Upon declaring Russia “the biggest threat to US national security” in 2015, and passing a bill that puts Russia atop the list of its principal enemies, the United States has been trying to inflict maximum damage upon the now targeted state through all means possible. However, attempts to exert pressure on Europe in a bid to place it in a confrontation with Moscow turned out to be unsuccessful. Instead, a number of EU countries were bold enough to go against the grain, lobbying for the normalization of relations with the Russian Federation. Washington’s attempt to make a decisive push in the Middle East has also failed, since Russia, on the back of Washington’s disastrous regional policies, is now being perceived in this part of the world as a true peacemaker that can negotiate a solution to almost any crisis by talking to all the parties involved. For several years now, Washington has also been trying to use its positions in the CIS, trying to take advantage of the situation in Ukraine that the US single-handedly manufactured, but to no avail.

Thus, from January 31 onward, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made a long tour, visiting the better part of the countries of the post-Soviet space, paying particular attention to those who have had some sort of dispute with
Russia in recent years including Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, in order to stir anti-Russian sentiments there.

On social media, Pompeo himself revealed the purpose behind his trip, by stating:

*Excited to travel to the UK, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan to meet with counterparts and affirm US priorities across Europe and Central Asia.*

As for Washington’s approach to each of these individual countries, prior to visiting Kyiv in an interview with Bloomberg TV, Pompeo stated that Ukraine is an important country that sits at crossroads, with Donald Trump taking steps in it to counter Russia that Obama refused to take. He also added that the US has been providing "defensive systems" to Kyiv so that Ukrainians could “defend themselves”.

A memo released by the State Department on Pompeo’s visit to Kyiv shows the other side of Washington’s interests in this country, as it was stated the United States considers the preservation of gas transit through Ukraine an important factor in countering Russia. It makes clear that Washington intended to keep the gas transit going so that Russia would carry on feeding Ukraine financially, without having any possibility to influence it in any way. In addition, amid its official rhetoric, Washington has been advocating “prevention of Russia's influence on Europe through energy deliveries”, in hopes that it will preserve Europe’s energy security with Russian gas transited through Ukraine, thus maintaining control over the situation.

But the visit of the US Secretary of State took place at a time when Ukraine was in a difficult situation, with certain statements made by Pompeo indicating that the White House is not that interested in its ally, so the principal objective behind this visit was to downplay the criticism voiced against the US in Ukraine. Pompeo’s lack of interest towards Ukraine became known when a scandal erupted over his interview with Mary Kelly, a journalist with the largest nonprofit network of radio stations in the US, NPR.

Today, Ukraine is a toxic asset for American politicians so they prefer to provide lip service to it in public, while discussing everything behind closed doors, like the ongoing split in the Orthodox Church that Washington is actively trying to use toward its own interests in its confrontation with Moscow.

Then, on February 1, Pompeo set off for Minsk, where, following an outward demonstration of friendliness, further efforts were made to push Belarus to an even greater distance away from Russia. According to German media, this visit was the first visit of a senior US politician to this country since 1994, and that it was particularly important after the forced expulsion of the US ambassador to Minsk, Karen Stewart in 2008 organized by President Lukashenko. It’s curious that this visit was paid at the height of a quarrel between Belarus and its officially designated “strategic partner” – Russia, against the backdrop of Lukashenko’s refusal to “deepen integration” with Moscow and the ongoing dispute over preferential prices on Russian oil and gas that Belarus enjoys to this date. That is why Pompeo was quick to propose to provide Belarus with the necessary energy resources.

But long before the US Secretary of State left Minsk, allegations appeared across the media about a secret letter that he allegedly handed over to Alexander Lukashenko from President Donald Trump carrying proposals to join the WTO, NATO and the EU within a three years period. In return, the US would promise to withdraw all sanctions, provide assistance of 25 billion dollars in credit. It’s also rumored that the United States allegedly promised Belarus “preservation of sovereignty” and international support, with Minsk and Washington reinstating ambassadors after an 11-year pause, and the United States having the intention of building a new embassy in Belarus. At the same time, it is noteworthy that those spreading such allegations were trying to artificially increase the significance of Pompeo’s visit to Minsk, following Washington’s designs.

Against this backdrop, it should be noted that there was yet another noteworthy development – a few days prior to the departure of Pompeo from Minsk, a draft of a list of new nationalities that would be prohibited from entering the United States was leaked to the media, and Belarusians were on it. So the friendly smile of Mike Pompeo during his meeting with Lukashenko clearly does not reflect Washington’s true attitude towards Belarus.

Pompeo’s visit to Minsk was followed by his trips to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, where Washington’s interests in both states has recently increased against the backdrop of a rocky transit of power that is taking place there. After the announcement of the new US National Security Strategy, the priorities of US foreign policy towards Central Asia were clearly defined: the US wants a stable developing region, devoid of any influence from Russia and China. The main goals of US policy in this region is to deepen relations with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, and to work together on Afghanistan (or rather, to ensure that these countries allocate more of their own funds on the development of
Afghanistan and preserve supply routes for American goods).

At the same time, Washington views Kazakhstan as a natural counterweight to Russia in Central Asia. To strengthen Washington’s positions in this country, the United States has recently been taking steps aimed at developing bilateral military and political cooperation, while sending major oil companies to invest billions of dollars in joint ventures to develop hydrocarbon fields of the Caspian, as Kazakhstan has the largest reserves of oil and gas in the region, which Washington strives to control. Uzbekistan is the most populous country in Central Asia that remains in possession of significant oil and gas reserves and is also considered a partial counterbalance to Russian influence by Washington.

Therefore, it is not surprising that in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, and Belarus Pompeo promised prosperity in cooperation with America. In essence, he was promising mirrors and fire water to the “Indians of the CIS”. He spoke in Tashkent with Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and in Nur Sultan with Kazakh President Kassym-Zhomart Tokaev and his predecessor Nursultan Nazarbayev, who retains the status of national leader.

Pompeo’s visit to Tashkent also featured meetings with foreign ministers of all of the Central Asian countries — Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan — designed to emphasize US support for a more “interconnected, prosperous, and protected” Central Asia, in line with US strategy. Thus, Pompeo continued to advertise the development of the C5 + 1 format, proposed by the State Department in 2015, which is perhaps the only framework that allows American politicians to meet with high-profile representatives of all Central Asian countries in relative privacy. Of course, there are other bilateral initiatives, but nothing can replace a personal meeting with all of the major regional players.

It’s curious that Pompeo promised 1 million dollars to Uzbek politicians so that they can expand trade ties with Afghanistan, while thanking Kazakhstan for the fact that this country did not expel representatives of Muslim minorities to China and defended those who sought asylum. Of course, the senior American diplomat was alluding to the Muslims of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of China. China has already reacted very sharply to such actions by Pompeo during his tour of Central Asia, saying that the intention of the US Secretary of State to discuss the internal affairs of China with Central Asian diplomats at a meeting in the C5 + 1 format was an attempt to undermine China’s credibility and sow discord between China and the states of the Central Asian region.

Regarding the results of Pompeo’s tour, it should be noted that many analysts were expecting him to present an updated US strategy for Central Asia and the post-Soviet space during the trip. It can be assumed that the observation he made during his trip would result in changes that are about to be made to this document, laying the groundwork for Washington’s future policies across the post-Soviet space.

Valery Kulikov, political analyst, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”.