

Africa-China Relations Could Serve as Bulwark Against Imperialist Hegemony?

Over six decades there has been growing cooperation between two major geopolitical regions and centers of economic power

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Author’s Note: These remarks were prepared and delivered in part for a webinar held on Sunday December 12 entitled “China/Africa Relations: Challenges of Cooperation and Development.” The event was sponsored by the International Manifesto Group and the Group for Research and Initiative for the Liberation of Africa (GRILA).

According to the promotional language for the webinar, the “discussion presented both African and Chinese viewpoints, focusing on the reciprocal contributions made by China and Africa in recent decades to each other’s economic and cultural development. It also addressed the task faced by Africa of optimizing this relationship.”

Other participants were Ameth Lo of GRILA; John Ridell, founding director of the Comintern Publishing Project; Danny Haiphong, journalist with Black Agenda Report (BAR); Barry Sautman, professor at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology; Huang Chang, associate of the Chinese Academy for Social Sciences; Kristin Plys, professor of sociology at the University of Toronto; Pablo Idahosa, professor of African Studies at York University; and Yan Hairong, teacher at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. (See [this](#))

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A ministerial summit of the Forum on China and Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) held on November 29-30 in Dakar, Senegal reinforced the continuing bonds between Beijing and the 55-member African Union (AU).

FOCAC was formed in 2000 during an important period which was marked by several years of substantial economic growth on the continent of Africa and in the People’s Republic of China.

Concurrently, over the same last two decades, the United States, Britain, the European Union (EU) countries and their allies globally, have been embroiled in numerous imperialist interventions resulting in destabilization, military interventions, proxy wars and the expansion of the presence of Pentagon and NATO forces throughout Africa, Asia and Latin

America. These imperialist endeavors aimed at maintaining the political and economic domination of the world's population has created enormous difficulties for peoples globally including the working class, nationally oppressed and impoverished living within the western capitalist countries.

Successive administrations in the U.S. and Britain have turned away, even rhetorically, from the notions of multilateralism, reliance on the United Nations to resolve tensions and conflicts as well, creating the conditions for widespread displacement internationally. The migration crisis in North Africa, the Mediterranean extending into Southern, Central and Western Europe, is a direct result of a series of wars and their aftermaths in Libya, Mali, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Haiti, to name the most well-known and devastating.

The 21st century has witnessed U.S.-instigated regime change in numerous states while the socialist states such as the PRC, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Cuba, Venezuela, etc., have not embarked upon any destabilization efforts let alone invasions into other sovereign states.

Due to socialist economic planning and their advancement of the notions of international cooperation and peace even among states with varying social systems, there has been tremendous progress in the areas of international solidarity.

The Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) grouping is a manifestation of the role of Beijing, Moscow and Pretoria along with the other states which have varied in regard to their political orientation in recent years. These new alliances are perceived as a threat to the role of the U.S., Britain and the EU since they are not participant-members and cannot directly impact the agendas and goals established by FOCAC and BRICS.

With specific reference to the structures and objectives of FOCAC, the [website for the grouping says](#) the following:

“The FOCAC follow-up mechanisms are built at three levels: The Ministerial Conference is held every three years; the Senior Officials Follow-up Meeting and the Senior Officials Preparatory Meeting for the Ministerial Conference are held respectively in the year and a few days before the Ministerial Conference is held; and the consultations between the African Diplomatic Corps in China and the Secretariat of the Chinese Follow-up Committee are held at least twice a year. The Ministerial Conference and the Senior Officials Meeting are held alternately in China and an African country, with China and the African host being co-chairs presiding over the meetings and taking lead in implementing the outcomes of the meetings. The Ministerial Conference is attended by foreign ministers and ministers in charge of international economic cooperation, and the Senior Officials Meeting by director-general level officials of the competent departments of China and African countries.”

At the recent 8th Ministerial meeting of FOCAC in Senegal a myriad of issues were discussed including trade, investment, climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic along with the distribution and manufacturing of vaccines. The gathering coincided with the publication of a White Paper by the Chinese government on the China-Africa cooperation.

This event was marked by a keynote address from President Xi Jinping who evaluated the work of FOCAC over the previous twenty-one years and emphasized that the involvement of

Beijing on the continent was not conducted in competition with the U.S. or any other country. Xi announced new projects aimed at assisting Africa in curtailing the impact of the pandemic by building capacity on the continent to produce and deliver medicines including vaccines.

The Chinese president spoke to the summit via video-link. His presentation was widely covered in the state media in China.

Over the period since 2000, China has built 80 large-scale electricity projects, 130 medical facilities, 45 stadiums, 170 schools, numerous rail lines and transport services, the new AU headquarters, to only name a few. In addition, there have been 160,000 Africans trained by Chinese educators and technicians both on the continent and in Asia.

Within the White Paper entitled “China and Africa in the New Era”, issued for the FOCAC Conference, [it says that](#):

“China has been Africa’s largest trading partner for the 12 years since 2009. The proportion of Africa’s trade with China in the continent’s total external trade has continued to rise. In 2020, the figure exceeded 21 percent. The structure of China-Africa trade is improving. There has been a marked increase in technology in China’s exports to Africa, with the export of mechanical and electrical products and high-tech products now accounting for more than 50 percent of the total. China has increased its imports of non-resource products from Africa and offered zero-tariff treatment to 97 percent of taxable items exported to China by the 33 least-developed countries in Africa, with the goal of helping more African agricultural and manufactured goods gain access to the Chinese market. China’s imports in services from Africa have been growing at an average annual rate of 20 percent since 2017, creating close to 400,000 jobs for the continent every year. In recent years, China’s imports of agricultural products from Africa have also risen, and China has emerged as the second largest destination for Africa’s agricultural exports. China and Africa have seen booming trade in new business models including cross-border e-commerce. Cooperation under the Silk Road E-commerce initiative has advanced. China has built a mechanism for e-commerce cooperation with Rwanda, and Chinese businesses have been active in investing in overseas order fulfillment centers. High-quality and special products from Africa are now directly available to the Chinese market via e-commerce platforms. The China-Mauritius free trade agreement (FTA), which became effective on January 1, 2021, was the first FTA between China and an African country. It has injected new vitality into China-Africa economic and trade cooperation.”

This conference obviously has reinforced the existing trajectory of growth in mutual cooperation between Beijing and the overwhelming majority of independent African states with the exception of the Monarchy in Eswatini (Swaziland). Of course, there is an internal struggle taking place in Swaziland over whether the country will be governed democratically or not. The Communist Party of Swaziland (CPS) and its allies are playing a leading role in the democratic movement which has gained considerable attention and support from world communist organizations, labor and anti-imperialist groupings around the world.

State Department Deploys Blinken in Failed Attempt to Weaken FOCAC Conference

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited three African states during mid-November in

advance of the FOCAC Conference. Blinken traveled to Kenya, Senegal, the location of the FOCAC Conference, and Nigeria, the most populous state on the continent.

Objectively, no serious observer could argue that the foreign policy of the current President Joe Biden differs fundamentally from his predecessor, Donald J. Trump, in reference to the AU member-states. This lack of even a slight shift in policy towards Africa is reflected in the current conflict in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia where Washington is backing a rebel group, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which previously was the leading force in the country's government prior to 2018. The TPLF has maintained close links with the U.S. since in 1991 under the-then administration of President George W.H. Bush, Sr. It was the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Herman Cohen, who declared the TPLF and the Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolutionary Front (EPRDF) as the official government in 1991.

Over the next 27 years until 2018, when the EPRDF government collapsed due to an internal uprising which drew mass support, this tendency has collaborated with the U.S. in various military operations across the East Africa region. Since the taking of power by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and his election earlier in the year, the U.S. under Trump and Biden have waged campaigns to undermine the government and install armed opposition groups.

The U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), founded under the administration of President George W. Bush, Jr. in 2008, has been maintained and strengthened by every successive regime in Washington. Biden withdrew Pentagon troops from Afghanistan in August after a two decades-long disastrous occupation, however, there are many other geo-political regions of the world where the U.S. is escalating its military presence.

China is a central focus of imperialism in the Asia Pacific region where Beijing is promoting its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The plans for an alternative economic and trading system includes the African continent as well. Blinken's visit to three African countries where he sought to place the U.S. at the center of discussions over the future of the continent and the world, did not generate much interest.

Coinciding with the U.S. chief envoy's trip to Africa, the talking points claiming "Chinese debt traps" surfaced in the corporate media. Both Chinese and African officials dismissed such characterizations of relations between the two entities.

Nonetheless, the role of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and other financial institutions have entangled post-colonial African states hampering national planning, regional and continental collaboration, and integration. Since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and the closing down of economies, the rates of joblessness and poverty have accelerated. A recent travel ban initiated by the U.S. and other western governments directed at several Southern African Development Community (SADC), has been condemned as unjustified and damaging to the gross domestic product of these impacted countries.

Global Times noted in [an article](#):

"Even today, the U.S. has still failed to win much trust from African countries, as one of the major purposes of Blinken's African trip was to get rid of the traumatic effect former U.S. President Donald Trump made to the continent during his term. A recent report by well-known African pollster Afrobarometer shows that China ranks first in terms of

external influence in Africa, with 63 percent of Africans saying the economic and political influence of China in their country is 'somewhat positive' or 'very positive,' and 66 percent perceiving China's economic and political influence in Africa as positive."

Democracy: The U.S. vs. China

There was also a White Paper issued in China explaining the concepts of democratic governance embodied within the program of the Communist Party distinguishing its definition from what prevails in the U.S. The U.S. promotes itself as the citadel of world democracy placing human rights as a cornerstone of its foreign policy. This White Paper is entitled "China: Democracy That Works," which suggests that the western form of democracy has extreme deficiencies.

The worsening economic conditions in the U.S. has served to inflame already existing social contradictions within the society. The country was founded on the seizure of the lands of the indigenous people, their forced removal and mass extermination. Today the indigenous are largely relegated to reservations where many have been subjected to dangerous intrusions into their territories by multinational energy corporations that poison the soil and water sources.

As far as the descendants of African people are concerned, even though the Civil War ended 156 years ago after nearly two-and-one-half centuries of enslavement under Spain, Britain, France and the Netherlands, there is widespread state-sponsored racism across the country where people are often impeded, harassed, arrested, prosecuted, falsely imprisoned and even killed by law-enforcement personnel.

Today, some 56 years since the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Supreme Court along with state legislative structures are working feverishly to deny people the right to cast ballots for the candidates of their choice. Impoverishment is highly correlated with color and national origin, meaning that the problem of racism is institutional.

The U.S. Congress has failed to pass legislation which would reestablish the right to universal suffrage. At the same time, the right to housing, reproductive rights, justice in policing and freedom from unwarranted institutional racism remain elusive within the political system led by the politicians in Washington who are underpinned by Wall Street and the Pentagon.

[Global Times reports on the China White Paper](#) emphasizing:

"The publication of the document has challenged the U.S. and the West's monopolistic definition of democracy, marking the further clarification of human beings' various practices of democracy. China's economic and social construction continues to make world-renowned achievements, people's comprehensive rights are also continuously improving. China has also achieved results that have embarrassed the West in the fight against the sudden COVID-19 outbreak, protecting people's lives in a most effective way. The whole process of people's democracy proposed by China has a strong realistic foundation and basis. It will not be a short-lived slogan but will continue to unfold with the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and form a demonstration of democratic construction outside of the West."

Therefore, under existing conditions internationally, the U.S. cannot reasonably say it is the

paramount example of democratic governance. As the people of color communities rapidly become a collective majority by the mid-21st century, the undemocratic practices reflected in the neo-fascist movements gaining ground inside the country will continue to pose a challenge to the working class and oppressed.

Internationalism in the 21st Century

China and Africa have similarities in their historical development being post-colonial geopolitical countries and regions seeking to reaffirm their places within the international community of nations and peoples. China under socialist construction has moved within a reachable distance to surpass the U.S. in economic status.

The main difference is that the U.S. built its wealth on the expropriation of indigenous land and the enslavement of Africans. During the mid-19th century, Mexico had huge swaths of its territory stolen by Washington under the guise of “manifest destiny.”

In the present period, the people of Mexico, Central America, South America and the Caribbean are being blocked, incarcerated in federal detention facilities and deported from the U.S. on a routine basis. Here again, the anti-immigrant policies of the Trump administration are being extended under Biden. The continued enactment of Title 42 under the Biden regime where migrants fleeing economic distress and human rights violations can be expelled due to there being a public health crisis in the U.S. This measure was specifically designed to deny migrants from Haiti the right to stay within the country despite the role of U.S. imperialism in the isolation and exploitation of Haiti since the early 19th century.

People in North America must not be misled into taking a hostile position towards China in the burgeoning conflict between Washington and Beijing. The role of FOCAC and other structures guiding China-Africa cooperation should be studied as a model for greater international solidarity among working and oppressed people across the globe.

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