

Strengthening the Struggle between the Powers for Influence in Central Asia

Bloomberg reported on July 2 that the Biden administration had asked Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to temporarily house 9,000 Afghans who were helping coalition forces in Afghanistan. The publication noted that if the governments of these countries agree, the United States will begin broader cooperation with the Central Asian countries regarding Afghanistan. Russia has expressed its categorical disagreement with such contacts.

The publication also notes that on July 1, Washington hosted separate meetings of US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken with the foreign ministers of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, within which the US initiative to deploy Afghans was discussed. One of the sources of the publication, familiar with the request, said that at these meetings, the Americans proposed an agreement that would allow them to collect intelligence and conduct surveillance and military reconnaissance from the territories of these states.

In addition, quite recently, during a briefing with reporters, answering the question of whether the United States intends to build military bases in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said: "Together with the colleagues from the State Department, we communicate with the border countries and try to understand what opportunities may appear there. I will leave these countries to speak at their own expense."

It is worth noting that the first messages about the intention of the United States to place its military facilities on the territory of the Central Asian countries appeared in early May of this year. So, on May 8, The Wall Street Journal, citing its sources, reported that the United States is considering the possibility of deploying troops withdrawn from Afghanistan in Central Asia, in particular, in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. "However, the large military presence of Russia in the region, the growing influence of China and tensions in its relations with Washington complicate plans to [create] bases in Central Asia," the newspaper noted at the time.

This development of events does not suit Moscow at all, which is not going to share its influence in the region. Zamir Kabulov, the Russian president's special envoy for Afghanistan, told RIA Novosti that the process of withdrawing US troops from Afghanistan should not turn into a redeployment of the US and NATO infrastructure, especially to the countries of Central Asia. "We have already sent such a signal to Washington at various levels, I hope it will be heard," Kabulov said.

Recall that the withdrawal of American troops was agreed with the Taliban wing at the talks in Doha in February 2020. Under the terms of the agreement between the United States and the Taliban, the Americans pledged to withdraw their and NATO military contingent within 14 months, as well as to lift sanctions from the Taliban. In turn, the moderate wing of the Taliban pledged not to attack a foreign contingent and to abandon the use of Afghan territory to attack the United States and other countries. In addition, they had to begin interaction with the UN Security Council so that its members were excluded from the sanctions list.

It is worth noting that the Taliban, neither politically nor militarily, do not pose a real threat to the security of the United States. But the Americans have always manipulated the topic of security to achieve their political goals.

It is also noteworthy how the Taliban over the past two months have seized without significant efforts a large part of the territory of Afghanistan, especially in the northern regions bordering the countries of Central Asia. Note that the northern regions of Afghanistan are inhabited mainly by Tajiks and Uzbeks, and the Taliban could not capture them even when they were in power from 1996 to 2001. Observers note that government forces are leaving settlements without proper resistance to the Taliban, and hundreds of them have even crossed the Tajik-Afghan and Uzbek-Afghan borders.

So, on Monday morning, the press service of the border troops of the State Committee for National Security of Tajikistan reported that on the night of June 4-5, 1,037 Afghan soldiers crossed the Tajik-Afghan border, while the Taliban took full control of several border areas of the Afghan province of Badakhshan, which have a 910 kilometers long common border with Tajikistan.

A day earlier, the press center of the border troops of the State Committee for National Security of Tajikistan reported that on July 4, an armed group of the Taliban movement captured the Hohon district of the Afghan province of Badakhshan without a fight, in connection with which "94 servicemen of the armed forces of Afghanistan retreated and, in order to save their lives, crossed the

state border at the site “Shokhon” of the border detachment in the area of Shamsiddin Shokhin (formerly Shuroabad) and entered the territory of Tajikistan.”

In a July 4 article, Al-Jazeera writes that provincial councilor Muhib al-Rahman said that the gains in the northeastern province of Badakhshan in recent days have been largely achieved by the armed group without fighting. “*Unfortunately, most areas have been left without a fight to the Taliban,*” he said. According to him, over the past three days, 10 districts fell at the hands of the Taliban, eight of which - without a fight.

Al-Jazeera also said that Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid confirmed the fall of the areas and said that most of them were taken without a fight. During previous surrenders, the Taliban showed videos of Afghan soldiers taking travel money and returning to their homes.

Let us remind that the Taliban are also seizing the regions bordering with Uzbekistan and the Afghan military several times crossed over to the Uzbek territory. In early July, they also seized the Andkhoy region bordering Turkmenistan in Faryab province, where the dry port of Akin is located, through which Turkmen goods and foodstuffs are imported. As the MENAFN newspaper reports, 13 out of 14 districts of this province came under the control of the Taliban.

On July 7, Sputnik Tajikistan reported in one of its articles that Afghan Foreign Minister Hanif Atmar recently announced that the surrender of regions and provinces to the Taliban is an elaborated plan of the Afghan government to achieve peace with the Taliban.

Commenting on the situation in Afghanistan, journalist Fakhridin Holbek in his article entitled “The surrender of a part of the country to the Taliban is a planned action by the leadership of Afghanistan” writes: “Official Kabul itself, represented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and even the President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, admitted that they are giving away territories on purpose according to some plan. They call the surrender of territories to the Taliban a “tactical retreat” and assure that they will soon return them. “The trouble is this, most of the areas where the Taliban appear surrender without a fight, and this is a question that needs an answer, and when government forces are about to fight back the Taliban fighters, the Ghani government orders them to give up and not resist, and this is “amazing fact” - says the expert.

In turn, Russia is also taking steps to prevent the implementation of US plans to establish military cooperation with the countries of Central Asia. So, on July 7, the TASS news agency reported that Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, following talks with the Laotian Foreign Minister, said the following: “We will do everything, including using the capabilities of the Russian military base on the Tajik-Afghan border, in order to prevent any or aggressive inclinations against our allies”. The minister recalled that Putin held talks with Russian henchmen from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and is in contact with other Central Asian leaders. “The obligations within the framework of the CSTO remain in full force. Representatives of the organization’s secretariat visited the area of the Tajik-Afghan border, assessed the situation and will report to the Permanent Council,” Lavrov said.

According to observers, the withdrawal of American troops in agreement with the Taliban is due to the desire of the United States to strengthen its position in the Central Asian region, and the Taliban’s advance in this direction is not an accident. Experts and analysts see the strengthening of the Taliban in the northern regions, where anti-Taliban forces have traditionally been strong, in the surrender of their positions in the border regions with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan by the Afghan military without a fight, as well as in the transition of hundreds of Afghan military to Tajik and Uzbek territories - a kind pressure on the countries of Central Asia, which clearly demonstrates the intention of the United States to fight for influence in this strategically important region.

This is not the first time that Muslims have become hostages of the struggle between colonial powers for influence in the Islamic world in pursuit of political and economic benefits. Since the time of tsarist Russia, Russia has colonized the Central Asian region and began the economic and cultural expansion of these lands, taking away our material wealth and trying to alienate us from our culture and religion. Even after gaining so-called “independence”, the countries of Central Asia still remain dependent on Russia in many aspects of domestic and foreign policy. The same fate overtook the Afghans, who fell under the yoke of the Anglo-Saxons. For more than a century and a half, Muslims around the world have been suffering from the consequences of the struggle between the colonialists, for whom the highest value is material wealth, and human life does not matter.

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