

The Clintons and the Bushs - Political Twins

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Recently, a recognizable tendency re-emerged within a part of the Russian political establishment: the US Democrats paving their way to power with the corpses of the US soldiers killed in Iraq are viewed with the same kind of hope as B. Clinton - «our friend Bill» - was viewed by Russian liberals with rather murky credentials in the 1990ies. Seeking exposure, folks from the political and business circles frequent Washington.

They seem to be full of good intentions as they try to make contact with the «reasonable» people likely to be in the future Democratic Administration. **However, the problem is that, if you look at things closely, the concentration of the «reasonable» among the Dems is not higher than in the ranks of the Republicans. And even those who can be found are a lot more hawkish than Bush, Cheney, and Co.**

This is particularly clear when it comes to world affairs. While disapproving of G. Bush's military escapade in Iraq, they are eager to make even more trouble. **A notable example of the kind is the charismatic Barack Obama's idea of shifting the priorities of the war on terrorism from Afghanistan to Pakistan and bombing entire regions of the country (which has been a nuclear power since 1998).**

In the meantime, Senator Hillary Clinton suddenly got preoccupied with the Kosovo problem. She suggests finalizing the job started by her rather promiscuous husband in 1999, when, acting without a UN mandate, NATO attacked Yugoslavia and practically deprived Belgrade of any control over Kosovo. Now, H. Clinton proposes to perpetuate the result of the aggression and to recognize the independence of Kosovo: "In the event of Priština declaring independence, I will firmly urge the U.S. to recognize that country and I call on the EU to do likewise". Commenting on the negotiations on the issue within the US-EU-Russia Troika, she said: "Bearing in mind that Russia is threatening to use its veto for any proposal brought before the Security Council, we must be ready to resolutely support the will of the vast majority of Kosovo people".

It is no secret that the current US Administration also supports Kosovo's bid for independence. **Nevertheless, neither Secretary of State C. Rice nor US President G. Bush (even during his visit to Albania) ever expressed the view that the unilaterally declared independence must be recognized with such «readiness».**

Moreover, there is information that it is the US Department of State that is currently trying, via unofficial channels, to convince Albanians to refrain from declaring independence immediately. This must be the reason why the event has been postponed in Priština a number of times. Whereas just a couple of months ago Kosovo PM Agim Çeku indicated that

the independence would be declared on November 28 (the Albanian Flag Day), later Hashim Thaçi, the leader of the Democratic Party which won the November 17 elections in Kosovo, shifted the date to mid-December. Now Agim Çeku says that the declaration is due early next year, no later than by March. According to the Kosovo Albanian media, no independence declaration should be expected at least till the end of February or early March. For sure, the tendency is explained by Washington's pressure. It seems that the US is beginning to worry about taking the responsibility for Priština's steps that are likely to trigger another Balkan war, and intends to somehow shift the burden to the EU. Hence the impatience of Mrs. Clinton who has sensed the ongoing change of philosophy in Washington.

Perhaps the criticisms directed by Democrats at the US campaign in Iraq should not be taken too seriously either. These days, quite a few of the Dems call it a mistake, but they are the same people, including Senator H. Clinton, who voted for authorizing G. Bush to launch the attack at his discretion. What the Democrats charge the Republicans with is not the aggression against a sovereign Arab country, but only their failure to provide the adequate information on the operation's terms and costs, and on the potential level of the international support for it.

Maybe, the radicalism and the irresponsibility of the Democrats are selective and somehow do not concern Russia, which is going to be treated as a partner? Maybe, H. Clinton and B. Obama will welcome Russia to the WTO, or the US congress with a Democratic majority will finally abolish the Jackson-Vanik amendment? Maybe NATO will drop its expansion plans, and the US will cease the anti-Russian activity in the countries neighboring Russia?

I asked the questions to N. Zlobin, director of the Russia and Eurasia Project at the Washington-based World Security Institute and a person exceptionally knowledgeable about the internal workings of the US politics. He reacted ironically to the idea that Democrats would be easier partners for Russia: «We should be realists. Criticizing G. Bush for his foreign politics, practically all of the Democrats cite Russia as an example of its failure. They blame it on Bush that during his presidency the country with the world's largest territory stopped being democratic and reverted to authoritarianism, the return being shielded by the close relationship of the two Presidents, their statements to the effects that the sides trust each other, and mutual admirations. Therefore, the politics of any new US President and the Congress with a Democratic majority is going to be harsher on Russia. The current, and even more so, the next Congress are going to be the centers of anti-Russian tendencies in what concerns a whole range of issues such as admitting Russia to the WTO, the situation in the post-Soviet space, NATO expansion, and especially the Kremlin's energy policy».

That is *déjà vu*. The attempts made by some Russian politicians to find «perfect political partners» on the banks of the Potomac River are in no way congenial to Russia's national interests. One can't help recalling how our home-grown political analysts used to tell 8 years ago that it would be easier for Moscow to deal with the Republican G. Bush than with the Democrat Al Gore. The current reorientation is not the first one in the eventful careers of the turncoats. A great power such as Russia simply should not seek strategic support from the politicians on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean whose behavior is entirely selfish and whose goals are dictated by domestic political or financial interests.

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