A visit to Singapore and Vietnam on August 22-26 by US Vice President Kamala Harris is further evidence of the growing urgency of the situation in Southeast Asia at the current stage of the “Great World Game”. Even though the Afghan problem remains at the top of the public political agenda, which, in the author’s opinion, is much less important (in that same Great Game), as it is quite local in nature.

Its current predominance in the media space is entirely due to the activities of the global media, which perform a variety of roles, but lately have become more and more like scavengers, capturing the specific scent of human tragedies. Afghanistan finally burst a long-overdue festering boil, one of many in the body of world politics. Media scavengers fly in at the smell of its contents.

Let us note the attempts of both major world players (the PRC and the US) to somehow localize the spillage of the aforementioned “content” and then, perhaps, even to heal the wound. Naturally, mostly to everyone’s own advantage.

That is, the prospect of a direct armed confrontation between them in Afghanistan seems extremely unlikely. Despite the “incitement,” which was immediately taken up by Washington’s longtime “worst friend,” London. It does not give up trying to position itself as a guide for the “inexperienced overseas sister”.

Meanwhile, one of the main regions where this collision (which will inevitably become global) is not only possible, but its probability is growing, is Southeast Asia. It is no coincidence that this region is the subject of special
attention from the top officials of both major players. Within a month, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin visited
the area, several video conferences with participants of ASEAN (regional association including all 10 countries of
Southeast Asia) were held by the head of the US Department of State Antony Blinken.

Finally, Vice President Kamala Harris visited the two aforementioned leading countries in the region. After
occupying the second most important post in the hierarchy of the current US administration, this was her first trip
abroad. It was not cancelled or even rescheduled, despite the fact that the climax of the Afghan drama, the
consequences of which for the US are still difficult to assess, had quite clearly emerged at the time of his departure
for Southeast Asia.

The first country Harris visited, the city-state of Singapore (the most prosperous and advanced in the region, and
one of the most advanced in the world), is strategically very important. The importance of this factor only increases
as the central motif of global political processes develops, which is the growing and comprehensive confrontation
between the two leading world powers, the US and China.

Singapore occupies the narrowest (in every sense) place on one of the most important trade routes, the smooth
functioning of which has long been in the focus of the leadership of China (as well as Japan, South Korea, and other
“economies” of East Asia). One of the main objectives of China’s global Belt and Road Initiative project is to organize
overland trade routes alternative to the aforementioned sea routes. Which remains vulnerable to the actions of the
US Navy, still maintaining supremacy over the world’s oceans.

There has been notable progress on various ways (for example, the Pakistani route) to achieve such a goal for China.
But, of course, there is still a long way to go from solving the problem as a whole. This explains the increased
attention to Singapore by both of the world’s leading powers.

Again, only a month before the vice-president of the United States visited the country, Secretary of Defense Lloyd
Austin began his tour in Southeast Asia with it. Once again, we note the generally balanced tone of his keynote
address in the format of the so-called “Fullerton Lecture” at a hotel in Singapore. That is, there was almost no
“hawk’s cluck” in it, which seems to be the duty of the speaker. While he was conspicuously present in the speeches
in Singapore of Austin’s civilian supervisor. The outbursts in her speeches clearly encompassed both main elements
of official US rhetoric toward China, namely, Beijing’s alleged violation of “established norms and rules” in global
politics in general (and in the Southeast Asian region in particular), as well as its “non-compliance” with various
human rights issues.

As for the substance of Kamala Harris’s visit, according to a detailed report by Singapore’s Foreign Ministry, all the
agreements on bilateral cooperation in the fields of politics, economy and defense reached over the decades have
been confirmed.

By way of commentary, we note that the same is true of Singapore’s relations with China, as well as of the behavior
of all other countries in the region, which is a similar “balancing act” in the field of tension created by the two
leading world powers. Each of them may (periodically and in its own way) deviate somewhat from the
aforementioned point of equilibrium.

In this regard, the words of Singapore’s Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan that his country intends to maintain
equally good relations with both the US and China are quite noteworthy. According to him, Singapore considers
itself “useful” to both, but sees no prospect of being a “useful tool” in the struggle of one leading world power
against the other.

As for the main results of Harris’ visit to Vietnam, the White House report on the subject draws attention to several
points. First, the state of bilateral relations is characterized as a “growing comprehensive partnership”. Further
noting the fact that the US is the second (after the PRC) trading partner of Vietnam, it points to the first place that
the Americans occupy in its imports. And this is an important circumstance, because one of Hanoi’s long-standing
grievances against Beijing boils down to a very significant negative balance in trade between the former and the
latter.

Third, it points to the “dramatic expansion of our security relationship” as well as US support for “Vietnam’s
independence and sovereignty, especially at sea”. The last remark is particularly significant because it is in the
waters of “the sea” (the South China Sea) that the main source of problems between China and Vietnam are related
to the claims of both to the same territories in the South China Sea.

Another reiteration of the long-standing (and no less meaningful) meme of respect for “freedom, openness, and the
healthy and sustainable development of the Indo-Pacific region” was to be expected. The implication (by default) is who is the source of threats to all that is good indicated by this principle.

The addressee, of course, heard the implicit and explicit invectives contained in this document and advised the second person in the hierarchy of the main geopolitical opponent not to overestimate his capabilities when various anti-Chinese intrigues are planned in Southeast Asia (in particular, in Vietnam).

Meanwhile, Washington is not restricting the range of its efforts to expand and strengthen its presence in a key region of the world to politics, diplomacy and economic cooperation, as the military factor is dramatically increasing in importance. However, some specific forms of implementation of the latter deserve a separate consideration.

Finally, in the comments of the US vice president’s first overseas tour in Southeast Asia, the theme of “compensation” (or rather, propaganda) for the dire consequences of Washington’s highly unsuccessful end to the Afghan adventure prevails in the comments of the first US Vice President’s tour of Southeast Asia. Such an assessment of the prevailing motives for Kamala Harris’s trip to Singapore and Vietnam is not without merit because of the increasing importance of propaganda in modern politics.

But once again, let us emphasize the factor of the transformation of Southeast Asia into a key region of the political game between the world’s leading powers. This is serious and long term. While the propaganda is engaged to solve relatively immediate problems.

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