

Peace Pipeline or Strategic Gamble

Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline Project:

Challenges, Opportunities and Foreign Policy Implications

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Abstract- The Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline project, once envisioned as “Peace Pipeline” has become “strategic gamble” due to political and economic uncertainties. This research explore the deep insights into challenges, Opportunities and foreign policy implications surrounding the project. The key challenges revolve around geopolitical tension in the region, due to economic issues, sanctions imposed by the USA on Iran, and security concerns in terror-prone areas. While, the pipeline project presents promising opportunities such as strengthening regional cooperation, mitigating energy shortages, and boosting economic progress. The research use mix method approach, primarily focus on qualitative analysis. The analysis reveal how US sanctions and regional instability have effect the project progress, while also highlights the potential benefits of energy security and regional cooperation for both Iran and Pakistan. Ultimately the research concludes that the Pipelines future depends on Pakistan’s ability to navigate the complex geopolitical dynamics, with the potential to become either bridge or barrier to regional peace.

Index Terms- Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline Project, Strategic gamble, regional economic development, foreign policy implications

I. INTRODUCTION

The successful execution of multinational infrastructure projects often serves as a paces for regional cooperation and stability. One such project is the Iran-Pakistan(IP) Gas Pipeline. The pipeline, ambitious both in scope and potential benefits, has been a main point of discussions related to energy security and foreign policy in South Asia. In Pakistan’s case, Pakistan faces a significant challenge in meeting its growing energy demand, particularly for natural gas. Pakistan’s energy depends on heavily fossil fuels, with natural gas contributing 30%-40%. However the gas reserves are depleting which lead to an increased dependence on imports[1]. Whereas Pakistan’s economy and rising population need energy to power their homes and industries,

Especially electricity. And the government shifted oil-based plant to gas-based plant for power generation, which also increase in natural gas consumption [2]. This research find to undertake a comprehensive exploration of the challenges and opportunities linked with the IP gas pipeline, particularly in the context of foreign policy shifts and its implications for regional energy dynamics. Be it the sovereignty issues, India-Pakistan tensions, the sanctions imposed on Iran, or the potential of the pipeline as a means to alleviate energy deficits and foster economic integration. The project symbolizes the complex interplay of geopolitical, economic, and strategic calculations that frame foreign policies. The relevance of the IP Gas Pipeline in the foreign policy context can hardly be exaggerated. Whether it is in allocating resources, forging new regional alliances, or realigning interests. Through this paper, we intend to explore not only into the myriad challenges that this pipeline faces but also unravel the opportunities it provides. And potential impact on the region, perspective largely overlooked in scholarly debates. And prospect for pipelines eventual completion.

Background

Certainly, the conception of the Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline (IPGP), also known as the Peace Pipeline, was given by Rajendra k Pachauri while partnering with deputy Foreign Minister of Iran [3]. But the idea of Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline was first given by a Pakistani Civil Engineer Malik Aftab Ahmed Khan in 1950s [4]. In his article “Persian Pipeline” apart from benefits of pipeline, he also proposed the protection method for security of this project in hostile territory. The proposed pipeline, stretching over 2,775 kilometers (1724 Miles), is a symbol of cooperation between Iran, Pakistan, and India and represents a substantial shift in the energy politics of the region. And the estimated cost of the project is around \$7.5b [5]. The pipeline aims to connect Iran’s massive South Pars gas field with the burgeoning energy markets of Pakistan and India, proposing to deliver over 2.5 billion cubic feet of natural gas per day to India and

Pakistan. Iran, with the world's second-largest natural gas reserves [6], stands to find a steady market for its reserves in India and Pakistan – countries that have rapidly growing energy demands. Its strategic location enables it to connect the energy-rich West Asia to energy-consuming South Asia, thereby playing a vital role in the global energy supply landscape.

The IGP project transverse over approx. 1700 mile in Pakistan and Iran. Starting from South Pars energy economic zone. The Iranian section of pipeline is long, about approx. 1172km. The first 902Km pipeline, which starts from Asaloyeh southwest of Iran to Iranshahr. Then 270 km to Sistan-baluchistan. Construction of Iranian side has been completed, and pipeline diameter of there side is 56” [7]. The Pakistani portion of pipeline could be approx. 780Km long and have diameter of 42”. From Pakistan border, About 664 km of section will pass through Khuzdar to Gwader in Baluchistan province. And 115 km through province of Sindh

II. CHALLENGES

The construction of The Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline (IPGP) faces multiple challenges owing to its geopolitical, security, and financial & technological issues.

A. Geopolitical Challenges

One cannot overlook the role of international politics in the implementation of the pipeline project. The US has been a vocal critic of any initiative that seems to empower Iran, primarily due to unresolved disputes regarding Iran's nuclear program. US has been Opposing this project since the negotiations in 2005. The US ambassador Steven Mann Said “ U.S. government supports multiple pipelines from the Caspian region but remains absolutely opposed to pipelines involving Iran.” [8]

Sanctions on Iran: The international sanctions imposed upon Iran by the US and allied powers have further complicated the financing and execution of the pipeline [9]. And for Pakistan, it will suffer significant economic penalties by participating and violating US sanctions. These penalties includes restrictions for Pakistan's access to US financial market, including secondary sanctions which restrict the Pakistani companies to access international services and financial markets [10]. Or even blocking sanctions can imposed by US Treasury department, which freeze assets [11]. And such sanctions can damage Pakistan repute in international system and among international institutions. Which Impact on its ability to secure future loans and investments from international institutions. Also sanctions could strain Pak-US relationship. Which could also cause reduction in US aids and cooperation in other issues.

Competing Pipeline project: One of the other hurdle in this project is another gas pipeline project Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline. Because TAPI is economically backed by US and Asian Development Bank, moreover India has also shifts it's focus to TAPI [12], because of diversification of gas source, they see the diversification of gas as

to Multan city. And If India wants to join project it will extend more 600km from Multan to India.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research paper will employee mix method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis. Primarily focus on qualitative data analysis through scholarly articles, news, governments reports and data through news source to understand the challenge, opportunities and foreign Policy implications for surrounding of IGP project. The methodology was chosen due to project's ongoing nature and limited availability of primary data. However for a comprehensive picture, the research also used quantitative data where applicable.

a strategic move to not become dependent on only one gas supplier.

Regional Tensions: Volatile geopolitical landscape of Middle East are can impact the IGP project. The intense rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia and there ongoing proxy conflicts in whole region, could threaten the pipeline or disrupt the gas flows. And Pakistan could be pressurized by Saudi Arabia, a close ally, to limit its energy cooperation with Iran. This could stop the progress or even lead Pakistan to seek alternative resources. And the ongoing instability in Afghanistan due to terrorism and Civil war could also challenge the completion of project. And worst case scenario, a wider regional conflict could directly damage the infrastructure of project, making the project economically and strategically inevitable. However, the pipeline could be extent to other countries like India, but strained relations between Iran and India make it unlikely that India would participate in the project These geopolitical intricacies introduce considerable uncertainty to the project, given that any change in international relations or power dynamics could dramatically impact the project's feasibility.

B. Security Concerns

The pipeline's proposed route generates substantial security concerns. The pipeline is intended to pass through some of the most unstable regions in both Pakistan and Iran, which have been hotbeds for terrorist and separatist activities [13]. The Baluchistan region in Pakistan, which is significant to the pipeline's route approx. 475 miles, is marred by continuing conflicts and unrest. Such volatile conditions pose potential hazards to the pipeline infrastructure and operational safety. E.g. Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA) blew up Gas pipeline and water pipeline in Pir Koh on Oct 2006 [14] And later on 01 Jan, 2007 Claimed the responsibility of blowing pipelines [15] To mitigate the security concerns Pakistan will need to implement strong security measures, which include, Increased military and law enforcement presence for deterrence and rapid response to potential threats. Building trust and cooperation with local communities in Baluchistan to gain their support for project.

Beyond these internal unrests, the historical tension between India and Pakistan also presents a serious security challenge. Any escalation in crossborder hostilities could push the pipeline into the crosshairs, threatening the consistent and safe transport of natural gas [16].

C. *Financial & Technological Issues*

Financial hurdles cannot be understated. The pipeline's estimated cost stands at around \$7.5 billion [17], a substantial sum demanding significant financial commitments from all participant nations. In Iran, economic struggles caused by international sanctions have strained the nation's ability to fund such expensive projects, however Iran still has managed to build the pipeline on its sides since 2011 [18]. Simultaneously, Pakistan, grappling with set of economic priorities and issues, find it challenging to mobilize the required capital for the project. The investment risk in such projects can skyrocket given the geopolitical and security challenges, making it even harder to attract external investors or lenders. Constructing long distance pipeline across diverse terrain is itself a hurdle. Also delay in construction can significantly increase the construction cost due to Factors like inflation. The pipeline route traverse across mountainous region in Iran and Baluchistan, requires specialized construction techniques and material to ensure structure safety. Also the geological considerations should be factored into the design. Which could be a great challenge for the execution of project However, the another financial issue related to IP is unresolved pricing mechanism, transit fees and gas sale purchase agreement between Pakistan and India [19]. The pipeline's future profoundly depends on how these countries navigate their interests in the face of these daunting realities, hold negotiations, and implement resolutions.

III. *Opportunities*

The Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline (IPGP) project, while ensnared in complex challenges, presents a minefield of opportunities. It's not merely a pipeline ferrying natural gas, but it's a transformative geopolitical tool that has the potential to reshape the regional economic and political landscape. Here's deeper dive into the potential benefits of the project.

A. *Regional Economic Development:*

The pipeline route traverses through Sistan province of Iran and Baluchistan province of Pakistan. The project has potential to increase economic development in these areas. Whereas HDI and IDI of both provinces are relatively low [20]. Building pipeline will require infrastructure upgrades in these provinces, such as roads and communication networks to execute project efficiently and smoothly. This improved infrastructure can benefit not only pipeline project but also facilitate trade and economic activities in the region in long term. While the presence of this pipeline in the region, this project could attracts new business, particularly related to Gas-field industries. Which could further lead to increased in investment and job creations.

Job Creation: This project has potential to create huge number of jobs of various skill across Pakistan and Iran, Particularly

Baluchistan and Sindh [21]. The project could create jobs between 7,000-12,000 jobs, with skilled labor like welders, pipefitters and engineers making up 10%-20% of these jobs. The remaining jobs would be semi-skilled (operating machinery, technical task) and unskilled (labors, security and drivers etc.), offering opportunities for on job training and immediate income. These jobs would be economically beneficial for Baluchistan and Sindh, where the route of pipeline traverse. With increased employment, also have good impacts on the living standard of peoples in region, which come out as better access to Education, Healthcare and essential goods. However project long-term job Creation lies in the maintenance and operations of the pipeline. To maximize this benefits, Pakistan can develop training programs which equips local peoples and teach them necessary skills for these future opportunities. Same could be applied to Iran's side. And lastly by prioritizing the local force development and planning for long term job Creation, this project could be catalyst for reduction of unemployment and poverty.

Boost to Manufacturing and Services: For the execution of the project, it would require a significant amount of materials and services, leading to a sudden demand of business involved in steel production, logistics, and construction materials. The increased demand would stimulate these sectors, which lead to the investment expansion for production and creations of additional jobs. [22]

B. *Opportunities for Pakistan*

The IP Gas Pipeline project has potential to be game changer and offers significant opportunities for Pakistan.

Energy Securities: Pakistan has mainly relied on Gas as primary energy source. Mainly consumed in Industrial, domestic, commercial and transportation sectors. Growing demand of gas in these sector, Particularly a source for the thermal power generation, leads to decline in gas reserves. As natural gas production is declining, more imported natural gas would be required. For the past 14 years the government has importing gas to meet the demands. But the shortages will be worsen over time. In a EYB report of 2021, required net supply of gas will reduced to 593,793millioncft and 952,680millioncft will be imported by 2025. And by 2030, it will require three time more import quantities to fulfill the meet [23]. However, price fluctuation due to global market leads to price volatility and shears the foreign exchange reserve.

In the aspects of energy security, this IP pipeline project is extremely beneficial for Pakistan, and can enhance Pakistan's energy security as Pakistan relies primarily on Gas to meet its energy requirements in different sectors. The IP gas pipeline would provide Pakistan with stable and long-term source of natural gas at lower cost compared to volatile global market. Which could significantly reduce burden on Foreign exchange reserve and savings on energy import [24].

Also IPGP Project could provide enough gas to address electricity shortages. As the gas is the primary source for thermal power generation. Asim Hussain a energy advisor said the "project will generate 5000MW for Pakistan" [25].

Diversification and Reliable Source: As discussed before, Pakistan faces challenge in it domestic gas production, leading to

shortages and power outage. Also some times, geopolitical tensions can disrupt gas from other sources. As Pakistan relies heavily on natural gas. The IPG pipeline would diversify energy sources. And due to long term agreement gas supply plan with Iran, it would be more reliable and stable source of natural gas [26]. Which would make the energy sector less vulnerable to global price fluctuation and supply chain disruption to one source.

Root Revenue: If the pipeline extended to other countries like India China. Pakistan could earn significant revenue through transit fees for transporting Iranian gas. Pakistan can gain around \$600m to \$700m annually in term of transit fees if the pipeline would extend to India [27]. This fees could help Pakistan in stabilizes its fluctuating economy or provide steady income to invest in some other infrastructure project or social programs.

C. *Opportunities for Iran:*

For Iran, the pipeline is a gateway to a robust economic future. Iran will sell 750million cubic feet of natural gas per day after completion of project. The exports of natural gas to energy-hungry nations like Pakistan can inject much-needed revenue into Iran's sanction-hit economy, helping stimulate economic growth and improve its balance of trade. Such prospects can bolster Iran's regional influence and mitigate the impacts of international sanctions. This project could be strategically key for Iran to link with other countries in region.

D. *Beyond Borders:*

India's participation in the project would serves its national interests by addressing its persistent energy deficits [28]. With consistent supply from the IP Gas pipeline, India can not only focus on maintaining its impressive economic growth but can also chart more ambitious plans in industrial expansion and infrastructural development. It will also help India in diversifying its energy imports, thus reducing over-reliance on any single source.

E. *Reshaping Geopolitical Dynamics:*

Despite the complexities, the IPGP offers promising opportunities. If harnessed judiciously, these could help reshape the geopolitical order of the region significantly. The pipeline could generate a win-win scenario where all parties stand to gain – opening avenues for economic prosperity, energy security, and regional stability.

F. *Regional cooperation and Diplomatic Relations:*

The IP Gas Project also offers an effective platform for promoting regional cooperation. The Iran-Pakistan Gas project necessitate engagement between Pakistan and Iran throughout construction, operations and maintenance phases. The regular interaction foster the dialogue and strengthen bilateral relations and leading to improved diplomatic relations. Which could lead to cooperation on other serious issues [29]. Additionally, The pipeline can serve as a peace conduit between traditionally rival nations – India and Pakistan, if the project extend to India. The

joint stakes in the project could encourage cooperation and dialogue over conflict, fostering an environment of peaceful coexistence and mutual benefit.

IV. *Foreign Policy Implications:*

Navigating the intricate intricacies of international relations and policy dynamics, the Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline (IPGP) has profound implications for the foreign policies of Iran and Pakistan. The participation of these countries in the project speaks to a potential shift in the regional balance of power. The project has the potential to create new strategic alignments, unsettling the traditional power dynamic. Additionally, the project faces influence and pressures from other global powers, adding intricacies to the geopolitical game board.

A. *Balancing Act:*

Completion of the IP Gas Project could strengthen the Iran's position as regional energy exporter. Bolstering its ties with Pakistan could Potentially weaken influence of US and KSA in the region. For Iran, the pipeline is more than an economic venture; it is a diplomatic instrument in the regional and international arena. Providing natural gas to energy-hungry economies like Pakistan can significantly enhance Iran's geopolitical prominence and leverage, enabling it to form strategic alliances. And at same time trying to tap other markets, drive up oil prices and try to achieve their interest with locking demands [30]. It would allow Iran to maneuver past economic sanctions, bolstering its ailing economy. However, this move may set Iran on a collision course with global powers like the US, which have taken a strict stance against its nuclear program [31]. Maintaining this precarious balance could mandate strategic shifts in Iran's foreign policy. Thus, Iran must tread the fine line between reaping economic benefits of interdependence and not fueling further international censure. However this project can also cause increase in influence and leverage of Iran over South Asia.

Conversely, for Pakistan, the pipeline diversifies their respective energy mix, ensuring reliable energy security at the regional level. However, this directly defies the U.S.'s anti-Iran stance, potentially straining relations with Washington, a crucial donor and partner of Pakistan. It demands Islamabad to balance their interests carefully, ensuring energy security without antagonizing a global superpower. This challenge is further amplified by the delicate India-Pakistan relationship, teetering on the brink, which strains regional cooperation. Thus, resulting in India Backing out of Project in 2008 [32]. Pakistan must carefully drive their foreign policies to accommodate these complexities.

B. *Global Power Play:*

The IPGP also casts shadows over the foreign policies of other global powers. The US, with its rigorous anti-Iran policy stance, has always opposed the pipeline project. It has capped sanctions over Iran and voiced concerns over Pakistan and India's participation, emphasizing their roles in global counterterrorism efforts and nuclear proliferation issues. The U.S insist Pakistan not to buy gas from Iran [33]. This could serve US goal of isolating China and maintaining its own influence in region. And

it shows how international strategic adversaries of Iran can employ dissuasion strategies, complicating the pipeline project dynamics.

Additionally, global powers like China and Russia might be eyeing the project with strategic interests. China, with its Belt & Road initiative and expanding economic clout, may see the pipeline as a potential extension of its energy security and geopolitical reach. Concurrently, Russia, another major player in global energy politics, Both Iran and Russia see US as their common enemy. And Russia is determined to maintain supply of gas in European market. So wants Iran to send gas to east through proposed IP project instead of west through proposed Nabucco gas pipeline, so that it can maintain its supply to west [34]. Which cause of high Russian interest in IP project.

The IPGP is entwined with intricate foreign policy implications for Iran, Pakistan, India, and other global powers. A delicate balance must be struck between pursuing energy security and regional integration, maintaining relations with adversary nations, and managing the international implications of aligning with Iran. In this context, the pipeline project becomes a catalyst for foreign policy shifts, nuanced diplomatic engagements, and strategic maneuvering in global and regional political landscapes. The succeeding paths of IPGP, therefore, hold a profound bearing on geopolitics within and beyond the region.

V. CONCLUSION

Dealing with the complexities of geopolitics, international economics, and energy diplomacy, the construction of the Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline encapsulates the intricacy of interstate developments in the modern era. Its potentially significant impacts on regional stability, energy security, and economic growth make the IPGP project highly attractive. Yet, the project poses substantial disruptions through international, regional, and national political barriers, security threats, and financial constraints. Wrapped within these challenges and opportunities are the foreign policy implications for all involved nations, shaping decisions and strategies on multiple fronts.

The considerable economic opportunity makes the pipeline an appealing venture. With an incessant demand for energy, Pakistan can leverage the supply of natural gas from Iran's colossal reserves. This doesn't only alleviate its energy shortages, it also helps bolster industrial growth and economic development. The transit fees collected by Pakistan could add another source to its national revenue, further enhancing the project's attractiveness.

Moreover, the project significantly opens the door to foster stronger regional integration amongst Iran and Pakistan. As they are interconnected through the pipeline network, a sense of interdependence for energy needs could transform into a drive for a cooperative regional alliance, paving the road to enhanced political stability and improved diplomatic relations.

However, the implications on the foreign policies of Iran, Pakistan, and India, with each stakeholder confronted with powerful decision-altering realities, are weighty. Iran, while potentially viewing this as an opportunity to assert its regional authority, is faced with challenges emerging from international sanctions and pressures from the West. Pakistan and India's potential to diverge from the U.S.'s anti-Iran trajectory while

seeking energy securities places them in a critical geopolitical position, requiring delicate diplomatic maneuvers, conflict resolution, and complex alliance balancing.

Understanding the complexity embedded within the IPGP's construct, we could draw parallels with similar projects that succeeded despite geopolitical hurdles similar to what the IPGP confronts today. The successful implementation of the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline), despite traversing through volatile regions, underlines the viability of such projects given the political will and perceived shared benefits of involved stakeholders.

In sum, the saga of the IPGP offers a valuable lesson in the tangled, intricate interplay between geopolitics and geo-economics in the 21st century. It showcases the potential for Energy diplomacy to shape regional politics significantly and alter the course of nations' foreign policies. While the project remains just a project at present, its realization could alter the regional dynamics of South and West Asia fundamentally. It calls for involved nations to reassess their strategic considerations, navigate diplomatic challenges, and potentially redraw their alliances.

Furthermore, it emphasizes the need for global energy governance mechanisms that go beyond narrow confines of national interests and move towards promoting regional cooperation, stability, and shared prosperity. Lastly, the IPGP project is a stark reminder of the critical role of international consensus and regional cooperation for infrastructure projects of sovereign nations that hold the potential to contribute to global energy security and economic stability.

The IPGP project, once envisioned as a beacon of regional cooperation and named as "Peace Pipeline" altered to "Strategic Gamble" filled with political and economic uncertainties. Initially, the project was seen as a win-win situation for both countries. Which held the promise of fostering economic interdependence. However, dream of Peace pipeline is eroded by the sanctions of US on Iran, which making it harder for Pakistan to get money for the project. The hopeful nickname "Peace Pipeline" feels like faded dream. Initial optimism of regional peace turn into calculation of risks and rewards.

Pakistan now find itself in curious position, completing the pipeline offer energy security and economic benefits. Yet, defying US sanctions could invite economic compulsions and strain diplomatic ties. This situation shows that the project transform into "strategic gamble". A high-stakes game where you could win big rewards or lose everything. The project now totally depends on Pakistan's strategy that how will it navigate complex between complex choices. And the outcome will determine whether the project is bridge or barrier to the peace in region.

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