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Need for Gas Export Pipelines Bypassing Hormuz: Projects and Challenges

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The major crisis in the Gulf that erupted in late February 2026 has prevented around 21 percent of the global supply of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from being exported, representing about 85 million tons annually of LNG, from both Qatar (some 77 million tons) and the United Arab Emirates (some 6 million tons).

Considering that there are no alternative gas pipelines or shipping routes that can bypass the Strait of Hormuz capable of handling even a fraction of the missing volumes of LNG from the Gulf, together with the threat of open-ended Iranian control over the Strait, Arab gas producers in the region must urgently develop alternative outlets for their exports. These would need to be quickly and securely activated and have adequate, sustainable capacity to accommodate the highest possible export volume.

Without a doubt, building export pipelines may be the only practical way to reduce the enduring vulnerability of Arab Gulf gas exporters to disruption in the Strait, even though such projects would themselves be vulnerable, politically complex, and require many years and huge investments to complete. Therefore, Arab Gulf countries would need to revisit a few pipeline schemes to bypass the Strait of Hormuz so they can continue exporting their natural gas without interruption.

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Pipeline Projects Aimed at European Markets

The current Gulf crisis could well revive many gas pipeline projects previously proposed to link the Gulf to the Levant, aimed at serving European markets. One of those schemes was the **Qatar-Türkiye gas pipeline**, with one suggested route (1,500km long at a total cost of US$10 billion (2009$) to Türkiye via Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Syria, and another through Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iraq. It is interesting to note that, following the fall of the Assad regime in Syria in late 2024, the Turkish Energy Minister stated that the Qatar-Türkiye gas pipeline project could well be revived if "Syria achieves its territorial integrity and stability."

Another scheme on the table since the 1990s has been the **Qatar-Egypt gas pipeline**, projected to pass through Saudi Arabia and the Gulf of Aqaba, to cater to the expected growth in Egyptian gas demand. A larger scheme could involve the construction of more export liquefaction plants on Egypt's Mediterranean coast or perhaps a further pipeline feed to a Libyan-based export plant, or even an extension of the pipeline to connect to Algeria's TransMed gas line, while transiting Tunisia and running parallel to Italy and the rest of Europe. The Qatar-Egypt project could otherwise be connected to the currently idle Arab Gas Pipeline (AGP), which, since 2003, has

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been linking Egypt to its Arab neighbors, including Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon (through a branch line from Syria), with a plan to connect with the European network in Türkiye.

The Qatar-Egypt gas pipeline project was part of a much larger gas network scheme, the **Gulf-Levant gas pipeline**, proposed in the early 1990's by the Qatar General Petroleum Corporation (QGPC, now QatarEnergy) that would have enabled Qatar and Abu Dhabi to supply countries in the Middle East and beyond with natural gas. The 1,680-km, US$1.8 billion (1995$) main gas network would have had an annual capacity of around 20 billion cubic meters, of which 60 percent would have been supplied by Qatar and the remaining 40 percent by Abu Dhabi. The main gas network would have run from Qatar and Abu Dhabi to Bahrain, Kuwait, and Baghdad. An expanded gas network would have boosted the annual capacity to about 26 billion cubic meters and would have been extended to the Syrian/Jordanian border, and from there to Amman and Damascus. The cost of the entire scheme would have reached about US$2.6 billion (1995$), with a network length of around 3,000 kilometers. However, the Gulf-Levant gas network project has been put on ice since the conflict over Kuwait in 1990-91.

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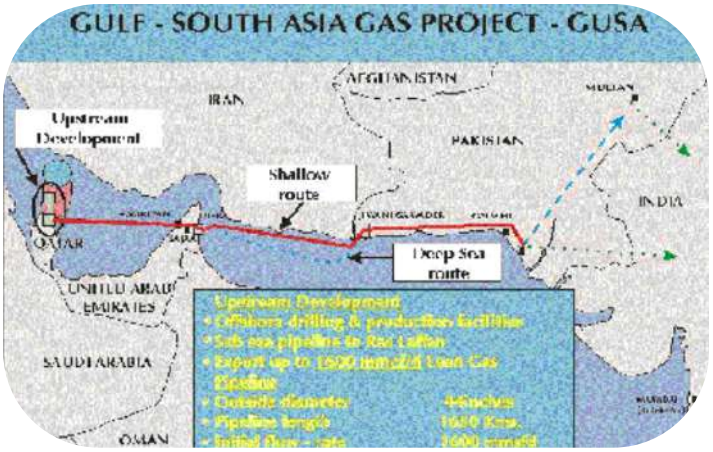
Schemes for Pipelines Bound to Asian Consumers

The present conflict in the Gulf could bring back to the table many gas pipeline projects suggested earlier to connect the Gulf with Asia and its gas consumers. One of these schemes was the **Gulf-South Asia Pipeline (the Gusa project)**, which was proposed in the 1990s by the Sharjah-based Crescent Petroleum to link Qatar to Pakistan. The 1,620-km (1,500 km offshore and 120 km onshore), 44-inch, US$2.7 billion (1992$), 20 billion cubic meter/year pipeline was proposed to originate from the Qatari North Field and run through the UAE before going offshore to the Pakistani coastal city of Gadani.



A new, creative project would be to build **a gas line from Qatar through either Saudi Arabia or the UAE to gas liquefaction plants to be built at Fujairah on the Arabian Sea or on the Omani coast**. Such a pipeline could run parallel to the 48-inch, 364-km, 32-billion-cubic-meter-per-year Dolphin pipeline, which has been pumping Qatari gas since 2007 to Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Fujairah in the UAE, and to the industrial city of Sohar in Oman. The Dolphin pipeline has been the most successful cross-border gas transmission project across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and is one of the largest energy-related ventures in the region.

Main Challenges

The success of the Dolphin pipeline could well serve as a model for the Gulf and the Middle East as a whole, a region that has been suffering from the poor performance of existing petroleum export pipelines. In fact, every oil pipeline in the region has been shut down at least once, and most remain closed to this day.

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From this regional experience, it is becoming clear that the vulnerability of an international pipeline is proportionate to the number of borders it crosses. Most of the pipelines crossing state boundaries in the Middle East have fallen victim to the region's political rivalries and conflicts. In fact, political conflicts within producing countries or transit states, as well as interstate disputes, remain the primary reasons for the shutdown of many export pipelines in the region.

In this context, the Gulf and the wider Middle East could learn major lessons from the development of the European energy and gas market over time. There, market integration required political will, a top-down vision, and a robust regulatory framework. The European gas market took time and required persistence, agility, and adaptability, with countries abandoning their individualist policies. The end results were significant benefits and enhanced security of gas supply.

Perhaps the Gulf and the Middle East as a whole need a special framework for negotiating gas supply, transit, and transportation agreements, a framework that is fundamental to the feasibility of pipeline projects in the region. An important coordination role governing such a framework could well be played by the GCC for the sake of its member states or by other regional bodies that involve all or most of the countries in the Middle East, similar to the European Commission in Brussels, which sets out rules for ensuring gas transit through third-party states through Gas Transit Directives.

When talking about Europe, the declining path of gas demand there in the medium- to long-term poses a real challenge for projects to link the Gulf to the Old Continent. In fact, in the medium- to long-term, European energy plans and programs will be affected by the European Union's Energy Strategy. According to this strategy, natural gas shall continue to play an important role in energy consumption and electricity generation in European countries until 2030, after which its use there will likely decline in line with the EU's climate neutrality commitments by 2050.

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