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# The intriguing visit of Cheney to Baku

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The prompt visit to Baku of US Vice President Dick Cheney during his swift tour along the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Ukraine-Italy route, which became an event of an extraordinary significance, actually proceeded under the veil of secrecy. In essence, for the first time such a mighty, impressive and special mission from Washington, led by the second man of the US administration, arrived in Azerbaijan.

Visit of multiple meaning

In other - calmer and "safer" time, such a high-ranking visit would have gone in a superpompous festive atmosphere and official mass media outlets of the country would have tried to squeeze maximum propaganda effect out of it. Under the current confrontational situation, by virtue of sharply increasing geopolitical risks in the region and threats, the visit of Cheney went on in everyday working, strictly confidential mode with lack of information.

>From condensed and vague information of the White House administration ahead of the visit followed to obtain that the key topics of the negotiations between Dick Cheney and Ilham Aliyev would be the situation around Georgia, cooperation between Washington and Baku in the fight against threats of terror, the issues of energy and the delivery of energy resources to world markets, the settlement of the Nagornyy Karabakh problem as well as issues of democracy and supremacy of laws in the light of the upcoming [on 15 October] presidential election in Azerbaijan.

According to the same source, the visits of Cheney to Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine were aimed at "assuring them of remaining deep-rooted US interest in the region and its firm intention to keep cooperating over them". "The appearance of US Vice President Cheney in places where he has not been so far is a sign of support. I would not underestimate the importance of such a signal by the vice president and the president, who considered it important to send Cheney there with such a mission in the middle of such a crisis," a high-ranking representative of the US State Department said.

USA to stand firm behind the allies

In his words, in the region, where Cheney is visiting, the USA "is firmly intended to strengthen cooperation in both economic and political as well as in security spheres". Upon arrival in Baku of the high-level delegation from the USA, Cheney's national security aide, John Hanna, said briefly that the key aim of the visit is to demonstrate the US interest in security and stability in this part of the hemisphere. "The US administration attaches great significance to this swift visit of Cheney."

In Baku the US vice president had meetings with heads of the leading oil companies (in particular, BP) which once more time demonstrated priority of the hidden energy motive of the visit, and then he had intensive tête-à-tête talks with President Ilham Aliyev. A brief press report was released at the end of the talks. Cheney did not hide that his visit was to demonstrate the US support to its partners in the CIS [the Commonwealth of Independent States]. Cheney said that the Russian military operation against Georgia and one-sided recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia by Moscow added to significance of the visit.

The USA is deeply interested in welfare of its allies in the Caucasus region,

the US vice president said.. "President Bush has sent me here with a precise message to the people of Azerbaijan and the whole region: the USA has deep and firm interests in your wellbeing and security," he said. Cheney also added that the USA wants to cooperate with Azerbaijan for the development of extra routes of exporting energy resources.

Russia threatens US interests in the region

"The USA is convinced that together with European countries and Turkey, we have to work with Azerbaijan and other countries of Caucasus and Central Asia over extra routes of exporting energy resources which will secure their free flow," said he.

So the intriguing visit of Cheney has taken place and it remains to guess how far the negotiations turned out to be productive and to what extent the sides (Baku and Washington) have reached understanding and remained satisfied with the outcome of the meetings. Time will show it.

In the light of extreme escalation of tension in the region and dangerous confrontation between the West (USA) and Russia, the visit of Cheney to Baku (and further on to Tbilisi and Kiev) caused special interests and was full of intriguing underlying motives.

The swift tour with lack of information in the context of complexity (entanglement) of the situation that has emerged in the region, ambiguity of the future development of the situation and ambiguous "silence" of official Baku do not allow us to unambiguously assess the outcome of the visit and form well-grounded predictions.

At the same time, one aspect is out of question: the USA has perceived the "anti-GUAM [the alliance of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova] assault" of Russia started in Georgia as a very serious threat to own geopolitical and energy interests and is intended to maximum attach efforts to maintain security of own allies in the post-Soviet space and lead alternative oil and gas projects to logical end.

It is also clear that in this global geopolitical and energy battle of the West (USA) with Russia, an important role is given to Azerbaijan which will hardly manage to keep silent and sit on the fence in the current conditions. Baku is also facing the burden of the complicated choice.

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