

Mubarak: Toshka Project opens way toward 'new civilization' in Egypt

by Marcia Merry Baker

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, in an interview with the German weekly *Der Spiegel*, published on Dec. 8, drew attention to the Toshka Project for land reclamation in southern Egypt, as the kind of priority national task deserving of international backing. In response to *Der Spiegel* reporter Volkhard Windfuhr's question about whether social problems were the basis for terrorism in Egypt, President Mubarak gave an emphatic reply.

Spiegel: "The social problems help the radicals to find recruits. What are you doing against this?"

Mubarak: "Land reclamation of the desert must be pursued with the greatest urgency. The Toshka Project which has been begun in southern Egypt is the first step of a decades-long plan, which in the future will provide new living space for millions of Egyptians. We are currently going through a shift in Egypt's history, and I am devoting no less energy to this, than I am to combatting terrorism and solving the Mideast problem."

The location of the Toshka Project is shown near the center of the map of Egypt and Sudan, to the west of the Aswan Dam and Lake Nasser, where the Toshka Depression is located. The project involves diverting Nile waters, from the Toshka overflow basin, through a 360-kilometer-long canal, into the desert, to create the basis for thousands of hectares of new agricultural land, and new towns for hundreds of thousands of people. Construction began in January 1997.

Sabotage of development projects

President Mubarak's stress on the Toshka Project, as a counter-perspective to terrorism, throws a new spotlight on the fact that over the past two decades, this kind of economic development approach in Egypt has been deliberately thwarted by International Monetary Fund (IMF)-connected forces, centered in London, which are opposed to national economic advancement, and instead, are backing financial looting and geopolitical dirty tricks, including assassinations.

Along with the famed Aswan High Dam (formally inaugurated on Jan. 9, 1960), there were many kinds of infrastructure projects for land reclamation and other improvements, on the agenda for both Egypt and Sudan, over the 1970s, '80s, and '90s. But, one by one, these were stalled or cancelled under vicious outside pressure and intervention.

This sabotage of national development efforts is epitomized by the shutdown of a conference on economic develop-

ment, which had been scheduled for Cairo in the fall of 1983, at which Lyndon LaRouche was scheduled to speak. Wide participation was expected; Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the prime minister of India and leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, had indicated her interest in attending.

The 1983 conference was jointly sponsored and prepared by the Ministry of Agriculture of Egypt, directed then, as now, by the famous agronomy expert Dr. Youssef Wali; and by the Club of Life, founded in 1982 on the initiative of Helga Zepp LaRouche as an international pro-development counter-pole to the anti-development drive by the Club of Rome, and other Malthusian propaganda instruments serving the IMF.

The Cairo conference agenda included topics concerning bringing about a *new, just world economic order*, and discussion of key high-technology and infrastructure development programs to raise the standard of living around the world.

At the last minute, the entire conference was cancelled. Subsequent indications showed that, at the least, Egypt was threatened with cut-off of food imports, if the conference were to proceed.

The circumstances surrounding the sabotage of the conference indicated the direct involvement of Henry Kissinger, whose credentials for such threats include the formal drafting of a policy of using *food as a weapon*, in the 1970s.¹

In issuing ultimatums and threats, Kissinger was operating as part of the international alignment of the IMF, World Bank, and related financial circles, to oppose needed large-scale infrastructure development projects, and force austerity and poverty on developing nations.

Over the 1980s, projects that were on the drawing boards, or even under construction, were forced to shut down. **Figure 1** shows a selection of the priority projects of Egypt and Sudan, all of which were targeted.

- Qattara Depression. This energy project in northwestern Egypt was actively under study in Egypt in 1982-83, by a committee whose members included the ministers of Industry, Petroleum, Electricity, Agriculture, and Tourism, who

1. In December 1974, when Kissinger was U.S. National Security Adviser, a classified 200-page study, "National Security Study Memorandum 200 (NSSM 200): Implications of Worldwide Population Growth for U.S. Security and Overseas Interests," was completed over his signature. It identified 13 "key countries," including Egypt and India, which were considered foreign policy targets for population reduction and food and economic control.



Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (pointing), and Prime Minister Dr. Kamal al-Ganzouri, on Jan. 9, 1997, on the inauguration of the Toshka Project, look over a model of southern Egypt development. President Mubarak said, "A new era is opening in Egypt—the era when we go out of the confines of the narrow Nile Valley."

were to determine the best way to develop hydro-power potential. Engineers from Sweden and Germany were involved in studies; and also, some years earlier, studies of the Qattara energy and water potential were conducted by the Japanese Global Infrastructure Fund (1977), and in the 1950s, by the U.S. "Project Plowshare" of the Atoms for Peace program.

In an interview with *EIR* on Dec. 17, 1982, Egypt's Electricity Minister Maher Abaza, still today a government minister, said that the Germans estimated in the 1980s that it would cost \$3 billion to build the Qattara canal-tunnel project using peaceful nuclear explosives, and \$6 billion using conventional excavation. The project was shelved.

- Nuclear power. In December 1982, Energy Minister Abaza described to *EIR* the goals for developing nuclear power in Egypt by the year 2000. He said: "At the end of the century, hydro-power will be the source of 10-15% of energy, 10-15% will be gas-powered stations, 15% will be coal-powered stations, and 15% diesel-powered stations. The rest, which is 40%, we expect to be nuclear power stations. We do not want to have all our eggs in one basket." This was thwarted.

- Jonglei Canal, Sudan. This project, partially excavated, involves digging a straight cut of 360 km through the Sudd swamplands in southern Sudan (from Borr to Malakal), which would channel the flow of the White Nile so efficiently, that the savings of water from evaporation, would increase the flow of the Nile downriver by 5-7%, for use by Sudan and Egypt. Moreover, the canal would give the surrounding area a vast improvement in usable farmland, transportation, and reduction in breeding grounds for mosquitoes, flukes, and other parasites. The canal was begun in 1978, using the gigantic "Bucketwheel" excavator, and as of 1981, was chewing a

channel at the rate of 2 km a week. But in 1984, all work stopped. A length of 180 km, the northern portion of the canal, has been completed, but remains undeveloped; the Bucket-wheel digger lies disabled. In the 1980s, a coordinated operation was conducted by IMF, World Bank, and London circles to close down the project. Civil strife was instigated; propaganda was spread about the canal's harm to the environment, and similar dirty operations were mounted against Sudan. In 1994, Sudan's President, Gen. Omar Al Bashir, reiterated his desire to resume the Jonglei Canal Project, to develop the region.

Death toll from stalled projects

The above are just the most prominent of infrastructure development plans that were prevented by the international regime of the IMF. The damage and death toll from this obstruction has been huge over the past 20 years.

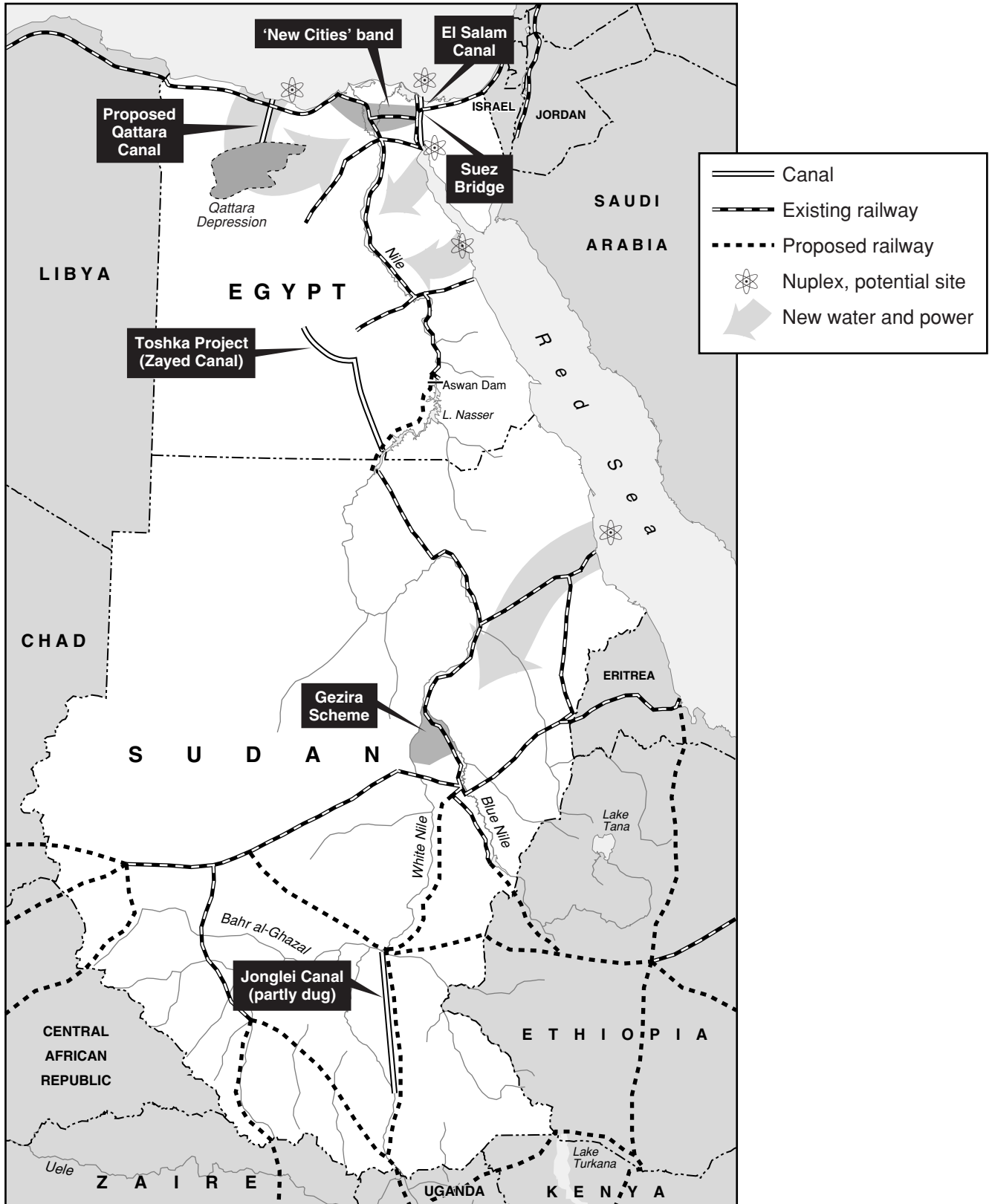
In Sudan, over the 1980s, an estimated *1 million lives have been lost*, due to the dislocation, warfare, and starvation because of preventable lack of food. In 1985, a famine took thousands of lives. During the entire 1980s and 1990s, the IMF has acted to oppose any development initiative, and to isolate Sudan.

In Egypt, over the 1980s and 1990s, the population has become more and more dependent on food imports each year, after centuries of food surpluses and exports. In 1974, Egypt became a net food importer; as of 1990, Egypt depended on imports for over 40% of its annual basic cereal grains. This food dependency is not dictated by any lack of resource base, but came about because of the anti-infrastructure moves forced on Egypt over the past 25-30 years.

Given the basic factors of climate, soils, and water poten-

FIGURE 11

Egypt and Sudan: selected infrastructure projects, present and proposed, 1997



tially available in the Egypt-Sudan Nile corridor of northeast Africa, this rich agricultural region could feed hundreds of millions of people in Africa and the Middle East, with abundance. Egypt, with 60 million people, and Sudan (the largest country in Africa), with 28 million people, occupy the strategic gateway between Africa and the Eurasian continent, where link-up with the Eurasian Land-Bridge projects could mean a 21st century of development.

Toshka Project: ‘Out from the Nile’

The Toshka Project was officially inaugurated at a ceremony on Jan. 9, 1997 by President Mubarak.² Thirty-seven years earlier to the day, President Gamal Abdel Nasser attended the opening ceremony for the Aswan High Dam. The official name of the Toshka Project is the National Project for Developing Upper Egypt (NPDUE). Toshka is the name of the depression near the Nile, at the point near the beginning of the new canal, designed to take water from the Nile along a length of 310 km to new communities in the desert.

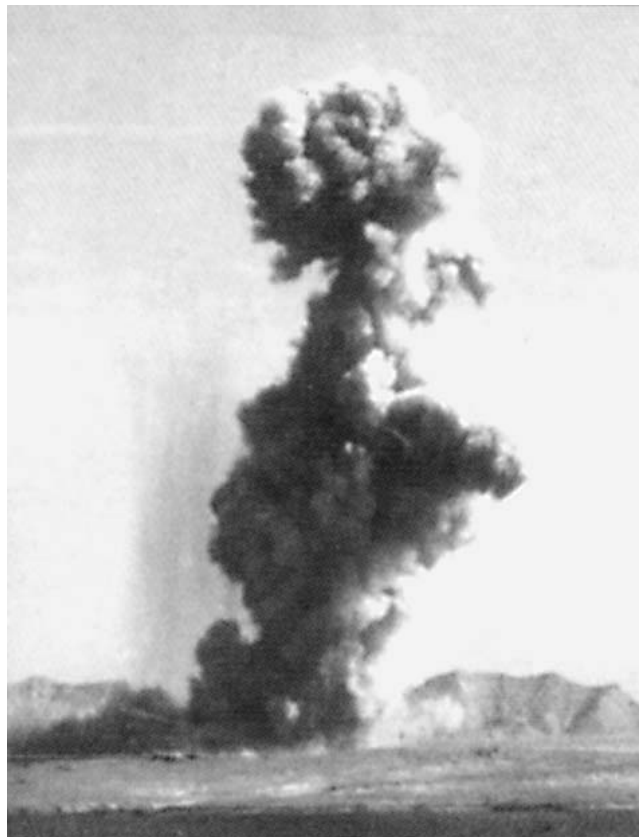
The aim is to “go out from the Nile Valley,” and to set up new agro-industrial population centers in the central Western Desert. The town of New Tiba, built on an area of 700 feddans (one feddan is about an acre), is to have a population of 35-150,000; the proposed town of New Aswan (to be built on an area of 250 feddans), is intended for 50-75,000 people.

The goal is to reclaim some 1 million feddans (420,000 hectares) of land for farming, irrigated equally by groundwater and by canal-borne water from the Nile. Water from the Nile will be diverted north-westward, pumped out at a station on Lake Nasser, just north of the Toshka outfall. The Nile water will run along a route that some geologists believe was the former western branch of the Nile. Its course follows underground aquifers. There is the possibility that water used to irrigate reclaimed land, will additionally have the benefit of contributing to recharging the aquifers.

The Toshka Project is sometimes also called the “New Delta” project. Similar plans for a “New Valley” were put forward in the recent past. President Nasser had backed development of Western Desert oases, based on drawing water from the Nubian aquifers. These are the same types of water deposits lying beneath the Sahara, that are being tapped for the source of Libya’s Great Man-Made River Project.

Egyptian geologist Dr. Farouk Al Baz, director of Boston University’s Remote Sensing Department, has carried out satellite mapping of the patterns and geologic history of underground water in the Western Desert of Egypt.

In the 1970s, President Anwar Sadat’s administration backed the idea of permanently filling the Toshka Depression,



A symbolic explosion, on Jan. 9, 1997, marking the start of excavation on the site of what will be the world’s biggest pumping station, lifting water out of the Aswan High Dam Lake, into the Toshka Depression.

which is designed to take overflow from Lake Nasser, and build a canal to irrigate projects in the New Valley. The first time the Toshka overflow canal, completed in 1978, came into use, was on Oct. 6, 1996, when the level of Lake Nasser, behind the Aswan Dam, reached the record high of 178.10 meters (584 feet) above sea level.

With the new Toshka Project, the government plans on taking some 5 billion cubic meters of water out of Lake Nasser yearly. Under the terms of the 1959 Nile-watersharing agreement with Sudan, in which Egypt’s annual entitlement is 55.5 billion cubic meters, Egypt would then offset the Lake Nasser withdrawals by limiting use elsewhere, which the government has said can be done by a number of means, including recycling treated wastewater, and improving agricultural methods in the Delta.

A centerpiece of the construction to date is what is known as the “world’s biggest bulldozer,” a 750 horsepower earth-moving machine. The canal channel is 30 meters wide, being dug out of sand and rock. The channel is called the Sheikh Zayed Canal, after Sheikh Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, which is financially backing the project.

2. See Marcia Merry Baker, “‘Out from the Nile’: New Rivers, New Civilization in Egypt, Sudan,” pp. 132-145, in *Peace through Development in Africa’s Great Lakes Region: Proceedings of a Seminar in Walluf, Germany, April 26-27, 1997*, a special report published August 1997 by EIR News Service.