

Washington Update - By Mesfin Mekonen

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Ethiopia is preparing to start the second season of filling its Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) and tensions with Egypt and Sudan are certain to rise even faster than the water.

Negotiations among the three countries have broken down and rational discussions have been replaced with accusations and counter-accusations. Amid the confusion, it is important to remember a few clear facts:

- Ethiopia does not feel bound by treaties signed by the British during the colonial era that allocate 100% of the Blue Nile water to Egypt and Sudan, and give Ethiopia absolutely no rights to a river that originates in and flows through Ethiopia. Ethiopia will not respect colonial era water rights treaties that it was excluded from.
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- Ethiopia will not abandon the GERD, a project that it has invested \$5 billion to create.
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- Ethiopia and the entire region need the electricity that will be generated by the GERD. Power from the GERD is essential for Ethiopia to develop and lift its people from poverty.
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- Irrigation projects enabled by the GERD are essential to freeing Ethiopia from drought-induced famines that are certain to become more frequent and severe as a result of climate change.
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- The Blue Nile can benefit every nation that is home to its life-sustaining waters. No nation has an exclusive right to its water, and every nation has an obligation to protect and preserve the river. In building and wisely operating the GERD, Ethiopia will finally obtain some of the benefits that its neighbors have long enjoyed, and can do so without harming anyone.

The recent invasion by Sudanese armed forces of Ethiopia's territory is a violation of international treaty obligations. The

international community must condemn this incursion and demand its reversal.

The US Congress and Biden administration must reverse the Trump administration's decision to back the Egyptian government's side in the conflict over completion of the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

Although 85 percent of the water in the Nile originates in Ethiopia, in the Blue Nile, the Ethiopian people derive very little benefit from the river. The GERD will meet Ethiopia's need for power.

Ethiopia is at a critical crossroad with a large and increasing population, a depressed national economy, insufficient agricultural production, and a low number of developed energy sources. The upper Blue Nile basin harbors considerable untapped potential for irrigation and hydropower development and expansion.

The famines that periodically bring mass deaths and deprivation to Ethiopia are a direct result of underdevelopment of irrigation and water resources.

Egypt and Sudan must recognize these realities and negotiate technical aspects of water management with Ethiopia in good faith. Egypt must renounce threats to bomb or sabotage the GERD. Sudan must withdraw from Ethiopian territory it has seized in recent months.