

Start Middle East 'Oasis Plan' projects now for world peace

The Middle East (geographically, southwestern Asia) is a crossroads linking the world's largest land masses and greatest population densities—Europe, Asia, and Africa. Thus, economic infrastructure development for this strategic region is a priority for the common benefit of billions of people (**Map 2**, yellow). There are 210 million people in the 14 nations in the region itself.

Because of its strategic location, the region should be at the top of the world agenda for economic development projects, especially intercontinental rail transit, ports, and adequate supplies of freshwater. Without these projects, the Middle East for decades has been the cockpit of strife extending from northern Africa through the eastern Mediterranean to Central Asia. This potentially rich region has been marked by barbed wire, dead-end roads, fear, and bloodshed.

The Middle East is foremost among development regions today because of the historic peace initiative taken in 1993 by Arab and Israeli leaders. The pact signed in Washington on Sept. 13, 1993 by Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, included Annex III, the "Protocol on Israeli-Palestinian Cooperation in Economic and Development Programs." It listed nine points, beginning with the necessity for providing adequate water and power for the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

"Make the gardens of Jericho bloom again," said Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres. Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian representative, spoke on Sept. 13 about how the lack of infrastructure has for too long "drained the population" and caused misery. In July 1994, accords were signed between Israel and Jordan. The example of accomplishments in this region could lead the way to success in key areas all around the globe.

However, as of January 1995, little ground has been broken for needed projects, and what has been, is mostly for hotels and housing for administrators, not basic infrastructure. Fierce opposition to the Peace Accord development perspective has been waged since its signing by financial and political circles associated with the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and related private interests in the disintegrating Bretton Woods monetary system, and from associated terrorist networks.

Nevertheless, a series of proposals has been put forward

for specific projects—many of them on the drawing board for decades—by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Sudan, and others in the region.

- The PNA in 1994 promulgated plans for 200 projects. Earlier studies, for example, included a 1992 program by the Palestine Studies Project of the Center for Engineering and Planning in Ramallah, entitled "Masterplanning: The State of Palestine: Suggested Guidelines for Comprehensive Development."

- The Israeli government published proposals in a document entitled "Development Options for Regional Cooperation," released in October 1994.

- The Jordanian government put forward proposals in 1994, emphasizing increased water supplies and transportation.

- The Arab League proposed in the 1970s a trans-Arabian and Greater Mideast rail grid, including "Guidelines for Railroad Projects in the Middle East."

- Sudan President Omar El Bashir announced in October 1993 an intention to complete the half-finished Jonglei Canal on the upper White Nile, which would develop the Sudd region in southern Sudan and augment the Nile River flow to the mutual benefit of Sudan and Egypt (**Map 19**).

- In Casablanca on Oct. 25-28, 1994, representatives of 60 nations met to confer on economic tasks for the Middle East. A development bank was proposed to finance priority projects. As the new year begins, it is essential to delay no longer on breaking ground.

Maps 9-12 depict some of the key proposals for economic development in the region. Lyndon LaRouche's "Oasis Plan" approach, shown schematically in **Map 11**, serves as a blueprint for a high-technology-based development approach for the entire region.

LaRouche's 'Oasis Plan'

"Launch an 'Oasis Plan,'" LaRouche proposed, in campaigning for priority project designs for the region. He urged that they be combined with nuclear-powered desalination plants to create "oases" of development.

In 1975, LaRouche visited Baghdad, and subsequently in the year proposed an International Development Bank to fund common-interest infrastructure projects in the Mideast and other regions. In 1986, Peres, then prime minister of Israel, called for a "Marshall Plan" approach, involving high-technology-vectored infrastructure including desalination plants, international electricity grids, and rail and road networks. The Oasis Plan goals cohere with this and also with the program elaborated by Palestinian economists such as Yousef Sayegh.

The priority Oasis Plan projects include:

- 1) High-speed rail lines through the region, connecting Africa, Asia, and Europe (red lines), which presumes a grid of other main lines, and secondary and local lines throughout the Greater Middle East area.

2) Waterway projects (blue lines), along with nuclear-powered desalination. The Suez Canal, first cut in 1859-69, needs upgrading, and the entire Suez corridor from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea needs to be developed. New waterway-based development corridors can be opened up along 1) a combination canal-tunnel waterway from the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea, beginning near Gaza on the coast, proceeding south of Beersheba as a tunnel through the highlands (about 100 km); and/or 2) a canal from the Gulf of Aqaba to the Dead Sea, through Jordan (180 km).

These waterways can be the site of a series of nuclear-powered desalination plants, around which whole complexes of new industry, intensive agriculture, and residential development can be built—"nuplexes."

The new canals, and selected coastal sites, can thus provide the new resource base for a chain of man-made "oases" through the deserts that will give plentiful freshwater, power, and easy transportation in the lower trans-Jordan Valley region.

A second Jordan River. The newest generation of designs for modular nuclear power units are made to order for desalinating seawater. The Asea Brown Boveri-Siemens "potato" reactor, so named for its spherical fuel cells (the pebble bed design), uses a safe thorium cycle. California-based General Atomics has proposed a modular, helium-cooled unit which runs entirely underground. A portion of the energy from either type of unit (at about 135 megawatts), can be handily used for desalinating seawater, and units can be added as required.

With four nuclear power units per installation, only 20 such complexes could desalinate 3,500 million cubic meters of water for the Jordan River basin, the equivalent of a second Jordan River.

Arab rail grid proposals. Map 9 shows (black) selected lines of the existing (sparse) rail grid. In the Arabian desert there are ruins of the 19th-century Berlin-to-Baghdad rail system that was dynamited by British terrorists. New rail lines and upgrades of existing lines are shown (red). These include selected links from Jordanian, Palestinian, and other proposals. In Saudi Arabia, parallel trans-Arabian lines are shown.

Palestinian proposals would also integrate (not shown on the map) new rail lines with superhighway and secondary road development in Gaza and the West Bank, and a connecting corridor between them. The proposed rail line would trace an arc from Irbid, Jordan, into the northern West Bank, up to Jenin, southwest through Tulkarm, with a main link to Nablus, and from Tulkarm southward (just east of Qalqiliya), swinging southwest of Ramallah, with a main branch to Amman, Jordan. From this east-west line, a main line would go southward through Hebron to the Gaza Strip, via Beit Hanun. The West Bank to Gaza corridor would accommodate rail, road, and air links into a network extending throughout the Gaza Strip and into Egypt.

The Israeli government program includes priority rail links from Israel to Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt.

Build the Gaza infrastructure now

Only 25 miles long and five miles wide, the Gaza Strip has over 800,000 residents (half of whom are under 15 years old), for whom the basic infrastructure of water, power, housing, and social services for a modern economy is lacking, and needs to be built right away. Under the Oasis Plan approach, the Gaza Strip, and the city of Gaza in particular, would be the littoral terminus for a new canal-based corridor of development through the desert to the Dead Sea. The PNA has extensive plans for the area.

Map 10 is a schematic of the Gaza region (called the "Western Region Development Center") from the October 1994 Israeli government report "Development Options for Regional Cooperation." Projects outlined include proposed port developments, transportation links to the West Bank, a fuel pipeline, and the Mediterranean Sea-Dead Sea project. Among the basic utility projects, the report calls for constructing 26 water treatment plants.

Create 'natural' resources

The present Jordan River valley flow is capable of supporting about 5 million people on the scale of water per capita required for modern economic activity; however, more than 14 million people already reside in the Jordan basin. Therefore, new "natural" resources must be created by man.

Map 12 shows a proposal for a "northern" Med-Dead conduit taken from the Israeli government "Development Options" report. As shown on a satellite-image base-map, the superimposed blue line traces the route of Mediterranean seawater pumped into a canal-conduit south of Haifa, which flows via tunnel under Mt. Carmel, thence to a point in the Jordan basin north of the Dead Sea. Here the 400-meter drop in elevation would allow the water to "desalt itself" by plunging at the right pressure through reverse osmosis semipermeable membranes. Such a state-of-the-art system operates at 125 pounds per square inch, far less than that of the falling water entering the plant. No extra energy would be required. Engineers estimate that a supply of freshwater equal to the existing flow of the Jordan could be created—a new man-made river. A storage lake is shown in light blue.

However, for many reasons, this option may be far less desirable than other projects. The new freshwater would be under exclusive Israeli control, for example, whereas the Oasis Plan of waterway corridors of development, based on nuplexes, would provide the ratios of water per capita and per kilometer where it is politically and geographically required.

What the maps show is the need to get on with the job. Referring to the proposed Red Sea-Dead Sea canal project, Dr. Munther Haddadin, a Jordanian hydrologist and political leader, told a science reporter in November 1994, "This project started as a dream. But so did peace in the Middle East."