

Forum Considers Bering Strait Crossing

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On September 12, 2005, at the inauguration of the UPF, Dr. Sun Myung Moon called for the construction of a “World Peace King Bridge Tunnel,” a 52-mile link between Alaska and Russia. Dr. Moon said this passage “will allow people to travel on land from Africa’s Cape of Good Hope to Santiago, Chile, and from London to New York, across the Bering Strait, connecting the world as a single community.” Anticipating the technological and economic challenges, he said, “Some may doubt such a project can be completed, but where there is a will, there is always a way—especially if it is the will of God.”

On the occasion of the upcoming 10th anniversary of Dr. Moon’s proposal and the founding of the UPF, the Washington, D.C. Office of Peace and Security Affairs brought together on March 25, 2015 a select group of Ambassadors for Peace and Unificationists to examine the genesis, history, and most significantly, the current status of this visionary proposal.

The World Peace King Bridge Tunnel project and an International Peace Highway / Railway System continue to be discussed by people in many of the nations most immediately affected, such as Russia and China, as well as multinational corporations and NGOs. This report endeavors to summarize some of the current activities and progress surrounding one of the boldest overtures for peace championed by UPF Founder Dr. Moon.

Dr. Antonio Betancourt, Director, Office of Peace and Security Affairs, UPF International, Washington, D.C. — Both China and Russia announced broad plans to eventually undertake the vision of an international network to connect the nations of the world. Specifically, in May 2014, China announced a proposal to build a 6,000 mile-long high-speed rail line from China's northeast to the United States. It would include a tunnel under the Bering Strait and connect to Canada, and by extension to the United States and all of Central and South America.

Russia has understood the enormous implications of such a project and made a number of announcements in recent years. Just this month, at a meeting of the Russian Academy of Science, the head of Russian Railways, Vladimir Yakunin, presented the idea for the Trans-Eurasian Belt Development (TEPR). Seen as a powerful and versatile transportation corridor, it would join with other networks and reach from the Atlantic to the Pacific, via the heart of Siberia and the Far East. Yakunin said, “The idea is that basing on the new technology of high-speed rail transport, we can build a new railway near the Trans-Siberian Railway with the opportunity to go to Chukotka and Bering Strait and then to the American continent.”

With the recent initiatives of China regarding the New Silk Road and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), along with the various initiatives of the other BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), we are witnessing the historic emergence of an alternative to the geopolitical game of each against all. In this new paradigm, the application of the fruits of human ingenuity are being applied to realize for all participating nations the mutual benefits of a commitment to a policy of large-scale infrastructure development. But, this can be taken even further.

To this effect, in September 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping made the first public declaration of China’s commitment to a policy of developing the “New Silk Road”, a rail network of trade and development corridors (which was soon augmented to include the “New Maritime Silk Road”) that unites the Asian and European continents in a common development bloc, emphasizing it as a “grand cause benefiting people in regional countries along the route.” Xi has gone on to characterize this as a “win-win” policy for every nation involved and has been diligent in securing relationships with each and every nation open to embracing this vision.

This idea was raised to a broadened scope of intensity and potential with the annual meeting of the BRICS nations in July 2014 which, among other things, laid the foundation for the establishment of the BRICS Development Bank, intended to finance large-scale infrastructure projects across the globe. These efforts were furthered by the solidification of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in 2014 (characterized by many as a positive alternative to the IMF, World Bank, and ADB), that was formally established in Beijing in October, capitalized with an initial \$100 billion to finance infrastructure projects throughout Asia. Xi went on to offer to President Obama and the United States an open invitation to join the AIIB in this grand vision at the 2014 APEC summit.

What we are witnessing as emerging with China, and the BRICS nations more broadly, is only the tip of the spear of what could emerge as a new paradigm for humankind. The International Peace Highway/Rail System has the potential to truly unite all the nations of the world in a common mission with the potential of equal benefit to all.

Project Concerns

Dr. Mark P. Barry, Senior Advisor, Office of Peace and Security Affairs, UPF International, Washington, D.C., presented a paper on “Advancing the Bering Strait Tunnel Project in the United States and Canada.” He wrote:

The most common refrain one hears about a proposed Bering Strait project is not that it is technologically unfeasible to construct a tunnel – because it is feasible – but that it is prohibitively expensive with insufficient economic return in a very under-populated area. Consider the following:

1. The tunnel would connect several continents, even hemispheres, not just two islands or an island with the mainland: North and South America (the Americas or Western Hemisphere) with Europe and Asia (Eurasia). This is far more significant than connecting Europe with an island which was very accessible without the Channel tunnel (much of the debate over the Chunnel was more about keeping Britain separate from Europe rather than the economics of the project). Thus, the frequently-made Chunnel comparison is in fact not very relevant.
2. The requirement for the extensive infrastructure to access a Bering Strait tunnel from both continents exists no matter what, but creation of access routes to the tunnel also serves to open the currently isolated areas of the far north of North America and the Russian Far East. The alternative is no access and no development, which – over the long run – is not economically appealing.
3. More importantly, the tunnel must be viewed as a passage point between the continents, rather than merely a means of local development for areas with small populations. The tunnel would create the linkage of a vast interior transport network that would make possible commercial (including passenger) rail transport from cities such as Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, and Mexico City to Moscow, Beijing, Mumbai, Berlin, Paris, London, etc.
4. A Bering Strait rail tunnel would have to compete against the alternatives, mainly, ocean-going shipping. Yet, there are countries and vast regions which are far from any ports but could have direct rail access to North America via a Bering Strait crossing. In the end, a great deal of economic stimulus over the long run would result from that.
5. The projected costs of the project seem prohibitively large, but only when seen in isolation. Governments spend staggering sums with zero, or negative, economic returns. The current annual U.S. military budget is in excess of \$685 billion (and over \$1.1 trillion has been spent since 2001 fighting wars in Afghanistan and Iraq). One may ask where is the economic payoff in that, yet it is considered necessary for America’s security. The issue is really one of world vision and political will, rather than simply a cost/benefit analysis. Clearly, the Bering Strait project is about much more than economics. It can be articulated as a global investment in peace and mutual security that would bring clear-cut long-term benefits at a cost certainly far less than conducting wars to maintain security.

(from Mark P. Barry, “Advancing the Bering Strait Tunnel Project in the United States and Canada,” *Journal of Peace Studies*, June 2012)

Dr. William Selig, Forum moderator and Deputy Director, OPSA - reviewed the project’s timeline:

- November 10, 1981 - The development of an international highway was suggested by Dr. Moon at an International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences (ICUS) attended by Nobel Prize winners and other scientists. For the first stage of this ambitious project, he proposed an East Asian highway starting from China and going down the Korean Peninsula, through an underwater tunnel to Japan’s Kyushu Island and north to Hokkaido Island.
- February 2, 1990 - At the second meeting of the Summit Council for World Peace, Dr. Moon spoke of the importance of this project and of the unique opportunity provided through President Mikhail Gorbachev’s implementation of *glasnost*.
- September 12, 2005 - At the inauguration of the UPF, Rev. Moon called for the construction of a “World Peace King Bridge Tunnel,” a 52-mile link to connect East and West, the Americas and Asia.
- January 2008 - The Foundation for Peace and Unification (FPU) sponsored an international thesis competition on the topic, “The Significance of the Bering Strait Project and the Korea-Japan Tunnel Project from a Providential Viewpoint and Ways to Pursue These Two Projects.” Dr. Michael Mickler, Professor of Church History at the Unification Theological Seminary, won second prize for “Vital Missing Links: The Bering Strait and Korea-Japan Tunnel Projects in the Context of an Emerging Global Transportation Network.”

- June 18, 2009 - The Bering Strait International Ideas Competition was established. The first-place winner was submitted by Taller 301, an architecture firm based in Bogota, Colombia. They proposed the creation of a series of artificial islands by dredging and land reclamation at the narrowest point between the Chukchi Peninsula, Russia and the Cape of Prince of Wales, Alaska — a distance of about 52 miles.

Glenn Strait, Senior editor of *World and I: Innovative Approaches to Peace*, a publication of the Universal Peace Federation, was on the staff of the International Conference on the Unity of Sciences in 1981 and attended the seminal event when Dr. Moon announced this unique initiative for peace. Booklets, maps and audio-visual materials were produced to explain the details. A mile on both sides of a “corridor” was envisioned that would be allocated as a Free Economic Zone (FEZ) in which trade and commerce companies would be taxed lightly or not at all. The original vision included the tunnel between Korea and Japan. In the ensuing years, a Japanese group did substantial surveying and even began pilot tunnels. Another part of Dr. Moon’s strategy regarded the connection between Japan and Korea which would then travel north from South Korea to North Korea, so it had an important component that encouraged greater interaction between the nations.

Strait also reported on two articles that the *World & I* published about the Bering Strait tunnel and railway project. Craig Burroughs, chairman of BXB Corporation and director of Alaska’s Interhemispheric Bering Strait Tunnel & Rail Group, reported that “preliminary investigations of the engineering feasibility and estimated costs of constructing the Bering Strait crossing have been very encouraging. The concept of building a tunnel system under the strait has obvious advantages over alternative but entirely unproven designs to build a huge bridge structure above the surface.” This plan was the subject of program on the Discovery Channel.

“Burroughs is a railroad man,” said Strait, “so his article focused on railroads as a sort of primary driver of this venture.” He mentioned several interesting points. The tunnel that would go under the Bering Strait would have these two islands that are conveniently located in the middle, sort of a resting place there between the two. They are named Little Diomed (USA) and Big Diomed (Russia). The rocks down below are made of granite. Granite chips are what is best for making road beds for railways so granite that is dug out could be used as roadbed for the rails across the tundra over Alaska. Eventually there would be three tunnels under the Bering Strait — for the trains, services, mechanical support systems, pipeline. The tunnel would extend 52 miles across the Bering Strait so there would be three tunnel systems with those two islands in the middle. Tunnels of comparable length have been dug in Japan and under the Alps.

Although Dr. Moon's original vision called for a highway traversing the whole world, Burroughs believes rails would be more efficient. Autos can be placed on the railcars. There would be much less disruption of the permafrost if a layer of granite rock is placed over it and a railroad built as opposed to paving and widening the roads for cars. New cities would be built along the corridor on each side. Giving the land to the railroads would be an incentive for them to build railroads. A whole new system of management would have to be created according to Burroughs.

In an article by Gary A. Spanovich, executive director of the Wholistic Peace Institute, the focus is on the spiritual side of a visionary project and how it can stand as a substantial symbol of peace. Spanovich calls the Bering Strait project “a world symbol for peace.” He believes that the 21st-century and its worldwide problems require worldwide solutions. “There are no national boundaries to global warming, the depletion of fresh water, or the end of peak oil: We must solve these problems as if we are one interdependent whole – which we are.” By the year 2100, the world’s population will be 10 billion or more. This will have direct impact on the availability of fresh water as well as energy supplies and reserves, so it may come to the point that a Bering Strait connection will be “more than a symbol of world peace. It could be also the reason that humanity survives in the face of mounting crises of resource depletion and environmental degradation. If we consider the huge minerals and other natural resources in Alaska and Russia, along with the market needs of Europe, Africa, Asia, North and South America, it becomes clear that this project may preserve our civilization not only by showing us how to work together but also by providing needed resources.”

Dr. Selig began the discussion on how to attract other spiritually-based organizations as well as faith-based and community organizations and make them aware of the significance of this project. Selig said, “If I were an architect, I would view this project from a scientific and technical perspective, but as a spiritually-based person, how can we make the world more aware of this project’s importance?”

In terms of getting groups to buy-in, Glenn Strait suggested focusing on the environmental footprint argument — maritime shipping vs. rail and truck modes of freight transport. Maritime shipping contributes more carbon emission to the atmosphere while rail usage is more fuel efficient. There is also the issue of long-distance travel because the great circle route over the North Pole is shorter than shipping routes from China to the Americas. From Beijing to Chicago is about 11,000 miles but to go through the Bering Strait by rail is about 6500 miles. The shorter distance translates into economic savings. Also the materials would be brought into the center of the continent instead of to a port city.

Prof. Diane Falk, who served 28 years as director of *The World & I* magazine's research department, regards the "World Peace King Bridge Tunnel," as an important interfaith project, something to which everyone can connect. This is tremendously beneficial to everyone, bringing traditions together, for travel, for connection, interfaith, and with intercultural value and benefits to all faith traditions.

Dr. Betancourt believes the financing and building of an International Peace Highway / Railway System will be done by the Chinese. According to the *New York Times* (Jan. 12, 2015), China is pursuing a number of mega-projects with multibillion-dollar price tags — the world's largest bridge, the biggest airport, the longest gas pipeline — and the recently announced plan to build the world's longest underwater tunnel between two port cities in China (Dalian to Yantai) a distance of about 75 miles at a cost of about \$35 billion. Plans have been announced to build an "international railway" that would link China to the United States by digging under the Bering Strait and creating a tunnel between Russia and Alaska.

Louise Strait, Coauthor, *Citizens Proposal for a Border between Israel and Palestine*, expressed concerns about the motivations of an aggressive power, such as Russia. At this point, she said, "we should be glad that China worships the dollar instead of political ideology."

Dr. Betancourt recently attended a program hosted by the Lyndon LaRouche organization. Mrs. Helga LaRouche, founder of the Schiller Institute, gave a report on the Bering Strait Tunnel project. The organization is actively promoting the enterprise as a "key element to efficiently connect the Eurasian economic engine with the economic engines of the Americas, as a transportation backbone for world development." Mrs. LaRouche was a driving force to convince China to include discussions about the Bering Strait project in last year's BRICS meetings held July 14-16, 2014 in Brazil.

The leaders of the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), along with the heads of state of South America issued the *Fortaleza Declaration* which announced the formation of a New Development Bank (NDB) to fund infrastructure projects for the purpose of building a world highway including a crossing at the Bering Strait.

The LaRouche Movement, the Schiller Institute and the Executive Intelligence Review are leading proponents for the tunnel project. They have spent huge sums of money to educate people about this project, which they envision will unify East and West, and North and South.

Ricardo De Sena, Secretary General of UPF North America, said he is inspired by this project. In trying to understand how to get the religions involved and interested, he said you must "connect to the heart of the parent. It is the heart of God to want to draw together people of all races, cultures, religions and nationalities as in one peaceful, prosperous global community." An interfaith sanctuary should be part of this design, he said. "It is not just about economics or moving goods from one place to another and financial development. The project must be connected to God."

Conclusion:

It was the consensus of the forum participants that the UPF should re-launch the Bering Strait Tunnel Project, particularly in preparation to commemorate its 10th anniversary, and appeal to the world to work toward this substantial bridge to go over barriers between races, cultures, religions and nationalities.

On March 3, 2015, on the occasion of the second anniversary of the Cheon Il Guk Foundation, Mrs. Hak Ja Han Moon said: "Looking at the world today, have you thought, who is the owner of this world? There is no owner. Is it the democratic world? Is it the communist world? Are the prosperous nations the owners of this world? No. The true owner must appear. The true owner is the one who perfects God's providential history. That person is the true parent." She added, "Humankind is suffering and dying amidst the destructive force of religion, race and national borders that is afflicting tragedies upon the world today. Can you gaze upon them without doing anything? We must educate everyone and raise them up as True Parents' children. That is the only way to go in order to bring about one united world that we, Heaven, and all humankind have longed for. I sincerely ask that you engrave these goals in your hearts, and do your best."

The Bering Strait Tunnel and the International Peace Highway / Rail System represents an opportunity, particularly for religious and spiritual leaders, to inspire and offer guidance to political and civic leaders and to motivate the public for peaceful and constructive change. This has been the traditional role of religious and spiritual leaders, and to follow in the footsteps of Mohandas Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King, and the Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon.

Forum participants encourage UPF members and Ambassadors for Peace to recapture the inspiring vision of the World Peace King Bridge Tunnel project, reach out and find partners to build bridges of peace, host forums and invite leaders from the realms of science and religion to join together.