On December 24, the Mongolian Parliament (State Great Khural) approved the Law on Presidential Elections. In the summer of 2021, the country will hold its eighth presidential election in its history, in which Mongolians will choose their sixth president.

The upcoming presidential elections in Mongolia have already intensified the activities of the US Embassy and Washington-dependent NGOs in the country, seeking thereby to increase their influence on Mongolian territory and to direct the political processes in a direction beneficial to the United States. Ever since the aforementioned successful democratic revolution in 1990 took place in Mongolia, the United States became one of the primary ‘patrons’ of democratic reforms in the country. To this end, Washington has made efforts not only to develop escalating political, economic, cultural and military cooperation, but also to break this country away from its traditional partners, Russia and China. This included an attempt in the summer of 2008 at a “color revolution” designed by Washington.
The question of finding a new place in the world system of international relations, which confronted the former allies of the USSR after its collapse in the early 1990s and caused the revitalization of such a search in the Soviet-oriented socialist countries, was especially relevant for Mongolia. There, soon after the revolution in 1990, a severe economic crisis began, caused by the cessation of massive Soviet economic aid and the severance of years of trade and economic ties with its northern neighbor.

Mongolia’s location between Russia and China, whose image among Mongolians is still overshadowed by the memory of more than 200 years of rule by the Qing Empire, as well as the changed international balance of power after the collapse of the USSR and the socialist system in 1990, made the development of a new policy of the country a serious challenge for the Mongolian political elite. A certain response to it was the so-called “third neighbor” concept proposed in August 1990 by US Secretary of State James Baker, who visited Ulaanbaatar on an official visit. Therefore, the main goal of the “third neighbor” concept was to develop ties with states not bordering Mongolia, which, according to Washington, would counterbalance the influence of its closest neighbors, Russia and China.

Throwing away diplomatic overtures, the true goals of the “third neighbor” concept and the involvement of Mongolia in the American “Eurasian orbit” were directly indicated by Pentagon Chief David Rumsfeld in October 2005. In particular, Rumsfeld said at a press conference in Ulaanbaatar that “the United States is exceptionally interested in building military bases in Mongolia, which has long been a vassal of the USSR.”

In recent years, Mongolia has received increasing attention in a comprehensive and multifaceted US strategy aimed at dominating the Eurasian continent. First of all, due to the enormous natural resources and other economic opportunities of this country, the active development of which Washington is expecting following the substitution of the presence of Russia and China in this area. The growing US presence in this strategically important region of Northeast Asia is also due to the rapid growth of economic power of Asian countries and their political weight on the world stage. And in this regard, the US is actively promoting the political and ideological orientation of the Mongolian elite toward Western countries, counting on the fact that Ulaanbaatar can become a conductor of American influence in the region, as well as possibly prevent the creation of the Russian-Chinese alliance, which is not desirable for the United States. Incidentally, the US has repeatedly pointed to Mongolia’s potential to mediate regional conflicts in Northeast Asia, especially in view of its good relations with all states in the region, including the DPRK, the Republic of Korea, and Afghanistan.

In recent years, Washington has placed particular emphasis on the separation of Mongolia from China, especially using the issue of the border region of Inner Mongolia, which is a very large autonomous region. Thus, in November 2019, the “Eighth International Conference of Tibet and Inner Mongolia Support Groups” was held in the North Indian city of Dharamsala (not far from India’s borders with Chinese Tibet and Nepal) with the active participation of American intelligence services and the support of the American NGO National Endowment for Democracy (NED), known for its role in organizing “color revolutions.” In addition to the separatist slogans, this forum was characterized by an emphasis on the “southern Mongolian” theme, as evidenced by the “proclamation” of the so-called Congress of Southern Mongolia (CSM), which was presented there in a suitably anti-Chinese tone. It included accusations addressed to Beijing of “cultural, economic genocide of the Mongolian minority” and demands for an investigation into the situation of violations of the rights of the Mongolian minority. According to News Busters, NED directly funds CSM, which advocates the separation of Inner Mongolia from the People’s Republic of China. Between 2006 and 2020, NED has allocated more than $44 million to CSM.

Since the start of the Donald Trump administration in 2016, its Indo-Pacific Strategy has focused on further strengthening political, economic and security ties between the US and Mongolia. In 2019, during a state visit to Washington by Mongolian President Khaltmaagiin Battulga, the US became Mongolia’s fifth strategic partner – especially in strengthening economic and trade ties, which had not yielded meaningful results for some time. On the other hand, while a strategic partnership implies economic cooperation, US aid to Mongolia has dropped significantly during the Trump administration, from $46 million in 2018 to $12 million in 2020.

The unconditional payment for the strategic partnership with the US should be the Mongolian concessions in the exploitation of 75 strategic fields, the first ten of which cost $2.75 trillion. “Gold” and “copper” interests of American resource hunters are complemented by the geographical location of the mines – almost on the border of Mongolia with the Chinese “Inner Mongolia”.

Certain hopes for greater use of Mongolia against China have been tied by the Trump administration to Khaltmaagiin Battulga from the Democratic Party, one of the country’s richest men, who was elected as Mongolia’s president in July 2017. During the election campaign, Battulga repeatedly used anti-Chinese rhetoric, which, according to some
political analysts, ensured his victory. The United States was already closely watching the 2017 election campaign, and criticism of China by the incoming Mongolian president only further “sharpened their focus”.

Today, as Mongolia prepares for the next presidential election in 2021, these are the aspects to which the United States intends to pay their closest attention.

The fact that the Asian direction in American foreign policy is becoming increasingly relevant is not much of a secret. What is worrying though, is that as soon as the representatives of Washington become more active somewhere, especially on the eve of presidential elections, there is bound to be something bad happening. And in this regard, the people of Mongolia must keep vigilant in the coming months.

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