

Pipe Dreams - Afghanistan as the International Center of Natural Gas Competition

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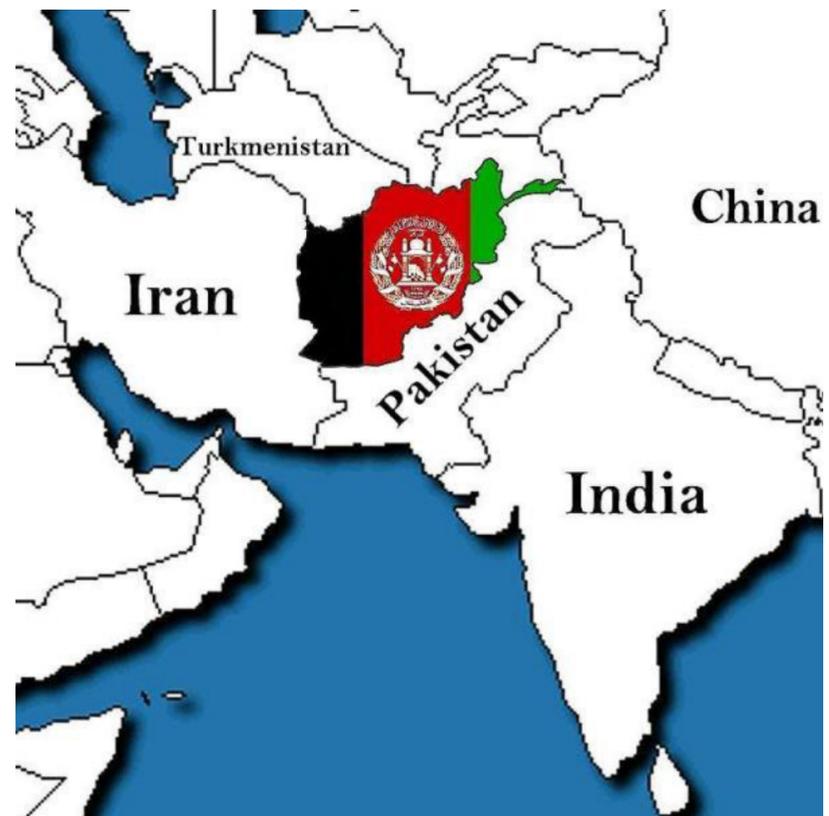
Economics and Social Action/Social Change

The enormous natural resources (oil and gas) in Central Asia and the Caspian region remain largely untapped. If these resources were to reach the international market, where they are needed, it would not only enhance the lives of those living in the region, but also provide energy growth to major industrialized and developing countries around the world.

The world's major multinational oil and gas companies have shifted their attention to a pipeline project which would transfer the tremendous natural gas and oil of Central Asia and the Caspian region to the rest of the world. The only possible route for the pipeline is through Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, to New Delhi, where it will connect to an already built pipeline. The Central Asia pipeline project cannot be completed without a stable government in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is one of the very few countries in the world whose natural resources (minerals, oil, and natural gas) have not been exploited. During the summer of 2010, The New York Times reported the discovery of over \$1 trillion-worth of untapped minerals in Afghanistan. That is just a fraction of the natural resources in that region. These resources have been inaccessible as a result of political and military conflicts in the region.

The geographical position of Afghanistan and its natural resources have put this country in a very unique situation. The former Soviet Union, Iran, and the United States and its Western European allies would all like access to Afghanistan's natural resources. Some would argue that one of the goals of NATO



(North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and the United States in Afghanistan is to maintain a permanent base to solidify this access.

In the future, Afghanistan is going to be the major sector for natural gas competition in the world. This could be a golden opportunity for Afghans, but only if these resources are extracted by a government that is responsible for its people and puts the profit into the national wealth rather than into the hands of a few. Otherwise, it could instead exacerbate existing political, social, and military tensions in Afghanistan.

In my thesis I will talk about the importance of the pipeline project, what it means for Afghanistan, and what can be done to use those resources efficiently, in a way that enhances the lives of Afghans and benefits other countries where these resources are needed.