US Is Actively Trying to Extend Its Influence to Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan has always been of interest to the USA. And this interest has especially picked up lately, as the upcoming presidential election of the Republic of Uzbekistan scheduled for October 24 this year draws near.

Washington decided once again to remind how important Uzbekistan is to it in July this year, when US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken during a meeting with Uzbekistan’s Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov “expressed the United States’ desire to deepen its strategic partnership with Uzbekistan” and “commended Uzbekistan’s initiatives to improve relations within Central Asia, noting the two countries’ active cooperation through the C5+1 regional diplomatic platform,” reports the State Department official website. The page of the US Embassy in Uzbekistan also contains a whole set of “US initiatives” covering, in particular, the development of the agricultural sector, work to improve the quality of nutrition of Uzbekistan people, and even the installation of seismic stations. In addition, an entire delegation headed by Brigadier General Duke Pirak visited Samarkand in April to discuss issues of cooperation in the military sphere.

Back in May 2019, when Daniel Rosenblum was sworn in as the future US Ambassador to Uzbekistan, the through-line in his speech was the intention to “provide as much support as possible” to the reforms taking place in Uzbekistan. The “reforms” have been the main focus of American analysts after Shavkat Mirziyoyev became the President of Uzbekistan. The reforms initiated in Uzbekistan are perceived in Washington as a “window of
opportunity” that would allow the United States to increase its influence in the republic and, accordingly, to both move the latter away from Russia and reduce China’s growing influence.

On particular, much attention has been paid to the Mirziyoyev Course by the leading American think tank on Central Asia, the Johns Hopkins University’s Central Asia-Caucasus Institute headed by Frederick Starr. The same university, it turns out, that the current US Ambassador to Uzbekistan Daniel Rosenblum completed his master’s degree, specializing in Sovietology and International Economics at the School of Advanced International Studies.

The plans of the United States and the actions of Ambassador Rosenblum in Uzbekistan can be additionally explained through some details of his biography. He had previously for many years been involved in the programs of key American soft power institutions, such as the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy, which took active role in the implementation of numerous color revolutions. In 1997-2008, Rosenblum worked in the office of the Coordinator of Assistance to the countries of Europe and Eurasia of the US Department of State, and it was then that color revolutions took place in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005), which Rosenblum had a hand in organizing. It is therefore not surprising that in 2020, Washington, with ardent support from Rosenblum, decided to get USAID involved more in the “reforms in Uzbekistan”, for which purpose an entire separate USAID office was established in this republic. Michaela Meredith, who has a significant track record and “merits” with USAID, was appointed the first director of the office. She arrived in Uzbekistan in June this year, at a time of active preparation for the upcoming October 24 elections in the country.

As part of its soft power policy the US Department of State has previously stated its intentions to allocate funds for the implementation of a program to strengthen the capacity of civil society and “independent” media in Uzbekistan. Through this project, Washington hoped to increase the ability of civil society organizations to respond to the social needs of Uzbekistanis, as well as to facilitate the work of the media and institutions engaged in professional training of journalists.

Traces of USAID’s soft power being used in Uzbekistan can already be found in attempts to involve certain “Washington-ridden” political forces in the country in calls to abandon the Russian language and putting up relevant leaflets in shops, public transport, educational institutions and elsewhere. The provocative nature of such actions is both obvious and ill-conceived, considering that Uzbek and Tajik migrants are prevalent in Russia’s foreign labor market, which, in particular, is reflected in the significant increase in the money they have been sending back to their homeland in recent years. And if they can’t speak Russian, they will not be able to legalize themselves on the Russian labor market. It should also be stressed that, according to the Uzbek Law “On the State Language”, citizens have the right to choose for themselves the language they use for interethnic communication. In addition, no one has the right to regulate the use of languages in everyday life, in interpersonal communication and in the administration of religious and cult rites.

However, the appearance of such provocative actions in Uzbekistan on the eve of the elections is nothing new. After all, according to research by the American Carnegie Mellon University, between the end of World War II and 2000, the United States interfered in elections at least 80 times in 45 countries across the globe, not to mention countless military coups and color revolutions. And this also largely explains Washington’s activity in Uzbekistan in recent months.

Another factor in initiating additional “interest” of Uzbekistan in the development of relations with the United States was the demonstration - on the eve of the upcoming elections, no less - by Rothschild & Co of its a willingness to act as interested investors for various sectors of the Uzbek economy. This, in particular, was announced in early October in Tashkent at a meeting of the Deputy Prime Minister - Minister of Investment and Foreign Trade of Uzbekistan Sardor Umurzakov with the deputy chairman of the company’s supervisory board, Baron Eric de Rothschild. In particular, Rothschild expressed readiness to assist in the privatization of large state-owned enterprises and banks and bring in foreign investors for this purpose, as well as to cooperate in the development and reform of the national banking system. The company stated its desire to help transform the transport sector of Uzbekistan, including by attracting private investors to the implementation of infrastructure projects.

An important factor in the spread of instability was the attempts by the United States to obtain the consent of the leadership of certain states in the region, including Uzbekistan, to create camps for Afghan refugees on their territories. However, such camps have a tendency of turning into hotbeds of terrorism and centers of drug and arms smuggling, while in no way contributing to eliminating the actual threat of uncontrolled migration from Afghanistan.

In addition to the creation of camps for Afghan refugees, earlier, against the background of the complete withdrawal
of US military personnel from Afghanistan, the American media repeatedly stated the interest of the United States in the possible use of military bases in Central Asia, with a particular emphasis on Uzbekistan. However, Uzbekistan refused to discuss this issue with the United States. On October 5, the Vice-Speaker of the Senate of the Republic, Sadik Safayev, again officially confirmed that Tashkent would not negotiate with Washington on the provision of its military bases for the deployment of a US or NATO contingent for operations in Afghanistan. According to him, such a dialogue is impossible, since “the laws do not allow it.”

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