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Executive Secretary
Shkurina S.S.

Computer-aided makeup by
Antsiferova A.S.

Translated by
Chernyshova E.V.

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CONTENTS

POLITICAL PROCESS IN RUSSIA

<i>Nazarov A.D.</i> Moon Race: Lessons, Challenges and Perspectives	359
<i>Afanasyeva E.V., Bitieva Z.R.</i> Russia's Foreign Policy During the Presidency of Vladimir Putin.....	373
<i>Karatueva E.N.</i> "Eco-Terrorism": the Essence and Peculiarity	378
<i>Datukishvili E.Z.</i> The Impact of Migration Flows on the Identity of Russians	385
<i>Denisov A.S.</i> "Government as a Platform" in the Context of Public Administration Reform	394

PROBLEMS OF EURASIAN AND POST-SOVIET COOPERATION

<i>Abramov V.L., Prokofiev V.A.</i> New Armenia's Foreign Policy in the Development of Integration Processes in the Context of Growing Geopolitical Tensions	401
<i>Khoperskaya L.L.</i> Information Aspect of the Formation of the Anti-Terrorist Eurasian Space	409
<i>Aliyev U.S.</i> Prospects for the Development of Military-Political Cooperation of the Countries of the Post-Soviet Space	422

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND WORLD POLITICS

<i>Khanaliev N.U.</i> On Some Features of the US Policy in Central Asia	429
<i>Davydov V.N.</i> Alienation of Information as a Political and Legal Problem	437
<i>Savalkha O.</i> Political Image of Modern Russia in the Arab World Countries	447

REVIEWS

<i>Slizovskiy D.E., Medvedev N.P.</i> Reflections on the Read	453
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OUR AUTHORS	460
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AUTHORS' GUIDELINES	461
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N.U. KHANALIEV

*Candidate of Sciences (political sciences),
First Secretary, Department for New Challenges and Threats
of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation
Moscow, Russia*

ON SOME FEATURES OF THE US POLICY IN CENTRAL ASIA

An attempt is made in the article to identify and analyze some aspects of the US foreign strategy in Central Asia which, in the author's opinion, although in one form or another are touched upon in the domestic political science, can nevertheless be interpreted from a new angle, subjecting the existing interpretations to a certain re-evaluation and adjustment. Washington's policy in the region is viewed in a broader context, Central Asia is considered an integral part of Eurasia. The main attention is focused on the justification of the thesis that in the 90s of the last century the United States claimed to be the main actor occupying the dominant position in Eurasia as a whole and Central Asia in particular, but due to a number of factors failed to reach that aim. After analyzing the activities of the US administration in using the territory of the five countries as a springboard for the military operations in Afghanistan, it is concluded that from the beginning of the war until recently, the possibilities of achieving goals sought by Washington in the region gradually narrowed. It is shown that the situation was determined both by Russia's return to the region as a great military and political power and emergence of such a new powerful actor as China, as well as by the mistakes and miscalculations of the US leadership.

Key words: *Eurasia, Central Asia, Russia, China, USA, Afghanistan, region, territory, terrorism, war, strategy, politics, etc.*

As is known, since the appearance of the paper "The Geopolitical Pivot of History" by the English geographer and politician Halford Mackinder in 1904, Eurasia has a special place in the world science, especially in the theories of international relations and geopolitics. Mackinder initially singled out Central Asia as the pivot of the world history, he called it the "Middle earth" (Heartland). It was from here, that the Tatar-Mongols were able to spread their influence throughout Asia and the vast territories and peoples of Europe. Based on this thesis, Mackinder concluded: "He who dominates the Middle Earth dominates the world."

A huge incentive to an increase of interest in Eurasia and, consequently, in Central Asia was given by the appearance of the book by the American analyst Zb. Brzezinski "The Grand Chessboard", published in 1997, it became a kind of Bible for the supporters of the idea of a liberal/unipolar world order led by the United States. In his own interpretation of Mackinder's idea, Brzezinski stressed that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Eurasia turned into a kind of "The Grand Chessboard" on which "for the first time in history, the Eurasian power became not only the main arbiter of relations between the Eurasian states, but also the most powerful power in the world" [3. P. 12]. He bluntly stated that "the main geopolitical prize for America is Eurasia" [3. P. 44]. In it Brzezinski saw the keystone of American hegemony throughout the world. In a somewhat veiled form, repeating Mackinder's idea, he concluded that He who controls Eurasia, controls the whole world.

It should be noted that for a long time this region was a bone of contention in the so-called Big Game between Russia and Great Britain. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the West in general and the United States in particular gained access to the vast regions of Eurasia, which during the bipolar world order, were almost closed for them. These areas include, of course, Central Asia, which, due to its geopolitical location, has attracted the attention of both regional and world powers. Moreover, the attractiveness of the region for the West was determined by the possible prospects of diversification of sources of hydrocarbon resources and the weakening of dependence in this area on the Middle East and Russia. Moreover, due to the fact that Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan are Caspian states, Central Asia is considered part of the vast Caucasus-Caspian region. At the same time, its large territories border China and the States of the Greater Middle East, primarily Iran and Afghanistan, and are geographically close to the two major Asian powers – India and Pakistan.

Initially, the region and its member countries were in the field of close attention of the West in general and Washington in particular since about the mid-90s of the last century, when they began to talk about the allegedly untold hydrocarbon resources of the entire Caucasus-Caspian region. As for the United States, its policy in the region was formed as a part of a common foreign policy strategy aimed at achieving control over hydrocarbon resources and ways of their transportation to the world markets, bypassing the Russian Federation and Iran. In this vein, it is significant that in 1997, the Caucasus and Central Asia were declared by Washington a "zone of the US vital interests."

A kind of milestone event that sharply increased Washington's interest in the region was the terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001, as a result of which Washington declared a large-scale struggle against international terrorism, part of which was a military operation Enduring Freedom that began in the same year in Afghanistan. According to the American political scientist L. Brener, until that event, the region "was on the periphery of the global strategy

of the United States, and the question of their strategy in this region did not cause open discussions either in political or academic circles, so that the differences did not go beyond a relatively restrained professional polemic" [1]. The interest in Central Asia was primarily determined by the fact that the three countries of the region: Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan share borders with Afghanistan, where Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Turkmens live on the respective Northern border territories. As for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, although they do not share a border with Afghanistan, because of their geographical proximity to it, they have played an important role as transshipment sites for American troops and civilian military cargo and provided logistical support for the troops stationed in Afghanistan. Washington, not without the help of the Russian Federation, managed to reach an agreement on the establishment of military bases in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and their leadership gave permission, together with Kazakhstan, to open air space for the transportation of goods and personnel of the American army to Afghanistan. As a result, Central Asia has become a kind of "gateway" to Afghanistan for the United States, a kind of rear base for the combat operations in Afghanistan, complementing Pakistan in this direction.

However, though at the beginning the USA has achieved some success in this direction, in the end, due to a combination of factors, primarily the restoration of Russia's geopolitical status and influence of China, formation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), awareness of the heads of the Central Asian states of the threat to their regimes from the political strategy of Washington, the space for the realization of the US goals in the region gradually declined. Of particular importance from the perspective of the Washington's political strategy in the region was the fact that, while expanding its ties with the Central Asian states in the military and political sphere, Washington did not forget about its mission to protect human rights and freedoms and other democratic values in these countries. It seemed that the US leadership in assessing the situation in Central Asia proceeded from the belief that all the problems in the region were caused by a lack of democracy. Therefore, the US State Department did not forget to assist new states in promoting human rights and political democracy. Programs were proposed to finance independent media and non-profit public organizations, some of which were focused on rapprochement with the West, often to the detriment of the interests of the Central Asian countries.

It gradually became clear that this flipside of the Washington's strategy of exporting the democratic revolution, which was expressed in the promotion of "color revolutions," had its flaws and limits. Quite a serious blow to Washington's strategy was caused by the disappointment in it of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, especially in the part that concerned claims to protect human rights and freedoms. One of the results of this strategy was the so-called "color revolutions" in the post-Soviet space in general and in Central Asia in particular. We mean primarily the so-called "Tulip revolution" in Kyrgyzstan in March 2005 and the events in

Andijan in Uzbekistan in May of the same year. As a result of this “revolution,” which turned into a riot and looting, the President of Kyrgyzstan A. Akayev, who was considered almost an exemplary liberal head of state, was overthrown. The leadership of Uzbekistan, led by President I. Karimov, has demonstrated its ability to resist the strategy of the export of “democratic revolutions” and all kinds of “color revolutions.”

These events demonstrated the incompatibility of the two directions of Washington’s political strategy: value and military, Washington was not able to solve the dilemma of “values and interests” and clearly determine which of them has the priority in its political strategy. The question remained open as to what was most valuable to the United States: energy resources or military presence, security cooperation, or election transparency and media freedom. As G. I. Chufrin noted, these events “confirmed that the challenges to stability in the region come not only from the Islamic extremism and international terrorism, but also from the United States, which has embarked on the path of exporting democracy and direct support of the “color revolutions” [5. Pp. 29-30].

The process of reducing the US military presence in the region gradually began, in particular it was expressed in the elimination of the US military base in Khanabad in the Andijan region of Uzbekistan. The issue of the prospects of the American air base in Manas in Kyrgyzstan became urgent.

Naturally, the growth of the US influence in the region especially in light of the “Tulip revolution” in Kyrgyzstan and the Andijan events have caused significant concern in the region of Russia, China and other neighboring countries, primarily Turkey and Iran. The priorities of the fight against international terrorism made their leaders coordinate their efforts to achieve common goals. Most importantly, with the return of Russia to the geopolitical arena as a great military and political power, capable of ensuring its national security and protecting its vital national interests, and the activation of China’s policy, the situation in this area began to change more or less significantly. As K. S. Hajiyevev noted, gradually large cracks began to appear on the “Grand Chessboard” as a the result, first of all, of a significant change in the nature and configuration of the geopolitical forces on the entire Eurasian continent as a whole and in Central Asia in particular [6. Pp. 29-42].

From this point of view, two integration associations have become increasingly important for the Central Asian countries: the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), of which Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are members, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which includes four of the five Central Asian states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as full members, with the exception of Turkmenistan. In this context, it is necessary to take into account the fact that a significant part of the new Silk Road is expected to pass through the territory of Kazakhstan. The importance of these associations is evidenced by the fact that their participants, first of all, Russia and China demanded to determine

the timing of the presence and liquidation of US military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Four Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, except of Turkmenistan, are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), established in 2001.

Beijing is interested in ties with Central Asia because of the factor of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region with a predominantly Muslim population.

In addition, as noted by the American researcher L. Bichner, the Central Asian countries, suspecting the United States of aggressive actions, “stated that they intend to firmly and consistently strengthen cooperation with Russia and China. The actions of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization were highly impressive and successful. The SCO has formed a powerful force to challenge the American strategy in the region” [1]. One of the results of the activation of Russia’s policy in the region was the opening of the Russian air base in Kant in the Chui region of Kyrgyzstan and the creation of the SCO anti-Terrorist center in Tashkent.

In this direction, Turkey and Iran, which have their own vital interests here, cannot be excluded. Due to a complex of factors, informal geopolitical triangles China-Russia-Iran and Russia-Turkey-Iran were formed largely in order to counter the policy of President Donald Trump’s administration.

In this direction, the steady growth of China’s influence, trade, economic and investment presence in the region over the past two or three decades is becoming increasingly important. Naturally, it is facilitated by the geographical proximity of China with the Central Asian States, three out of five of them: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have common borders with it. If in the Soviet period before the collapse of the USSR, the trade turnover between China and the former Central Asian republics was from US\$ 350 to 750 million, now its volume has reached tens of billions of dollars. According to available data, China’s investment in the region’s economy has reached US\$ 100 billion. Naturally, the key factor is the export of hydrocarbon resources to China. Beijing has invested billions of dollars in infrastructural projects in the energy sector. According to A. Dubnov, “in contrast to the straight-forward Americans, the Chinese are taking the CA region into their hands with a quiet SAP, involving these countries in their project of the Silk Road Economic belt and investing a lot of money [4]. As a result of this and similar trends and processes, according to some authors, after some time, the countries of Central Asia “will de facto be under the Chinese protectorate” [4]. In this context, Beijing’s efforts to implement the “One belt, One road” project, in which Central Asia is given a key place, are particularly important.

It became obvious that as a result of these and other related events and processes, the United States suffered a serious setback in Central Asia, one might even say a serious strategic defeat. There is an increasing tendency to reduce their ability to actively pursue their foreign policy strategy in the region, especially as far as their efforts to spread democracy are concerned.

These processes and trends, in turn, have caused serious disputes and discussions in American society, among politicians, intellectual and media elite on the issue of American strategy in the region. It has become clear that the consensus on the Central Asian strategy that existed after the September 11, 2001 attacks has become a thing of the past. So naturally, the presidential administration and the State Department made the necessary adjustments to their strategy in the region. An important step in this direction was the Report on “National security strategy of the United States of America” for 2006, which stated that Central Asia is still a priority region for the United States. According to the authors of the Report, various components of the overall US strategy intersect in Central Asia, which is why it is necessary to focus simultaneously on promoting political democracy and market economy, “diversifying energy sources on a global scale; strengthening security and ensuring victory in the war against terrorism” [9].

The report can be considered an evidence of the fact that Washington is not going to stop its activities aimed at continuing and even expanding its presence in the region. As K. S. Hajiyeu rightly noted, “the cracks that have formed in the Eurasian space become a serious obstacle to Washington’s protection of its interests here. But it would be an unforgivable mistake to believe that the US will simply refuse to protect its interests in Eurasia in general and in Central Asia in particular. We must not forget that the United States as a great military and political power, due to its imperial nature, just can not give up its positions and interests in the region” [6. P. 38].

At a time when the leaders of the Central Asian states became more and more aware of the threat to their regimes emanating from the US policy, Washington strategists got the idea of creating the so-called “Greater Central Asia” as a kind of analogue of the Greater Middle East. It was an attempt to unite the Central Asian states and Afghanistan into a single entity. This project was at first proposed by F. Starr, Chairman of the Institute of Central Asia and the Caucasus at Johns Hopkins University, in his article published in *Foreign Affairs* magazine in the summer of 2005 [8. Pp. 72-87]. The idea was to strengthen relations with NATO and, above all, with the United States, to select and construct routes for the transportation of hydrocarbons to the world markets, of course, bypassing the territory of Russia; to promote the development of market economy and political democracy; to fight the drug trafficking; to carry out “an offensive against terrorism and create security infrastructure closely connected to the US was declared one of the key tasks” [8. P. 76].

This idea was used by Condoleezza Rice, the US Secretary of State under President of the United States G. W. Bush Jr. As part of the revision of the political strategy in the region, during her visit to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in October 2005, she put forward the idea of a “reform corridor” and a proposal to combine the proposed Greater Central Asia and Greater South Asia. Justifying this idea, Assistant Secretary of State for these two regions, R. A. Boucher ar-

gued that Washington has here long-term interests that determine the three main goals of the United States: “strengthening democratic stability and economic reforms; strengthening regional security and cooperation in the war on drugs and terrorism; promoting economic growth and regional cooperation” [2]. To achieve these goals, in 2006, the Central Asian countries were taken from the State Department’s Bureau for Europe and Eurasia and transferred to the State Department’s Bureau for South Asia [11. P. 96]. The Administration of President Bush, Jr. created the Department of South and Central Asia, the main goal of which was integration of these two regions.

The Administration of President Barack Obama continued attempts to expand and strengthen US cooperation with Central Asian states. During the visit to the region of the then Secretary of State J. Carrie in November 2015, a C5+1 meeting of the leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan with the United States was organized in the Uzbek city of Samarkand to discuss the key issues of Washington’s policy in the region. As a result of the negotiations, the so-called “Samarkand Declaration” was adopted, which outlined a fairly wide range of areas of cooperation between the United States and the countries of the region.

From this point of view, the results of the visit of the new President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev to the United States in May 2018 are of interest. During the talks with the US President Donald Trump a number of agreements worth US\$4.8 billion were concluded between the two countries [7]. The contacts between the representatives of the two countries were continued at the VIII Central Asian Trade Forum, held on October 17-19 in Tashkent and organized on the initiative of the American Agency for International Development (USAID). At the forum, US representatives announced Washington’s readiness to provide duty-free access to the American market for several thousand items of goods from the Central Asian states.

Concluding this article of a limited volume, it should be noted that the US foreign policy strategy in Central Asia in the period after the collapse of the Soviet Union has gone a difficult way from attempts to establish the US as a leading, even dominant, military-political power to becoming one of the actors inferior in terms of its capabilities and influence to Russia and China. It is a result of a whole range of factors, such as the return of the Russian Federation to the geopolitical arena, including the Eurasian space and the Central Asia, and a number of mistakes and failures in the policy of Washington. An important role in this context seems to have been played by the fact that the US leadership could not, perhaps did not want to overcome the dual nature of its strategy, the essence of which was the contradiction between the military and political goals of conducting combat operations in Afghanistan and the promotion of the values of human rights, political democracy and the rule of law in the region. As a result, Washington ultimately failed to fully achieve its strategic goals. However, it would be a mistake

to assume that the US will abandon them. However, time will show exactly how the balance of geopolitical forces of the main actors in the region will develop.

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