

## American-Indian Initiatives and Turkey's Foreign Policy ARVAK Center comment, 25.02.2025<sup>1</sup>

On 14.02.2025, a meeting took place in Washington between U.S. President Donald Trump and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi took place in Washington. During the negotiations, the parties discussed a wide range of issues regarding international and regional security, trade and economic relations, and military-political cooperation between the two powers.

According to media reports, the negotiations were remarkably successful, and their main achievement is the decision to resume work on building “*one of the greatest trade routes in history*”, which will be laid “*from India to Israel, Italy, and further to the United States*”<sup>2</sup>. American sources also believe that the summit between the heads of the U.S. and India could serve as a catalyst for easing the “*trade wars*” between the countries, which arose during Trump's first term<sup>3</sup>.

The second important achievement of the meeting in Washington was Trump's statement about the U.S. readiness to increase sales of military products to India “*by many billions of dollars*” starting this year, with the 5<sup>th</sup> generation F-35 Lightning II fighter jets being the main item in the list<sup>4</sup>. This is extremely interesting news, considering that the Pentagon and the U.S. Senate apply strict criteria when selecting interested countries to which Washington can sell these advanced fighters. It is known that the export sanction of F-35s has long been used by the U.S. in shaping its relationships with allies and in the context of the strategy of pressure on adversaries.

It is noteworthy that on the day of the Trump–Modi negotiations, the international airshow *Aero India* in Bangalore, India, concluded, where U.S. representatives suddenly refused to perform demonstrations of the F-35. Russian sources reported that the Americans' refusal was supposedly due to the F-35's inferiority compared to the latest Russian Su-57E fighter, which demonstrated its flight characteristics at the *Aero India* airshow. However, the true motives of the Americans remained unknown. In this regard, it can be assumed that this decision was related to the deal announced by Trump for the sale of F-35s to India. It seems that New Delhi, apparently, has already made its choice for the new-generation jet acquired to modernize the Indian Air Force's fleet.

The outcome of the negotiations in Washington indicates that D. Trump, following his campaign promises, is implementing a strategy to weaken China's positions and increase U.S. hegemony in the Pacific and Southeast Asian regions. It is evident that the new administration in Washington aims to disrupt the current military-political balance between New Delhi and Beijing and to enhance competition against China's mega-project “One Belt, One Road” with the “South Transcontinental Trade and Energy Route” promoted by India.

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<sup>1</sup> The original (in Rus.) was posted on our website on 23.02.2025.

<sup>2</sup> “Trump: The USA and India will create 'one of the greatest' trade routes in history”. TACC (in Rus.), 14.02.2025, <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/23136903/> (download date: 18.02.2025).

<sup>3</sup> “The USA and India want to create a trade route through Israel and Italy”. Коммерсант, (in Rus.), 14.02.2025, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/7499108/> (download date: 18.02.2025).

<sup>4</sup> “The USA intends to supply India with F-35s”. TACC (in Rus.), 14.02.2025, <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/23136745> (download date: 18.02.2025).

In this light, it is not surprising that the BRICS countries are planning to “*cease strategic cooperation with India*” after reviewing the results of the Trump–Modi negotiations in Washington (as yet unconfirmed). It is clear that New Delhi has agreed to Washington’s proposals on the geopolitical reorganization of the balance of power in Asia and, importantly, is ready to align with the pace set by the U.S. president in this process. Thus, India is showing signs of deviating from its traditional neutrality in the global North–South competition.

In the context of these events, Turkey’s position is of particular interest, as Trump’s radical actions to foster closer ties with India have put Turkey at a disadvantage in several areas. In recent years, New Delhi’s policies in the regions of Western and Central Asia have certainly constrained Ankara’s actions and ambitions. India’s main logic has been to neutralize the threat of a Turkish-Pakistani alliance, which is increasingly likely to materialize geographically alongside weakening Russia in the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Among the measures taken by India to curb Turkey’s activities, the following initiatives are particularly noteworthy:

1. New Delhi has enhanced its cooperation with France and Greece to the level of strategic partnership, focusing on close military-technical interaction and cooperation in the defense industry.

2. New Delhi has become Armenia’s main partner in rearming the Armenian Army and enhancing its technological capabilities.

3. India has become one of the main beneficiaries of the “North–South” trade and transportation project and insists on the inclusion of Armenia in the logistic route from the Persian Gulf through the Southern Caucasus to Europe.

4. India has blocked Turkey’s accession to BRICS, thus preventing it from gaining influence in the emerging political-economic alliance of the “Global South”<sup>5</sup>.

These measures outline the strategic directions through which New Delhi attempts to limit Turkish activity. These include the Eastern Mediterranean, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia, where Turkey aimed to increase its influence through participation in BRICS. Finally, we can add to the list of New Delhi’s counteractions the southern direction of Turkish activity, where India, in cooperation with the United States, is developing the “*greatest*” trade route in history, as Trump put it. Naturally, India’s interest in this project is not driven by the Turkish factor. However, the implementation of this project, in addition to other geostrategic and trade-economic benefits, will also help New Delhi create additional problems for Ankara’s expansionist ambitions in the southern direction. These chances are extremely high, considering that India will act in close cooperation with Israel, Saudi Arabia, Greece, and with comprehensive support of the U.S. Consequently, Turkey’s chances of stopping the construction of this route and monopolizing global trade-communication logistics along the Europe-Asia axis will be practically reduced to zero.

The ARVAK Center in a previous publication had already addressed the [topic](#) of intense competition between Turkey and Israel for access to the Persian Gulf, transit of Qatari

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<sup>5</sup> “Media: India blocked Turkey’s entry into BRICS”. Форпост Северо-Запад (in Rus.), 24.10.2024, <https://forpost-sz.ru/a/2024-10-24/smi-indiya-zablokirovala-vstuplenie-turcii-v-briks> (download date: 19.02.2025).

[pipeline gas](#), and control over the trade route from the Indian Ocean to the [Mediterranean Sea](#). At that time, this topic was hardly discussed in public space, and experts did not consider it among the reasons and motives explaining the deterioration of relations between Ankara and Tel Aviv. However, the agreement between D. Trump and N. Modi in Washington (DC), mentioned earlier, showed that the Center's assumptions were justified: the contradictions between Turkey and Israel over the Palestinian issue, the future of Syria, and the status of the Kurds were largely exacerbated by the efforts of both sides to become the “key hub” for gas flows and goods coming from the Persian Gulf to the European market. Within its capabilities, Turkey took all measures to stop the implementation of the *IMEC* project, announced by U.S. President D. Biden in New Delhi on 09.09.2023, linking India with Europe through the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel<sup>6</sup>. In this context, the Hamas attack on Israel on 07.10.2023 and the ensuing Palestinian-Israeli armed confrontation in the Gaza Strip contributed to the fact that the program presented at the September G20 summit in New Delhi losing its relevance or being postponed indefinitely. Taking advantage of this, in April 2024, during R. T. Erdogan's visit to Baghdad, Turkey signed a package of 26 agreements with Iran, including agreements on creating a combined route (railway, broadband highway, gas pipeline, oil pipeline, “green energy” cables, and digital communication) from the Persian Gulf through Iraq to Turkish ports on the Mediterranean Sea<sup>7</sup>. Following that, after the change of power in Damascus, Ankara actively attempted to actualize the project of laying a gas pipeline from Qatar through Saudi Arabia and Jordan to Syria and Turkey, which was allegedly conceived back in 2009 but was not implemented due to Bashar al-Assad's negative stance. According to the Middle Eastern media, immediately after formation of the transitional government in Syria in December 2024, Ankara instructed Syrian prime minister Muhammad al-Bashir to draft the Syrian section of the pipeline, while Turkish foreign minister Hakan Fidan, at a meeting with Gulf Arab foreign ministers in Doha, proposed reviving the forgotten “Syrian gas route”.

Thus, it is evident that Ankara has made every effort to take advantage of the fighting in Gaza and build a global alternative to the *IMEC* trade-energy route in order to draw the role of the hub and strategic bridge between Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, and the Indian Ocean countries upon itself. However, as the latest developments have shown, the routes promoted by Turkey did not interest global and most significant regional players. On 07.01.2025, Qatar's foreign ministry spokesman Majid bin Mohammed al-Ansari officially stated that Qatar does not plan to supply its gas to Europe through Syria and Turkey<sup>8</sup>. After the joint statement on February 14, 2025 by American and Indian leaders at a briefing in Washington (DC) about continuing work on the *IMEC* global project, it became definitively clear that the “Iraqi trade-energy route” promoted by Ankara loses promising prospects. If

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<sup>6</sup> “The USA and India will build a corridor to Europe”. Вестник (in Rus.), 11.09.2023, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2023/09/11/994386-ssha-i-indiya-postroyat-koridor-v-evropu/> (download date: 19.02.2025).

<sup>7</sup> “26 agreements have been signed between Turkey and Iraq”. Anadolu Ajansı (in Rus.), 22.04.2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/ru/турция/глава-разведки-турции-провел-переговоры-в-иране/3476162/> (download date: 19.02.2025).

<sup>8</sup> “Qatar does not plan to supply gas to Europe through Syria and Turkey”. ТАСС (in Rus.), 07.01.2025, <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/22832689/> (download date: 19.02.2025).

*IMEC* is launched, it will lose its attractiveness and profitability, especially given the high likelihood of continued destabilization in Iraq.

Therefore, the current realities allow us to conclude that Turkey has already lost the competition with Israel for access to the Persian Gulf and control over global integration projects along the West–East axis. This has been possible mainly thanks to the efforts of the U.S. and India, which evidently plan to reshape the entire security and cooperation architecture in the region from the Mediterranean Sea to China.

Equally sad news for Turkey is the fact that in the new geopolitical arrangements, the U.S., India, and possibly Russia are inclined to maximally limit Turkey's role in the unfolding processes. This primarily concerns the refusal of Ankara's refusal to mediate in the American-Russian negotiations on Ukraine. This "prestigious role" has been entrusted by Washington and Moscow to Saudi Arabia, which, according to observers, indicates, firstly, a mutual loss of trust in Turkey, and secondly, an unspoken recognition of Riyadh's primacy in the upcoming processes in the Middle East region. In particular, for the D. Trump administration, it is important to ease tensions between the Saudi Royal House and Israel and restore trust between these two countries, with the prospect of Riyadh recognizing Israeli sovereignty. Only under such conditions can the *IMEC* overcome the last obstacle on its way to practical implementation. In this context, the choice of Saudi Arabia as the technical mediator of the global U.S.-Russian deal, in which the Ukrainian issue will be far from the only topic of negotiation, should be considered a major political advance for the Saudis. It is a kind of admission ticket to the "big league" of the global game aimed at reformatting the world balance of power. Given these facts, it becomes understandable why the ambitious R. T. Erdogan is actively attempting to regain the role of the "*most ideal platform*" for the peace negotiations<sup>9</sup>.

Turkey feels unfairly deprived of the attention of major international players and seeks new maneuvering space in hopes of regaining lost positions. Such measures include initiating a conflict situation between Ankara-controlled Baku and Moscow, stirring up nationalist sentiments in Abkhazia, supporting Zelensky's anti-American *demarche*<sup>10</sup>, and signing a declaration with Pakistan on "*deepening and diversifying strategic partnership*"<sup>11</sup>.

All these steps indicate a rather complex situation in Turkey's foreign policy, simultaneously signaling its dissatisfaction with the actions of the U.S., India, and Russia. The question is how long Ankara's resilience and resourcefulness will last to withstand on three geopolitical fronts, which, under certain conditions, may merge into a single anti-Turkish front. If this happens, Turkey under R. T. Erdogan may face marginalization and isolation, alone with its unfulfilled ambitions, the unsolvable Syrian-Kurdish issue, and the prospect of a Turkish-Israeli confrontation.

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<sup>9</sup> "Erdogan: The sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine are very important to us". Armenia News (in Rus.), 18.02.2025, <https://news.am/rus/news/867399.html> (download date: 19.02.2025).

<sup>10</sup> "Ukraine expects security guarantees from the USA, the EU, and Turkey", - Zelensky". УНИАН (in Rus.), 18.02.2025, <https://www.unian.net/politics/ukraina-ozhidaet-garantiy-bezopasnosti-ot-ssha-es-turcii-zelenskiy-12919419.html> (download date: 20.02.2025).

<sup>11</sup> "24 agreements were signed between Turkey and Pakistan". Красная Весна (in Rus.), 13.02.2025, <https://rossaprimavera.ru/news/29280e81/> (download date: 19.02.2025).