Multidirectional policies have become a characteristic feature of Indian foreign policy in recent years. New Delhi actively seeks to establish relations with China, normalize relations with its main regional adversary, Pakistan, maintain ties with Russia and develop relations with Israel, the United States, Iran and the Arabian monarchies, Afghanistan, the states of Central Asia and Southeast Asia, Japan and South Korea. Balancing between its partners, India seeks to use their contradictions to its advantage.

One of the most telling examples of this is India's cooperation with the United States, Israel and Iran simultaneously, which has been successfully developing against a background of blatant contradictions. India is Israel's third-largest trading partner in Asia in terms of precious stones. Ties have been developed in science, technology and agriculture, where joint ventures have been established in irrigation, water allocation and agro-production. India is one of the largest importers of Israeli military products, and the military cooperation is entirely commercial.

India's relations with the United States have remained quite sour for half a century. The main reason was Washington's support for Pakistan, while Moscow was New Delhi's main ally in the superpower confrontation. De facto, the modern process of US-Indian rapprochement began in 2000 with a visit to New Delhi by US President Bill Clinton.
ABC Australia recently published a secret US Indo-Pacific strategy signed in 2017 by former US President Donald Trump, former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, and former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Although, as the ABC notes, the main focus of this secret strategy of the US and its two allies in the Indo-Pacific region is aimed against China and at "doubling Washington's efforts to assert its dominance in the Indo-Pacific," it places considerable emphasis on the role the U.S. assigned to India.

In particular, the above mentioned strategy deprives New Delhi of even the slightest possibility of attempting rapprochement with Moscow and Beijing. To this end, the United States is expected to help accelerate the use of India as its security tool, with plans to support India through various, including military and intelligence channels, to help it deal with continental problems such as border disputes with China. Therefore, it is not surprising that even the Washington-based publication The Diplomat believes that the US wants to use India as an "ideological alternative" to Communist China.

But if India were to accept this role from Washington, it would inevitably have to reverse its commitment to nonalignment and become a guarantor of American interests, actively opposing the Chinese military presence not only in Ladakh, but also in the South China Sea, Afghanistan, and other countries in the region, where Beijing has recently been successfully developing the political and economic cooperation and infrastructure that they so desperately need. And, above all, this concerns Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal; besides, China is the main arms supplier to Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Under the mentioned conditions, as well as taking into account the growing influence of China on India's neighbors, the anti-Americanism of Russia and China, their joint strategic understanding — all this forces India to define its interests and understand its political position, including the complex confrontation between its two partners - Russia and the United States.

It is well known that Russia provides arms for 70% of India's armed forces. In addition, according to Indian media reports, New Delhi is planning to buy 21 more MiG-29 light fighters and 12 Su-30MKI fighters from Russia in the near future. The purchase of this batch of MiG-29s at relatively low prices will increase the number of such fighters in the Indian Air Force to 59 and the purchase of 12 Su-30MKIs will bring the number of these combat aircraft in the Indian Air Force to 284.

India will soon begin production under license of Russian Kalashnikov AK-203 assault rifles at a plant in Korwa (Uttar Pradesh), the Indian newspaper The Economic Times reports.

In addition, at the end of January, the first group of 100 Indian soldiers will arrive in Russia for training in the operation and combat use of surface-to-air missile systems (SAMs) S-400 "Triumph". Delivery of the first of the planned five regiment sets of S-400 SAMs will begin in September-October this year, and its acceptance by the Indian armed forces is scheduled for the end of this year. According to estimates published in the Indian media, it "will revolutionize India's air defense." They will be deployed in the western, northern and eastern regions of India, given the threats from both China and Pakistan.

But Washington has always been particularly jealous of the development of military cooperation between India and Russia, seeking to prevent its further intensification, especially when considering the interrelated problems of US arms sales to that country and the reinforcement of relations with New Delhi. The Congressional Research Service (CRS) recently devoted its latest report to defense cooperation between Washington and New Delhi. Among other things, the experts of the organization noted that sanctions may be imposed on India if it does not give up the deal on the purchase of Russian S-400 SAMs. They cite the Countering America's Adversaries by Sanctions Act (CAATSA) as a reason.

Anurag Srivastava, spokesperson of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, addressed the issue. Noting that India and the United States have a comprehensive global strategic partnership, Srivastava stressed: "At the same time, India has a special and privileged partnership with Russia. India has always had an independent foreign policy. This also applies to our defense spending, in which we are guided by our national security interests."

Given the recent intensification of US hostility toward Russia at the instigation of Washington, it is becoming increasingly difficult for India to balance the two and get the most out of relations with both countries, notes The Times of India. As Indian analysts point out, New Delhi can hardly count on Russia's protection in its confrontation with China, particularly in the border conflict. This is partly because Russia's main interest is to counter US world domination along with China, with whom it has a comprehensive strategic partnership. In addition, Russia opposes India's support for the American concept of the Indo-Pacific region and its membership in the Quadrilateral Security
Dialogue.

As for the stance on China, in India, which has significantly reduced its relations with the PRC since April 2020 (after the Ladakh incident), there has been a growing awareness that it might be "off-trend" as many international players have begun to show a desire for closer economic relations with Beijing. Even before Biden came to the White House and despite his promises to activate the US-EU axis, Europe turned its back on America and renewed its ties with China by concluding negotiations on the Comprehensive Agreement on investment cooperation between the EU and China. Thus, in one decisive move, Europe has shattered any hope that China will remain isolated in 2021, notes The Hindu.

Against this background, last September, India went the extra mile with Washington by allowing a US P-8 Poseidon anti-submarine maritime patrol aircraft to refuel for the first time at an Indian strategic base in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands under a Memorandum of Agreement on Logistic Exchange signed between India and the United States in 2016. In addition, New Delhi has suggested that a series of defense agreements have paved the way for a likely strengthening of military ties between the two countries, and even in the absence of a formal alliance, the United States could help India strengthen reconnaissance and strategic assessment capabilities, enhance naval security through joint planning and patrols, and conduct more joint military exercises.

At the same time, the Indian media, expressing the opinion of part of the population of their country, believe that if New Delhi does not yield to the pressure of Washington, followed by the loss of identity and political independence, the country will face the prospect of American sanctions, which the US may impose against India for the purchase of Russian arms.

That is why, according to Indian analysts, the current situation forces India to define its interests faster and pushes it to defend its place in the world by balancing on a tightrope between the United States, Russia and China. But what stance official New Delhi takes will largely depend on the opinion of the people, as anti-American sentiments are growing in the country, just like in many other countries around the world.

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