Against the background of the developments in Ukraine in recent days, the US, in the context of adjusting its policy in Central Asia (CA), urgently convened a C5+1 online meeting on February 28, with the participation of foreign ministers: Kazakhstan’s Mukhtar Tileuberdi, Kyrgyzstan’s Ruslan Kazakbaev, Tajikistan’s Sirojiddin Muhriddin, Turkmenistan’s Rasit Meredow, Uzbekistan’s Abdulaziz Kamilov, and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

According to the foreign ministries of the CA states, “participants discussed pressing issues on the international and regional agenda, including the situation in Ukraine and its impact on the Central Asian region.”

The US initiative in convening this meeting and Secretary Blinken’s participation in it demonstrate the undeniable importance of Central Asia not only in their regional policy, but also in their actions towards Russia and its allies, primarily the CSTO and EAEU. Moreover, the White House’s interest in Central Asia and the C5+1 format itself has increased in recent days in terms of clarifying the region’s stance on the Ukrainian issue and bringing the Central Asian states over to unconditionally support Washington’s policy.

That is why the said online meeting was initiated by the White House on the eve of consideration of the openly anti-Russian US resolution on Ukraine at the UN, and Antony Blinken, under various pretexts, took steps to win the C5 foreign ministers’ support for the resolution. Secretary Blinken also confirmed on Twitter that the reason for this online meeting was to discuss the situation in Ukraine.

In the course of clarifying the position of the Central Asian states on Russia’s special operation in Ukraine, the United States was probing, with a view to coaxing the C5 states, the options of returning not only the USAID
programs with its investments and grants to the region, but also of reopening US transit and even full-fledged military air bases in Central Asia. At the same time, the issues of strengthening practical cooperation in the economic, security and climate change fields as well as the situation in Afghanistan were touched upon, but this was already very superficial, as this was not the purpose of Blinken’s convening of this C5+1 meeting.

Nevertheless, the Central Asian states have shown that they are no longer “natives who can be bought with American beads,” and Washington’s subversive aims in the region are already clear to all, as was showcased by the US involvement in the January events in Kazakhstan, its attempts to destabilize Kyrgyzstan in recent years and the situation on the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border. It is not surprising, therefore, that during the March 3 vote at the UN on the US-proposed resolution on Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan abstained, while Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan did not vote.

However, there was a statement by Sadyr Japarov, President of Kyrgyzstan, supporting Russia’s special operation in Ukraine and Russia’s decisive actions to protect civilians in Donbass, while also pointing to Kiev’s responsibility for the failure of the Minsk agreements. “Kyrgyzstan notes with great disappointment that today, instead of unification, the world is more divided into those right and wrong. In this regard, the minister noted that today the UN Security Council has a special responsibility to maintain peace and security,” the Foreign Ministry of Kyrgyzstan said in a statement on the Ukrainian issue.

Kazakhstan has offered its peacekeeping services and a platform for talks between Moscow and Kiev, if they agree. On March 1, at an extraordinary congress of the Nur Otan party, renamed Amanat the day before, Kazakhstan’s President Tokayev stressed: “As the country that hosted the OSCE Summit in 2010, we insist on the principle of the indivisibility of Eurasian security. I stated this during a visit to Moscow on February 10. The principle of indivisibility and common security implies mutual understanding based on mutual trust. Unfortunately, this has not happened. The Minsk agreements remained on paper, leading to military action on Ukrainian territory.”

Certainly, this reaction of the Central Asian states to Washington’s attempts to “rally them against Russia” has frankly “disappointed” the Anglo-Saxons. And a manifestation of this was a proposal on March 1 by a British MP, Margaret Hodge, to consider sanctions against Kazakhstan “for supporting Putin.”

However, this is not the first time the words “sanctions” and “Kazakhstan” have been heard in the British parliament. After the January events, the same Margaret Hodge proposed sanctions against Kazakhstan’s “kleptocratic elite,” clearly showing London’s “disappointment” that its preorganized unrest and anti-government protests in that country were thwarted by the CSTO and Moscow.

Against this background, British Ambassador Kathy Leach was summoned to the Foreign Ministry of Kazakhstan on March 2 to seek clarification from Britain following statements by MP Hodge to “punish Kazakhstan.”

Overall, however, it should be noted that the US has recently stepped up its efforts to combat Russian influence in Central Asia, in particular through the use of non-governmental organizations and the so-called independent media.

In Kazakhstan alone, for example, the total number of NGOs has grown significantly over the past 15 years: from around 2,000 in 2009 to 22,000 now! According to a report at a recent Civil Society Forum in Astana, Minister of Social Development Darkhan Kaletaev pointed out that approximately 200 Kazakhstani NGOs receive foreign funding, 70% of which comes from the United States.

In addition, the main objective of most US-supported information projects in Kazakhstan is to mentally and psychologically separate the population of the republic from Russia and to undermine Russia’s position in Central Asia. The emphasis is on young people in the hope that, in time, people brought up on Western “democratic” values and not inclined to cooperate with Russia will come to power in the country. An important role in such subversive work by the US is played by the Internet resource Karavansaray, sponsored by the US Central Command of the Armed Forces (CENTCOM), which regularly posts publications aimed at discrediting the Russian military presence in Central Asia, spreading misinformation about the alleged threat to the Central Asian countries of a Russian military invasion.

Washington’s subversive plans in Central Asia are actively “facilitated” by Britain and its representatives in the region. On February 15, the Kyrgyzstan’s government newspaper, Kyrgyz Tuusu, published an article by Melis Sovetuulu, which touched on the subject of NGOs in that republic and the role played by British Ambassador Charles Garrett, a career MI6 intelligence officer. According to StanRadar.com, Ambassador Charles Garrett is instructing a “fifth column” in the country; in 2020, he and US State Department officials met with local journalists and bloggers
in Kyrgyzstan, who were asked to look for any irregularities in the vote count in favor of pro-government parties for a fee. In order to improve “outreach,” the ambassador offered to donate new equipment to loyal media, and USAID and the Soros Foundation, known for their close ties to US intelligence services, provided a grant of some $2.5 million, which included funds promised to media representatives as a “royalty for carrying out embassy assignments.”

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