

A Marshall Plan for Afghanistan



It seems these days as if Russia is living in its own universe. For example, the United States, NATO, China, India and Iran all consider the situation in Afghanistan a top foreign policy priority. Russia, however, does not. This is more than a little strange.

Russia was essentially the first country to recognize Afghanistan's independence in May 1919. The Soviet Union made a significant contribution to Afghanistan's modern economy by building the country's infrastructure between 1950 and 1980. What's more, Afghanistan is geographically the "soft underbelly" of Russia and not of the United States or NATO member countries.

Afghanistan's well-being depends on whether it enjoys true sovereignty and becomes a powerful, independent state. This is a question of vital importance.

When discussing the "Afghanistan problem," the global community has a habit of treating the country as an extraneous problem that requires some type of humanitarian or military action. But Afghanistan is a sovereign state historically composed of a unique grouping of peoples, primarily the Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazara and Uzbeks. That is why Russia should deal with Afghanistan as an independent state, as a full-fledged peer and partner in interstate relations.

Russia has always had a stake in promoting the peaceful development and stabilization of its neighbors and other peoples of the world. Moscow's doctrine has been to provide assistance in its efforts to build strong and prosperous states based on a dialogue among equals, providing full respect to the traditions and uniqueness of those peoples. That is precisely why Russia focused on science, education and industry to achieve advances and breakthroughs.

It is therefore extremely important that Russia adopt the more creative and effective doctrine of "exporting development" as an alternative to the bankrupt doctrine of "exporting democracy," which has been a central U.S. foreign policy goal for decades.

The idea that democracy could be exported to various peoples in order to make them "good citizens" has failed miserably. This can be seen not only in Iraq, the most glaring example of a failed U.S. policy, but also in Afghanistan and Pakistan. A nation cannot be developed or "democratized" by imposing force or coercion.

This opens up a unique opportunity for Russia to help stabilize the situation

and establish peace in Afghanistan and throughout Central Asia. Russia should declare the principle of a united, industrialized and independent Afghanistan as the cornerstone of its policy toward Central Asia. The best way to achieve this is to organize a Marshall Plan for Afghanistan -- obviously adapted to the specific circumstances of the region. Unfortunately, the United States is pursuing the opposite goal for Afghanistan -- its disintegration and subordination.

Unlike the United States and its allies, Russia does not interfere in Afghanistan's internal affairs. Russia's greatest advantage is that it does not need anything from Afghanistan.

On Thursday, Moscow will host the Russian-Afghan Forum. A delegation of 25 parliament members, community leaders, businessmen and analysts will attend. They will be joined by a delegation of Afghan officials from various ministries and headed by Afghanistan's second vice president, Abdul Karim Khalili. Among the members of the visiting Afghan delegation is a candidate for the country's presidency (the election will be held in August). But that fact will not be addressed or exploited in any way. Russia has no desire to influence Afghanistan's electoral process. In fact, Russia acknowledges the contribution that Afghan President Hamid Karzai has made.

Russia's most important goal is not to show a preference for a particular faction but to establish a full-fledged dialogue with Afghanistan. In this way, the Russian-Afghan relationship can set an example for the rest of the world.

Постоянный адрес статьи:

- <http://kroupnov.ru/pubs/2009/05/16/10636/>
- <http://www.moscowtimes.ru/article/1016/42/377117.htm>