Central Asia occupies a very important place in US foreign policy, primarily because of its geographical location next to the largest states of Eurasia — Russia and China, which Washington has already officially begun to call its main strategic adversaries. In recent years, the attractiveness of Central Asia for the global agenda has also been due to a major geopolitical shift in the region in the 2010s, which resulted in the growing influence and importance of Asian countries, as well as Washington’s presentation of Iran to the international community as a “violator of international peace”.

In its Central Asia Strategy, Washington usually makes revisions every five years, skillfully setting the points of focus and changing the nuances depending on US interests in the region. So, in previous versions of the document, the Americans sometimes considered Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan as part of South Asia, or introduced a special concept of “Greater Middle East” or “Greater Central Asia” to link the post-Soviet region with the neighboring Muslim world. In the latest Strategy 2020 there is a red thread running through the neighborhood of Central Asia with Afghanistan and an appeal to the republics to take partial responsibility for its reconstruction.

The United States, as part of its increased presence in Central Asia, has sought in recent years to pay undeniable attention to Turkmenistan, with which it established diplomatic relations on February 19, 1992. Over the past 29
years, connections have been established in industries such as oil, gas and chemical industry, computer technology, energy, agriculture, transport and logistics. In 2008, the Turkmen-American Business Council was even formed.

Turkmenistan also remains in the field of vision of the Pentagon, whose “neutral” status does not prevent the Americans from promoting their political-military programs here, which, one way or another, can influence the foreign policy sympathies and antipathies of the leadership of this republic. These include International Military Education and Training (IMET), the Regional Defense Counterterrorism Fellowship Program (CTFP), and several others. This also includes a training plan for Turkmen servicemen to “fight international terrorism and provide security” for their homeland, which they undergo on a rotational basis at the Pentagon’s regional centers.

In addition to the Pentagon, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy, co-sponsored by the US federal budget, also play an active role in Washington’s efforts to “unite” with Turkmenistan. Many are well familiar with the agency’s leading role in organizing “colored revolutions” in many countries. It is well known that the main implementers of the US “color programs” in the world are transnational Western NGOs, foreign foundations and the media. In Turkmenistan, in particular, the US has long been trying to secure the Soros Foundation, Radio Liberty, the Institute for War and Peace, the Eurasia Foundation, Internews, etc. Various Turkmen organizations are involved in carrying out NPO tasks: news agencies, sociological services, educational institutions, labor associations, law firms, and ethno-religious communities.

All these facts show the increasing importance of the states of Central Asia and, in particular, Turkmenistan in the realization of Washington’s global “interests” not only in this region, but also in Afghanistan, the Middle East, the Caspian Sea and Transcaucasia. Maintaining Afghanistan in a state of “controlled chaos,” for example, gives the Americans a formal pretext for “imposing” their military presence in Central Asia, presenting themselves as “guarantors” of peace and security for the states located there. At the same time, the calculation is undoubtedly made to provoke tension in the relations of the Central Asian countries with their proven political ally — Russia, which is a partner of most of them in the CSTO and the Eurasian Union. Those very integration associations, whose collapse and complete discredit has been a “dream” of the occupants of the White House for many years, regardless of their party affiliation.

In this context, the recent increased interest in Turkmenistan is largely due to the fact that it shares 744 kilometers of border with troubled Afghanistan and more than 990 kilometers of border with Iran, which Washington particularly cares about. At the same time, of course, one should not forget the active desire of Washington to limit by any means the flow of Russian gas to Europe, and in order to achieve this goal, the United States has been supporting attempts to direct the flow of Turkmen gas in the western direction for more than 20 years.

Given the very wide range of such truly military-strategic tasks, the previous Trump administration sent a kind of military landing party to Turkmenistan in 2019, represented by US Ambassador Colonel (ret) Matthew S. Klimow and his wife, Major (ret) Edie Gunnels Klimow, to lead the US diplomatic mission in Turkmenistan. Matthew Klimow’s entire previous career was inextricably tied to service in the US Army, having commanded infantry units from platoon to brigade, and held senior positions during Operation Desert Storm in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

However, all this expertise never allowed Klimow to achieve any significant result in the field of “the work” in Turkmenistan. Moreover, he was at the center of Washington’s current fiasco in this country over the demolition of the new US embassy building already built in Ashkhabad, because its borders went beyond the so-called “red line”.

Back in September 2014, the US Department of State signed a $196 million contract with Caddell Construction, the main contractor for overseas construction projects, to build the US Embassy building in Ashkhabad by July 2018. It was planned that the significantly increased number of employees of various US services and agencies working at scattered addresses in recent years could be gathered under one roof of the new embassy building on a plot of land located at the intersection of Arçabil Avenue and Atatürk Street. This site was leased to the US Embassy back in 1998 for 99 years.

According to the rules in force in Turkmenistan, buildings in Ashkhabad must be faced with white marble and aesthetically aligned along a single “red line”. However, as it turned out, the US Bureau of Foreign Buildings Operations did not bring the project in line with this rule, and Caddell Construction never received a construction permit from the Turkmen authorities. As a result, in July 2016, construction, on which $26 million had already been spent, was frozen by the authorities of Turkmenistan.

The US side repeatedly proposed to the Turkmen authorities various options to remedy the situation, which would have allowed the building not to be demolished, but all options were rejected. At his first meeting with Turkmen
President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov in 2019, US Ambassador Matthew Klimow, whom Washington had pinned its hopes on, among other things, to resolve the problem of the construction, tried to persuade him not to demolish the building. However, the head of state said that the “red line” was introduced by the legislation of Turkmenistan, and its laws must be respected.

Thus, this Central Asian state, small in size and potential, has publicly shown Washington that insolence and disregard for the laws of others cannot always bring victory to the United States, even to such an authoritative military landing force in Ashkhabad as the Klimow couple.

So Matthew Klimow will have to continue to run Ashkhabad (until he is inevitably replaced soon) in the familiar camp conditions of his former army service, rather than in the new embassy building. Now the main office of the American diplomatic mission is a building on Pushkin Street (crossing Makhtumkuli Avenue), which was built as a temporary building and was to be used for 10 years, and since then 25 years have passed. There is not enough room for all the employees, so the embassy has to rent additional space at different addresses.

Apparently, with Klimow’s departure, Washington will have to cut some of the other employees of the US diplomatic mission, which has lately grown unjustifiably, because of “insufficient conditions”.

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