

Providing security in a liberal world order: The only tool left for European Union in Africa?

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Abstract

China has established a strong economic position in Africa, in particular due to the volume of its trade and FDI. No doubt, the progress of China challenges the former predominant position of Europe/the European Union on the continent. The paper argues that provision of security in violent conflicts is the only tool left for the EU to maintain some influence on African governments and African regional organizations. The argument is located within the debate on the development of a liberal world order. Therefore, the paper scrutinizes not only a number of conflicts but also the political dialogue between the African Union and the EU and the one between China and the AU. It also looks into the debate on the 'responsibility to protect' to see if there is a convergence of norms and values linked to the R2P. The paper concludes that provision of security is hardly an efficient tool for the European Union to maintain influence in Africa. Not only is China becoming very actively involved in peacekeeping. Moreover, the political dialogue between Africa and China is fairly conflict free and the two parties seem to share values and norms on the R2P. Not least, the Libya 2011 war split the EU and the Africans on norms and values on top of a difficult dialogue.

Introduction

When radical Islamists took over power in Northern Mali in early 2012, decision-makers in Europe and in Washington were alarmed. Encouraged by France, the European Union and the US engaged in the battle against the radical Islamists in Mali with troops and logistical support (Olsen 2014). China was so worried by the rise of radical Islamism in the Sahel that Beijing for the first time in its history committed combat troops to a UN peacekeeping mission. The deployment of combat troops signaled a remarkable significant shift in Beijing's foreign policy. According to Financial Times, the Chinese military contribution to MINUSMA in Mali was not different from its participation in the UN mission in South Sudan. What was different was the government's public announcement which showed "that sending troops that might have to fight was now accepted policy" (Financial Times 27.06.2013).

It is the argument of the paper that the recent change in Chinese Africa policy showing readiness to deploy troops trained to engage in combat threatens the unique position the European Union has had until now in Africa. In the current century, the European Union is the only external power apart from France that on a number of occasions has been willing to commit combat troops to manage violent conflicts in Africa. With its still weaker economic position in Africa (cf. Financial Times, March 11 2014; Helly 2013: 139-140), Europe's basis for exerting influence in Africa is rapidly being undermined. At the same time, China and a number of emerging powers are strengthening their prospects for influencing future developments in Africa by economic means, trade and FDI and also by providing security. In this context it is not irrelevant that surveys indicate that in general, China is well perceived by rulers, leaders and elites throughout the continent (Wang & Elliot 2014). Also, China seems to be much more well-known among African populations than the European Union (Keuleers 2015). Therefore and on the face of it, it seems as if Europe is simply losing the competition for influence on the course of events in Africa.

On the other hand, since the turn of the century we have been witnessing an explicit intention on behalf of Europe to develop a much more equal relationship between the two continents. The relationship between the old colonial Europe and its former colonies in Africa is officially described as an "equal partnership" which is "firmly rooted in shared values..." (cf. General Secretariat 2014). If it is possible and if it makes sense to talk about a separate sphere covering politics, security, norms and values (cf. Buzan & Lawson 2014: 75ff), the European Union/Europe may not be in such a weak position after all, when it comes to influencing African governments in the future. In spite of its declining economic position and the possibility to exert influence via economic means, the EU/Europe still has the possibility to influence what goes on in the continent by providing security. Concretely, it is the paper's argument that the proven willingness and readiness of the Europeans to provide security is an efficient tool for the Europe Union to maintain some level of influence on African governments and on regional organizations including the African Union. The considerable economic, logistical and military support from Europe sends a signal to African political leaders that Europe cares about Africa and about the lives of civilians Africans.

Because China so obviously is on the rise in Africa, the paper scrutinizes if China is challenging the unique position of the EU on the continent as far as providing security is concerned. However, it is necessary to situate China, the EU and Africa within the current international system

which can be described and characterized in different ways (Grieco et al. 2015: 416-451). The analysis here is based on the assumption that the international system in the current phase of its development can be described as a kind of liberal world order. Therefore, the next section gives a brief overview of the liberal debate on the emerging and/or the current world order which has inspired the analysis in the paper.

After the presentation of the theoretical inspiration, the paper has chosen to focus on a number of recent crises where the European Union and China both have been involved in providing security. Somalia, Mali and South Sudan are the cases which are scrutinized with the aim to assess if security provision is a tool if not the only tool left for the EU to maintain some of its traditional influence in Africa. The analysis is divided into two sections with one focusing on the political dialogue between the EU and the AU and on the dialogue between China and the African Union. The second section scrutinizes if it is possible to show that there has been a development of common norms and values among the three actors the African Union, the EU and China where the focus is on the recent international debates on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P).

The theoretical inspiration

The argument of the paper builds on the assumption that the current global system is in a special phase of its development which is different from for example imperialism, the cold war era and from the 'transition' phase during the years following the fall of the Berlin wall. As mentioned, the current international system can be described in different ways depending on the theoretical starting point. The framework used to structure the following analysis is inspired by the debate on the liberal world order (Sørensen 2011; Ikenberry 2008; Ikenberry 2010; Dunne & McDonald 2013; Dunne 2010).

Two opposing views can be identified in this debate. On the one hand, there is the view that the rise of China (and India) inevitably leads to confrontation and conflict between the 'West' and the rising powers simply because their interests and strategies are incompatible. This is the so-called pessimist perspective (Fernando 2014). It argues that the current order cannot be taken for granted simply because the newcomers on the global scene do not feel ownership to the

prevailing institutions and to the prevailing institutional order (Koivisto & Dunne 2010: 616; Ikenberry 2010: 80).

On the other hand stands the liberal argument that the rise of China and India does not necessarily lead to confrontation and conflict. It might as well result in increased cooperation between the great powers of the world. This is obviously the optimist argument (Fernando 2014). The liberals argue that China (India and others) gradually accept and abide to the prevailing norms and rules governing the international system. These norms and rules are basically Western. John Ikenberry maintains that the Western order has a remarkable capacity to accommodate rising powers such as China. “The Western order’s strong framework of rules and institutions is already starting to facilitate Chinese integration” (Ikenberry 2008).

The point of view that Western institutions and values are so strong that they are capable of integrating and accommodating rising powers such as China presupposes that the current world order contains substantial elements of a liberal world order. Georg Sørensen argues that four major elements contribute to constituting a liberal world order (Sørensen 2011: 47-53). The first among these is democracy which is important because states with liberal democratic institutions are the basis for a liberal world order. Second, there are transnational relations between individuals and private groups emphasizing free market intercourse and commercial relations. Third, there are international institutions which are crucial because of the value of cooperation through international institutions regulated by common rules of international law. Fourth, the existence of common moral values is considered important and not least is the support important for central liberal values such as freedom, responsibility, tolerance, social justice and equality.

It is obvious that the current world order comprising Africa, the EU and China far from entirely lives up to these four elements. To modify the requirements to the existence of a liberal world order, Sørensen suggests distinguishing between a ‘thick’ and robust liberal order and a ‘thin’ and less robust liberal order. The first is found among the consolidated democracies in the North Atlantic areas whereas the second is found in other areas of the world like Africa and China. The ‘thin’ liberal order “is based on global liberal progress....in the sense it is founded on interdependence, institutions and common values.....most importantly, common values are agreed upon in principle but this does not reflect a deep commitment to such values in the statesthat have agreed to them” (Sørensen 2006: 257-8).

The focus of this paper is on the relationship between the EU embedded in the thick and robust order and Africa with its ‘thin’ and less robust consent to the global liberal order. Also, the paper scrutinizes the relationship between Africa and China both with a thin and less robust consent to liberal order. The division of the world between states embedded in a robust liberal order and states embedded in the less robust liberal order can be considered a challenge to a core assumption in liberal thinking which is that rules and international institutions exist and there is a minimum of rule-based order (Sørensen 2011: 141ff). Nevertheless and that is the position here because of the division, China can be considered as a least likely case in the following analysis. As such the scrutiny of China’s provision of security can be considered a particularly hard ‘test’ of the paper’s argument that the EU has a unique position within the liberal international order.

There are obvious similarities between the approach described above and what liberal theory in the discipline of international relations (IR) describes as a regime theory. Liberalism in IR has always been strongly preoccupied with interdependency and with the pressure for international cooperation which follows from the increased interdependency among countries and regions (Grieco et al. 2015: 79ff; Jackson & Sørensen 2003:105-138). The pressure from interdependency may lead to the development of a ‘regime’, originally defined by Stephen Krasner as “principles, rules and norms and expectations within a given issue area” (Krasner 1983: 2). A recent definition emphasizes that an international regime can adequately be defined as “social institutions consisting of agreed upon principles, norms, rules, procedures and programs that govern the interactions of actors in specific issue areas” (Levy et al. 1995: 274).

The debate on the liberal world order and the debate on international regimes emphasizes the increasing interdependency between international actors and the simultaneous pressure for international cooperation. Therefore, the paper has chosen to scrutinize two formal fora framing the cooperation between on the one hand ‘Africa-EU partnership’ and the other hand the ‘Forum for China Africa Cooperation’ (FOCAC). In both cases, there is a special emphasis on the question of provision of security by the European Union viz. by China. For the development of a liberal international order or the development of an international regime, it is important if it can be indicated that there exists some kind of political dialogue and cooperation within the framework set by these formal institutions.

Turning to second important issue in the debate on the liberal world order, the question of common norms and values, Thomas Weiss and Ramesh Thakur state that there has been

an interesting evolution in the current century touching upon core international issues like sovereignty and non-intervention. These changes have been related to the argument that states have of a responsibility to protect their citizens (R2P) and that states cannot do whatever they want to their own citizens protected behind the argument of state sovereignty (Weiss & Thakur: 2009). Philipp Rotmann et al. argue that “the debates around a responsibility to protect provide a unique opportunity to analyze the changing global order in a way that focuses on fundamental conflicts over sovereignty and responsibility, universalism and exceptionalism, hypocrisy and selectively” (Rotmann et al. 2014: 356).

Security provision

With the end of the cold war, the wars in the Balkans and the attacks of September 11, 2001, traditional hard security interests increasingly became important to EU decision-makers. The European Security Strategy (ESS) from 2003 underlined that hard security had become a common European interest, not least in relations to developing countries including African countries. The Strategy emphasized that terrorism, regional conflicts, state failure and organized crime are considered threats to Europe. It is clearly stated that “With the new threats, the first line of defence will often be abroad....this implies that we should be ready to act before the crisis occurs. Conflict prevention and threat prevention cannot start too early” (European Council 2003: 7). The focus on “European” security interests in Africa has been repeated in a number of policy papers following the issue of the EES. At the same time, the EU has clearly and very strongly given its consent to the idea of African ownership (Council of the EU 2007).

China’s involvement in Africa is motivated by a number of interrelated issues. First are resource security and the need for new markets and investment opportunities. With the increasing economic interdependency between China and Africa, Beijing realizes its need for stable overseas markets and general long-term stability in Africa (Lei 2011, 346ff; Stahl 2011b). Therefore, China perceives a peaceful international environment not only an economic necessity but also an attractive foreign policy goal (Zengyu & Taylor 2011: 150-151). Second, Beijing has a political-strategic interest in making allies in Africa (Alden 2007; Yi-chong 2008: 23ff). By pursuing this particular interest, China hopes to increase its influence on its African partners and to

strengthen the African voting bloc within the UN to have a group of like-minded countries challenging the global dominance of the US and the West. The bottom line to these different types of interest is all about the core national interest of China namely wealth and security in this particular order.

Somalia

In January 2007, the African Union launched its mission (AMISOM) to Somalia. Initially the EU was reluctant to support AMISOM because of the controversial US-backed Ethiopian invasion of Somalia and because of the lack of African interests in the operation. Driven by concerns on terrorism and encouraged by the US, on 23 April 2007 the EU council decided to include a military support element for setting up AMISOM. However, funding was the main contribution from the EU as it provided a consolidated package of civilian and military measures in response to a request from the AU. With the new funding decided in early 2013, the EU's overall contribution to AMISOM amounts to over 444 Euro since 2007 (European Commission 2013). A very significant proportion of this money came from the African Peace Facility. In addition, the individual EU member states contributed significant amounts of Euros through bilateral channels (Ekengard 2008: 36ff).

In 2010, the European Union increased its involvement further as the Foreign Affairs Council decided to establish an EU training mission (EUTM) in Somalia as part of its comprehensive approach to Somalia. Only a few years later in 2012, the President of the EU Commission Mr. Barroso announced that the EU was ready to provide additional support to the AU mission. The new commitment would contribute to the proposed increase in troop strength active in AMISOM from 12.000 to almost 18.000. The EU economic assistance covers costs such as troop allowances, medical care, housing, fuels and communication equipment (Olsen 2014).

China was a strong advocate of greater UN involvement in Somalia and of a takeover by the UN of the AU's peacekeeping tasks in the country. It is particularly important to note that during a UNSC mission to Addis Ababa in June 2006 it was China that urged other nations to support the deployment of peacekeepers to Somalia (Zhegyu & Taylor: 148). An important factor behind China's position was that the African Peace and Security Council for a long time had pushed for a UN takeover of the AU mission in Somalia (Hoeymissen 2011: 96). It has to be stressed that

Beijing did contribute to financing AMISOM even though the Chinese financial support has been very limited in comparison to the assistance from the EU (Hoeymissen 2011: 101).

Summing up, there is no doubt that the European Union has contributed significantly to managing the conflicts in and around Somalia and as such, the EU has contributed greatly to providing security. The European generous support to AMISOM sent at least two signals to African decision-makers. First, it would have been almost impossible to run the whole AMISOM mission if the EU and the member states had not supported the mission with very generous funding. Second, with the decision to establish the EUTM, the Europeans also involved themselves directly in providing security. In comparison, the Chinese involvement has been very limited both in financial terms and as far as military support is concerned.

Mali

In January 2012, an armed rebellion expelled the Malian army from the north of the country and during the following months a hard line Islamist regime was established in Northern Mali. The outside world including the EU reacted strongly to the coup and to the consolidation of the rule of the radical Islamists. In July 2012, EU foreign ministers expressed alarm over the deteriorating circumstances in Mali and tasked HR/VP Ashton to draw up concrete proposals on how the EU could help. When the Council of ministers in December 2012 approved the management concept for the military mission it emphasized that “the EU remains deeply concerned about the serious political and security crisis affecting Mali....marked by the emergence and consolidation of a safe haven for terrorists and organized crime that poses a threat to the Sahel region as well as to West and North Africa and Europe” (Press 10 December 2012).

In spite of such declarations and in spite of the AU’s call for an armed intervention in Northern Mali to oust the Islamist regime, no serious step were taken until France in January 2013 intervened with almost 4000 troops removing the Islamists and re-establishing some order in the country. The unilateral French interventions opened the way for an extended EU involvement in Mali in the context of its comprehensive approach to the crisis. The EU aid program suspended in the wake of the Islamist coup in early 2012 was resumed in February 2013 when the Commission unblocked Euro 250 million from the EDF. The EU promised Euro 225 in budget support to help

fund the security and justice sector as well as basic public services, health and education. For obvious reasons, there was a strong focus on Mali's humanitarian crisis.

The most conspicuous initiative was the launch of the EU training mission for the Malian armed forces. In addition to the EUTM Mali, the Council in mid-April 2014 established a civilian CSDP mission to support the internal security forces mainly the police with strategic advice and training. The Council described the initiative, planned for two years, as "an additional contribution to the EU's overall support to stability, institutional reform and the full restoration of state authority throughout the country" (Press, 8773/14, Luxembourg 15 April 2014; Furness & Olsen 2015).

When the United Nations in early 2013 called for the member nations to provide personnel and support for a peacekeeping mission to Mali, it was perceived as an opportunity for Beijing to expand its commitment to peacekeeping. The fact that the UN peacekeeping mission was designed to protect a regime rather than undermining it was a factor in China's decision to participate. The positive Chinese response was linked to the fact that the adversaries in Mali were religious extremists seeking to overthrow the government in a sovereign state by force (Lanteigne 2014: 11).

A number of authors point out that China's decision to participate in the UN operation in Mali in 2013 is an important milestone in the development of China's peacekeeping policy (Lanteigne 2014: 5ff; Wang & Zou 2014: 1121). First and foremost, it has to do with the fact that the Mali mission meant that China for the first time in its history agreed to send combat troops to a UN mission. Previously, Beijing had restricted itself to send police personnel, engineers and other types of support staff. The Mali mission was also unlike the other operations where China contributed with personnel because Beijing had no major economic interests in the country. The Mali mission even suggests that Beijing is becoming more comfortable with UN combat missions under certain circumstances and in selected regions including in Africa. Finally, the Mali mission was an attempt to improve diplomatic ties with African governments by supporting regional security initiatives also, if it involved potential competition with for example France (Lanteigne 2014: 17-18).

Summarizing, the Mali crisis was in many respects remarkable, first of all because it signaled a radical change and a significant increase in the China's involvement in providing security

in Africa. The Mali crisis was also remarkable because the EU's involvement was extensive due to the size of the economic support and also because of the training mission.

South Sudan

Only a couple of years after independence in December 2013, violence and subsequently civil war broke out in South Sudan. On December 24 2013, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2132 calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities and the opening of political dialogue between the conflicting parties. The resolution supported an increase from 7.000 to 12.500 troops in the military component of the UN mission (UNMISS) already on the ground and in the police component from 900 to 1323 personnel (Blanchard 2014: 2-10; Johnson 2014).

The EU launched a comprehensive development program in South Sudan following independence in 2011 (Furness & Olsen 2015). The program was suspended as a consequence of the outbreak of the civil war in December 2013. At the same time, the EU engaged together with the international community to prevent the crisis from escalating. In particular, the EU supported the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) politically and financially in its efforts to mediate between the conflicting groups and facilitating peace talks. Also, the European member states and the EU have supported the reinforcement of the UNMISS including the deployment of a regional force operating under a UN mandate (EEAS 15/12/2014; EEAS 140710/01). It is worth noting that neither the EU nor the member states contributed troops to UNMISS.

The Chinese behavior was very different as Beijing in early September 2014 decided to contribute a full infantry battalion of 700 soldiers to the UN mission which already had 350 Chinese peacekeepers on the ground, mainly engineering units and medical staff. The decision is described as a "significant shift" from China's stated policy of non-interference in African conflicts. Others describe the step as "a new era in the way China is engaging with Africa" (The Guardian, 2014/Dec/23). China has also played an active diplomatic role urging the conflicting parties to enter into serious and substantive negotiations as soon as possible (China brief, 2014).

Summing up, the European Union has acted more or less in line with its traditional mode of crisis management in Africa. It has been ready to use its huge development aid program to support peace talks and not least to deliver humanitarian assistance. Compared with the Mali crisis,

neither the EU nor the member states have been willing to deploy own combat troops in managing the conflict. In comparison, the Chinese behavior was remarkably different not least as far as the conspicuous deployment of combat troops in the UN mission is concerned.

Political dialogue

Since the Africa-Europe Cairo summit in 2000, the European Union and the African Union have aimed at developing and expanding their relations. Toni Haastrup describes the 2000 Cairo Declaration and the EU-Africa Cairo Plan of Action also from 2000 as a “significant moment in EU-Africa relations” (Haastrup 2013: 19) because it laid out the way forwards for a new ‘dynamics’ (Helly 2013: ?) of inter-regional cooperation between the two continents based on equality. The first real step towards moving beyond the cooperation till then came with the December 2007 Lisbon EU-Africa summit. The participants signed the Joint Africa EU Strategy (JAES) which is described as a “capstone doctrine of European Union-Africa relations consolidated in about fifty years of trade and development cooperation and substantially revisited in the last decade” (Pirozzi 2010: 85). It was the principal aim of the JAES is to address the concerns of Africa and its relationship with the European Union with special emphasis on fighting insecurity and underdevelopment. The Joint Europe Africa Strategy covered 8 areas of cooperation which was mainly supported financially by the European Development Fund and the African Peace Facility (Haastrup 2013: 19-26). Three principles seem to characterize the ambitions for the relationship between the two parties namely equality, partnership and ownership (Haastrup 2013: 24-26).

The focus here is mainly on the political dialogue on peace and security and governance issues. In spite of the priority given to the notion of a joint governance approach, Damien Helly finds that consensus-building between the EU and the AU on mutual governance issues and political crises has been limited until now. The extended cooperation and dialogue have been limited to issues such as cultural cooperation and the prospects for joint actions in multilateral arenas (Helly 2013: 146-147). Instead of developing common understandings and consensus, the EU and the AU including individual African countries have tended to be in disagreement on many governance-related issues including such crucial questions as the respect for human rights and democracy (Helly 2013: 146f). Moreover and importantly, on several occasions Africa and Europe

have clashed over violent political crises not least the crisis in Libya in 2011 lead to deep disagreements between the two parties.

One of the outcomes of the Lisbon Treaty from 2007 was the establishment of the European External Actions Service. The first delivery of this new bureaucratic institution was two regional strategies namely the one for the Horn of Africa and the one for the Sahel. The production of the two strategies was solely the result of the work by the EU bureaucracy obviously contradicting the rhetoric about the pursuit of a mutual governance approach to the relationship between the two continents. Damien Helly maintains that “both cases showed that the EU had not waited for the African side to formulate its own approach” (Helly 2013: 146). Turning to the issue of promoting multilateral approaches to peace and security the European Union has committed earmarked funding for promoting peace and stability on the continent by means of earmarked funding from the African Peace Facility (Carbone 2013). On a number of occasions, the EU support has no doubt met African needs and requests and in that sense and to some extent, it has been effective and successful as it was the case in the crises in Darfur, Somalia, Chad etc. where the operations would never have been implemented had the EU not supported the stability mission.

Soon after the founding of the African Union, China established a tradition of attending AU summit meetings as an observer and the two parties hold annual meetings exchanging views on major international and regional issues of common concern. As early as 2005, China appointed a representative to the African Union. Moreover, the AU Commission has developed into being a full member of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) (Hoeymissen 2011: 99). In 2006, a ‘strategic partnership’ between China and Africa was announced based on ‘political equality and mutual trust’ (Fernando 2014: 149). The 2009 FOCAC declared that China had agreed to step up cooperation with the UN, the AU and regional African institutions to address security issues on the continent.

It is important that FOCAC was never envisioned to replace the cooperation between the developed Northern countries and Africa. Neither was it meant to create an exclusive China-Africa block. The political consultations between the foreign ministers of China and Africa were aimed at strengthening the collective bargaining position of China and the African countries at the UN which was chosen by the Chinese leadership as one of the key venues for exerting influence while, at the same time demonstrating that China was a responsible great power (Fernando 2014: 149-151; Foot 2014: 1088; Breslin 2013: 631).

As a consequence of the close relationship between China and the AU, the views of African regional organizations have emerged as an important factor influencing China's position in the UN Security Council (UNSC) on African issues (Hoeymissen 2011: 95). Concretely, China allowed the adoption of UN Security resolution 1973 on Libya at the request of both the African Union and the Arab League (Liu & Zhang, 2014: 417). Also, China has taken a more and more cooperative stance and supportive role in the UN towards peacekeeping, indicating that the Chinese leadership has taken a more flexible position on the crucial issues related to sovereignty and thus on the issue of non-intervention in internal African affairs (Huang 2011: 161; Shelton 2008: 4-5).

Summing up, in spite of the good intentions on both sides, the European Union has faced serious challenges in meeting the declared intentions of the JAES. First, the two parties have been in deep disagreement on fundamental issues like human rights, democracy and intervention versus non-intervention in sovereign states. Second and a bit surprising, the European Union bureaucracy produced on its own the two regional strategies for West Africa viz. the Horn of Africa, apparently without consulting the African partners. In comparison to such a unilateral behavior, the political dialogue between China and the African Union appears much more equal and much less conflict-ridden. In assessing if there is a development towards a liberal world order, it is important to note that the close political dialogue between Beijing and the African Union within the framework of the FOCAC can be considered a natural element in the development of a liberal order not least because it was never aimed at excluding other non-African partners such as the EU.

Norms, values and the R2P

It is assumed that the following analysis on the R2P can indicate if there among the actors scrutinized in this paper is a convergence of common norms and values and in particular if there is convergence of norms and values in the implementation of the responsibility to protect. As far as the African Union is concerned, the R2P is effectively written into the AU's founding treaty and basically the treaty is more in line with the notion of 'responsible sovereignty' than with the conventional emphasis on state rights (Geldenhuis 2014: 355-358). At the same time, the localization of the R2P norm within the AU treaty goes hand in hand with the adherence to the principles of non-interference by non-African powers which exists together with the duty of the Africans to take care of each other (Dembinski & Schott 2014: 371ff.).

Following the World Summit in September 2005, EU statements began to express strong support for the R2P. It soon became clear that the European Union supported an understanding of the implementation of the R2P outside Europe which implied the empowerment of local actors. In relation to Africa, the position basically means that the EU should only play an auxiliary role and only in exceptional cases step in and temporarily fill the gap before the local actors or the UN can take over (Dembinski & Schott 2014:368ff). Both the EU Commission and the member states have expressed the view that the best way of operationalizing the R2P is by preventing a conflict from escalating. The Union already has a range of instruments at its disposal when it comes to conflict prevention including development aid, trade and the whole range of policies linked to human rights and environment. With the launch of its comprehensive approach to crisis management, the European Union is even better equipped to play the role as conflict preventer (Furness & Olsen 2015; Dembinski & Schott 2014: 370).

The Chinese government has in general been supportive of the concept and the idea of a 'Responsibility to protect' as it was formulated at the 2005 World Summit. At the same time it is not to be neglected that China's so-called 'New Security Concept' launched in 2002 stressed respect for sovereignty especially in developing countries and also stressed the requirement for the United Nations to play a "leading role in the settlement of disputes preferably through negotiations and reciprocity" (Lanteigne 2014: 7). Sven Grimm argues that this principle can be regarded as one of the strong selling points to African elites entering into a political dialogue with Beijing. Not least the principle of non-interference has a strong sounding board among African governing elites and also in the provisions of the African Union (Grimm 2014: 999-1000).

During the years following the 2005 Summit, Beijing has altered its attitude from no interventions at all to accepting interventions under certain conditions. Also important, China has expressed serious concerns regarding human rights as well as Beijing has taken steps to improve the human rights situation on several occasions (Tiewa 2012: 157f, 160; Kerr & Xu 2014). The first time, the change of position manifested itself was in the acceptance of a UN Security Council resolution on Darfur. Also, the Chinese abstention from voting during the Libya crisis has to be mentioned (Tiewa 2012: 165-169). The bottom line seems to be that the Chinese government is developing a more and more open mind towards giving priority to priority protecting human rights and accepting interventions under the strict precondition that it takes place under the framework of the UN (Tiewa 2012: 170; Kerr & Xu 2014: 92).

The 2011 Libya intervention had a significant impact on African decision-makers as far as the norms and values guiding R2P are concerned. Following the Libyan crisis, a number of African states indicated a greater reluctance towards supporting future UN resolutions authorizing the use of force by non-UN forces. Also, a re-strengthening of the principle of non-interference in relation to the norm of R2P seems to appear (Dembinski & Schott 2014: 375ff; Weiss & Welz 2014: 895ff). The same lines of conflict can be found in the case of the crises in the Ivory Coast and Mali (Helly 2012: 147; Williams & Boutellis 2014).

The Libya crisis revealed strong ambivalences within the European Union with some member states such as Germany being very careful not to use the terminology of R2P whereas, France and the UK were much more outspoken in favor of using R2P arguments (Dembinski & Schotte 2014: 371). There is no doubt that the Libya campaign had serious consequences for the Chinese attitudes towards crucial R2P issues like intervention and state sovereignty. First of all, Beijing had a feeling of being deceived and betrayed by the Western powers not least by France and the UK because the mission against the Qaddafi-regime developed from protecting human rights and civilians to regime change. Chinese representatives have even used words like ‘conspiracy’ or ‘trick’ describing the behavior of the three Western powers operating in the UNSC (Liu & Zhang: 418, 423).

Summing up, it is not to be neglected that the provisions of the African Union contain a right of the AU to intervene in a member state in situations with grave violations of human rights. Most probably, this duality in the founding principles of the African Union has contributed to changing and softening the stance of Beijing in relation to not getting involved in internal African affairs (Grimm 2014: 1000). In view of the rather strong Chinese reactions in the wake of the fall of the Qaddafi regime in Libya, it seems as if regime change is the real bottom line for Beijing and not so much non-interference and the defense of state sovereignty. Here, Western governments including the European Union have a much more ambiguous position not least when it comes to implementing policy initiatives when it is not only about declarations and general policy statements.

Concluding reflections

The paper started out with the assumption that the traditionally predominant position of the European Union in Africa is increasingly being challenged by the economic progress of China on the continent. Currently, China has strong positions both in trade and in FDI whereas the former dominating position of Europe is being rapidly undermined. If influence follows economic power, there is no doubt that the European Union's prospects for influencing developments in Africa are being diminished. However, it is the argument of the paper that the readiness of the EU to provide security in African crisis situations gives 'Europe' a unique tool to influence African governments and regional organizations and thereby to maintain some influence on the course of events in the continent.

In order to support the argument, three recent violent crises have been scrutinized. It is Somalia, Mali and South Sudan where both the European Union and China, to varying degrees have been involved with providing security. It is possible to observe an interesting development in the size and the character of the involvement of the two non-African actors. The European Union has been strongly engaged in providing security in the case of Somalia. The Union has supported the AMISOM mission with significant amounts of money and also, the EU has participated in the training of the Somali soldiers via the EUTM. In comparison, China has been reluctant to involve itself in the crisis in Somalia.

Looking at the crisis in Mali, the situation was different from the Somali case. First of all, a number of high ranking European policy-makers clearly signaled that the takeover of control by radical Islamists in northern Mali was a threat to Europe. Therefore, European member states and the European Union supported the provision of security to Mali both during and after the actual fighting of the radicals in the North. During the Mali crisis, China manifested a real break with its traditional position by deploying combat troops in the UN peacekeeping mission in the country. Finally in the crisis in South Sudan, the EU was remarkably reluctant to engage even though, it has to be stressed that the Union applied its comprehensive approach but without any military component whereas China once again was willing to deploy combat troops to the UN peacekeeping mission. The preliminary conclusion based on these three crisis situations seems to point towards the European Union in spite of its proven willingness to provide security is challenged by the new Chinese policy characterized by the deployment of combat troops to UN missions.

Concerning the political dialogue between Africa/the African Union and the two non-African actors, it is worth stressing that there is considerable agreement between the AU and

Beijing on many controversial issues. In comparison, the dialogue between the EU and the AU appears much more characterized by conflict. In relation to the theoretical framework, the brief analysis of the political dialogue points towards a preliminary conclusion that the 'new' Chinese foreign policy reflects the influence from the increasing economic interdependency. It manifests itself in the agreement with the AU on the need to have the UN in a strong role and as a legitimate forum for international decision-making. It is also manifested in the renewed Chinese willingness to deploy troops in UN peacekeeping missions.

It seems as if this preliminary conclusion can be transferred to cover the question of norms and values. In declarations and policy statements, all three actors are in agreement about the notion of responsible sovereignty and they are in agreement that there are restrictions on the sovereignty of states. However, the implemented policy of the European powers during the Libyan crisis in 2011 lead to a deep split between the AU and the EU. The Africans were simply uncomfortable with the European position which, in reality meant regime change and not protections of civilians. The Africans are joined by the Chinese government which is equally uncomfortable with the European behavior which is described as a conspiracy and a trick. As to the question of the development of a liberal world order covering certain norms and values, it seems as if Africa and China are much more within the mainstream position on the R2P whereas the Europeans simply are saying one thing while they are acting differently when it comes to implementation.

In conclusion, the scrutiny of the three African crises seems to point towards a conclusion that the European Union is challenged on its only remaining instrument for influence in Africa namely security provision. With the new and, to some extent radical Chinese policy involving deployment of combat troops in UN missions, the EU is no longer the only relevant non-African actor to provide security. China is definitely a core player, too. The position of China in Africa is moreover strengthened by the much less conflict-ridden political dialogue between the AU and Beijing. The same is true when it comes to the issue of norms and values where China and Africa seem to be much closer than the AU and Europe. And on top of this, China abides to the formulations and provisions from the 2005 World Summit whereas the EU pursues its own agenda which, as Libya case shows not necessary is in agreement with internationally agreed norms and values.

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