

Afghan Pipeline Wins Backing of 3 Nations

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan — The leaders of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkmenistan on Saturday agreed to move forward with a complicated and risky plan to build a natural gas pipeline across rugged territory plagued by war and terrorism.

The pipeline, which would terminate in India, would bring huge amounts of gas to underdeveloped regions and could earn impoverished Afghanistan hundreds of millions of dollars in transit fees.

The route for the 1,700-kilometer TAPI pipeline from Turkmenistan would cross Afghanistan's Kandahar Province, where the Taliban and international forces are locked in battle, as well as some of Pakistan's unruly tribal areas. Concerns about security for the pipeline itself and for the workers who construct it have cast doubt on the project's near-term feasibility, but proponents say it would calm the chaotic region.

“Along with commercial and economic benefits, this project will also yield a stabilizing influence on the region and beyond,” Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov said after the leaders signed a document supporting the project.

“Afghanistan will live up to its obligations in ensuring the pipeline’s construction and safety,” said Afghan President Hamid Karzai, whose army is struggling against the resurgent Taliban.

Contents of the document signed by Karzai, Berdymukhamedov, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari and Indian petroleum minister Murli Deora were not immediately made public.

But the apparent next step will be to secure financial backing and firm bids from energy companies.

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