New US Ambassador to Tajikistan Seems to be Up To the Task

To this day Central Asia remains an arena of struggle for a number of major international players, namely Russia, China and the United States. In this struggle, Washington has now started losing its influence, which resulted in a series of desperate attempts to establish a sound foothold in this region, which could serve as a bulwark against both Russia and China. Against this backdrop, it's no coincidence that the so-called private intelligence service known as Stratfor would reveal in its forecast for this year that the United States is planning to step up its efforts in Central Asia, especially in those countries that share a common border with Afghanistan, namely Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. This service won't go into much detail about the efforts it's referring to, but it's hardly a secret that Washington has been busy redeploying radical Islamists from Syria, where they are getting defeated by the government forces and its allies, to Afghanistan, while making claims about its devotion to the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking.

In this situation, a relatively small regional player - Tajikistan found itself at the forefront of Washington's attempt to push Moscow and Beijing out of the region. The US is particularly interested in influencing the foreign policy pursued by Dushanbe due to the two following reasons.

First of all, Tajikistan is not just an immediate neighbor of Afghanistan, but it shares the longest common border with this country out of all of the former Soviet republics – 800 miles in total. Secondly, Dushanbe has been enjoying close ties with Russia, which resulted in Moscow establishing its largest overseas military installation in Tajikistan -
Due to the negligible size of its economy and its relative geographic isolation, Tajikistan can hardly be described as a promising trade partner of the United States, as Western oligarchies would have a hard time justifying investments in this country. So, the only approach that Washington can take in influencing Tajikistan into those decisions that it's not willing to make is to complain about Dushanbe undermining democratic values, while pursuing closer military cooperation with it. For instance, as it's been reported by a number of media sources, last year the Pentagon handed out 8 million dollars worth of military equipment to Dushanbe.

However, the situation on the ground may change rather abruptly and unexpectedly at any given moment. For instance, on the back of a long list of complaints Washington has made about Dushanbe being “not democratic enough” the West may decide to pursue a regime change in this country, which will result in the CIA and the Pentagon cutting costs on the illegal transit of opiates from Afghanistan.

That is why, in order to achieve its goals, the United States has been actively promoting the notion of establishing a regional young leadership network in Central Asia, under which young activists from Central Asian states would be able to receive education in Western universities together with the offsprings of the regional elites. It goes without saying that after returning home those youngsters would promote Western neoliberal ideas, pedaling American interests like there's no tomorrow. That is why Washington spends hundreds of millions of dollars on sponsoring various non-governmental organizations in Tajikistan.

In recent years, a large network of various organizations has been working for American money in the country, including, among others, the Soros Foundation, the Aga Khan, the Institute of War and Peace, and so on. In fact, there's well over 3,000 non-profit organizations registered in Tajikistan, with most of them being involved in the promotion of Western interests, including news agencies and law firms.

Back in the early 90s the United States and Tajikistan signed a deal on mutual attempts to facilitate the promotion of humanitarian and technical assistance. It's hard to say how much money Washington has spent so far while promoting its narrative in Dushanbe, but it's clear that USAID alone spent some 450 million dollars on such activities in the last three decades alone.

However, a series of “color revolutions” that Washington staged across the globe resulted in a considerable tightening of anti-NGO legislation in Tajikistan, which means that Dushanbe has been steadily increasing its ability to shape the internal situation within the country.

Now the US is testing a new strategy of coercion developed at the Pentagon for Venezuela and a number of other countries that dare to disagree publicly with Washington. It involves the use of a number of leverages, including financial sanctions and offensive online operations against the target country, along with the support of the political opposition and continuous threats of imminent military aggression.

There's every reason to believe that the United States is going to test this new approach in Tajikistan, combining anti-government street protests with armed “revolutionary” jihad mounted by radical forces and, quite possibly, supported by a rebellion of local criminal groups. At the same time, Washington’s calculations of such developments clearly suggest that the leader of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, Muhiddin Kabiri would be advertised as the new leader of Tajikistan, while the prominent Badakhshan drug dealers would be tasked with fielding militants to support the runaway Tajik commander of the special forces who defected to ISIS, Gulmurod Khalimov. The Tajik portal Akhbor, in particular, has already announced that the United States initiated the transfer of elite ISIS fighters from Afghanistan that are being led by Halimov, with Saudi Arabia footing the bill for this operation.

Against this background, the arrival of the new US ambassador to Dushanbe, John Pommersheim can only be regarded as a troubling development. Pommersheim is considered to be one of the best experts on Russia in the entire State Department, as he would study Russian in Moscow after obtain scholarship from the US Department of Defense. The man who made a career at the US Information Agency (USIA) back in the 1980s is being transferred to Tajikistan from the US embassy in Kazakhstan. Moreover, Pommersheim is reverted as an expert on Central Asia and the Caucasus. His appointment in Tajikistan further demonstrates Washington’s growing interest in Central Asia. By using Tajikistan as a bridgehead, the United States can inflict extensive damage to both Russia and China, that are being described as the strategic opponents of Washington. In particular, should it succeed in destabilizing Central Asia, Washington would render the entire concept of the One Belt One Road initiative senseless, which implies China reorienting its trade routes to Europe from sea to land.
Of course, it would be naive to assume that John Pommersheim will start staging a “color revolution” in Dushanbe on the day of his arrival. As of now, the US cannot build enough momentum to force Russia or China out of Tajikistan. Instead it’s going to support all sorts of anti-Chinese and anti-Russian sentiments, taking advantage of the network of NGOs, the tactics that Pommersheim managed to master a long while ago.

We are going to follow the achievements of Pommersheim in Dushanbe rather closely, as it seems unlikely that Washington would have sent such a figure to Tajikistan for him just to enjoy the view.

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