

III. The Egyptian Project for Linking with the New Silk Road

Egypt can link the Rafah rail project with the Orient Express and the New Silk Road in two ways. First, is the land route across Israel through the Israeli-Syrian-Iranian rail networks. The second, is the sea route through Nuweiba el Muzein-Aqaba, because the Rafah rail line can be extended [to the south of Sinai] to Nuweiba el Muzein, where ferries could be used to transport the rail cars to Aqaba and to the Arabian Mashriq. The first route has a historical precedent associated with the previous existence of the Orient Express, which was functional from the beginning of the early 20th century from Aleppo to Haifa and Gaza, and from there to north Sinai and Al-Ismailia. This line was closed when the first Arab-Israeli war [1948] broke out. The reopening of this line implies the end of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the establishment of peace in the Middle East. In light of the current regional and international paradigm shifts, this issue is possible to solve, despite

the balance of the peace that will be achieved. In our assessment, we believe that the goal of Egyptian policy is to reopen this route, because it has already started building the rail line to Rafah in northern Sinai, and especially because there are projects for building a Middle Eastern rail network, as was announced in 1999.

Currently, there is a Turkish-Syrian initiative to revive the Hijaz Railway [see box]. On April 29, 1999, Syria and Turkey signed an agreement in Damascus, Syria to build joint transport networks. The agreement explicitly referred to the concept of "the Eurasian Land-Bridge," as it stated that Damascus would become the center for a number of rail lines connecting to Europe, Central Asia, and Iran in the north, and to Jordan and Saudi Arabia in the south. The two sides agreed to revive the Hijaz Railway, which was built by the Germans for the Ottoman state in parallel with the Baghdad Railway. The 2,000 km Hijaz Railway went from Istanbul to Damascus and Al-Madinah, Saudi Arabia. In the current agreement, Tur-

Iran, Iraq, and Syria To Connect Their Rail Networks

In a breakthrough for relations among Iraq, Iran, and Syria, in line with the New Silk Road diplomacy, Syrian Railroad Organization Managing Director Mohammad Ayad Qazal said in Tehran on July 20 that Syria and Iran have agreed to link their railroad network across Iraq, and that Syria will soon start negotiations with Iraq on the matter.

At the signing ceremonies of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Iranian Railway Organization Chairman Rahman Dadman, Ayad Qazal said that the design and construction of the 150 kilometer Syria-Iraq rail link had been contracted out to an Iranian company. He also expressed hope that with the 30 km rail link between the southern Iranian city of Khorramshahr and the Iraqi city of Basrah, the two countries would be linked by rail.

Dadman also welcomed the projected link among Iran, Iraq, and Syria, adding that the line would be an important transportation link to the Mediterranean Sea, the Persian Gulf, and Central Asia. He said that once complete, the Iran-Iraq-Syria rail line would be the most important surface transportation route in the region.

Connections to Turkey

The Iranian-Syrian MOU is related to the construction of rail lines and the launch of a Tehran-Damascus passenger train via Turkey. According to the agreement, a number of Iranian experts will design and construct three rail lines

in Syria, as well as a new underground train in the Syrian city of Halab (Aleppo). The Iranian Railway Organization agreed to dispatch experts for welding track-joints, and to help repair locomotives in Syria while providing them with spare parts and services.

Representatives of Iran, Syria, and Turkey are to meet in Aleppo to agree on target dates for the project. In the beginning, the passenger trains will operate between Tehran and Damascus once a week, but their schedule will be upgraded depending on the number of regular passengers between the two cities.

On July 5, Turkey and Syria inaugurated the Istanbul-Damascus rail line. The Istanbul-Damascus train service was also reopened to Aleppo, signalling the start of operations for passenger and goods transport between the two countries. Turkey and Syria agreed last year to renovate and reopen the Hijaz Railway, which extends through Syria to Lebanon, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. On the Turkish side, this new line will extend to Iran and Central Asia.

Turkey has also agreed to reopen the Nusaybin-Qamishly line in northeastern Syria, which also links the two countries with the city of Mosul (northwestern Iraq).

Reopening the railways inaugurates a new era in relations among these central nations in the Eastern Mediterranean region and the rest of the Middle East. These kinds of projects upend many Anglo-American geopolitical manipulations and schemes, which say that any regional economic or political development, especially infrastructure projects, should be stopped until the present Iraqi government is overthrown (see "State Department Joins Britain and Kuwait in Plot To Oust Saddam Hussein," *EIR*, June 2, 2000). — *Hussein Al-Nadeem*