The announcement by a US State Department spokesman, prompted by the American Washington Free Beacon information portal, that under the leadership of Joe Biden, the American authorities will be more cautious than under Trump, and shall tackle the issue of land ownership in the Golan Heights, once again stirred up the military-political groups not only in Israel and the United States in response to this issue.

Secretary of State Anthony Blinken first raised the issue of the Biden administration’s position on this in February, without saying, however, whether or not the State Department with him in charge would continue to implement the former administration’s position on the Golan Heights. Then he noted that the Golan Heights still has real significance for the security of Israel, but that its formal status remains unclear.

However, the other day, an unnamed State Department official, under the onslaught of the Washington Free Beacon, allegedly stated that this territory does not belong to anyone and control over it could change depending on the constantly changing dynamics of the region.

These statements have already caused a wave of outrage not only in Israeli political circles, but also among Republican lawmakers in the United States. Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, on the eve of a June 27 meeting in Rome with US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken at a conference of the international coalition to combat the Islamic State terrorist group (banned in Russia), said: “The Golan Heights is a strategic asset and an integral part of the sovereign state of Israel.”
Mike Pompeo, who played a central role in the development and promotion of the Trump administration’s decision on the Golan Heights, emphasized to the Washington Free Beacon that the current White House administration threatens Israel’s security at a time when Iranian-backed militants allegedly continue to plan attacks on the country’s northern cities. “The Golan Heights are not occupied by Israel, they are part of it. The Israelis have a right to it as sovereign land,” Pompeo said. “The proposal to return these lands to Syria, even if it is due to changes in the Syrian regime, is incompatible with both Israeli security and international law ... The State Department’s proposal that if Assad falls and the Iranians leave Syria, then the Golan Heights should be handed over to Syria, misinterprets the history and requirements for security in the state of Israel,” Pompeo said.

Wisconsin Representative Mike Gallagher, who introduced a bill earlier this year to consolidate the United States’ recognition of Israel’s sovereignty over the Golan Heights, called on GOP leaders in Congress to stop the Biden administration from revoking that sovereignty.

Earlier, Syria already officially stated on several occasions that it reserves the right to use any means to regain control over the Golan Heights, that no unilateral decisions taken by the United States can change the status of the Golan Heights. It remains Syrian territory, belonging to the Arab world. The occupation that took place in 1967 can never give the occupier the right to consider this territory as its property, and any state facing the occupation has the right to fight for the return of its territory by any possible means, including military force. The Trump administration’s decision in 2019 on the Golan Heights showed that in this situation, the United States is a country that provokes conflict and that it is just pouring fuel into the fire, inciting further conflict.

Iraqi pro-Iranian Shiite militia “Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba” has already threatened Israel with war. Paramilitary spokesman Nasser al-Shammari told Lebanese portal Al-Ahed News that a separate “brigade” in Syria is ready to begin the liberation of the Golan Heights when the Syrian government gives the command.

The Golan Heights, which Israel captured in 1967, is a unique territory. It is an important strategic area due to the relief of the land - almost half of Israel’s territory can be attacked from it if hostile forces appear there. Its uniqueness is also due to the natural resources already being mined or the potential to mine in this area. Agriculture and winemaking are well developed there, and the Golan Heights provides up to a third of all drinking water consumed in Israel.

The problem of the Golan Heights, which has remained frozen for a long time, has become especially urgent after the former US President Donald Trump signed a resolution on March 25, 2019 recognizing Israel’s sovereignty over the Golan Heights. Then Washington’s unilateral decision was not supported either in the UN or in Europe, and the Arab countries at the subsequent Arab League summit in Tunisia categorically opposed Trump’s decision. Even the closest allies in the Middle East did not support the United States: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stressed that the UN adheres to the previous resolutions on the Golan heights, and unilateral decisions taken by the United States are not able to change anything. The Russian Foreign Ministry said bluntly that the Trump administration’s decision dealt a blow to the credibility of international law and postponed a solution to the problematic situation in the Golan Heights.

In addition to the escalating conflict over the Golan Heights in recent days, the ongoing construction of Israeli colonial settlements in “occupied Palestinian lands” is also of serious concern, which could cause the situation to spiral out of control. According to recent reports, tensions in East Jerusalem, especially in the Shaykh Jarah area and around the Al-Aqsa Mosque, have not subsided. Clashes between Palestinians and Israelis are taking place both there and elsewhere in the West Bank.

After taking over as prime minister, Naftali Bennett said the new government would tackle settlement problems in Judea and Samaria. However, it became known that a commission of the Ministry of Defense for the first time since the creation of the new Israeli government approved new construction in settlements in these regions.

In these conditions, it seems very important to consolidate the still fragile ceasefire through the mediation of regional partners, primarily Egypt. It is necessary to preserve the status quo of the holy sites of Jerusalem, taking into account the special role of the Jordanian monarchy, the provision of humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza and the restoration of destroyed infrastructure. In this regard, the work of UNRWA, whose funding should be stable and sustainable, is commendable. Finding a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question is a precondition for ensuring regional peace and stability. In this regard, Russia calls on colleagues in the Quartet of international mediators in the Middle East to consider Moscow’s initiatives, which propose to convene a meeting in an expanded format with the participation of nations in the region. Against this background, the intention of the Israeli delegation to hold a meeting with Egyptian mediators in Cairo at the end of June and to convey the demands
of the new government regarding a ceasefire with the terrorist organization Hamas is commendable.

Vladimir Platov, expert on the Middle East, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”.