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**Gauging the Goeconomic Relations Between Pakistan and
Turkmenistan: The Tapi Gas Pipeline**

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Abstract

The geostrategic location of Pakistan and Turkmenistan makes both the countries mutually beneficial for each other, due to which the two have a history of sharing cordial relations with each other ever since the independence of Turkmenistan in 1991. The two countries share commonalities which are rooted in religious, political and cultural values, and more recently by the geoeconomic vision they share for the region which is underlined in their Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Gas Pipeline project. This project holds great promise for the region's development for the reason that the energy-rich Central Asia will become enabled to open up markets to the energy-starved South Asia. This will collectively uplift the regional economy. Crucially, the TAPI project will enhance Pakistan's connectivity with Turkmenistan and help the two promote a shared understanding of the evolving dynamics in the region and internationally.

Importance of the Tapi Gas Pipeline for Pakistan and Turkmenistan

Prior to their independence, Pakistan's relationship with the Central Asian states under the USSR were somewhat rocky despite the religious, traditional, political and commercial values they shared.



This however has recently evolved for the better with Pakistan's recent economic initiatives which are not only improving Pakistan's relationships with the Central Asian



states but are benefitting regional connectivity of the larger Asian region. In this regard, Pakistan's cooperation with Turkmenistan for the construction of the TAPI gas pipeline, stretching across four countries has the prospective of developing 'Asian peace'.

This initiative to link up Central Asia with South Asia aims to mutually benefit the region by enhancing connectivity and interdependence. Once completed, TAPI gas pipeline will have the potential to export approximately 33 billion cubic meters of natural gas from Turkmenistan across a 1815km long pipeline. What makes this project so beneficial is the interest taken in it by India, which effectively puts the hostile country in a dependent relationship with Pakistan. The project is thus viewed as crucial for stabilizing Pakistan's relations with its hostile neighbor. Finally, the geoeconomic benefits of the project for Pakistan and Turkmenistan particularly are not limited to strengthened bilateral relations between the two; rather, Pakistan recognizes Turkmenistan to be a crucial transit route for accessing Europe. Adding to this is the fact that Pakistan suffers tremendously from power shortages for which the gas brought in from the project will be a much-needed solution. For Turkmenistan itself, the project provides the landlocked country with access to Pakistan's warm water ports, the importance of which will be multiplied with the completion of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.



Source: <https://www.eias.org/news/review-of-peace-pipelines-safe-logistics-of-the-tapi-pipelines/>

One of the most immediate outcomes of the TAPI pipeline construction is that Pakistan will get access to gas supply of Galkynysh, Turkmenistan which is the world's 2nd largest natural gas reserve. From the total supply of 33 billion cubic meters, Pakistan will receive approximately 42% of the supply. Turkmenistan's bilateral benefits are witnessed in the utilization of its massive gas reserves. Previously Turkmenistan has faced a lack of market to provide its gas with and its previous importers were limited to China, Russia and Iran. With the construction of TAPI gas pipeline with Pakistan, Turkmenistan will not only gain access to a new market with ample demand, but also massively benefit from partaking in the CPEC project and will become able to expand its market natural gas and other resources to the Middle East, Africa and the Asia-Pacific.



Pakistan also happens to be one of the largest consumers of Turkmenistan's gas under the project.

This stems from the reason that Pakistan in the recent years has faced severe energy deficit in the industrial and domestic sphere due to which Pakistan's economy has been negatively impacted. So severe is the energy



crises in Pakistan that one of Pakistan's biggest industries, the textile industry has been effected to the extent that 40% of the industry was compelled to transfer to Bangladesh due to unstable gas and electricity supply (Roop Pervaiz Butt, 2015). Understanding Pakistan's dire need for more energy supply, Pakistan sees Turkmenistan as a vital trading partner. Turkmenistan provides Pakistan with an indispensable ally and a relationship which is mutually beneficial for both countries. However, despite addressing the thirst of energy in South Asia, TAPI continues to face challenges due to certain political and geostrategic choices that rivalling countries of the region make. India's differing political interests like its aggressive approach towards Pakistan and its suspicious role in Afghanistan directly impact the TAPI gas pipeline project; however, on a brighter side, TAPI may yet just be the solution that can contribute in normalizing the stringent relations between these countries. Thus, TAPI's importance as a tool for geoeconomic diplomacy stands ground despite the challenges it faces.



Challenges Faced and the Way Forward

Undoubtedly, the functioning of the TAPI gas pipeline is severely dependent on the stable security situation in the region. However, the most serious threat is the exploitation of trade routes between South Asia and Central Asia by foreign powers, and even worse, by terrorists. Terrorism already poses a grave threat to Afghanistan and Pakistan in South Asia and the lack of state-led development of trade routes may lead to propagation of terrorism. Pakistan should work towards playing the role of a responsible state by acting in cohesion with Turkmenistan in order to promote regional stability. TAPI gas pipeline can thus be used as an opportunity by Pakistan and Turkmenistan to collaborate and act as the peacemakers in the region by using geoeconomics as an instrument. It is for these very reasons that the TAPI gas pipeline project between Pakistan and Turkmenistan, along with its many stakeholders, becomes one of the most promising upcoming projects of the region.

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