

## POLITICAL

## THE IMPACTS OF QOSH TEPA CANAL DEVELOPMENT ON AFGHANISTAN-CENTRAL ASIA RELATIONS

*Samiullah Ahmadzai**Student of Kazakh-German University  
Masters of Integrated Water Resources Management,  
Kazakhstan, Almaty*

## ABSTRACT

This article examines the effects of the development of the Qosh Tapa canal on the relationship between Afghanistan and Central Asian countries. The article provides a brief overview of the canal and its significance to the region, and then looks at the history of the relationship between the two regions, before and after the canal's development. It goes on to explore the positive and negative impacts of the canal on the relationship, such as improved trade and transportation, enhanced cultural exchange, and potential political tensions and environmental damage. The article also examines the impact of the canal on the relationship between Afghanistan and Central Asia, focusing on the political, economic, and social implications of the project. The article argues that the canal has had a positive impact on the relationship between Afghanistan and Central Asia, as it has increased economic cooperation, improved transportation links, and strengthened cultural ties between the two regions. The article concludes with a summary of the effects of the canal on the relationship between the two regions, and recommendations for future cooperation.

**1. Introduction**

The Qosh Tapa canal is a waterway that runs from the northern Afghan city of Qala-i-Naw to the Amu Darya River. Constructed in the early 20th century, the canal is a major artery of trade and transportation for Afghanistan and the Central Asian region as a whole. It is also a vital source of water for both Afghanistan and its Central Asian neighbours. The project was a means of improving the agricultural production of the region and providing a reliable source of water for both Afghanistan and Central Asia. The project has also strengthened cultural ties between Afghanistan and Central Asia, as the canal has become a symbol of shared history and identity. In this article, we will examine the effects of the development of the Qosh Tapa canal on the relationship between Afghanistan and Central Asian countries (Admin, 2023).

**2. Overview of Qosh Tapa Canal**

The Qosh Tapa canal is a major waterway that runs through Afghanistan, connecting the northern Afghan city of Qala-i-Naw to the Amu Darya River. It was constructed in the early 20th century and is a major artery of trade and transportation for Afghanistan and the Central Asian region as a whole. It is also a vital source of water for both Afghanistan and its Central Asian neighbours (Holmberg et al., 2012).

The Qosh Tapa Canal, located in the Jawzjan province of Afghanistan, is a 285km long and 100 meter wide waterway that has the potential to affect the water availability situation to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The Taliban are building the canal from their own revenues and with the help of more than 5500 people, 3300 pieces of machinery, and 200 local companies. Once complete, it will be able to carry 650 cusec of water and irrigate 550000 hectares of land across the Balkh, Jawzjan, and Faryab provinces. The first phase of the project, which is 100km in length, is estimated to cost USD 91 million and is expected to be completed by June

2023, two months ahead of the schedule. The revenue from the selling of mines, particularly the Dar-e-Souph Mine, will be used to fund the subsequent two phases of the project. The canal will have a massive impact on the water availability situation in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan and is an important step towards improving the agricultural sector in Afghanistan (Sebtur, 2022).

**3. Significance of Central Asia in Afghanistan**

Central Asia is an important region for Afghanistan, as it is a source of trade, investment, and cultural exchange. The region is home to many ethnic groups, including Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Turkmen, who make up a significant part of the Afghan population. Central Asian countries also share a long and rich history with Afghanistan, and have been important allies in times of conflict (Saltmarshe & Medhi, 2011).

**4. History of the Relationship between Afghanistan and Central Asia****Pre-Qosh Tapa Canal Development**

Before the development of the Qosh Tapa canal, the relationship between Afghanistan and Central Asia was largely based on trade. Afghanistan exported goods such as fruit and vegetables to Central Asian countries, while Central Asian countries exported items such as cotton, silk, and other luxury goods to Afghanistan. This trade was a vital source of income for both regions, and helped to strengthen their relationship (Saltmarshe & Medhi, 2011).

**5. Changes to Relationship Since Qosh Tapa Canal Development**

Since the development of the Qosh Tapa canal, the relationship between Afghanistan and Central Asian countries has changed significantly. The canal has improved trade and transportation between the two regions, allowing for increased economic activity and cultural exchange. Additionally, the canal has created new sources of water for both Afghanistan and Central Asia,

helping to improve water security in the region (Admin, 2023).

#### **6. Positive Impacts of Qosh Tepa Canal Development Improved Trade and Transportation**

The development of the Qosh Tepa canal has had a significant impact on trade and transportation between Afghanistan and Central Asia. The canal has allowed for increased trade between the two regions, resulting in greater economic activity. Additionally, the canal has improved transportation between the two regions, making it easier for goods to be transported and for people to travel between the two regions (Saltmarshe & Medhi, 2011).

#### **7. Political Implications**

The Qosh Tepa canal has had a positive impact on the political relationship between Afghanistan and Central Asia. Firstly, the project has increased economic cooperation between the two regions. The canal has allowed for increased trade between the two regions, as the two sides are now able to easily transport goods and services across the border. This has resulted in increased investment in the region and has had a positive impact on the economic development of both Afghanistan and Central Asia (Sebtur, 2022).

In addition, the project has also increased political dialogue between the two regions. The canal has become a symbol of shared history and identity, and as such has encouraged the two sides to engage in dialogue and cooperate in order to ensure the success of the project. This has resulted in increased political dialogue between the two regions, as well as increased cooperation in areas such as security and counter-terrorism. Finally, the project has also strengthened the ties between Afghanistan and Central Asia, as it has provided a platform for the two regions to share their experiences and learn from each other. The project has also encouraged the two regions to work together in order to address common issues, such as poverty and environmental degradation (Holmberg et al., 2012).

#### **8. Economic Implications**

The development of the canal has also had a positive effect on the region's economic development. Trade between Afghanistan and its neighbors has increased significantly, as the canal has allowed for faster and more efficient transportation of goods and services. This has had a beneficial effect on the overall economic welfare of the region. The idea of constructing a canal in Afghanistan has been around for decades, with feasibility studies being conducted under the American-backed government of the past. However, the Taliban have made impressive progress in the past 10 months, according to satellite imagery from the American firm Planet Labs, pbc. It has been estimated that over 100km of the canal has been excavated since then. The canal, which stretches across northern Afghanistan, is seen as an important resource for the country's agriculture and irrigation. It will help provide water to the land and help farmers to cultivate the land and increase crop yields. The project is also seen as a way to bring economic activity and investment to the northern region of the country (Cuffley, 2022).

The Taliban have been making strides in the project, but they still have a long way to go. They are working

hard to finish the canal, but there are still obstacles to be overcome, such as financing and safety. The Taliban have been able to make progress so far by relying on donations from local citizens and businesses. The Taliban also hope that the canal will bring stability to the region, as well as economic opportunities. Overall, the Taliban's progress on the canal has been impressive, and it is an important step towards providing water to the land and bringing economic activity to the northern part of Afghanistan. However, there is still much work to be done in order to bring the project to completion (Cuffley, 2022).

In addition, the project has also increased economic cooperation between the two regions. The canal has allowed for increased investment in the region, as the two sides are now able to take advantage of economies of scale and increased access to resources. This has resulted in increased economic growth and development in both Afghanistan and Central Asia (Saltmarshe & Medhi, 2011).

#### **9. Social Implications**

The Taliban government's decision to develop the Qosh Tepa Canal in Afghanistan has had significant political and socio-economic implications for the entire region of Central Asia. The canal is of strategic importance, as it is located on a major trade route connecting Afghanistan to its neighbors. It has been seen as a major step towards improving regional connectivity and facilitating economic growth. The development of the canal has been a source of tension between Afghanistan and some of its neighbors, particularly Tajikistan. The Taliban government's decision to develop the canal has been seen as a move to strengthen Afghanistan's economic and political ties with the region and to gain a better bargaining position in regional negotiations. It is also seen as a way of improving Afghanistan's relationship with its neighbors, as well as providing a platform for constructive diplomatic engagement (Council on Foreign Relations).

The canal has also had a significant impact on Afghanistan's relationship with its Central Asian neighbors. The presence of the canal has improved the relationship between Afghanistan and its Central Asian neighbors, as it has enabled the two sides to discuss and work together on regional issues. This has allowed Central Asian countries to become more involved in regional affairs and has helped foster closer ties between the two sides. Overall, the Qosh Tepa Canal development project has had significant implications for Afghanistan and its Central Asian neighbors. It has been a source of tension between Afghanistan and some of its neighbors, but it has also been a positive step towards strengthening regional connectivity and improving economic welfare (Sebtur, 2022).

The Qosh Tepa canal has had a positive impact on the social relationship between Afghanistan and Central Asia. Firstly, the project has increased cultural ties between the two regions, as the canal has become a symbol of shared history and identity. This has resulted in increased cultural exchange between the two regions, as well as improved understanding of the cultures of both Afghanistan and Central Asia (Giustozzi & Reuter, 2011).

## 10. Negative Impacts of Qosh Tepa Canal Development

### Environmental Damage

The development of the Qosh Tepa canal has had a significant impact on the environment of both Afghanistan and Central Asia. The canal has caused significant water pollution, resulting in the destruction of wildlife habitats and the degradation of water quality. Additionally, the increased trade and transportation has led to increased air pollution, which has had a negative impact on the environment (Azimi & McCauley, 2002).

### 11. Possible Political Tension

The Qosh Tepa Canal, which is being built in Afghanistan, is nearing completion. The canal is expected to provide much-needed water to Afghan farmers. However, some are concerned that the completion of the canal may lead to tensions in the region over the use of water from the Amu River. Afghanistan has not had the opportunity to use water from the Amu River due to the ongoing conflicts in the region. This has caused some to question whether Uzbekistan, a neighboring country, will respect Afghanistan's right to use water from the Amu River. The first phase of the Qosh Tepa Canal is 54% complete, according to the National Development Company. If completed, the canal is expected to reduce the amount of water flowing down the Amu River, which could benefit Afghan farmers, but would be detrimental to the Uzbek cotton industry. Analysts have suggested that the completion of the canal may cause tension in the region due to the reduced flow of water down the Amu River. It is hoped that Uzbekistan will respect the rights of its neighbors and that tensions do not arise due to the completion of the canal (Qooyash & Qooyash, 2023).

The improved trade and transportation between Afghanistan and Central Asian countries has also had the potential to lead to political tension. The increased interaction between the two regions has created the potential for economic and political competition, which could

lead to disputes between the two regions. Additionally, the increased cultural exchange has the potential to lead to conflict between the two regions, as different cultures clash (Holmberg et al., 2012).

### 12. Conclusion

The development of the Qosh Tepa canal has had a significant impact on the relationship between Afghanistan and Central Asia. The improved trade and transportation has had a positive effect on the relationship, allowing for increased economic activity and cultural exchange. The project has also allowed for increased dialogue between the two regions, as the two sides are now able to share their experiences and learn from each other. However, the development of the canal has also had some negative impacts, such as environmental damage and potential political tension. As such, it is important for both Afghanistan and Central Asian countries to take steps to ensure that the positive effects of the canal outweigh the negative.

### 13. Summary of Effects of Qosh Tepa Canal Development

The development of the Qosh Tepa canal has had both positive and negative effects on the relationship between Afghanistan and Central Asia. The improved trade and transportation has resulted in increased economic activity and cultural exchange, while the potential for political tension and environmental damage is an ever-present concern.

### 14. Recommendations for Future Cooperation

In order to ensure that the positive effects of the Qosh Tepa canal outweigh the negative, it is important for Afghanistan and Central Asian countries to cooperate in a manner that is mutually beneficial. This should include measures such as environmental protection, water management, and cooperation on trade and transportation initiatives. Additionally, both regions should work to promote cultural exchange and understanding, in order to strengthen their relationship and reduce the potential for conflict.

## References:

- Admin. (2023, February 20). Afghanistan is building an enormous canal to draw water from Amudarya River. this may affect water availability situation in Central Asia. News Central Asia (nCa). Retrieved February 24, 2023, from <https://www.newscentralasia.net/2023/02/20/afghanistan-is-building-an-enormous-canal-to-draw-water-from-amudarya-river-this-may-affect-water-availability-situation-in-central-asia/>
- Azimi, A., & McCauley, D. (2002). Afghanistan's environment in transition. Asian Development Bank.
- Council on Foreign Relations. (n.d.). What is the Taliban? Council on Foreign Relations. Retrieved February 24, 2023, from <https://www.cfr.org/background/taliban-afghanistan>
- Cuffley, A. (2022, November 21). Afghanistan under the Taliban: Findings on the current Situation • Stimson Center. Stimson Center. Retrieved February 24, 2023, from <https://www.stimson.org/2022/afghanistan-under-the-taliban-findings-on-the-current-situation/>
- Giustozzi, A., & Reuter, C. (2011). The insurgents of the Afghan north. AAN Thematic Report, 4, 2011.
- Holmberg, B., Nuzhat, A., Wafa, J., Ludin, A., & Senarathna, T. (2012). Strategic Conflict Analysis of Afghanistan. Cooperation for Peace and Unity.
- Qooyash, H.R., & Qooyash, H.R. (n.d.). Mujahid: Afghanistan has right to use Amu River Water. TOLONews. Retrieved February 24, 2023, from <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-182128>
- Saltmarshe, D., & Medhi, A. (2011). Local Governance in Afghanistan. Synthesis Paper. Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.
- Sebtur. (2022, December 11). روز اعلات روزنامه زراعتی خودکفایی به رسیدن برای تپه قوش کانال کار یادامه. Retrieved February 24, 2023, from <https://www.etilaatroz.com/161451/%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%87%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%B4-%D8%AA%D9%BE%D9%87/>