There seems to be a light at the end of the tunnel for the US in its struggle against the ‘Afghan Trap.’ This light emanates from the agreement signed on February 29 in Doha, the capital of Qatar, between US representatives and the Taliban movement (banned in Russia).

Russia’s role is quite notable here. It contributed to the preparation and signing of this treaty, which was an important favor done for Trump’s administration. For one, during the Taliban delegation’s visit to Moscow in May of 2019, negotiations were held with the envoys of former Afghan President Karzai through the mediation of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A representative of the Russian President attended the signing procedure of the discussed agreement in Doha, which includes several provisions.

Among them is the cessation of combat, as well as the unhindered and complete withdrawal of US troops and their allies from Afghanistan within 14 months. But in the first four and a half months, their number should already be reduced to 8,500.

Kabul’s official leadership will soon join the UN Security Council with the initiative to remove the Taliban from the sanctions list. This, in particular, should help eliminate the current nonsensical situations where representatives of the movement visit a certain country and the publications that allow the absence of the word ‘banned’ in their articles about the movement are punished.

During the last two centuries, Afghanistan has functioned as the ‘gravedigger of empires’ and a kind of ‘geopolitical black hole,’ in which (as in astrophysical analogues) gigantic quantities of all sorts of ‘matter’, i.e. money, technology...
and people disappear without a trace. Just 10 years ago, news pieces were released on the redirection of budget funds allocated by the American Congress for the struggle against the Taliban into the hands of the Taliban itself. This topic has repeatedly been discussed in Congress.

So, this time it is the United States that is fleeing from Afghanistan, same as the USSR had to do 30 years ago in the last throes of its existence. As in the case with the Soviet Union, a couple of important questions arise. Why did the US end up tangled in Afghan affairs in the first place? What should be expected now and after the 14 months stipulated in the document in the region as a whole and in Afghanistan, in particular?

The notorious events of 9/11 in 2001 have been repeatedly referred to as the motivation for the USA’s invasion of this country. Today, one can increasingly often hear the opinion that the main (but certainly not the only) goal of this entire Afghan adventure was to rebuild and dramatically increase drug trafficking from this country. According to the UN, it had been reduced to almost zero by the time of the aforementioned ‘events,’ and Afghanistan was then led by the same old Taliban.

In this regard, it is completely ridiculous to see frequent statements about the ‘failure of the Americans’ in the fight against the production and export of drugs from Afghanistan, which have increased in volume by a whopping 50 times since late 2001.

The motive was most likely ‘smuggled’ to the US leadership under a thick guise of political and strategic benefits that will come with establishing control over the territory of Afghanistan. That is to say, behind China’s back; even then, China was already considered by Washington to potentially be its main geopolitical opponent for the entire 21st century. The US seized the opportunity to open a kind of ‘second front’ in the fight against such an opponent (Taiwan had long played the role of the ‘first front’).

Today, the results of America’s Afghan adventure are quite unambiguous: no political and strategic benefits, huge material and financial costs and somebody’s (equally gigantic) income from drug trafficking. It is quite probable that the parties benefitting from the drug trade are from the same nation which made no less profit during the Opium Wars 150 years ago.

However, this possibility was, evidently, clear to Barack Obama 15 years ago. After all, he promised the Americans during the first election campaign for the post of the President of the USA to end the war and fully withdraw troops from Afghanistan. It was President Obama who reduced the number of US troops in this country by a factor of 10. He also established a negotiation channel with the Taliban leadership.

In 2016, future American President Donald Trump, despite his generally ‘anti-Obama’ election rhetoric, actually promised to complete what his predecessor had started in Afghanistan. He outlined his position on this matter after he assumed office, six months after his inauguration.

This position included a strikingly different assessment of India and Pakistan’s roles both in the affairs of the region in general and in the Afghan issue in particular. The former was assessed in the most complimentary tones, while the latter was designated as a ‘safe haven for terrorists.’

It took a year to realize that it was impossible to achieve the primary goal without close cooperation of Pakistan, which had a certain measure of influence on the Taliban (banned in Russia). This, of course, called for a change in rhetoric. This abrupt change manifested itself at the end of 2018 in Trump’s personal message to Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan.

President Trump’s subsequent personal meetings with him in September 2019 in Washington and in mid-February 2020 in Munich have consolidated the trend of improvement in US-Pakistani relations.

At the formal welcoming ceremony for the American President, who arrived to India for an official visit on February 24, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had to listen to comments about the ‘good state’ of American-Pakistani relations (hardly pleasant for him), along with a flow of compliments directed at his country and him personally.

Commenting on the agreement signed in Doha, Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi spoke about his country’s ‘central role’ in the signing of this document. This is not a minor exaggeration, considering the role of other countries and, above all, the parties of the conflict themselves, i.e. the US and the Taliban.

Moreover, the degree of influence of the Pakistani leadership on the Taliban should not be exaggerated. Now, what can be expected next? The key to answering this question may lie in the assessment of the very phenomenon of the
Taliban religious movement, formed by the Pakistani security services during their struggle against the presence of the Soviet troops in Afghanistan, as well as with the then Soviet-backed government in Kabul.

It can be argued that the Taliban turned out to be just a ‘religious shell’ of the Pashtuns’ longstanding desire to solve their own problem, very similar to that of the Kurds (Pashtuns comprise one of the main ‘local’ nationalities). That problem is the divided status of a more or less unified population of 40 million (the same as the Kurds), of which an estimated two-thirds live in Pakistan and one-third in Afghanistan.

Pashtuns are divided by the so-called ‘Durand Line’ (Mortimer Durand was one of the top officials of the British colonial administration in India in the late 19th century). Pashtuns refuse to recognize this ‘line’ as the Afghan-Pakistani border, as well as the ‘secular’ government in Kabul, which in no small part gravitates not towards ‘believers’ in Islamabad, but towards ‘pagans’ in Delhi and ‘heretics’ in Tehran.

One of the provisions of the Agreement is the establishment of a dialogue between the Taliban and the Government of Kabul, as well as respect for certain secular provisions of the current system of official statehood in Afghanistan. However, it is impossible to predict how this process will actually unfold, all the more so because the result of the presidential elections that have just taken place is, de facto, a dual rule established in Kabul.

Under these conditions, the only thing that can be more or less confidently predicted is the gradual reduction of the role of the United States in the process of solving an increasingly complicated mass of problems in Afghanistan, as well as in the surrounding region. The USA’s influence can decrease all the way down to zero in 14 months. Distancing itself from Afghan problems is Washington’s primary goal, and so the US is fleeing the country into which it interfered, for some reason, 20 years ago.

At the same time, one should expect a gradual redirection of the headache caused by the very fact of existence of this (unfortunate) country, from Washington to the capitals of other countries, such as Islamabad, Delhi, Beijing, Tehran. Unlike Washington, these nations cannot eliminate the factor of their neighboring with Afghanistan.

The situation will be aggravated by the fact that these ‘other’ nations make up a very complex web of interstate configuration. All of them have different views on the signing of the US-Taliban Agreement in Doha.

Finally, it has to be strongly emphasized once more that the Taliban is (still) banned in Russia.

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