

# S. Mahmud Ali: Lyndon and Helga LaRouche, Prophets of the New Silk Road

by S. Mahmud Ali

*This is an edited extract of a chapter, titled “America’s Foundational Contributions to China’s Belt & Road Initiative,” posted by the author, S. Mahmud Ali, on LinkedIn, from his forthcoming book, China’s Belt and Road Vision: Geo-Economics and Geopolitics, to be published by Springer in 2019. It is published here by permission of the author. Ali is an Associate Fellow at the Institute of China Studies, University of Malaya, and author of several books on the Asia-Pacific region.*



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Aug. 26—Western BRI [Belt and Road Initiative] discourse, especially commentary by U.S. strategic analysts and even cabinet-level leaders, not to speak of responsible officials making policy-statements or drafting high-level executive- and legislative branch documents, and contributing to the rapidly growing China-focused academic literature have, over the past five years since Xi Jinping proclaimed his BRI vision, made clear their disdain for the initiative, and underscored their suspicions that Beijing’s BRI vision is, in fact, a geopolitical stratagem aimed at non-violently supplanting America at the core of the post-Soviet international security system, dressed up as an innocuous geo-eco-

nomic plan to gird the planet with Chinese-designed infrastructure, trade and regulatory norms with all roads leading to Beijing.

Repeated *ad nauseam*, not only by U.S. officials, media-observers and academic researchers, this view has become the mainstream not only in the U.S.A., but also in U.S.-allied and -aligned states, especially across Western Europe, Japan, India and Australia. Coincidentally, the latter three, led by the U.S.A., have recently revived their 2007-vintage Quadrilateral Initiative, or the Quad, to deter feared Chinese aggression across the newly-proclaimed Indo-Pacific stretching, in the words of the recently retired Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, now renamed the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, “from Hollywood to Bollywood.” Naval drills, policy coordination and official remarks by the leaders of the four states make clear their collective determina-

tion to stop any Chinese attempts or even intent—repeatedly denied by Beijing—to erode American and allied force-projection capabilities all along China’s periphery, defeat the PLA in combat if China crosses certain “red lines,” and extend America’s systemic primacy into the indefinite future.

It is in this context that the BRI has been viewed by leaders, legislators and their advisors in these capitals, although their counterparts from at least 68 countries in Asia, Europe, Africa, Latin America and Oceania appear to have voluntarily joined China in benefiting from the BRI. This notable dichotomy, while clear and widely un-



Xinhua/Wang Ye  
Chinese President Xi Jinping announcing the New Silk Road policy at the Nazarbayev University in Astana, Kazakhstan, Sept. 7, 2013.



EIRNS/Philip Ulanowsky

Lyndon LaRouche and Helga Zepp-LaRouche, Leesburg, Virginia, 1986.

derstood, does not explain the BRI's historical evolution. The BRI's terrestrial component, the Silk Road Economic Belt, an overland network of roads, railways, airports, transport hubs, fibre-optic cables, oil and gas pipelines, and coordinated regulatory frameworks easing and optimizing their trans-Eurasian utilization, in fact, originated in America, with U.S. visionaries envisaging, promoting and advancing the cause of a united Euro-Asian economic space, as early as the late 1980s, before politicians and their assorted advisers had begun considering the possibility of the collapse of the Soviet Union, or the end of the Cold War. It was that American intellectual spark, nurtured by a few farsighted men and women, which illuminated the new world of possibilities. Without it, and direct intervention by governments and multilateral agencies based in America and its allies, there would probably be no BRI today.

### American Prophets Imagine a New Silk Road

Western imagery of Eurasia and imagination of Asia played a significant role in creating a European collective and ideational identity in opposition to the non-European-inhabited continental landmass stretching away eastward. Early in the 20th Century, the eminent British geopolitician, Halford Mackinder, posited, "European civilization is, in a very real sense, the outcome of the secular struggle against Asiatic invasion."<sup>1</sup> His

1. "The Geographical Pivot of History," Halford Mackinder. *The Geographic Journal*, 1904. 23:422.

seminal construct of the "world island," its two-tiered "peripheries" and the need to dominate this territory or, at least prevent it from falling to hostile hands, shaped Western strategic thinking for over a century. This motivation acquired added salience following the Soviet collapse and the advent of U.S. primacy which began confronting challenges in the early 21st Century.<sup>2</sup> While official and semi-official analyses viewed the possible rise of "near-peer rivals" in Eurasia, namely Russia and China, Western thinkers operating outside state-funded national security establishments envisioned a non-competitive, indeed collaborative, vision of the future.

One of them, the U.S. politician and co-founder, with his wife Helga LaRouche, of the Washington-based Schiller Institute, Lyndon LaRouche, promoted such a vision, with some success in influencing segments of trans-Atlantic opinion.<sup>3</sup> In October 1988, LaRouche briefed the media in

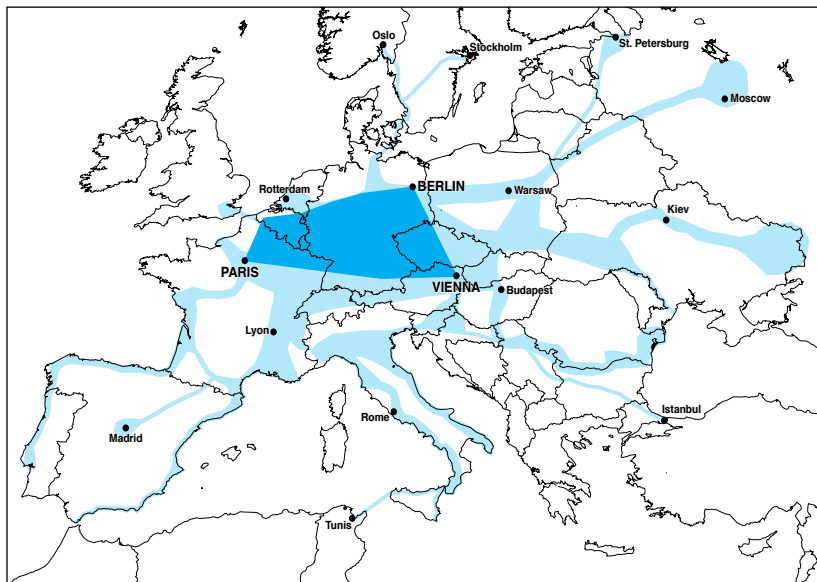
2. "The U.S. Grand Strategy and the Eurasian Heartland in the 21st Century," Emre Iseri. *Geopolitics*, Vol. 14, Issue 1, February 2009, pp. 26-46; "From Competition to Compatibility: Striking a Eurasian Balance in EU-Russia Relations," Tony van der Togt, Francesco Montesano, and Iaroslav Kozak. Clingendael Institute, The Hague, Oct. 2015.

3. Friedrich von Schiller's plays and romantic poetry contributed to shaping post-revolutionary European thought. His *Ode to Joy*, which praised freedom, unity and the brotherhood of all mankind in a period that had divided and frozen society into an arbitrary stratification, was set to music by Beethoven in his Ninth Symphony. That symphony is now celebrated as the European Union's collective anthem. C. Rabitz (2009). Friedrich Schiller's works have withstood the trials of revolution. *DW*, Bonn, Nov. 10, 2009.



EIRNS/Dean Andromidas

Lyndon LaRouche forecasts the fall of the Soviet Union and reunification of Germany in a speech in West Berlin, Oct. 22, 1988.



Schiller Institute

*LaRouche's concept of the European Productive Triangle Paris-Berlin-Vienna, 1988-90.*

West Berlin on “U.S. Policy Toward the Reunification of Germany,” prophesying the collapse of COMECON economies, and urging food-support to Poland so that a “majority of Germans on both sides” desired reunification. In December, he assigned a group of Schiller Institute specialists to examine prospects for establishing a Paris-Berlin-Vienna “productive triangle.” In January 1990, the Schiller Institute published LaRouche’s book on a proposed 320,000 square-kilometer European economic area comprising a population of 92 million concentrated in 10 large industrial areas, from which he envisaged infrastructural corridors, linked with high-speed railways, radiating in all directions, “providing a basis for upgrading living standards” across Eurasia.<sup>4</sup>

At the Schiller Institute’s March 1991 “Infrastructure for a Free Europe” conference in Berlin, LaRouche’s paper—as he was a prisoner in America since January 1989—urging the construction of “a sphere of cooperation for mutual benefit among sovereign states” of Europe and Asia, was read out to over 100 participants from 17 countries. In October 1991, at the first All-European Conference on Transport in Prague, the Schiller Institute staff distributed literature describing energy-and-technology-intensive economic corridors radiating from Europe’s “productive triangle.” In No-

4. “The Productive Triangle: Locomotive for the World Economy,” Lyndon LaRouche. Schiller Institute, West Berlin, 1990. (in German)

vember, 400 delegates from almost three-dozen countries, including former Soviet republics, gathered at the Schiller Institute’s Berlin conference on “The Productive Triangle: Cornerstone of an All-Eurasian Program of Eurasian Development.”

In 1992, Schiller Institute economists detailed the “spiral arms” or economic/infrastructure corridors radiating from the “productive triangle,” claiming resonances in Beijing’s “Eurasian Land-Bridge” initiatives as the Chinese-Kazakh rail connectivity became operational in June 1992. This made it possible for the first time to travel 11,000 km from China’s Yellow Sea port of Lianyungang across Eurasia to Rotterdam.<sup>5</sup> LaRouche’s political action committee and the Schiller Institute mounted a privately funded campaign aimed at persuading the Amer-

ican political mainstream to abandon its “policy of antagonism towards China, and Russia,” and embrace Eurasian economic integration instead.<sup>6</sup> This proved to be a particularly complex undertaking.

In late 1993, the European Union championed Jacques Delors’ eponymous “Delors Plan” to extend Western Europe’s high-speed railway network into

5. “From Productive Triangle to Eurasian Land-Bridge.” Schiller Institute. Undated. Accessed Jan. 23, 2018.

6. “The U.S. Joins the New Silk Road: A Hamiltonian Vision for an Economic Renaissance.” LaRouche Political Action Committee. Leesburg, VA, 2018, pp. 1-5. Accessed May 19, 2018.



EIRNS/Christopher Lewis

*Lyndon LaRouche addresses a Schiller Institute conference, focused on the New Silk Road development policy, Eltville, Germany, Nov. 12, 1994.*



EIRNS

*Symposium on Economic Development Along the New Euro-Asia Continental Bridge, Beijing, China, May 7-9, 1996.*

former Soviet-bloc Central and Eastern European countries, starting with a Berlin-Warsaw section, and raising the prospects for the eventual fashioning of a “continental bridge” linking Europe to ports in Asian Russia and, later, China. Unlike the Schiller Institute’s theoretical proposition, the EU’s more pragmatic plan excluded the war-torn Balkans. In December 1994, the recently freed Lyndon LaRouche presided over the Schiller Institute’s conference on “Global Economic Recovery and the Cultural Renaissance” in Eltville, Germany, leading a seminar on Eurasian development corridors attended by leading figures from China, Russia, Ukraine and Eastern Europe.

This led, on May 7-9, 1996, to the UNDP [United Nations Development Programme], the UN Department for Development Support and Management Services, the WBG [World Bank Group], EU Commission, ADB [Asian Development Bank] and other multilateral and international organizations helping the Chinese government to host a three-day “Symposium on Economic Development along New Euro-Asia Continental Bridge” in Beijing. More than 400 delegates representing governments, academia and businesses discussed the status of socio-economic development across Eurasia,

“thereby, laying the groundwork for a new continental bridge to cover a vast area of the Eurasian continent.”<sup>7</sup> In addition to ministerial-level officials from China and other participating states, and non-governmental contributors to the Eurasian economic-infrastructure integration discourse, co-founder of the Schiller Institute Helga Zepp-LaRouche, addressed the gathering, focusing on “Building the Silk Road Land-Bridge: The Basis for the Mutual Security Interests of Asia and Europe.”

Coincidentally, around this time, Iran and Turkmenistan announced the opening of the Mashhad-Ashgabat railway line, enabling direct rail-transport from the Persian Gulf to Central Asia and

further east and west, potentially knitting much of the southern half of Eurasia into a cohesive transport network. In January 1997, Lyndon LaRouche addressed a Washington conference, urging the Clinton Administration to sponsor a “New Bretton Woods system,” reorganizing the world economy to prevent disruptive boom-bust cycles, and recognize the global merit of the

7. “Symposium on Economic Development along New Euro-Asia Continental Bridge Opens in Beijing.” UN Information Office, New York, May 9, 1996.



Schiller Institute/Mary Burdman

*Helga Zepp-LaRouche addresses professors and students in Beijing, China, May, 1986.*

“Eurasian Land-Bridge” program. Reinforcing and explaining her husband’s persistent thematic refrain, Helga Zepp-LaRouche published a commentary titled, “Eurasian Land-Bridge: A New Era for Mankind,” which was widely circulated across the Atlantic by the Schiller Institute.<sup>8</sup> In October-November 1997, she presented a paper on “Principles of Foreign Policy in the Coming Era of the New Eurasian Land-Bridge” at a conference themed, “Asia-Europe Economic and Trade Relations in the 21st Century and the 2nd Eurasian Bridge,” hosted by Beijing with multilateral financial assistance. By then, railway connectivity between coastal China, Central Asia and Russia was a reality; Europe beckoned.<sup>9</sup>

A year-and-a-half later, in July 1999, the Schiller Institute’s India representative, Ramtanu Maitra, convened an academic seminar in Delhi with Russian, Chinese, and Indian scholars discussing triangular collaboration across Eurasia. R.B. Ryabkov, Chairman of the Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of Oriental Studies, Ma Jiali, a professor at the Chinese Institute for Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), and Devendra Kaushik, Head of the School of International Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, discussed challenges and prospects. With Ryabkov presiding, the scholars established a “Triangular Association” with the goal of promoting Indo-Russian-Chinese cooperation in forging a shared vision of Eurasia’s post-Cold War future of peace, progress and prosperity. The effort failed for a combination of distractions and difficulties: fallout from the “Asian Economic Crisis,” the September 2001 al-Qaeda attacks on New York City and Wash-



EIRNS/Stuart Lewis

Lyndon LaRouche and Helga Zepp-LaRouche on the occasion of her 65th birthday, Round Hill, Virginia, Aug. 25, 2013.

ington and America’s subsequent “Global War on Terrorism,” wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and then, the Great Recession.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, seeds had been sown in the febrile post-Cold War intellectual hotbeds. Ideas analyzed at the Schiller Institute’s many conferences and events began gelling into policy-frameworks in early 21st century.

The LaRouches were not the only American visionaries imagining a new, post-Cold War, inter-connected Eurasian future. The Schiller Institute’s protracted endeavors eventually percolated into U.S. academia. S. Frederick Starr, a Johns Hopkins University scholar specializing in Central Asian studies, presided over a conference themed “Partnership, Trade and Development in Greater Central Asia” in Kabul, Afghanistan, in

April 2006, amidst the U.S.-led counter-Taliban campaign raging across much of the country. A number of mostly Western specialists presented papers which were later edited into a volume titled, *The New Silk Roads: Transport and Trade in Greater Central Asia*, and published in 2007.<sup>11</sup> By this time, the U.S. Congress was already actively exploring legislative options supportive of the U.S. engagement with the region and regional cohesion, with a view to strengthening America’s strategic influence and footprint there. So, the general concept of Eurasian transport-and-trade integration, with many separate but inter-connected points of origin, including scholarly American minds, came together early in the new century. Execution, dogged by practical, political, financial, regulatory and engineering challenges, was slow. Beijing’s assumption of leadership, with much multilateral support, propelled the drive to forge the BRI.

8. “[Eurasian Land-Bridge: A New Era for Mankind](#),” Helga Zepp-LaRouche. *Executive Intelligence Review*, Vol. 24, No. 19, May 2, 1997, pp. 21-25.

9. “The New Asia-Europe Land Bridge: Current Situation and Future Prospects.” Xu Shu, *Japan Railway and Transport Review*, Dec. 1997, pp. 30-33.

10. “[The Alliance of India-Russia-China](#).” A paper presented at Conference on “The 2nd American Revolution: Developing the Pacific and Ending the Grip of Empire,” Ramtanu Maitra. Schiller Institute, Los Angeles, CA, Nov. 2, 2013.

11. *The New Silk Roads: Transport and Trade in Greater Central Asia*. S. Frederick Starr (ed.), Johns Hopkins University, Washington, DC, 2007.