

## **The Sensational news of “Diversion” of Blue Nile River**

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If one is interested to hold the attention of Ethiopians, Egyptians and the Sudanese at the same time, a single dose of one “drug” is just enough for all, the Nile. Every time something of Nile comes to the media, people from the three countries particularly those from Ethiopia and Egypt actively engage themselves in the internet windows. A bird’s eye view of the responses reveals that most of them contain plausible ideas advocating understanding and cooperation, some others are naïve lacking depth of message and yet few others are very dangerous opinions stuffed with hatred and war mongering words. Worth noting is also, albeit ludicrous, inflammatory and derogatory comments from few “Shabianized” Eritreans, using one name or another<sup>1</sup>.

What was witnessed this week was not an exception. The news of “diversion” of the course of the Blue Nile River for the construction of the Great Renaissance Dam (GRD) seems to top the agenda of Egyptian media. It appears that Egyptian media caught news different from the simmering internal political rift, socio-economic problems and Sinai security issues. The governing brotherhoods seem to have a relief, for at least a while, from sharp and persistent criticism from their political opponents.

The catch phrase in this week’s sensational news is the word “diversion”. Simply stated, the dictionary meaning of this word can be taken as “change of direction”. For a lay man to the technical terms and for a naïve person alike, it may seem that Nile has taken a different course from its natural one for good. But the reality with regard to GRD is distinctly different from this presumption.

Like any dam construction in the world, the flowing water of Blue Nile has to give dry and clear working space for the civil works. Before commencing erection of the dam; all water, mud, debris and weathered rock has to be removed from the bed of the river. Unsuitable material having low load bearing capacity is excavated and disposed until the desired firm foundation material is reached. Thereafter, the bed of the river is grouted and reinforced until it becomes completely water tight, making it ready for casting the dam concrete.

Construction cannot be undertaken unless the flowing river water gives way to the sides. Due to this technical reason, the Contractor of the GRD lead the water to the other side of the bank in a course parallel to the natural course thereby ensuring a clear working space at the bed of the river. This temporary water conveyance canal is 120m wide, 21m deep and nearly a km long. The temporary conveyance canal then rejoins the natural course allowing Nile’s hitherto flow to the Mediterranean Sea. The flow of the river is neither abated nor obstructed at the GRD construction site.

Egyptians made a similar “diversion” in the late 1960s during the construction of the Aswan High Dam. The Sudanese did the same when they constructed their dams on Blue Nile, Atbara and Nile. So did Turkey in its trans boundary rivers, Europeans in the Danube, India in the ganges, China in the three

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<sup>1</sup> Poor Shabias, Suffering from identity crisis and remorse.

gorges project, USA in the Hoover dam, etc. What makes Ethiopia's diversion different? Why all the noise when it is in Ethiopia?

Two main reasons may instigate the noisy and inflated news. Firstly, the Egyptian and to a lesser extent the Sudanese media picked the "drug" giving it a sensational façade thereby attracting a wider attention and interest in their business. The second covert reason may stem from the brotherhoods so as to deflect internal problems by indirectly airing contradictory remarks. Some seemingly experts and analysts used the diversion "shocking", "catastrophic", "unexpected" and similar other attention grabbing phrases aiming to attract public attention. Some called Arab League intervention and yet others proposed war as a solution. Still some others initiated the idea of sealing Suez Canal to Ethiopia, China and Italy considering the latter two as financiers of the project.

All ridiculous propositions due to the fact that Ethiopia as a source country and Egypt and Sudan as Lower Riparian states cannot be changed with war, canal embargo or whatever. That being the side of negative opinions, there are also a considerable number of people from all sides with humanely thinking reflecting rational ideas.

Diverting the flow through a temporary canal is long known to everyone starting from day one when the dam construction commenced. Calling the temporary diversion of Nile as shocking and catastrophic after two years of construction is nothing more than a self-deceiving expression. But, one cannot help, but mused, when a Sudanese politician considers the intervention of the Arab League. It would have been close to the matter if this politician called for the Nile basin countries or a little bigger, the African Union. What does the Arab League to do here Mr. Politician? What a confused and self-degrading proposal? It is better to advise this guy next door that the League has nothing to do here. If the League has the capacity to intervene, let it attempt to ease the plights of the Syrians, Palestine, Bahrain, etc. Is that not too overwhelming to engage with, Mr Politician?

In the old times, there were so many cards against Ethiopia under the tables of Nasir, Sadat and Mubarak. Supporting secessionists, assisting neighboring Somalia and later on Eritrea, pressing potential financiers, diplomatic pressure, direct military confrontation and the Suez Canal embargo were the prominent cards. Sadat and Mubarak used them one by one and in multiple as the case may be. As it appears now, most cards proved useless. The idea of sealing the Suez Canal seems the last card Sadat-Mubarak famed Egyptians are left with.

Just for the benefit of doubt, let's accept this last Egyptian card works. Blocking China and Italy (by extension EU) is far, far from reality. Well, as the Canal is Egypt's sole property, likely you may block access to Ethiopia. In this case, Ethiopia can use other water navigation routes, at a longer time and higher costs. But Ethiopia will not pass this embargo without a counter measure, essentially targeting the strategic pillars of Egypt. Certainly, the counter measure Ethiopia takes can cause a colossal damage to Egypt<sup>2</sup>. Dear Sadat-Mubarak framed Egyptians, have you ever thought that way?

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<sup>2</sup> Please also read my previous brief analysis under the title: *[Egyptian Mega projects on the Nile: repercussions and implications to Ethiopia](#)* from Google or aigaforum by simply searching the title.

It is necessary to reiterate that we Ethiopians are financing the dam construction by ourselves. We will continue financing not only GRD but also other dams to follow for the simple reason that we need to come out of hunger, poverty and backwardness. Not only we pour our money and resources towards the construction of the dam, there are millions who want to sacrifice their lives for the benefit of the next generation. Out of genuine outlook and determination for prosperous future Ethiopia, the writer of this article is ready to give his bones and blood to serve as a mason and mortar of the dam, let alone his money. The single thing I need is an assurance from the dam engineers if the masonry from my bones and blood is water tight to store water upstream. What is it after all life being poor, destitute and a synonym with hunger? An Ethiopian Proverb goes on saying “war is favoured than hunger”. Is it not noble to give bones and blood today to have a hunger free next generation?

The writer feels humbled by his conviction for the simple reason that the dam is an asset of development not only to Ethiopians but also to Egyptians, the Sudanese and beyond. Kindly allow me to posit my reasons in the following points.

- 1) The dam stores some 74 billion cubic meters of water to generate 6,000 mega watt of electricity. The generated electricity will supply cheap power to industries in Ethiopia allowing the creation of jobs, industrialization, production of consumable and exportable items, etc. This is an economic arsenal to lift millions from poverty.
- 2) The excess power generated will be part of the African power pool benefitting all Nile states and beyond thereby leading to a better integrated and prosperous Africa.
- 3) Export of electricity fetches hard currency to Ethiopia, the sole ingredient for the purchase of capital goods, food and services.
- 4) The dam releases stored water on a regulated manner saving the Sudanese from flush floods and excess silt load.
- 5) Both Egypt and Sudan receive a regulated and predictable flow throughout the years to come.
- 6) The dam adds some 8 billion cubic meters of water which could have been lost to evaporation if stored in Sudan or Egypt. The secret is we store the water in deep highland gorges where evaporation is minimal.
- 7) The dam helps as a source of fish farm for Ethiopians bringing a balanced nutrition mix to the wider public.
- 8) Through energy integration brings political and economic integration thereby leading to peace and tranquility in the region.

Dear reader,

Is that not a cause to give bones and blood, let alone money? I hope the few Sadat-Mubarak framed Egyptians and few mediocre politicians from Sudan will come to their senses for understanding, cooperation and mutual benefit. If not, the future will tell them their misdeeds. Ethiopia will continue developing its water resources responsibly benefitting all Nile citizens, whatever sensational news may blow now and then. May I conclude my remarks with an Egyptian proverb which nearly goes on saying “The dogs bark, the (camel) caravan moves.”

God bless the children of the Nile!