

We Need a Marshall Plan for Africa

Supporting Africa's recovery from the pandemic could inject a positive agenda into transatlantic relations

Calls for a new Marshall Plan reverberate across Europe today. From Spain's Pedro Sanchez to the European Commission's Ursula von der Leyen, leaders are urging Europeans to tackle the COVID-19 crisis with a bold new joint initiative.

Beyond the reference to Marshall, these proposals bear little resemblance to the massive US-financed program to reconstruct Europe after World War II. These "Marshall Plans" are not about an outside great power helping Europe; they are about Europe helping itself. However, these attempts to build solidarity among European Union members are a positive step away from the overwhelming inward-looking, nationalistic responses that marked the first weeks of countries' responses to the pandemic.

Donald Trump's reaction to this pandemic has been nationalist too. This is not an America looking to lead a transatlantic, never mind a global, coalition to combat the coronavirus. The pandemic is accelerating trends that were alive and well long before this new virus appeared.

The United States and every European country need to heal their own societies by getting the pandemic under control and restarting their economies to reverse as much of the damage as possible. And yet, at this time of crisis, transatlantic leadership is sorely needed. One opportunity is



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KAREN DONFRIED
President, The German Marshall Fund
of the United States, Washington, D. C.

indeed a Marshall Plan, not for Europe, but for Africa. The African continent is woefully short on resources – both in the public health and economic sectors – to respond effectively to a pandemic. Beyond the compassion Europeans and Americans would show by helping Africans, such engagement would also be in their enlightened self-interest. That was key to the original Marshall Plan. Rebuilt European economies would become important markets for US goods, European integration would

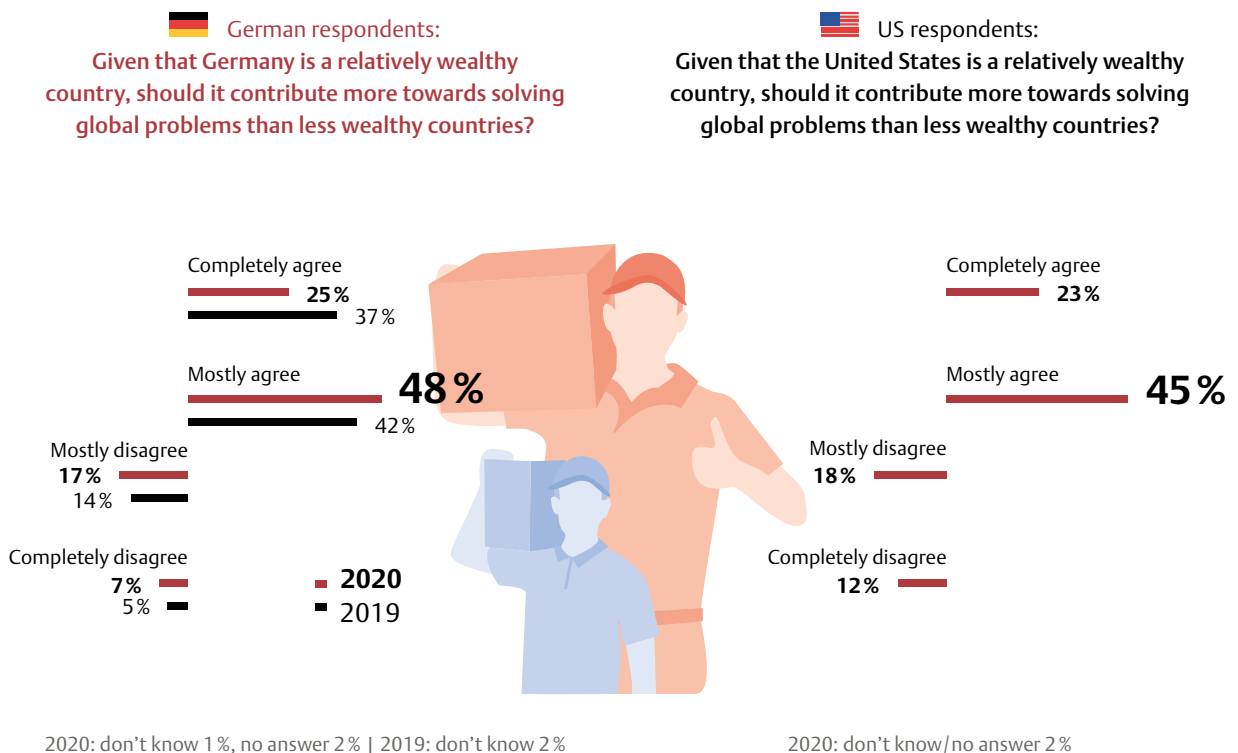
help prevent future war on the continent, and a prosperous Europe would be less vulnerable to the lure of Soviet communism.

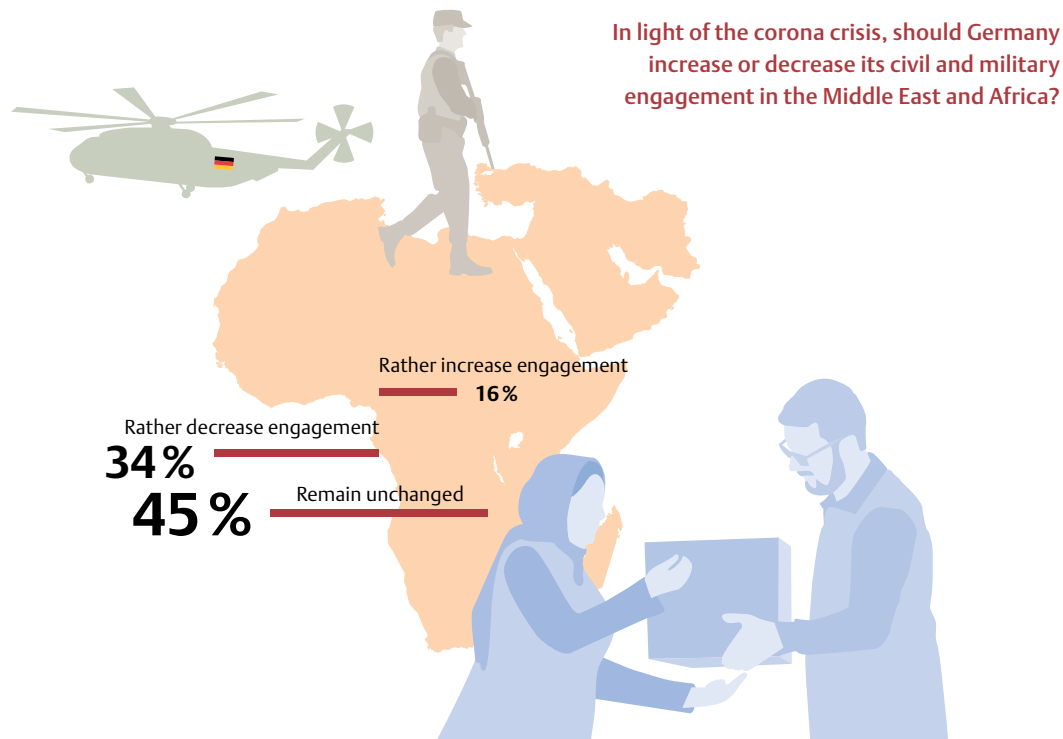
A Marshall Plan for Africa is not a new idea. Back in January 2017, the German government launched its Marshall Plan with Africa, which Chancellor Merkel saw as a centerpiece of her policy to stem the flow of migrants. For similar reasons, Antonio Tajani, as president of the European Parliament from 2017 to 2019, called repeatedly for such a plan. If today the United States and Europe were to join forces in providing African countries with the resources to help themselves, the impact would be powerful.

This may well seem like a pipe dream given the mounting deficits caused by dealing with the pandemic and its aftermath in the United States and Europe, as well as the frayed state of transat-

lantic relations in 2020. How could the two sides of the Atlantic possibly come together and create an aid programme on the scale of the Marshall Plan?

We forget how contentious the Marshall Plan was back in 1947, however. Amid a sharp divide between the Democratic administration of President Harry Truman and the Republican, isolationist Congress, US officials had to spread out across the country to make the case for the Plan to war-weary Americans, who wanted to focus inward, rather than provide substantial support to help a devastated Europe recover. Ultimately, the Truman Administration, with the help of leading Republicans, successfully made the case that it was in the US interest to rebuild Europe's economies at a time when Britain's empire was collapsing and the appeal of Stalin's communism in war-ravaged Europe was growing.





2019: don't know 4%, no answer 1%

Similar imperatives argue for the United States and Europe, based on their collective enlightened self-interest, to join forces now in support of Africa. By 2035, Africa will be home to the world's biggest potential labor force and, by 2050, to 20 percent of the world's population. Roughly half of the world's 20 fastest growing economies are located on the continent. Africa also faces enormous challenges, ranging from the climate crisis to a youth employment crisis to pandemics. Europe worries about ever more significant migration from Africa. The United States worries about the deep investment China, its major strategic competitor, is making in Africa. The countries of Africa have set

an ambitious agenda for their own socio-economic transformation. The United States and Europe need to support that agenda through a new Marshall Plan.

The coronavirus has yet to hit Africa with force. Seventeen world leaders – eight of them European – believe it will and have issued a call for an enormous support package for the continent, because they believe only victory in Africa can end this pandemic. Surely, there is a role for others – from the G20 to the IMF – but no duo can galvanize global action more effectively than the US and the EU. A transatlantic Marshall Plan for Africa is essential and the time is now.

