

THE COLLISION OF THE INTERESTS OF RUSSIA AND THE USA IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Abstract

This article analyzes the foreign policy of Russia and the United States in the Middle East region. The paper identifies the main interests of the two world powers in this region, as well as the historical background of their formation. In addition, the author makes the analysis of the both conceptual foundations of the foreign policy of Russia and the United States in the Middle East, and the impact of the implementation of foreign policy strategies in the region on Russian-American relations and world politics as a whole.

Based on the analysis of the foreign policy concepts, the author comes to the conclusion that besides the geopolitical reasons for the collision of the interests between Russia and the United States, there is the difference in attitudes of the two states to the existing system of the international relations and the international law, which leads to the permanent complications in the bilateral relations not only in the Middle East, but also in other regions.

Key words: Russia, USA, Middle East, security, foreign policy, concept.

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Since the second half of the XX century the USA and the USSR have begun to compete practically in all regions, trying to include into the sphere of influence as much states as possible. One of these areas of competition was the Middle East region, which is crucial for the implementation of foreign policy strategies of global powers. The Middle East is located at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa, at the intersection of transport routes with the most important communications. In this regard, the control provides access and influence in adjacent regions: in the southern Mediterranean, Central Asia, South-East Asia, the Middle and the Far East, as well as in Europe, which is dependent on the supply of energy from this region.

In addition, the Middle East is of great strategic importance due to the concentration in this region of almost half of

all world oil and gas reserves, as well as the availability of accessible routes for their transportation, through the Strait of Hormuz, the Suez Canal and the Babel-Mandeb Strait [15. — P. 121–148]. The presence of a huge amount of resources makes this region even more attractive to modern global actors. The states controlling the extraction and sale of these resources will have a serious influence in the regions that are dependent on the supply of oil and gas and, accordingly, will be able to strengthen their global positions. In addition, given the conflict potential of the Middle East, it is also an attractive market for arms manufacturers. However, conflicts also make this region a source of constant challenges and threats in the form of international terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the export of radical ideas and movements that can

undermine the security of even global powers.

Nowadays, a large number of domestic and foreign scientific publications are devoted to the problems of interaction between Russia and the United States in various regions. At the same time, there is no comprehensive analysis of the reasons for the formation of regional interests and their relationship with the global goals of the two major world powers. In this regard, the purpose of this article is to identify the main interests of Russia and the United States in the Middle East, by analyzing the historical background of their formation, the conceptual framework, and also to identify the connection of these interests with the current regional and global goals of the two countries.

Historical background

Even during the Second World War, the US has already clearly defined for itself the geopolitical and energy importance of the Middle East. At the same time, the US leadership was confident that the main threat to their interests in the region comes from the USSR. As a result, immediately after the war, the Middle East region became a zone of conflict of interests between the Soviet Union and the United States. Thus, the modern interests of Russia and the United States in the Middle East began to take shape in the conditions of the Cold War and global competition.

The conceptual interests of the United States were recorded in the Eisenhower Doctrine of 1957. The foreign policy doctrine of the United States in the Middle East, in the preparation of which participated the US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, was first written in the President's Special Message to the Congress of Dwight David Eisenhower in early 1957, and received legislative enactment in the spring of the same year. The aim of the Eisenhower Doctrine was to strengthen American positions in the Middle East

and to establish control over the energy resources of the region¹. In accordance with it, the US President had the right to provide military assistance to the Middle East states and to use armed forces in the region². In addition, the Doctrine allowed to provide full support to Israel to ensure its security, as well as to support the opposition movements in the Arab States, in order to strengthen the influence of the United States [13. — P. 38–47].

In its turn, the Soviet Union aspired to strengthen the influence in the region. It should be noted that the policy of the USSR in this direction was successful, it was possible to establish allied relations with many large states of the region, in particular, with Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Libya and the now-defunct People's Democratic Republic of Yemen³. The closest relations were built with Syria and Egypt. However, after 1970, President Anwar Sadat came to power in Egypt, and focused more on the United States, so Russian relations with the country have deteriorated, and the importance of Syria as the main geopolitical stronghold has increased many times. In 1971, Syria was headed by pro-Soviet President Hafez al-Assad⁴, who was in power until 2000. Thus, Soviet-Syrian, and then Russian-Syrian relations have historically been at a high level.

¹ The first official use of the term Middle East by the US government appeared in the Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957. The Secretary of the State John Foster Dulles determined the term as "the area lying between and including Libya in the West and Pakistan in the East, Syria and Iran in the North and the Arabian Peninsula in the South, as well as Sudan and Ethiopia". In 1958 the US State Department explained that the terms "Near East" and "Middle East" are used interchangeably and defined the region as including only Egypt, Syria, Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar.

² The region in this article refers to the Middle East.

³ The state existed from 1967 to 1990 and merged with the Yemen Arab Republic and formed the Republic of Yemen in May 1990.

⁴ The father of the current Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Russian interests in the Middle East

The demise of the Soviet Union has seriously weakened Russia's influence in the Middle East. Having a large number of internal problems, as well as issues related to the vital post-Soviet space, it was increasingly difficult for Russia to leave its interests in this direction, of which, of course, the United States and its allies took advantage. However, since the beginning of the new millennium, having recovered from the "geopolitical catastrophe"¹, Russia began to pursue a more active foreign policy beyond the near abroad. Moscow's involvement in the processes taking place in the Middle East has increased significantly with the beginning of the "Arab spring", especially after the collapse of Libya and the beginning of the civil war in Syria. However, the growing threat of terrorism associated with the inability of regional and Western countries to cope with the "Islamic state" together with the threat of the collapse of Syria, which also officially appealed to Russia for military assistance, were the main reasons for the beginning of the Russian military operation in Syria and for general political activity in the region.

Russia's current foreign policy in the Middle East has a solid conceptual basis. Thus, according to the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation of November 30, 2016, the objectives of Russia in the region are stabilization of the situation, neutralization of terrorist threats and political and diplomatic settlement of conflicts, based on respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and the right to determine their own destiny without external interference [1]. So, the conceptual interests of Russia in the Middle East are the elimination of terrorism in the region, which is an immediate threat to the internal stability of Russia and the preservation of the post-

war structure of the world and the role of international law, which is, the prevention of the regime change policy and of the intervention without the consent of the UN Security Council or the request of the official authorities of the states.

In addition to the conceptual interests, Russia has a number of interests in the Middle East that can be divided into military-political and economic-energy interests. From the point of view of military and political interests, Russia naturally seeks to maintain friendly relations with all the states of the region and in the future to build long-term alliances with them, not excluding the military presence in some of them, in particular, in Syria. The military and political interests also include Russia's desire to increase its role as a global power who is able to defend its interests far beyond the post-Soviet space.

Russia's economic interests in the Middle East are related to the sale of weapons and food, investments of the economically developed states of the region and to energy. The states of the Middle East occupy an important place among buyers of the products of the Russian military-industrial complex, the interest towards which has increased many times in connection with the testing of Russian weapons during the military operation in Syria. In addition to weapons, Russia also seeks to increase food sales, in particular grain, currently the main buyer in the region is Egypt. Attracting investment is directly related to the establishment of pragmatic relations with the Gulf region monarchies, which have great financial opportunities.

In the energy matters, Russia is interested both in raising energy prices by reaching appropriate agreements to reduce production with major oil exporters in the Middle East, and in the broad participation of Russian companies in the extraction and export of oil and gas resources in the region. Nuclear power also plays an important role. As a world leader in the number of simultaneously constructed nuclear power plants abroad and having the appropriate agreements for

¹ In 2005 in the message to the Federal Assembly, Vladimir Putin described the collapse of the USSR as the largest geopolitical catastrophe of the last century

the construction of nuclear power plants in Turkey, Egypt and Jordan, Russia seeks not only to implement them, but also to provide Rosatom with new orders [12].

The US interests in the Middle East

The conceptual basis of the United States foreign policy strategy are such documents as National Security Strategy, Address to the Nation and the annual State of the Union Address. At the same time, the main thing in the foreign policy strategy of the United States is to ensure national security, which is associated with almost all the US actions in the international arena [10]. That is why some overseas regions are declared as the sphere of "vital interests of the United States". The Middle East is also important from the point of view of ensuring the security of the key US ally in the region — Israel.

It is worth noting that one of the most important aspects in ensuring the national security of the United States is energy security, which makes the Middle East and the Caspian sea region even more important. At the same time, the Middle East is important not only and not so much for the energy resources of the United States itself, but also in the context of the dependence of many European countries, of Japan (the main US military allies) on the oil supplies from this territory.

Thus, the Middle East continued to be one of the most strategically important regions for the United States after the demise of the USSR. At the same time, if earlier the US leadership noted that the main threat to their interests is the danger of falling into the region from the sphere of Soviet influence, then it was replaced by the designation of such threats as Islamic fundamentalism and the oppositional to the American interests regimes. At the same time, becoming the only world hegemon after the disappearance of the Soviet Union, the United States began to openly pursue its main global goal, which was to establish a new world order. This goal was directly reflected in politics in

the Middle East, where the US aspired to establish its autocratic control.

On 11 September 1990, US President George Herbert Walker Bush in his State of the Union Address said that a new world order may arise in the conditions of the crisis in the Gulf states [3]. Immediately after that, US Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz were assigned to develop a conceptual framework for this goal and to determine the political and military implications of its implementation. As a result, the Defense Planning Guidance was prepared, where the principles of American hegemony were first recorded [2]. This document formed the basis of the National Security Strategy of the Bush (Junior) administration in 2002. In general, the essence of the new world order is to reorganize the systems of international relations and of the world economy to establish the control of the United States over the international development.

The additional motivation for the implementation of US foreign policy in the Middle East was the experience of September 11, 2001. So, on September 21, speaking to the Congresses after the tragic events, J. Bush Jr. outlined the existence of a new threat in the form of international terrorism, and the world as a whole divided into those who will fight against terrorism and those who support them or remain neutral, that is, on the principle of "who is not with us, is against us" [7]. Already 29 January 2002 in his annual address to the Congress, US President said that Iraq, Iran and North Korea are the "axis of evil" and that the US will conduct a preemptive struggle against these states, adding: "I will not stand by as peril draws closer and closer. The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons". [6]

So, by the end of 2002, shortly before the invasion of Iraq, the new American doctrine was finally developed and officially approved in the form of the US

National Security Strategy [5] and the National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction [4]. This doctrine, often referred to as the Bush Doctrine, is based on the idea of pre-emptive war and pre-emption. The pre-emption implies a pre-emptive strike against both the potential threat to US security and all factors related to it, including the leadership of the states. Thus, the pre-emption is also oriented towards regime change [11].

Afterwards, the Bush Doctrine was supplemented by the geopolitical concepts of the "Greater Middle East" of 2003 and the "Greater Central Asia" of 2005, which meant the traditional Middle East together with Western Asia, the South Caucasus and Central Asia. According to this concept, the states from the "Greater Middle East" should be in economic and political dependence on the United States. The United States attached particular importance to the control over the raw materials of these countries, to ensure the diversification of energy supplies, and, accordingly, the energy security of the allies of their main allies. And the concept of the "Greater Central Asia" is the part of the "Greater Middle East". Within the framework of this concept, serious geopolitical changes are planned in the post-Soviet countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia [8. — P. 15–28].

Current the US interests in the Middle East have inherited much from the Bush Doctrine and the concept of the "Greater Middle East". Thus, in addition to the global goal of dominance, the US interests in the middle East also include:

- ensuring the security of its allies in the region, of some countries of the Persian Gulf and Israel's main ally, which is provided with serious military assistance to ensure its military superiority over the Arab countries, as well as the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the interests of the latter;
- ensuring uninterrupted supply of energy resources to its European allies and Japan, as well as control of oil prices with the help of Saudi Arabia. Despite a

decrease in US dependence on Middle Eastern oil, the United States continues to seek to control energy sources flows, which remain vital to the global economy [14];

- the fight against terrorism and nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), which in principle is the main justification for the US military presence in the region;
- "regime change" in states where the elites in power are not Pro-American and the intensification of democratic reforms in allied countries (in particular, in Saudi Arabia);
- the ousting of Russia from the "Greater Middle East", the spread of the US influence on the states of this territory to isolate Russia and to create a buffer zone between the "Greater Middle East" and China.

Clash of Interests

The contradictions between Russia and the United States in the Middle East entered into an active phase after the "Arab spring" and intensified even more because of the civil war in Syria. Russia perceived the events of the "Arab spring" as an illegal overthrow of the current government, and the United States, on the contrary, as the spread of democracy and the Western model of building society and state. In this regard, official Moscow opposed the fall of the Hosni Mubarak and Muammar Gaddafi regimes, which in the first case led to the Islamists coming to power in Egypt, and in the second, destroyed Libya, while the United States supported the protest movements. Given the remoteness of the region from the United States, Washington does not see a threat in the destabilization of the Middle East, and uses chaos to increase its influence. For Russia, on the contrary, destabilization of the region and the fall of the states means the presence of permanent threats in the form of terrorism. In connection with these already in the Syrian issue, Moscow has moved from a political reaction to concrete actions

to preserve Syria and conduct the fight against terrorists on its territory.

Moreover, to stabilize the situation in the Middle East, Moscow seeks to resolve the Syrian conflict solely in a diplomatic way, not allowing external interference. To achieve this goal, Russia had to repeatedly use the veto power in the UN Security Council and take control of the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons in order to deprive the United States and its allies of a pretext for intervention. The successful Russian military operation in Syria, along with diplomatic efforts, in particular the convening of international conferences, including representatives of the moderate Syrian opposition, led to the achievement of relative peace in Syria. Despite this, the US has linked the final resolution of the conflict with the departure of President Bashar al-Assad, thus, without departing from its policy of regime change. To achieve its goal, the United States supports the Syrian armed opposition, considering the Middle East as a sphere of its national interests, while Russia supports the Syrian government, at the same time turning this state into its outpost in the region.

The collision of Russian-American interests also occurs in economic issues, including energy. Thus, the United States is trying to reduce energy prices through cooperation with the monarchies of the Persian Gulf, while Russia is interested in stably high oil prices. In addition, there is competition in the sale of weapons to the states of the region. The US response to the sale of Russian anti-aircraft missile systems S-400 to Turkey is a clear confirmation of this.

Conclusion

Clashes of interests of Russia and the United States in the Middle East have deep historical roots. At the same time, the contradictions in the region significantly increased with the onset of the "Arab Spring". This is due both to the need to respond to new challenges and threats

emanating from an unstable Middle Eastern region, and to the fact that after recovering from the collapse of the USSR, Russia began to more actively defend its interests outside the post-Soviet space. The United States, in turn, maintained its influence in the region, precisely due to destabilization and chaos.

In this regard, the revitalization of Russia in the Middle East was directly linked to the actions of the United States, which led to the emergence of an "Islamic state" and, accordingly, the threat of terrorism for Russia [9. P. — 38–44]. Thus, at present, the US needs to control the region, first of all, to restrain the growing power of China and Russia. In these circumstances, the implementation of Russia's foreign policy strategy in the Middle East, which, in addition to achieving stability, is also aimed at increasing its role and importance both in the region and in the world, poses a threat to the global ambitions and interests of the United States. Especially strong damage to the US positions in the region was caused by the Russian military operation in Syria, which was one of the main reasons for the deterioration of Russian-American relations. In addition, we can assume with certainty that, in general, the collision of interests between Russia and the United States is primarily related to how these two global powers integrate into the existing system of international relations and international law. Russia is interested in preserving the post-war structure of the world and in observing the norms of international law. In this regard, Moscow is opposed to the regime change through external intervention without the consent of the UN Security Council or the request of the official authorities of the states, and the events taking place in the Arab countries consider them an internal matter. On the contrary, the United States conducts the regime change in unfriendly states, conducts military operations and illegally invades the territory of states, seeking to establish control over regional and international development.

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