branches out. Beijing’s aggressive courting of African states is a direct challenge to U.S. interests”. *Los Angeles Times*, 13 Apr 2006. <http://latimes.com>, Accessed on 19 May 2013.

⁸² “Africa: ‘Absolute Confidence’ Youth Will Bring Change – Senior U.S. Africa Official Tibor Nagy”. *AllAfrica*, 14 Aug 2018. <https://allafrica.com/stories/201808140588.html> (Accessed on 18 August 2018)

⁸³ Ferguson, “Team ‘Chimerica’”.

⁸⁴ Wonacott, P. “In Africa, U.S. Watches China’s Rise”. The *Wall Street Journal*, 2 Sept 2011. <https://online.wsj.com>, Accessed on 15 March 2013.

kind of stability can help achieve the goal of the ‘collaborative project’⁸⁵. There are numerous areas for cooperation ranging from peacekeeping to agricultural development, climate change to the development of energy resources, to name but a few. What should be discussed and placed high on any potential joint agenda is that “the United States and China need to focus on identifying areas where they can [and really want to] cooperate in ways that will also benefit Africa. This is not part of the world where China and the United States find themselves in conflict or where competition should loom large in the relationship”⁸⁶. But, as Wickham underlines, “African nations would be wise to not let others have a heavy hand in defining what is in their best interest”⁸⁷. African governments should stay mature enough in their decisions as to who to cooperate with, and for what purposes, for the sake of their own societies.

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⁸⁵ Tarrósy I. “‘Chimerican’ Interests...”. 11–28.

⁸⁶ Tarrósy I. “‘Chimerican’ Interests...”. 11–28.

⁸⁷ Wickham, D. “African nations need to pave their own roads”. *USA Today*, 2 Apr 2013. 6A.

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