

Developing Central Asia is key to implement 'Productive Triangle'

by Konstantin George

The basis for the long overdue infrastructural development and modernization of the newly independent republics of Central Asia lies in the comprehensive Eurasian development program drafted in 1990 by American economist and 1992 Democratic presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche. The proposal detailed how to maximize the rates of economic growth and modernization within an area of Europe bounded by Paris, Berlin, and Vienna—what LaRouche calls the “Productive Triangle,” the industrial-technological heart of the continent—as the motor for Eurasian-wide Great Projects in infrastructure. The program envisions the construction and completion of high-speed rail lines during this decade connecting Europe with the largest population concentrations in the world in Eurasia (China, Southeast Asia-Indonesia, and the Indian subcontinent), to lay the physical basis for transforming underdeveloped areas and, indeed, in many cases, regions of abject poverty, comprising over 2 billion human beings, into flourishing modern economies.

The advocates of the “Productive Triangle” proposal are well aware that without a program to develop the five independent republics of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan), the morally grounded necessity to rapidly develop all of Eurasia will face crippling obstacles. A glance at the map tells why. These five republics form the geographic bridge linking Europe to China, and Europe to the Indian subcontinent. Along with Turkey, they also form a second overland bridge linking Iran to Europe.

This role is not new. Over the territory of the Central Asian region once lay the famed Silk Route, the primary route of commerce between Europe and Asia. The ancient and beautiful cities of this region, foremost among which are Samarkand and Bukhara, were, until the devastation caused by the Mongol invasions, at the crossroads of Eurasian trade and commerce. Indeed, for centuries, Samarkand and Bukhara were, as were the cities of the Islamic Renaissance, world centers of culture and learning. Developing Central Asia is, therefore, more than just an economic development program. The implementation of the LaRouche “Productive Triangle” program would create the basis for restoring the great cultural-historical traditions of the region. By laying the basis for a second Islamic Renaissance, the entire world would not only benefit in prosperity, but also in precious

cultural terms which cannot be measured in dollars.

The republics of Central Asia must be developed not only to serve as a transportation hub between Europe and the greater part of Asia, but most emphatically, to come into their own as healthy modern economies. Without that, the political chaos and conflicts which would erupt in the region in the absence of a comprehensive development program, would ensure that the “transit” function, even if the physical infrastructure were built, would not succeed. As in the European part of the former Soviet Union, the development of Central Asia is the only alternative to a descent, fueled by economic desperation, into region-wide inter-ethnic clashes and conflicts which, in terms of geographical scope and bloodshed, could make anything seen in the Transcaucasus seem mild by comparison. The past few years have provided more than enough warning signals of what could occur unless the region is lifted out of the deep economic crisis bequeathed to it by 70 years of Bolshevik exploitation. We have been given a preview in the senseless and tragic inter-ethnic violence between Uzbeks and Kyrgyzstanis, and the potential for far worse between Uzbeks and Tajiks.

Thus, a comprehensive development program for Central Asia is not just a “nice idea.” It is the only means to avert an

Tajikistan



Proposed railway development projects for Central Asia



unnecessary historical tragedy.

A guideline for development

What does infrastructure development for Central Asia mean concretely? We offer some guidelines.

Transportation infrastructure: While the rail network in Central Asia is “thin” by European standards, nonetheless all major cities of the region are linked by rail. This existing rail network must be modernized into a high-speed rail network, with modern rolling stock and loading-unloading facilities at

all urban centers along its routes. This latter point would embrace all the inland centers, and obviously include a comprehensive Caspian Sea port and rail ferry development program. The new rail line linking Kazakhstan with China must also be similarly modernized. Were this to occur in tandem with a similar modernization of the Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarus rail systems on the one hand, and of the Turkish and Iranian rail systems on the other, one would have the first unbroken, modern overland transport link, along two main axes, between Europe and all of Central Asia, and from there on to the Indian subcontinent and China.

The economically debilitating fact that there exist no rail lines connecting the Islamic republics of Central Asia with any of their southern neighbors must be rectified. Thus, the two most urgent priorities for the construction of new rail routes are: 1) two routes connecting Iran with Turkmenistan. The first route would run north-south linking the northwest Iranian city of Mashhad with the west-east trunk rail line of Turkmenistan, running from Ashkhabad to Mary, linking up with this line at the town of Tedzhen in Turkmenistan. The second would run north from the Teheran-Mashhad main rail line along the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea, connecting with the Caspian rail ferry terminus at Krasnovodsk where the west-east Turkmenistan trunk line begins. These would be built in tandem with the above-mentioned development of high-speed rail routes across the entire length of Turkey and Iran, and from there through Afghanistan and into the Indian subcontinent. 2) A rail line from Uzbekistan southward across the Amudar'ya River border into and through Afghanistan, connecting with the Pakistani-Indian subcontinent rail grid at the Khyber Pass near Peshawar. Even the first completed phase of this project would provide an enormous benefit to the entire region, as it would infrastructurally develop the extremely fertile Amudar'ya valley of northern Afghanistan, the traditional breadbasket for that country.

Water development: No economic development program for Central Asia can achieve more than limited success unless the crucial problem of developing adequate fresh water resources is dealt with. Our conception of "adequate" water resources, i.e., of ensuring sufficient water for the needs of the current population of Central Asia, is not a static one. A water development program begun now and completed by the end of this decade must provide water to meet the needs of the population which Central Asia is expected to have by the end of the first quarter of the next century, i.e., for at least triple the current population.

The severe water shortages and problems of the region are only in part due to so-called natural causes. The effect of Soviet colonial policies, which established by decree a cotton monoculture for the region, demanding over the decades ever-higher cotton production quotas, have been devastating. Land that had once produced grain and other food crops—even without the benefits of modern farming techniques the main river valleys of the Amudar'ya and Syrdar'ya in Central

Asia had, for centuries, been the "breadbasket" for the entire region—was forcibly converted *en bloc* to cotton production, turning Central Asia into a grain-deficit region. Cotton requires far more water, a precious asset in this region, than does grain, and the cotton production quotas were met by mass irrigation schemes which wasted much of the water and otherwise cut the flow of the region's rivers to below replenishment levels.

Over the decades, by needlessly reducing the flow of the rivers into the salt water Aral Sea, this policy has produced a disaster. The volume of the Aral Sea has shrunk to a small fraction of its former size, producing an expanding salt flats desert which has ruined large areas in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Water for oil

Great water projects are urgent. Central Asia is very rich in oil, natural gas, and minerals. Its neighbor to the north, Russia, has the opposite problem. Russia has vast water resources in Siberia, but, as its easily exploitable oil reserves in western Siberia are being rapidly depleted, it has experienced drastic cutbacks in oil production. The key to solving the Russian energy crisis and the Central Asia water crisis lies in agreements with Russia, where, say, in exchange for oil and gas, etc., a sensible project could be worked out for diverting some of the huge freshwater surplus of the great Siberian rivers for the agricultural development of Central Asia. Similar arrangements could be made, for example, between fossil fuel-rich republics, which contain large arid regions, such as Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, with Tajikistan, which is water-rich, blessed with mountain rivers and reservoirs, but is otherwise the poorest of the republics.

For Central Asia, the urgent priority is not only to secure large volumes of fresh water for agriculture, but also to begin a crash program to build water purification and sewage treatment plants. The construction of water desalination plants along the Caspian Sea must be a major part of this program. Potable drinking water for the population is at the very top of infrastructure priorities.

The peoples of Central Asia suffer most from the extreme lack of clean drinking water, coupled with the backwardness of the health system. The disease-infested and sewage-contaminated water supply is the leading cause of the region's extremely high infant and child mortality rates. It is a tragic fact that infant and child mortality in four of the five Islamic republics of Central Asia (excluding Kazakhstan), is higher than Iraq's, which continues to be victimized by the Persian Gulf war and the U.N. embargo. And this scandalous state of affairs, again a legacy of Bolshevik colonialism, has struck a population which has, by developing sector standards, very high literacy and educational levels.

The LaRouche program for Great Projects in infrastructure in Central Asia, as throughout the Eurasian continent, means the difference between millions of human beings living or dying.