

NATO Trains Afghan Army To Guard Asian Pipeline

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On December 11 the presidents of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkmenistan and the energy minister of India met in the Turkmen capital of Ashgabat to bring to fruition fifteen years of planning by interests in the United States to bring natural gas from the Caspian Sea to the energy-needy nations of South and East Asia.

Presidents Hamid Karzai, Asif Ali Zardari and Gurbangulu Berdimuhammedov along with Indian Union Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Murli Deora signed agreements – an Inter-Government Agreement and the Gas Pipeline Transmission Agreement – to construct a natural gas pipeline from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan and Pakistan to India. The initials of the first three countries involved lend themselves to the project’s acronym: TAP, now known as TAPI.

The Inter-Government Agreement “enjoins the four governments to provide all support including security for the pipeline.” [1]

The next day, Wahidullah Shahrani, Afghanistan’s Minister of Mines and Industries, confirmed that “Afghanistan will deploy about 7,000 troops to secure a major transnational gas pipeline slated to run through some of the most dangerous parts of the war-torn country.” [2]

Speaking at a press conference in the Afghan capital, Shahrani added: “This huge project is very important for Afghanistan. Five thousand to seven thousand security forces will be deployed to safeguard the pipeline route....We will also keep an eye on the security situation....If more troops are needed, we will take action.” [3]

Four days later U.S. Army Colonel John Ferrari, Deputy Commander of Programs for the NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan, was quoted on the U.S. Defense Department’s website stating:

“Our mission is to help the government of Afghanistan generate and sustain

the Afghan army and police, all the way from the ministerial systems – essentially, their version of the Pentagon – through their operational commands, down to the individual units.” [4]



Colonel Ferrari disclosed at the same time that in the next few days the U.S. Army “will finally award a much-delayed \$1.6 billion contract for a private security firm to supplement [the] NATO training command’s efforts to professionalize Afghan cops.” The lucrative bid, according to an American news source, “touched off a bureaucratic tempest between Blackwater/Xe Services and DynCorp, which held an old contract for the same job....” [5]

On the same day North Atlantic Treaty Organization Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen endorsed the U.S.’s Afghanistan and Pakistan Annual Review released on December 15 and stated:

“We will continue to train Afghan forces so they can provide security for the Afghan people.

“[A]s the long-term partnership that President Karzai and I signed at Lisbon demonstrates, our commitment to Afghanistan will continue well beyond 2014. NATO will also remain engaged with Pakistan....

“I welcome the release today of the United States’ annual review on Afghanistan and Pakistan. It builds on the decisions on Afghanistan that NATO Allies and Partners took at our summit in Lisbon.” [6]

What the Pentagon and NATO are training Afghan troops for is in part to ensure that the 1,700-kilometer (1,050-mile) TAPI pipeline running from the former Soviet republic of Turkmenistan to India – with transshipment to nations like Japan, South Korea and China in the offing – will function unimpeded.

The pipeline is to be started in 2012, completed two years later and provide 33 billion cubic meters (over one trillion cubic feet) of Turkmen gas to Pakistan, India and Afghanistan. According to the recently signed agreement, India and Pakistan will each receive 14 billion and Afghanistan 5 billion cubic meters of natural gas a year.

The undertaking is being financed by the Asian Development Bank in which the U.S. and Japan each hold 552,210 shares, the largest proportion of shares among its 67 members at 12.756 percent apiece.

The pipeline will run from Turkmenistan’s Dovletabat (also Dovletabad and Dauletabad) field

along the 350-mile Herat-Kandahar Highway in Afghanistan to the capital of Pakistan's Balochistan province, Quetta, to the Fazlaka region on the Indian-Pakistani border.

Five years ago the Asian Development Bank estimated gross natural gas reserves at Dovletabat to be 49.5 trillion cubic feet (1.4 trillion cubic meters). Turkmenistan also intends to include the new Southern Yoloten-Osman field, where government geologists estimate there are over 21 trillion cubic meters of gas, to fill the TAPI pipeline.

The inauguration of TAPI is the realization of plans going back to four years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, 1995, the year before the Taliban consolidated control of Afghanistan. One of its prime movers was the Union Oil Company of California (Unocal), which merged with and became a subsidiary of Chevron in the same year.



Former Secretary of State and NATO Supreme Allied Commander Alexander Haig visited Turkmenistan in 1992, immediately after it became an independent state for the first time, after which he became “an unofficial adviser and confidant” to President Saparmurat Niyazov, “screening foreign companies and helping arrange a Niyazov visit to Washington in 1993.” [7]

Haig's dealings, which would later be augmented by the likes of Henry Kissinger and Zalmay Khalilzad, were part of U.S. strategy in the Caspian Sea region, which was to:

“Tap the Caspian mother lodes while giving as little leverage as possible to Russia in the north and Iran in the south.

“Across the Caspian, Azerbaijan had already enlisted U.S. oil companies and pulled the Clinton administration into a crusade to build pipelines that would skirt Russia on the way to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. In Kazakhstan, the Clinton administration [risked] provoking Moscow again by promoting pipelines that would carry Kazakh oil to western markets without Russian interference.”

In 1995 the White House blocked a deal between ConocoPhillips and Iran for the transiting of gas from Turkmenistan through the first country. “To State Department strategists, the perfect pipeline out of Dauletabad lay in a different direction: from Turkmenistan across Afghanistan to Pakistan, connecting the gas resources of Central Asia to the surging economies of South Asia. Such a line would deprive Iran of transit fees for Turkmen gas crossing its territory while capturing the South Asian gas market coveted by Iran.” [8]

In the same year the president of Unocal, John Imle, “wooed Niyazov and Benazir Bhutto, then prime minister of Pakistan...with a vision of a Unocal pipeline” running from Turkmenistan to Pakistan. According to the Washington Post three years after the fact: “A Unocal link had strong appeal for Niyazov. Afghanistan was in turmoil. A big American oil company could draw on the political muscle of the United States....” [9]

Later in the year President Niyazov announced the selection of Unocal to construct the pipeline, which Henry Kissinger – at the time a Unocal consultant – deemed “the triumph of hope over experience.” (Afghan-born Zalmay Khalilzad, while Director of the Strategy, Doctrine, and Force Structure at the RAND Corporation, consulted for Cambridge Energy Research Associates, which at the time was conducting a risk analysis for Unocal on what is now the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline. He later became U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan after the invasion of 2001, then ambassador to Iraq and the United Nations.}

Unocal opened an office in Kandahar, which the media unfailingly recall is the “spiritual birthplace of the Taliban,” in 1996 as the latter were completing their conquest of Afghanistan.

In 1997 a senior Taliban delegation arrived in the U.S. to meet with Unocal officials. At the time a Unocal spokesman said “the Taleban were expected to spend several days at the company’s headquarters in Sugarland, Texas” and it was confirmed that “Unocal says it has agreements both with Turkmenistan to sell its gas and with Pakistan to buy it.” [10]

After last week’s agreement was signed in Turkmenistan to complete 15 years of U.S. plans, the BBC reported that “The pipeline will have to cross Taliban-controlled regions and Pakistan’s troubled border region. The US has also encouraged the project as an alternative to a proposed Iranian pipeline to India and Pakistan.” [11]

In fact TAPI is the American alternative to what until then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice pressured – in fact blackmailed – Pakistan and India in 2005 to kill the project was referred to as the peace pipeline: One which was to transport Caspian Sea Basin natural gas from Iran to Pakistan and India (the IPI pipeline) and from there to China. The joint endeavor would indeed have promoted cooperation and peace not only between Pakistan and India but between India and China as well.

Washington – the White House, the State Department and Congress – linked India’s agreeing to abandon the IPI project and cooperate with the U.S. punishing Iran in the United Nations Security Council over its civilian nuclear power program with actualizing the provisions of the framework agreement signed by President George W. Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on July 18, 2005 on full nuclear collaboration. The U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Cooperation Initiative.

“The Americans had, so far, largely ignored India’s ties with Iran, which grew impressively during the late 1990s....The tipping point came when both sides, along with Pakistan, began seriously to consider the construction of the 2,600-km Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for the first time publicly aired her concerns about the prospective deal during her visit to New Delhi in March 2005.” [12]

Also in 2005 Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs E. Anthony Wayne told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee:

“Both Chinese and Indian firms have reportedly been involved in oil and gas-sector deals in Iran that raise concerns under US law and policy.

“For example, Indian and Pakistani officials are engaged in detailed discussions on the technical, financial and legal aspects of building a USD 4 billion pipeline that would bring Iranian natural gas to Pakistan and India, a project that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has said also raises US concerns.” [13]

India formally withdrew from the project in 2009 and in January of this year Washington prevailed upon Pakistan to abandon the pipeline in exchange for the U.S. constructing a liquefied natural gas terminal and arranging the supply of electricity from Tajikistan through Afghanistan.

“With the Asian Development Bank backing the TAPI project unlike the IPI pipeline” currently:

“Besides putting the IPI pipeline in cold storage, the TAPI pipeline could also push back moves to bring Turkmenistan gas via northern Iran. Talks were held earlier in this respect on exchanging it with Iranian gas, which would have been sent to India and other countries from an under-sea pipeline. This pipeline would have been one of the branches of a Middle East natural gas gathering system.” [14]

Last month Turkmenistan was also recruited to supply natural gas for the Nabucco pipeline running in the opposite direction, west through Azerbaijan and Georgia to Europe, to further U.S. strategy to squeeze Russia out of that market.

“Turkmen Deputy Prime Minister Baymyrad Hoyamuhamedov said the country would supply natural gas for the planned Nabucco pipeline. Hence, EU countries would no longer have to worry about uncertain natural gas supplies.” Which means “the European bloc will have to rely less on Russia for its growing gas requirement.”

“The pledge also means the construction of the planned 2046-mile pipeline can go ahead as uncertainty over its gas supplies had caused delay. Nabucco will transport gas from the Caspian region and the Middle East across Turkey into Europe.

“At present, Turkmenistan sells natural gas to Iran, China and Russia.” [15]

In fact, in late November the Turkmen government pledged to “provide up to 40 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year, more than the planned capacity of Nabucco which is 31 billion per year.” [16]

As such Nabucco will be “drawing gas from Turkmenistan in addition to Azerbaijan and Iraqi Kurdistan” in what Christian Dolezal, spokesperson for the Nabucco Consortium (Nabucco Gas Pipeline International GmbH), called a “remarkable step.”

“Dolezal said the first gas supplies for Nabucco are expected to come from Azerbaijan –

about 8 billion cubic meters per year at first, of which 6 billion could come from the Shah Deniz 2 field. Another 10 billion cubic meters are expected from Iraqi Kurdistan, and the consortium is awaiting the outcome of talks with the Iraqi government.

“The construction of the Nabucco gas transit pipeline will start in 2012, and the first natural gas deliveries through it should be a fact in 2015....” [17]

The Nabucco pipeline will supplement previous Western-initiated projects like the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum natural gas pipelines beginning in Azerbaijan and proceeding westward through Georgia to Turkey.

A previous article in this series detailed that the overall strategy is “not limited to efforts to muscle into nations and regions rich in oil and natural gas (and uranium), nor to employing fair means or foul, peaceful or otherwise, to seize the commanding heights of the international energy market.

“The overarching objective is to control the ownership, transport and consumption of energy worldwide. To determine who receives oil and natural gas, through which routes and at which prices. And to dictate what the political and military quid pro quo will be for being invited to join a U.S.-dominated international energy transportation and accessibility network.

“Azerbaijan and Georgia are salient examples. The last two-named nations have increased their military budgets by well over 1,000 percent in the first case and by over 3,000 percent in the second in the span of a few years.

“In the Caspian Sea Basin and its neighborhood, which takes in the Afghanistan-Pakistan war theater and the turbulent and explosive Caucasus, Azerbaijan last week marked the fifteenth anniversary of what was called the Contract of the Century in 1994, engineered by the United States and Britain to open up the Caspian region to Western energy companies.

“The intent of all of them is to prevent Iran from exporting hydrocarbons to Europe and to expel Russia entirely from its previous contracts to provide Europe with natural gas and Caspian oil. Russia currently supplies the European Union with 30 percent of its gas, but the West – the U.S. and its EU allies – is well on its way to replacing Russian oil and gas with supplies from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan via Azerbaijan and from Iraq and North Africa through Turkey where all of the three pipelines [Nabucco, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum] end.” [18]

In addition to transforming Azerbaijan and Georgia into U.S. and NATO outposts in the South Caucasus and on the Caspian Sea – Azerbaijan borders both Iran and Russia and Georgia borders Russia – Washington and its North Atlantic military bloc are increasing military ties with the other Caspian coastal states, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan.

The expanding American and NATO role in Central and South Asia – in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – is inextricably connected with NATO nations’ Eurasian energy strategies.

In 2008 Matthew Bryza, then-Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, delivered an address which contained these assertions:

“The East-West Corridor we had been building from Turkey and the Black Sea through Georgia and Azerbaijan and across the Caspian became the strategic air corridor, and the lifeline, into Afghanistan allowing the United States and our coalition partners to conduct Operation Enduring Freedom.”

“Our goal is to develop a ‘Southern Corridor’ of energy infrastructure to transport Caspian and Iraqi oil and gas to Turkey and Europe. The Turkey-Greece-Italy (TGI) and Nabucco natural gas pipelines are key elements of the Southern Corridor.”

“Potential gas supplies in Turkmenistan and Iraq can provide the crucial additional volumes beyond those in Azerbaijan to realize the Southern Corridor.

“Washington and [Turkey] are working together with Baghdad to help Iraq develop its own large natural gas reserves for both domestic consumption and for export to Turkey and the EU.” [19]

The U.S. and Britain led NATO Partnership for Peace military exercises in Kazakhstan, from where the West plans to construct a pipeline under the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan, last August, and the country has recently agreed to allow overflights to the U.S. and NATO for the war in Afghanistan. [20]

In August it was disclosed that U.S. military equipment is being transferred from Iraq to Afghanistan “via Turkey, Azerbaijan, the Caspian Sea and Turkmenistan.” [21]

Despite its formal status of neutrality, Turkmenistan has allowed the transit of American and NATO “armored vehicles, combat helicopters and crates of ammunition” to the Afghanistan-Pakistan war theater.

In addition, the U.S. “has gained access to use almost all the military airfields of Turkmenistan, including the airport in Nebit-Dag near the Iranian border” and “An American military contingent is located in Ashgabat to oversee the operations related to refueling of military airplanes. NATO is also trying to open up a land corridor to bring freight by road and rail....” [22]

The second station of the soon-to-be-launched Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline is Herat, the capital city of the Afghan province of the same name which borders eastern Iran.

From there it will head to Kandahar, where the U.S. and NATO have been conducting what the Western press refers to as the “battle for Kandahar” since August in an attempt to clear the area of Taliban fighters and sympathizers.

The pipeline will then proceed to Quetta, the capital of Balochistan.

The U.S. and NATO have expanded the Afghan war into Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas and increasingly into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It has also launched attacks inside Balochistan and has pressured the Pakistani government to permit them to conduct full-scale military operations in the province.

In October NATO helicopters crossed 200 meters into Balochistan.

In the same month it was reported that “US officials may be eying a repeat of the cross-border incident by seeking raids into Balochistan.”

“US military officials [are] advocating crossing the border with US forces and expanding the war formally into Pakistan.” [23]

Last month the U.S. Defense Department presented a report to Congress revealing that “Pakistan Army General Headquarters recently approved an ODRP and Coalition presence at the PAKMIL 12 Corps HQ in Quetta, Balochistan.” [24]

ODRP stands for the Pentagon’s Office of Defense Representative, Pakistan and Coalition is a reference to NATO’s International Security Assistance Force.

A U.S. military buildup in Balochistan presents a direct threat to Iran, whose province of Sistan and Baluchistan borders the Pakistani province, the largest provinces in the respective nations. The U.S. is accused of supporting separatist elements in the Iranian territory and could exploit Baloch agents on the Pakistani side of the border in an attempt to destabilize Iran.

Three years ago China completed a port in Gwadar on Balochistan’s Arabian Sea coastline, which is to be expanded into a deep-sea port and naval base with Chinese technical and financial assistance.

China also intends to turn the port into an energy transit center for oil and natural gas originating from Iran and other parts of the Middle East as well as Africa and plans to construct an oil pipeline from Gwadar to China’s Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

The TAPI and related pipeline projects will not only adversely affect Iran and Russia.

Turkmen gas that had formerly flowed through Russia and Iran will now be diverted via the TAPI and Nabucco pipelines – as many as 73 billion cubic meters – strengthening the West’s influence in the region in a number of spheres, including in regards to energy, transport, financial and economic, political and military matters.

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The NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan (NTM-A) was launched at the military bloc’s sixtieth anniversary summit in Strasbourg, France and Kehl, Germany last year, and after this year’s summit in Portugal thousands of new trainers have been pledged by NATO member states.

According to the NATO website,

“NTM-A brings together efforts to train the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) with the aim of increasing coherence and effectiveness among all contributors. Support to the ANSF including the building of an Afghan institutional training base for both the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) and coordinating international efforts to train, equip and sustain these forces.

“The NATO Training Mission Afghanistan (NTM-A) operates under a dual-hatted command, with one commander for both the US-led Combined Security Transition Command- Afghanistan (CSTC-A) and the NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan. The mission provides a higher-level training for the Afghan National Army (ANA), including defense colleges and academies, as well as being responsible for doctrine development, and training and advising Afghan



Iraqi Head of Navy during recent NATO Training Mission-Iraq visit

The NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan is modeled after the NATO Training Mission – Iraq [26], established by a decision made at the 2004 NATO summit in Istanbul, Turkey. Its first commander was General David Petraeus, now in charge of over 150,000 U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan.

The NATO Training Mission – Iraq is the model for building from the top down the armed forces of a conquered and subjugated nation by the Western alliance, including training military and security forces to guard the country’s energy infrastructure.

In Iraq and now even more so in Afghanistan, NATO is assisting the U.S. in achieving vital geopolitical objectives in strategically vital parts of the world.

Notes

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