

---

## IRAN AND TAJIKISTAN ON VERGE OF BREAKING RELATIONS

- 18.10.2018

---

Vestnik Kavkaza (17 October 2018)

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Morteza Sarmadi met with Tajik Foreign Minister Sirodjidin Aslov on the sidelines of the SCO summit in Dushanbe last Thursday to discuss bilateral ties and boosting cooperation. The Tajik minister, in turn, recalled the history of relations between the two countries, noting that Iran has always supported the development of regional countries, including Tajikistan. Meanwhile, Vestnik Kavkaza learned that at the meeting the sides also discussed the fate of the Iranian embassy building, which was earmarked for demolition.

In translation from a diplomatic language, the Iranian side tried to convince Dushanbe at a meeting to prevent a final break in relations. Or, at the least, avoid such pushy and demonstrative actions as pending the demolition order in respect of the Iranian embassy, even under the specious pretext of building a new government complex in Dushanbe, which will be built with Chinese money.

According to the member of the Iran-East Institute's Scientific Council, doctor of historical sciences Igor Pankratenko, this attempt by Tehran had no chance to succeed: "President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon and his entourage consider today's demonstrative hatred of Iran and blaming it for everything wrong with the world as a pass to a new bright world. The world, where the rain of Saudi investments is poured over Dushanbe, and Donald Trump will welcome the Leader of all Tajiks and the Father of the whole nation with open arms into the modern "Fellowship of the Ring," combating the 21st century Mordor - Tehran."

However, recently, Tajikistan said that Iran is a friendly country, and their people are relatives. Both countries speak Farsi, the only difference is writing. Iran's one is based on Arabic script, Tajikistan's one is Cyrillic. Over 20 years, about 180 intergovernmental agreements have been signed. Iran implemented two investment projects in the post-Soviet republic: the Sangtuda 1 HPP and a five-kilometer tunnel in the Sughd region. The Islamic Republic of Iran provided political support to Tajikistan, especially during the 1992-1997 civil war. There was a Committee in Dushanbe to assist Tajik citizens, including financial aid. Iran has allocated a grant of \$35 million to Tajikistan to build new schools.

Relationships between the two countries have started in 2013, when local businessman Babak Zanjani, accused of corruption ties with the Tajik government, was arrested and later sentenced to death in Iran. Zanjani exported Iranian oil bypassing the sanctions. The Iranian court claimed that Zanjani laundered \$2 billion through the National Bank of Tajikistan. This money he allegedly stole in the Iranian Oil Ministry. Speaking with Iranian media, a member of the investigative committee

on the Zanjani case, Amir Abbas Soltani, claimed that Zanjani had paid \$3 million to a high-ranking representative of the National Bank of Tajikistan in order to get a false document. Sultoni said that the billionaire paid the money to the deputy chairman of the National Bank of Tajikistan. At the same time, he did not name the deputy. Amir Abbas Soltani also claimed that Zanjani had previously presented a document to the Iranian parliament, which showed that the money had been transferred to Iran's Central Bank from the Tajik National Bank. However, Dushanbe rejected this accusation, denying the possibility of a corrupt connection with the Iranian oligarch. However, Tehran is reluctant to execute Zanjani, hoping to get their money back with his help.

Having a grievance with Iran, Dushanbe accused Tehran of involvement in the coup d'etat in 2015, which was allegedly prepared by the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) and its leader Muhiddin Kabiri. According to the Tajik version, Iran funded this party. As a result, the IRPT was recognized as terrorist organization in Tajikistan, and its activities were prohibited on the territory of the country.

Muhiddin Kabiri's meeting with Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei on the sidelines of the international conference and a picture of them together made a lot of noise. After that, Dushanbe restricted imports from Iran, stopped preferential issuance of visas to its citizens and began to shut down Iranian companies in the republic.

In less than three years, Iran has turned from a "brotherly state", a reliable business partner and one of the co-sponsors of ending the fratricidal war in Tajikistan, into a monster who was planning several coups in the republic and the assassination of prominent members of the political elite. Dushanbe even tried to accuse Iranian agents of attacking and killing Western tourists, which shocked Central Asia this summer, but then ISIS (banned in the Russian Federation) convincingly proved that the attack was carried out by its members, and not some members of the IRPT, not yet annihilated by the valiant Tajik security forces.

"There's nothing special about Rakhmons irrational hatred for Tehran. Such phenomena are not uncommon in recent history of Central Asia, the Near and Middle East, it is enough to recall how the Muhammad Salih case affected Uzbek-Turkish relations. The problem for Iran is that the sudden outbreak of Iranophobia in Dushanbe was in demand in certain circles in the international arena and was easily capitalized," Pankratenko believes.

Saudi Arabia seeks to occupy the niche previously occupied by Iran. Earlier, Wahhabism was perceived as a threat in Tajikistan, now suitable conditions have been formed for it, since its main competitors, Iran's Shiites, have been eliminated. Saudi Arabian Ambassador Abdulaziz bin Mohammed Al-Badi told the Tajik news agency 'Avesta': "Saudi Arabia is not one of those countries that talks about permanent friendship with the Tajik people, but then sticks its knife in the back." He explained that he was referring to "Iran's dubious and suspicious activities in Tajikistan."

The head of the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre, Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Rabeeah, said that the organization has invested \$9.5 million in humanitarian projects over the past three years. In particular, the center allocated more than \$1 million to the modern Emergency Committee training center with furniture and equipment, which was opened in early October. In addition, the Saudi delegation took part in the launch of a humanitarian project worth \$6 million in the south of Tajikistan - Hamadoni district. Shore protection works along the 20 km sides of Pyanj River are planned there. Acts of nature will no longer threaten the area's population of 135 thousand people, and over 14 thousand hectares of farmland will be protected during flood and

rain seasons.

According to Igor Pankratenko, the Saudi capitalization was not very significant. Dushanbe is praised for its adherence to the anti-Iranian position, it is promised all sorts of bonuses, but they have to wait. When it comes to assessing Riyadh's direct financial injection to Tajikistan, then the overall figures, about \$65 million over the past two years, or \$110 million during the establishment of diplomatic relations, do not look impressive. "Rakhmons ability to damage Iran is quite limited, and if this is the case, so why pay a lot? But the Leader of the Nation and the Founding Father do not lose hope to earn money on the conflict with Tehran. Therefore, the level of hostility towards Iran will not decrease in the near future," the expert noted.

<http://vestnikkavkaza.net/analysis/Iran-and-Tajikistan-on-verge-of-breaking-relations.html>

---

Kaynak/Source: