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CHINA-INDIA'S CONFLICT OF INTEREST IN THE REGION OF SOUTH ASIA

КОНФЛИКТ ІНТЕРЕСІВ ІНДІЇ ТА КИТАЮ У РЕГІОНІ ПІВДЕННОЇ АЗІЇ

КОНФЛИКТ ИНТЕРЕСОВ ИНДИИ И КИТАЯ В РЕГИОНЕ ЮЖНОЙ АЗИИ

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Abstract. *The trends of the growing confrontation of international relations and the increasing role of Asian countries in world politics directly affect the issue of China-India interaction in the strategically important region of South Asia. It is clear that the role of the region for each of the sides has a different weight: if India considers leadership in South Asia as a key geopolitical goal, for the PRC it is only one element of the global expansion strategy. Both states are trying to consolidate their influence in the region through various kinds of collaboration and assistance, using bilateral and multilateral formats of cooperation. In particular, at the level of competition of geoeconomic initiatives, China is actively promoting the "One Belt, One Road" project, while India seeks to balance using a wider range of integration tools – SAARC, "North-South", "Spice Route" and "Look East" policy. However, the Chinese side is achieving success due to great financial opportunities and promises, the needs of the countries of the region for external impulses for economic development, the lack of determination in Indian regional politics, and the rejection by South Asian countries the prospect of Indian domination, key reason of what is various kinds of problems in relations with official New-Delhi. This concerns primarily Pakistan, which at the same time is a key regional partner of China. Now the regional policy of India has a clear advantage over the Chinese strategy of "geopolitical ticks" only in Bhutan and tactically in the Maldives. However, Chinese influence is increasingly causing concern among the regional*

given the growth of financial dependence, the use of so-called “debt-trap diplomacy” and even a demonstration of strength, the most colorful evidence of what is the experience of Sri Lanka.

Keywords: *India, China, South Asia, region, “One Belt, One Road”, strategy of “geopolitical clutches”*

Анотація. *Тенденції зростання конфронтаційності міжнародних відносин та посилення ролі азійських країн у світовій політиці напрямку зачіпають проблему індо-китайської взаємодії у стратегічно важливому регіоні Південної Азії. Зрозуміло, що роль регіону для кожної із сторін має різну вагу: якщо Індія розглядає лідерство у Південній Азії як ключову геополітичну мету, то для КНР – це лише один із елементів глобальної стратегії експансії. Обидві держави намагаються за рахунок різного роду співробітництва і надання допомоги закріпити свій вплив у регіоні, використовуючи двосторонні та багатосторонні формати співпраці. Зокрема, на рівні конкуренції геоекономічних ініціатив Китай активно просуває проект «Одного поясу, одного шляху», а Індія прагне балансувати, використовуючи більш ширший діапазон інтеграційних інструментів – СААРК, «Північ-Південь», «Маршрут прянощів», політика «Дивись на Схід». Втім, успіхів досягає саме китайська сторона завдяки більшим фінансовим можливостям та обіцянкам, потребі країн регіону у зовнішніх імпульсах для економічного поступу, відсутності цілеспрямованості у індійській регіональній політиці, несприйнятті країнами Південної Азії перспективи домінування Індії, що також зумовлено різного роду проблемами у відносинах із офіційним Нью-Делі. Це стосується, у першу чергу, Пакистану, який водночас є ключовим регіональним партнером КНР. Наразі регіональна політика Індії має чітку перевагу перед китайською стратегією «геополітичних кліщів» лише у Бутані та тактично на Мальдівах. Однак китайський вплив все більше викликає занепокоєння серед держав регіону з огляду на зростання фінансової залежності, використання так званої «дипломатії боргової пастки» та навіть демонстрації сили, найбільш яскравим свідченням чого виступає досвід Шрі-Ланки.*

Ключові слова: *Індія, Китай, Південна Азія, регіон, «Один пояс, один шлях», стратегія «геополітичних кліщів»*

Аннотация. *Тенденции роста конфронтационности международных отношений и усиление роли азиатских стран в мировой политике напрямую затрагивают проблему индо-китайского взаимодействия в стратегически важном регионе Южной Азии. Понятно, что роль региона для каждой из сторон имеет разный вес: если Индия рассматривает лидерство в Южной Азии как ключевую геополитическую цель, то для КНР – это лишь один из элементов глобальной стратегии экспансии. Оба государства пытаются за счет разного рода сотрудничества и оказания помощи закрепить свое влияние в регионе, используя двусторонние и многосторонние форматы сотрудничества. В частности, на уровне конкуренции геоекономических инициатив Китай активно продвигает проект «Один пояс, одного пути», а Индия стремится балансировать, используя более широкий диапазон интеграционных инструментов – СААРК, «Север-Юг», «Маршрут пряностей» и инициатива «Глянь на Восток». Впрочем, успехов достигает именно китайская сторона благодаря большим финансовым возможностям и обещаниям, потребности стран региона во внешних импульсах для экономического развития, отсутствия целеустремленности в индийской региональной политике, неприятия странами Южной Азии перспективы доминирования Индии, что также обусловлено разного рода проблемами в отношениях с официальным Нью-Дели. Это касается, в первую очередь, Пакистана, который в то же время является ключевым региональным партнером КНР. Сейчас региональная политика Индии имеет четкое преимущество перед китайской стратегией «геополитических клещей» только в Бутане и тактически на Мальдивах. Однако китайское влияние все больше вызывает беспокойство среди государств региона в связи с ростом финансовой*

зависимости, использованием так называемой «дипломатии долговой ловушки» и даже демонстрации силы, наиболее ярким свидетельством чего выступает опыт Шри-Ланки.

Ключевые слова: *Индия, Китай, Южная Азия, регион, «Один пояс, один путь», стратегия «геополитических клещей»*

Formulation of the problem. The current state of international relations is marked by growing turbulence. From time to time, new points of confrontation appear on the geopolitical map of the world, or at the same time the old contradictions between the states receive a new impetus. The interdependence is increasing, but meanwhile the world is becoming more conflictual due to the growing need of countries for various limited resources and markets. On this background, the tendency of intensification of the struggle between geopolitical centers aimed to achievement of influence in regions is clearly evident. A significant number of experts predict that the 21st century will be the so-called “Asian Age”, which means relocation of the center of international affairs to this geopolitical space. In this context, the relationship between the two neighboring Asian giants – China and India, which have a number of similar characteristics, including thousands of civilizational traditions, demographic potential, numerous armed forces and economical success, becomes a point of great interest. Therefore, it is not surprising that both countries are striving to strengthen their role in world politics, which, in turn, causes a lot of dimensions of competition between them, in particular in the region of South Asia, which occupies a strategically important position on the crossing of routes between the Middle East and the East Asia.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the peculiarities of China-India confrontation in South Asia, focusing on the tools used by the sides in order to achieve geopolitical goals, and to outline the successes and failures of regional policies of both countries.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The question of China-India interaction has always been the focus of attention of scientists and analysts. In particular, among the domestic experts, we can mention the fundamental works and analytical investigations of O. Bordilovskaya, V. Kasprook [16], O. Klimenko, V. Taran, G. Kukhaleishvili [21]. It is noteworthy that more actively Sino-Indian relations are being explored by foreign experts, where current analytical investigations of A. Aamir [1], S. Denyer and A. Gowen, S. Ganguly and R. Menon, Ghoshal, S. Haider [4], A. Hossain [5], should be noted. Kupriyanov, A. Panda [7], S. Ramachandran [9], covers a wide range of bilateral relations issues from the balance of military capabilities to India's implementation of “Look East policy” in the context of competition with the PRC. However, the domestic researchers do not pay much attention to the study of the relations between China and India in the region of South Asia that determines the relevance of this article.

The important research results. It should be noted that the actual vision of India and China at each other significantly feels the inheritance of the historical development of bilateral relations. In particular, these are territorial problems which started in 1962 when official Beijing defeated India during the short-term war and took control over the Aksai Chin and Arunchal Pradesh regions. However, the armed clash was preceded by the emigration of the spiritual and political leader of Tibet (a region that was finally incorporated by force into the Chinese state) – the Dalai Lama – to India in 1959. This is a reason of accusations of the official New Delhi in sheltering of Tibetan insurgents, especially at times when the Indian leadership invites the Dalai Lama to official events. China's statements appear to be understandable in view of the implementation of the ethnic policy aimed to the radical change in favor of the Han population in order to establish final control over the separatist region. This policy is also followed by significant financial inflows and the implementation of infrastructure projects that connect Tibet with other regions of China.

Characteristically, that since the early 1960s territorial disputes have not led to large-scale military confrontation. However, occasionally there have been insignificant incidents at the disputed border. In particular, a new moment of tension was marked by 2017, when an explosive situation arose over the Plateau Doklam that is the object of contradictions between China and Bhutan. The reason is the construction of a PRC's road through Bhutanese territory has provoked protests from official Thimphu. India, using the military force, has supported its regional ally,

displacing Chinese military builders from Bhutan territory. China, in turn, has deployed its own military contingent that was located just before the Indian military personnel, accompanying such steps with accuses that the Indian side had violated China's territorial integrity. At the time of the greatest tension soldiers from both sides threw stones at each other.

This reaction of the official New Delhi to the attempts of the Celestial to improve the infrastructure on that part of common border follows from the military-strategic calculations. The Plateau Doklam is strategically important for India because control over it poses a threat to the so-called Siliguri corridor (the so-called “Chicken’s Neck”) – an extremely narrow stretch of Indian territory that connects the main part of republic with 7 eastern states and is locked between Bangladesh and Nepal.

Indian military experts say that in case of China's control over the Southern Doklam it would be necessary to deploy 9-16 Indian troops against every equipped Chinese detachment in the highlands. Herewith China's conflict strategy is based on the slow depletion of its opponent [18].

It is important to emphasize that it has been the most serious aggravation of bilateral relations over the last few decades which also affected for the first time a third party – the tiny kingdom of Bhutan.

However, the confrontation has not come to a large-scale clash and this could serve as a evidence the unwillingness of parties to complicate significantly relations. The nuclear status of both countries (in the case of India – unofficial) plays a crucial role in this. It is interesting that despite India's key military threat is also the nuclear-capable official Islamabad, the official New Delhi is developing a program of intercontinental ballistic missiles, the hypothetical target of which is, of course, not Pakistan's geographically close territory, but more remote territory of the Celestial.

Another point in this confrontation is that Bhutan has been steadily expanding its cooperation with India without establishing diplomatic relations with the PRC. In addition, this small country, as well as India, did not join the China’s New Silk Road, clearly underlining its geopolitical orientation.

India, as the largest country in the region by the cumulated potential, seeks to fix its leadership status. In particular, this is achieved through cooperation with other countries of the South Asia. It should be noted, that in order to create its own positive image in the international environment and to form a network of international economic tools of influence, India uses the so-called “Indian Development Initiative” that is focused on assisting other developing countries.

With regard to already mentioned Bhutan, India has become the largest donor to this country's economic development since the 1960s, fully funding the first five-year plan for its development. Bhutan is currently accumulating about a third of India's foreign aid. The Indian projects include the construction of a number of hydroelectric power plants that have positive effects for both sides, especially considering the fact that the large part of the produced energy goes to the needs of India, the construction of a single airport in the town Paro, all helicopter platforms, as well as 1,600 kilometers of highways [Ura, 2014]. Indian assistance plays an important role in the development of the armed forces, the health care system and the development of Bhutan's human potential.

Nepal, another small Himalayan country, has long been actively using Indian aid for economic development. In particular, much of the foreign assistance in the 2000s to this country came from India. India has provided substantial assistance in building health care, road and rail infrastructure, staff training on its territory through grants, and construction of hydroelectric power stations [12]. India and Nepal are characterized by the common religious orientation (the majority of the country's population is Hindu). In addition, bilateral trade are also systematically increasing .

However, significant tensions arose between the parties in 2015-2016 that became the point of impulse for seeking economic opportunities by the Nepalese leadership with the aim to reduce dependence on India [Ramachandran, 2019]. The point of contradiction between the parties was, according to the Nepalese authorities that, with the tacit consent of the Indian leadership, there was the stoppage of supply of fuel and food that caused significant problems for the Nepalese people.

Given the peculiarities of the geographical location, official Beijing is the only option to counteract Indian influence for Nepal. China, for its side, pragmatically has taken advantage of this

situation and as result in 2016 Nepal joined the One Belt, One Road project by signing an Agreement on Economic Co-operation and Transport Infrastructure with official Beijing. Moreover, in 2019, the Chinese leader visited Nepal for the first time in the history of bilateral relations [Panda, 2019]. However, as revenge the Nepalese leadership preferred the Chinese company Gezhouba Group Company instead of the Indian one in the Budhi Gandaki hydroelectric project [Bansh, 2019]. In addition, the ability to circulate the Indian rupee, as well as the activities of Indian workers and businessmen on the Nepal's territory has been complicated. We also note that the orientation towards the Middle Kingdom is strengthened by the fact that the authorities in this country are adherents of communist ideology, whose functionaries are being ideologically trained on the territory of the PRC. Currently, China is also developing transport infrastructure where could be noticed the rail link between Kathmandu and other tourist centers of Nepal – Pokhara and Lumbini with the city of Kerung in Tibet. This project will obviously enhance the tourist flow to this mountainous country [Ramachandran, 2019].

Sri Lanka is also one of the largest recipients of Indian aid, totaling \$ 3 billion, out of which around \$ 560 million are purely in grants [13]. The multidimensional assistance includes areas such as infrastructure, education, emergency assistance, humanitarian issues related to the Sinhala-Tamil conflict, in other words, spheres in what Sri Lanka often suffers.

In this context we should admit the necessity of post-war construction of Sri Lanka and the refusal of Western institutions to provide finance in view of the unwillingness of the country's leadership to investigate crimes during the civil war that, in turn, allows the penetration of Chinese capital. In particular, due to Chinese funds, were realized the construction of the seaport of Hambantota, the international airport in Mattala, as well as thermal power stations [Ramachandran, 2019].

Moreover, China has succeeded in turning Sri Lanka into a pillar in its so called the “string of pearls” strategy [Hossain, 2018], successfully using the “debt-trap diplomacy” approach, in which official Beijing, in case of a partner's failure to pay its loans, take under control important logistical or resource capabilities. For example, due to financial insolvency, Sri Lanka's leadership transferred the port of Hambantota and 15,000 acres of land around it to China for a 99-year lease [Ramachandran, 2019]. It should be noted that the essence of the unofficial strategy of the Celestial “string of pearls” is to build the maritime, including military, infrastructure of China along the key routes of maritime trade of which official Beijing is highly dependent and at the same time vulnerable due to the advantages of US naval military capabilities.

True, Sri Lanka's compliance was provoked not only by economical factor. Thus, the complaint of local business elites found expression during the presidency of M. Sirisena, who decided to declare the end of the era of Chinese influence and stopped the construction of Port City in Colombo. However, the Chinese side demonstrated strength by sending its submarine to the island. As a result, construction was restored and local businessmen suppressed [Polevik, 2018].

Since 1988 India's economic assistance to the Maldives has been stepped up. The precondition was a successful prevention by the Indian military the attempt of coup d'état by Tamil rebels in that country. On this basis, India placed its own military objects on the territory of the island republic in order to ensure stability there. Moreover, the leadership of Maldives proclaimed “India First” in foreign and domestic policies. These moments were a demonstration that the country was entering in orbit of the exclusive geopolitical influence of the Republic of India.

In turn, the Indian party continued to provide substantial assistance to the Maldives in disaster relief, including through the supply of medicines, medical equipment, food, drinking water and rescue units.

However, by the time the Maldivian leadership began to consider options for creating a geopolitical balance for Indian influence. This has been successfully exploited by the Chinese state that traditionally uses a strategy of developing economic cooperation, the real purpose of what is to establish the economic dependence of the country-partner. Among the successes of the PRC is the growing economic dependence of the official Male, what is reflected in the fact that China is the largest supplier of tourists to the Maldives (the economy of this Muslim country is based on the

tourism industry), as well as holding much of the national debt of the republic [Kupriyanov, 2018]. The Maldives took a favorable step for China in 2015 by allowing foreigners to buy its land. In addition, the situation with the contract for the construction of the Nasir Airport, initially received by an Indian company in 2010, was a very unpleasant moment for official New Delhi, because in 2014 the Maldivian administration terminated it in favor of the Chinese company, arguing such step by infractions in the process of concluding an agreement [Kupriyanov, 2018].

A critical moment was the domestic political situation ahead of the 2018 parliamentary elections, where each party had its supporters. India, increasingly sensing its position in the Maldives, supported opposition politicians who had even called for India to use its armed forces on the territory of the island republic. Interestingly, similar statements were made by the Indian political establishment which identified the situation in the Maldives as a threat to national interests [Kupriyanov, 2018]. But official Beijing, in turn, sent a message through the article of its own English-language newspaper Global Times, emphasizing the inadmissibility of the Indian military force use in the Maldives [Ai, 2018].

However, the situation has not come to the using of military power. Besides, in the island republic pro-India-minded president came to power – Mohamed Solih, which right away declared the necessary of increase of India's assistance and meanwhile raised the issue of debt to China, in particular in the context of one of the already implemented bilateral large-scale infrastructure project – Sino-Maldivian friendship bridge that linked the capital city of Male with the island of Hulhumale, where the international airport is located [14]. In turn, the problem of debt has a negative impact on China's international image and activity, specially taking into account the point that cooperation with the Maldives has been considered as a successful example in demonstration that “One Belt, One Road” really could help the economic development of small countries [Mundy, Hille, 2019].

Bangladesh, despite the fact that India played a key role in declaring the country's independence from official Islamabad in 1971, also demonstrates a desire to limit India's influence in the region by building cooperation with the PRC. This clearly demonstrates the official Beijing's has got access to the strategically important port of Chittagong, the use of which has been unsuccessfully claimed by the official New Delhi for the purpose of transporting natural gas from Myanmar [Casprook, 2012]. Bangladesh, besides its location, is also the place of interest given the significant deposits of natural gas. Moreover, by joining the NSR, Bangladesh has agreed to emphasize a new level of relations with China – by declaring a strategic partnership in 2016 [23].

This step seems logical given that China has invested more than \$ 10 billion in the country, in particular, focused on the development of a special economic zone and the construction of thermal power station near the Chittagong, as well as the construction of a port in Cox's Bazar [Polevik, 2018].

The aspirations of official Dhaka to curb India's influence can be explained by the problems of bilateral relations, such as the division of water resources of 54 common rivers, accusation in purchasing by anti-Indian rebel weapons in Bangladesh, and illegal migrants.

Moving away from the cooperation with the United States, at present Pakistan has become the most close regional ally of China and the fundamental reason for the Sino-Pakistani partnership is objective – its complex relations with India. This was the precondition for the rapprochement of parties in the 1960's on the background of Indo-Pakistan conflicts. Moreover, the official Islamabad has given in favor of the PRC the Karabulak valley in the north of Kashmir that is a strategically important pass through Karakoram [Borisov, 2019: 149]. China, in turn, has made a significant contribution to the national security of Pakistan.

After Indo-Pakistani military clash in 1965, the first phase of military-technical cooperation (MTC) between Pakistan and China has begun with supply of a significant number of tanks, aircraft and artillery systems to official Islamabad. Much more important in this context was the transfer of the military technologies and the Chinese assistance in building-up of Pakistan's own military-industrial complex.

The readiness of China to assist played the key role in the second phase of the MTC, which began in the 1990s and continues today. In particular, Pakistan's armored, aeronautical, missile and shipbuilding industries were started thanks to the PRC [Borisov, 2019:159-169]. Moreover, a significant number of experts believe that nuclear weapons technologies have emerged in Pakistan thanks to the Middle Kingdom.

At present Sino-Pakistani relations have been significantly supplemented by economic cooperation related to the active involvement of Pakistan in the Belt and Road project, especially since 2015 when the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Agreement was signed according to what Beijing has declared the intention to provide \$ 42 billion to \$ 62 billion for the construction of infrastructure on Pakistani territory [Ramachandran, 2019]. Obviously, suffering economic and security difficulties, Pakistan through relationship with the PRC hoped to gain additional job places, power generation capacity, attract of investment and ultimately stimulate the economic development of its own economy.

In 2019 was a significant military aggravation with the use of aviation and artillery in Indo-Pakistan relations based on the ancient cause of Kashmir affiliation. But as in case of territorial contradictions between Bhutan and China, clashes have not come to a serious escalation. It is clear that moment of confrontation has touched the issue of CPEC implementation as Pakistan's investment attractiveness has been diminished because of arising risks to Chinese companies's activities. It should be noted that in 2018 was announced information on the intention to create a special economic zone in Pakistan-controlled part of Kashmir for the production of space satellites and the production of new generation Chinese aircraft [Kukhaleishvili, 2019]. It is also logical to assume that a new moment of conflict with India will add arguments for the possible transformation of Gwadar into a Chinese military base and help boost Chinese arms imports to Pakistan.

At an official level, during the Russia-India-China meeting in February 2019 on the background of Kashmir confrontation China took a neutral stance, calling for a peaceful settlement and condemning terrorism (the terrorist attack on the Indian territory of Kashmir was the occasion for aggravation) [Korostikov, 2019]. Meanwhile, the PRC did not allow to include in the UN list of global terrorists the leader of the Jaish-e-Muhammad group that had been accused responsible for the Kashmir terrorist attack [Strokan, 2019].

It should be emphasized that India has an ally within Pakistan both in the context of confrontation with official Islamabad and the growing Chinese influence in that country. Pakistan is a state made up of individual ethnic groups, most of what are demonstrating separatist tendencies. The most privileged position in Pakistani society belongs to the residents from the Punjab region, while the most depressed are Baloch, a multimillion ethnic group without its own statehood which is divided by the borders of Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan. The Baloch of Pakistan are trying to achieve independence by force tools. Important point is that Balochistan is rich in energy resources and has a strategically crucial position because a lot of infrastructure projects can be implemented through its territory, including pipelines for the transport of energy from Iran to China. Therefore, it is not surprising that Chinese companies are active in Pakistani Balochistan. It is also important to remind that in the province is located a deep-water port of Gwadar.

However, the Baloch have a very negative perception of Chinese presence on their territory, believing that the representatives of the Celestial are exploiting the resources of their land only for own enrichment and the welfare of Pakistani non- Baloch. As a demonstration of the rejection of the Chinese presence growth, Baloch attack not only Chinese citizens in their region, but also the Chinese Consulate in Karachi [Aamir, 2019]. The purpose of this kind of action, according to the statements of the Baloch rebels, is to end Chinese activity in their region. Moreover, the Baloch called on India to take more aggressive action against Pakistan in the context of confrontation in 2019, promising to open a second front within the Islamic republic in case of a massive escalation [Thakuria, 2019].

Of course, Chinese loans for infrastructure projects meet the interests of economic development of receiving countries which are looking for economic opportunities. However, in cooperation with the Chinese part, it important to remember that the PRC puts always on the first

place its own interests. This obviously prompts the growing fears of recipient countries of economic dependence from official Beijing. Such alarming has strengthened taking into account the experience of Sri Lanka.

It is interesting that even the closest regional ally, Pakistan, expresses dissatisfaction with cooperation with China. In particular, the imposition of financial constraints on the construction of the Diamer-Bhash dam in 2017 prompted the Pakistani leadership to exclude this project from the CPEC list [Ramachandran, 2019]. Later, official Islamabad announced a reduction of Chinese loans.

However, the success of the fulfillment of the Silk Road project in South Asia has led Indian experts to the opinion that the PRC is realizing a “geopolitical clutches” strategy against India, aimed at surrounding the official New Delhi with allied states to China and, accordingly, curbing its ambitions.

In response to the implementation in the region of the Chinese project, India is attempting to propose its own geo-economic projects, which, however, extend beyond South Asia. In particular, as a counterbalance to the CPEC, the official New Delhi is trying to develop the so-called “North-South” infrastructure project, the idea of which emerged in 2000 with the involvement of India, Iran and Russia. The essence of it is to connect the ports of the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf with the Caspian railway centers, and further through the Russian Federation with the Scandinavian countries [Haider, 2019].

The key point of Indian interest is the Iranian port of Chabahar, located in the east of the Persian Gulf. India's interests in this strategic point are the possibility of using it as an alternative to Pakistan's Gwadar, including the place of the Indian naval forces location in the case of Gwadar could be converted to Chinese navy base. The Indian leadership managed to reach an agreement in 2016 with Iran and Afghanistan (which also did not join the New Silk Road because due to existing Afghan-Pakistani controversies over the issues of demarcation of the common border, the role Pakistan's role in the activities of the Taliban and the undesirability to give Pakistan access to Central Asia) to transform Chabahar into a transit point.

However, Indian activity is not achieving the desired results, as Iran is highly dependent on cooperation with China. In addition, official Beijing, after the activation of India's policy towards Iran, and possessing huge amount of financial resources, began to pay more attention to the Tehran's necessary of infrastructure development. Such step from the PRC even led to statements by the Iranian leadership about the possibility of Chabahar's connection with Gwadar [Haider, 2019].

Another project to counter China's influence is an attempt to restore the medieval “Spice Route” that aims to connect Indian ports with Middle Eastern countries. In this regard, India has succeeded to establish maritime communications with its key Middle East trading partner – Oman. However, the financial weakness and lateness of Indian proposals do not compete with the Chinese initiative and, as a result, this leads to the lack of interest from potential participants [Pandit, 2015].

Also we cannot but mention The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) – the single institution that embraces all the regional countries. At present, India is losing interest in it as tool of regional influence spreading in favour of sub-regional cooperation projects, particularly the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), South Asia Growth Quadrangle (SAGQ – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal), which are more effective instruments to curb the PRC and to counteract Pakistan's intentions. Among the reasons of the ineffectiveness of the SAAR are the lack of trust between the participating countries, China's generous promises and financial insufficiency in conjunction with lack of goaloriented activity from India, the desire of small countries to avoid the exclusive influence of New Delhi [Unnikrishnan, Purushothaman, 2019].

Last point we need to admit – the Indian initiative “Look east policy”, in which the official New Delhi seeks to turn the geostrategic weakness of the seven remote Northeast regions (so-called “Seven Sisters”) into a point of its influence in ASEAN countries. The Indian side's argument is that its North East is a single region that physically contacts with ASEAN countries, emphasizing that

through cooperation it is possible to earn significant success, such as the EU, specially given the enormous human and market capacity of ASEAN, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal (BBN) and mentioned part of India (800 million people). Among the practical steps are the implementation of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral highway and the establishment of the Assam Act East Policy Affairs Department in Assam devoted to build up relations with ASEAN and BBN [15].

Conclusions. India, as a biggest state in the region, aimed at leadership in South Asia, is seeking through a wide range of measures to promote its influence, providing regional countries with assistance in the creating of educational and social infrastructure, the construction of hydropower and thermal power stations, the provision of financial aid, the supply of medicines, the construction of transport infrastructure, and even in cases military support. However, India's positions in the region are weakening by the increasing influence of China which is trying to surround the growing "South Asian giant" with loyal countries.

China is realizing economic penetration and strengthening of its position in South Asia, actively using the contradictions between the countries of the region and the major regional state – India. In case of Pakistan, this is a long-term military and political confrontation, considering Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives – intention to avoid a one-sided geopolitical orientation towards official New Delhi. Factors contributing to the strengthening of the PRC's influence are the economic weakness of the South Asia's countries and their need to attract foreign financing, the lack of economic capacity of India and the refusal of Westerners to lend money in the face of criticism of non-observance of democratic principles and corruption. However, increasingly raising cooperation with China provokes alarming among countries of the region because of increasing economic dependence on the Middle Kingdom. As a result, most South Asian countries attempt to maneuver between India and China's ambitions in the region, often receiving funding from each party.

The confrontation between India and China in South Asia is now marked by several points: 1. India's closest regional ally is Bhutan which also has territorial disputes with the PRC and has refused to join the China's Silk Road as India; 2. the official New Delhi received a tactical victory in the Maldives where president-supporter of deeper cooperation with India came to power; 3. the PRC has substantially strengthened its influence in Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and has increasingly enhanced its partnership with Pakistan; 4. more and more moments are appearing between India and China that can lead to direct military clashes. However, military and, firstly, nuclear capabilities, interest in economic cooperation and at the highest level dialogue allow to avoid massive military confrontation; 5. in order to create a balance for the New Silk Road and prevent the geopolitical surrounding by of the Celestial Empire, India is trying to promote geo-economic projects – SAARC, "North-South", "Spice Route" and "Look East" policy. True, lack of financial resources, lateness, various contradictions with regional countries and more attractive China's proposals are preconditions of a failure of Indian efforts.

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