Uzbekistan has always been of interest to the United States because it is a “key state” bordering all countries in the region as Zbigniew Brzezinski put it in his book “The Grand Chessboard.”

With the beginning of the “war on terror” in 2001, the USA leased a military base in Karshi Khanabad in Uzbekistan. However, relations between Tashkent and Washington have steadily soured since the Andijan events in 2005. In 2012, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov refused to renew the lease. The US military was forced to withdraw from this strategically and logistically very important country, especially amid their military operations in Afghanistan. Subsequently, all appeals from Washington to revive Khanabad or host a new base have been consistently rejected by Tashkent, including references to national legislation that forbids the stationing of foreign troops on the country’s territory.

Washington has always been attracted to Uzbekistan because of its desire to have an ally in Central Asia to balance Russian and Chinese influence and unfold a struggle with Beijing and Moscow. Washington has also linked the
special importance of Uzbekistan to its actions in Afghanistan. In particular, based on the fact that the Uzbek population in Afghanistan is the second largest after the Tajik population and has considerable influence in some parts of the country. In addition, the Uzbek army is probably the most significant, best trained, and most combat-ready force in Central Asia. Therefore, the USA has repeatedly demonstrated its willingness to supply Tashkent with modern air defense systems, combat drones, along with other weapons and equipment, hoping to use Uzbekistan’s military potential to its advantage in Afghanistan and regional politics in general.

In recent years, Washington has ostentatiously emphasized Uzbekistan in its relations with Central Asia. This became evident after Shavkat Mirziyoyev came to power in this country in September 2016, demonstrating himself as a reformist president. In his first days, he announced sweeping changes and did everything not to be associated with the harsh regime of his late predecessor, Islam Karimov. Liberal reforms began to take hold in Uzbekistan’s economy. The first signs of freedom of speech appeared, and the political elite began to rebuild ties with society and other countries, including the United States. However, Shavkat Mirziyoyev was in no hurry to get actively involved in the confrontation between Washington, Moscow, and Beijing, no matter how much the United States sought to do so.

Uzbekistan has recently faced a particularly acute choice with foreign policy options, whether it be the restoration and expansion of relations with the United States or integration into the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Washington began to take more active steps to encourage the country and its renewed political elite to strengthen ties with the USA.

As a result, Shavkat Mirziyoyev was invited by the US President to Washington in May 2018. On February 3-4, 2020, Mike Pompeo arrived in Uzbekistan as the US Secretary of State, who played on the long-standing rivalry between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, offering Uzbekistan a new status and a new role in the region.

After the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, Washington hoped to station its troops in Central Asia temporarily. Therefore, in July, Washington requested Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan to temporarily deploy several thousand citizens on their territory in Afghanistan to actively help the Americans. The request came personally from Head of the White House Joe Biden. Moreover, Washington has discussed the possibility of conducting reconnaissance operations from the territories of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It was even reported that Washington tried to negotiate the details of a corresponding agreement with the countries of the region. However, such steps were disapproved in Tashkent.

The USA is not a significant economic partner for any of the Central Asian states, and therefore its influence and omnipotence in the region should not be exaggerated. Russia and China are competing here for the garland of victory. At the same time, the USA is definitely trying to prevent Uzbekistan from fully joining the EAEU.

Therefore, through its embassy in Tashkent, The USA sought to move directly from the economy to the “humanitarian field.” Taking into account the adoption a program to incite anti-Russian sentiment in the countries closest to the Russian Federation, entitled “Countering the malicious influence of the Kremlin.” in 2019 by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). In 2020, it was decided to get more significantly involved in this plan A separate Agency office was established in Uzbekistan (previously, it was part of the USAID mission in Central Asia based in Almaty). The first USAID mission director in Uzbekistan is Mikaela Meredith, who arrived in June of this year and has a significant record of service and “merit” in the USAID field. The particular importance of this step in building closer relations with Uzbekistan through USAID may be demonstrated by the fact that, against the backdrop of a recent reduction in the Agency’s support for many C.I.S. countries, only Uzbekistan has increased its funding. One of the main objectives of USAID was to reduce the influence of Russian media in the region. It is envisaged that such activities will be carried out in three directions. The USA is confident, the first is technical and organizational support for media companies and journalists, improving their professionalism and solving financial viability and self-sufficiency, replacing Russian entertainment content on television with Western shows and series. The second direction should be the promotion of “information literacy” of the population, clarification of the “role of the media in a democratic society,” training “to critical thinking” in a way favorable to the United States, providing the local community with tools to acquire an “active citizenship,” pressure on the government in order to make their work more transparent and accountable. The third direction is activities aimed at changing media legislation that would “improve the quality of the media,” naturally within the framework of US interests.

As for the responsibility for the security of the post-Soviet states of Central Asia, the United States is not only not ready but also not willing to assume it, on the contrary, doing a lot to undermine it. Thus, during their presence in
Afghanistan, drug trafficking along the northern route increased more than 40-fold. And when they left Afghanistan, they left weapons and military equipment that went to radical Islamists. This was particularly the case with the abandonment of the most extensive US base at Bagram in early July of this year. The US was counting on the waves of instability that would move into the zones of responsibility of its geopolitical rivals - Russia, China, and Iran. Considering the presidential election is scheduled for October 24, attempts of Washington to influence it in a favorable for the US direction, undoubtedly, will increase, including through the active involvement of the USAID mission in the country. However, Washington should still understand that the public in Uzbekistan, as in other Central Asian states, is not a collection of primitive Papuans. With the wisdom inherent in representatives of the East, this public can distinguish the “beads of colonizers” thrown to them for fun from the actions of true friends, Russia and China, who are openly interested in the growth, prosperity, and power of Uzbekistan.

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