

## PAKISTAN - TURKMENISTAN RELATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF (TAPI) GAS PIPELINE PROJECT

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to analyze Pakistan-Turkmenistan relations through the lens of the TAPI gas pipeline while assessing the challenges posed by Afghanistan to its implementation. The study explores the strategic importance of TAPI for regional energy security and economic cooperation, emphasizing its role in strengthening Pakistan-Turkmenistan ties. However, Afghanistan's security instability, governance issues, and economic constraints present significant obstacles to the project's progress. By examining these challenges, the study aims to provide insights into the geopolitical risks, policy gaps, and potential solutions necessary for the successful realization of TAPI. It also highlights the need for regional collaboration, diplomatic engagement, and security frameworks to ensure the project's viability and long-term benefits for all stakeholders.

**Keywords:** Pakistan - Turkmenistan relations, TAPI Gas Pipeline, Foreign policy, Geo strategy, Regional connectivity, Energy Cooperation, Afghanistan Security Challenges.

### INTRODUCTION

Developing strong relationships with the Muslim world at large has continued to be a major component of Pakistan's foreign policy. Pakistan and Central Asian states are members of the Economic Cooperation Organisation, which provides an ideal location for talks between leaders of state and government. Side meetings between two people provide a more in-depth examination of bilateral ties. Pakistan's foreign policy has placed a strong emphasis on the Central Asian republics since 1991, when they gained independence from the Soviet Union. Central Asia has five sovereign republics: Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. Every republic is rich in energy and landlocked. The instability in Afghanistan has also presented Pakistan with a variety of challenges as it seeks to strengthen ties with the

CAR's. The most significant impediment to Pakistan's economic ambitions, such as the proposed pipeline projects that could transport gas and oil from Central Asia to Pakistan, is the adverse border situation with Afghanistan. TAPI is a natural gas pipeline project that connects Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India with the purpose of increasing connectivity and mutual dependency among Central and South Asian countries. Thus, Turkmenistan will be able to send gas to the east. These countries require a steady supply of inexpensive petrol to meet their expanding energy needs and industries.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Pakistan's ports have the potential to help Central Asian countries grow. However, India is attempting to distance itself from Pakistan in

order to forge solid ties with Central Asian states. Pakistan, a state with a booming agricultural economy and an expanding industrial base, is eager and curious to establish communication with the Central Asian Republics. Pakistan may make a significant contribution to its economic development by importing gas and oil from states in Central Asia (Adnan & Fatima, 2015).

TAPI is a huge gas pipeline connecting Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India in South Asia with Turkmenistan, an energy-rich Central Asian country. Rail lines between Iran and Kazakhstan might eventually connect Pakistan and Turkmenistan. The construction of the gas pipeline is expected to boost Pakistan's investment confidence in energy-rich Turkmenistan. The project is extremely important to all four of the participating states because it has the potential to both alleviate Pakistan's and India's energy crises and give Turkmenistan a great chance to export its energy resources and create jobs for Afghanistan. It has the potential to significantly contribute to these states moving towards regional growth (Khetran, 2020).

Pakistan serves as an ideal conduit for Central Asian governments' interstate maritime trade. Because of the instability and hostility in Afghanistan, this trade route has been rendered useless and ineffectual for an extended length of time. Pakistan has considerable strategic and commercial interests in Central Asia. Pakistan has significant energy resources and is seeking low-cost energy alternatives to suit its energy requirements. CAR's can help. In order to facilitate contacts with Central Asia, Pakistan is working to establish amicable ties with Afghanistan (Javaid & Dashti, 2016).

## PAKISTAN RELATIONS WITH TURKMENISTAN

Since Pakistan accepted Turkmenistan's independence in 1991, the two countries have enjoyed great political, social, cultural, and economic ties. Pakistan and Turkmenistan have been fostering cordial diplomatic ties for the previous 20 years. Benazir Bhutto, who was Pakistan's prime minister at the time, had travelled to Turkmenistan in October 1994, and Nawaz Sharif had done the same in October

1997 (Irfan, 2011). Both parties place a high value on the friendship between their people and the necessity of enhancing their collaboration in a variety of disciplines. Two Muslim states that are brothers, Turkmenistan and Pakistan, have certain historical and political similarities. Since 1991, Turkmenistan and Pakistan have had outstanding political, social, cultural, and economic ties. Large hydrocarbon reserves exist in Turkmenistan, which can supply Pakistan with all the energy it requires. The proposal by Turkmenistan to create transregional energy corridors has the backing of Pakistan as well. Over the course of their 25- year bilateral relationship, both countries have signed various intergovernmental agreements to strengthen cooperation in trade, energy, agriculture and livestock, science and technology, education, health, sports, and tourism. These accords will not only boost ties between Turkmenistan and Pakistan but will also have a substantial impact in their respective economies (Khan, 2017).

According to Muhammad Adnan Jalil, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's caretaker minister for industries, commerce, and technical education, Pakistan and Turkmenistan share historical warm relations as well as religions. Therefore, fostering trade and cultural exchanges between the two states will strengthen their bonds. There was a plethora of opportunities for trade promotion between Turkmenistan and Pakistan, which, if taken advantage of, could significantly contribute to the economic growth of both states.

During a meeting in Islamabad with Mr. Atadjan Movlamov, the Turkmenistan ambassador to Pakistan, Adnan Jalil shared these opinions ("Pakistan, Turkmenistan to further boost trade ties", 2023). Pakistan has consistently aspired to strengthen its ties with the states of Central Asia. This attachment also extends to the shared religious ties as well as the proximity in terms of culture and language. Aside from such ideas, one potential option to develop bilateral and multilateral relations between the Central Asian Republics (CAR's) and Pakistan is to capitalize on the region's excellent trade and investment opportunities. Pakistan has always considered Turkmenistan, a wealthy state in Central Asia with abundant natural gas and oil reserves, to be a valuable partner for collaboration (Brohi, 2016).

## PAKISTAN FOREIGN POLICY WITH TURKMENISTAN

The Pakistan and Turkmenistan countries are strongly linked to one another due to a multitude of cultural, religious, and economic relations. In addition to having many cultural similarities, Pakistan and Turkmenistan also have a same religion (Dawar, 2020). History, culture, and religion have all contributed to the friendly and respectful relations that exist between Turkmenistan and Pakistan. Both states place a high importance on interpersonal relationships and stress the necessity of advancing bilateral cooperation in a few areas (Khetran, 2020).

Turkmenistan will maintain its policy of neutrality, which is founded on equality, good neighborliness, respect for one another, and mutually beneficial cooperation with other states worldwide. The cornerstones of state's legal neutrality, which are bolstering interstitial peace and security, expanding goodwill-based friendly and fraternal ties, and promoting sustainable global development, will remain the top priorities of Turkmenistan's independent foreign policy. Pakistan has multiple primary goals that direct its foreign policy towards Turkmenistan.

- The upholding and strengthening of Turkmenistan's state sovereignty, which will increase its stature and relevance within the global order.
- The establishment of advantageous interstate political circumstances for the state's domestic development.
- Protecting and advancing Turkmenistan's state interests through all channels available in the global diplomatic process.
- Turkmenistan's state interests are upheld and implemented through all channels available in the interstate practice of diplomatic interactions.
- Creation of positive, mutually beneficial relationships based on equality and respect with all foreign partners.
- Ensuring that Turkmenistan's foreign policy actions fully abide by the UN Charter and interstate law (Rahmanov, 2022).

According to a news release from MFA Turkmenistan, on August 31, 2023, Pakistan's Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jalil Abbas

Jilani, met with Turkmen Ambassador to Pakistan, Atajan Movlamov. The Pakistani side expressed great appreciation for Turkmenistan's foreign policy approach and the status of bilateral relations, noting that cooperative initiatives like TAPI are crucial for Pakistan (Pakistan appreciates foreign policy of Turkmenistan, 2023).

## GEO-STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF (TAPI) PROJECT

The initiative has enormous strategy importance. When finished, TAPI has the potential to revolutionize the industry and give hitherto unfeasible regional economic integration initiatives more traction. The project will not be impacted by a change in government in any of the partner countries because the agreement is between the states. It would be a key tool for raising living conditions in South and Central Asia and promoting regional stability.

The transit price for Afghanistan and Pakistan, the cheap petrol for Pakistan and India, and the energy market for Turkmenistan are all benefits of TAPI that will increase the economic reward for all participating states. It will give customers access to cleaner, more affordable energy, boosting the economy and lowering high inflation rates. It will bring in money that can be utilized to advance the social sectors, particularly housing, clean water, health care, and education. It will provide jobs, which could eliminate the incentives for young individuals to join extremist organizations.

It would improve bilateral and regional connectivity and have a "force multiplier" effect on future initiatives of a similar nature. The pipeline would be able to force states in the region to shift from zero sum rivalry towards a mutually beneficial framework of collaboration by fostering confidence between the public and the governments (Rajpoot & Naeem, 2020).

## PAKISTAN-TURKMENISTAN RELATIONS AND COOPERATION

Pakistan and Turkmenistan have a close and cordial relationship based on shared history, culture, and religion. Both countries place a high value on interpersonal interactions and strive to improve bilateral cooperation in a range of

sectors. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project fosters bilateral collaboration while addressing socioeconomic concerns. The Turkmen-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Gas Pipeline Project aims to address regional energy shortages while simultaneously increasing regional connectivity. Pakistan exports jute fabric, pyrotechnic items, fruits, and vegetables to Turkmenistan, while importing raw cotton, cotton yarn, and chemical components. Regular exchanges of high-level visits between the two countries have strengthened bilateral ties.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, Pakistan and Turkmenistan have forged coalitions in a few bilateral relations areas. The heads of state and foreign ministry have maintained frequent political relations, and both states have interacted successfully in bilateral and multilateral contexts inside major interstate institutions such as the UN, OIC, ECO, and the Non-Aligned Movement ("Economic Cooperation Organization Science Foundation", 2022).

### REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY AND ENERGY COOPERATION

Pakistan and Turkmenistan have close fraternal relations. The Turkmenistan Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project, an important regional energy cooperation project, will help Pakistan address its natural gas shortfall. To address its energy shortage, Pakistan has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with both Turkmenistan and Afghanistan to acquire 1,000 MW of electricity from Turkmenistan via Afghanistan.

These regional energy efforts are regarded as critical to enhancing regional connectivity since they will strengthen interdependence and facilitate regional trade and commerce. Turkmenistan and other Central Asian republics see Pakistan's deep seaports as important access routes. Beyond the energy sector, Pakistan and Turkmenistan are collaborating to improve infrastructure and connectivity, hence strengthening business connections and people-to-people relationships.

### COUNTER-TERRORISM STRATEGY TOWARDS TERRORIST ORGANIZATION

Pakistan and Turkmenistan have faced significant security challenges, particularly in the context of counterterrorism. The Taliban's involvement in terrorism, drug trafficking, and the construction of interstate terrorist training sites on Taliban-controlled territory have all threatened regional stability. Since terrorism and extremism are viewed as the main contributors to the region's instability and insecurity, Pakistan and Turkmenistan have similar concerns about these issues. Both states have pledged to work together to eradicate the evils of terrorism and extremism, and they effectively collaborate in interstate forums (Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2024).

### ECONOMIC BENEFIT OF TAPI PROJECT

According to PM Shehbaz, Pakistan and Turkmenistan have cordial ties based on shared cultural, religious, and historical backgrounds. The leaders of both countries are eager to advance their economies and trade ties. He underlined that Pakistan might serve as a point of entry for simple access to Turkmenistan's significant oil reserves. The Prime Minister discussed the project's strategic significance, noting that it exemplifies Pakistan-Turkey strategic cooperation in the energy sector. "Our government's vision for ensuring Pakistan's energy security that will bring economic growth and prosperity not only in Pakistan but in the entire region," he stated, highlighting TAPI's significance. He underlined his commitment to completing the project as quickly as possible (TAPI project to strengthen regional cooperation: PM, 2023).

### IMPORTANCE OF TAPI FOR PAKISTAN

Pakistan considers Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India Project to be critical because of its strategic importance in boosting regional energy cooperation and economic growth.

The project's purpose is to develop a natural gas pipeline that will provide Pakistan and the other participating countries with a consistent supply of energy. Pakistan's economic development, energy security, and regional connectivity all depend on this project. Pakistan's dedication to diversifying its energy supplies and establishing closer links



with its neighbors for mutual benefit is demonstrated by its participation in the TAPI Project (Mamchii, 2023).

### ROLE OF PAKISTAN IN (TAPI) GAS PIPELINE PROJECT

The massive gas TAPI known as project will link Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India with Turkmenistan, a state rich in energy in Central Asia. The TAPI gas pipeline, which has been studied since 2001, aims to deliver gas from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan and India. Pakistan is aiming to complete the TAPI gas pipeline as soon as possible. The huge TAPI project has the potential to solve Pakistan's energy problems. This additional energy source enables the local industries to operate at full capacity (Khetran, 2020). The construction of the TAPI gas pipeline began with a groundbreaking ceremony in December 2015 in the Turkmen city of Mary, 311 kilometres from the capital, Ashgabat. Vice President Mohammad Hamid Ansari of India, President Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai of Afghanistan, Prime Minister Nawaz

Sharif of Pakistan, and Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov all attended this historic event. In February 2016, the four participating states' leaders signed an investment agreement for the TAPI pipeline project in Istanbul. Afghanistan will get 14 million standard cubic metres of natural gas per day (mmscmd) from TAPI, compared to 38 mmscmd from India and Pakistan. TAPI will offer a total of 90 mmscmd. The TAPI project in Afghanistan is projected to offer economic opportunities for the local population and potentially ease political tensions inside the country (Qonunov, 2016).

Turkmenistan has abundant hydrocarbon reserves that can provide Pakistan with all its energy needs. Pakistan has long viewed Turkmenistan as a useful partner for cooperation. Turkmenistan is a prosperous country in Central Asia with vast natural gas and oil deposits. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project is an important regional energy cooperation endeavor that will help Pakistan address its natural gas shortage.

Figure 1.1 TAPI Pipeline



<https://images.app.goo.gl/4gAx6FPBiGzBSzoD9>

The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project aims to transport natural gas to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India from Turkmenistan's Yoloten and neighboring gas fields. For the project, the ADB is serving as coordinator and facilitator. The project's feasibility study was carried out in 2004 with funding from ADB and was carried out by the British consulting firm PENSPEN. The feasibility

study proposed building a 1,680-kilometer pipeline with a 56-inch diameter and a design capacity of 3.2 billion BCFD from Turkmenistan via Pakistan and Afghanistan to the Pakistan-India border. Pakistan has been chosen to serve as the TPCL Board Chairman (Mughees, Rubab, & Akram, 2015).

This project would meet Pakistan's and Afghanistan's power supply requirements and

strengthen Turkmenistan's economy (Rauf, 2021). The Pakistani side went on to demonstrate their commitment to the project's mutual benefits, promising to provide all support necessary to expedite the fulfilment of the TAPI project's long-held goal. Pakistan expressed heartfelt thanks to Turkmenistan for promising to assist it in supplying an additional 1000MW to its electricity systems to compensate for the country's current

electricity constraint.

While the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Pakistan's extended assistance will have a significant impact on the region's future role and opportunities, the project will also allow Turkmenistan to export and capitalize on opportunities in the regional and global markets through its trade and commerce capacity (Brohi, 2016).

Table 1.1

TAPI GAS PIPELINE PROJECT, ROUTE, LENGTH, COST, COMPLETION DATE

Pipe-line	Route (source & recipient)	Length, Volume	Cost US\$ bn	Completion Date
TAPI	Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India	33 BCM 1,700 km	\$7.6	2015
Partner	Financing	Support	Oppose	Certainty of Supply
Special venture company held by state companies. May bring in private partners	ADB	USA	Russia	Security problems

<https://journals.pu.edu.pk/journals/index.php/IJSAS/article/view/2972>

Pakistan and Turkmenistan reached an agreement to deliver Turkmen gas to Pakistan via Afghanistan under the aegis of the Asian Development Bank. In 2008, India joined this project. Foster (2008) asserts that the United States' backing for this initiative is its most significant component.

There are eight trillion cubic metres of confirmed gas reserves in Turkmenistan. This pipeline will connect Turkmenistan's Daulatabad gas field with the Indian city of Fazilka via Quetta, Multan, and the Afghan cities of Herat, Helmand, and Kandhar. This pipeline will transmit 33 billion cubic feet yearly. Afghanistan will profit the most from this pipeline project, which will grow to be the country's largest developmental effort, because it acts as a bridge between Central and South Asia. The country's prosperity will be further aided by the US\$160 million annual transit fee. Cooperation between regions will be encouraged through this channel (Fatima & Zafar, 2014).

Turkmenistan's energy resources continue to be strategically significant given Pakistan's expanding population and rising energy requirements. Through the establishment of a sustainable

pipeline for natural gas supply, TAPI will assist Pakistan in mitigating its energy scarcity. The economy of Turkmenistan is reliant on the export of natural gas. The project is significant because it will solve issues related to regional energy security. The project is envisioned by Turkmenistan as a vast "Energy Silk Road" that connects Central and South Asia. TAPI is a multifaceted project that has implications for increased cooperation, employment growth, infrastructure development in member countries, and regional and interregional integration.

Atajan Movlamov, the ambassador of Turkmenistan to Pakistan, said that his state wants to expedite TAPI and places a high value on improved relations with Pakistan. Access to Pakistan's ports at Karachi and Gwadar is crucial, he said, noting the creation of a logistical hub for transit commerce in Turkmenistan (Kizilay, 2023). According to Turkmenistan's ambassador to Pakistan, Atadjan Movlamov, the (TAPI) gas pipeline is presently at the practical execution stage. The project is predicted to have a substantial impact on Pakistan's economic growth. He made this statement during a meeting in Islamabad with members of the Economic

Journalists Association Forum (EJAF). Turkmenistan's envoy argued that the TAPI project has the potential to significantly improve Pakistan's condition since natural gas is far less expensive to generate energy from than fuel oil and diesel, and it will also boost investment and industrialization. This initiative will also bring new high-tech equipment, technology, and other expertise to the region. He noted that because natural gas provides a cleaner and safer alternative to coal and diesel-fired power generation, the project is also essential from a social and environmental perspective (paracha, 2020).

President Asif Ali Zardari demanded on Monday that the Transit Trade Agreement with Turkmenistan be completed as soon as possible to strengthen the two friendly states' bilateral ties. When Atadjan Movlamov, the ambassador of Turkmenistan, paid him a visit at Aiwan-i-Sadr, the president shared similar opinions. After it is inked, Mr. Zardari claimed, the pact will support regional economic growth, trade expansion, and connectivity. The President claims that all parties conveyed a wish to finish the TAPI Gas Pipeline as soon as possible. They said that doing so would help Pakistan satisfy its energy needs and boost the country's economy. President Asif Ali Zardari declared his intention to boost high-level discussions with Turkmenistan to revitalise bilateral relations (President Zardari calls for transit trade deal with Turkmenistan, 2024).

The pipeline will lower the unemployment rate and provide jobs (Saira, & Javed, 2022). The TAPI project gas pipeline will raise living standards, stimulate the economy. It would promote regional trade and growth and aid in the fight against terrorism. TurkmenPakistan bilateral relations would be improved further by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)-TAPI and One Belt-One Road initiatives. This will be reflected in increased trade and commerce ties, sustained socio-economic integration, and improved political understanding of various regional and global issues of mutual interest (Khan, 2017).

## BENEFITS OF TAPI PROJECT FOR PAKISTAN

The TAPI Project will not only contribute to regional development, but also has the potential to positively impact Afghans' psychological well-being and brain function also can also build trust, which might lead to growth, habitation, humanity, and a comfortable living rather than devastation. Increasing Afghanistan's reputation in the community as part of the TAPI Project will benefit Afghans' quality of life and constitute a significant step forward in the country's development and construction. Turkmenistan, with its huge natural gas resources, is currently the world's fourth-largest country. Throughout the course of this project, it could send gas to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India and earn enormous profits. Also, Turkmenistan can enlarge and develop its commercial and business contacts with the project member states and as well as with the world economic market.

The TAPI Project will benefit Pakistan and India because both states are experiencing many issues because of growing populations, particularly India, which is growing daily. Natural gas supply is declining, which is one of India's main issues. To meet people's needs and boost their economic activity, they are attempting to put such projects into action in a way that will benefit both parties. Pakistan has seen numerous political and economic challenges and has been wary of other countries' relationships. Crucially, the project's execution would provide solutions for their issues. It is possible to argue that the TAPI Project will help them meet their gas needs and find solutions to other issues they are facing (Mehrzai & Safai, 2019).

## NEED OF ENERGY PAKISTAN AND PROVISION OF GAS THROUGH (TAPI) PROJECT

The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline project aims to carry natural gas from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan, providing these countries with long-term energy security. It is anticipated that the project will assist both countries fulfil their increasing energy needs and lessen Pakistan's developing domestic gas constraint.

The TAPI pipeline is essential for Pakistan to

address its energy crisis. The state frequently experiences load shedding and disruptions in fuel supplies, leading to severe energy shortages. It is anticipated that the TAPI pipeline will offer a dependable and reasonably priced energy source, assisting in meeting the state's expanding energy needs and enhancing its energy supply mix. The project helps Afghanistan achieve its strategic goals of increasing energy commerce and regional collaboration. Afghanistan will benefit economically from the pipeline by becoming a major energy export transit state, bringing in money (Saleem, 2018). The TAPI pipeline is expected to transmit up to 33 billion cubic metres of natural gas from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India per year. As a result, trade in energy will increase dramatically between the four states, fostering economic expansion and regional integration (Asian Development Bank, 2012).

### EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES OF TAPI PROJECT

Afghanistan is one of the world's poorest countries, with most of its population still living in poverty. Poverty is one of the worst problems a country can face, yet tragically, most countries continue to face this dreadful situation. While a large portion of this project is being moved throughout Afghanistan, more than 50,000 Afghan workers would have had job opportunities during the pipeline's construction. In the long run, however, job opportunities for 9,000–11,000 thousand workers would be available to ensure the pipeline's security and safety over the next 30 years.

Many jobs would be available to hundreds of individuals because of the TAPI Project's building activities. Moreover, this project is among the largest in Afghanistan, and its completion could potentially create employment possibilities for thousands of Afghans. The job opportunities that are now available pertain to a variety of fields, including technical, engineering, and security guards who will be hired for this project. Fortunately, the workers hired for this project will be committed on a long-term basis, which means they will contribute for a lengthy period (Mehrzai & Safai, 2019).

### CHALLENGES OF (TAPI) GAS PIPELINE PROJECT

Turkmenistan's efforts have made significant progress towards the implementation of the long-postponed TAPI project in recent years. The project has been effectively postponed because to several factors, including tensions between the participating countries, lack of money, and issues with regional security. The largest hindrance to the project occurred in the summer of 2021, when the Taliban took seized power in Afghanistan. Turkmenistan is working very hard to finish the line, despite the challenges in Afghanistan (Tamer, 2023).

Afghanistan will be crucial to the implementation of project because it has been a war-torn region with several internal issues for many years. Afghanistan has never developed into a strong, centralised state because of internal unrest. A structured political system could not be established because internal power struggles among Afghanistan's many linguistic and ethnic groups, who had developed their institutions through militarization and violence, prevented them from banding together to fight outside forces.

The pipeline connects Afghanistan's southeast border with Turkmenistan to its southwest border with Pakistan's Balochistan province. Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras are among the ethnic groups represented along the pipeline route. The proposed pipeline route will pass through Taliban-controlled areas of Afghanistan, which raises security concerns. The instability in Afghanistan has posed a threat to surrounding countries, since there have been reports of terrorist assaults on the porous border between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. This has raised concerns regarding the security of the gas pipeline (Saira & Javed, 2022).

One of the project's major challenges has been bilateral disagreements among the member governments. The deterioration of bilateral relations between India and Pakistan has hampered a few development endeavours. The Pakistani government was required to pay royalties to the Balochis for the privilege of constructing pipelines on their land. There is a very good risk that these organisations will bomb the areas where the project is to be developed if



this is not done. The future of TAPI is also somewhat reliant on the political stability of Afghanistan and the capacity of the government to maintain security transit (Vasani, 2020).

The project requires interstate coordination and is politically complex. The pipeline would pass through areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan where the Taliban and separatist terrorists pose a threat, making logistics challenging. The province of Balochistan presents a significant risk to the corporation due to the state of law and order there. Daud Shah Saba, the minister of mines and petroleum in Afghanistan, informed the upper house of parliament that the force will provide security while the project is being implemented and that the pipeline's route is being demined. The TAPI gas pipeline will significantly advance the member states' economies and regional integration. Most significantly, the pipeline has the potential to significantly lessen tensions between Pakistan and India since it will provide both states the chance to collaborate on ensuring security, which will benefit both states equally (Khetran, 2017).

The insecurity in Balochistan poses significant challenges to the Turkmenistan Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline project. The insurrection of Baloch separatists in Pakistan's Balochistan area poses a threat to TAPI's development. Feeling alienated, the Baloch state lists have been waging a bloody war for independence, which has resulted in violent protests and assaults. To guarantee the security of the pipeline that passes through Balochistan, the Pakistani government must respond to the worries expressed by separatists in the Baloch region. Separatist movements-fueled instability in Balochistan poses a risk to the TAPI project, underscoring the significance of Balochistan's problems being resolved to ensure the pipeline's success (Khan, 2012).

### RECENT DEVELOPMENTS OF (TAPI) GAS PIPELINE PROJECT

Turkmenistan and Afghanistan formally started building the Afghan portion of the TAPI pipeline again in September 2024. The 150-kilometer stretch that will connect the Afghan border town of Herat with the Turkmenistan border town of Serhetabat will be financed by Turkmenistan.

The project's execution has been delayed because of regional security concerns, but this development represents a major step forward. The TAPI project still faces several obstacles in spite of these encouraging advancements. Afghanistan's security situation is still a major worry because instability might jeopardise the pipeline's future functioning as well as its construction. Furthermore, the project's advancement and the cooperation of the participating nations may be impacted by geopolitical tensions in the area (Afzal, 2024).

The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Gas Pipeline project is still unfinished as of early 2025. On September 10, 2024, work on the Afghan segment began, and by January 2025, about three kilometres had been finished. In 2024, the Turkmen section was finished. The areas in India and Pakistan, however, are still in the early stages of development. The project's completion date is still undetermined due to regional difficulties and ongoing work (Jamestown Foundation, 2024).

### FUTURE PROSPECTS OF PAKISTAN-TURKMENISTAN RELATIONS

The relationship between Pakistan and Turkmenistan has bright future prospects as both states work to strengthen their collaboration in a number of areas, most notably energy and regional connectivity. One key area of focus is the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project, which both countries have reaffirmed their commitment to completing on time. The pipeline will assist Pakistan deal with its energy constraint by bringing natural gas from Turkmenistan to Pakistan. To fortify energy cooperation, Turkmenistan also hopes to export electricity to Pakistan ("Pakistan, Turkmenistan agree to deepen political", 2024). Turkmenistan may access the Arabian Sea and interstate markets via the ports of Gwadar and Karachi, thanks to Pakistan's ideal geographical location. Turkmenistan and other Central Asian states hope to benefit substantially from the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is regarded as a revolutionary effort that will expand access to the region. Both states are eager to increase their investment and economic connections ("Pakistan, Turkmenistan agree to

expand bilateral investment in energy", 2024). In addition to diversifying its economy by establishing new sectors based on raw materials derived from hydrocarbons, Turkmenistan is interested in initiatives involving the export of its energy resources to Europe. Turkmenistan may be able to reach South Asian markets through Pakistan.

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed by Turkmenistan's Magtymguly Turkmen State University (MTSU) and Pakistan's State University of Modern Languages (NUML) to bridge the communication gap between the two countries. Long-term maintenance of the friendly relations between Pakistan and Turkmenistan depends on fostering people-to-people contacts.

The April 2023 interstate conference on Afghanistan in Samarkand created a favourable environment for better ties between Ashgabat and Islamabad. there is optimism for the future of relations between Pakistan and Turkmenistan, as both states are dedicated to strengthening their collaboration in the energy sector, trade, investment, and people-to people contacts. The successful implementation of programmes such as TAPI and CPEC has the potential to significantly strengthen both countries' economies and regional integration ("Pakistan, Turkmenistan to work together", 2024).

## SUMMARY

Pakistan and Turkmenistan have had strong political, social, cultural, and economic relations ever since the former accepted the latter's independence in 1991. The importance of improving their cooperation across a range of fields and the friendship between their people are highly valued by both sides. Turkmenistan has abundant hydrocarbon reserves that can provide Pakistan with all its energy needs. Pakistan has long viewed Turkmenistan as a useful partner for cooperation. Turkmenistan is a prosperous country in Central Asia with vast natural gas and oil deposits. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project is an important regional energy cooperation endeavor that will help Pakistan address its natural gas shortfall.

Pakistan sees great significance in Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India Project because

of its strategic role in promoting regional energy cooperation and economic development. It would be an essential tool for raising living conditions and promoting stability throughout South and Central Asia. The benefits of TAPI, which will increase the economic return for all participating countries, include lower transit prices for Afghanistan and Pakistan, cheaper petrol for Pakistan and India, and an energy market for Turkmenistan. Even if a significant amount of this project is being relocated around Afghanistan, the construction of the pipeline would have provided employment possibilities for over 50,000 Afghan labourers.

Due to a few obstacles, including financial constraints, regional security concerns, and conflicts between the participating states, the project has been successfully done. The pipeline connects Afghanistan's southeast border with Turkmenistan and Pakistan's southwest border with the Balochistan province. Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras are some of the ethnic groups that live along the pipeline's route. The planned pipeline route will pass through areas of Afghanistan that are strongly controlled by the Taliban, which presents a security risk. Most importantly, since the pipeline will allow both countries to work together to ensure security, which will benefit both equally, it has the potential to greatly reduce tensions between Pakistan and India.

## FINDINGS

- History, culture, and religion have all contributed to the friendly and respectful relations that exist between Turkmenistan and Pakistan.
- One of Afghanistan's most serious issues is a lack of natural gas. This project has the potential to alleviate a wide range of problems in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Because the development of this project will offer jobs for many people in Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- By strengthening its political and economic ties with Afghanistan, Pakistan can successfully complete the construction of its TAPI project with Turkmenistan. This will increase the standard of living for the people and provide employment for them.
- The project will not be impacted by a

change in government in any of the partner countries because the agreement is between the states. It would be a key tool for raising living conditions in South and Central Asia and promoting regional stability.

➤ The transit price for Afghanistan and Pakistan, the cheap petrol for Pakistan and India, and the energy market for Turkmenistan are all benefits of TAPI that will increase the economic reward for all participating states. It will give customers more affordable energy, boost the economy, and lower high inflation rates. It will bring in money that can be used to advance the social sectors, particularly housing, clean water, health care, and education. It will provide jobs, which could eliminate the incentives for young individuals to join extremist organisations.

## CONCLUSION

After accepting the independence of Turkmenistan in 1991, Pakistan and Turkmenistan have strong political, social, cultural, and economic relations between the two countries. Turkmenistan has large hydrocarbon resources that can provide all the energy Pakistan needs. Turkmenistan is a rich country in Central Asia with abundant natural gas and oil resources. Pakistan has always considered Turkmenistan a valuable partner for cooperation. The TAPI region is a major energy cooperation project that will help reduce Pakistan's natural gas deficit. Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan consider this project very important due to its strategic importance to promote regional energy cooperation and economic development. The TAPI project will be an important tool for improving living conditions and promoting regional stability in South and West Asia. This project will provide all the benefits of transit costs for Afghanistan and Pakistan, cheaper petrol for Pakistan and India, and an energy market for Turkmenistan.

While a substantial portion of this project is being shifted to Afghanistan, providing employment possibilities for over 50,000 Afghan people during pipeline construction, the project has been postponed due to various reasons. The animosity between the participating countries stems from a shortage of funds and regional security concerns. The pipeline connects

Afghanistan's southeastern border with Turkmenistan to the western border with Pakistan's Balochistan province. The pipeline route is dominated by Pakhtun, Uzbek, Tajik, and Hazara, among other ethnic groups. The security risk here is that a portion of the pipeline will run through Afghanistan, which is highly influenced by the Taliban. But this project is also important for Pakistan because it has the potential to reduce tensions between Pakistan and India. Because it will provide opportunities for cooperation to ensure the security of both countries. Which will benefit both countries equally.

Both Pakistan and Turkmenistan are concerned about security concerns from Afghanistan, particularly the presence of terrorist organizations and the possibility of spreading instability in their own states. US sanctions against Iran have damaged prospects for bilateral cooperation. Turkmenistan and Pakistan are attempting to improve their bilateral relations, particularly in the oil sector. Pakistan will benefit from strategic investment in this project. Because it would give it direct access to Turkmenistan's energy resources. And will meet the country's energy needs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ Pakistan should keep up its strong political commitment to the prompt execution of the TAPI project and collaborate closely with the other participating states to address any lingering problems.

➤ Pakistan ought to take proactive measures to establish stronger regional cooperation on energy, commerce, and connectivity initiatives such as TAPI by interacting with Turkmenistan and other Central Asian States.

➤ Pakistan should collaborate with its allies to resolve issues related to security, funding shortages, and other roadblocks to the TAPI project's effective execution.

➤ Pakistan needs to make sure that its participation in the TAPI project is in line with its larger state goals concerning energy, the economy, and foreign policy.

➤ To enhance economic interdependence and prosperity, the Turkmen-

Afghanistan Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project should be completed as soon as possible.

➤ To promote economic and energy cooperation, Turkmenistan and Pakistan can be connected by road, rail, and pipeline through Afghanistan.

➤ To improve bilateral relations and people-to-people contact, Pakistan and Turkmenistan should rekindle their profound cultural, religious, and historical ties.

➤ Since the TAPI gas pipeline is the most practical and affordable way for Pakistan to address its energy and economic crises, it is in the country's geopolitical and economic best interests to pursue it.

➤ Pakistan and Turkmenistan need to strengthen their relations with the Taliban government so that they can successfully complete their TAPI project.

➤ The South and Central Asian regions should benefit from the TAPI gas pipelines, which would support peace, stability, collaboration, and economic stability.

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