

Indo-Iranian project is being challenged

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On the evening of 04.04.2024, unidentified persons carried out terrorist attacks on police officers in Chabahar and Rask cities in the Iranian province of Sistan-Baluchistan. Three servicemen from the Chabahar police station were killed in the attack. In Rask, the militants tried to enter the IRGC headquarters, however, and rebuffed from the law enforcement forces and leaving many corpses behind, they were obliged to flee.

Later, the Sunni Baluch terrorist group *Jaish-ul-Adl* (“Army of Justice”) claimed responsibility for the attack, declaring as its main goal the fight against the “*Shiite regime*” led by Iran. This is not the first time that terrorist attacks have been carried out in this area. Last December, for example, *Jaish-ul-Adl* again claimed responsibility for attacks on a police station in the Rask area that killed 12 Iranian police officers.

After the latest attack, Alireza Marhamati, the Vice Governor for Security Affairs of Sistan-Baluchistan province, hastened to claim that Israel was behind the *Jaish-ul-Adl* attack.

This assessment can be seen in two ways. On the one hand, against the backdrop of the current events in the Middle East, Iranians have a tradition of blaming the “*Zionist regime*” for all the country’s problems and propagating its involvement in any kind of hostile incidents against Iran. On the other hand, one cannot exclude an Israeli or Western trace in the episode, as it is well known that Iran's separatist or Islamist problem areas have always been of interest for the country's enemies. In this context, it is worth recalling the events of January this year, when war almost broke out between Iran and Pakistan due to the activation of the same Baluchistan group, *Jaysh-ul-Adl*. Then, Tehran and Islamabad managed to quickly cool their emotions and defuse the explosive situation. However, it is obvious that someone is using the Baluchis to stir up the situation on the Iranian-Persian border.

The fact that Chabahar, whose police station was attacked, is currently a rapidly developing port with tangible investments, adds to the intrigue. Chabahar and Rask are located on the planned India-Europe trade route, which is expected to compete in the future with China's “One Belt– One Road” megaproject and especially its so-called “Middle Way”, which is planned to run through Pakistan, Central Asia, the South Caucasus and on to Europe. It was New Delhi that provided substantial funding for the construction and development of Chabahar's port infrastructure, oil terminals, refineries, petrochemical plants, and tanker fleet to help Iran turn this small town into a major transshipment point for global trade. Symptomatically, even the Afghan Taliban has expressed interest in operating the port.

In general, the Iranian province of Sistan and Baluchistan is developing dynamically because of these measures, which can only benefit the welfare of the Iranian Baluch population living there. Ironically, however, it is the terrorist group “*speaking on their behalf*” that is trying to destabilize the rich province.

In this context, it can be assumed that some external forces, with the help of the Baluchistan militants, are trying to influence the situation in the southern Iran for their own interests. *A priori*, both Israel with its Western allies, and the beneficiary countries of the Chinese trade route could be interested in this. For the former, the Chabahar port and the economic zone around it are seen as the basis for the unacceptable development and strengthening of Tehran's position in the region. For the second group, the new mega-port is a direct competitor to the neighboring (170 km) Pakistani port of Gwadar, which, in turn, is being developed by the Chinese. In addition, Chabahar could significantly attract the attention of many European cargo carriers, weakening their interest in the "Middle China Route" ("Middle Corridor").

In any case, the Islamic Republic has something to worry about and will significantly strengthen the protection of its new sea gates.

P.S While the material was being prepared for release, on 09.04.2024, it became known about another terrorist attack on two police cars on the Soran-Moherstan road in the north of the province of Sistan and Baluchistan, as a result of which several Iranian law enforcement officers were killed.