The “Cartoon” Incident in Sino-Australian Relations

The reason for the latest scandal in Sino-Australian relations was when an official representative from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs posted a cartoon on Twitter about, to put it mildly, the “serious costs” incurred by the “limited contingent” of Australian armed forces during their stay in Afghanistan.

Throughout this period, which can be counted as starting in November 2001 (that is, almost immediately after the notorious “9/11 events” in the United States) and going up to the end of 2014, about 26,000 Australian troops have toured this country. Several hundred of them are still staying in Afghanistan with the official status of “instructors”.

It is worth clarifying that the author is not referring to the entire Australian “contingent”, but only to the special forces that were included in (the Australian Special Forces, or ASF); the “costs” of their behavior were the subject of an investigation by the legal department (Inspector-General of the Australian Defense Force, IGADF) that reports directly to the Australian Minister of Defense. How the “contingent” behaved as a whole has simply not been examined that thoroughly yet. Not to mention all the other armed bearers of “European values” who have toured Afghanistan.

In particular, the key issue for virtually the entire reckless scheme in Afghanistan that awaits researchers is the following: is the fiftyfold increase in drug production that occurred over the course of it merely a coincidence, or is there a direct cause-and-effect relationship between these two facts? The author suspects that the latter version is correct, and consideration about “gaining a strategically advantageous position in the face of the prospect of China becoming a global power” was just a baited hook that US leadership back then fell for.

The official investigation into ASF activities in Afghanistan began in 2016. The impetus for that, apparently, was an
earlier private investigation into the possible causes behind a series of suicides committed by former ASF employees that was conducted by having conversations with some of their colleagues. That was the time when shocking combinations of words like “baptism by blood” or “absolute psychopaths” originated.

On November 19 this year, Minister of Defense Linda Reynolds commented on the “unclassified interim” part of the investigation. What is remarkable is that the time period when the ASF toured Afghanistan that was identified by the minister as the subject of the IGADF’s investigation covers 2005-2016. That means it is also for those two years when only Australian “instructors” were supposed to remain in Afghanistan.

Several dozen instances have already appeared in the press about which it can be stated with absolute certainty that they had no connection with any combat operations, and either unarmed prisoners of war, or simply civilians - including women and children - fell victim to them. Nevertheless, it is still too early to draw ultimate conclusions (including about the instances indicated), since the purely legal component of the entire official “case” that began in 2016 is only just getting off the ground. This follows directly from the words uttered by that same Linda Reynolds concerning creating a special group of attorneys for this purpose that would report directly to the Ministry of Defense.

Succinctly put, this is the factual background against which the cartoon mentioned at the beginning appeared. The author has no desire to participate in popular debate about the rights that particular civil servants have, as they say, to speak out in various ways on various privately-run information platforms “in their free time” on various problems that are sore points for other countries. But it was the form, and not the substantive aspect, of the investigation mentioned that turned out to be the target of anti-Chinese maneuvering on the part of the Australian government - something which immediately received support from various representatives from “democratic” countries.

In the wake of the mushrooming scandal, the Chinese Global Times posted an article published by the official government newspaper in Kabul (the Afghanistan Times Daily), accompanied by its own illustration. The latter harshly, but mostly accurately, reflects the hypocritical nature of current “human rights advocates”, especially those at the national level. They offer services “pulling out the specks” from the eyes of geopolitical opponents (in Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and Tibet), while completely ignoring the “logs” that wound up in their own eyes - and not only during their colonial legacies, but following very recent operations in Iraq, Libya, and that very same Afghanistan.

The only point of criticism that could be raised with the Global Times illustration is that the poster with the inscription “Human Rights” should hardly have been placed in the hands of a soldier whose image is meant to depict nothing more than the harsh realities of our immoral world. But in the hands of some pique waistcoat-wearing hoodlum (with some kind of national insignia on a jacket lapel) this poster would have seamlessly blended in.

It is also worth noting that the next upwelling of politically motivated, anti-Chinese hubbub initiated by Canberra represents nothing more than one another episode in the overall process of deteriorating relations with Beijing. Which began almost immediately when the government of Scott Morrison came to power in mid-2018, but accelerated sharply starting in the spring of 2020 when a certain eagerness was demonstrated, (and apparently not while thinking straight), in the bounds of a campaign initiated by Washington to hold Beijing fully responsible for the various negative consequences following the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. Including demands for financial compensation for losses that people have incurred.

Was it really difficult to foresee that sooner or later “countermeasures” would follow in the area of trade with China, an extremely important and beneficial one for Australia? If so, then this is the “seal of quality” for its ruling elite.

The NEO has repeatedly reported on how this set of measures adopted has already had a very tangible impact on the Australian economy. In early December, the subject of discussion by the Australian newspaper the Sydney Morning Herald was the issue of the problems with selling wine after Beijing increased its duties (up to 212%) on wine imports. Meanwhile, China used to buy about 40% of the entire volume of this good that Australia made.

And here, in the political arena, one of the main allies of the “Western world” in the region has taken shape in the form of the current Taiwanese leadership. On December 3, Taiwan’s President Tsai Ing-wen said that the islanders would “stand with the Australians, who are under tremendous pressure.” The article in the Taipei Times that cites these words, is accompanied by a photo of (strangely) smiling members of the Taiwanese ruling Democratic Progressive Party leadership, each holding a bottle of Australian wine.

Nine bottles is something nice. But obviously not nearly enough. Moreover, it is unlikely that all those out of 24 million Taiwanese who are not averse to, as they say, “imbibing” for one reason or another (or even when there is no
reason) would be able to drink the entire volume of Australian wine that has been imported so far into China, with its one-and-a-half billion people.

Meanwhile, they will still have to eat American pork with ractopamine, which Washington intends to sell to Taiwan “as a package” with artillery, missiles, and fighter jets designed to strengthen the island’s defense against a possible attack from the “mainland”.

This way, during the process of expressing its gratitude to its allies, as well as standing with them “side by side”, it does not take long before the health of its own population becomes jeopardized. Which health has so successfully been preserved in the framework of the coronavirus pandemic that hit everyone hard - and in a variety of ways - but mainly affected Taiwan’s key ally.

It follows from the same article in the Taipei Times that even the Vatican is ready to help Australia in its time of yet more troubles. And this is where wine really is used “for the purpose of providing services.” But, once again, those are not the kind of volumes that Australia needs. In addition, Italy is filled to the brim with its own wines.

The author does not have the slightest doubt that the emerging market of a “shared enemy” will, without any hesitation, become filled with Californian wine from the US, meaning a country that is now Australia’s main ally.

During any period of large-scale, collective insanity, hellish laughter always resounds. Today, the world as a whole is falling into a state of madness, but at the same time each of the more significant world players is showing off its own specific traits in this process.

As it turns out, Australia also has them, and it is really behaving vis-a-vis its main economic partner in the way that has been captured in “cartoons”.

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