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FOREIGN POLICY OF GEORGE W. BUSH IN AFGHANISTAN

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Abstract: The article explores the strategic issues arising from the U.S. involvement in the conflict in Afghanistan. The role of the U.S. President George W. Bush in this conflict is assessed. Special attention is paid to the extent to which the strategic tasks set by the President were achieved as a result of military operations in Afghanistan.

Introduction

The military campaign that the United States launched in Afghanistan shortly after the September 11, 2001 attacks turned out to be the longest in American history. For nearly two decades, Washington tried to maintain the strategic initiative with its allied forces and strove to contain destabilizing tendencies in order to prevent the conflict from escalating beyond the borders of the Afghanistan-Pakistan (AfPak) zone. In the sixteenth year of the war, the United States headed by Donald Trump obviously decided to repeat cycle, declaring its intention to increase its military contingent by approximately one and a half times, i.e. to add to the 8400 military personnel (as of 2017) another 4000 people [1].

However, the duration of the U.S. involvement in the armed confrontation in Afghanistan did not bring its successful end. On the contrary, the struggle against the anti-government forces took on a protracted character. The loss by the Afghan government of control over almost half of the country's territory and the emergence of new anti-government formations significantly complicate the process of both military and diplomatic resolution of the conflict. Then it was already clear that the allied forces would lose and, in the end, U.S. would have to leave Afghanistan. But what did the United States to get out of the conflict with the maximum gain?

Main part

In its actions in Afghanistan, Washington has never been guided by a long-term approach that would be consistently implemented in practice over a long period of time. On the contrary, American interests in this country have traditionally played a subordinate role in relation to other regional or global plans of the United States, and relations with Kabul outside the agenda of ensuring their own security were not of significant importance for the United States. In American policy towards Afghanistan during the armed conflict of the beginning of the XXI century it is possible to identify at least three phases of changing priorities, which were formulated and implemented in practice by the three presidential administrations.

For the first time in the period under review, a relatively comprehensive vision of U.S. policy on Afghanistan was formed after the tragic events of September 11, 2001. The fact that some of the terrorists took refuge in Afghanistan controlled by the Taliban prompted the U.S. authorities to launch a military invasion without a long preliminary development of an appropriate strategy. A key factor in the further

development of the conflict was the decision of the White House to focus on a narrow range of security issues [2].

At first, the United States was not going to take on the burden of reconstructing Afghanistan and thoroughly engage in the creation of state institutions. The administration of George Walker Bush has followed this approach since the 2000 presidential election; by the beginning of the military intervention, this position was manifested in the statements of officials [3]. In the first months of the operation, the White House worked exclusively to bring down the Taliban regime, focusing on a few specific tasks: the destruction of al-Qaeda, the overthrow the Taliban, as well as the reconstruction of some basic infrastructure, hospitals and humanitarian assistance.

In the first months of the war Bush's administration decided that, the main initiator of the settlement within the framework of the Bonn peace process would be the UN. In the process of developing the Bonn Agreements at the end of 2001, it was revealed that there was a conflict of interests between the actors: on the one hand, the UN, which defended the tasks of democratizing Afghanistan, and on the other hand, the United States, which identified the fight against terrorism as the main task. In late 2001 - early 2002, in order to strengthen control over the territory of the country, the United States and its allies supported field commanders and various rebel groups of the united anti-Taliban front [4]. However, after the overthrow of the Taliban regime, Washington set as its goal the gradual transfer of responsibility for ensuring security to the government of Afghanistan [5]. This determined the U.S. interest in forming a loyal and effective government in Kabul and in stimulating the rapid building of state institutions. Therefore, within the framework of the Bonn process, the White House sought to rely not on creating a coalition of local forces and developing a consensus between various ethnic and tribal groups, but on placing representatives of the Northern Alliance, Hamid Karzai's people and loyal field commanders at the head of the government [6].

During the first year of its military campaign, the U.S. showed little interest in the long-term reconstruction of Afghanistan. During this period, more than 75% of non-military assistance to Kabul was allocated to humanitarian purposes and only 20% to long-term reconstruction projects (in the second case, U.S. assistance accounted for only 10% of total spending) [7]. Moreover, for a long time the administration did not release any clearly articulated comprehensive agenda for the political, economic and social reconstruction of the country.

A long-term peace settlement in Afghanistan has become much more difficult due to the chronic lack of the necessary resources. The outbreak of the war in Iraq in March 2003, the imminent U.S. presidential elections in 2004, and, as a result, the low level of funding for projects in Afghanistan began to have a stronger effect on the formation and effectiveness of the work of Afghan state institutions. The small scale of some attempts to develop political pluralism, an independent judiciary, free media, as well as the potential of regional and local authorities and other institutions was not enough to reduce the intensity of the armed confrontation.

The Kabul government began to quickly lose its position in the regions (by November 2007, the authorities no longer controlled 54% of the country's territory, and by the end of 2008 this share had increased to 72%) [8]; number of casualties among American military personnel, as well as the number of terrorist attacks, began to rise sharply. The United States was forced to quickly change the course of its policy towards greater involvement in solving the Afghan problem, which was also manifested in an increase in the number of military personnel in the country from 23,800 people in mid-2007 to 325,000 at the end of 2008, and in growing aid to Afghanistan (2006-2009).



**Figure 1. U.S. Foreign Aid to Afghanistan (2006-2009)
 (U.S. dollars (current) millions) [9]**

The expansion of U.S. participation in the war in Afghanistan by the end of the term of George W. Bush's presidency found its conceptual expression already under the Obama administration, which formulated the second strategic approach to determining the format of the American presence in the country. Against the background of the record unpopularity of the foreign war policy, the key was the transition from the idea of a long-term preservation of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan ("open-ended strategy") to the exit strategy ("exit strategy"). Such a transition, in turn, meant a reorientation from the "freedom agenda" to security interests.

Conclusion

The complex evolution of the U.S. strategy towards Afghanistan is connected both with the transformation of Washington's own priorities outside the AfPak zone and with serious changes in the situation in the region. The main goal of any strategy is to achieve political goals. This has only been achieved to a small extent, as the war in Afghanistan has only fueled more terrorist shelters. Thus, Bush failed to eradicate terrorism in the region. His strategy only contributed to the spread of extremist

groups in the region and the radicalization of the Taliban. The only achievement of the United States can be considered the establishment of control over drug production and drug trafficking, which helped America to take root in the region, unable to solve any strategic problems.

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