

Turkmenistan's Recent Developments and Interests

In recent years, Turkmenistan has emerged as a nation of great interest due to its strategic location, rich cultural heritage, and rapidly developing economy. This Central Asian country, bordered by Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and Iran, is known for its vast reserves of natural gas, unique architectural landmarks, and ambitious infrastructure projects.

The Natural Gas Giant

Turkmenistan is often referred to as the "Natural Gas Giant" due to its extensive reserves of this valuable resource. The country has been actively exploring and extracting natural gas for decades, making it one of the largest exporters in the region. Turkmenistan's strategic location between resource-rich countries like Russia and consumer markets in Europe and Asia has made it a crucial player in the global energy sector.

In recent years, Turkmenistan has focused on diversifying its gas export routes, aiming to reduce dependency on a single market. The construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline is a testament to this effort. Upon completion, this pipeline will allow Turkmenistan to directly supply gas to energy-hungry South Asian countries, strengthening its regional influence.



Turkmenistan: Recent Developments and U.S.

Interests by Cheryl Wolken (Kindle Edition)

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Cultural Heritage and Architectural Marvels

Turkmenistan is home to a rich cultural heritage, shaped by centuries of history and a blend of various influences. The country is renowned for its unique architectural marvels, such as the ancient city of Merv, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Merv once served as an important trading post along the Great Silk Road, showcasing the prosperous past of this region.

Another notable landmark is the city of Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan. Ashgabat showcases an impressive array of modern architecture, with a distinct futuristic touch. The capital city boasts grand government buildings, meticulously designed parks, and awe-inspiring monuments, reflecting the nation's aspirations and commitment to transforming itself into a global player.

A Rapidly Developing Economy

Turkmenistan has witnessed significant economic growth over the past decade, propelled by its natural resources and government-led initiatives. The country has made substantial investments in infrastructure development, including transportation networks, educational institutions, and healthcare facilities.

One of the key drivers of Turkmenistan's economy is the construction sector. Large-scale projects, such as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan railway line and the Turkmenbashi International Seaport, are transforming the transportation landscape in the region. These initiatives not only enhance

Turkmenistan's connectivity but also stimulate economic activity and create employment opportunities.

The Quest for International Partnerships

Turkmenistan has demonstrated a keen interest in forging international partnerships to strengthen its position in the global arena. The country actively engages in multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, aiming to enhance diplomatic ties and promote economic cooperation.

Furthermore, Turkmenistan has been proactive in fostering cultural exchanges and tourism. The annual Turkmenistan International Oil and Gas Conference attracts industry leaders from around the world, facilitating knowledge sharing and collaboration.

The Path Ahead

Turkmenistan's recent developments and interests reflect a nation seeking to utilize its resources, diversify its economy, and build strong international relationships. As the country continues to invest in infrastructure, explore new energy markets, and promote its cultural heritage, Turkmenistan is poised to play an increasingly prominent role in Central Asia and beyond.

As the world pays attention to Turkmenistan's progress, the nation's rich history, breathtaking architecture, and ambitious development plans make it an intriguing destination for investors, tourists, and academics alike.

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When Turkmenistan gained independence with the dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991, the former republic's president and head of the Turkmen Communist Party, Saparamurad Niyazov, retained power. He was reelected president in another uncontested race in 1992, and a referendum in 1994 extended his term until 2002. Before facing reelection, however, constitutional amendments approved in 1999 proclaimed him president for life. The country's May 1992 constitution granted Niyazov overwhelming powers to rule by decree as head of state and government. According to several assessments, he was among the world's most authoritarian rulers, and his regime was highly corrupt and responsible for serious human rights abuses.

Following the death of President Niyazov in December 2006, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow was elected president in early 2007. A new constitution approved in 2008 reaffirmed Turkmenistan as a "secular democracy" with a powerful president able to rule by decree. The constitution included an impressive list of individual rights, but emphasized that the exercise of rights must not violate public order or damage national security. An early legislative election was held in December 2008. International observers assessed the election as not free and fair. The next Mejlis election is scheduled for December 2013. According to some observers, the Berdimuhamedow government has retained many authoritarian

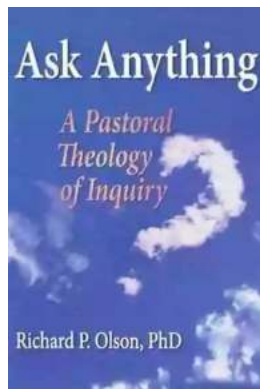
features of the previous regime, and the human rights situation has deteriorated after an initial improvement at the time of the political succession.

In October 2011, the Turkmen Central Electoral Commission (CEC) announced that a presidential election would be held on February 12, 2012. During the last two weeks of December 2011, initiative groups nominated candidates for president and gathered 10,000 signatures in a majority of the country's districts in order to gain registration of their candidates. The National Revival Movement, a civic association headed by the president, nominated President Berdimuhamedow as its candidate. In January 2012, the CEC registered eight candidates. All of Berdimuhamedow's challengers were ministerial officials or state plant managers. Based on an inadequate legal and political framework to ensure a pluralistic election, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe decided not to formally monitor the election. The CEC announced that Berdimuhamedow won over 97% of the vote and that turnout was over 96%.

In Congressional testimony in late July 2012, Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake praised Turkmenistan for providing some humanitarian aid to Afghanistan and for constructing or planning rail and energy links to the country, including the prospective Turkmenistan- Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline. He stated that such projects illustrate that Turkmenistan has the potential to be a leader in regional economic development. At the same time, he cautioned that to reach this potential, Turkmenistan must address its human rights problems. He reported that the United States would continue to offer assistance to help Turkmenistan democratize and respect human rights.

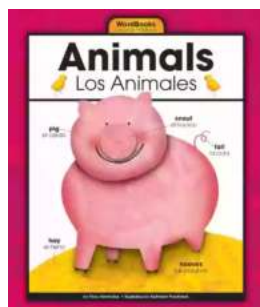
Cumulative U.S. assistance to Turkmenistan has amounted to \$351.55 million over the period FY1992-FY2010 (all agencies and programs). U.S. foreign assistance amounted to \$11.01 million in FY2011 and an estimated \$9.89 million

in FY2012. The Administration has requested \$6.73 million for FY2013 (these latter amounts include “Function 150” foreign assistance programs and exclude Defense and Energy Department funding).



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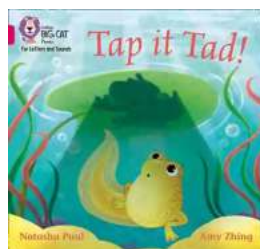
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