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Farzad Bonesh

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The Taliban's approach to the TAPI pipeline: challenges, and obstacles

Although TAPI has now taken on more of a bilateral partnership between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, its earlier implementation will certainly have greater domestic consequences for Afghanistan.



The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline, a combination of the first letters of the Latin names of the countries participating in the regional project, runs from Turkmenistan to India. The length of the 1,814-kilometer line is 214 kilometers in Turkmenistan and 816 kilometers in Afghanistan.

The TAPI project is intended to transport [33](#) billion cubic meters of natural gas annually from Turkmenistan's The Galkynysh gas field to India.

The full and successful construction and operation of the pipeline requires the political will of the leaders of the four countries and serious bilateral and multilateral discussions with all partners

In 2015, the leaders of the four TAPI participating countries celebrated the groundbreaking ceremony for the gas pipeline in the city of Merv. But apart from the laying of the Turkmen section, virtually no major activity took place.

After the Taliban returned to power, international financial institutions either refused to directly support the project due to legal and political considerations or showed no interest in investing.

The Afghan Taliban is not officially recognized, and international sanctions against the Taliban, political differences between India and Pakistan, and tense relations between Kabul and Islamabad have slowed down the implementation of the project.

However, in September 2024, former President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov and Taliban Prime Minister Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund jointly launched the TAPI project in 2024 at a [ceremony](#) on the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan border.

Recently, Hedayatullah Badri, Minister of Mines and Petroleum, and a high-ranking delegation from Turkmenistan, visited the [progress](#) of the TAPI gas transmission project in Herat province and emphasized the acceleration of the work process.

Although Pakistan and India have not been involved much in the recent developments of the TAPI gas pipeline, the Taliban, adopting a pragmatic approach, have decided to take this energy transmission project step by step with the cooperation of Turkmenistan.

Political and geopolitical goals and interests of the Afghan Taliban:

From the perspective of TAPI, it is an opportunity to solve the security problem within the country, and Kabul hopes that the opposition will also agree to the construction of this pipeline, considering national interests. During the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Taliban, in a statement, while supporting the TAPI project, saw TAPI as an important economic project and an important element in the country's economic infrastructure.

Gaining greater regional and global support for this pipeline will further link Afghanistan's security with regional and global partners. The passage of the TAPI gas pipeline through Afghanistan will link the tangible and real interests of several regional and global countries, and the neighboring countries will also ensure Afghanistan's security.

The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project has helped increase Afghanistan's geopolitical position and strengthen relations and mutual interests among

partner countries. Taliban leaders seem to believe that TAPI has the potential to expand relations between member countries and strengthen common interests.

On the other hand, from the perspective of many in Kabul, the pipeline's passage through Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India will reduce Pakistan's incentive to play a negative role in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Kabul expects the TAPI project to encourage countries' interests to move away from confrontation with each other in Afghanistan to a policy of tolerance.

In this approach, accurate and efficient management in the TAPI can have important effects on the public opinion of the people, show the government efficiently, deal with the opposition, and satisfy nationalist feelings.

Economic goals and benefits:

Of course, this plan cannot pave the way for an economic revolution in Afghanistan, but it can be very useful for other major construction projects, reconstruction, economic development and production, trade, and transit in Afghanistan.

It will also employ about ten thousand people for the next few decades, creating thousands of direct and indirect jobs and reducing some of the unemployment problem.

Over the past few years, the Taliban have focused on several projects such as the [TAP-500](#) energy system, the revival of important energy transmission and transit projects, including CASA-1000.

In addition, the Taliban have planned and inaugurated some infrastructure and economic projects, such as solar power generation over the past two years. The Taliban consider energy projects important in the development and self-sufficiency of the country, saving Afghanistan from poverty and dependence on expanding [energy](#) production, and managing water resources.

The implementation of TAPI can help transform Afghanistan's energy consumption infrastructure from oil and coal to natural gas, and help increase the country's production and economic growth.

For the first time, Afghanistan can achieve reliable natural gas for domestic and industrial use. For example, the TAPI pipeline passing through Herat province (the economic hub of Afghanistan) could be a driving force for other local industries.

Afghanistan could be actor into a major transit route for Central Asia and a bridge between Central Asian energy-consuming and exporting countries. South Asian countries are in great need of energy, and Central Asian countries have abundant gas and electricity reserves. Afghanistan has the potential to connect the two sides.

Success in this project could accelerate the construction of power transmission lines, railways, fiber optics, etc., in the field of regional cooperation. If TAPI is completed at a cost of more than \$7-10 billion, it could also help attract foreign investment to the country. In addition to meeting the gas needs of its growing economy, Afghanistan could also receive \$1 billion in gas transit rights annually. This amount could be a major contribution to the economy.

TAPI could be an important step towards strengthening the economic diplomacy of the Kabul government. Apart from the main role of Turkmen Gas Company, with an 85% stake, in July 2024, Pakistan and Turkmenistan [agreed](#) to accelerate the progress of the TAPI gas pipeline project.

Kazakhstan also seems to be willing to join the project. The Russian companies may participate in the TAPI project, “as soon as the situation in Afghanistan stabilizes”.

Challenges and Outlook

TAPI suffers from major challenges, from insecurity to political complications, regional instability, the international isolation of the Taliban, and doubts about the investment capacity.

The TAPI project in the Turkmen section has been completed. The Taliban also plan four [phases](#) for construction from the Turkmenistan border to the city of Herat; Herat to Helmand; Helmand to Kandahar; and Kandahar to the Pakistani border. But as of April 2025, about 11 kilometers of pipeline have been laid in Afghanistan.

Large investments require security and stability, and major extremist groups such as ISIS* can be a significant threat in Afghanistan.

The Afghan section of TAPI (in Herat, Farah, Nimroz, Helmand, and Kandahar provinces) passes through some of the most unstable parts of the country. The Taliban is not yet a legitimate government, with legal standing as an economic contracting party and a reliable partner. Critics have [warned](#) that the Taliban government does not have national legitimacy and international and legal recognition.

Pakistan and India appear to be cautiously refraining from immediately participating in the TAPI gas pipeline, waiting for conditions in Afghanistan to change.

While the Taliban has not been recognized yet, it is also not possible to secure financial assistance or loans from international institutions.

In addition, the full and successful construction and operation of the pipeline requires the political will of the leaders of the four countries and serious bilateral and multilateral discussions with all partners.

However, although TAPI has now taken on more of a bilateral partnership between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, its earlier implementation will certainly have greater domestic consequences for Afghanistan.

**-banned in Russia*

[Farzad Bonesh](#), April 24, 2025

Farzad Bonesh – geopolitical and geoeconomic analyst, researcher and writer