Four months after the withdrawal of the US and NATO troops from Afghanistan, the Taliban (movement is banned in the Russian Federation) attempts to shape the country on their image, despite the lack of recognition. Nevertheless, they have complete freedom from their neighbors to do whatever they want. They do not officially interfere but try to be orientated towards joint economic projects, providing humanitarian assistance to the Afghan population. The neighboring states and the entire world expect positive results in the predetermined areas, such as forming an inclusive government, preventing an uncontrolled flow of refugees, active assistance in establishing civil peace, and neutralizing terrorist structures and drug-related crime in Afghanistan.

Of course, ruling dozens of people in Afghanistan with a small, mono-ethnic government is not easy. And this is where time works against the Taliban. Today, one of the main tasks for Afghanistan is to prevent new geopolitical adventures of external players such as the US and NATO. Meanwhile, the new Afghan authorities and outside observers understand that unless Kabul succeeds in normalizing the situation and the international community provides adequate support to the Afghan people, events can develop into catastrophic scenarios. Including civil war, widespread bankruptcy, starvation, and an uncontrollable flow of refugees.

Executive Director of the World Food Programme, David Beasley, estimates that Afghanistan has one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world right now, if not the worst. It is heading for disaster: more than half of the Afghan population, some 22.8 million people, faces severe food insecurity, and 3.2 million children under five are suffering from malnutrition. For this reason, millions of Afghans face a choice between migration or starvation. In these conditions, international assistance to the Afghan people becomes critical and relevant. Still, in its current form, it is not commensurate with the scale of the humanitarian disaster in the country.
Afghanistan’s funds have notoriously been frozen for the long haul in US banks. The Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund totals $1.5 billion, but that money is hard to get. On December 2, the World Bank approved $280 million of frozen food aid money for Afghanistan, that is $7 per capita. On the same day, Kabul received $16 million from the UN. UNICEF will receive $100 million to provide life-saving health care for 12.5 million people and vaccinate 1 million. WFP accounts will receive $180 million to provide food for about 2.7 million people. But these measures are not enough to stabilize the situation.

The actual contribution to humanitarian aid to Afghanistan could be much more significant if, in particular, the previously imposed disconnection of Afghan banks from the SWIFT system by the World Bank, which prevents the delivery of humanitarian aid funds to those in need in Afghanistan, were to stop.

In addition, the country is severely cash-strapped, both in dollars and the Afghan national currency. This is mainly because various large companies of both Afghan and foreign origin have accumulated large amounts of local currency in their vaults. Still, so far, they do not know where to apply it, thereby artificially eliminating real Afghani from circulation. Therefore, such companies must urgently address this issue before the local currency depreciates further.

Under the circumstances, Russia, China, and several other countries try to persuade the US to unfreeze the Afghan assets. But the impression is that the West has deliberately blocked these funds to manipulate the radical Taliban movement. The US is trying to explain all the difficulties by saying that Afghan money has been frozen by lawsuits filed by families of victims of the September 11, 2001 tragedy in New York.

Afghanistan’s relationship with its neighbors remains complex. Having seized power in the country, the Taliban promised their neighbors not to interfere in their internal affairs, establish a popular government, and refuse to cooperate with terrorists. However, while Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have demonstrated their loyalty, Tajikistan is not ready to recognize the new government in Kabul, justifying its position by the fact that the Taliban have not fulfilled their promises even in small ways.

The relationship between Iran and Afghanistan has been ambiguous. It’s always been complicated. However, even before the current capture of Kabul by the Taliban, Tehran had contacts and negotiations with them. Iran has consistently opposed the presence of the Americans and their NATO allies in Afghanistan. It has to some extent supported the Taliban, at least in the western provinces of that country. Iran’s policy towards Afghanistan has always been to rely on a significant number of Shiites living in that country, the Hazaras, who make up about a fifth of Afghanistan’s population of 40 million. In mid-November, the Iranian special representative for Afghanistan, Hassan Kazemi Qomi, visited Kabul, whose participation helped reach several agreements with the Taliban, including concerns about the Hazaras. They seemed to have been taken under additional Taliban protection after that visit. Iran is positively developing economic cooperation with the new Afghan authorities. In November, it signed an agreement to supply 100 megawatts of electricity to the Afghan provinces of Herat, Nimroz, and Farah. Iranians are ready to invest in the development of Afghan mines (precious stones, gold, lithium, copper) and build roads and bridges.

On the other hand, Tehran is concerned about Afghan drug trafficking and the flow of Afghan refugees into Iran. A protective wall was built hundreds of meters from the border to combat smugglers in Iran’s Sistan and Baluchistan border provinces. In early December, heavy fighting between the Iranian army and the Taliban, involving small arms, armored vehicles, and artillery, erupted on the Afghan-Iranian border: on December 1, Iranian peasants accidentally went behind this wall in their territory. They came under Taliban fire - as trespassers in Afghanistan’s Nimroz Province. It turned out that the Taliban border guards did not know where the state border line was and began shooting at civilians in the neighboring country. The Iranian Border Guard responded with fire, including 122 mm D-30 howitzers. The Taliban used captured NATO armor. The fighting ended on December 2, after negotiations. The parties to the conflict do not officially report casualties. However, information was previously published about dozens of people killed and wounded and the capture of two Iranian checkpoints by the Taliban.

In any case, the December 1 incident on the Iranian-Afghan border was a single, highly localized incident. The fact is that the new Afghan authorities do not benefit from any military action against their neighbors. Given that Afghanistan’s economic and financial situation is challenging today, what the Taliban want from the international community is, if not full recognition, then at least a favorable attitude towards their regime.

The international community also wants stability and a decrease in the level of economic disaster in the country from the new Afghan authorities. After all, according to the IMF forecast, a sharp decline in living standards and a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan could inevitably affect the neighboring countries and several European States. In
particular, Afghan refugees can put a devastating strain on budgets and labor markets, increasing social tensions in various countries. IMF specialists calculated: if only one million citizens leave Afghanistan, the cost of their accommodation would be $100 million in Tajikistan (which would amount to 1.3% of GDP), $300 million in Iran (0.03% of GDP), and more than $500 million in Pakistan (0.2% of GDP).

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