Cancellation on August 5 this year of the fundamental provisions of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution became one of the most important recent political events in the Indo-Pacific Region. It de facto means the elimination of the special status of the State of Jammu and Kashmir with mainly Muslim population (about 70%). From now on, the state is divided into two allied territories under the full control of the central government.

The legislative act to this effect was adopted by the lower house of Parliament by a majority vote (351 in favor, 72 against from a total of 545 deputies in the house).

Before trying to analyze what it can mean for the political situation in India, in the area around it and in the Big Global Game now unfolding, let us briefly dwell on the history of the issue.

Article 370 was adopted nearly 10 years after the adoption of the Constitution of independent India (in 1957). This article, first, legalized the de-facto control of the Indian army over 60% of the former principality of Jammu and Kashmir and, second, stated Delhi's claims to the remaining part.

The Article 370 provisions on the de-facto independent status (except for the issues of defense and foreign policy) of the new Indian state represented a compromise in the negotiations of the leader of the then leading political force in the territory of Kashmir, sheikh Abdullah, with the Prime Minister of the central government Jawaharlal Nehru. This compromise was what allowed sheikh Abdullah to package the process of legislative-based accession to the Republic of India into a way that was, more or less, acceptable for the population of the state.

Over the recent 20-30 years, there has been an increasingly active movement in the Indian political circles which considers that modern India is the successor of British India with all territorial claims implied by this stance. Attempts of nationalist forces to bring clerical (Hinduism-based) elements to the originally secular Republic of India are in a way connected to the aforementioned movement.

Both of these political trends share a great respect for a certain historical figure: Vallabhbhai Patel (dubbed the Indian Bismarck) who, during his time as the first deputy of J. Nehru, indeed played an outstanding role in the crucial moment of the formation of independent India. He died in December 1950 and, according to his present followers, would have never allowed the de-facto independent status of the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

However, this is anybody's guess, because V. Patel simply had no chance to participate in the resolution of the legal part of the Kashmir issue, while J. Nehru, as the author of this articles believes, proceeded from the extremely difficult internal and external circumstances that existed back then.

Let us only mention the preservation of the religious component in the difficult situation in the country (today, there are about 180 million Muslims in India no more than 6-7% of whom live in the state of Jammu and Kashmir), the consequences of recently completed first war against Pakistan (also essentially caused by an interreligious conflict), the Chinese People's Liberation Army (CPLA) troops reaching the 4,000 km long borders with India high in the mountains, the US (the most reliable ally back then) involvement in the Korean war.

The amendments to Article 370 caused various reactions in India. It is clear how Muslims reacted, while the Hindu community of the (now former) State of Jammu and Kashmir is exulting.

As for secular commentators, the author mostly came across guarded stances of various degrees. Discussing the
prospects awaiting Kashmir, India in general and the situation outside the country, highly colored wording is quite often used. For example, when a comparison to Kosovo is made, it is said that “instead of an Indianization of Kashmir, there will be a Kashmirization of India.”

Let us note that judicial proceedings about the possession of a hectare of land on the hill top in the small town of Ajodhya located in Northeast India are in progress. The aforementioned hills and hectare are sacred both for the Hindus and the Muslims. For the internal political situation in India, the importance of this or that decision can be just as great as the amendments to Article 370. The first court session held on August 7 so far ended with the requirement that the parties produce their argument and the evidence anew.

The need for an urgent strategy for managing the external factors in the wake of the annulment of Article 370 is emphasized by one of the leading Indian analysts Raja Mohan. The intuition of the experienced political scientist does not fail him because those external factors look rather adversely for India so far.

The strongly negative reaction of Pakistan came as no surprise. Let us mention the statement by the General Qamar Javed Bajwa, Chief of Army Staff (COAS) of the Pakistan Army, on the support of “the Kashmireans in their fair fight” and the “readiness to fulfill our duty” to them. Which was followed by the statement of Prime Minister Imran Khan that he was going to address the UNSC with a demand to condemn the aforementioned decision of the Indian Parliament. Finally, the suspension of diplomatic and trade relations with India was declared.

It is possible that all this will eventually turn out to be a propaganda ritual dance (in the style of a New Zealand rugby team before the match). One thing is certain: one may forget for a long time the positive messages sent by Islamabad to Delhi over the last two years.

The position of the People's Republic of China concerning the situation with the radical amendments to Article 370 of the Indian Constitution was expressed on August 8 at the traditional briefing with the participation of foreign journalists by the Chinese Foreign Ministry press secretary Hua Chunying. In particular, she urged both parties “to restraint and discreet actions which would not violate the status quo.”

A detailed comment must be made on the position of the leading world player, that is, the US. Actually, so far it comes down to the “mysterious silence” of the US President and a short remark by the Department of State that the aforementioned step of the Indian leadership was in no way coordinated with the US beforehand.

The aforementioned silence is quite clear, as the negative foreign policy consequences of the de-facto annulment of Article 370 will almost certainly aggravate the (already extremely complicated) US game in the region, where certain remarkable innovations appeared over the recent months.

Since the early 2000s, it seemed that, at the prospect of the (already obvious back then) transformation of the People's Republic of China into its main geopolitical opponent, Washington placed its final bet on a (quasi) union with India, which the US began to consider a natural counterbalance to Beijing. At the same time, it was necessary to sacrifice the relations with Pakistan which were almost those of allies during the entire period of the Cold War as well.

It was followed with the inevitable acceleration of the (long-standing) process of strengthening of comprehensive relations of Islamabad with Beijing at the same time as a gradual degradation of the relations with Washington. After the famous twitter post duel between D. Trump and I. Khan at the beginning of this year, one had a notion that both parties decided to abandon the bilateral relations completely.

In this respect, I. Khan’s visit to Washington 6 months later and the results of his negotiations with the US President could seem almost like a miracle. Which, however, has a rather rational explanation which we choose to omit here.

Let us only note that Washington is not at all going to sacrifice the relations with Delhi, the flaws in which Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan will proceed to correct in the second half of August.

It is quite probable that Washington could already picture a decrease in China’s influence on Pakistan, a cardinal improvement in the Pakistani-Indian relations and (you never can tell) forming a US-India-Pakistan coalition, which requires removing the main splinter in the Pakistani-Indian relations in the form of the Kashmir issue.

Undoubtedly, having at his disposal the information on the nature of the forthcoming decision of the Indian Parliament regarding Article 370, D. Trump, during his meeting with I. Khan, made the last (desperate and extremely clumsy) attempt to prevent the inevitable.
Now, it is quite probable that the US will see Southern Asia reproduce the scenario of Northeast Asia, where the two US allies, Japan and South Korea, are acting with increasing hostility, which, let us hope, will not go beyond the trade and political area. Let us note that peacekeeping missions of the top-ranking emissaries of Washington to Tokyo and Seoul are to no avail.

Here, it would seem appropriate to comment on the key statement of the most radical (and idiotic) branch of the anti-Americanism professed by a certain part of the Russian political circles: “Everything that is bad for the US is good for Russia.”

Nobody in today’s world will manage to capitalize on either the Kashmir issue or the comprehensive opposition between the US and China, the aggravation of the Japanese-South Korean relations, the situations around Taiwan, in the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca, in the Indian Ocean in general and in the Strait of Hormuz in particular.

As for the amendments to Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, the author of this article believes that the Indian Parliament had to choose “between bad and very bad,” rather than “between bad and good.” And the Indian leadership (again, according to the subjective author’s opinion) chose the “very bad” option.

Let us hope that this pessimistic assessment should turn out to be wrong.

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