

Story Behind the Water War Between Ethiopia and Egypt

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The Grand Renaissance Dam, which Ethiopia is building, will be the biggest hydroelectric power plant in Africa when completed. The dam is being built on the river Nile, thus causing increasing conflict with Egypt. Some fear this tension could lead to a potential war, thus mediation talks have been taking place under the supervision of the US.

Historically there are international treaties coming from 1929 and 1959 which give Egypt and Sudan the rights of nearly all the Nile waters. These treaties also give Egypt the right to veto any kind of project by upstream countries which would affect its usage of water resources. These agreements did not include the other states that have the Nile in their territory. Ethiopia stated that it should not be bound by decades-old agreements for supplying power to their country.

The building of the dam started in 2011 without consulting Egypt when the country was under serious political turmoil due to the Arab Spring. Egyptian President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi stated that Ethiopia would not be able to go to this route if their country had not been going through political changes.

The main reason for the conflict is overfilling up the mega-dam, as Egypt states Ethiopia would be able to control the flow of the river. Ethiopia plans to fill the dam in 6 years. Egypt states that this duration is not long enough, and it would affect the water level of the Nile, causing water shortages. They say filling up the dam should take time between 12 to 21 years if the flow of the Nile is not going to be distracted. Ethiopia states it is impossible to reach a conclusion with Egypt, and they refuse to cooperate in any manner. To prevent this tension from resulting in war, the US acts as a mediator between the two countries. A possible war would mean total devastation in the already fragile region, resulting in massive civilian deaths. Egypt is still under the effects of the Arab Spring; Sudan is living the effects of decades-old civil wars and Ethiopia also fails to give reasonable living standards to its citizens.

The dam is very important for Ethiopian citizens. 65 percent of the country does not have access to continuous electricity. Building the dam would mean Ethiopia would be able to supply its citizens with electricity while also selling the surplus to the neighboring countries. Neighboring countries Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, Kenya, and Djibouti who has similar problems related to electricity will also benefit from this power generated in the dam. Besides, the dam is being constructed on government bonds and private funding, thus it does not rely on external funding. This makes the project an issue of national sovereignty for Ethiopia.

The flow of the Nile is very important for Egypt as well, considering how the country with water scarcity problems relies on this river for 90% of its water. This historically makes the flow of Nile a precondition for survival in the country. The Nile is approximately the

only water resource of Egyptian citizens for survival, thus a decrease in the water levels means serious damage to the population's health. This is further accelerated with the ongoing pandemic. Low levels would also affect the lives of the agricultural population of the country who rely on the river for irrigation and make transportation through the Nile problematic.

Ethiopia's new Nile dam



References:

1- <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-50328647>