What are Washington's New Goals in Central Asia?

The ongoing catastrophe that would typically be referred to as the US “military presence” in Afghanistan has lasted for almost two decades, yet Washington has so far failed to demonstrate to the rest of the world its “humanitarian intentions” in this country. At the same time, we’ve seen no shortage of bold statements made by US officials on all levels that are designed to hype up yet another fancy-named operation like Operation Enduring Freedom that is usually followed by the adoption of new “strategies” (the last of these strategies was, in particular, released in 2018).

According to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), over the past decade more than one hundred thousand Afghan civilians have perished or endured unbearable suffering. However, the fighting never ends. Some attempts made by the local authorities to restore order in certain areas of the country would typically fail to produce any noticeable results.

The negotiations held by Washington and Kabul with the Taliban were stalled after a series of terrorist attacks and the untimely demise of a number of American servicemen. After eight meetings between the US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad and the Taliban movement, the parties managed to compose a draft ceasefire agreement, but that was pretty much it.

These days, the better part of the country is tightly controlled by the Taliban. As for US troops, they can only cling to the perimeters of their own bases. In such a situation, it’s no wonder they are not inclined to show “massive heroism”, preferring to buy calm days through arming and bribing local militant groups. The Wall Street Journal would go to great lengths describing those “compensations for safety” handed over to the radical Taliban movement. As it was revealed by Joshua Branson, a representative of the Kellogg, Hansen, Todd, Figel & Frederick law firm,
those “payments for protection” result in the Taliban choosing other targets for its attacks, thus sparing Washington’s contractors in Afghanistan. In turn, the money that the Taliban receives through such arrangements is spent on financing new terror operations that result in deaths and injuries of thousands of American servicemen.

In particular, the publication names two of the largest contractors of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) engaged in such activities: DAI Global and Louis Berger, who received more than 1 billion dollars from the funds allocated by Washington on the restoration of Afghanistan in 2007-2009. In addition, such claims are leveled against the US-based Black & Veatch, Centerra, and Janus Global Operations, together with the British G4S and the South African MTN. It is indicated that the size of the payments handed over to the Taliban for its non-aggression against the employees of certain companies may reach up to 40% of all of the funds allocated on the implementation of any given reconstruction project.

This report makes it clear that Washington has no sincere interest in pursuing a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan, as this conflict can be used as a pretext to siphon money from the US budget. That’s precisely why nobody is able to pinpoint any positive developments in this conflict-stricken country.

As for the actions of US servicemen in Afghanistan, one can get a grasp of the logic behind them by reading the so-called “Afghanistan Papers”. Those documents show that General Douglas Lute, (who oversaw the US war on Afghanistan under Presidents Bush and Obama) stated at one point that:

“We were devoid of a fundamental understanding of Afghanistan. We didn’t know what we were doing.”

Due to the revelations made by the Washington Post we have finally learned that the US Congress, no matter under which party's control, was pushing the neo-liberal hawks to lie about the imminent victory in Afghanistan that was but “a grasp away” and could be finally secured if only enough money is allocated to end hostilities.

This notion was pushed by a number of US presidents together with biased experts that would lie to the rest of the world for a total of 18 years.

And as a result, the greatest crimes in US history go unpunished. None of the three US presidents involved in the Afghan scam, none of the generals and politicians who stained their hands with bribes would ever face any charges. This unprecedented impunity in the Afghan affair allows the sitting US military and political elites to carry on pulling various schemes without ever giving it a second thought, committing new crimes in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, and all across the African continent!

And now, against the background of the catastrophe known as the US-peddled Afghan settlement, the Trump administration has developed a new US strategy for the Central Asian region. Its essence is the reintegration (naturally, on American terms) of Afghanistan into Central Asia designed in such a way as to decrease the influence of Washington’s competitors on this country, namely Russia and China. As for the responsibility for the fate of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, it will be pushed on the shoulders of Kabul’s immediate neighbors – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. In Trump’s opinion, this plan would allow the US to strengthen its influence in Central Asia.

Preliminary steps toward this direction with the Central Asian republics of the CIS has already been made by the United States. In particular, for the first time in four years, a US delegation visited Kyrgyzstan, while Washington treated to a warm reception the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, Raşit Meredow. Finally, at a meeting with Kazakh Foreign Minister Mukhtar Tleuberdi, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo stated that Kazakhstan was playing a leading role in Central Asia, that’s why Washington would rely on it in securing certain goals. In order to strengthen American influence in this region, a special emphasis will be placed on improving ties with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, which are not members of the CSTO but share a long border with Afghanistan (85 miles and 463 miles, respectively). Millions upon millions of dollars have already been allocated to bribe the political elites in these Central Asian countries, all while American policymakers hope to put a lion’s share of these funds into their own pockets.

But will such a policy of overt corruption bring success to Washington in Central Asia? Well, hardly anyone has any doubts about its non-competitiveness at this point!

Vladimir Odintsov, expert politologist, exclusively for the online magazine ‘New Eastern Outlook’.