

Afghanistan and the “Great Chessboard”

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Abstract. The article is devoted to US politics in Eurasia in the context of the US claims to a key role in the world and the desire to independently manage the pieces on the “Great Chessboard”. The article examines US policy in the Middle East and the relationship between the military campaign in Iraq and the situation in Afghanistan. The author concludes that at present the United States concentrated attention on the territories around the Russian Federation, forming a belt of unfriendliness.

Keywords: Eurasia, United States of America, politics, military conflicts

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Introduction

The problem of scientific research is connected with the actual problem of international relations - the contradiction between the installation on a unipolar world order, in which the United States continues to claim sole leadership, and the emerging multipolar world, in which not only new economic centers, but also regional centers of power have acquired a noticeable influence. The relevance of the study is related to the current situation of international relations, military conflicts, when the old world order is trying to maintain the status quo and for this it uses force not only on the periphery of the so-called “golden billion” in South America, Asia and Africa, but also in Europe. The purpose of the study is to show, on the basis of a comprehensive analysis of sources and scientific literature, the futility of the attempts of the “only” superpower through a series

of military conflicts unleashed with the help of its satellites to maintain a unipolar world.

Materials and Methods

The study uses a comparative historical method: through a comparison of a number of military conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, the general and the special are revealed; the conclusions are applicable to the periphery of Europe as well. The scientific problem under study has not been left without attention in recent years. However, Western authors considered it, as a rule, from the standpoint of neo-Atlanticism (Samuel Huntington, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Francis Fukuyama, and others). Domestic researchers (E.M.Primakov, L.I.Medvedko, authors who consider not only political, but also military factors, such as I.M.Popov, M.M.Khamzatov, etc.) studied this problem from the point of view of the objective development of the world community and international relations.

Results

The connection between events in the Near and Middle East and in Europe is obvious. Firstly, in Eurasia, as well as in the world as a whole, the United States is trying to play a key role, assuming sole leadership of the world and trying to independently move the pieces on the “Great Chessboard” [3].

A number of military conflicts took place in the Near and Middle East in the 21st century, and their incitement was not without the direct and indirect participation of the United States. The United States, under the guise of a global struggle against world terrorism, and then the idea of democratization of local regimes put forward by them, first unleashed aggression against Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003), and then (since 2011) took part in attacks on Libya and Syria. But they got bogged down in the realization of their intentions to build their statehood according to the model they proposed: a Western, liberal model alien to the peoples of these countries. Secondly, the United States is not able to complete its undertakings. Or were they not provided for, because chaos, including in the form of armed clashes, is beneficial to them? [2]

Let's start, breaking the chronology, with the events in Iraq, where the first phase of the operation of the Western coalition Freedom to Iraq (March 19 – May 1, 2003) achieved its political goal: it overthrew Saddam Hussein's regime and replaced it with a pro-American administration. However, the long-term second phase of the operation (2003–2010) did not lead to a post-conflict settlement and stabilization of the situation in the country: resistance to the occupying forces unfolded and the position of the puppet “liberal” government did not strengthen, but ethno-confessional contradictions sharply aggravated. As a result, Iraq has become a base of “international terrorism”, influencing neighboring states. The

terrorist threat has increased in other parts of Asia, Africa and Europe after professional jihadists from various countries have been trained in combat and subversion. Is this not proof that the United States does not understand the Muslim East and overestimates its capabilities? [2]

Let's skip the failures of the multinational forces' military operations against the Iraqi resistance, let's move on to the fact that on December 31, 2008, the mandate of the UN Security Council for their activities in the country expired. On November 17, 2008, after a lengthy negotiation, a bilateral US-Iraqi agreement on the presence of a contingent of the US armed forces was signed: it provided for the withdrawal of Americans from Iraqi settlements by July 2009, and their complete withdrawal from the country was scheduled for the end of 2011. Indeed, by the end of August 2010, 90,000 US troops and all military contingents of the multinational force were withdrawn from Iraq. This was a significant step. Recall that the maximum number of US military forces in Iraq reached 170 thousand people¹. Less than 50,000 US troops remained in the country, some of them were supposed to be in Iraq until the end of 2011 [2]

US President Barack Obama on September 1, 2010 announced the completion of Operation Iraqi Freedom. At the same time, Vice President Joe Biden announced the start of the non-combat operation of the US Military Forces "New Dawn" in Iraq and its leader, General Lloyd Austin (the former later became the President of the United States, and the latter became Secretary of Defense in his administration) [2]. As for the foreign policy of President Barack Obama, it was controversial, especially if we compare his campaign promises and real actions in the presidency. If his policy towards Iraq was consistent (he nevertheless, albeit temporarily, withdrew American troops from the country), but this was not the case with Afghanistan. Being a president, he called the war in Afghanistan "necessary" to protect national security, and the war in Iraq "an alternative choice" of the previous administration. In a televised address to the nation, B. Obama admitted: "Thanks to the withdrawal of our troops from Iraq, we will now be able to use the necessary resources to continue the offensive" (in Afghanistan. – M.S.)². This means that in Afghanistan the US military effort (and the number of its troops) has grown at the same time as it has been reduced in Iraq. In the same speech, he said that in August 2011 the United States will begin to transfer responsibility for ensuring security in the country to the Afghans, which will determine the rate of reduction of the American presence³. As you know, neither in 2011 nor ten years later did the situation in Afghanistan stabilize, and American troops remained until their evacuation became more like a flight⁴.

¹ Voroshilov D. Operation Iraqi Freedom is over, Obama said. RIA News. Available from: <http://ria.ru/world/20100901/270934576.html>

² From withdrawal to troop increase in Afghanistan: Why is the US contradicting itself? Zhemini Zhibao online. 2014. December 10. Available from: https://www.1tv.ru/news/2010-09-05/136512-barak_obama_vypolnil_predvybornye_obeschaniya_ssha_vyveli_boevye_chasti_iz_iraka

³ The "Afghan fracture" of the United States. BCS Express. Available from: [https://bcs-express.ru/novosti-i-analitika/afganskiy-izlom-ssha; Baranov E. Barack Obama fulfilled his election promises: the United States withdrew combat troops from Iraq. Pervyj kanal \(The First Channel\).](https://bcs-express.ru/novosti-i-analitika/afganskiy-izlom-ssha; Baranov E. Barack Obama fulfilled his election promises: the United States withdrew combat troops from Iraq. Pervyj kanal (The First Channel).)

⁴ The US President announced the end of hostilities in Iraq. Smotrim. Available from: <https://smotrim.ru/article/2053988>

The very fact of the transfer of American forces from Iraq to Afghanistan shows that American possibilities are not unlimited, and that they are bogged down in many military conflicts and can no longer fight all of them at the same time. The American authorities have an understanding of this. And then B. Obama, who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009, began to strengthen the American presence in Afghanistan by reducing troops in Iraq. This is another proof of the interdependence of US foreign policy actions [2].

Another fact from the history of military conflicts is the crisis around Libya, initiated by European countries, primarily France, as well as the use of military forces to "resolve" it. Revanchist sentiments and longing for the former colonial greatness; prevailed in the political elite of a number of European states. The US has long refrained from actively participating in the conflict, citing the unfinished war in Afghanistan. But when the aggression became a reality, the United States did not see any other alternative but to lead it, especially since they were not satisfied with the possible leading role in this of another NATO country. They still considered themselves the sole world leader, although some European countries were already seeing a weakening of the US position, which encouraged them to play a more active role in their former colonies [2].

Differences in NATO on the management of the military operation prevented the creation of a unified command and control system and the launch of an anti-Libyan campaign according to a single plan. From March 19 to March 31, 2011, different countries planned their actions independently, and therefore operations were carried out by the United States – "Odyssey Dawn", France – "Harmatan", Great Britain – "Ellamy", Canada – "Mobile" and etc. However, even then, the overall leadership of them was intercepted by the African Command of the US Military Forces (AFRICOM), which coordinated its actions with representatives of the anti-Libyan coalition⁵. Only on March 31 did the general military operation Unified Protector begin. It was led by the NATO bloc, in which the Americans occupy a leading position. This suited the US. If not for the circumstances, the United States would have tried to avoid its military participation in the Libyan events, as they did not want and were not able at that moment to disperse their forces into several military conflicts at the same time. Here is another fact to consider [2].

At the same time, the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan did not develop as it was planned by the United States, and in Libya they did not manage the events as they wanted, but followed them. As in Afghanistan and Iraq, although the political goal of the operation was achieved (the overthrow of the regime of M.Gaddafi), the country remained in a state of permanent war, and the participants of the invasion did not receive the expected all political dividends [2].

The US failed (or they wanted that?) to achieve stability in Iraq either. In 2013, the situation in the country worsened again. This was due to the transition of the organization "Islamic State* of Iraq" (later "Islamic State* of Iraq and the Levant" – ISIS*, and then simply

⁵ About the international military operation in Libya (some features of the fighting). Middle East Institute. Available from: <http://www.iimes.ru/rus/stat/2011/28-03-11.htm>.

"Islamic State")⁶ from terror to offensive actions in order to establish control over the territory of the country. This required the direct involvement of the US military. From August 2014, they were forced to start using aviation in Iraq, and then proceed to form a coalition to fight against this organization. The military operation of the coalition was called "Inherent Resolve". By the end of 2017, the positions of the Islamic State* in Iraq were undermined. However, the organization itself and its militias continued to enjoy the support of part of the local population, especially in the so-called Sunni Triangle [2]. Iraqi Prime Minister H. al-Abadi on December 9, 2017 announced the end of hostilities against the Islamic State* in the country. However, the head of the press service of the US State Department, Heather Nauert, noted that "... this does not mean that the fight against terrorism is over"⁷ The United States and the anti-terrorism coalition it created continued to provide assistance to the Iraqi military and security forces. Was that not their purpose? After all, the lobbied companies of the US military-industrial complex continued to grow rich on the ongoing hostilities.

In early February 2018, the first reports appeared about the reduction in the number of US troops in Iraq and their transfer to Afghanistan. On February 26, 2018, US Army Colonel Ryan Dillon, spokesman for the Joint Tactical Forces for "Inherent Resolve", stated that "... ISIS* continues to pose a threat... the coalition will continue to provide intelligence and advisory services to the Iraqis, as well as provide training and equipment to overcome these challenges..."⁸ Who would doubt it?

What is Afghanistan? US President B. Obama, as already noted, changed his position on Iraq and Afghanistan. Back in February 2009, he sent 17,000 troops to Afghanistan. On July 4, 2010, the leadership of the International Security Forces (ISAF) was transferred to American General David Petraeus. His appointment from the post of commander of the United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) was associated with the importance of achieving success in the war in Afghanistan. We recall that before he distinguished himself in the fight against the insurgency in Iraq. And at the NATO summit in Lisbon (Portugal) in November 2010, in the approved strategic concept for the next 10 years, one of the Alliance's key priorities was the mission in Afghanistan. The transfer of security responsibilities in the country to the Afghan security forces was to be completed before the end of 2014⁹. Therefore, in addition to participating in combat operations, NATO's efforts were focused on training Afghan recruits, which was practically not carried out before [2].

But despite the gradual transfer of responsibility for security to the Afghan security forces, the number of foreign troops in the country grew. In 2010, there were more than 105

6 *The organization has been recognized a terrorist organization by the Russian Supreme Court. Unified federal list of organizations, including foreign and international organizations, recognized as terrorist in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation (as of June 25, 2023). Available from: <http://www.fsb.ru/fsb/npd/terror.htm>. (accessed: 25.06.2023);18+

7 Iraq declares victory over ISIS*. Euronews. Available from: <http://ru.euronews.com/2017/12/09/iraq-announces-victory-over-islamic-state>.

8 Colonel Ryan Dillon. Joint Operational and Tactical Group for the implementation of Operation Inherent Resolve. US Department of State. Available from: <http://ru.euronews.com/2017/12/09/iraq-announces-victory-over-islamic-state>

9 Declaration of the Lisbon NATO Summit. Russian Legal Portal: Pashkov Library. Available from: <https://constitutions.ru/?p=4446>

thousand of them. In March 2011, the number of American military personnel increased to 90 thousand people (plus 16 thousand American military personnel under the command of the International Security Assistance Force), British - up to 9.5 thousand, German - up to more than 4.9 thousand people¹⁰. But the announced completion of the mission of the International Security Assistance Force assumed their reduction, and by September 30, 2013, foreign forces were brought to 65,522 people (39,253 Americans and 26,269 military personnel from other countries)¹¹.

The ceremony dedicated to the completion of the activities of the International Security Assistance Force took place on December 28, 2014 at the headquarters of the coalition forces in Kabul. Initiated by the United States in 2001, Operation Enduring Freedom, which had no time or geographical limits, continued in Afghanistan under the name Freedom's Sentinel. At the same time, the commander of the International Security Assistance Force, US General John Campbell, raised the flag of the new Resolute Support training mission. Both operations required the participation of foreign military contingents, which was enshrined on September 30, 2014 in Kabul; Agreement on cooperation in the fields of security and defense between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan" and "Status of Forces Agreement – SOFA"¹².

The mandate of the Support training mission "Resolute Support Mission" of 12.5 thousand people (10.8 thousand Americans) was originally designed for 2015-2016. Its employees were forbidden to take part in hostilities, but these restrictions did not apply to coalition forces involved in Operation Freedom's Sentinel. The support training mission was repeatedly extended, which, together with the complete dependence of the Afghan security forces on external funding, guaranteed the permanent presence, and hence the influence of the United States, in the "heart of Asia." In 2017, this was confirmed by the Secretary of Defense of the new US administration, James Mattis, stating that a long-term US presence in Afghanistan would be required¹³. President Donald Trump's strategy, unveiled on August 21, 2017, again relied on military force and did not stipulate a time frame for resolving the Afghan problem. Judging by press reports, it included sending about 4,000 people to Afghanistan in addition to the 11,000 troops already there, as well as the widespread use of private military companies in order to hide from the public the real number of foreign troops¹⁴.

In 2018, direct negotiations between the United States and the Islamic «Taliban»*

10 ISAF – Troop numbers and contributions. NATO/ISAF contributions by country. March 2011. ISAF. Available from: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/troop-numbers-and-contributions/index.php>.

11 Plekhanov I. Military news: Afghan Arithmetic. InoSMI. Available from: <http://www.inosmi.ru/overview/20131112/214697842.html>

12 Agreement between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on the Status of NATO Forces and NATO personnel conducting mutually agreed NATO-led activities in Afghanistan. NATO-OTAN. Available from: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_116072.htm?selectedLocale=en

13 The Pentagon is deciding whether to increase the presence of its troops in Afghanistan. Afghanistan.Ru. Available from: <http://afghanistan.ru/doc/111139.html>

14 Volkov V. Trump's New Afghan strategy: what is expected in Central Asia. DW. Available from: www.dw.com/ru/новая-афганская-стратегия-трампа-чего-ждут-в.../a-40417009

Movement began¹⁵. The futility of continuing the fight against "international" terrorism on Afghan soil, the impossibility of achieving any "victory" here by force led to significant concessions to the «Taliban»*. In Doha (Qatar) on February 29, 2020, the parties signed an "Agreement on Peace in Afghanistan" with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, which the United States does not recognize as a state and is known as the «Taliban»* movement. It allowed the Americans to declare their own victory, and the «Taliban»* to continue the fight against the government forces of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. When US President Joe Biden declared on April 14, 2021: "It's time to end America's longest war, it's time to bring our military home"¹⁶, – the initiative in the conduct of the war has completely passed to the «Taliban»* [2].

On August 15, 2021, the «Taliban»* entered Kabul without a fight. The security forces of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan did not resist them either in the capital or in the provinces. They fled or surrendered. And these are the forces (army, police and special services) that have been generously supplied and armed by the United States and its allies for 20 years. Their number was more than 300 thousand people, the necessary military infrastructure was created and weapons worth billions of dollars were delivered. As a result, all this went to the «Taliban»*. Government officials led by a puppet "president" and members of parliament fled to neighboring countries. This was the end of the West's efforts to "democratize" Afghanistan. The radical «Taliban»*, which was overthrown in 2001 and was the main opponent of the collective West for the next 20 years, re-came to power in Afghanistan [2].

What have the United States and its allies been fighting for two decades? Or did they foresee that new "worries" were waiting for them in another part of the Great Chessboard? Let's not exaggerate the predictive abilities of Western political theorists. But the US claims to lead the world have remained, their efforts to create so-called "controlled chaos" are seen by all unbiased observers. Obviously, it is impossible for the United States to get involved in several military conflicts at the same time. This indicates their progressive weakness, since the preliminary withdrawal of troops from one place precedes their buildup in another, focusing efforts on the most important direction [2].

Is this the reason for the hasty withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan? After all, events were ripening in Europe. The former Soviet Baltic republics pursued a Russophobic policy: despite their economic and military weakness, they pinned their hopes on NATO and followed the US-imposed course of aggravating relations with Russia. The same can be said about Poland, where revanchist sentiments and longing for the former greatness of the Commonwealth have never faded. In Ukraine, the brainwashing of the population that grew up after the collapse of the USSR reached the point where it accepted Nazi ideas on faith and in 2014 carried out a coup d'état. With the help of the United States and NATO, the country's military forces have strengthened to such an extent that, as the Ukrainian leaders believed and their foreign curators were convinced, this made it possible to begin the "liberation"

¹⁵ *The organization has been recognized a terrorist organization by the Russian Supreme Court. Unified federal list of organizations, including foreign and international organizations, recognized as terrorist in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation (as of June 25, 2023). Available from: <http://www.fsb.ru/fsb/npd/terror.htm>. (accessed: 25.06.2023);18+

¹⁶ Biden announced the beginning of the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan on May 1. Interfax. Available from: <https://www.interfax.ru/world/761296>

of the territories in the Crimea and Donbass, promising huge profits for the military-industrial complex and peacekeepers' dividends for politicians, more precisely lobbying their interests in the authorities. And the events in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria have shown that the United States is ready to benefit only by proxy, sharing responsibility with allies that are part of the coalitions they have created, and shifting the responsibility for conducting hostilities to local forces [2].

This is a convenient position, but understandable from the point of view of military science: when in reality there is a so-called "cloud enemy", but it does not seem to exist, and its structural elements are outside the combat areas (3:656). There are only "disposable militants" here, in our case representing the "armed forces of Ukraine" and mercenaries from different countries, and the true customers, the United States, NATO and the European Union, make them puppets and arm them, playing by their own rules, appealing from time to time to international the rules and principles of the United Nations. Hence the war is to the last Ukrainian, because this people is not a pity, but you need to take care of your own military personnel, because their own voters may be outraged. The most "bloodless war" for the West is quite acceptable and has already been tested in the Muslim East, where the local military and civilians suffered dozens of human lives, that is, hundreds of times more than foreign "peacekeepers".

Overseas sponsors pay for the war in Ukraine, so-called civilized Europe also pays, but the money is taken from the budgets, where they come from taxpayers. These funds are returned a hundredfold, but exclusively into the pockets of arms manufacturers, and the population, that is, taxpayers and voters, is impoverished. How long will this continue? Judging by the experience of Afghanistan, for a long time, because the military-industrial complex will be loaded for many years, and a powerful propaganda machine has already been launched for ordinary citizens, justifying spending with the slogans of "struggle for democracy" and achieving the freedom of an "oppressed nation". The information struggle has reached an unprecedented intensity; it is dominated by Western media that hush up the real state of affairs. Other media trying to convey the truth are simply closed and not allowed into the information space. That's the freedom of speech!

From the point of view of military art, forbidden methods of war, mockery of prisoners, shelling of civilians, their use as a "human shield", etc., previously used only by extremists, have long been adopted by Ukraine. And the point here is not the asymmetry of hostilities, because Ukrainian politicians and the media are constantly talking about their strength and rightness. It's all about the Nazi ideology, which cannot be hidden, since the ideological nationalists and accomplices of the German occupiers Stepan Bandera, Roman Shukhevych and others have long been glorified.

Conclusions

After the defeat in Afghanistan and the hasty withdrawal of troops from this country, the United States switched to another part of the Grand Chessboard, closer to Russia, against which their policy has always been directed in the East, and in Europe, and

around the world. They formed an ally in the face of Ukraine, the leadership and part of the population of which professes the Nazi ideology. But the United States does not notice this, because their real policy is directed against Russia, according to the United States, followed by European countries, this is the main enemy of the so-called civilized world. But all empires will eventually fall [2]. Even one of the main American Russophobes and at the same time politicians, recognizing this, noted that "... America's global superiority directly depends on how long and effectively its superiority on the Eurasian continent will be maintained" [1:43]. And in Eurasia, in addition to American "pawns" among the EU countries and Ukraine, which joined it, there are also "queens", Russia and China [4].

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Contribution of the author

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