

How Egypt could link Africa to the Eurasian Land-Bridge

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Throughout the millennia of its history, Egypt has been the fertile ground for the cultivation of ideas, originating in various parts of the world, and generating the development of civilization. From the earliest times, Egypt was one center of the sea-faring culture of the Peoples of the Sea, the founder of Sumerian culture. From the sea-faring culture, it developed a riparian culture, utilizing the vast resources of the great Nile River, to build up a civilization, throughout the area including modern-day Sudan (Eir Sudan), which was a culture known for its advanced astronomical knowledge. Under the impulse of the colonization of Alexander the Great, Egypt became the center of Greek Classical culture, epitomized in the institution of research and learning which was the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, founded on Alexander's orders. From this cultural center in the third century B.C., Egyptian colonizers explored and settled vast areas of Polynesia, as well as the Americas (see Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., "Scrapping the Usual Academic Frauds: 'Go with the Flow': Why Scholars Lied About Ulysses' Transatlantic Crossing," *EIR*, Nov. 20, 1998). In the modern era, Christianity arrived on the continent through Egypt, through the Coptic Church, and, later, was a beachhead for the Arabs who introduced Islam from the seventh century.

In the 21st century, Egypt's function will be to provide the bridge between the civilization of the Orient and that of Africa. It is as a bridge between the great Eurasian continent and the vast, undeveloped potential of the African continent, that Egypt is destined to fulfill its promise.

This concept was the theme of a lively exchange of views, during a seminar held at the University of Cairo in December. Sponsored by the Center for Asian Studies and the Center for African Studies, of the Faculty of Economics and Political Science, the seminar heard a presentation by *EIR* representatives on the Eurasian Land-Bridge, and its extension into Africa through Egypt. Jacques Cheminade, president of the Solidarity and Progress political party in France, joined in to present the proposals elaborated by the LaRouche movement, for the rapid industrialization of the African economy. Cheminade contrasted the projects envisioned by the British, for depopulation of Africa through the ravages of wars and famine, to the extraordinarily rapid expansion of urban centers

hosting populations at a high living standard and technology, made possible by the establishment of continental grids of basic infrastructure: This includes a north-south, east-west railway system, with branches into all nations of the continent. It includes as well, a series of projects in water management, like the Transaqua project (see "Transaqua: An Idea for the Sahel," *EIR*, Aug. 29, 1997), the Qattara Depression, and the second Nile.

The idea of the Eurasian Land-Bridge, as a project not only promoted by the LaRouche movement, but actively being implemented by the government of the People's Republic of China, in cooperation with other states, first came to the attention of the Center for Asian Studies a year earlier, when the director of the institute, Prof. Selim Mohammad, attended a seminar on Central Asian development in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. There, as Professor Selim noted in his introductory remarks at the Cairo seminar, he had heard a presentation by *EIR* on the Eurasian Land-Bridge perspective, as the driving force for world economic recovery. Following that, scholars at the Cairo institute started studying the project, he said, and focussed, in particular, on the role which Egypt could play, in becoming the bridge into Africa.

The idea since then had generated considerable interest, as became evident in the discussion at the seminar. The central issue which emerged in the debate, was the impact the Land-Bridge would have on the Suez Canal, which provides transit for ocean-going vessels between Europe and Africa, Africa, and Asia. The concern expressed by representatives of the Suez Canal Authority from Ismailia, present at the seminar, was that the land route would compete with the ship traffic, negatively affecting the canal's activities and revenues. The argument was also put forth, that sea lanes offered cheaper and more efficient means of transportation.

In the ensuing debate, the apparent paradox was solved, by elaboration of the actual economic impact the Land-Bridge would have not only on Egypt, but on the continent as a whole. Here, by vastly upgrading the technological levels of the economic process, through advanced rail infrastructure and modern inland waterways, as well as extensive application of nuclear energy for urban agro-industrial development, the levels



Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak points out the extent of the Toshka Project to create a new Nile delta in Upper Egypt, on a scale-model of the project, which he inaugurated on Jan. 9, 1997. Like the “New Cities” project, the Toshka Project aims to bring people, industry, and agriculture out of the narrow band defined by the Nile River.

of energy throughput in the whole economy would be so raised, as to generate the need for more, not less, trade overall, thus generating more, not less, demand for the Suez Canal. More broadly, the point was made, that if the Land-Bridge is not implemented, the world economic depression, already in progress, will wipe out trade, thus rendering passages like the Suez Canal, obsolete. Finally, if the world economy is conceptualized as one process, then the various forms of transportation systems of goods and persons, must be considered as parts of an integrated system. This, in fact, is the case of the projected Eurasian Land-Bridge in *EIR*'s elaboration; it is also the case of the Transaqua project, which foresees integrated container traffic via water and road/rail lines.

The deeper question underlying such concerns has to do with the reality factor: insofar as the world financial, monetary, and economic crises are not seen to be “real” in Egypt, because no dramatic collapse in the fledgling stock market or national currency has yet hit the country, to that extent the urgent need for alternative structures and a motor for world economic recovery, is not perceived as immediate and desirable. This perception is destined to change in the short term, as world events, including the dramatic dynamic toward war and chaos in the region, will deal a reality shock.

Beyond the Nile

While the debate about the Eurasian Land-Bridge continues to rage—and it is a real debate, which involves serious work of the Center for Asian Studies as well as the Suez Canal Authority, to develop feasibility studies—the country is already engaged in a series of projects which are coherent with the Eurasian Land-Bridge approach. The most energeti-

cally pursued project, is the government plan to create a large number of new cities. The basic concept, is that in order to alleviate the population pressures on Cairo, it is necessary to create new urban centers outside the capital, which offer all the advantages of major cities. If the project succeeds, it will mean that for the first time in Egypt's history, population growth will be extended beyond of the Nile River valley.

That such urban development is required, is obvious the minute one takes a taxi anywhere in Cairo. The greater Cairo area, with some 10 million residents, does not have the transportation infrastructure to handle enormous flows of goods and people. Work is continuing on a citywide subway network, which will improve communications, but will not solve the problem. Thus the need for new cities, within a broader plan for national development.

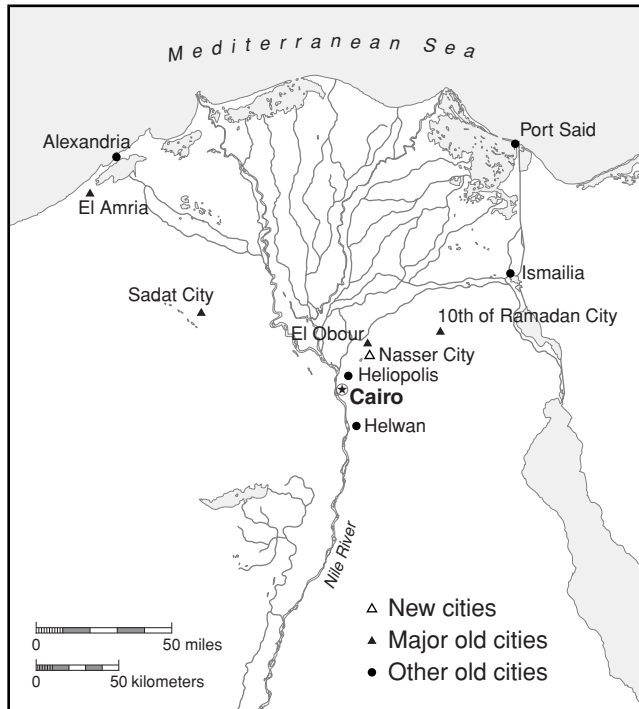
According to a background briefing provided to *EIR* by the Ministry of Housing, Utilities, and Urban Communities, the government strategy moves along three axes:

1. Development of remote areas, such as the Sinai, the northwest coastal areas, the Red Sea, etc. In these designated “development areas,” the government provides basic infrastructure—roads, water pipelines, desalination plants, and electricity—as the precondition for development. Here, for example, in the Red Sea area, five water pipelines have been built, to transport Nile water, to the Sinai, the Northwest and Red Sea. For those areas which are too distant to be economically provided with Nile water, the government has set up desalination plants, for example, for Sharm al Shaik.

2. Construction of new urban communities, chosen to create “development poles.” These are the new cities around

FIGURE 1

Egypt's New-Cities Program

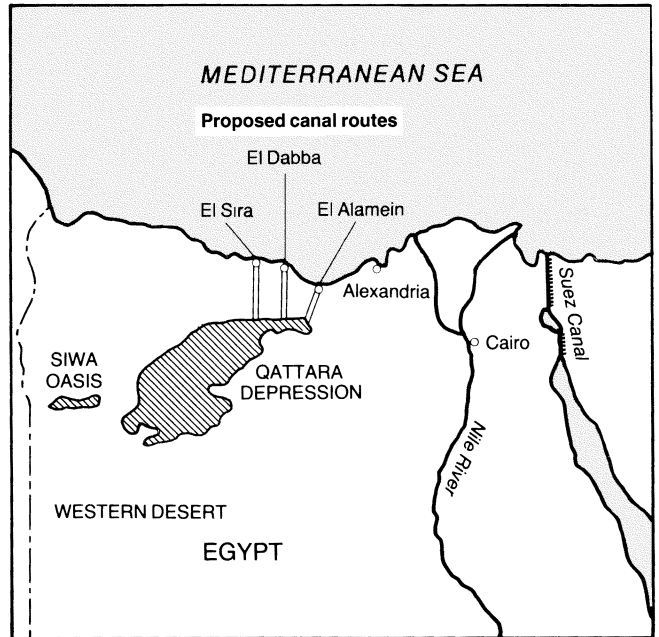


Cairo, such as by the 10th of Ramadan, located between Cairo and the Suez Canal; Sadat City, which lies between Cairo and Alexandria; the 6th of October City, between Cairo and Fayoum. The program, which began in the late 1970s, has led to the creation of 16 to 18 new cities, in various stages of development; about 16 are completed. There are 2,200 factories currently operating in them, providing 250,000 new jobs, which account for annual production worth 23 billion Egyptian pounds (roughly \$6-7 billion at current rates). There are plans to build 44 more new cities by the year 2017-2020. Egypt expects a population growth of about 20 million in that time-frame, and therefore requires housing and jobs for the expansion. Sites are selected for new cities, according to geographical considerations, the preference going to flat land areas, not affected by earthquake activity. The sites are chosen such that they can be connected up to the existing infrastructure networks. Since the late 1970s, some 12-15 billion Egyptian pounds have been spent for infrastructure and infrastructure networks, services, schools, mosques, churches, hospitals, commercial centers, and some housing units for low- and middle-income families, in the new cities. About 2-2.5 billion pounds per year are allocated for further development, from the federal budget. The remaining expenditures are covered from the cities, which sell land.

3. Existing urban centers in the Nile Valley and Nile

FIGURE 2

Qattara Depression project



Delta are to be equipped with upgraded infrastructure and services, especially water and modern sewage systems. All this involves massive investment, estimated at 3-5 billion Egyptian pounds (\$1-1.5 billion) per year. A total of 40 billion has been spent for water and waste water projects since 1988. Government financing provides basic infrastructure, and the private sector is expected to then step in and finance housing, industry and agriculture. The biggest problem encountered thus far by the government in its urban expansion plan, is subjective: how to encourage citizens to leave a metropolis like Cairo, for example, and move to a new town, which will take time to develop? Rapid and efficient transportation links to the main cities, is seen as a priority in solving this problem. The other main attraction to the new cities, is the promise of productive employment in modern factories. There has been an attempt to characterize the cities, giving each a special area of expertise, such that one may be known for its medical centers, another for its institutions of higher education, another for its concentration of industrial activity.

The 6th of October City

During a visit to the 6th of October City, *EIR* correspondents had a chance to see firsthand what the potentials and problems associated with the new cities program are. This city, about 40 kilometers west of Cairo, is 190 meters above sea level, about the same height as the Pyramid plateau. The

land area of the city is 360 square kilometers, and its population, currently 250,000, is expected to reach 1 million by the year 2020. The basic infrastructure includes water, which is pumped in by a pumping station near Giza. After use, the water is treated, and repumped for agricultural and industrial use. Electricity is produced by the high dam, and bus service provides transportation to Cairo. The city plan was designed with a residential area, an agricultural belt and an industrial area. These zones were placed, such that winds, moving from east to west, would carry any industrial fumes away from residential areas. In addition to these zones, there is also a sports and recreation center with golf course, hotels, and a media project.

The residential area is divided into 12 districts, provided with community centers, fire stations, schools, kindergartens, and shopping centers. Building plots are sold in different sizes, and there are three basic categories of housing, to accommodate different income levels. The industrial area has facilities for food processing, textiles, chemicals, and construction material production. There are 343 factories operating in the city today. For industrial investors, the land is, technically speaking, not purchased, but made available; the investors pay for the basic infrastructure, as well as construction of production sites. The city authority started in 1982 with loans from Egyptian banks, to set up the basic infrastructure, then paid off the loans by selling land for residential development. The investor community meets monthly with the city authority, along with representatives of the federal and local government, to coordinate further work.

In an effort to attract foreign investment into the city, special incentives are being offered; investors can operate for ten years without paying taxes, are freed from paying import duty on imported machines, and pay low tariffs for production materials which must be imported. Protective tariffs have been established to protect all Egyptian production, until the year 2005. Among the foreign groups operating in the city, are BMW, Mercedes, Suzuki, Daewoo, Hyundai, Citroën, and Opel.

The main problem faced by this city, is the same one others share: how to attract residents. The city has two public and several private hospitals, and schools at all levels up to university. Yet, still, much of the housing that is available has not been occupied, partly due to higher prices than in Cairo. One important factor in populating the city, has been the offer of productive employment. Typically, young men will find jobs in the factories, and, perhaps after a period of commuting from Cairo, will move into the city with their wives and families. The majority of the residents in this city are young couples around 25 to 30 years old.

The Mubarak-Kohl Initiative

The most exciting aspect of the new cities is certainly the way in which industrial production is organized and coordi-

nated with technical and vocational training. As the name of the program, "Mubarak-Kohl Initiative," indicates, it came about as part of an agreement between the German and Egyptian governments. First proposed by President Hosni Mubarak during a 1991 visit to Germany, as a means of promoting education and developing employment opportunities for young Egyptians, the agreement was sealed in a letter of intent in 1992. It called for Germany to provide assistance to Egypt, technically, in developing "Technical and Vocational Training" (TEVT), through the introduction of what is known as the Dual/Cooperative System. Following a series of seminars and studies, it was decided to launch the program as a pilot project in the new cities, precisely because they offered modern industries, advanced technologies, and coordination of the private sector with the authorities. Thus the first programs were introduced in the 10th of Ramadan City, the 6th of October City and Sadat City, beginning with trades deemed crucial for all production, i.e., industrial mechanics and industrial electronics. Other sectors were introduced as well, garment production, heavy machinery, and sugar production.

The basic concept of the program is one that has been tried and tested with excellent results in Germany, the "dual system" of factory and theoretical training combined. The aim is to develop a skilled labor force trained in both the scientific and practical basis, and using the most advanced technologies and teaching methods available. This approach aims at tackling youth unemployment in Egypt, from an advanced standpoint, creating the skilled labor which the country's economy will require to be independent in the repair and maintenance of equipment.

The partners in the initiative are the Egyptian Ministry of Education, the investors associations in the new cities, and the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ). The Education Ministry provides qualified teaching personnel, and adapts the school facilities to run the regional projects, it pays the personnel, and oversees the qualification of candidates. The investors contract the apprentices for factory training, assume costs of the regional units, and take part in identifying the production sectors to be developed. The GTZ, which is part of the German Ministry of International Cooperation and Development, supplies training aids and experts as required, and helps set up the regional units, as well as training Egyptian teachers.

The type of training is both theoretical and vocational, as carried out in the German *technische Hochschule*. Students or apprentices, spend four days a week in the factory and two in the classroom. They do this for 34 weeks in the school year, then work full-time in the factory during summer vacation, with one month off. The three-year program stipulates that the apprentice should work at least one year following promotion, in the factory. The companies must guarantee 48 jobs, in order to participate.

The program works, because it provides students with

instruction, which is immediately transferred to the practical realm. Demonstration laboratories, student experiment laboratories and workshops are some of the facilities available for training. There are production facilities at the school, to allow for initial work experience under school guidance, followed by training in rare skills with complex machinery, in the central training facilities. Finally, there is on-the-job training in the workplace.

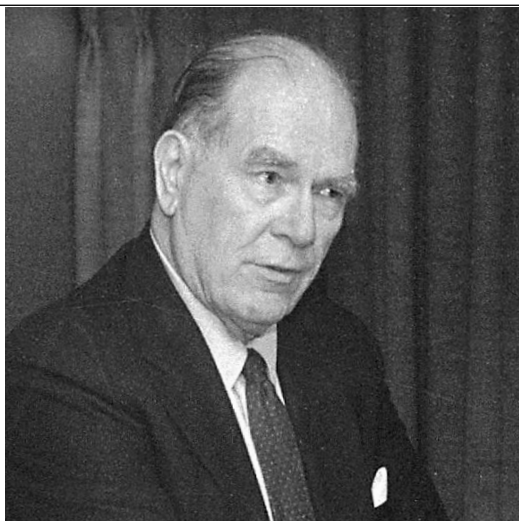
The emphasis in the program, is to develop in the young man or woman, the ability to develop new capacities, in a continuing process. And the program has had excellent results, according to the dean of the Faculty of Engineering, Dr. Ibrahim Shabaka, who is also the head of the Regional Unit Dual System (RUDS) at the 6th of October City. He reported that, compared to other young workers, those who have graduated from this program have shown a higher rate of development, acquiring skills 6-12 months more quickly than others. Most important, he said, is that the young worker can immediately pose problems in the classroom that he has encountered in the workplace, and vice versa. Dr. Shabaka said that students in the program have shown great initiative and innovative talents, proposing, for example, modifications in the transmission system of a vehicle, which were then adopted.

As a result of the initial success of the program, the de-

mand from Egyptian industries for such training has multiplied. Initially 50 companies took part, then 80, then 110 joined the program in its first three years. The number of apprentices has also grown steadily, to currently about 700.

The German-Egyptian joint project is a good example of how government agencies in advanced economies can concretely transfer their experience to partners in the developing sector. Yet, the challenges posed to Egypt for its development, require that such north-south cooperation be elevated to a yet higher plane, to encompass the kind of infrastructure expansion envisioned in the Eurasian Land-Bridge program. This is the context in which the problems identified in making the new cities function, can be most readily solved: To the extent a massive infrastructure effort is launched, with technologically advanced railway networks through the Middle East into Egypt, and through Egypt to Sudan, and the rest of Africa, then a complete national network of advanced rail transportation can also be achieved. This, in turn, would provide the rapid transportation required to link up the new cities with one another, and with existing large cities.

Egypt's becoming the bridge from Eurasia into Africa, would redefine the entire nation's economy for the African continent, generating the internal dynamic for industrialization, through the realization around transportation lines, of true development corridors.



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