



President of Republic of Kenya arrives in Beijing for 2024 FOCAC summit.

2024 FOCAC SUMMIT REKINDLES HUMANITY'S DREAM OF "LEAVING NO CIVILIZATION BEHIND"

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Manifestly, the 2024 Summit of the Forum for China- Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is rekindling the dream of co-prosperity of civilizations, for long cherished and shared by Africa and China. Obviously, the concept of co-prosperity or shared prosperity is a bold moral rejection of the idea of 'clash of civilizations'. Human cultures and civilizations are not legions, armour-plated and ready for a cataclysmic war. Truth be told, Human civilizations cannot be the dreaded

Sword of Damocles hanging perilously over our heads. Instead, a more blissful idea is that of our world as a commonwealth of civilizations. This is not a pipe-dream but the reality propelling global developments. Certainly, the concept of co-prosperity is the kernel of the United Nation's transformative clarion cry of "Leaving no one behind". This is the spirit of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Humanity's collective history is about tapping into the tapestry of experiences, exchanges and contributions by all civilizations to our shared past. But the dominance of hegemonic narratives undergirding the global hegemony of the West have tended to eclipse this idea of commonwealth of civilizations. This is the poignant point that the British historian, Peter Frankopan is making in *The Silk Roads* (2015). There is not one Silk Road as architects of the hegemonic narrative of the world as a triumph of one civilization—the West and its assumed Greco-Roman ancestry—would want us to believe. The truth is: human civilizations met along the many enchanted “Silk Roads” where they exchanged goods, services and ideas about values, religions, cultures, economies and forms of government. War and peace are part of this story.

In the run up to the 2024 FOCAC Summit, African and Chinese intellectuals and thought leaders in the media, think tanks and academic institutions converged in Beijing for the 6th Forum on China-Africa Media Cooperation & Think Tank High-Level Dialogue” under the theme of “Joining Hands on the Path Towards Modernization”. The forum highlighted the historic mission of intellectuals and thought leaders in the global South, including China and Africa, to paint on the canvass of history the beautiful story of world civilizations working hand in glove to remake the World into what Chinese President Xi Jinping aptly describes as “a community of shared future for mankind”.

It is this idea of human civilizations living harmoniously side by side as equal and mutually respecting partners that birthed the Forum on China-Africa-Cooperation 24 years ago. FOCAC is essentially about the co-prosperity of civilizations which has been derailed from time to time by hegemonic projects.

The story of FOCAC started centuries, perhaps millennia, long before the first westerner ever sailed into the Indo-Pacific region. China and Africa first met along the enchanted ancient Silk Road. Here, they exchanged goods, ideas and cultures as equal and mutually respecting civilizations. Lamentably, after 1840, both China and Africa were invaded, occupied and humiliated by external forces.

Consequently, they were effectively removed from the table of free civilizations and placed on menu. In this regard, between 1860 and 1949, China was occupied and incorporated into what was colonizers touted as a ‘sphere of co-prosperity’. Similarly, during the Berlin Conference (1884), Africa was on the menu, shared out like a hot cake by European powers and incorporated into their hegemonic ‘spheres of prosperity’.

After 1949, when modern China was born, the two civilizations began to search for each other's hand and reconnect. In the decades that followed, China helped Africa to cast off the yoke of colonialism. And newly independent African countries voted for China to regain its seat in the United Nations.

The 2024 FOCAC Summit is a culmination of decades of efforts to build a China-Africa community of shared future. In 1978, China adopted the reform and opening up policy, which enabled it to lift up over 850 millions of its people from poverty. This astounding success of Chinese-style modernization has greatly inspired Africa. It also reassured the continent's people that poverty is not a curse for any country or civilization. Africa, too, can lift millions of its poor from poverty!

Since 2000, the goal of co-prosperity is driving Sino-Africa economic diplomacy. Development cooperation between Africa and China is weaved around the dream of ‘African Renaissance’, signified

by the African Union Agenda 2063, Africa's development blueprint.

FOCAC, founded in 2000 as the premier forum for policy dialogue and sharing of ideas, has emerged as the link between the Chinese and African dreams and agendas. Over the last 24 years, China has channelled over \$200 billion to support the continent's development including promotion of access to trade and investments, infrastructure, industrialization and capacity building. As of August 2024, 52 out of 54 African countries are participating in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China's multi-trillion dollar connectivity initiative through which China has supported the building of networks of railways, highways, cyber and harbors. China-Africa development cooperation has also been extended to shared responses to disasters and humanitarian emergencies, including epidemics. When Ebola and the COVID-19 struck, China deploy massive resources and personnel to help Africa contain the pandemics.

FOCAC is not immune to the dynamics of our post-truth age characterized misinformation and fake news as part of geopolitical competition that

bedevils the world today. We refuse to believe the lie that China is a neo-colonial power and that Chinese support to African development is debt trap diplomacy. This negative thinking risks derailing African progress. China, through FOCAC, is providing Africa with a vital lifeline out of poverty. The 2024 FOCAC Summit is about exploring new innovative ways of deepening cooperation on all fronts to realize win-win scenarios and move the co-prosperity of China and Africa to a whole new level. FOCAC 2024 must also chart a new pathway to realize humanity's goal of a peaceful, non-hegemonic, prosperous and equitable multipolar world at peace with its environment. Let every flower in the garden of civilizations blossom.

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