

Egypt's Intractable Behaviour Vis-A-Vis The Nile

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On his famous book “The Animal Farm”, George Orwell describes injustices, inequalities, unfairness and even selfishness amongst society using the animal kingdom as an example. On that book, the leader of the animal kingdom tries to convince his followers into believing that he cares for them deeply and that they are all equal; but then, he goes on to clarify his privileged and untouchable position by saying “All animals are equal but some are more equal than others”. Here, his intention is to solidify his position, his privilege and his superiority at the expense of the rest.

The Almighty God/ Allah, has endowed mankind with numerous types of natural resources; and, rivers are among them. The Nile, the longest river in the World, stretches over more than 6500 kms across many countries. The Nile River is fed by many tributaries from about nine countries; however, it originates in the highlands of Ethiopia (lake Tana) and the East African region (lake Victoria) and culminates at the Mediterranean sea. The Nile has also been the base for numerous population settlements and civilizations around its banks and wider basin area for thousands of years. Nile has nine children; however, it has not yet treated them all with equal parity, fairness and dignity. As a result, some have been more equal than others. Most of Nile’s children did not benefit from the blessings of their mother despite the fact that none of them is illegitimate, adopted or a step child. Although they are all legal children of the Nile, one of the children who became a street smart wants to have it all denying others of their legitimate and God given rights. As a result, this street smart child has been sucking the milk of mother Nile alone for a long period of time solely benefiting from the mother’s milk. This spoiled child did not stop there; in fact he is currently working day and night to abort or at least delay the possible birth of a new born child in South Sudan expected on January 2011 so that the expected baby child would not claim its share/ quota of mother Nile. This greedy child is not only denying the rights of the living fellow children of the Nile, but indeed that of a child ready to be born as well. This spoiled child of the Nile is none other but Egypt.

Nile has been the major source of water supply and livelihood to Egypt for thousands of years. In fact, Nile has been the principal cause for the birth and development of the great Egyptian civilization that we all are proud of. Nile has been feeding the canals of Egypt creating huge man-made lake (lake Nasser) producing abundant food not only for its population but surplus for large scale export as well. Furthermore, Nile has been feeding mega dams like the Aswan dam in order to generate adequate electricity for Egypt’s urban and rural towns and cities and for powering Egypt’s industries. Also, Egypt has artificially diverted huge volume of the Nile water (more than 10 billion CBM) from its natural course to Tushka dessert in western Egypt (Tushka project) and

to the Sinai desert in eastern Egypt (Al Salam project) to execute gigantic and ambitious agricultural projects contrary to international laws and conventions on trans-boundary Rivers. The sad thing is that due to Egypt's boundless contempt towards fellow riparian states, all these mega projects were thought of and carried out without consultations and without giving any consideration towards the legitimate interests of the other riparian countries such as Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, etc. as if these countries have no right what so ever and as if Egypt is the sole owner of the river. It is a pity that previous unfair and illegal status queue has given Egypt false sense of monopolistic ownership of the river. Nile belongs to all the riparian countries and no single nation including Egypt can claim exclusive right and control over the river and its blessings. Whereas Ethiopia is the net contributor to the water of the Nile (85 %), it gets nothing while Egypt, contributing not even a drop of water gets almost everything. If this cannot be called unfairness and injustice, what will!

What is Egypt's answer to this injustice? Whenever challenged and/or confronted, Egypt always refers to the two archaic and colonial era treaties of 1929 and 1959 signed between Egypt and their colonial rulers on the one hand and Egypt and Sudan on the other. Here, it should be noted that the other riparian countries neither signed that archaic treaty nor have they anything to do with these long dead and buried treaties. As far as the other riparian countries and as far as Ethiopia is concerned, the first legal and multilateral treaty of the river Nile basin is the one signed and adopted in May 2010 by the major five Nile riparian countries namely Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda) which are contributors to about 95 % of the Nile water and where both the sources of the Blue and White Nile are located in. The other two, namely DRC and Burundi are expected to sign the agreement any time because their national interest is in one basket with those of the five signatories. This legitimate, fair and legal treaty has been signed, sealed and delivered. This treaty is irreversible and any future discussions and negotiations could therefore only be made within the framework of this treaty.

Generally, Nile's water resources should be used for the common benefit of all the people within the basin. Fair and equitable usage of the river Nile is the only option and path to peace, understanding and cooperation among the people of the region. The people of the Nile basin (Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, etc.) have said enough is enough to the repeated severe drought, poverty and backwardness that they have been confronted with for a very long time due to this unfair distribution of water from this river. They are fed up with Egypt's monopolistic mentality and usage of the river Nile. Therefore, they do not wish to live under the previous archaic status queue. They are determined to ascertain their rights and decide their own future. To this end and after decades of patience and mature diplomacy, they have managed to bury the old unjust status queue by signing and adoption of the sole and legal treaty of the river Nile on May, 2010. Congratulations! To the Peoples and Governments of Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda for your historic achievements in spite of Egypt's intractable dilemmas over the Nile issue.

The Nile river is so huge that it can easily feed and accommodate all the people of the basin, from Egypt to Kenya, from Ethiopia to Rwanda if joint projects are designed and

carried out at basin/ region level and if smart and scientific usage of the river is made. Unlike the present wasteful projects in Egypt where huge amounts of valuable water is lost by evaporation due to excessive heat and human mishandling, the riparian states in general and Egypt in particular can manifest good will amongst themselves and with a joint and scientific projects, human and natural wastage could be avoided and the water could be wisely used at basin level and in places of less evaporation such as in cool places of Ethiopia. The fact that Egypt diverted huge volumes of the Nile water from its natural course for external usage is testimonial to the abundance of the Nile water.

It was the earnest hope of the people of the Nile basin countries that Egypt would come to its senses, heed to logic, fairness and legality and adapt itself to live with the realities of the 21st Century. Further, there was hope that Egypt would desist from its emotional and negative roles that it has been playing and would constructively engage with the other riparian countries that are committed to genuine and serious discussions in order to bring about lasting agreement for the common benefit of the entire people of the basin. It was also hoped that Egypt would realize that its current inappropriate and stubborn position is indefensible and unsustainable and would benefit no one including itself.

Unfortunately, Egypt preferred to continue with its desperate and die-hard strategy to keep the archaic status quo alive by waging a losing battle. To this end, Egypt has been resorting to all possible means in its power (indirectly and covertly) in order to ensure the continuity of its monopolistic control and usage of the Nile. Further, Egypt has been knocking the doors of every potential donors and creditors such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to deny Ethiopia from getting funds for its river projects. Worst of all, it has been committing serious crimes against the Ethiopian people by providing financial, material, intelligence and diplomatic assistance to any anti-Ethiopia terrorist group such as Alshabab, ONLF, OLF etc. via its close ally and cheap conduit, the rogue regime of Asmara hoping and wishing Ethiopia would be destabilized and disintegrated. This behavior and strategy on the part of Egypt has become the hallmark and cornerstone of its foreign policy. This tactic and strategy never worked before and it is doomed to fail again. In fact, it will strengthen the determination and vigilance of the people of Ethiopia and for that matter even those other riparian states to keep going with their plan. As a result, Ethiopia and the other member countries will not have any sleep until they free themselves from poverty and backwardness a cherished goal and a stark contrast to that of Egypt. Therefore, it is time; in fact, it is long overdue that Egypt realizes that discussions, compromise and negotiations are the orders of the day in our era of 21st Century and that gone are the days for rigidity, selfishness, monopolistic and militaristic mentalities.

Here are Egypt's illogical arguments

First and foremost, Egypt argues that Ethiopia is full of rivers and water supply and thus, should not touch or utilize the river Nile. This argument doesn't hold water due to the following reasons. To begin with, it is not the business of any country including Egypt to enlist natural resources that Ethiopia within its own territory possess as that will entail a breach of national territorial veracity. Ethiopia may have adequate water

supply in certain parts of the country. However, Ethiopia wouldn't have been hit by repetitive and severe droughts in the past forty/ fifty years if this argument was true. But, the fact of the matter is that Ethiopia has been struggling to free itself from the cycle of drought, poverty and backwardness for the last two decades. That is why Ethiopia and for that matter the other riparian countries are determined to exploit their natural resources including the river Nile in order to produce adequate food for their growing populations; to light millions of their households both in the urban and rural areas; to power their emerging factories and industries and in general to enhance their economies and improve the livelihood of their poor people. Even if we assume that Ethiopia has excess water supply, does it mean that Egypt has the right to rob Ethiopia's natural resource just because it doesn't have enough? By the same token then does that mean that Ethiopia can also claim to some natural resources such as petroleum and natural gas which Egypt possesses in plenty and that Ethiopia has none? What a bizarre argument. The position taken by the Ethiopian people and the other riparian states is only meant to get rid of poverty and backwardness, to feed their people using and sharing equally from the natural resources endowed to them. Other than that, they have never been against the interest of any nation before and currently, they have no desire to be against the interest of any nation including that of Egypt.

The second line of argument which Egypt advances to defend its position is although it doesn't have legal right for its monopolistic use of the Nile, it claims to have "historical right" for its monopoly. To begin with, there is no such thing as historical right but only historical facts. Egypt may present its peculiar historical fact such as its past exclusive reliance and usage over and above its share/ quota. Ethiopia on the other hand could present its peculiar historical facts being a victim of repetitive and severe droughts during the last century. The same is true with the other riparian countries. However, these presentations whatever merit or demerit they might carry could only come to surface only after the rights and responsibilities of all riparian countries is respected and the legal treaty of May 2010 is accepted and signed by all or by the majority of states in question. Therefore, further engagement with Egypt not signing the treaty would not bear any fruit and it would only be waste of time. Hence this argument too has proven baseless and wrong beyond any shadow of doubt. Nile is just one of the World's trans-boundary rivers such as the Danube, Rhine, Amazon, etc. Trans-boundary Rivers are governed by international laws and conventions pertaining to trans-boundary Rivers. Nile could not be an exception. It is, therefore, inappropriate, unjust and unacceptable that one riparian state, Egypt exclusively claims and uses the water of the Nile in its entirety. Egypt, thus, lacks any legal ground or valid argument to back its monopolistic position.

Recently, there has been frequent talks by Few Egyptian Officials and Egyptian Media about declaring the Nile issue as "national security" and waging war against the five signatories (Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Rwanda) in general and Ethiopia in particular to safeguard the continuity of Egypt's absolute control and usage of the Nile. Egypt is a sovereign country and it can declare any issue as "national security" as it deems right. However, Ethiopia too is a sovereign country. If the unjustified desire for keeping its monopoly of the Nile warrants the issuance of "national security" on the part

of Egypt, then by the same token, the desire for a just and equitable use of the Nile river more than warrants the issuance of “national security” on the part of Ethiopia and on the part of the other riparian countries. It is as simple as that.

There has also been a threat of war on the part of Egypt, Hope those who claim this crazy idea should stop entertaining such fanatical thought. Ethiopia, the origin of mankind is a peace loving nation friendly with the global community and that includes Egypt. Ethiopia also has a proud history and is a very proud nation. It has successfully safeguarded its independence and sovereignty for thousands of years with the blood and bones of its forefathers in spite of numerous challenges and ups and downs. It has never bowed to any external invader and no foreign force has ever conquered and occupied its land. It has repeatedly and successfully repelled all foreign aggressions and the battles of Adwa, Gundet , Gura, ets. are testimonial to its proud history. As Prime Minister Meles Zenawi recently stated, “nobody who has tried to invade Ethiopia has lived to tell the story”.

During its long history as a nation, there is no enemy that Ethiopia has not defeated except one, that is off course poverty. It has been almost two decades since Ethiopia has declared war on this enemy and the battle is still going on with the Ethiopian people getting the upper hand with each passing day and they are determined than ever before to defeat this remaining enemy once and for all.

Furthermore, Ethiopia shares with Egypt the two great religions of the World: Christianity and Islam. Ethiopia was the second nation on Earth to receive Islam following the visit of the family and followers of the prophet Mohammed peace be upon him to Ethiopia in the 6th Century escaping persecutions within their backyard.. It was then that the Prophet Mohammed peace be upon him that instructed his followers not to touch or wage any war against the Ethiopian people and the Ethiopian state. As there is no greater prophet than the Prophet himself, any genuine Muslim who claims to follow the teachings of the one and only Prophet should not contemplate even for one second the thought of waging war against Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian people have always been ready and willing to share, to forgive if Egypt makes change of heart and mind and rectify its past mischievous deeds. Nile’s blessing is abundant for all of us. Let us jointly and genuinely re-visit and address past injustices and come up with a common win-win solution. As sons and daughters of the timeless and great Nile, let’s have vision beyond our selfish individual adventures. Let us respect and put genuine consideration for each other’s national interest. Let us avoid unnecessary rivalry and confrontation and join hands to coordinate our natural, human and financial resources to develop our basin and lift the standard of living of our people and make poverty history. If Egypt is the gift of the Nile, Nile is the gift of Ethiopia. Then, by implication Egypt is the gift of Ethiopia. Hence, Egypt and Ethiopia are tied by this eternal bond which neither of them could afford to underestimate even during times of temporary challenges and setbacks. Thus, this natural bondage, which dwarfs all other situations, could not be broken by any human force. Hope and wish all the best for all the people of Nile basin countries

