

India ties Iran to itself with no regard to the U.S.

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On 13.05.2024 Iran and India signed a 10-year agreement on the management of Iranian port of Chabahar by New Delhi. The signatories were the Indian *Port Global Ltd. & Ports* and the IRI's State Maritime Organization. According to the Indian edition of *The Economic Times*, this is “a major geopolitical step towards Iran, which will have a significant impact on the region”. The paper said that this cooperation will strengthen India's ties with Afghanistan, Central Asia and Europe, bypassing Pakistan. *The Economic Times* estimates that this is the first time India has taken over the management of a foreign port. New Delhi also expects the project to improve the country's connectivity to the North-South International Transport Corridor being developed jointly with Iran and Russia.

The Iranian side, for its part, described the 10-year agreement as a great success for the country, praising its comprehensive relationship with New Delhi. On this occasion, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said that Iran considers India as a reliable partner: “*India is a trustworthy partner*”.

As a result, the Chabahar joint development project, which was launched in 2015-2016, is entering the phase of comprehensive launch of the port's capacity and operation of its entire infrastructure, in which the Indian side has invested billions of dollars. The process started despite all the U.S. warnings about the inadmissibility of the economic cooperation with Iran, which contradicts the logic of the sanctions imposed by the West on the Islamic Republic. India preferred not to abandon its course of including Iran in its mega-project of trade and energy communications with the EU and EurAsEC, which has become the main competitor of the China's global “One Belt, One Road” program. It must be assumed that it is precisely the factor of this competition that gives New Delhi confidence that the United States, which has an existential interest in the political and economic weakening of China, will in practice resort to pressure on India because of its close interaction with the IRI.

While Washington benefits from the Indian route's advantage over the Chinese in the rivalry for leadership in continental trade, the United States presented New Delhi's primacy in a slightly different way. India was once offered the alternative of routing its major logistics communications to Europe through Arab countries and the Middle East rather than through Iran. As early as October 2023, during the G20 summit held in New Delhi, the United States reached an agreement with India to begin consultations on the development of a new India-Middle East-Europe transport and energy route. This route would include Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and other countries of interests to US allies in the region. In order to ensure the security and cost-effectiveness of this alternative program, Washington promised New Delhi to resolve contradictions and conflict issues in the region. First of all, there was the possibility of Riyadh's recognition of Israel's independence, which would be a starting point for the settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and related contradictions in the region.

India did not reject the American proposals, but the signed memorandum did not move forward. The reason was a new bloody war in the Middle East, which broke out in the very days when Joe Biden was convincing Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi that the route bypassing Iran was promising.

Apparently, New Delhi is ready to continue discussing the possibility of implementing the American proposals. However, this does not mean that it will wait until the U.S. succeeds in fulfilling its obligations to establish tranquility and peace in the geographical area of the proposed alternative route. Therefore, the Iranian direction apparently remains a priority and still the safest for India's ambitious plans, and this rapidly developing country is tying the IRI step by step to the logistical program of its economic expansion into vastness of the Eurasian continent.