China Strengthens its Ties with Africa, which Irritates Those Opposing It

The Eighth Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), which took place on November 29-30 in Senegal, Dakar, is quite a remarkable event at the present stage of the Great World Game, as it affects almost the central point of the said game due to the escalating struggle between the world’s leading actors to influence third world countries.

The game is being played around the problem of the economic development of these countries, which problem, while unresolved, remains one of the main factors in destabilizing the entire world situation. The understanding of the vital importance of this problem, that is the impossibility of building local well-being in the surrounding sea of troubles, was present even in the USSR. With its disappearance, China took over the baton of aid to third-world countries. The interaction with these countries is carried out, among other things, through several political platforms, one of which is the FOCAC, operating since 2000. All African countries participate in it except the Kingdom of Eswatini, also known as Swaziland, which maintains diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Of the eight meetings held during this time, five, including the last in Dakar, were at the ministerial level. Three were attended by senior officials of the FOCAC member countries.

The Dakar meeting was held under the slogan Deepen China-Africa Partnership and Promote Sustainable Development to Build a China-Africa Community with a Shared Future in the New Era. The leader of the People’s Republic of China, Xi Jinping addressed the participants online. He pointed out the need to join efforts to “fight the COVID-19 pandemic, deepen pragmatic cooperation, promote green development and safeguard fairness and justice.”

In particular, it was announced that the PRC is ready to provide Africa with a batch of COVID-19 vaccines of 1 billion
This announcement was of particular interest due to discovering a new dangerous strain of this infection in the south of the African continent.

On the eve of the Dakar meeting, the Chinese media summed up impressive results of twenty years of implementation of various projects in Africa, which since 2013 have become an integral part of the Belt and Road Initiative global project. China has long been the undisputed leader among other world powers in African economies’ trade and investment. Trade with the African continent in the 2020 COVID year amounted to $187 billion, and it will grow by another 40% in the first three quarters of 2021. With the help of the PRC, 10,000 km of railways and 100,000 km of highways have been laid in Africa, creating 4.5 million jobs. China invests annually over $ 2.5 billion in the African continent’s economies.

Against the background of these figures, attempts to throw dirt in the direction of the main geopolitical opponent look undignified, to put it mildly, which its ill-wishers once again did in connection with the FOCAC meeting in Dakar. The propaganda soapbox on the topic of “debt traps” was relaunched in the case of African partners of the PRC. The narrative was abused to spread hysteria around the Entebbe International Airport, the only one in Uganda, whose modernization was financed by the Export-Import Bank of China.

The terms of loans secured by the airport being modernized in the total amount of $ 207 million (plus 2% as the creditor’s income) with an installment plan to repay the debt over 20 years were agreed upon in 2017. Two or three years later, the country’s government announced that it would not be able to pay off the lender and held a series of negotiations with Beijing to change the terms. At the same time, the question of the “quality of the money used” received by the Ugandan government remains unclear. A few days before the start of FOCAC, Western media citing Sahara Reporters were quick to announce that the PRC had taken over Entebbe International Airport.

However, no information has yet been released from Beijing confirming the adoption of such a decision, which would be legal, but fraught with certain reputational costs for the BRI as a whole. Perhaps, it is also taken into account that the initial hopes for turning the process of modernization of Entebbe International Airport into a profitable business project for the projected sharp increase in “youth tourism” are unlikely to be realized. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and especially infectious strains with the general impoverishment of the population even in developed countries have neutralized these previous forecasts.

The NEO has repeatedly addressed the topic of propaganda attacks on projects implemented within the BRI. Earlier, the threat of falling into debt traps and the subsequent abuse of such a situation by Beijing was discussed concerning the China-Pakistan economic corridor, the construction of the Hambantota port in the south of Sri Lanka. If any, the only abuse in Sri Lanka was related to the fact that Chinese companies have received orders to modernize other ports in the country. Western companies would do the same if they won the relevant tenders.

Although the annoyance of losing lucrative contracts is understandable, this does not justify the attempts of the Western media to paint predatory teeth on the Chinese panda. A completely different picture illustrates the already observed actual results of the same Sino-African cooperation. China’s BRI partners receive the urgently needed transport and industrial infrastructure, education and health facilities, assistance in the development of agriculture, and the fight against epidemics. None of the “debtors” have had any serious problems with the PRC so far.

By a strange coincidence, a week before the discussed FOCAC event, three employees of Chinese companies operating in Nigeria and five in the Democratic Republic of Congo were abducted by some “armed men.” Recall that earlier in Pakistan, buses with Chinese specialists were blown up, who work at the facilities of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor, which is one of the critical elements of BRI.

Since something similar is being done with respect to the Russian Federation, the question arises: Isn’t it boring to engage in petty mischief against major geopolitical rivals with the help of the wholly controlled media, using “international terrorists,” and the Eastern European “independent” extremists who are not far behind them?

It’s hard to refrain from talking about wasted energy in the battle against windmills. How much good could come not from confrontation in the fields of countries in dire need of help but from coordinating the efforts of those who can provide it?

Vladimir Terekhov, expert on the issues of the Asia-Pacific region, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”.