After witnessing unfortunate events in the Crimea and not having been able to realize its ambitions in Ukraine, the USA is now trying to maintain influence in Central Asia. The region, which borders troubled Afghanistan, may become a new battlefield between the USA and Russia. Given the situation, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Desai Biswal’s visit in the beginning of April is of particular interest. Her main goal was to “get a feel for” the atmosphere in the region and the Central Asian leaders “in the wake of” recent events in Ukraine, as well as to assess their intentions in terms of the ongoing process of Eurasian integration.

U.S. State Department Office of Press Relations announced that the official goal of Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Desai Biswal’s visit was the need to demonstrate to the countries of Central Asia “our commitment to continued cooperation and partnership between the USA and the countries of the region in order to provide stability and development.” Experts agree that the American administration is testing the waters in the Central Asian region with a view to further realizing its foreign policy in the post-soviet republics. Moreover, in Astana, Almaty and Bishkek the topic of the Ukrainian crisis came up during all the American diplomat’s meetings, whether with higher-ups, politicians, representatives of NGOs or businessmen. Biswal did not forget to emphasize that Moscow violated all international norms when it “annexed” the Crimea and “interfered in Ukrainian internal affairs.” She stressed that “Washington strictly supports Ukraine’s territorial integrity and is ready to impose harsher economic sanctions against Russia.”

“A substantial amount of American politicians and experts openly criticize the Obama Administration for failing in regards to the Crimea. Russia beat the USA. To a certain extent this is true. It’s entirely possible that Washington has decided to make amends through another foreign policy avenue,” Azhdar Kurtov, an expert from the Russian Strategic Research Institute told the author. According to him, normal diplomatic operations continue in all directions which the USA considers promising.

The events in Ukraine have highlighted two important points that changed global political reality. First, the configuration of power in the world arena is undergoing substantial changes. Russia has noticeably increased her military potential since the 1990’s. Secondly, opposition between countries, which seemed to fade away after the cold war, is coming back. Eurasia will soon become the main battlefield on which, more and more distinctly, the afore-mentioned trends will come into play.

Kyrgyz political analyst Mars Sariev believes that “the USA and Europe, from a geopolitical point of view, could not realize their plans in Ukraine. In trying to take revenge in the struggle with Russia, they are turning to Central Asia. This is where they plan to create new trouble zones, to stimulate opposition movements and pressure the governments, in order to perform the general task in Central Asia – to liquidate Kazakhstan’s, Kyrgyzstan’s, and Tajikistan’s foreign policy bent towards Russia.”

These countries are oriented towards Russia and are building a Eurasian Union. By the end of May presidents Vladimir Putin, Nursultan Nazarbayev and Aleksandr Lukashenko are expected to sign a founders agreement for the Eurasian Union. Kyrgyzstan is preparing a “road map” for entrance into the Customs Union, after which it will be allowed to join the Eurasian Union. Tajikistan is not far behind.
America was not expecting Moscow to manage to “collect” the former Soviet republics in one organization. In Almaty the American diplomat more or less directly announced that the US does not support “exclusive unions.” In her words, the world is moving towards an era of globalization, where “more and more often, countries will be choosing to employ multi-vector politics.” Apparently it’s no coincidence that the Anti-Eurasian forum took place there after she left. During the course of said forum Kazakh public figure Serikzhan Mambetalin explained that integration into the Customs and Eurasian Unions would mean the end of Astana’s multi-vector politics and a geopolitical shift in the direction of Moscow: “We can't integrate with Russia to the point of forgoing the opportunity to develop independently, without looking at Russia, our relations with China, the European Union, the USA, and other regional powers.”

In Kyrgyzstan Nisha Desai Biswal gave special attention to the events in Maidan (the name of Independence square in the center of Kiev.) As Kyrgyz experts note, the American diplomat nearly avoided drawing a direct parallel between Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine. She promised Bishkek all manner of support in “strengthening democracy.” It is noteworthy that after the negotiations with the leader of the “National Opposition Movement,” Ravshan Jeenbekov, an opposition meeting took place in Bishkek. Those restrained during the meeting indicated that for their participation, opposition politicians reimbursed them “for travel expenses, room and board in Bishkek.” Rumor has it the opposition spent about $300,000 on the meeting. Apart from “supporting democracy,” Nisha Biswal expressed Washington's interest in cooperation with Kyrgyzstan in creating a transportation corridor whose infrastructure will avoid Russia, and the electrical power ring CASA-1000. But making the electrical CASA-1000 project a reality will cast doubts on the practicality of joint Russian-Kyrgyz efforts in the construction of a hydro-electric power plant in Naryn province.

Special promises were made to the governments of the Central Asian states in terms of realizing “interesting” projects. In particular, the questions of Kazakhstan's involvement in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan and the transportation of Kazakh oil south to India were discussed in Astana. Kazakhstan, even without American participation, contributes significantly to Afghanistan; American politics' current task consists of the activation of Kazakh business in Afghanistan for the maximum reorientation of commercial and financial currents from the north (Russian Federation) and east (China) to the south. Aleksandr Knyazev, expert on Central Asia and the Middle East believes that “what we have here is an attempt to reanimate under new slogans the old and already largely forgotten concept of “Big Central Asia” – it's just that now it's called “the New Silk Road.” The USA will be persistent in its attempts to pull the region out of the orbit of Eurasian integration, Kazakhstan leadership's adherence to which, on the backdrop of recent events in Ukraine, annoys Washington.”

Regarding the reorientation of the export of energy-containing materials such as utilities and fossil fuels, this project fits into the USA's overall plans by the reduction or ideally cessation of the export of said goods into China. “The Kazakh-Indian oil export project adds an element of manipulation to the trans-Afghan gas pipe line “TAPI” (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) project that has been discussed by political, expert and business circles for over twenty years.” In Knyazev's opinion, all Afghan transit projects in the foreseeable future are unfeasible and are myths - be it the transit of gas, oil, electrical energy or the building of railroads. Even more so given the fact that the situation in Afghanistan may deteriorate further after the presidential elections, which took place on April 5th. No winner has yet been declared. The leaders of the presidential race so far are Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, who took 44.4 and 33.2 percent of the vote, respectively.

According to Azhdar Kurtov, the winning candidate will face problems that have been on the Afghan government's to-do list for decades. Some of these problems are difficult to solve using Afghanistan's available resources. Those resources, including foreign aid, will only dwindle, with the population's discontent only increasing. This means that any central power in Afghanistan, no matter the political bent, will not be capable of controlling the country or stabilizing the situation if one considers insurgent forces, a portion of which, considering its ethnic composition, is entirely capable of nurturing plans of their own in relation to Central Asia. Consequently, destabilization of the region is entirely possible, and the most vulnerable link in the chain is Kyrgyzstan.

Most experts believe that the West, which would like to see a decrease in Russian influence in the region, will incite opposition in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to act. In Kyrgyzstan this process is already observable - Western-grant-funded non-governmental organizations are conducting counter-propaganda against the idea of pro-Russian integrative union. In connection with events in Ukraine, the West will do everything it can to strengthen this vector.

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