

IRAN, PAKISTAN BREAK GROUND ON GAS PIPELINE, CAPPING HORRIBLE WEEK FOR US IN REGION

High pressure: President inaugurates historic Pak-Iran gas pipeline

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Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (C) shakes hands with Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari during a ceremony marking the start of work on the 380-kilometre (485-mile) pipeline from Iran to Pakistan. PHOTO: AFP

Headline and photo from Pakistan's Express Tribune announcing the pipeline groundbreaking ceremony. The image could be an old one, since that is Pakistan's former Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani on the left.

On Saturday, the ceremony to transfer final control of the Detention Facility in Parwan to Afghanistan was canceled at the last minute as the US once again tried to maintain veto power over Afghan decisions on which prisoners to free. This occurred amid a backdrop of a range of other events demonstrating how the US is trapped in a quagmire in Afghanistan and yesterday was no better, as Karzai ratcheted up his rhetoric even further, prompting cancellation of the joint press appearance featuring Karzai and Chuck Hagel, who was making his first trip to Afghanistan as the new US Secretary of Defense.

Today caps the shitstorm in the region, as we have yet another green on blue attack, and although it is very early in sorting out details, it appears to involve US Special Forces in Maidan Wardak province, where Karzai had made today the deadline for SOf to withdraw from the province over allegations of widespread atrocities at the hands of groups claiming to be affiliated with and/or trained by US SOf. But US pain and embarrassment spread further out into the region immediately surrounding Afghanistan today, as Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad made a joint appearance to commemorate the official ground-breaking for construction of Pakistan's side of the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline. From the PressTV account of the event, we get some background:

The 1,600-kilometer pipeline, projected to cost USD 1.2-1.5 billion, would enable the export of 21.5 million cubic meters of Iranian natural gas to Pakistan on a daily basis.

Iran has already constructed more than 900 kilometers of the pipeline on its soil.

Tehran-based Tadbir Energy Development Group will reportedly undertake all engineering procurement and construction work for the first segment of the project, which starts from the Iran-Pakistan border and costs around USD 250 million.

The Iranian firm will also carry out the second segment of the project, and extend the financing later to USD 500 million.

The Express Tribune relates the history of the US trying to prevent the pipeline being built:

The two sides hope the pipeline will be complete in time to start delivery of 21.5 million cubic metres of gas per day

to Pakistan by December 2014.

The US has issued warnings to invoke economic sanctions already in place against Iran if Pakistan went ahead with its plans to import natural gas from the Islamic republic.

The United States has steadfastly opposed Pakistani and Indian involvement, saying the project could violate sanctions imposed on Iran over nuclear activities that Washington suspects are aimed at developing a weapons capability. Iran denies this.

India quit the project in 2009, citing costs and security issues, a year after it signed a nuclear deal with Washington.

Isn't that interesting? The pipeline could come online the same month that NATO troops are scheduled to end their involvement in Afghanistan. That could well be why we see this paragraph in the Fars News story on the pipeline:

During the meeting at the international airport of the Southeastern Iranian port of Chabahar today, Ahmadinejad and Zardari said that the gas pipeline will further strengthen the economic, political and security relations between Tehran and Islamabad and other regional states.

US presence in the region clearly has been a destabilizing force. Iran and Pakistan appear to be taking steps toward what they hope will be improved stability once we are gone.