Who is Responsible for the Collapse of Washington’s Afghan policy?

In the face of yet another blatant collapse of US foreign policy (this time following the comfortable entry into Kabul of the Taliban (banned in the Russian Federation)), not only around the world, but in the US itself, there was an active search for someone to blame.

As Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on August 16, the two opposing forces in Afghanistan - the government and the Taliban - are the result of the US “thought process” that has set up another experiment in the country and the world is watching the result with horror. But no one ever bears the responsibility for these blunders. “This was not an American campaign, it was a UN Security Council mandate given to the coalition... Those countries that were part of the coalition never once came to the Security Council and never once reported back on what they were doing,” Zakharova said. The Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman noted that, for this reason, the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan could not be considered “the logical conclusion of the operation”.

Famous American political scientist Yascha Mounk, associate professor at Johns Hopkins University and senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, said in the American publication The Atlantic that Biden’s liberal “middle class” foreign policy had failed in Afghanistan on its first attempt. It was not accepted either outside or inside the US. It has weakened Biden’s position and strengthened that of Donald Trump. The consequences of the failure in Afghanistan will deepen the rift within the US. “So far, attacks on Biden as incompetent have lacked punch outside the right-wing media echo chamber; voters had little reason to think that he was unable to lead the country. But the videos now emanating from Afghanistan give a visceral visual to a line of attack that is sure to ramp up in the coming months. Fairly or not, they connect Republicans’ preferred characterization of Biden with a real-world catastrophe
What is happening in Afghanistan is not the “end to endless wars” advocated by both 45th US President Donald Trump and White House President Joe Biden, but America’s “capitulation” to the Taliban (banned in Russia), US House of Representatives member Liz Cheney said on August 16. However, Cheney added that both Trump, who “negotiated with terrorists”, and Biden, who is now “leaving Afghanistan to the terrorist enemies”, are responsible for the current situation in Afghanistan, in her view.

In a letter to US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, several Republican senators said they were “horrified” to see pictures of Taliban fighters with US weapons. Politicians have asked the Pentagon for details of expensive military equipment left behind in Afghanistan during the troop withdrawal, Fox News reports. As Fox News reminds us, the United States has spent more than $80 billion over the past two decades training and arming Afghan forces. And now that the Taliban have seized significant territory in the country, concerns about US weapons falling into the hands of terrorists have increased.

Earlier, Jake Sullivan, the United States National Security Advisor to President, said the US army had lost a significant amount of multi-billion dollar military equipment in Afghanistan, including Black Hawk helicopters, drones and off-road vehicles. The official admitted, however, that he had no data on the exact number of weapons the Taliban fighters had seized and added that US authorities “doubt that they would willingly return the weapons”.

However, it is well known that the Taliban have taken hundreds of special vehicles, spare parts and equipment from the Bagram base alone. Helicopters and light attack aircraft were acquired by the militants in the capture of Mazar--Sharif and Kandahar. According to The Military Balance, the government forces had 40 T-55 and T-62 medium tanks, 640 MSFV armored personnel carriers, 200 MaxxPro armored vehicles, thousands of Humvees, artillery 50 Grad MLRSs, 85 D-30 122mm howitzers and 24 M114A1 155mm howitzers, as well as around 600 mortars. In addition, the radicals have tens of thousands of small arms, tons of ammunition, night sights, thermal imagers, special equipment, uniforms and protective gear.

With aviation, new opportunities have opened up for the militants. They had equipment at their disposal that had previously been in service with the Afghan Air Force. These are EMB-314 Super Tucano attack aircraft, Cessna 208B, Mi-35 and Mi-17 helicopters and many more.

And against this background, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken’s statement on August 15 in an interview with ABC television that the US has achieved its goals in Afghanistan and eliminated the terrorist threat there is not just openly surprising around the world. Japanese political scientist and Central Asian specialist Naomi Hirose, in the national publication Toyo Keizai, says bluntly that the US war on terror in Afghanistan has ended to no avail. The situation has gone back 20 years. The US itself has been engaged in terror here, the hatred for it in the region has only intensified. Instead of democracy, it has brought chaos to Afghanistan.

In an attempt to find an excuse, the Pentagon blamed US intelligence for inaccurate forecasts on Afghanistan. In particular, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, said US intelligence had not reported to the Pentagon leadership that Afghan security forces would give up so quickly in battles with the Taliban.

However, the new situation is by all accounts not very worrying for the White House, which does not feel like a loser. Although, as the Pentagon daily Stars and Stripes reported, diplomats leaving the United States embassy in the Afghan capital had to destroy not only sensitive documentation, but also American flags, the symbol of nationhood for which combat soldiers in all wars fight to the last drop of their blood.

On the eve of the Taliban’s takeover of Kabul, President Joe Biden responded to a reporter’s question about whether the US would help its abandoned Afghan allies this way: “The security of the Afghans is now the problem of the Afghans”.

Even more remarkable is Biden’s statement on the future of American policy in Afghanistan. He does not fear the consequences of the Taliban coming to power because “a permanent US military presence in Afghanistan can be sustained without ground troops”. In much the same way as in Somalia or Yemen, that is, by blatantly implying that, if necessary, the US Air Force will continue to bomb Afghanistan as much as they like.

The fiasco that President Biden orchestrated today in Afghanistan is the most embarrassing thing that has happened to the US in three decades, notes The Washington Post. The mission in Afghanistan was never to turn that country into a Jeffersonian democracy. It was to ensure that Afghanistan had a government whose leaders did not wake up every morning thinking that America must be destroyed — and did not provide sanctuary for terrorists determined to
bring that destruction to the American homeland. That mission was succeeding — until Joe Biden’s misbegotten, incompetent, unconditional retreat handed Afghanistan over to the United States’ enemies, who will turn it into an Islamist militant haven once again,” The Washington Post concludes.

Today, as after the fall of South Vietnam in 1975, there is a heated debate in America about who lost the Afghan war. Sadly, no one in the US now recalls the words of the 40th president of the United States, Ronald Reagan. On 27 December 1983, the then head of the White House said: “With little in the way of arms or organization, the vast majority of the Afghan people have demonstrated that they will not be dominated and that they are prepared to give their lives for independence and freedom. The price they have so willingly paid is incalculable....” On 26 December 1984, Reagan pointed out that “the Afghan freedom fighters - the mujahidin - remind us daily that the human spirit is resilient and tenacious, and that liberty is not easily stolen from a people determined to defend it. The Afghan people are writing a new chapter in the history of freedom.” “We Americans salute their magnificent courage...,” the 40th American president announced at the time.

As The Washington Post notes in another article, the real blame for the collapse of US policy in Afghanistan lies entirely with politicians and generals, both American and Afghan. A succession of US presidents have made one mistake after another. The US military cannot escape blame for this fiasco. As The Washington Post’s Afghanistan Papers series pointed out, US forces failed to “build a competent Afghan army and police force” or to tell the truth about how badly the war was going. The publication acknowledges that Afghan fighters are not winning the fight, but simply outlasting a stronger enemy. The Taliban have done just that, they have already defeated the government in Washington. “Let the recriminations and finger-pointing begin. If Vietnam is any indication, the Afghanistan “blame game” could roil US politics for decades to come,” the US publication stresses.

_valery Kulikov, political expert, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”._