

MILANMUN 2018

Chair: Giulia Tronconi**Issue:** The question of state imposed vaccinations **1. Introduction**

Throughout the course of history, mankind has always been moved by economic interest, hence it is understandable how the construction of artificial canals is aimed at improvements in the exchange, transportation and selling of goods. Therefore, canals have been constructed by men, both as means of carrying vessels transporting goods and people and of water conveyance and supply.

There are two broad types of canal:

- **Waterways:** canals and navigations used for the transportation of goods and people. They can be of two types, to be identified with those connecting existing lakes, rivers, other canals or seas and oceans; and those connected within a city network (such as the *Canal Grande* in Venice, Italy and the *Gracht* of Amsterdam, The Netherlands);
- **Aqueducts:** water supply canals which are used for the conveyance and delivery of potable water for human consumption, hydro power canals and agriculture irrigation.

The importance of canals is rather significant, seen how they can represent a Country's possibility of developing economically and enhancing their income. Canals are indeed long-term investments, however surely provide economical and financial improvements, as they imply that funding States might have control over the notable increase in trade processes in that area.

Nevertheless, the construction of canals entails a number of issues which shall be taken into consideration: who is going to construct and fund it, what countries are going to be involved, what are the environmental consequences going to be and how is it going to affect trades and economies.

2. Key Terms

Isthmus: a narrow strip of land, bordered on both sides by water, connecting two larger bodies of land. Isthmuses have been strategic locations for centuries. They are natural sites for ports and canals linking terrestrial and aquatic trade routes. Isthmuses

are also key sites for communications and cultural exchange, as well as military outposts.

Weir and dams: both are implemented in order to rise river water levels to usable depths; a **weir** is a barrier constructed across the horizontal width of a river and a **dam** is a barrier that stops or restricts the flow of water or underground stream.

Kariba Dam, Zambia-Zimbabwe.

Warleigh weir, Bath, United Kingdom.



Drainage basin: any area of land where water can be collected and drain off into a common outlet, for instance into a river, bay, or other body of water.

Lock: a device employed so as to raise and lower boats, ships and other watercraft between stretches of water at different levels. Locks are used to make a river's navigation more accessible or to allow a canal to cross land that is not on the same level.

Antwerp's Kieldrecht Lock, the biggest of the world as to 2016.



HKND (Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development) Group: this being a private infrastructure, it is a development firm based in Hong Kong which was founded in 2012 with the purpose of developing the Nicaragua Canal as a wider and deeper alternative to the already existing Panama Canal; the development of the Nicaragua Canal is the first project for HKND.

3. History of the Issue

Being an essential aspect of civilization, the cutting of canals for irrigation has been firstly undertaken in ancient Mesopotamia, as means of controlling the water of the Euphrates and the Tigris; those canals have allegedly been built circa 4000 BC.

Similarly, the Chinese undertook several major projects from the 3rd century BC. Their waterways combined the functions of irrigation and transport.

In one area of Europe, the Netherlands, canal building was an integral part of economic development. The primary purpose being drainage, the possibility of canals being an efficient transport network was gladly welcomed.

In Italy, in the late 12th century, an ambitious canal system for transportation of good was constructed without any subsidiary motive of drainage or even irrigation., and developed its full potential of a means of transport only as time passed by.

The issue we are going to debate, however, focuses on the construction of a new canal connecting the Pacific and the Atlantic, which is to say, two Oceans separated by Central America, at the geographical height of Nicaragua. A canal which may appear to have some similarities already exists, and can be found two thousands or so kilometers down south. This is the Panama Canal.

The Panama Canal



Following the failure of a French construction team in the 1880s, the United States started building a canal across the 50-mile stretch of the Panama isthmus in 1904. The idea of creating a water passage across the isthmus of Panama to link the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans dates back to at least the 1500s, when King Charles I of Spain encouraged his regional governor to survey a route along the Chagres River. The realization of such a route across the mountainous terrain was deemed however impossible at the time and was ultimately abandoned.

France was ultimately the first country to attempt the task. Led by Count Ferdinand de Lesseps, the builder of the Suez Canal in Egypt, the construction team began the construction of a sea-level canal in 1880. Following the deliberations of the U.S. Isthmian Canal Commission and a push from President Theodore Roosevelt, the U.S. purchased the already existing French possessions in that area for \$40 million in 1902. The Panama Canal officially opened on August 15, 1914, although the planned grand ceremony was downgraded due to the outbreak of WWI. Completed at a cost of more than \$350 million, it was the most expensive construction project in U.S. history to that point. Altogether, some 3.4 million cubic meters of concrete went into building the locks, and nearly 240 million cubic yards of rock and dirt were excavated during the American construction phase. Of the 56,000 workers employed between 1904 and 1913, roughly 5,600 were reported killed.

In the 100 and more years since its opening, the canal has continued to enjoy great success. Even though world shipping—and the size of ships themselves—has changed markedly since the canal was designed, it continues to be a vital link in world trade.

Nevertheless, the canal faces a number of potential concerns. Additionally, the possibility of expanding the canal has arisen a certain debate concerning the environmental consequences such a project might have.

The original canal is considered to have changed its surrounding environment forever. Mountains were moved and more than 150 square miles of jungle were submerged under a new manmade lake. Moreover, we can imagine that many people were moved out of their land and displaced (apparently up 50,000 people were affected during the original Panama Canal construction). But we do not know how many species of rainforest animals and plants went extinct or the sheer volume of biomass that was lost as a result of this rainforest destruction.

For further and more detailed information concerning environmental related issues, visit <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/canal/canal-environment.pdf>.

To gather information concerning other important canals in the world, visit <https://www.marineinsight.com/know-more/10-famous-shipping-canals-of-the-world/>.

To learn more about the Nicaragua Canal in detail visit:

https://people.hofstra.edu/geotrans/eng/ch1en/appl1en/nicaragua_canal.html

The Issue on our Agenda, however, concerns the construction of a new canal connecting the Pacific and the Atlantic, a plan which is being considered since the XV century and still hasn't managed to be put together in the form of concrete actions.

4. The Nicaragua Canal

The construction of said canal is aimed at providing a shortcut for container ships carrying goods to and from Asia and the east coast of North America. Like others before it, the plan is controversial — for economic, political, and environmental reasons.

The Spanish conquistadores were the first to investigate a canal route through Nicaragua in the **1500s**. Interest revived with the arrival of the California Gold Rush in the **1840s**. In the early 1900s, the U.S. Senate faced a choice between backing a canal project in Nicaragua or one in Panama. For a while, Nicaragua looked like a strong favorite, however the alleged seismic activity of the area served as a dealbreaker.

In 1995, American, Asian and European investors planned 400 kilometer, \$1.4 billion high speed rail link - a "dry canal" as an alternative solution to the issue. However, Nicaraguan President Arnoldo Aleman dropped that plan two years later, citing likely negative environmental effects.

In **2006**, Nicaragua's government proposed a 280 kilometer canal (for the total cost of \$18 billion) between points near Rivas on the Pacific and Bluefields on the Atlantic. Estimated to take 11-12 years to build and to eventually handle 4.5% of world shipping, with ships of up to 250,000 deadweight tons, about double those possible in the Panama Canal. Such a project, after being set aside for a long time due to its overwhelming costs and possible environmental impact, was taken into consideration again only in **2012**. At that time, the Nicaraguan Government and the newly formed Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development Group (HKND) agreed on the fact that it ought to up to HKND to finance and build a new project, this time more detailed and to be anticipated by intensive research. the "Nicaraguan Canal and Development Project. On June 2013, The Nicaraguan government approved the *Master Concession Agreement* with HKND, thereby granting the company "the sole rights to the HKND Group to plan, design, construct and thereafter to operate and manage the Nicaragua Grand Canal and other related projects, including ports, a free



trade zone, an international airport and other infrastructure development projects”. As of today, the Nicaragua Canal project has not been accomplished nor have constructions begun.

The creation of this waterway would represent an important element for the development of the economy of Cuba (port of Mariel) and for the Caribbean area including Venezuela and, further South, Brasil.

Issues and Controversy

The realisation of such a massive and important project has not been universally met with pleasure; in fact, some of its aspects have left public opinion perplexed and suspicious. Firstly, HKND’s involvement constitutes a matter of concern: for what concerns environmental consequences, HKND has sporadically announced some environmental impact studies, but those have not been carried out convincingly and showed no concrete and useful data. Secondly, the lack of readiness shown by the Group has convinced many that such a thing as the Nicaragua Canal Project might not even exist. As a consequence, there are fears that HKND could now use its 50-year concession to sell the rights to ports, airports and tourism complexes, with zero benefit for the Nicaraguan people.

A general overview at the Group’s website could benefit the research process:

<http://hknd-group.com>

Environmentally speaking, there are some major general concerns: the natural habitat hosts at least 22 endangered species, which would be destroyed during the construction; similarly, the project’s impact on Lake Nicaragua, the largest source of freshwater in Nicaragua, is yet to be identified and defined.

Social aspects to be quoted are the amount of people potentially displaced during the construction: the canal would forcibly displace an estimated 120,000 people, this being a rather important figure.

5. Major Countries involved

Nicaragua

Being the major State involved in the issue, Nicaragua's position has created intense debate from time to time. The *Master Concession Agreement* has been criticized by many who argue that Nicaragua sold its sovereignty to a foreign-owned private company for a century (this being HKND). Additionally, the agreement has been negotiated without transparency and, above all, national consensus. Moreover, it ought to be considered that while the reserves of the Nicaraguan National Bank might as collateral on Nicaragua's side, HKND has no such economic resources. However, the realization of the canal would completely transform one of the poorest countries in the Western hemisphere. The canal is considered to double the economy and boost employment threefold while simultaneously pulling over 400,000 out of poverty by 2018.

China

Clearly, the concern shown by the Republic of China has somehow sparked some perplexities, to the extent that the latter has been accused of having shown interest in the project simply to gain a certain influence on the region. As a matter of fact the relations between HKND and China are uncertain, keeping in mind that in 2013 there was widespread speculation that the Chinese government was operating behind HKND and that China could significantly increase its growing clout in Latin America by controlling one of the globe's major shipping lanes. With the number of transport days from the Caribbean to China projected to be cut dramatically by the Nicaraguan canal, Beijing would be a primary beneficiary.

Russia

Throughout the elaboration of the project, the Russian Federation has indeed shown great interest in its development. This resulted in a resolution passed by Nicaragua's parliament in 2015 which allowed Russian warships to dock in Nicaraguan ports, following earlier agreements to permit patrolling in coastal waters. Russia began supplying armoured personnel carriers, aircraft and mobile rocket launchers. The Russian buildup in Nicaragua has somehow coincided with deteriorating relations between the USA and Nicaragua. As a matter of fact, Russian intervention and the planting of spy bases on Nicaragua's territory could represent the Country's progressive approach to the USA for unknown purposes.

6. Possible solutions

Seen what the major concerns about such project are, possible solutions might include some third party analysing HKND involvement and trying to understand its strategies. HKND could be urged to lay down a clear, detailed and defined Plan of Action.

Moreover, something which ought to be researched is the Chinese Government involvement in the issue. The house should go after the promotion of international transparency and sharing of information.

Environmental and social concerns need to be resolved, possibly through the implementation of accurate, regulated and sophisticated research to be carried out without any form of corruption interfering.

Nicaragua should be helped on an international level so as to decide how to tackle the potential issue of population being displaced and the management of the project altogether, seen the economic and social general weakness of the Country.

Additionally, the question of the State's sovereignty being outrageously violated baits agreement with HKND needs to be addressed.

Lacking at the moment, in Nicaragua in particular but globally as well, would have to be general awareness and information on the issue. Governments should take action so that a comprehensive understanding of the topic can be reached.

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Should any delegate wish for more help during their research or need further information, feel free to contact the chair at giul.tronconi@gmail.com