

NAWAPA: Bridging The Darien Gap

by Dennis Small

Aug. 16—In remarks on the Aug. 11 LPAC-TV Weekly Report, Lyndon LaRouche presented the international scope of his concept of the NAWAPA (North American Water and Power Alliance) project, including its connection to similar water projects on the drawing boards or underway in Russia and China; to the proposal to build a tunnel under the Bering Strait; and to the need to build a high-speed rail corridor to bridge the Darien Gap, a 60-mile stretch of currently impenetrable jungle along the Colombia-Panama border, which thereby divides North from South America.

“When you have a NAWAPA project, which immediately demands the Bering Strait tunnel project, now you have taken, and you are now integrating it . . . with the Darien strait obstacle overcome. Implicitly, we now have the entire area of Eurasia *and* the Americas, as united into one international system, among respectively sovereign nation-states! Who are in economic cooperation, based on a differentiation of sharing of technologies, complementary development.”

Such an integrated world system, LaRouche continued, “would open up the railway systems into Africa. Now the only way you can solve the problems of Africa . . . is largely, basic economic infrastructure.”

The fact that LaRouche is making the NAWAPA project an object for immediate implementation in the United States, means that projects such as the Bering Strait tunnel and the Darien Gap railroad have also suddenly become central, live issues on the international stage. This is something of which incoming Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, who took office on Aug. 7, is probably quite unaware, but which he would be wise to take note of immediately. The British intend to use their long-standing influence on Santos to ensure that Colombia abandons its serious war on drugs under the previous administration of Alvaro Uribe, and that no significant economic development occurs in the region.

But the Darien Gap railroad could well become the

dominant issue facing Santos’s fledgling presidency—to his own surprise, and Britain’s great discomfiture.

The Twain *Shall* Meet

The Darien Gap is a region of some 60 miles (100 kilometers) in length, covering the border region between Colombia and Panama. It is generally considered to be impenetrable (although, if truth be told, it is, today, overrun by the FARC narcoterrorist drug cartel, among others). The Pan American Highway, for example, extends down through all of Central America and Panama, until it reaches the Darien Gap, and goes no further. Detailed plans for the construction of a Pan American Railway, including through the Darien Gap, were drawn up as far back as the administration of U.S. President William McKinley (1897-1901), but have never been implemented.

Environmentalists and other anti-scientific pessimists have insisted that it is technically impossible to build a highway or railway there, because “the jungle will swallow it up.” Furthermore, they say, even if it were possible, it should not be built, because the Gap is a “natural barrier” between North and South America, which man dare not breach.

Both problems can, and must be overcome.

On the technical side: If the Biosphere, left to its own devices, has denied the Great American Desert (which stretches through western Canada, the United States, and northern Mexico) enough water to sustain life to the degree required, it has dumped excessive amounts of water in the Darien region. The area is one of the wettest places on Earth, with very heavy rainfall, over 300 days a year, producing annual precipitation of more than 5,000 mm (5 meters) per year—about 20 times more than the Great American Desert! As a result, the area is a swampy jungle, and any highway built in the ordinary fashion sinks into the mud with each rainy season.

Local inhabitants have learned to go with the flow, building roads on top of tree trunks, which then float when the solid land turns into marsh. But a more sophisticated approach will be required for the maglev rail lines which will be built there, including the use of elevated roadways and railways, among other technical advances.

The Darien Gap has been newly studied by the highly qualified American rail engineer Hal Cooper. In a paper prepared for delivery in October 2008 at an international conference in Turkey (an advance copy of which was made available to *EIR*), Cooper presents two

FIGURE 1

Proposed Route Options for the InterAmerican Railway Through the Darien Gap of Panama



Source: Hal Cooper/EIR

distinct, viable routes for the project (Figure 1).

“The Darien Gap railway connector would be approximately 85 to 95 miles (136 to 152 km) long, and could go by either a central lowland route, parallel to the uncompleted Pan American Highway, or by an elevated hill and mountain route to the east of the Pan American highway,” Cooper proposes. The former route would run “through thick tropical rain forests in parallel to the Chucunaque and Tuira Rivers where heavy rainfall, thick jungles, insects and snakes, plus frequent flooding, would be major problems over much of the year. . . . The alternative eastern mountain route would go over the Serranía del Darién Mountains to the Atlantic drainage side over relatively gentle grades through rolling hills with maximum elevations of 1,500 to 2,000 feet (455 to 610 meters) through heavy tropical forests.”

“A significant challenge would be involved no matter what routes were chosen,” Cooper notes. “The western lowlands route would be shorter in length, but would go through flood-prone areas with heavy rainfall, and would have to be built through a national park. The eastern highland route would be longer, but would be able to avoid much of the flood-prone areas, and

would probably not need any tunnels, and would not have to be built on an elevated courseway.”¹

Technical matters aside, there is good reason to choose the western lowland route, precisely because it *does* go right through the Darien National Park. Such “Biosphere reserves” are a concoction of Nazi Prince Philip and Prince Bernhard’s World Wildlife Fund (WWF), for the very purpose of denying necessary development to the world, and taking entire swaths of territory—often in border regions—away from sovereign nation-states’ control (see *EIR*, Aug. 22, 1997). Unless such greenie ideology and policies are wiped off the planet, humanity will not survive. That alone is a good reason to run the Darien Gap maglev railroad right through the middle of the British Empire’s “Biosphere reserve.”

This new east-west route along the Colombia-Panama border should be joined to another great infrastructure project on the Colombian side of the border, which would run north-south:

the *Atrato-Truandó Canal*. This canal, some 50 miles (80 km) in length, would use two semi-navigable rivers in the region—the Atrato and the Truandó—to create a sea-level canal between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, through which ships larger than 65,000 tons—the current limit on the Panama Canal—would be able to travel.

In this way, what is today perhaps the most inhospitable region of the Biosphere in the Western Hemisphere, would be turned into a unique world crossroads for north-south and east-west transport and commerce.

It would also go a long way towards wiping out the British-run drug trade which infests the region.

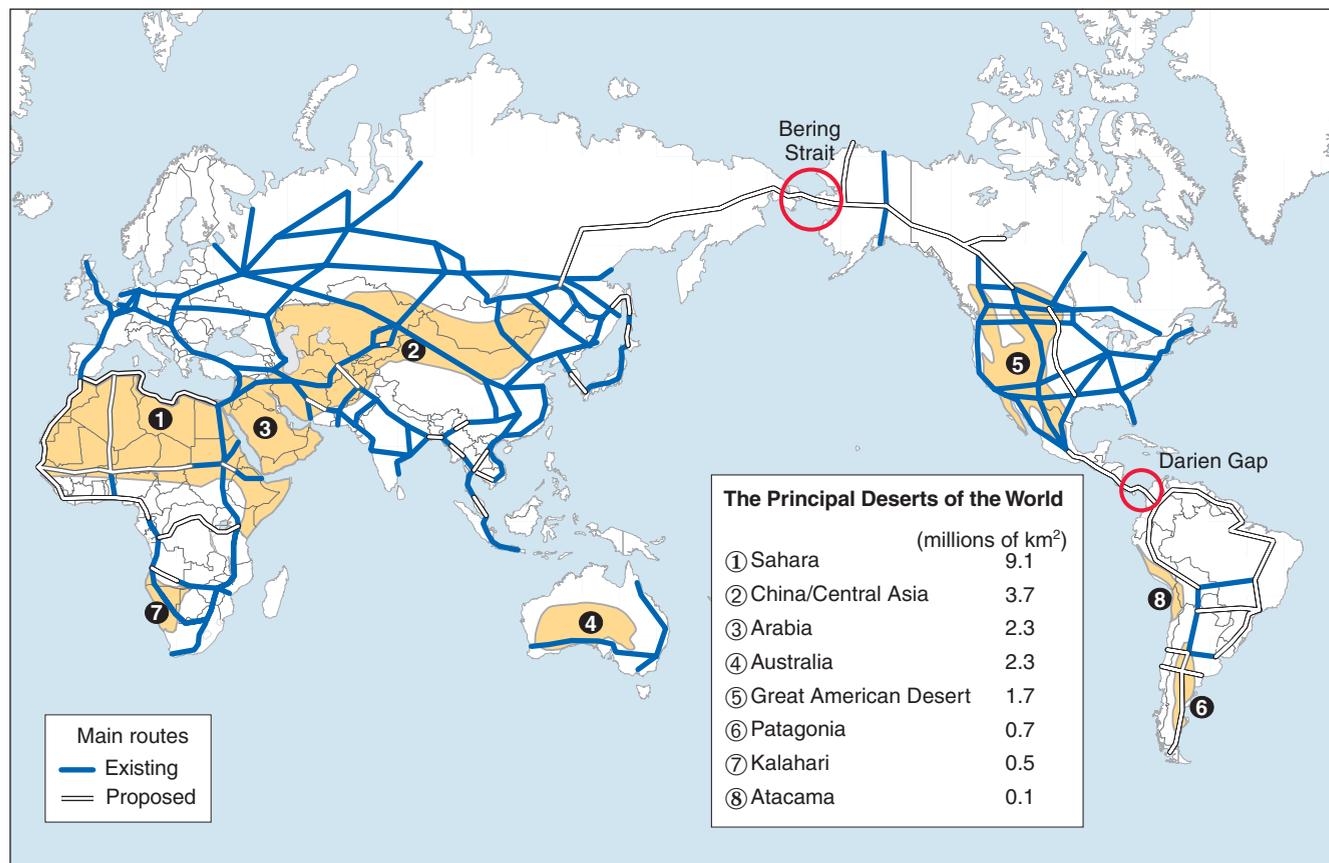
Tripling Ibero-American Food Production

Once the rail line has crossed the Darien Gap into Colombia, it will branch into a number of major North-South continental corridors which run the length of South America. The Western Corridor will run south

1. Further considerations by Cooper can be found in an interview with *EIR*, Jan. 30, 2009 (http://www.larouche.com/eiw/public/2009/eirv36n04-20090130/eirv36n04-20090130_049-rail_expert_build_the_darien_gap.pdf).

FIGURE 1

The World Land-Bridge and the Principal Deserts of the World*



* Shaded areas include both deserts (0-250 mm. annual precipitation) and contiguous semi-arid area (250-500 mm. annual precipitation).

Source: EIR.

from Bogotá, Colombia, through Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, and into Argentina. This route will run along the eastern foothills of the Andes Mountains, laying the basis for opening up the entire undeveloped interior of the continent, which runs from the Andes to the Atlantic coast.

This includes the highly fertile Colombian-Venezuelan plains region, a continuous stretch of some 50 million hectares (212,000 square miles) in the Orinoco River basin, where adequate rail and water management infrastructure would allow the production of some 60 million tons of grain per year. In size, the Colombian-Venezuelan plains are equivalent to the combined area of the U.S. Great Plains states of Nebraska, Kansas, and Iowa. In fact, it was President Abraham Lincoln's Transcontinental Railroad that allowed for the transformation of the Great Plains states west of the Mississippi into the agri-

culture powerhouse that they became. That same principle applies, 150 years later, to the heartland of South America.

In addition, such a rail network would lay the groundwork for also opening up Brazil's highly fertile *Cerrado* region, which could produce some 210 million tons of grain per year. These two projects, in combination with the increased food production which NAWAPA would help bring to Mexico, mean that Ibero-America's current production of some 160 million tons of grain, could readily be *tripled*.

More broadly, the Darien Gap project, along with the Bering Strait tunnel, will allow the full link-up of the Americas, North and South, with the World Land-Bridge, as indicated in **Figure 2**. Such an achievement, in combination with NAWAPA, would lead to an unprecedented explosion of physical-economic productivity worldwide.