

Creating New Mideast Water Resources Is a Necessity for Economy and Peace

by Marcia Merry Baker

In scientific terminology, so-called “natural” resources—including water—are actually “man-made.” For the past four decades, the human intervention has been blocked, that could have created a new water resource base for the Jordan River basin region and throughout the Mideast, utilizing the various modern technologies for desalination, power generation, and hydro-engineering. Providing new water supplies there is one of the first principles that must be dealt with, as part of ending war once and for all. The other is the related matter of economic development itself. President Clinton’s recently debated, crucial omissions at the July 2000 Summit talks with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, should again throw these principles into strongest relief.

At the time of the 2000 Camp David meeting, there were several Mideast water-expansion programs in public circulation. The plans were known to the Clinton Administration, as well as to engineers, hydrologists and political leaders in the region. *EIR* published these programs in some detail leading to the Summer 2000 peace talks. Here, we review certain parameters, beginning with the LaRouche “Oasis Plan,” which had first been released in the 1970s, and later widely debated as the strategic policy alternative, among forces opposed to the Bush-Thatcher 1991 Gulf War.

These proposals are in no way outmoded by the current state of war. Years ago, Mideast ratios of fresh water per capita, per hectare, and per unit of economic activity, were already inadequate. There are 35 million people in five Mideast countries today, for whom water availability has been steadily dropping. The deficiencies are now catastrophic.

A TVA on the Jordan

One way to put the task of resources-building into perspective, is to proceed from an historical vantage point. We must pick up “where we left off” after World War II. At that time, the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission proposed international “Project Ploughshare” plans for energy, water, and infrastructure improvements in critical locations around the globe. In the 1950s, various leaders of the successful Tennessee Valley Authority (begun in 1933) proposed a “TVA on the Jordan.” The scale of the two projects—impoundments, power plants, etc.—is vastly different.

The legendary Jordan River Basin has a mere fraction of the water of the vast Tennessee system; moreover, some of the water present in the Jordan Valley—continuation of the

Great African Rift Valley—may be fossil water. But the *high-tech, TVA-style approach* is what is required, especially in the case of tough physical constraints.

In 1944, TVA head David Lilienthal wrote, “Cooperation between Israel and the adjacent Arab states would be absolutely essential to the successful execution of the proposed overall plan; only small portions could be developed to an individual country’s advantage without such cooperation.” In 1953, during a time of war in the Mideast, President Dwight Eisenhower dispatched emissary Eric Johnston to the region, for a political/economic mission that became known as the “Johnston Plan.”

Working with technical experts from all the countries concerned, and with TVA experts, Johnston promoted a plan for regional water development and shared allocation, to manage resources “system-wide” on behalf of Jordan, Israel, Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinians. The plan involved dams, hydroelectric power, irrigation schemes, and potential nuclear power under the Atoms for Peace program.

The Johnston Plan was accepted by all the technical representatives, but it was rejected politically, and failed. Geopolitical interests in London and elsewhere blocked any and all initiatives for mutual-interest resource improvement in the Mideast.

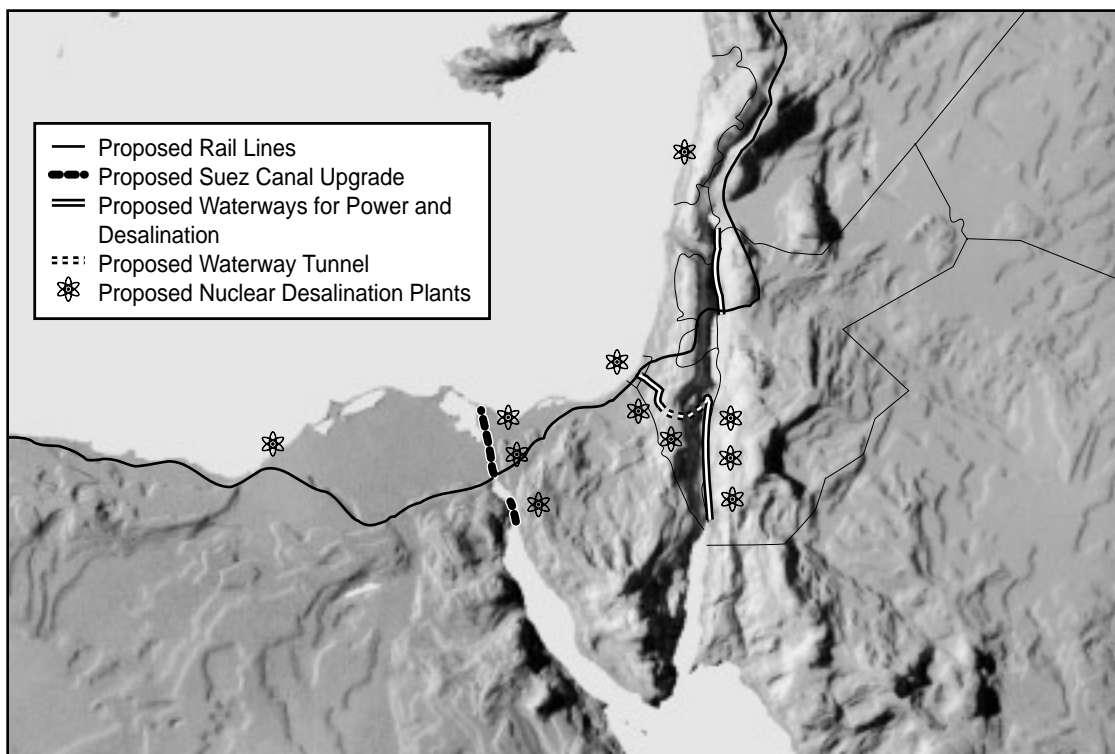
Subsequent decades saw a grab for water by Israel, with its National Water Carrier project, and other maneuvers, including seizing the flow of the Litani River in southern Lebanon. Jordan and Syria moved to develop some of the Yarmuk River system, one of whose key waterworks Israel bombed to bits in 1967.

The 1993 Oslo Accords offered the prospect of hope and economic development. The specific idea of *nuclear desalination* of water was introduced into the negotiating process, by LaRouche’s associates and *EIR*. In late 1993, Palestinian Finance Minister Mohammad Nashibi, an engineer, went on record in an interview with *EIR*, enthusiastically supporting the concept. At the same time, independently, Shimon Peres, then Israeli Foreign Minister, elaborated the idea of “nuclear islands” of power and water, in an Italian journal—“islands” in the sense of sites under international control.

The September Accords included economic protocols favoring high-tech water, energy, and infrastructure development. But even by December 1993, the World Bank had issued its definitive report on what would be “allowed,” rejecting desalination and nuclear power.

FIGURE 1

LaRouche's 'Oasis Plan' For Development Of Middle East Crossroads



All U.S. Presidents have left out the crucial water issue and economic principles of peace-making. Lyndon LaRouche's "Oasis Plan" Mideast policy proposal features canals linking the Mediterranean with the Dead Sea and Red Sea to provide source-water. Locations indicated are for nuclear desalination facilities to provide, in effect, a "second Jordan River." EIR published this map in 1994.

LaRouche's 'Oasis Plan'

The LaRouche "Oasis Plan" approach outlined how large-scale saltwater desalination facilities should be strategically located, powered by high-tech nuclear generators, to create plentiful electricity and water for new "Oases" and corridors of development in the desert (see **Figure 1**). It was updated to take into account technological advances—hydroponics, breakthroughs in the high-temperature gas-cooled nuclear reactor, etc. Also required, are long-planned hydro-engineering projects, such as the (saltwater) Med-Dead Canal.

Figure 1 was first published in January 1994. If the locations shown on the map by atomic symbols, were sites of desalination plants powered by modest-sized modular high-temperature gas-cooled reactors, a total of some 2.35 billion cubic meters a year of "manufactured" water would be added to the resource base. This matches the current water output of Saudi Arabia, from some 30 fossil-fuel desalination plants.

In November 1999, a White Paper was released by the Washington-based Center for Middle East Peace and Economic Cooperation, titled "Solving the Problem of Fresh Water Scarcity in Israel, Jordan, Gaza and West Bank." Large-scale desalination (conventional, non-nuclear powered) of seawater and brackish water, was a plan which the Center ran as full-page advertisements in major Hebrew and Arabic newspapers before the 2000 Summit peace talks.

The report summarized the water crisis as of that time—it is now much worse: "Freshwater supplies in the Jordan

River are at an all-time low in terms of availability per capita. Water quality and environmental problems are serious. And a freshwater shortfall of at least 20% by 2010 is forecast by almost all credible experts, when the current population of 13 million people will have increased to as much as 20 million." The White Paper provided a map of Mediterranean and inland desalination sites, conveyance systems, etc. (see *EIR*, Aug. 4, 2000; www.centerpeace.org).

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), some months before the 2000 Camp David Summit, published, in the *IAEA Bulletin*, "Nuclear Energy for Seawater Desalination: Updating the Record," by Juergen Kupitz, then head of the IAEA Section on Nuclear Power Technology Development. In response to requests from North African Mediterranean nations (Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia), the IAEA designated good sites in that region for large-scale combined desalination and power output.

The report stated, "A desalination plant with a capacity of 1 million cubic meters per day could supply an urban concentration of 3 to 4 million people with sufficient potable water for domestic use. Such a desalination plant, using the RO [reverse osmosis] process, would require a nuclear plant having an installed capacity of about 300 MW-electric. The same urban concentration of people also would require between 4,000 to 6,000 MWe of installed capacity to provide their corresponding electricity needs." Hence, double-duty designs are in order for many water-short littoral sites.