

# افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد  
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

[www.afgazad.com](http://www.afgazad.com)

[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2014/01/26/turkmen-gas-and-the-pipeline-politics.html>

## Turkmen Gas and the Pipeline Politics

Nikolai BOBKIN

26.01.2014



US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, Nisha Desai Biswal, has set out on a tour of Central Asia from Turkmenistan. President Barack Obama gave her a message of gratitude to be passed on to the President of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, for his international initiatives in securing peace, stability and security in the Central Asian region, and expressed his confidence that the Turkmenistan - Afghanistan - Pakistan - India (TAPI) [gas pipeline project](#), stretching more than 1700 kilometres with a capacity of around 30 billion cubic metres of gas per year, will come to fruition. Judging by the outcome of the State Department

representative's visit, discussing the subject of the TAPI pipeline was the main aim of her talks in Ashgabat. Washington is trying to convince Turkmenistan that there will be no problems regarding the security of the pipeline going through Afghanistan. «We are confident that this project can and should go ahead. We are confident that a solution to the issue of security can be found», Biswal declared.

Exactly what the Americans are basing this confidence on remains a mystery. Just a few months ago, the US Agency for International Development (USAID), which is financing the TAPI project, put a hold on its implementation due to uncertainty associated with the withdrawal of international security forces from Afghanistan in 2014, where the situation is not only not improving, it is showing clear signs of escalating into a civil war. A report by the US intelligence-gathering community entitled «An evaluation of global threats in 2013» acknowledges that attempts to achieve security are particularly fragile in those areas where responsibility is being handed over to the Afghan National Security Forces, which are in need of international help. The Taliban are still capable of challenging the United States.

Essentially, the Americans are insisting that the gas pipeline be built in the middle of a combat situation. There are areas in Afghanistan where the authority of the central government is rather weak, and local government bodies are known for their corruption and irresponsibility, allowing the Taliban to maintain its leverage on the situation in the south, southeast and east of the country. Armed groups of rebels are still intentionally attacking the road transport network and making use of their significant influence in rural areas. In the process, the size of these armed groups has increased, which became apparent, for example, in the brief capture of the district administrative centre in the south of Badakhshan that took place in the autumn of 2013. In the short term, a loose division of the spheres of influence is most likely. The Taliban's position will be strengthened, and it is quite possible that the country will destabilise dramatically and there will be a civil war.

Nevertheless, the US government is showing a profound interest in cooperating with Turkmenistan to implement the [TAPI project](#), suggesting an alternative construction location in a desolate, mountainous area. The security of the pipeline, as planned, will be provided from the air, although according to the Americans themselves, the Afghan Air Force does not have the resources for this. Furthermore, in Pakistan the pipeline needs to be laid around tribal areas where the situation is no less combative than in Afghanistan. In such circumstances, finding investors who are willing to finance work on the vast territories of two extremely unstable countries is incredibly difficult; serious government guarantees are needed. A private consortium, headed by the American company Unocal, refused to be involved in the project's financing, and the main investor is set to be the government agency USAID. American taxpayers, who last year were paying USD 12 million a day for their troops to stay in Afghanistan, are now going to have to put their hands in their pockets again for the TAPI project, the cost of which is estimated to be USD 8 billion.

The economic inviability of the TAPI project for the Americans has become particularly evident at the present time. China has made this project useless to the Americans, having become the main decision maker regarding Central Asia's gas resources. The expropriation of Washington's plans came about as a result of a contract between the state gas company Turkmengaz and the

Chinese company CNPC for the sale of 25 billion cubic metres of gas per year... The deal will bring the total volume of Turkmen gas supplied to China to 65 billion cubic metres. At the same time, agreements have been reached on a proposed new direction for the Turkmenistan-China pipeline (direction D) for additional supplies. Gas agreements have also enabled the approval of a Joint Declaration on Establishing a Strategic Partnership between Turkmenistan and China. The declaration was supported by a cooperation agreement for the financing of the second phase of development at the Galkynysh gas field, as well as a contract for the design and construction of a facility at this location for the production of 30 billion cubic metres of marketable gas per year. By gaining control over the source of raw materials, China has virtually appropriated the TAPI pipeline already. The US does not seem to have any objection. So where does America's interest lie?

Firstly, following 11 September 2001, Afghanistan became the primary target of America's global war on terror, while Washington declared that the countries of Central Asia were «frontline states». America's inability to reach a political settlement in Afghanistan, which is occupied by American troops, and before that in Iraq, raises natural doubts regarding the adequacy of the White House's strategy. On the eve of the troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan, there is a growing probability that the instability will move from there to neighbouring countries. Washington is obviously trying to keep the strategic gains it has made in Central Asia by imposing its partnership on Central Asian countries. To withdraw from Afghanistan and lose its influence in the region would be intolerable for America. This applies to Central Asia, to Pakistan, and to Iran.

Secondly, Iran is also seeking to supply its gas to Pakistan. In March 2013, the presidents of these two countries officially opened the final construction stage of the Peace pipeline. The construction of the Iranian section of the pipeline, the length of which, according to various estimates, is nearly 1150 kilometres, is almost completed, and work has begun to extend the pipe in Pakistan, which will be approximately 780 kilometres in length; the cost of the future work has been estimated at USD 1.5 billion. It is expected that Pakistan will begin to receive gas from the pipeline by December 2014 (exactly the same was planned for the TAPI pipeline). According to the contract signed for 25 years, the Islamic Republic of Iran will export 7.8 billion cubic metres of natural gas to Pakistan every year through the new Iranian pipeline. Tehran is not hiding its own particular interest in realising this project and is willing to make substantial concessions to Pakistan. And now the Americans are objecting. The US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, Victoria Nuland, has pointed out that the gas pipeline project between Iran and Pakistan could serve as the reason for new sanctions against both Tehran and Islamabad. Nuland observed that Pakistan has chosen the wrong path by entering into an energy agreement with Iran, and that a penalty in the form of sanctions is unavoidable.

Thirdly, America is consistently true to its desire to prevent the growth of Russia's international influence. America's strategic interests in the Central Asia region were stated clearly for the first time in April 1997, in a special report sent to Congress by the State Department. The document indicated that America would not abandon its claims in Central Asia, including with regard to extending and diversifying the world's energy routes. The contours of such a diversification are obvious: to damage Russia, bypass Iran and harm China. You will recall that the Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline from Turkmenistan to Azerbaijan appeared in 1996 as an alternative to the Russian-

Turkish Blue Stream project. This coincided with America declaring that the Black and Caspian Sea areas were a zone of its strategic interests. At present, the main support for the project is coming from the EU, and the US seems to have receded into the background. Nevertheless, it was the US in August 2010 who gave Azerbaijan nearly USD 2 million to prepare a feasibility study for the project in view of Kazakhstan's possible involvement in it.

America's invasion of Afghanistan, one of the most underdeveloped countries in the world, contributed absolutely nothing to the fight against terrorism. After overthrowing the Taliban regime, as much as a quarter of Afghanistan remains under their control. America's activities in the interests of peace and stability in Afghanistan have essentially come to an end, and the Americans no longer need cooperation in this area from neighbouring powers, including from Russia. The American administration continues to treat Central Asia like a field of strategic competition between the US and neighbouring countries; first and foremost Russia, but now China as well. This is the only reason why America is still suggesting the territory of rebellious Afghanistan as a safe corridor for the transit of energy from the Caspian Sea through Central Asia to Pakistan and India... And why it refuses to see that the mutual distrust of Pakistan and India has brought all talks on energy projects they have been involved in to deadlock, and that alone is turning the TAPI project into a gas pipeline that is going to lead nowhere.