

The GERD: What does Arabization go to do with it? A response for Ahmed Abul-Gheit comments on GERD

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As readers are well aware recently the issue of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) has dominated the media at the global level. This followed the rhetoric from Egypt that “no one will touch Egypt’s share of the Nile.” Egypt’s such claims are emanated from an attempt to deny almost all upstream countries of their equitable and reasonable share. Following that rhetoric, anyway, the current Secretary General of the League of Arab States and Egypt’s Mubarak era last foreign minister, Ahmed Abul-Gheit has remarked about the issue. Please, allow me, to say the following.

I read the Arab League’s Secretary General statement addressed during the Fourth Arab Water Forum in Cairo on 26 November 2017 with great interest. Ahmed Aboul-Gheit, however, used the forum to be an extension of the Office of the Spokesperson of Egypt’s Foreign Ministry. In his statement, he asserted that that the League of Arab States is following the issue of the GERD “with extreme concern.” As a mega and African project I would not be surprised had the concern been genuine and honest. I was dismayed to read that according to Ahmed Abul-Gheit, the League of Arab States “... do not feel that Ethiopia was cooperating and coordinating enough. Ethiopia’s plans to operate the dam and use its water in irrigation are ambiguous and concerning.... [the Arab League] call on Addis Ababa to show sufficient openness to the principles of cooperation.”

Calling Addis Ababa “to show sufficient openness and transparency” is none other than an attempt of portraying Ethiopia as if it is not cooperative and transparent. For a keen follower of the matter, Ethiopia has remain transparent, open and cooperative throughout the process. Such assertions are erroneous and misleading and not expected from a man who is at the helm of the organization of the worlds “Arabs.” In my view, the statement is a deliberate accusation of Ethiopia or lack the sufficient knowledge on the process of discussion and consultation that involves the three countries, namely Ethiopia, the Sudan and Egypt on the GERD. I would love to choose the second but I can't. Ahmed Abul-Gheit, as a former Minister of Foreign Affairs of

the Arab Republic of Egypt or in his current capacity knows or/and should know the facts. Hence, it is a deliberate move to accuse Ethiopia of non-cooperation. And this is totally untrue!!!

I would like also to remind the Secretary General about the pre-feasibility study of the GERD as Border Dam, conducted under the auspices of the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) while he was in power as a Foreign Minister of Egypt. I do not think the Secretary General denies that Egypt was part of this study. Should I also remind the Secretary General about how Ethiopia initiated the establishment of the International Panel of Experts (IPoE) to review the study and design documents of the GERD? And of course Ethiopia provided more than 150 documents to the IPoE for review without any legal obligation or customary practice to do so. It is not a secret that Egypt has never consulted any country in the Nile Basin while undertaking a major water infrastructure development. Besides, Ethiopia together with Sudan have been cooperative and transparent in the tripartite process. It is Egypt which has been trying to impose its wishes on the rest. Which is, of course, unacceptable.

Now let me also raise a very interesting point. Mr. Secretary General, was not, the same person, Dr. Ahmed Abul-Gheit, the current Secretary General, who lobbied against all financial sources that Ethiopia requested to finance the GERD while Egypt's Foreign Minister? Was not you Mr. Secretary General with the late Omar Suleiman conspiring to destabilize Ethiopia in 2010? We do not want to say much, albeit we have a lot.

The League of Arab States is a league of all Arab states, not one Arab state. Trying to equate the Arab League with Egypt is tantamount of discrediting the League itself and confirming the allegation that "the Arab League is a continuation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt." While we recognize Egypt's and Sudan's membership to the League, this does not warrant the League's interference in the matter in a very unethical manner. As a Secretary General of this esteemed organization, Dr. Aboul-Gheit's attempted interference and unnecessary comments are not helpful but counterproductive. The issue of the GERD should be left to the concerned parties which have been in dialogue and consultation from the very beginning.

Dr. Ahmed Aboul-Ghiets remarks are part of the Egyptian longstanding "interest of Arabizing the Nile". In fact, Arabization of the Nile issue is not new for Egypt. For long, Egypt has tried to isolate Ethiopia through its proxies and ill-intentioned anti-Ethiopia narrative in relation to Islam and the Arab world. Furthermore, the Egyptian media has relentlessly worked towards

mobilizing the Arab world by relating the world with those countries which the Egyptian media alleged are “Anti-Arab”. These includes, for instance, the failed attempt of relating the GERD with Israel. The Egyptian political elite and the media, which of course works hand in hand with the Egyptian intelligence, tried to misinform and dis-inform the public by stating that “Israel is funding the construction of the GERD.” By extension, the Media further try to relate the Dam with the USA.

We have also seen the Egyptians trying to relate the GERD with Turkey claiming that the later “has always been against Arab interest”. And in recent months the misinformation and disinformation has brought Qatar into the theatre. Trying to take advantage of the existing crisis in the Arab world, the Egyptian media has accused “Qatar for funding the GERD.” These deliberate misinformation is an attempt to make the GERD political. One thing is, though, very clear. GERD is Ethiopia`s dam being constructed by the People and Government of Ethiopia, their blood and sweat! No external actor is financing the GERD. Despite its national project, Ethiopia believes, the GERD is “Ethiopia`s gift to the aspiration and effort of all the Nile basin countries for cooperation and regional integration.”

Ethiopia is very sure about the regional benefits of the GERD. And even the Egyptians do indeed know that the GERD is beneficiary to the Nile Basin in particular and the whole North-Eastern Africa in general by promoting cooperation and facilitating integration through the generation of clean energy and regional power interconnection. So what is the Egyptians trying to make a fuss out of this noble and cooperative project? As one commentator recently wrote on the Weekly English newspaper, the Ethiopian Reporter (18 November 2017), from the GERD related discussions, “*Egypt wants to hook up one big fish ... And that big fish is Ethiopia and the issue is the 1959 “Agreement”. Egypt calls it a “historic right” but it is a “historic wrong” for Egypt itself. Egypt wants this “historic wrong” be recognized by Ethiopia. In other words, Egypt is asking ‘Ethiopia to throw away its sovereign and natural right of utilizing the Nile and carry an Egyptian colonial yoke and deprive its people of their basic right of quenching their thirst from their Nile waters.’*”

It is easier to conclude then that the statement by the Secretary General of the Arab League is nothing other than a move to try to legitimize such unfair, unjust and immoral treaty that neglects the interests of almost 10 upstream countries of the Nile in favor of one state-Egypt. Therefore,

the Arab League, as a League of all the Arab states should be cautious of its comments. We do believe that the statement of its Secretary General does not represent all the Arab League member states. But it is obvious that the sentimental statement and remark of Dr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit is damaging to the reputation and credibility of the League as, he, the Secretary General, is its figure in the international fora. We do not think the Arab League is a Trojan Horse of Egypt or its Egyptian Secretary General. Hence, in the future, we hope, the Secretary General will watch his words and make sure whether he is speaking on behalf of the Arab League or his country of origin-Egypt.