The USA revised its strategy in respect of the countries of Great Central Asia, which, in addition to the former Soviet Union republics, comprise Pakistan, Afghanistan, India and Caucasus states - Georgia and Azerbaijan. The USA since recently has included Iran and Turkey in the Great Central Asia. Washington shifts from the policy of security to the policy of persistent diplomatic pressure. To use a carrot, Washington initiates the development of the New Silk Road Project that is supposed to win back the positions lost by the region in the world market and to turn it into international trade crossing. At the same time, the strategy is aimed at weakening Russia's positions and satisfying China's ambitions. Visibly or behind the scenes, everything for the USA will focus on this issue.

Richard Hougland, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, explained that Washington is intending to take consistent measures of human rights protection in Central Asia and it hopes to convince the government of each country that these reforms serve their national interests.

Anthony Blinken, the US Deputy Secretary of State, spoke in greater detail. According to him, security in Central Asian states strengthens the US security and therefore facilitates the global effort in anti-terrorism and extremism struggle. He emphasized that such stability can be reached in the circumstances when the Central Asian countries have not only a sovereign status, but, to a greater extent, are capable of protecting their own boundaries. In this context, the countries of the region will be connected with each other and with Asia's developing economies, while the governments will be accountable to their own residents.

Azhdar Kurtov, the Leading Research Scientist of the Russian Strategic Research Institute, believes that the Americans will try to differentiate their approach to the Central Asian states. "Something crucially new can hardly be expected from this strategy. It will be going the same old way all over again. Most likely, using the softer approaches than those in 1990s", Azhdar Kurtov told a NEO correspondent. The values to be dominated in the region are understood to be Western ones or American to be more exact. "They will promote the idea of independence as the main landmark for political, intellectual, journalistic elites of the Central Asia: to support the idea of strengthening independence the CA states will have to cooperate with the USA and EU. However, the political cooperation with the so called “rampant” regimes (implying Russia, Iran and to a certain degree China), that supposedly give no prospects for progress, is not quite forward-looking", Kurtov said. According to him, geopolitical players are competing to win Central Asia.

Other experts believe that the new strategy pursues different goals. "The US needs to activate their strategy in the East to give a peaceful respite to Ukraine which has just quit Russia's influence", Shokhrat Kadyrov, the Doctor of Historical Sciences, Leading Research Scientist of the Institute of Oriental Studies, told a NEO correspondent. According to him, the basic criterion that defines the US strategy efficiency is weakening Russia and China and winning a dominant position among the states along the perimeter of borders with Russia, avoiding stepping into direct conflict with Russia. "I don't think this strategy has focus on such complicated states as Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan which can be destabilized spontaneously (especially, in the Ferghana region) without any US interference, and the entanglement into conflicts among which can hardly be of any interest for the USA", Kadyrov said.
Andrei Kazantsev, the Director of the Analytical Center of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, believes the new strategy does not change the goals of foreign policy that the USA specifically pursues in various Central Asian states. Some states are more seen in the context of Afghanistan, South Asia and Great Middle East issues (Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan), others – more in the context of US geopolitical interests in the former Soviet Union (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as members of the Eurasian Integration Project launched by Moscow), while others – more in the context of energy issues (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan), etc. Besides, in terms of institutionalization, the Americans see Central Asia more in the context of issues of South Asia and Afghanistan than in the context of the former Soviet Union problems (the US State Department has the same division dealing with South and Central Asia). Only the general approach changes: more dialogs with Central Asian elites and more efforts to influence the groups in these countries that are ready to cooperate with the USA. This will allow to simultaneously and better promote the US interests (especially, achieve greater distance between the CA states and Russia, and most likely even China) and US values (i.e. standards of democracy and human rights). In the past, the USA constantly and actively criticized the Central Asian elites for violation of human rights, thus, in so doing, cutting off access to effective cooperation with them. And this approach, like the previous one, will be most likely disliked by Russia’s leadership. Now it will fear more that the USA can create its strong lobby in the Central Asia elites, which is going to be less willing to cooperate with Russia.

At the same time, the USA has nowhere stated officially that it confronts China. However, as Andrei Kazantsev noted, all the US documents covertly envisage it. This includes the concept of the Trans-Pacific Partnership and Obama’s new military doctrine providing for the shift of US main political and military efforts to the Pacific Ocean. With regard to Central Asia, given the problems in Afghanistan and the Islamic world on the whole, as well as the confrontation with Russia around Ukraine, the USA takes more moderate positions with regard to China. It will try to initiate interaction between two Silk Road projects, one of its own and one of China. This approach has a kernel. To start with, these two projects are associated with the infrastructure support provided to the region’s countries, and therefore, any structure to appear with the US help will in fact interact with another in a certain way. Of course, the USA is not ready “to give away” Central Asia to China. The US main goal has always been to provide multi-vector politicians of Central Asian states with a possibility to have a pro-Western landmark as the third and key vector in addition to the Russian and Chinese ones. In this context, the USA has a reason to expect that the Central Asian elites will appreciate the additional freedom of movement offered by the USA with regard to Russia and China. Of course, such approach makes neither Moscow nor Beijing excited about it.

Shokhrat Kadyrov believes that the new US strategy is focused not on shifting landmarks, but on the new emphasis triggered by mutually beneficial interests that appeared between Washington and Tehran. First, Iran is able and is already preparing to provide Europe and Ukraine with gas. Second, the loyal relations between Iran and the USA may put on the back burner the consortium’s project of gas supplies from Iran to Pakistan - I will emphasize – with the participation of Russia, as well as the Nabucco Project aimed to connect the Azerbaijani and Turkmen pipelines running on the Caspian bottom for gas supplies through Turkey to Europe, which Russia strongly opposes. The Iran-Pakistan project is being delayed because the TAPI pipeline construction has been started, which will allow US-based Chevron to supply gas to Pakistan. The Nabucco Project is delayed because Turkmenistan may obtain approval from Iran to participate in its own gas supplies to Europe through Iran and Turkey, bypassing Russia, and to spite the supply of Turkmen gas solely to China. As we can see, in both cases the USA evade in style any direct confrontation with Russia, and at the same time place it in a disadvantageous position.

Indeed, the US strategy is not limited to economic projects only, as for example, the operating BTD (Baku-Thilis-Ceyhan) pipeline, that bypasses Russia; it was built in 2005 and was immediately joined by Kazakhstan. The work is under way to create, with the US help, the special guard units of the Caspian marine (Caspian sea) and land borders of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. The construction of Khizi and Astara radar stations in Azerbaijan can be considered a success of the US policy. These stations are efficient to generate electromagnetic interference with Russia’s early warning radars installed in Azerbaijan.

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