Washington's Struggle for Central Asia Intensifies

Against the backdrop of a recent overall decline in US standing and influence due to the current administration’s policies, Washington has started to fight ever more desperately to maintain a foothold in regions of geopolitical interest. One graphic illustration of this is the US’ deepening struggle over Central Asia (CA).

The US largely came to appreciate the strategic value of this region in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks. Washington and its closest allies chose these southern formerly Soviet territories as transit routes to send supplies in support of military operations in Afghanistan. Between 2011 and 2015, roughly half of all the supplies to US and NATO troops in Afghanistan went through this “distribution network,” although Pakistan would have been a cheaper option.

This is how the US came to have a military presence in Central Asia, and one which Washington, in its confrontation with Moscow and Beijing, has actively sought to strengthen and consolidate. The occupation of Afghanistan by the United States and NATO troops, together with the expansion and deepening of military ties with the regional republics during the Afghan war, gave rise in Washington’s mind to the idyllic concept of geostrategic victory in the region. At the same time, the US clearly saw victory in this competitive struggle with Russia and China - both hitherto traditional allies of these Central Asian countries - not only in political, strategic and military terms, but also
by clearly linking it with the economic benefit of taking control of oil and gas production in this natural resource-rich region, along with taking control of the construction and operation of local pipelines, since they would bypass Iran, which has been under sanctions since 1979. However, Washington has been unable to achieve these objectives.

Realizing that the Central Asian states are, objectively speaking, inextricably linked through traditional ties with both Russia and China, which is seeking to offer them lucrative trade and economic cooperation, the US State Department formulated a new Central Asian strategy in February in a bid to strengthen antipathy towards Moscow and Beijing. It follows from this document that Washington not only thereby declares its readiness to compete for influence in this region, but would also like the Central Asian states to act as a single bloc and to strengthen ties not with Russia and China, but instead with Afghanistan and Pakistan under the auspices of the United States. In essence, the afore-mentioned “strategy” represents the evolution of the Greater Central Asia concept promoted by successive US administrations for about two decades, which, in addition to the five independent states of Central Asia, would include other Asian states loyal to the United States, thereby driving a wedge between the former Soviet republics of Central Asia and Russia. Hence, we can clearly trace the main idea that, for the US, Central Asia serves as a strategically significant bridgehead in the event of an eventual regional confrontation between the US on the one hand and Russia and China on the other.

The current US administration has correspondingly reshuffled its diplomatic and other liaison office personnel in Central Asia in order to implement these plans. In particular, employees were sent to the region who were not only experienced in imposing political and strategic policies on other countries which would be beneficial to Washington, but who had also already tested the practical use of “soft power” and the US army to achieve these ends.

So, in recent years a large network of various organizations backed by American money has been operating in Tajikistan, notably the Soros Foundation, the Aga Khan, the Institute for War and Peace and others who often meddle in the internal processes of this country, mainly promoting US foreign policy interests. To “coordinate” such work, in March 2019, a new US Ambassador was sent to Dushanbe - John Mark Pommersheim, who is well acquainted through the USIA with the implementation by Washington of “color revolutions” in a number of countries where he previously worked as well as with the use of “soft power” to conjure anti-Chinese and anti-Russian sentiment.

Another example is the June 2019 dispatch as new US ambassador to Turkmenistan of none other than a “military paratrooper” in the person of retired Colonel Matthew Stephen Klimow and his wife, retired Major Edie Gunnels. When nominating M. Klimow as ambassador to Turkmenistan, Washington clearly took into account his previous experience in resolving a host of purely military-strategic objectives, some of which the US hopes to achieve from the standpoint of this Central Asian country and the region as a whole. And Washington also factored in that it takes a military person, with his inherent impudence and fearlessness, to achieve in this country what his seven hapless predecessors had failed to do.

Recently, the abbreviation NED has increasingly begun to feature in the post-Soviet space of Central Asia (since July 2015, this NGO has been recognized by the Russian Prosecutor General’s Office as undesirable - ed.). This is the so-called National Endowment for Democracy, created by the US Congress under President Reagan in 1983 to “promote democracy.” Its activities are coordinated by such members of the Foundation Council as Wesley Clark - the former commander of NATO forces, Frank Carlucci - the former Secretary of Defense, Morton Abramovitz - the former adviser to President Reagan and the chairman of the International Crisis Center, and Lee Hamilton - the former Senator and member of the Presidential National Security Council. Zbigniew Brzezinski used to be a member of the Council. Well-known personalities associated with the American intelligence services including John Negroponte, Henry Chisneros and Elliot Abrams also took part in NED’s activities. Although the foundation declares itself to be an NGO, 95% of its funding comes from the US budget, and the more the fund fulfills the tasks assigned to it by the state and the US intelligence services, the more generous that funding becomes.

Having transferred some of the CIA’s functions to the NED, Washington is using various technologies to create an environment of discontent in the Central Asian countries, secretly distributing colossal sums which are being invested in “rocking” the state structure. Under the guise of grants, the foundation has been financing the opposition through programs to protect human rights, as well as to support independent media outlets, and to promote national literacy. Also noteworthy is the NED program to “support the global economy”, which is focused on adhering to US influence as a counterweight to the regional activities of Russia and China.

Washington’s bankrolling of diverse similarly subversive structures under the guise of “rights protection” is steadily growing in Central Asia. In 2017, a foreign aid bill was tabled in the US Congress which included some $2.5 billion
for similar “democracy projects” in Central Asia. A characteristic feature of such “aid” is its penetration into all areas which, on the face of it, are not even remotely related to the realization of the donors’ geopolitical interests: energy, health care, water use, ecology, the war on drugs and even ... the construction of toilets. In actuality though, in this way the US is trying to draw regional states into its strategies and economic devices, and to gain control over the resources and societies of the Central Asian countries. As analysts from the Central Asian countries themselves note, outwardly attractive aid in the field of health care and the fight against AIDS is not improving the situation in the region. Moreover, the war on drug trafficking results in distribution of the drug methadone, while the fight against infections has led to the opening by the US military on the ground in Central Asian countries of biological laboratories which are not under host government control, and which, quite possibly, are conducting biological weapons experiments as well as being involved in various kinds of mischief.

The “American aid” being imposed in this way, multibillion-dollar infusions through an ever-growing network of American NGOs that do not positively impact the socio-economic development of the Central Asian states, is now being seen as only nominal and indeed viewed critically by Central Asian countries. Moreover, there is now a sober assessment of its primarily propaganda-oriented nature, together with its desire to tear the regional republics away from their strong ties with Russia that have proven themselves for decades. After all, not one of the countries of the former USSR which chose the US as their strategic partner has achieved prosperity and economic growth. They have instead only come up against a host of societal and economic problems, leading to the growing realization: do we need “help” like this?

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