Washington may deploy an intelligence center in Kyrgyzstan

After being caught tapping telephone conversations and e-mails of both ordinary citizens and the first persons of key countries of the EU, the American intelligence agencies are looking for a new deployment site. According to some reports, the U.S. intelligence center east of the Atlantic may be located in Bishkek. The assumption arose because of the upcoming reformatting of the U.S. base at Bishkek Airport, the Manas Transit Traffic Center (TTC), and the construction of a new building of the U.S. embassy in Bishkek. All this created an anti-American wave in Kyrgyzstan. In particular, they are discussing a possible move to the new building of U.S. intelligence workers engaged in arranging total tapping of telephone conversations and control over the electronic information space, as well the installation of additional equipment for U.S. intelligence there. This talk is about the entire complex. Most buildings of the embassy will be located under the ground at a depth of 28 meters. Some of the electronic equipment of the TTC will be moved there, and it will be connected to the Echelon Global Tracking System. The U.S. Embassy officials are saying it is just an expansion of the activities of the embassy. “The information that the military will be working in the new embassy building is not true,” Susan Wood, press attaché of the U.S. Embassy in Kyrgyzstan, told to reporters.

Meanwhile, according to insiders, about 200 people will work in just this new complex. Such a number raises questions by itself. At least 500 people are working in the American Embassy already. For comparison, the number of employees of embassies of such countries as Germany or Iran is from 20 to 30 people, including the technical staff, and no more than 200 people work in the embassies of Russia and China. The 200 new people at the U.S. embassy are electronic intelligence service officers, redeployed to embassy staff and provided with diplomatic status. “All intelligence functions of Manas TTC will continue working under the roof of the U.S. Embassy. Servicing of U.S. Air Force flights will be entrusted to the transport aviation hub after reformatting of the American base. This will be done by either Turkish or Arab workers, but certainly not Russian or Kyrgyz people. Its new name does not matter much,” says Alexander Knyazev, an expert on Central Asia and the Middle East.

The issue of the expansion of the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek was discussed on November 6 this year, when the Kyrgyz parliament considered a bill on the transfer the control functions over import, export and use of special technical means for secret information collection onto the territory of Kyrgyzstan to the State Committee on National Security of the country. In particular, the question was raised by a Tursunbai Bakir Uulu, a deputy from the Ar-Namys fraction, who pointed to a high probability of imports being made of special equipment into Kyrgyzstan, intended for secret collection of information. The deputy asked how the technology imported from the United States to Kyrgyzstan is being inspected. “All of Europe is saying that the German Chancellor was tapped by the United States. Equipment is being brought to the U.S. Embassy in Kyrgyzstan all the time. There may be forbidden items among this equipment. How is the equipment being inspected?” asked the deputy, noting that the equipment imported into the TTC at the Manas Airport is not subject to inspection. The deputy chairman of the State Committee on National Security Aman Mambetseitov promised to answer these questions in writing. So let us wait!

The expansion of the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek suggests that the Americans are not going to go away from Kyrgyzstan. Just like they are not going to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan completely. In particular, recently President Barack Obama has said that the number of the U.S. troops in Afghanistan will be reduced, and eventually the military contingent will consist of 34,000 soldiers, instead of those 60,000 who are stationed in the Islamic
Republic of Afghanistan now. This means that Afghanistan will still need logistic centers in the region, particularly those with existing infrastructure, like in the Kyrgyz Manas Airport. Therefore, the expulsion of Americans from Manas, announced by Bishkek, will not be carried out.

President Kurmanbek Bakiyev intended to close the U.S. Air Force base at the Manas International Airport in 2009. However, after short negotiations between Washington and Bishkek, to increase the size of the rental fee, a new agreement was signed, under which the air base would restructured into a transit traffic center (TTC).

Having come into office, the subsequent President of Kyrgyzstan Almazbek Atambayev promised Moscow to eliminate the U.S. airbase. Last summer, he signed a law on closing it by July 2014. A civil aviation hub should appear there instead of an American military facility. However, experts are saying that Americans are not going to leave Kyrgyzstan. Quite the contrary, a basis for the southern NATO missile defense system is being created in this country, which will cover all countries of the Central Asian Region, and a new intelligence center is being built at the new U.S. Embassy. According to experts, the current Kyrgyz authorities cannot afford such gestures as the expulsion of the U.S. base from the country. However, recently the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic, Erlan Abdyldayev, handed to the U.S. Ambassador Pamela Spratlen a note with an official notice of termination of the agreement with the U.S.A. on the transit traffic center at the Manas Airport, effective July 11, 2014. According to eyewitnesses, the U.S. diplomat was evidently dissatisfied.

However, the situation was defused by the vice-speaker of the Kyrgyz parliament Asia Sasykbayeva who said that “in the event of a threat to the security of the Central Asian Region, the U.S. military, which had to leave the country in July 2014, might return to the republic again”. Experts have called this deputy’s statement a curtsey to the Americans. Kyrgyz political analyst Mars Sariyev believes that “the base will remain in Kyrgyzstan, and such a statement of the vice-speaker of the parliament is just a trial balloon, simple probing”. “The game around the American and NATO presence in the region is very tense, and as I said before, this base would remain in Kyrgyzstan one way or another, and this is certainly an issue of global bargaining between Russia and the United States, and here it is the question of missile defense systems and other issues. Thus, such a statement, such a trial balloon, is just part of this global game, for example, the Ministry of Defense also continuously conducts consultations with the U.S. military. So we may say that probing is being carried out and the pressure is being applied, so that the base remains in Kyrgyzstan,” says the analyst.

Now the base is being reformatted. New facilities, buildings and structures are being constructed on the territory of the Manas TTC, and a new ring road around the perimeter of the base is being built. All work is being done by Turkish contractors – these are the companies Setur and Serko. In addition, the construction of a new air navigation complex continues at the Manas Airport. This complex, currently under construction, is designed to ensure flight safety, and besides that, it will become the control center for a single radar space being created by the United States in Kyrgyzstan. According to the expert, in addition to the complex at Manas, the system includes 26 radar stations scattered around the country (the known stations include Sary-Tash in Alay Valley, area of Kadji Say in Issyk-Kul region, area of Tokmok) that will monitor the airspace not only of Kyrgyzstan, but also of the neighboring areas of China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan after they are placed into operation. In the future, this complex will be part of a new southern missile defense system of NATO.

Therefore the question – Who will be the new target of U.S. intelligence? - remains open, not only for Kyrgyzstan, but also for other countries in the region.

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