

Ethiopia's commitment to mutual benefit with Riparian Countries

By: Goitom T.

Various media outlets have been reporting as if Egypt was prepared to attack Ethiopia, to protect its stake in River Nile quoting the internal emails from the U.S. private-security firm STRATFOR. It is also heard that the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia General Nikolai Makarov in his E-mailed letter to President Putin reported Egyptian Air Force (EAF) bombers and fighter jets have been ordered to deploy to their secret airbase near Kursi in the west of Sudan's Darfur region following the news that Israeli Air Force (IAF) raided the Yarmouk military factory in Khartoum. Owing the different factors around the Nile, I think it is less probable that such an imminent danger exists, but it requires watchfulness.

Ethiopia, more than ever, is committed to bring the Nile River issue on board for mutual benefit. In the past two decades, through its foreign relation policy and strategy, Ethiopia has eagerly been striving to bring to the table the stakeholders to arrive at a consensus on the issue. The country, as always, pursued a policy of cooperation with its neighboring countries to foster the political, economic and people to people integration.

Ethiopia's ability to determine how to utilize the most contentious issue of water has now appeared an innovative achievement after years of being ignored by Egypt's and Sudan's Nile-based development since 1929. Egypt and Sudan insisted keeping their share of the waters based on the colonial treaty of 1959. The water flows through their largely arid lands on the way to the Mediterranean. Ethiopia, which provides not less than 85 percent of the flow into Lake Nasser from Abay where the Grand Renaissance Dam is being built and other watersheds, was not even considered as party state that contributes a drop of water let alone as of a riparian country.

Emperor Haile Selassie and Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam had been appealing of protesting to the international community, to no avail. There was a lot

misunderstanding between these two countries, Egypt and Ethiopia, and this has been going on since Sadat to Mubarek in Egypt and during Hailesselasei and Mengistu in Ethiopia. It should be noted, however, Egypt had been playing a major role in the decades of Nile talks sponsored by donors and World Bank. The nine basin members, now the new state of South Sudan is added, discussed and drafted a Nile Basin Initiative to manage the entire resources of the Nile with greater equity and efficiency. The Nile Basin Initiative was begun in 1999.

Now, Ethiopia is required to feed its above 85 million people. It should not suffer from the pervasive poverty for so long. It should eradicate its arch foe, poverty and backwardness. If it is to feed its people, it has to develop its water resources including the Nile River utilizing for irrigation and exporting electric power to neighboring countries including Egypt by constructing dams. Thus, it announced construction of a new dam, the Renaissance Dam. This was launched through significant study and on the basis of investigation whether it affects the dawn stream riparian countries, Egypt and Sudan.

It was obvious that the dam Ethiopia has started to build will not affect Egypt. Construction of Ethiopia's nearly \$5 billion hydro-electric dam on a main source of the river is on progress. It is with the unanimous focus of every Ethiopians who are eager to see its completion even before the time scheduled.

The Ethiopian government has proposed and shown a good gesture to Egypt and Sudan establishing the tripartite committee which is now called the International Panel of Experts (IPoE), composed of six experts from Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan and other international experts to prove whether the Dam would affect the countries, Egypt and Sudan. In addition, the government told the delegation from Cairo's transitional government that ratification of the agreement by the upstream signers can wait until Egypt, coming out of a revolution and regime change, could study the proposals and inspect the Renaissance Dam plans. Ethiopia remains confident enough that Egypt will

not be harmed. This was proved by the panel experts hinting during its meeting in Addis Ababa on October 8, 2012 that the Dam will have no negative effect on the dawn stream riparian nations, Egypt and Sudan according to their findings so far.

The construction of the greatest Dam in Africa has become certain to be financed by Ethiopians and the government. Egypt should not remain viewing Ethiopia as its threat and should not be remained concerned and suspicious, and it should stop lobbying donors and the international monetary organs not to support the construction of the dam, as it is being financed from inside. And it seems that the newly elected Egyptian government grasped the reality that it would better deal with all the riparian countries together on how to best develop comprehensive cooperation and integration though there is still some confusion with its politicians. The time that Egypt had seen Ethiopia as a threat should be terminated to the mutual benefit of the two countries. The dam will one, avoid the 10 billion cubic meters evaporation in the arid areas of Egypt and two, their dams will be protected from silt.

Ethiopia is pursuing an economic policy to enable lift its nation out of backwardness and poverty. It is, thus, committed and determined to build the capacity to push massive developments of dams with a series of new hydro-electric dams appear to the picture.

Despite the fallacious reporting in the media, the possibility of resorting to armed conflict of this point in time seems far-fetched. However, provide the Egyptian rhetoric in the past, the attempt at creating sabotage in Ethiopia can not be completely ruled out. And yet, the sense of cooperation and dialogue going on among the three riparian countries gives hope for a better time of real engagement in mutual development and regional prosperity.