Oasis Plan Conference

'Supply What Mankind Requires'

Here are selected excerpts from the discussion among four of the panelists, and moderator, in answer to questions from the international audience, which concluded Panel 2, "The Oasis Plan: The Physical Foundation for Economic Development of Southwest Asia." The video for the panel is here.

Why Propose Nuclear Plants for a War Zone?

Jason Ross: We learned about the unique benefits or properties of thorium reactors and about the Red Sea to Dead Sea connection as having the sort of ease of completion, being that it's in only one nation. We also talked about how water should be looked at from an energy perspective. There's only so much water coming down naturally, and if we want more, the question is, how are we going to create it, or pump it, and so forth?

The issues of development, the issues of energy, the issues of nuclear power really all come together here, and I think that that is important. Because a question that often comes up on the Oasis Plan that I've heard from a lot of people is: Why are you proposing putting nuclear plants in the middle of a war zone? Are you crazy? How could you possibly get these things built? And I think that the energy needs—and also for the particular case of Jordan as we just heard, that doesn't have the kind of hydrocarbon wealth that many other nations in the area have—provide a good answer to that question about why a higher energy form isn't just better, because of saving effort and resources and so forth, but it might indeed be necessary to get the project off the ground at all.

William DeOreo: As to putting nuclear power plants in a war zone: civilian nuclear plants, even standard boiling water reactors, are terribly unsuited [for proliferation]. They don't make nuclear weapons. When you take the fuel and put it into a nuclear reactor for more than a few weeks, the material that comes out of it is contaminated with isotopes. Dr. Kemm can probably elaborate on this better than I can, but it's not suitable for nuclear weapons. You need a specifically-designed reactor in order to create plutonium that's suitable for weapons.

A thorium reactor is even less suitable because the thorium fuel cycle does not create plutonium 239. It starts off too low on the periodic table. So, that is a good reason why we could use this technology anywhere without fear of proliferation.

Small Modular Reactors Are Ideal for Development Challenges

Dr. Kelvin Kemm: We have to start looking at technology beyond borders. It's interesting that he mentions Indonesia. I was the guest speaker to a nuclear conference in Hanoi in Vietnam, and I was talking there about the wide spaces in South Africa and how we would have power lines over desert sands and large areas that are rather arid. In the audience was a gentleman, Dr. Arnold Soetrisnanto, who was a nuclear chief in Indonesia. I recorded him saying, "You've got a problem getting your power lines over long distances of sand. We've got to cross water between all the Indonesian islands." I must say, that hadn't occurred to me about Indonesia. So, the idea of trying to get electricity on all those Indonesian islands without having to run cables under the water was quite a challenge. This is why the small modular reactors are ideal for that. We've heard the other gentleman talking about the molten salt reactors, which is one approach. Our reactor uses graphite balls about the size of a tennis ball with uranium grains inside. We cool it with helium gas going through. We've chosen that approach to be very versatile.

But the point is that with these small reactors now, as I indicated, you can put them wherever you like under the control of different people. Ours does not need a large body of water, so it's not constrained to [being] put on the coastline to use the ocean for cooling as many of the bigger reactors in days gone by needed.

We've got to be able to understand that the technology basis of the future is there; it's fixed. The electricity and the water are fundamental to existence. As I indicated, the amount of water on the planet is fixed, so we've got to figure out how do we keep restocking this water and how do you keep moving the water around?

Schiller Institute

Participants in this discussion, clockwise from upper left: Jason Ross, William DeOreo, moderator Stephan Ossenkopp, Dr. Kelvin Kemm, and Ilya Andreev.

So, yes, I think we need to look at independent technological centers—politically how are those controlled? There's absolutely no doubt that a capitalistic type of approach is required. People are going to do what's in their interest to do. You can't have this Green extremism where they go around saying no rules, we do our own thing, and somehow somebody is going to make society work—but not them—but they want to benefit from it.

So, I think it's a very interesting psychological and political challenge to enable the technology to supply what mankind requires.

How Can the Oasis Plan Address the Needs of War-Torn Countries?

Ross: The Oasis Plan itself I think connects regionally, so Syria in particular would benefit. Syria is right next to—Syria is part of this whole water basin, so the benefits would be very direct there. In terms of an approach and thinking through countries like Yemen or Afghanistan which are a little farther afield, I think the case of Afghanistan is a very good one.

Afghanistan is a nation where there is a political difficulty with the fact that countries are not recognizing the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, because the authorities in place aren't considered to be representative of the desire of the people. People still think the Taliban is an illegitimate government. As a result, there has been a tremendous drop in aid, and a decrease in development agencies, or even corporations that want to do business and work that way on the local economy, being able to get into the place. They're just worried there's too much political risk by this non-recognition.

Nonetheless, the perspective for the country, now that it's finally totally free of international—there's no armed forces in Afghanistan from outside anymore. It's got a lot of potential with the Qosh Tepa Canal in the north, and the perspective of "Hey, we don't need to wait for the political resolution to start trying to move forward on the economic issues," I think is an important lesson to take here.

In this case, you're not going to be able to build—you can't build out the Oasis Plan without resolving the warfare and the fighting for sure. But I think it's a

similar message in terms of how having that future perspective transforms what is the potential on the ground.

DeOreo: The beauty of the Oasis Plan is that it could begin with a small—you don't have to do the whole thing at once. It can grow organically. For instance, the idea of beginning in southern Jordan with building some installations in Aqaba and letting it grow up to the north is a demonstration of how this kind of system can benefit the local people. So, it's a question of, do we need to build a massive worldwide governmental control agency, or can we let the system grow organically from the bottom up? I prefer the second alternative, where it's more of an organic bottom-up type of solution, starting small and letting it grow. That's what I would like to suggest.

Stephan Ossenkopp: I just wanted to add something that Lyndon LaRouche had said at a conference of the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow in April 1994. You'll find it online at the webpage of *EIR*. He said, "I stated that the efforts to find a solution to the Middle East conflict would not succeed under any circumstances because we had extreme bitterness which would not be settled at the political bargaining table. Before we could have a political solution, we had to have an economic self-interest by both parties in a political solution."

He says that the project was already progressing very much, and that by early 1976 there was a very significant effort to bring this to success. But because of the very radical shift in politics in Israel, those efforts failed. That happened multiple times, but I think this time we don't have the time and we cannot afford to have it fail again.

Can BRICS Create Development 'Demonstrations'?

Kemm: As a South African, what happens with us is that we feel that the traditional Western world is often pushing us around and treating us in an inferior manner and coming along with their solutions which they expect will work here because they work there. That's not the case.

I mentioned earlier how big South Africa is. I'm in Pretoria right now, and the distance between Pretoria and Cape Town which is at the bottom of South Africa is the same distance as Rome to London. We have a beautiful but desolate area in South Africa called the Karoo. It has little bushes about the height of your knee or waist, and that's all. You can drive hundreds of kilometers and not see a human or any animal. That Karoo is bigger than Germany. We find that people who come, say from Germany, telling us that they've got a system for producing electricity with wind and solar panels and it's like this. But they have this little system which will fit in our desert area which is only a remote area that people go to, to experience driving through it. So, they say, that's going to work for your country.

What's happening with other African countries is the same. They're turning up in other African countries with the geography and social conditions and whole other things that are completely different, and [they] say "Just adopt our solution, because we are the important ones, and we know better than you." This has happened a lot in the past, and then they effectively bully other countries into adopting their solutions. Then they find they don't work. Like now, a lot of this wind and solar that has been pushed into other African countries is just not working. It's all well and good to have solar doing something for three hours in the middle of the day, but solar does not provide any electricity 24 hours a day.

So, they say, well, put batteries in. But they usually omit to say that if you put batteries in, you're going to triple, at least triple the size of the solar connectors; and so on and so on. So, now some of the African countries are realizing that our nuclear reactor, the HTMR-100 is a solution. Because you have mining areas, for example, potential mining areas that are hundreds of kilometers away from the nearest power line. They can't run large-scale power all that way, because of the expense and general problems. But you put a nuclear reactor there, and you can do it.

But you've got to stop having this case where the advanced world says we know what's better for you, so just toe the line and do what you're told. This is amongst the BRICS grouping now, there's a sensitivity amongst the BRICS grouping saying, "We are going to get together because we're similar, and we can look after ourselves. We're tired of being pushed around."

I think it's important for the traditional Western world to realize the sentiment is there, but they must stop acting like big brother and pushing us around, because it doesn't do any good; it creates an antagonism that you don't want. Thank you.

Ilya Andreev: Just a short remark about the BRICS.

The BRICS countries—[the number of] members is significantly increasing in the international arena. I'm sure you are aware about the decision to expand the membership of the BRICS, and new institutions are being created, including the financial institutions. So, the BRICS countries called for the respect for national values and norms. By the way, the share of global GDP of the BRICS countries has increased dramatically in recent years, and it is quite close to the G7 group. All this opens additional opportunities for working together and for implementing such large-scale infrastructure projects. Thank you.

What Is Africa's Role?

Kemm: It was interesting this year that the Koeberg Nuclear Power Station, which is a 2000 megawatt power station, is 40 years old. It's currently undergoing a major refurbishment which will set it right for another 40 years. It's currently producing South Africa's cheapest electricity by far. It's very stable and very reliable. Therefore, it's easy to control, as against wind and solar which are very erratic and unpredictable, and therefore very difficult to control. So, the nuclear has been highly beneficial. We see it particularly now that, after running for 40 years very successfully, it continues to produce very cheap electricity.

South Africa produces and consumes about 50% of the electricity of the whole of the continent of Africa. There's much more electricity required in Africa. The countries nearby us are something like 15% or maybe 20% electrified. So the only honorable thing they can do is double their electricity consumption and double it again, and double it again, and double it again.

When we get these extreme Greenies coming out and saying, "Stop expanding your electricity consumption; stop right now. You need to save the planet for your grandchildren." We say, "Hang on, why am I saving the planet for my grandchildren when my children are going to die now with you blocking us from expanding our electricity consumption?" It's that sort of thing which leads to bad feelings; it's just plain silly. It's silly to save your grandchildren if your own children are going to die in between.

Unfortunately the whole cause of affairs has gone so far now that you're not going to be able to stop it very easily. It shouldn't have started in the first place. To me, it was very interesting to hear about the Syrian revolt that started because of the water being reduced to the farmers. I didn't know that. But that shows you that had that been realized at the time, maybe they would have been able to produce more water for the farmers, and the farmers wouldn't have ended up precipitating the revolt that ended up with all the trouble. This is very much the case all over the world.

Earlier I said what we need is to try and have macro technology projects like looking at water in the Southern African region, electricity for the Southern African region, and having discussions on how we could technologically solve these, instead of settling for the politicians just sitting and fighting with each other about who's in charge and who's got the most control. Rather say: How do we supply what the people want, the basics like water and electricity? And how do we get railway lines running? Those, to my mind, should be of much higher authority than all the political bickering that goes on, which is such a waste of time.

Ross: To respond to the first of the questions you raised about what can Africans or African nations do, I would look at a couple of examples of what's already happening. South Africa went to the International Court of Justice and succeeded in its efforts to get a series of orders from that court for humanitarian aid, for not committing genocide [against the civilian population in Gaza]; basically calling on Israel to stop what it's doing. That was a diplomatic success for South Africa in achieving this and being the country that brought this onto the world stage. That's an example.

Another one is the fact that outside voices can play an important role, I believe, in shifting world opinion. The African Union or African Presidents' peace proposal for Ukraine, which has involved I think five presidents from African nations, including the head of the African Union, going to Kyiv, going to Moscow, and talking through the implications for the entire world, and themselves in particular, of the continuation of the conflict in Ukraine; thinking through what they could do in terms of contributing to stop that.

I think those two are examples of things that have already been done. I think what's most important is that people in the world do a lot more thinking and have a lot more specific ideas about what the future should look like.