

Stepashin's response to the crisis had been tough, but measured, although there were problems with combat proficiency in some Russian units. Through Aug. 7-8, Stepashin had reiterated his stance that, while Russia would proceed with force to crush the Wahhabite armed groups, he would "not make the same mistake twice" and engage in indiscriminate action against Chechnya. This was a clear reference to his co-responsibility for the December 1994 decision to invade Chechnya. Stepashin was also sending a clear signal that he agreed with Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov, who had declared, correctly, that he and the Chechen government had had nothing to do with the armed incursions into Dagestan.

In short, Stepashin's inclination was to target what he called "bandits" in remote mountainous areas, but to avoid another Chechen-type quagmire. For this reason, Stepashin was in Dagestan on Aug. 8, working with Gen. Anatoli Kvashnin, Chief of the General Staff and Gen. Col. Ovchinnikov, Commander of Russia's Interior Troops, on how to proceed.

## Oil and NATO

But, the Dagestan crisis has another dimension, of far greater strategic consequence. Dagestan is the Russian Federation's Caucasus republic through which Caspian Sea oil pipelines run. It is also the republic that links Russia to Azerbaijan, which, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, has been an independent republic.

In the words of one British specialist on the Caucasus, "The real prize is Azerbaijan." He explained: "That's where the oil wealth is. If Dagestan falls to the rebels, Azerbaijan is just over the border. The Lezgin ethnic group is on both sides of the Dagestan-Azeri border, and they could be expected to make their claims. There are various options that would become possible. What would happen, in any case, is that Azerbaijan couldn't defend itself, and it would call on NATO for protection. If that happens, NATO will come in, in some form, likely predominantly Turkish forces. [Azeri President] Heidar Aliyev has already asked for NATO help."

Since the beginning of this year, Aliyev, a wholly owned British asset, and cohort of Al Gore, has openly asked NATO, the United States, or Turkey, to establish military bases on its soil. Although no firm plans have been announced, U.S. Defense Secretary William Cohen, during a recent visit to neighboring Georgia, reiterated NATO's willingness to allow such Caucasus republics to join the alliance. Such an extension of NATO, Moscow has made known, constitutes a "red line" which dare not be crossed.

Were this insane option to be pursued, by British geopolitical maniacs of the likes of Zbigniew Brzezinski, there is no doubt that Russia would perceive a NATO move as a threat to the existence of Russia itself. As Lyndon LaRouche warned in a campaign statement on Aug. 12, this could become the trigger for thermonuclear confrontation.

# The southern Eurasian potential

*British monarchic interests are intent on destroying the growing potential for the entire belt of southern Eurasia—extending from the Balkans and extending through the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea region, and onward across the South Asian Subcontinent into Southeast Asia—to become a beehive of cooperative infrastructure development. This potential was highlighted in EIR's January 1997 Special Report, "The Eurasian Land-Bridge: The 'New Silk Road'—Locomotive for Worldwide Economic Development." Here we present excerpts from that report.*

Practically unnoticed by most Western commentators outside of LaRouche and EIR, the concept of reviving the old Silk Road has become the focus of a profound strategic shift in the relations among the nations of southern, central, and eastern Asia. Although the process of reordering the strategic map of Eurasia was first set into motion by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the growing momentum toward regional cooperation and development around a policy for a New Silk Road has so far been centered on China and Iran. That policy is drawing support from an ever larger circle of nations of the region—including Turkey, the Central Asian nations, Russia, Pakistan, and India. The growing momentum behind the New Silk Road land-bridge development policy opens the way toward gradually overcoming the countless conflicts and hot spots in this part of the world, and realizing the common economic interests of the nations and peoples through concrete projects. Above all, *speed* is of the utmost importance in realizing the promise of the New Silk Road: Concrete, positive developments must be achieved as soon as possible, in order to reduce and finally eliminate the potentials for geopolitical manipulation and sabotage from the side of London and its allies. . . .

The rail development, agreements, and mutual understandings between Iran and Turkey, with the encouragement of China and some other states, point to a potentially very far-reaching shift from an earlier, aggressive competition for influence in Central Asia and elsewhere, toward a consensus in favor of long-term cooperation. Numerous transport and energy projects are on the table, or have already been launched, reaching out from Iran eastward to Pakistan and India (see below), and northward through the Caucasus and Central Asia to Russia. Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati provided the following interesting formulation of his government's policy: "We cannot have a peaceful country in a region plagued by instability, and we cannot have a rich country in a region of poverty."

Besides railroad projects, the most important cooperative projects under discussion so far are directed at utilizing the enormous resources of oil and natural gas in the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea region. . . .

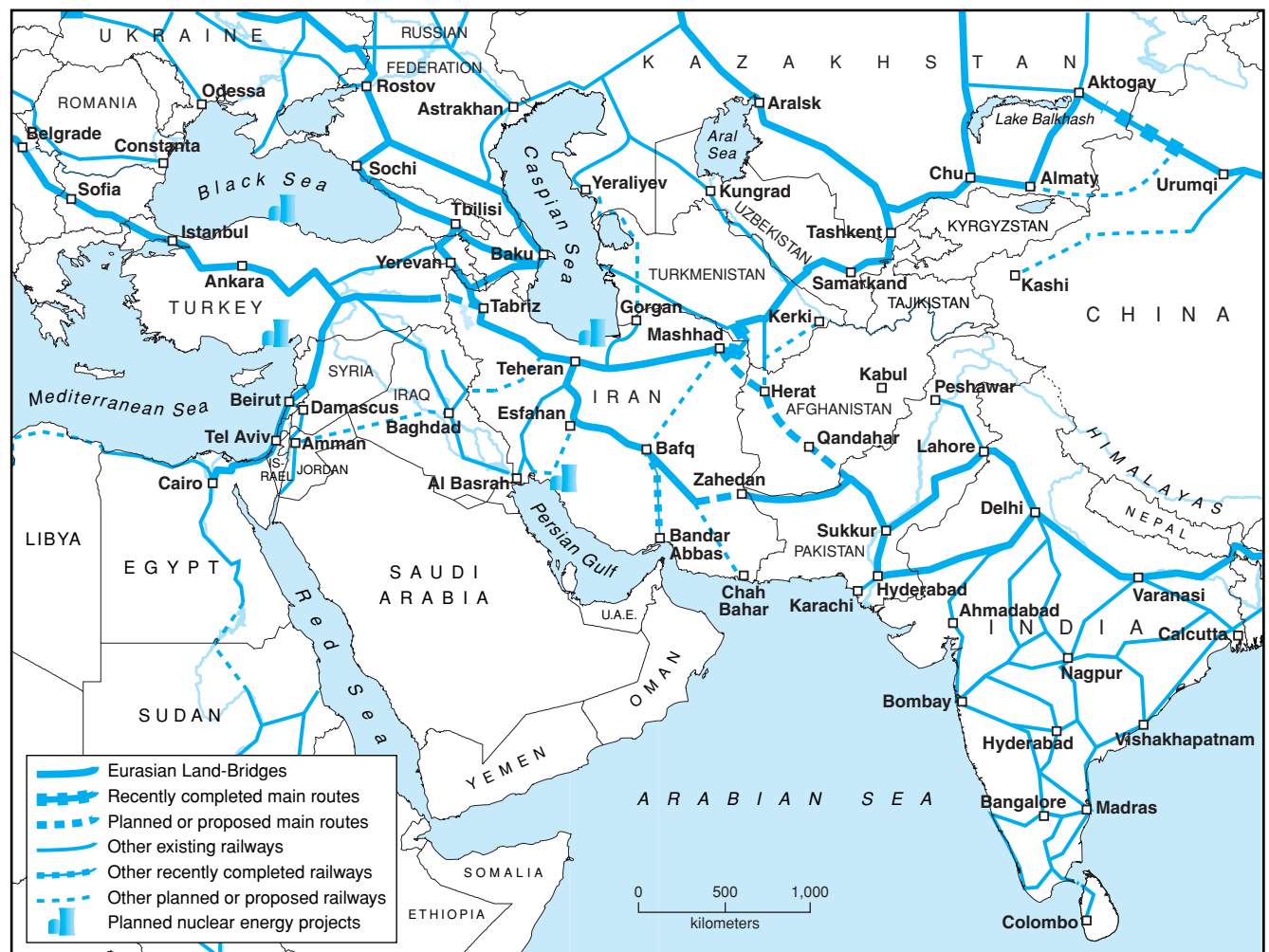
On the horizon of this complex process of negotiations and projects, are the outlines of a future *Eurasian pipeline network*. Such a network would transport oil and gas from the Caspian Sea/Persian Gulf region, not only to Europe (including Ukraine and European Russia), but also eastward, to Pakistan, India, China, and Japan. At the same time, however, the Eurasian-wide network could permit a more economical exploitation of other oil and gas reserves, including those in Siberia, giving them access to the fast-growing markets in Southern Asia.

Exactly this sort of idea is being strongly promoted by China, Japan, and other East Asian countries, sometimes in the form of a "Pan-Asia Continental Energy Bridge," which would consist of oil and gas pipelines linking China, Central

Asia, Russia, the Middle East, Japan, and South Korea. This topic was brought up during the May 1996 "Eurasian Land-Bridge" conference in Beijing. . . . As noted there, the available petroleum sources in the eastern part of China are already being depleted by that country's rapidly growing energy consumption. Although large reserves exist in northwest China, these require much greater investment.

For the newly independent nations of Kazakstan and the Central Asian republics Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, the New Silk Road is synonymous with hope for the future. Covering an area approximately twice as large as all the countries of the European Union combined, and strategically located between China, Russia, and Europe, this vast region is endowed with a rich historical-cultural tradition, a multi-ethnic population of some 53 million, and some of the largest deposits of oil and gas, strategic metals, and other mineral resources in the world. It also has some serious problems. . . .

FIGURE 1  
**Southwest Asia: rail routes and nuclear energy projects**



The economic crisis in Central Asia includes many aspects typical also of the situation in other parts of the former U.S.S.R.: breakdown of agriculture due to lack of machinery and replacement parts, formerly supplied from other areas of the U.S.S.R.; breakdown of industrial production, for similar reasons; lack of supplies of crucial materials; loss of former markets. These problems have taken on particularly monstrous proportions in Kazakstan and the Central Asian republics.

The situation in the Central Asia is also complicated by the intervention of foreign interests, who are grabbing for control over oil, gas, and the other, vast mineral resources of the region. The struggles over petroleum resources and pipeline routes around the Caspian Sea area are already well

known. On another front, the Japanese Chromium Corporation has bought a controlling interest in Kazchrom, which has the second-richest chromium deposits in the world and produced 97% of the chromium consumption of the Soviet Union. Many more examples could be given. There is a great danger, that the entire region will fall back into the destructive chaos of the British-orchestrated "Great Game" at the beginning of the century.

Today, only the rapid development of the Eurasian infrastructure corridors, can effectively overcome the present crisis, and provide the means to tap the enormous economic potential of the region. Indeed, Kazakstan and the Central Asian republics occupy a central position within the entire system of transcontinental corridors.

FIGURE 2  
**Central Asia rivers, canals, water diversion projects, and irrigation areas**

