

New US Military Base in Albania Aimed at Countering China

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In a recent interview, a former CIA agent reported that his country is opening a military base in Albania in order to contain China. A unit of American special forces in the Balkan country has as its main objective to stop any form of rapprochement between Tirana and Beijing, turning Albania into a mere regional satellite of Washington’s interests.

Last Friday, the US European Command (better known by the acronym, EUCOM) announced that it was establishing a new headquarters in the Balkans – a special operations unit based in Albania, which would form part of an overall US government effort to increase the capacity of Western forces to guarantee stability in that region, commonly strained by various conflicts with historical roots. The unit would be responsible for ensuring the interoperability between US and Albanian forces, as well as the strategic access to key Balkan military centers.

Commenting on the case during an interview with Sputnik, former CIA agent Ray McGovern stated that the US government decided to open a military base in the region “because they [the US] just learned that Albania is a tight ally of the Chinese Communists”. In this sense, the purpose of this new unity would be to undermine Chinese influence in the region and prevent the rapprochement between Tirana and Beijing, with little or no real interest on the part of Washington in guaranteeing stability and peace for the Balkans.

Analyzing the recent history of cooperation between China and Albania, it is really possible to see a significant increase in bilateral partnership. In a recent report by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (a pro-Western Balkan NGO), were identified at least 135 cooperation projects between China and Albania whose value exceeds US\$36 million. The projects work in the most diverse areas, including high technology, computing, metallurgy, mining, energy, transport, infrastructure, security, among others. One of the projects that most dislikes the West is cooperation in technology with Huawei, a Chinese company that has been the target of conspiracy theories and fake news promoted by Washington, which

accuses it of spying and stealing data in favor of Beijing.

In addition to economic cooperation, Beijing and Tirana have also expanded cultural cooperation ties, with an increase in mutual educational and scientific projects. Indeed, cultural and scientific cooperation is a key element of Chinese diplomacy, with Beijing trying to communicate with other states through the exchange of knowledge and academic professionals – and this is no different in the current Albanian case. In the same sense, it should be mentioned that the Chinese government also invests heavily in health diplomacy with the Balkan country, sending vaccines and medical equipment at low cost, which has been fundamental for Albania to deal with the new coronavirus pandemic.

All these measures are no surprise considering the Chinese project to create a global development platform for emerging nations. The search for acquiring new partners among emerging states has already become a central aspect of Chinese foreign policy, boosting cooperation projects within the scope of the Belt and Road Initiative. China is not doing any “kindness” or “charity” with this type of attitude, but a real investment: for Beijing, it is profitable that as many emerging countries as possible develop, integrating the BRI, so that in the future China can reduce part of its industrial production (fulfilling its ecological goals) and take advantage of foreign goods that will arrive in the country through the platform.

In October, Albanian President Ilir Meta and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met at an important summit in which they emphasized the great potential of bilateral cooperation and agreed to boost international trade, with the aim of integrating Albania more and more to the BRI. It is clear that these ties have increased even more in the last three months due to this summit’s results – and this is precisely what worries Washington: the arrival of the BRI in the Balkans.

Faced with this scenario, the American attitude seems simple: to inaugurate a special forces unit in Albania in order to intimidate the Albanian government to abdicate its ties with the Asian country. The US appears to act hurriedly and is unwilling to deal with any signs of growing Chinese influence, responding at the military level to a peaceful partnership. Washington seems determined to make Tirana to conform to a role of regional satellite of American interests.

On the one hand, the American attitude seems even irrational, as it is not common for a country to open a military base abroad just to undermine economic cooperation between two other states. On the other hand, this is consistent with recent US incursions against China. Washington seems desperate to stop Chinese growth in any way possible. And for that, it is willing even to extreme attitudes like this.

In this scenario, for China, nothing changes. The Chinese international attitude usually ignores political and military factors, focusing on economic cooperation. Beijing will continue to try to integrate Tirana into the BRI and it will be up to the Albanian government to decide whether to accept foreign impositions or limit American attitudes and ensure the fulfillment of its own national strategic interests.

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