

From strategic triangle to tripartite stakeholder-ship

ARTICLE FOR THE EVENT "THE NEW STRATEGIC TRIANGLE: CHINA, EUROPE, THE USA IN AN INTERNATIONAL CHANGING SYSTEM" IN NOVEMBRE AT BEIJING.¹

The U.S., China and the EU are the three central players among a growing number of globally and regionally significant states. Central in this context means, that their policies, mutual relations and international appearance have a strong influence on the rest of the world. In the long run, their co-operative interplay is one of the basic necessities in shaping effective and just global governance. In this endeavour macro-issues need admittedly be kept eye on and at best responsibly be dealt with. Yet, a common stakeholder-ship in dealing with issues of general concern within the regions stands at the centre of global governance. Thus, three main foci should rank high on the trilateral agenda.

Firstly, the dealing with structural problems arising within triangular relations, individual behaviour and from mutual perceptions among the three players is important in order to gain sustainable cooperation. Secondly, conflicting interests and strategies, colliding policies and resulting issues need to be commonly addressed. This would help to minimise the trio's own share in creating issues on the global governance agenda. Lastly, dialogue about general issues in the regions can lead to effective cooperation and sustainable solutions, which eventually might serve the global public good.

Structural implications

The way how three-way (if not six-directional) interactions and relations de-

velop has strong implications for the on-going endeavour in solving common global and regional issues. The central challenges are

- Existing 'spheres of influence'
- Individual player's capability and strategy as foreign and security policy (FSP) actors
- The perception, expectation, knowledge and realisation of the others as FSP actors.

In recent years the global shift of attention and engagement towards the regions was looked upon with suspicion. Particularly China's engagement in its periphery, but also in Africa and Latin America, was met with a mixture of admiration for this new kind of pro-activity and mistrust about its motives. China's engagement in Africa is a widely debated issue in Europe. Similarly, South-South partnerships with Latin American countries have aroused the U.S.' attention. At the same time a possible encroachment of the EU into Asian security affairs was met with mixed enthusiasm. For a while, China would have welcomed EU engagement in the Asia Pacific region, especially as a balance to U.S. leverage in the Asia Pacific region.

However, so far the U.S. has not welcomed the EU's interference into regional security affairs. This became especially visible in 2005 during the European debate on sus-

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pending the arms embargo towards China. Finally, the U.S.' appearance in international affairs after September 11th and the way how unilateral action was put into practice, has cost Washington a large amount of soft power and legitimacy. It has not only made for mistrust among allies and non-allies alike but also led to pragmatic and ethical divergences.

The capabilities and strategies of the three players in their FSPs have led to a certain degree of uncertainty within their relationships. The EU still possesses a limited capability to make generally binding decisions within its CFSP beyond trade issues and to become proactive in that matter. Especially security policy is traditionally a central domain of states and the European integration process has only progressed slowly in this field. Besides, there are divergences inside the EU about how to meet challenges such as human rights and authoritarianism. These divergent perspectives between ethical and more pragmatic approaches to foreign policy and development became even stronger after the EU's enlargement. The U.S.' lack of civilian perspectives and capabilities in conflict management and crisis prevention has cost them credibility as a 'marshalling power' beyond their military clout.

On basis of value-based arguments, China's one-party system often provided motive for individual U.S. officials and EU member-states to disapprove of cooperation. However, today concern is increasingly practically oriented. Generally speaking, China has not yet developed a clear pragmatic or normative perspective for the future of global cooperation beyond its economic clout. Beijing only slowly deviates rhetorically from traditional foreign policy principles of peaceful coexistence. However, China's engagement within its periphery and in other regions raised concern. Direct and indirect interference into internal affairs on bilateral basis have been denied so far. On the domestic side, China's intention to develop peacefully does of course not rule out a possible failure to sustain its development in all sectors in the long run. Neither can be guaranteed that China is not

disintegrating socially into one or the other direction. In terms of FSP, China is determined to safeguard the material and technical basis of its development and therewith most likely focuses on its own interest, notwithstanding local social compositions, state-society relations and lines of conflict. In securing resources and maintaining its energy security, China's foreign policies are not principled but strategically oriented and interest guided. In view of its public diplomacy measures, tactical considerations have considerably changed over recent years. However, the motives behind policies and general guidelines in policy-making and implementation are not always that comprehensible, and remain to great extent intransparent and unaccountable. This lack of transparency also involves the entanglement between state-institutions and the private sector including (semi-)state-owned companies in foreign transactions. Quite obviously, China's global engagement is not only aimed at securing resources in support of its development needs. Within the next twenty years the strategic window of opportunity, which opened for China globally after September 9, 2001 in terms of soft power and business opportunities (Strategic Opportunity Period), will be used to position Chinese firms as global players among other things.

With regard to expectations and perceptions most prominently former Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick's stakeholder challenge addressed the problem of China's contribution to the international system. At the same time both the U.S. and China have often expected the EU to appear and act as if it was a state or a constitutional federation rather than a multi-national body. In return, Europeans took for granted, that external actors would accept it as 'political animal' and tolerate its complicated and sometimes time consuming decision-making process. Last but not least, the Europeans have long regarded China as developing market and society. They were fairly unprepared for China becoming a proactive and influential international actor, with a wide geographical reach, so fast.

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The basic requirements to avoid unproductive divergences, such as those previously named, is to gain a common understanding of mutual positions and objectives and ideally to leave aside rivalries and suspicions. This, however, would involve active measures in terms of transparency and trust-building in policy-making and security affairs. Moreover, trust-building measures need to be based on effective mechanisms and unambiguous policies which can guarantee transparency, beyond public diplomacy and soft power initiatives.

Triangular issues of global reach – a European perspective

Conflicting interests and strategies as well as colliding policies among China, U.S. and the EU not only hamper cooperation and possibly create zero sum conditions. They also create new issues on the global governance agenda and to some extent on local agendas. From a European perspective a positive sum game is by and large only possible through coordination and cooperation. Especially macro-dynamics and rivalries for influence and resources will most likely turn into a zero sum game for the EU. In a strategic rivalry, the EU would inevitably become a playball between the U.S. and China. Therefore the EU needs to continuously assert its position and – so much for Cold War speak– avoid leaning to either side. In doing so the EU has a weak agenda as an influential power with strong limitations on its foreign policy implementation. In fact, the EU has developed an effective representation of its economic interests in trade and investment. However, in dealing with suppliers of raw materials and commodity-producing countries it also has to deal with a clearly defined ethical guidelines and public interest. The CFSP's room for manoeuvre is restricted by paradigmatic requirements, which are in line with its self-conception as a soft (stance) power. This particularly means that the European Security Strategy focuses on the nexus between security and development. Clearly defined development agendas are also being regarded as mitigating security risks, especially through sector development and civil capacity building. As for the European en-

ergy agenda and its energy security, there is still way to go, before a cohesive strategy might become implemented. A green paper drafted this year could be basis for a common approach. However, a full-blown policy can still be regarded as non-existent. The focus so far is on the liberalisation of the single market, environmental issues including climate change and alternative energy sources. As of yet, a global strategy for energy security did not officially find any attention. In contrast to China, in some European countries the energy sector is already detached from national control, as it is the case in the UK. Thus, energy strategies are for the most part a matter of the private sector. The new European strategy towards China with the title EU-China: Closer Partners, growing responsibilities implicitly sets out a range of issues within the relationship coming from China's broader geographical engagement. This involves the need for coordination in international development (particularly in Africa) and international and regional cooperation in security and integration issues. At the same time the paper lays emphasis on transparency in military affairs, cooperation in non-proliferation and a common interest in peaceful settlement of regional conflicts. Already on the EU-China Summit held in Helsinki in September 2006, both EU and China agreed on the necessities to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and that urgent action was needed in order to guarantee their implementation. A "structured" dialogue on Africa in order to explore ways of practical cooperation was agreed upon. However, so far, on part of China, a definition of issues in that matter was not met with great enthusiasm. Thus the joint statement does not contain any details or prospective themes for such dialogue. Neither did the Chinese side welcome a European request for involvement on its China-Africa Summit (November, 3.-6.2006).

Generally speaking, most issues which have consequences for either European security interests, its relations with China or the U.S., and might lead to policy collisions, involve individual development practices and strategic interest realisation, especially

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where raw materials and energy supplies are concerned.

It is not the extent of China's new international pro-activity per se that is cause for concern but how it engages in the regions. The need for energy and more so raw materials, in order to sustain its own development, for diversification, in order to avoid dependence on conflict areas, and for dealing with international outsiders, in order to avoid clashes of interest with the U.S., have led to a specific type of diplomacy. Under the guise of South-South relations, the promise of mutual benefits and trust, the principle of non-interference and an evidently traditional type of bilateralism with individual developing countries is being pursued. This again involves unconditional money-transfers or infra-structure projects, which are usually carried out by Chinese construction firms. In strategically important places (such as Sudan's central status in China's energy strategy) its involvement very probably even involves provision of governments with military hardware. Such quid pro quo ventures with have earned Beijing a lot of critique. The most common concern is that China ignores standards of good governance within states by supporting badly performing governments. As a recent study by the OECD Development Centre positively stated, there was a complementary effect between China's and India's economic growth and African economies.

The latter benefited from rising costs of raw materials and low wage competition. However, due to a lack of cross-funding to non-traditional economic sectors other than export of raw material, in the long term economic costs might evolve. Short-term financial blessings and perhaps even economic benefit do not necessarily pave the way for sustainability in political or economical development. This is also one of the reasons why good governance standards are important. The uncompromisingly bilateral way of interaction between Beijing and other governments, leads to the fact that civil societies (insofar existent), oppositions and individual group- or minority representations might become weakened, if not marginalised. Thus, democratic structures and hu-

man rights standards become weakened as well. Ownership in terms of local and country owned solutions in terms of long-term capacity-building have so far been ignored. In face of such indirect interference, the principle of non-interference seems to be discredited.

In view of this widespread unfolding of critique towards China, one should not let out of sight, that the EU and U.S. have not yet developed an adequate alternative. Especially European failure to responsibly deal with agricultural subsidies has been an obstacle to developing countries competitiveness in the internal market. Therefore common concepts for co-responsible action among the three actors need to be developed and put into practice.

An additional point, which creates issues on the global agenda and will most likely turn out to be disadvantageous for the EU, is the prospect of a U.S.-Chinese rivalry in a race for influence and resources in the regions. In their endeavour, it appears that the philosophies on both sides diverge. Yet, their policies become practically similar, only differing in the tools they use in their implementation. Rivalries, such as it is apparently evolving over the African sub-region around the Gulf of Guinea (especially the member-states of the Gulf of Guinea Commission - GCC), would be a zero sum game for the EU. At this stage, the EU cannot appear as a conventional strategic actor. The level of integration of its CFSP does not allow such an appearance in the long and short term. On the one hand, individual member-states would come back on the agenda and try to realise their interests. On the other hand, such challenge would involve the more fundamental debate about what the EU can do, what its interests are, and what it should be able to do in principle.

In terms of strategy, especially in securing "spheres of influence", the EU as a multilateral body would (besides the regions and countries in question) most likely play the role of an outsider. Due to the presence of firms and multinationals with own strategies the EU countries would not lose the benefits of direct or easy access to resources. How-

ever, politically it would be put into an inconvenient position. Due to its security strategy and global outlook the EU is most likely to pay part of the damages being done on the ground and pursue cheque-book diplomacy.

On side of the EU a zero sum game can only be avoided if all three actors commonly tackle and manage issues, and in doing so get involved in global governance. This does not necessarily mean that they should gain agreements on all kinds of policy-guidelines or mainstream them in form of generalised norms. It means that finding ways of practically dealing with particular issues of global and common concern and convergences need to be found. The latter involves differences arising from differing policies, all kinds of changes in the world coming from China's increasing engagement and conflicts of interest in terms of resources, security and regional influence. In view of the difficulties of bilateral cooperation and dialogue on each side of the triangle, the call for effective trilateral cooperation might be far-fetched at this stage. However, the possibility of addressing common issues and challenges and putting them into common perspective might help to gain a common understanding. The precondition is a strict focus on the issues at stake.

Issues, challenges and prospects of cooperation

The U.S., a great number of EU member-states and especially China have gained profit from globalisation. One cannot gainsay that the rise of China as a producer of commodities was one of the main driving forces behind globalisation. Thus, it has gained much attention on side of its global competitors – not least the EU, who has, in the Annex of its new 2006 strategy paper named Competition and Partnership, addressed the issue of competition within the Chinese market. An increasingly quasi-mercantile China is reducing the possibilities of mutual benefits. However, all three confront two kinds of challenges to their common interest in shaping globalisation. On the one hand, all of them are trying to maximise their economic benefit. On the

other hand, the detachment of global economy from the nation state, and the competition for investment, do not go without costs especially in terms of eroding social security and environmental problems. Protection of interests also means finding common solutions on political basis. However, this can no longer be done within states alone. Global governance can only be a common global effort including the members of the triangle and their willingness to tackle all kind of issues beyond their own benefit. It also involves the realisation that political solutions can in the long run create win-win situations beyond short term economic benefit. The main task is to define a common way of looking at problems to begin with. This includes the question, what kind of issues can be put onto the agenda at any point in time and how decisions can be implemented. This is especially valid for issues beyond economic cooperation and competition.

It is rather unlikely that trilateral agreements can be found on all kinds of issues and about ways of how to deal with them. Usually only two of the three might find agreements or at least engage in dialogue. One should also not lose sight of the possibility quid pro quo trade-offs between actors in the triangle, which might not be of general benefit. This could involve mutual recognition of security threats, such as terrorism, strategic reconfigurations of spheres of influence or diplomatic role games. The US and China are most likely to succeed to communicate on strategic level and in trade issues. Central common issues are the handling of North Korean and to some extent the future of Taiwan. The first issue is of common interest and only the means of engagement might differ. So far, the U.S. is more likely to wield pressure as additional instrument to the negotiation table. China has made an outstanding effort in facilitating the Six Party Talks and therewith diplomatic negotiation. The latter might only become an issue as soon as diplomatic rapprochement utterly fails.

EU-U.S. relations have been under strain during recent years. This is perhaps due to wrong expectations on side of U.S. policy-

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makers and pragmatic differences about how to handle contemporary security and development issues. It is perhaps also owed to a lack of knowledge and expertise on both sides. On side of the Europeans effective intelligence and strategies to handle and lobby the political system in Washington are arguably deficient for historical reasons. On side of U.S. policy-makers, there has either been a tendency to ignore the possibilities and limitations of the EU as a multinational body (as opposed to a federation) or simply impatience with the same. Instead of spurious debates on how a rift between the U.S. and the EU might be constituted and in how far the EU might be standing closer to other actors including China, a dialogue on common and generally important issues beyond American security interests would be a starting point in maximising the effectiveness of the relationship.

For China and the European it would be relatively to gain consent and cooperate on soft issues in security, globalisation and aspects of development. Neither China nor the EU is willing to become a hard (stance) power, backed by a considerable military power. However, both must take more global responsibility and develop effective capabilities in order to be able to assert their approaches, make them practicable and realistic. Whereas U.S. policy-planners might have to realise, that issues solving and effective global governance are more sustainable in dealing with all kinds of issues than ordering attempts, China and the EU will need to accept the impossibilities especially in international security, which not only appear in the dealing with old or new violent conflicts but also in peace-keeping. The issues which could be on the agenda should involve themes such as security, development, energy and environment no matter whether cooperation is realistic or not.

The field of security involves clear issues on the one hand and operational questions in the security sector on the other hand. Security issues involve common efforts in non-proliferation. The issue re-enters a prominent position on the global agenda. It is topical for a trilateral dialogue agenda be-

cause in the future individual interests and alliances might hinder an impartial dealing with the issue. A further common interest is security of waterways and sea routes. For example, there would be many incentives for the EU, China and the U.S. to commonly guard the Gulf of Aden or the Gulf of Guinea and monitor the Street of Malacca.

Terrorism remains a common issue. However, the motives and means of mobilisation need to be critically examined. This would help to deal with terrorism not only as an intelligence issue but also as a symptom. New kinds of conflicts have led to a refocus in security affairs towards developmental issues. Failed development especially in political integration and in effective and representative institution-building have led to domestic conflicts in the former socialist and Third World. Although violent conflicts are a serious matter across regions with repercussions across borders, such kind of security issues cannot be dealt with by military means alone. The global governance agenda should involve two kinds of issues to begin with.

Firstly, the future of interventions or the 'obligation to protect' needs to be discussed. This involves the definition of clear rules, frameworks for mandates, code of conduct and forms of monitoring. Secondly, such kind of frameworks needs to be supported by sufficient capabilities. These would need to be developed both along the nexus of peace-keeping and peace-building and in terms of rapid reaction. Whereas the EU might be on track in building up its battle groups, China has increasingly engaged in peace-keeping operations across the globe. However, the link between peace-keeping/rapid reaction on one hand and peace-building on the other hand, needs more attention. This means that peace operations would need to be consistently provided with robust mandates. At the same time concepts for Civil Military Cooperation (CIMIC) should be developed in order to gain sustainable results.

Simultaneously, the consequences of such mandates need be realised on official and public level. Such realisation involves both,

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possible measures that might become necessary and the possible costs including human lives; a fact that especially the European public might not be prepared for.

Cooperation in environmental issues is a central theme in global cooperation and cannot miss on the trilateral agenda. This is especially so, since all three produce a great part of carbon dioxide emissions and especially the U.S. has not yet shown any intention to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. Environmental issues also involve a security dimension. On one hand, major environmental disasters have caused a problem to human security. The consequences range from breakdown of public management to migration flows. On the other hand, resource scarcity and especially lacking access to clean water can cause major security problems of traditional and non-traditional kind. The development of alternative energy sources other than fossil fuels (and especially clean and renewable energies) is not only a matter of environmental protection. It will also serve to minimise security risks in the near future.

International Crime is a topic which should be gradually discussed from an early stage on. Cooperation in justice and home affairs and common policing is a difficult task which involves many legal problems in constitutional state law and touches a central task of nation states. However, money laundering, organised crime and corruption are big international problems in a globalised world and need close attention.

Finally, development issues are a field of common concern and need to be dealt with. Especially on part of Europe there is great concern about collisions between its development policies and the way China is securing access to resources and non-conditional way of government support. A common understanding about how the MDGs can be achieved and effective procedures for their implementation on all sides be developed. This would involve achieving sustainable solutions that combine the realisation of interests (resources, influence) and developmental needs on the ground. Additionally,

dialogues should involve the countries and regions concerned.

Final remarks

The great number of issues which can be commonly dealt with, stand facing a similarly high number of obstacles. At present there is no reason to be overly idealistic about trilateral cooperation. The task of putting relations on one side of the angle into a three-dimensional perspective is a difficult task itself. Thus, the opportunity would first of all be to commonly develop possibilities of cooperation and dialogue. Dialogue is an effective means to raise issues at stake, gain a common understanding about them as well as a mutual understanding about individual motives involved. However, dialogue can only be effective if translated into action, and therefore active cooperation and responsible engagement. Mechanisms need to be found to translate dialogue effectively into concrete policy-implementations. If practical results can not be achieved in the short and long run, dialogue would become under the impression that individual participants are intending to gain time and apply delaying tactics, rather than searching for solutions. A common mechanism, such as a trilateral standing committee or eminent person group, would be an effective means to raise common issues early on in order to prevent possible conflicts of interest. The task of such early warning mechanism would involve the indication of issues and the monitoring of dialog and policy implementation.

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