
Prof. Gabir Said Awad

Proposals Concerning The New Silk Road

Professor Awad was the first speaker on the panel of Jan. 16 on "The Role of Continent-Wide Infrastructure in the Development of Africa." He is a member of the Faculty of Economics and Political Science of Cairo University.

With the recent developments and changes on the international scene, namely the dissolution of the ex-Soviet Union, the collapse of the Berlin Wall, and, accordingly, the end of the Cold War, the Chinese government declared its own initiative concerning the restoration of the legendary historic Silk Road. The Chinese called this project the "project of the century," and put it on the top of their priorities. It was no surprise that they devoted an international conference to this project, held in Beijing in May 1996, under the title, "The Development of the Economic Regions Across Asia," attended by delegations from 34 countries.

Less than a year later, and exactly in January 1997, the famous and internationally highly respected *Executive Intelligence Review* issued a report of about 300 pages under the title of *The Eurasian Land-Bridge: The "New Silk Road" – Locomotive for Worldwide Economic Development*. Behind this report, which is considered the most recent and the most comprehensive, the most enthusiastic and which defends this new project the most, was the very well-known American economist Lyndon LaRouche, and his wife, Helga Zepp-LaRouche, the director of the Schiller Institute in Germany.

This new project, which is receiving increasing concern and attention from numerous governments and international institutions, is known as the Second Continental Land-Bridge, to distinguish it from the First Eurasian Land-Bridge, which was established in the 1960s, and connects the Russian port of Nakhodka on the Pacific Ocean, with the city of Rotterdam in the Netherlands, on the Atlantic Ocean in Western Europe (**Figure 1**).

Generally speaking, the basic idea of the Second Eurasian Land-Bridge is simply making use of the advantages of communications across land-bridges, with the aim of achieving



integration among the various economic regions and countries throughout Eurasia, in addition to the transmission of civilization and prosperity to the inland areas, mainly the northwestern part of China, the landlocked Central Asian Republics and Caucasia, which are less developed, despite their richness in natural resources.

In fact, the defenders of this great project look at it, not just as an extended net of railroads, but rather as a development corridor, which includes all means of transportation (i.e., railroads and paved land route networks), oil and natural gas pipelines, water supplies, high-voltage electricity networks, etc. All this derives from the assumption, or fact, that development always starts from such main arteries of infrastructure.

According to one of the projected proposals, the Second Eurasian Land-Bridge extends from the Chinese ports on the Yellow Sea in the east, to the port of Rotterdam in Western Europe, and across Eurasia for a total length of 11,000 kilometers, in two major lines: one goes north to Kazakstan, after it traverses China, then to Moscow, and finally to Europe; and the other goes southward to Iran, then to Turkey, and finally to Europe, too.

Some of these proposed projects are highly optimistic, to the degree that they talk about the possibility of extending this land-bridge to the northeastern-most part of Russia, where it crosses the Bering Strait, through a maritime tunnel to the American state of Alaska, and from there to Canada, then to the United States, and from there to the various countries of South America. Not only that, but also the proponents of such a plan view the possibility of extending the land-bridge from China to Myanmar, then to Thailand, where it goes eastward to Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, and southward to Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia.

This presentation will be divided into three major parts: The first deals with the Silk Road from an historical perspective. The second part presents the most important recent proposals concerning the restoration of the legendary Silk Road. This is, of course, our focus. As for the third and last part, it will deal with the major achievements and breakthroughs.

But before handling these three parts of our presentation, I have to note that the idea of establishing such continental corridors and land-bridges is not a new one. Rather, its root goes back to the American economist Henry Carey, who played a major role in establishing the first continental development corridor in the 1860s in the United States, to connect the country's eastern shores on the Atlantic Ocean with those of the Pacific Ocean, in order to develop the American West.

It is also worth noting that Carey suggested the possibility of developing a similar development corridor across Eurasia from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from the North Sea to the Indian Ocean.

Carey's idea was welcomed and adopted by Germany, France, Russia, China, and Japan. All these countries agreed at that time to develop such corridors. But the British Empire viewed such corridors as a real threat to it, as a maritime

FIGURE 1

Eurasia: Main Routes and Selected Secondary Routes of the Eurasian Land-Bridge



power, in favor of continental powers. Accordingly, it opposed the idea, as Mr. LaRouche’s report reveals.

Because of the British opposition, there was no possibility to implement the idea in Eurasia until the 1960s, with the establishment of the First Eurasian Land-Bridge or Trans-Siberian Railroad.

It is very obvious today, that the discussion about building new relationships between the various parts of Eurasia, has become increasingly intense. It can be argued—with some reservation, of course—that the world today is more open, free from intense ideological and military confrontation, and inclined toward more integration. To this, one must also add the revolutionary developments in information and telecommunications technology.

I. The Silk Road: An Historical Perspective

First of all, there are two important remarks that need to be made before talking about the circumstances that led to the establishment of the historical Silk Road. The first is, that no

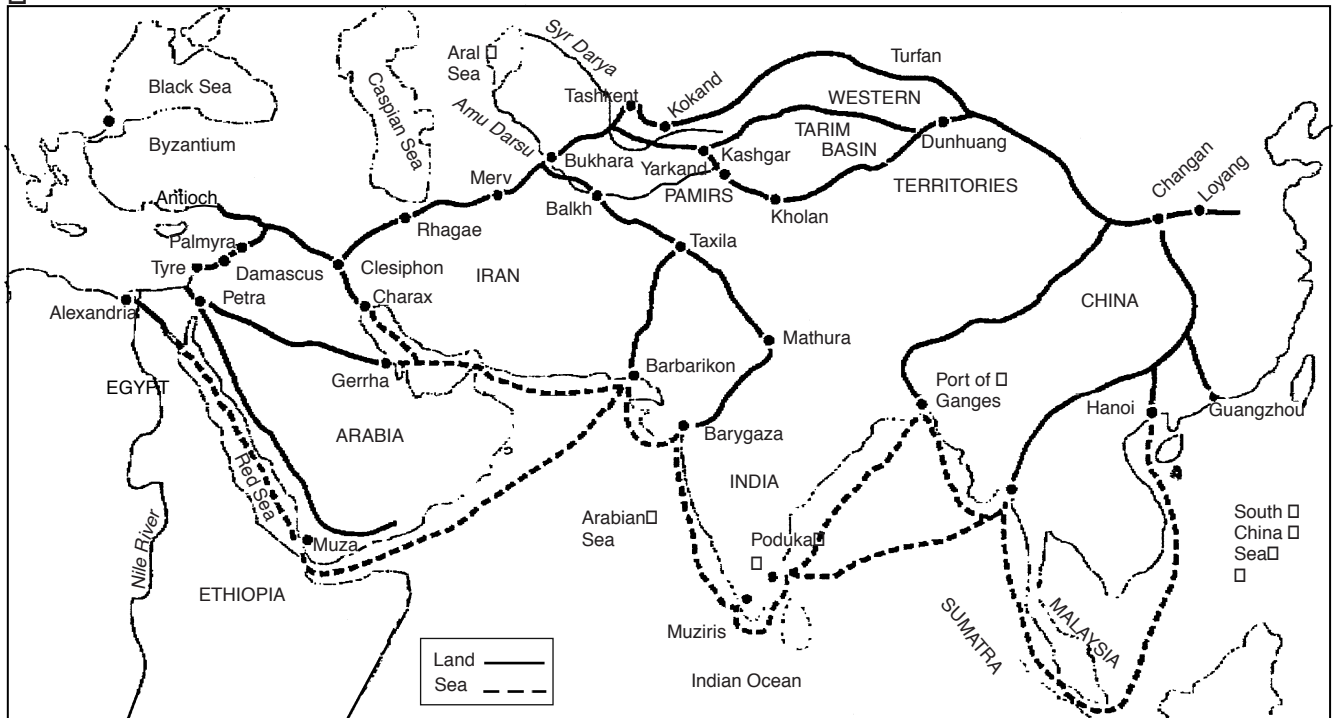
one knows for sure the exact historical passage of the trade routes across Central Asia, but there are ruins at Samarkand and Bukhara, in what is now Uzbekistan. It is believed that there was more than one passage—from two to three passages—although all start from Shangan, then the capital of China, and go through the Gansu corridor to Europe, through Central Asia.

The second remark, is that the description of the route as the Silk Road, is somewhat misleading, as it was not a trade route that existed solely for the purpose of trading in silk. However, silk was one of the major trade commodities. It was named such by the German geographer Ferdinand Richtofen, in the 19th Century.

In short, the Silk Road, as an international trade route, was established about 200 B.C., to connect Asia with Europe, with a total length of 6,400 kilometers, across the Eurasian land-mass, through the Caspian Sea (**Figure 2**).

Trade along this route reached its peak during the rule of the Tang dynasty in China, in the Seventh Century A.D. After that, its importance deteriorated, especially with the development of the maritime route to China by the Muslim Arabs. And by the 16th Century, it lost its importance completely, with the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope, by

FIGURE 20
The Old Silk Road



the Europeans.

However, it seems that it has regained its importance once again. And this leads us to the second part of our presentation.

II. Recent Proposals Concerning the New Silk Road

Actually, there are two important recent proposals in regard to the restoration of the legendary, historical Silk Road: The first one came into existence within the Chinese initiative concerning the development of the economic regions along the Eurasian continental land-bridge, which is generally known as the “policy of the Silk Road.” The second one is embodied in the Special Report published by *EIR* in 1997.

A. The Chinese Project

This project rises on the basis of connecting the Chinese port of Lianyungang, which lies on the China Sea and the Pacific Ocean, with the city of Rotterdam in the Netherlands, in Europe, through a series of railroads and roads, by making use of already existing ones, including parts of the First Eurasian Land-Bridge or Trans-Siberian Railroad, in addition to establishing new ones to fill in the gaps along the bridge.

According to the Chinese project, the New Silk Road starts from the Chinese ports of Lianyungang and Rizhao, in the east, and ends at Rotterdam in the west (about 11,000 kilometers across Eurasia). The route into China, from the east toward the northwestern part of the country, passing through Xinjiang Province and crossing the Chinese-Kazak borders at the Alataw Pass, connects the Chinese railroad net to its counterpart in Kazakstan, and goes westward up to the city of Aktogay, where it splits into three separate lines: the northern, the middle, and the southern lines.

The northern line goes from Aktogay to Bishkek, then goes northward and joins the Trans-Siberian Railroad to Moscow, and from there to north and western Europe.

The second line goes from Aktogay in Kazakstan, through Russia also, then to Ukraine, and from there to Slovakia, Hungary, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, France, and then crosses the British Channel Tunnel to England.

The third line goes from Aktogay in Kazakstan, through Tashkent in Uzbekistan, then from Turkmenistan to the city of Mashhad, then Tehran, in Iran, and from there, to Turkey, where it crosses the Bosphorus to Bulgaria, and from there to central, western, and southern Europe.

It is also worth noting here, that some Chinese studies show that this southern line may go south to the Middle East through Turkey, then to North Africa.

This Second Eurasian Land-Bridge with its three main

routes, represents, from the Chinese point of view, a revival of the Old Silk Road. It connects 40 countries and regions, including China, East Asia, Central Asia, West Asia, the Middle East, Russia, and all the regions of eastern, central, southern and western Europe.

What is more important is that the New Silk Road is no longer a plan for the Chinese. It became a reality, through a huge set of infrastructure projects within the Chinese territories, some of which are already completed, and others are on the way.

The Chinese government has outlined a program to accelerate development along the continental bridge with detailed plans contained in the Ninth Five-Year Plan (1996-2000) and the long-term objective through to the year 2010.

It was not strange, with all these efforts, that the New Eurasian Land-Bridge witnessed the first real achievement in 1992, when the Xinjiang railroads in northwestern China were connected for the first time with the Tuxi Railroad in

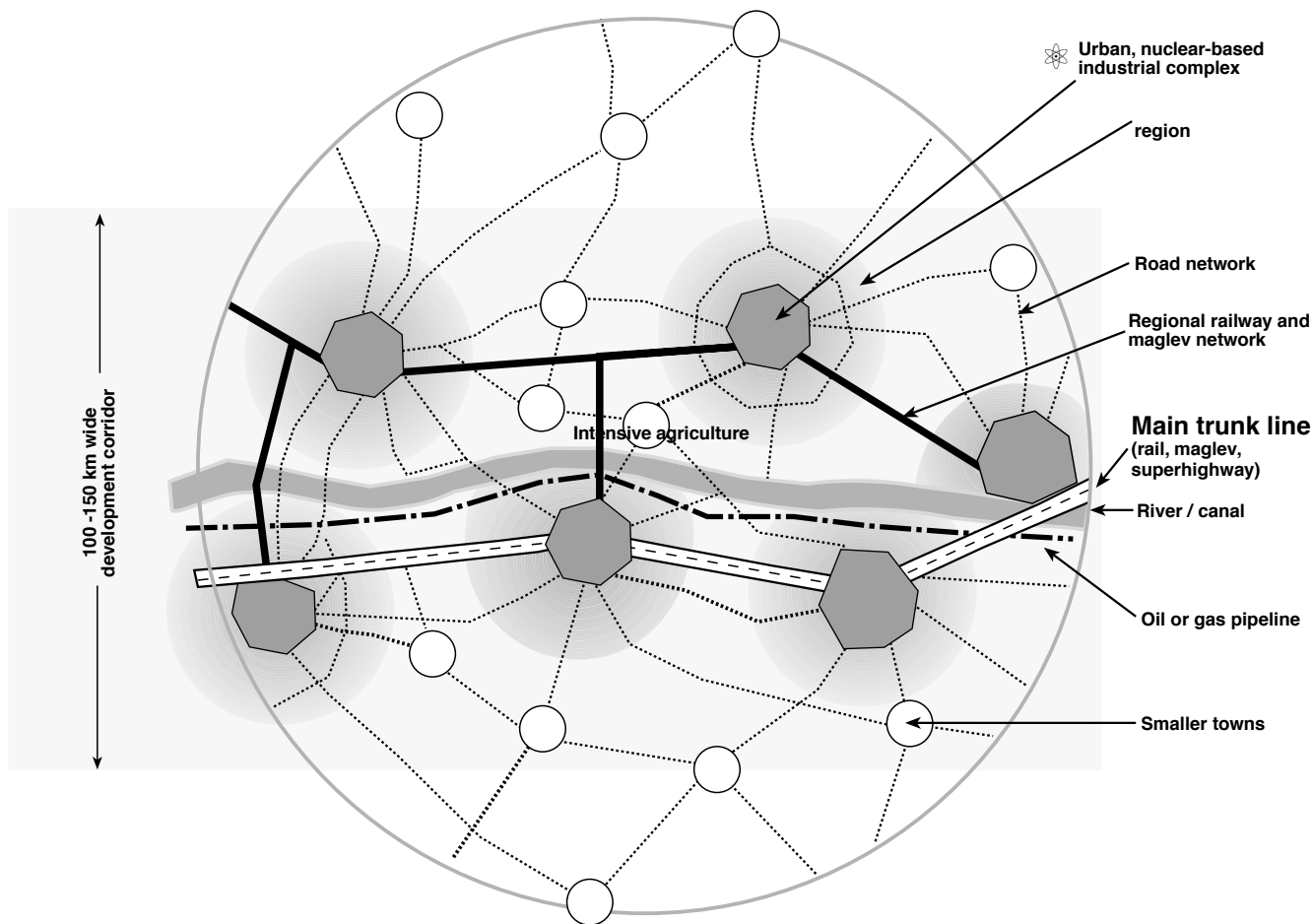
Kazakstan, across the Alatau Pass, on a trial basis. Such a connection represents the actual birth of the Second Eurasian Continental Land-Bridge.

B. The Proposal of Lyndon LaRouche

In the Special Report published by *EIR* in 1997, Mr. LaRouche proposed a somewhat detailed project for the New Silk Road. The report considers the project as the most important program of world economic recovery at the turn of the 21st Century.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Mr. LaRouche and his team believe that there is a real chance to achieve an economic miracle in all of Eurasia. What is really new in Mr. LaRouche's proposal is the idea of development corridors, which distinguishes it from the Chinese one. It is not confined to railroads. Rather, it can be visualized as a continuous strip of land, approximately 100 kilometers wide, centered on a major inland transport route such as the new Silk Road. In

FIGURE 3
Graphic Representation of a 'Development Corridor' □



addition to the railroads, there will be high-capacity electric power lines, oil and gas pipelines, water supply systems, etc. (Figure 3).

By establishing such infrastructure, the most essential precondition for every kind of industry, mining, and urban construction activity within the corridors will be created. It is easy to figure out, that any region in the corridor will be no more than 50 kilometers away from the main infrastructural arteries in the corridor.

Having presented the two most important proposals concerning the Second Eurasian Continental Land-Bridge or the New Silk Road, one can conclude that there are certain advantages to the second concept, compared to the first. First, it ends in the east with the Chinese ports free from ice all year round, unlike the Trans-Siberian line, which ends at the Russian port of Nakhodka, where water freezes about four months per year.

The second advantage is that it reduces the distance between the Atlantic and the Pacific Ocean, 2,000-5,000 kilometers.

Third, it passes through more than 30 countries and connects regions that are highly independent.

Fourth, it has the possibility to connect it to the rail networks in countries such as Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh.

In addition, there is a plan to connect the network with Southeast Asian countries. At present, China is establishing a new railroad from the Chinese city of Ruili to Myanmar, and from there to Thailand. Then, to Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam eastward, and to Malaysia and Singapore southward, which line can be extended in the future to Indonesia. That is to say, at a certain point in the future, a railroad from Rotterdam in Europe to Jakarta could exist. Not only, but according to Mr. LaRouche's proposal, it is possible to extend the first Eurasian Land-Bridge at its end at Nakhodka, northeastward to the remotest parts of the Asian continent, across the Russian territories to cross the Bering Strait, through a tunnel to the American state of Alaska, and thence, to North and South America. That is to say, this railroad network could cover the globe.

III. Major Achievements

Up to now, there are two main achievements in the Second Eurasian Land-Bridge, as proposed by China. The first breakthrough came from China, the initiator of the project, and resulted in the connection of the Chinese railroad network in the far northwestern part of the country at Xinjiang province, with its counterpart in Kazakstan, which is already connected to railroad networks in other Central Asian Republics.

The second major breakthrough came from Iran, the major supporter of the Chinese initiative, and resulted in filling another gap on the Second Eurasian Land-Bridge, through what is known as the Mashhad-Sarkhas-Tajan railroad, which, for the first time, linked the Iranian rail networks with those of

Central Asian Republics. This rail line extends for about 300 kilometers (about 165 km in Iran and the rest in Turkmenistan). Bridging this gap led to the reduction of time needed for transportation between China and Turkey, by ten days.

In conclusion, one might say that continental land-bridges are extremely important, due to the fact that they offer substantial reductions in distance and delivery time, when compared to sea transportation.

It seems that mankind is moving from the era of the river economy to the era of coastal economy, and finally now to the era of the land-bridge economy. Many expect that the 21st Century will be the century of continental land-bridges.

Dr. Hamdy Abdul Rahman

Egypt, Africa and the Eurasian Land-Bridge

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Let me first thank the Center for Strategic Studies here in Khartoum, and the Schiller Institute, and Mr. LaRouche, personally, and his team, for giving me this opportunity to address this distinguished panel. But let me first make a confession. I am replacing Prof. Mohammed Selim [director of the Center for Asian Studies at Cairo University], who was keen to attend this seminar personally, but was not able to come to Sudan, because he had a strong commitment at Cairo University at the same time. So, I will share some of his ideas, and try to develop some of my ideas, and if I be mistaken, it is my responsibility, and not Professor Selim's.

The second confession, is that I am a student of political science, I am not a civil engineer, dealing with railway issues and infrastructure, but this is relevant, in my opinion, because I think the crash program for infrastructure in Africa needs political vision and political realization. I remember, ten years ago, I was invited to participate in a seminar in Banjul, the capital city of Gambia. It was my first visit to any part of Africa south of Egypt at that time. I had to take a plane from Cairo to Zurich, and from Zurich to Geneva, and from Geneva to Dakar, and from Dakar to Banjul. It was amazing at that time, going to Africa, through Europe.

Two years ago, I was invited to participate in a conference in Durban, South Africa, and the picture was different: I took the plane directly from Cairo to Durban, by Egypt Air. So, there is room for hope for Africa. I do believe in hope, and in the potentiality of Africans to make radical changes, and to face the crisis we are living through, and create new potential.