AFRICA IN A CHANGING WORLD: NEW CENTERS OF POWER ON THE CONTINENT

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Konstantin A. Pantserev.
Saint-Petersburg State University, School of International Relations, Russia. E-mail: pantserev@yandex.ru

Keywords: African countries, Globalization, Dependence, Centers of Power.

Abstracts: The paper devotes to the problem of the dependence of the African countries. Analyzing the African policy of USA, European Union, China, India, Iran and Russia the author measures the structure of the dependence of African countries and comes to a conclusion that nowadays there are a number of centers of power on the Continent. But the inclusion of all those countries to the struggle for the influence on the Continent can lead only to the change of the structure of the dependence, but not to its overcoming.

During the postcolonial history of Africa the governments of African States have undertaken a number of attempts in order to ensure the sustainable growth of their countries. But all such attempts finished by the further strengthening of the dependence of African countries from the well-developed nations which pursued their own strategic interests on the Continent.

When analyzing the up-to-date structure of the dependence of African States it is necessary to get a brief overview of the history of this dependence. We’d like to remind that after the declaration of independence of the vast majority of African countries in early 1960-s they have come across the necessity of the provision of the sustainable social and economic growth. But in order to assure the complete modernization of their economy they had to dispose the sufficient financial and technological base and the strategy of the modernization itself. So in that period African countries had a dilemma: what strategy of the development to choose – a Western one or a social one?

The vast majority of African countries have chosen close contacts with former colonial empires (France and the United Kingdom) and the USA. But there also were a number of countries which choose cooperation with the Soviet Union. So Africa has transformed into a base of the confrontation of two systems: a Soviet one and a Western one. That’s why we can name a Soviet Union, USA and other Western countries – the old actors on the Continent.

After the fall of the Soviet empire the confrontation has finished. All those African countries which have chosen cooperation with the Soviet Union were enforced to change their political line and to set relations with Western countries. But we can’t say that nowadays Western countries remain the only influential center of power on the Continent. Besides the USA and European countries China, India and Iran also have interests on the Continent. Furthermore Russia tries to recover its position and influence in Africa which existed in the time of the Soviet Union. But we can affirm that the African stream of the Russian foreign policy is still not the priority one.

In this paper we’ll try to evaluate the role of all existing Centers of Powers on the continent. But we should ask a question: Does the appearance of new powerful actors on the Continent really can help the development of African countries or it leads to the strengthening of the dependence of African countries from the well-developed nations?
It is necessary to mark that this question is a very discussant one. And there are a number of researches who try to answer it. For example in the United States they have published a book concerning the place of African countries in the modern globalized world. The author of this book when analyzing the African stream of foreign policy of The United States and China poses a question: what globalization means for African countries: recolonization or renaissance? [Carmody, 2010].

Speaking of the up-to-date situation in Africa we’d like to mark that now in Africa there exist the only old influential actor – the USA and their European partners. Russia despite that one can consider this country as a legal representative of the Soviet Union; we’d like to relate to a new actor.

We prefer to start the analyses from the old actors. There is an opinion that the United States are probably one of the most influential actor on the continent. We’d like to mark that when Barak Obama who has his origins in Africa, has become a president of the USA a vast majority of African countries begin to believe that there started a new era of the relations between African countries and the United States. For example, Jean Ping, a head of the Commission of African Union when making a speech in the US Congress on a Conference “Challenges and Opportunities for the American Administration” has expressed a hope that new American administration would continue a political dialog with African countries, support the realization of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and help African countries to integrate into a global economy [Вишневский, 2009, С. 32].

To our opinion African countries shouldn’t expect an enforcement of the African stream of the United States foreign policy in the age of Obama. From one side we have some base to expect an intensification of the presence of the United States in Africa. Obama has origins in Kenya despite he has born in Hawaii. Besides after few months of his presidency he visited Egypt in June and Ghana in July 2009. In his speech in Accra President Obama has declared that the development of African countries depends mostly on good governance. So he “urged Africans to take responsibility for their continent. He pledged that the United States would support their efforts and committed his administration to opening the doors to African goods and services in ways that previous administrations have not” [Schmidt, 2010, p. 3-4]. But five years of the presidency of Barak Obama has shown that Africa has not become a centerpiece of the US foreign policy.

And it was evident from the very beginning. Such evaluation of an African stream of the US foreign policy we can find in different researches. For example Bereket Habte Selassie, an Ethiopian who lives in the USA and occupies a position of a Professor of law at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill marked a historical significance of the election of Barak Obama as a President of the United States. And he asks if, as a result of such elections, Africans can expect a significant change in relations between the United States and African countries. Trying to answer this main question he poses three additional ones:

“What are African expectations of Obama?”
“What should Obama do?”
“What can really Obama do?”

When responding these questions he argues that the priorities of the US foreign policy remain the same. United States continue to stand for peace and stability on the Continent, for sustainable economic growth, democracy and good governance [Habte Selassie, 2010, p. 6-11].

Another more pessimistic point of view has produced by Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, a scholar from the Democratic Republic of Congo who also lives in the USA and occupies a position of Professor of African studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In his research he states that Africans should have no illusions concerning how much President Obama
can do for Africa. He reminds that the American priorities were never being African ones. That means that African countries must try to solve all the main challenges by their own. They shouldn’t wait the assistance from the United States [Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2010, p. 12-15].

To our opinion this point of view is the most accurate. When realizing African stream of their foreign policy, the United States always tried to defend their strategic interests in the struggle for the reach African raw materials sources.

Besides the USA European countries, especially France and the United Kingdom – former colonial empires – also tried to preserve their influence in Africa. Of course the European integration has brought about some changes in relations between European and African countries. Firstly it required to stop the historical competitiveness between France and United Kingdom for reach raw materials sources in Africa.

The French and British government have started the harmonization of African stream of their foreign policy in 4th December 1998 in Saint-Malo where there was held a historical Franco-British Summit. On this meeting France and the United Kingdom has decided to make their African policy more harmonious and to intensify their cooperation in this sphere. “A series of practical initiatives were agreed. These included the exchange of information between capitals and between local embassies; joint Franco-British Africa Heads of Mission conferences and a joint visit by Foreign Ministers” [St. Malo: Britain and France working together in Africa].

As a result of this meeting Robin Cook and Hubert Vedrin – Ministers of Foreign Affairs of those countries – made a joint visit to Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire. Then in 2000 in Cairo (Egypt) there was held the first EU-Africa Summit which put a backbone on the future negotiation process between European and African countries.

Finally 18 November 2004 in Lancaster (Great Britain) they have adopted a joint Franco-British declaration on Africa. According to this document France and the United Kingdom have decided of further harmonization of their African policy in order to strengthen “their ability to support Africa’s development” [Franco-British Summit – joint declaration on Africa, 2004].

Such policy has reflected positively on French and British companies. Now French companies have a chance to enter into a big and perspective market of former British colonies; and the British ones – to former French colonies. For example the French telecommunication corporation France Telecom in early 2000-s has bought the vice majority of shares of the former national Kenyan telecommunication company Telcom Kenya. Due to this deal France Telecom has become the biggest infrastructural provider in Kenya.

But nevertheless despite the harmonization of the Franco-British African policy which has been declared France pretend to become the more influential actor on the Continent. We’d like to remind that it was France which initiated the dialog EU-Africa. Besides France in order to preserve its positions in the region continue more actively intervene in internal affairs of its former colonies. As an example we can show recent interventions of French troops in Mali and their participation in the incidents in Central African Republic and Cote d’Ivoire. So we can come to a conclusion that France which explains its military intervention by the necessity of the defense of interests of its citizens, who live in Africa, tries to preserve its military and business presence in the region and to participate in all the most important peacekeeping operations in its former colonies.

French government explains such policy by the fact that during last century France has accumulated enough experience in relations between African countries so it is France which understands more precisely necessities, problems and priorities of African countries. That’s why France should play the key role when arranging the dialog EU-Africa.

But today the United States and its European partners are not the only influential actors on the continent. Nowadays China has become one of the strongest centers of power in Africa.
For example, despite the world financial crisis of 2008 China is going to increase the amount of financial aid and investments to African countries. Only for the development of African infrastructure China is going to spend more than 20 billions of dollars. But besides direct investments Chinese financial aid implies different grants, interest-free loans and debts forgiveness.

There are six main areas of cooperation between China and African countries: industry, finance, poverty reduction, ecological protection, people-to-people exchanges, and peace and security. Speaking on the industrial cooperation one should mark the rapid growth of bilateral trade over recent years the total amount of which should exceed 400 billion U.S. dollars by 2020. In 2013 China-Africa trade reached 210.2 billion dollars. Besides China increases amounts of direct investments which should exceed 100 billion dollars by the year 2020. China is also “ready to expand cooperation with Africa in building road, rail, telecommunications, power grid and other infrastructure so as to help the continent realize regional interconnection” [Chinese premier calls for upgraded version of China-Africa cooperation, 2014]

In order to strengthen the cooperation between China and African countries they have established in October 1999 a special Forum on China-Africa cooperation. The first conference of this Forum has been held in Beijing in October 2000. 80 Ministers from more than 40 African countries and representatives of international organizations have participated on this meeting [Forum on China-Africa cooperation].

Participants of this Conference underlined that it is necessary to extend the cooperation between China and African countries in order to establish new fair international political and economic order which would be founded on equal political and economic relations. At the end of this meeting they have adopted two final documents: Beijing declaration of the Forum on China-Africa cooperation and a Programme of cooperation between China and Africa in economic and social development. On this Declaration China and African countries underlined “that the injustice and inequality in the current international system are incompatible with the trend of the times towards world peace and development, hinder the development of the countries of the South and pose threats to international peace and security” [Beijing declaration of the Forum on China-Africa cooperation, 2000].

Evaluating African stream of foreign policy of China we’d like to mark that Africa for China is an equal trade partner. But China doesn’t make investments only in profitable projects in Africa. It also participates in the realization of important humanitarian projects on the Continent such as building of hospitals, schools in rural areas and etc.

The thing which really distinguishes African policy of China is a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of African countries. China is not going to build a democratic society in Africa or impose against will of African countries its values, culture and ideology. Every time China underlines that it has only economic interests in Africa.

These Chines policy of non-interference find great support in Africa. For example, Jakaya Kikwete, a president of Tanzania, has marked in one of his speeches that “developing countries consider China as a partner which can help in solving the vast majority of problems” [Дейч, 2009, c. 19]. But there are in Africa those who criticize the policy of China in Africa. As an example we’d like to cite one of the statements of Moeletcy, brother of the former president of South Africa Thabo Mbeki. On his speech which was made in 2005 Moeletcy underlined that “Africa should preserve its resources for its own industrialization. But the cooperation with China can lead only to the deindustrialization of some more or less developed African countries” [Деминцева, 2009, c. 43].

The policy of Mvai Kibaki, a former president of Kenya, which supposed close cooperation with China also was criticized by his opposition. In Kenya China has started building the first highway which should lay through Nairobi. But Kenyans are not sure of the
necessity of this road. For Kenya it would be more essential to build reservoirs in North Kenya, the less developed region of the country. But the Chinese refused to make investments in the realization of this project which seem to be an important one only for those who live in north regions of the country. China prefers to participate in realization of those projects which are important for the country as a whole. The first highway in Kenya considers becoming one of such projects.

Thus we can come to a conclusion that China participate only in profitable projects which give an access for Chinese businessmen to reach African raw materials sources or in important humanitarian projects which help to create a positive image of China in Africa. For example, in Nigeria China has started repairing a railway system which should link 36 states and all big cities of the country. Besides in 2008 they have promised to invest 2.5 billions of dollars in realization of different infrastructural projects in Nigeria. But the purpose of these investments was to get an access to the oilfields in this country [Deich, 2010, c. 18]. Nowadays Chinese oil corporations such as China National Offshore Oil Corporation have become serious competitors of American and British oil companies in Nigeria such as Mobil, Shell and Chevron.

But despite of the mercantile character of the African stream of Chinese foreign policy and a certain criticism of such policy which one can find in speeches of some African leaders, the vast majority of African countries are interested in the further cooperation with China so far as it undermine the historic hegemony of the United Kingdom, France and other Western countries in the region.

China is not the only non-western state which has its interests in Africa. Nowadays India also pays increased attention to the African stream of its foreign policy. We’d like to mark that Indian diaspora in Africa is one of the biggest and Indian companies are very interesting in getting the access to an African market which seems to be one of the most perspective ones. Thus “India-Africa trade volume has increased by 285 percent to 25 billion U.S. dollars in the last four years” [India-Africa Forum Summit, 2008].

An African policy of India has a lot of common with Chinese one. India also pretends to establish equal partnership with African countries. In order to achieve this goal in 2008 on the Indian-African Summit which was held in New Deli from 4th to 8th April 2008 they have adopted a special declaration which put frames for future cooperation. It was the first Summit between head of states and governments of India and 14 African countries. At the end of the summit, the delegates issued two documents – “a joint declaration and a cooperative framework that will set out the road map on the new India-Africa engagement” [India Africa summit opens in New Delhi, 2008]. As a result of this negotiating process the trade volume between India and African countries has reached 30 billion dollars per year but it was still two times less than Chinese-African trade volume. The second Indian-African Forum was held in 2011 in Addis-Ababa with participation of heads of states and governments of 15 African countries. On this Forum they have issued the new “Africa-Indian Frameworks for Enhanced Cooperation”. According to the abovementioned document “Africa and India reiterate the mutual desire to expand economic cooperation and trade and investment linkages between them” [Africa-Indian Frameworks for Enhanced Cooperation, 2011].

Thereby one can observe sustainable relations between India and African countries but India is still far away from the real breakthrough of such cooperation and still surrenders the Chinese-African relations.

Iran also pays increased attention to the relations with African countries. Nowadays Iran has more than 300 economic agreements with different African countries. But the key point of the African policy of Iran is to strengthen culture, political and economic cooperation with African countries in order to create an alliance of independent states against colonial empires. Thus Iran tries to create an image in Africa of one who fights against colonial invaders. But we
can’t say that African policy of Iran is the most successful one. As distinct from India and China Iran participates in military conflicts on the Continent by supporting some groups of rebels. It is clear enough that such policy impedes the close relationship between Iran and governments of a number of African countries.

For example, in December 2010 they have found weapons on board of the Iranian vessel in Lagos, Nigeria. Senegalese army officers were sure that these weapons were aimed for the rebels of a Senegalese province Kasamanka. Government of Senegal was able to proof that 9 Senegalese soldiers were killed by Iranian weapons. As a result of this incident there took place a great international conflict which lead to the rupture of diplomatic relations between Iran and Senegal. The relations between Iran and Gambia were also complicated. The point was that Iran tried to proof that the weapons were aimed to Gambia. Of course the reaction of the government of this small African country was rather rough. Economic and political connections between two countries were dismantled and all the Iranians who have been living in Gambia were strongly recommended to leave the country.

And what about Russia? For the first ten years of the existence of a new Russia all the former connections and projects initiated by the Soviet Union were dismantled. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union there have been closed the vast majority of Soviet/Russian trade points. As consequence of that the total trade volume between Russia and African countries reduced. And only in the early 2000-s Russia started to come back on the Continent. Firstly this process was very weak. But later there appeared first national programmes concerning the establishment of Russian-African relationship. For example Russian Aluminum Corporation “RusAl” from the year 2007 is an owner of Aluminium Company of Nigeria “Alscon” (85 % of shares). “Alscon” is an owner of aluminum plant, gas power plant and port on board of the river Imo. Russian railways have a project of making investments in the development of African railway infrastructure. But despite of these entire projects one can conclude that the current level of Russian-African cooperation is still smaller than the one with China, United States, India and European countries. But African countries do believe that finally Russian-African relations would upraise to the level of former Soviet Union.

The appearance of new centers of powers, from one side, reflects very positively. Finally there was put the end to the hegemony of Western countries in the region. But from another side the active inclusion of China, India and Russia in the struggle for the influence on the Continent will lead to the change of the existing structure of the dependence of African societies but it won’t help to overcome it.
REFERENCES


2. Вишневский М.Л. Новый президент США и Африка // Азия и Африка сегодня. 2009. №5. С. 31-36.


