Ukraine: America’s Strategic Error

The international community is entering a period of global instability. The unipolar world that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union has receded into the past. Obviously, this would have happened a little later, but the U.S. has significantly accelerated the international processes when it interfered in the internal affairs of Ukraine rather rudely. It was Washington that pushed this country to disintegration when it placed its stakes on radical nationalists. This allowed overthrowing the spineless Viktor Yanukovych, who, like all his predecessors, cared only about his own welfare. At the same time, Ukraine did not obtain any new prospects. The country is confidently moving to a complete collapse. It can be saved neither by an association with the EU, nor by Western credits on crippling terms, nor by the upcoming presidential elections. Only the federalization of Ukraine has a chance to save it as a single state. Instead, the new government in Kiev, pandering to radical representatives of the Maidan, in the form of the “Right Sector”, is carrying out political repression in the country, strongly limiting the rights of the Russian-speaking population and other minorities, and organizing various forms of provocations and violations of international law.

The United States and its European partners immediately and unconditionally supported the new government in Kiev. This convinced many people about their direct involvement in the military coup, which was interpreted as a revolution against the hated regime of Viktor Yanukovych. If we analyze attentively all the events which took place in Kiev, the composition of the Maidan and the recent actions of the Supreme Rada, the attempts of a limited number of nationalists to impose their will on the Ukrainian people become apparent.

In such circumstances, Russia was forced to act, not to capture Ukrainian territories, but to ensure the safety of the Russian-speaking population. In particular, the Crimea was on the verge of a civil war since the Crimean Tatars, whose number, according to the population census conducted in 2001, was only 245,000 of the total population of 2.41 million, formed parallel authorities and presumably had weapons. Following the example of the Maidan, and with the tacit support of Turkey, the Crimean Tatars were ready to seize power in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. With a broad support from the local population, Crimean authorities, relying on friendly Russia, managed to paralyze the attempts aimed at destabilizing the situation on the peninsula by individual representatives of the Crimean Tatar people and the new government in Kiev. This created the conditions for the Crimean people for a free expression of their will as to their fate, via a referendum, the conditions of which fully comply with all European standards.

The information war, waged against Russia, allowed forming an extremely negative attitude in the West to President Vladimir Putin and his foreign policy. There have been clear attempts to demonize the Russian Federation, which allegedly threatens neighboring states by its actions and seeks to annex their territories. At the same time, they forget that it was the West that played a negative role in the disintegration of Yugoslavia, and enforced the separation from the country Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija. Similar actions were repeated in other regions, resulting, for example, in the de facto disintegration of Libya and Iraq.

There is no doubt that the events in Ukraine and Crimea will have a serious impact on the security of not only Europe, but also of the remote areas of the Middle East, Central Asia and the Caucasus. First, in the conditions of an extremely sharp confrontation between Russia and the West, we should forget about any nuclear arms reductions,
mutual trust in the military sphere and joint addressing of problems of nuclear weapons proliferation. This will result in the race of both conventional and nuclear weapons and blocking of efforts to resolve the Syrian crisis, Afghanistan and other issues of regional security.

Second, in view of the imminent introduction of not only political, but also economic sanctions against Russia by the U.S.A. and the EU, Moscow will try to compensate for the losses by an increased cooperation with China, Japan, Turkey and Iran. The interaction with the latter state is the most promising, as a trade-oil agreement is being prepared, under which Russian goods will be supplied to the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) in exchange for Iranian oil. Starting with the volume of 100-200 thousand barrels of crude oil per day, Moscow can bring these volumes to 500,000 barrels in the future. Some of this oil will be re-exported to China, which will allow Beijing to increase the purchases of Iranian oil significantly, without aggravating relations with Washington.

Another area for Russian-Iranian cooperation is in the nuclear sphere. In the near future, Russia can start the construction of not only the second, but also the third unit of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant in Iran. This can be represented as a continuation of the previously signed contract for the completion of the construction of the first power unit there. We should recall that Tehran has faithfully fulfilled the conditions of the first stage of the “Joint Action Plan” - an interim agreement between the representatives of Iran and the “six” international mediators (the permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany) to resolve the Iranian nuclear crisis, signed at Geneva on November 24, 2013. This was reflected in the relevant report by the IAEA Director General.

Of particular interest to the parties is the sphere of military and technical cooperation, which is limited to UN Security Council Resolution 1929 for the present. However, apart from the Russian Federation Presidential Decree No. 1154 of September 22, 2010 “On measures to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1929 of June 9, 2010”, nothing prevents supplying air defense systems to Iran. According to this decree, it was prohibited to supply surface-to-air missiles (SAM) S-300 to Iran. The latter resulted in a claim for $4 billion against the Russian state-owned Rosoboronexport OJSC in the International Arbitration Court in Geneva. This question may be closed on the basis of delivery of SAM S-400 to Iran, which will significantly expand the range of arms and military equipment supplied by Russia.

There are other areas of mutual interest, where major contracts can be signed rather quickly. In this case, the bilateral trade, which amounts to about $2 billion per year now, may be increased by many times.

Moreover, Russia is even willing to follow a course on building a strategic partnership with Iran. Formally, this could be announced during an official visit to Tehran by President Vladimir Putin or his meeting with President Hassan Rouhani at the Caspian states summit, which will be held in Astrakhan in September of this year. Then the role of Russia in the Middle East will change fundamentally, as well as in the resolution of the Syrian crisis and the Afghan problem.

Third, strengthening of Russian-Iranian relations and quite possible improvement of Iranian-Turkish relations will give an opportunity to raise the issue of forming a non-aligned security system, in the South Caucasus at first. To do that, it is desirable to hold trilateral talks between Russia, Iran and Turkey in the near future, to develop common approaches to resolving conflicts in the region. This will allow formulating the concept of a new regional security system. As a result, this will be an opportunity not only to avoid a new war in the South Caucasus, but also to create a favorable environment for the resolution of problems of Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Fourth, the strengthening of Russian-Chinese relations, up to becoming allies under certain conditions, is inevitable. This will mark the emergence of a multipolar world where the West will no longer dominate.

Thus, the U.S. has made a strategic error when it initiated an armed coup in Kiev. They hoped that they would significantly weaken Russia and the integration processes initiated by it in the post-Soviet space by directing Ukraine toward the West. In fact, Washington will reach quite the opposite effect. After a substantial strengthening of ties with China, Iran, Turkey and some other countries, Moscow will be one of the centers of a multipolar world, the interests of which will have to be considered by the Americans.

Vladimir Yevseyev, Director of the Center for Social and Political Studies, exclusively for the online magazine "New Eastern Outlook".