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a pressure card in Egypt's hand**

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Boycotting GERD Electricity, a pressure card in Egypt's hand

Dr. Abdel-Tawab Barakat

The crisis between Egypt and Ethiopia over the Nile waters has entered a new phase of conflict, especially after Ethiopia withdrew from negotiation meetings held in Washington under the auspices of the US administration late February 2020. The Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Energy, in a statement published on its official Facebook account, expressed "disappointment over the Statement issued by the United States [Department of Treasury](#) on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) released on 28 February 2020, following a meeting held without Ethiopia's participation".

The Ethiopian government also rejected the American role and considered it an unacceptable intervention. In a remark to the twelfth regular session of the Office of the National Council for the Coordination of Public Participation of GERD on 5 March 2020, Ethiopian Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonen said, "The Government of Ethiopia would not accept the crossing of the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) red line, which is a matter of sovereignty."

Meanwhile, Water, Irrigation and Energy Minister [Sileshi Bekele](#) at the same meeting pointed out that "the recent statement by the US Treasury has made the negotiation between three countries difficult". Accordingly the negotiations between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan reached a dead end. "External interference and a move to put pressure on Ethiopia in the GERD negotiations is unacceptable. The next negotiations should be conducted wisely and prioritize Ethiopia's national interest," said Deputy Prime Minister and chairman of the council Demeke Mekonnen, who is also head of the National Council for the Construction of the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

The Minister of Water, Irrigation, and Energy Sileshi Bekele, also said, "Though the US was invited in the negotiations as an observer, it later acted as a mediator and then drafted an agreement, which is unacceptable by the Ethiopian side," he said. Ethiopian President [Sahle-Work Zewde](#) also said that GERD is more than just a development project, and added that "filling the dam will begin in July, while the completion of the entire project will be in 2023".

Ethiopia imposes a fait accompli

Ethiopia has revealed its determination to proceed with the construction of the dam without waiting for the results of negotiations, taking advantage of Egypt's signing of the Declaration of Principles in Khartoum on March 23, 2015. The [statement](#) of Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Water, Irrigation and Energy on 29 February read: "Ethiopia as the owner of the GERD will commence first filling of the GERD in parallel with the construction of the Dam in accordance with the principles of equitable and reasonable utilization and the causing of no significant harm as provided for under the Agreement on the Declaration of Principles (DoP)."

In this way, Ethiopia is imposing a fait accompli policy of accomplishing the construction of the dam and starting its filling and operation without coordination with the downstream countries of Egypt and Sudan, as quoted by Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in his dialogue with a number of influential American figures within American society, on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly meetings in New York, according to [Al-Ahram](#) gate.

GERD catastrophic repercussions on economic and social life in Egypt

Ethiopia's fully completion of the filling of the dam in 2023, that is, 4 years from now, according to Ethiopian President statement, means that Egypt's share of the Blue Nile water will decline by 25 billion cubic meters per year. This amount can be compensated from the stockpile of Lake Nasser, but it will be fully exhausted within 3 years. In the fourth year, Egypt will lose 25 billion cubic meters of its share, which leads to the conversion of [5 million feddans](#) and displacement of 5 million farmers supporting 5 million families of about 25 million citizens.

The current Egyptian Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation, Mohamed Abdel-Ati, explained the danger of the Renaissance Dam on agricultural and economic life in Egypt to the American Chamber of Commerce in Cairo, saying that Egypt's losing of 2% of the water, equivalent to a billion cubic meters, means that 200 thousand families will lose their jobs, which will expose them to extremism, according to [Al-Masry Al-Youm](#).

In addition, the arable lands near the Mediterranean Sea in the northern delta will be affected due to the advance of the salty seawater beneath it, which will result in reduction of the area cultivated with rice that most Egyptians feed on; taking into account that Egypt has already switched to importing

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rice from China and India even before the crisis. Accordingly, the food import bill will increase, because Egypt suffers a deficit of 60% in wheat production, 50% in corn, and 92% in edible oils due to a water deficit of 20 billion cubic meters even before Ethiopia begins to fill the dam, according to the [New Arab](#).

Rural development experts at the Egyptian Agricultural Research Center expect that the Renaissance Dam will destroy the social fabric of the rural community. They stress that the lack of the annual share of the Nile water will lead to an increase in the food gap and high food prices, in addition to increasing rates of poverty, disease, crime, drug addiction, violence, due to unemployment and poverty, and will accordingly increase rates of internal migration to cities, and external immigration to Arab countries, as well as the illegal immigration to [European Union](#) countries.

Egypt's negotiating position is getting weaker

A study prepared by the [German Institute for International and Security Affairs](#) (SWP) on March 11, entitled: "Nile Conflict: Compensation Rather Than Mediation", confirmed complete failure of the United States initiative and that the crisis is likely to remain unresolved for a long time, which harms Egypt's negotiating position, which is already weakening over time. US Secretary of State [Mike Pompeo](#) has indicated that it could be months before an agreement is reached. The German study stated that "Since three rounds of negotiations in Washington have already failed to produce any tangible results, a complete failure of the US initiative cannot be ruled out."

Ethiopia has sufficient electricity and exports the surplus

The [economic viability](#) expected from the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam project, and declared at least by Ethiopia, is limited to the hydroelectric energy that the dam will produce. Although Ethiopia claims that it needs to build the GERD to get the electricity needed for development and addressing poverty, in fact Ethiopian local production of electricity covers its domestic consumption and allows it to export the surplus, especially after operating the dams of Gebi, Takizi, Halili and other wind dams. Bizuneh Tolcha, the Public Relation and Communication director with the Ethiopian Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Electricity said Ethiopia has finalized the feasibility study to export power to Egypt, indicating that "the feasibility study was carried out because Egypt is showing signs to buy electric power from Ethiopia," according to the Ethiopian News Agency (ENA). Bizuneh Tolcha told [ENA](#) that

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Ethiopia possesses about 4,625 megawatts of electricity, of which it exports about 190 megawatts, including 100 megawatts to Sudan, 80 megawatts to Djibouti, and 10 megawatts to Kenya.

Professor Dale Whittington, Professor of Environmental Science & Engineering and City & Regional Planning at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (USA) and the Manchester Business School (UK) has published an [article](#) on the Conversation website titled, "Why technical discussions are needed for the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam". Whittington, who worked for the World Bank and other international agencies on the development and application of techniques for estimating the economic value of environmental resources in developing countries, with a particular focus on water and sanitation, said that "The sale of the GERD's hydropower is a key component of these negotiations. Ethiopia cannot use all the electricity generated from the GERD in the short to medium term because its domestic market for electricity is too small and it has other hydropower projects under construction," which prompts Ethiopia to seek selling electricity to its neighbors.

Dale Whittington said that the financial success of the GERD for Ethiopia very much depends on its ability to sell this hydropower as soon as possible and at a reasonable price. Kenya is a small market for electricity sales. According to Whittington, it is in the interest of Egypt and Sudan, as well as Ethiopia, that the building of transmission lines from GERD to Sudan begin as soon as possible.

An Ethiopian expert, specializing in Ethiopian financial policies, [Ezana Kebede](#), questioned the feasibility of exporting GERD electricity to countries such as Eritrea, South Sudan and Yemen, as Ethiopian government claims, because the three countries are still in a state of civil war and are not likely to buy electricity at present. In his article published on March 29, 2015 titled "The Financing of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)", Kebede said that Ethiopia had only signed a memorandum of understanding with Kenya to sell 400 MW per year to the latter, and 60 megawatts to poor Djibouti, wondering about who would buy the rest of the 6000 megawatts! Kebede said that Ethiopia had no choice but to sell the GERD electricity to Egypt, otherwise the dam would have lost its benefits and failed to cover operation and maintenance expenses, not to mention making profits for shareholders.

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Ethiopia announces Egypt's intention to buy dam electricity, but Egypt denies

The Ethiopian Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Electricity revealed that Egypt has shown signs to buy electric power from Ethiopia and that the Ministry has in turn finalized the feasibility study to export power to Egypt, Sudan and Djibouti, according to [ENA](#), citing Bizuneh Tolcha, Public Relation and Communication Director with the Ethiopian Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Electricity. According to ENA, consultations are underway between the Egyptian and Ethiopian authorities on “ways of commencing” the supply of power to Egypt.

Commenting on these reports, the [Egyptian Ministry of Electricity](#) strongly ruled out the Ethiopian claim and denied any partnership with Ethiopia. However, experts in water resources and irrigation considered that what Ethiopia is deliberating might be true, explaining that Egypt had not reacted to Ethiopian abuses throughout the negotiation period over many years. Moreover, the experts stressed that the Declaration of Principles signed by Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia in 2017 also included provisions that suggest that Egypt may benefit from GERD electricity.

Earlier, Egyptian Minister of Electricity Mohamed Shaker, admitted at the “Renewable Energy Problems” seminar at the Egyptian Engineers Syndicate on October 26, 2014, that there were studies related to the possibility of purchasing electricity for GERD and that the whole matter only needs a political decision, according to the Egyptian [Veto](#) gate.

Purchase of GERD power under interconnection cover

Former Egyptian Irrigation Minister Mohamed Nasr El-Din Allam revealed that the US administration sent an initiative on the Renaissance Dam crisis to Egypt, including Egypt's recognition of the capacity of the Ethiopian dam, and then entering negotiations with Ethiopia on the GERD filling and operation policies. Allam said the US initiative also included that Egypt would pledge to buy the bulk of the dam's electricity. He said that some may be surprised that the American initiative was in line with the drafting of the Declaration of Principles document in March 2015, according to his article in the [Al-Watan](#) Egyptian newspaper.

In February 2018, the spokesman of the Egyptian Ministry of Electricity, Ayman Hamza, said that a number of previous studies of the electricity interconnection with Sudan and Ethiopia were being updated, according to [Al-Ahram](#). He said that electricity interconnection with Sudan would enable

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African countries like Congo and Ethiopia to export electricity to Europe via the Egyptian network, according to [Power News](#).

During the 2nd Africa Business Forum-2017, that was held from 7 to 9 December in the Egyptian city of Sharm El Sheikh, the Egyptian Minister of Electricity stated that Egypt is working to implement the joint electricity interconnection between the north and south of the Mediterranean, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Ethiopia to achieve what is known as the green corridor to connect and transport Ethiopian electricity to Asia and Europe via [Egyptian territory](#).

To achieve this goal, the Egyptian Electricity Transmission Company has signed a historic agreement for Egypt-Europe electricity interconnector via Cyprus. The historic framework agreement was signed in Cairo for the construction and commissioning of the EuroAfrica Interconnector which will interconnect the electricity networks of Egypt and Cyprus by the project promoter, EuroAfrica Interconnector Limited. The agreement was signed in the main hall of the Council of Ministers of Egypt by EuroAfrica Interconnector CEO Nasos Ktorides and Eng. Sabah Mohamed Mashal, Chairperson of the Egyptian Electricity Transmission Company, according to [Euro-Africa](#) website.

Boycotting GERD Electricity

Given the serious negotiating situation of the Egyptian government and the threat that GERD poses to Egyptian water and national security, the [Egyptian Nile Basin Group](#), which consists of 15 professors, experts, ambassadors, and irrigation ministers at Cairo University and the National Center for Water Research demanded in September 2015 suspension of participation in such absurd negotiations and going to the International Court of Justice and the Council International Security to halt construction of the Ethiopian dam and issue a decision obligating Ethiopia to do this until completion of technical studies, based on the International River Agreements approved by the United Nations in 1997, fearing that the dam would lead to a crisis, igniting an armed conflict and threatening peace and security of the region, which received no response from General Abdel Fattah El-Sisi so far.

In light of the intransigence of the Ethiopian side, Egypt's declaration of boycotting the GERD electricity and challenging its legitimacy is an important card that can be used to pressure Ethiopia and compel it to take some measures that would reduce likely damages on Egypt and Sudan.

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Former Egyptian Minister of Irrigation Dr. Mohamed Nasr El-Din Allam, also believes that Egypt should [boycott](#) the GERD electricity, in coordination with Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti, which will threaten the economic viability of the dam, especially that selection of the dam site near the Sudanese border aims to export most of its electricity. In the event that Ethiopia fails to export electricity, there will be no other way to use most of the dam's electricity, especially since the Ethiopian electricity distribution networks will not be able to absorb more than one sixth of the dam's power capacity, which amounts to 6000 megawatts.

It is expected, according to Allam, under this Egyptian-Sudanese boycott of GERD electricity, that the Ethiopian loss will not be less than \$6-7 billion, which is likely to affect Ethiopia's ability to repay internal and external loans, in addition to the negative effects of this on the country's stability. In addition, Ethiopia's hostility to Egypt will make it lose the only country in the region that can absorb huge amounts of electricity, either for domestic consumption or for export to Arab and European countries, in addition to the problems the will reflect on the dam operation, which may ultimately lead to its likely collapse, according to Allam.

Also, Somalia and Djibouti's reluctance to purchase GERD electricity will also be supportive to the Egyptian negotiating position with Ethiopia, especially that the two countries are members of the Arab League. The Arab League Council at the end of its 153rd session on 5 March 2020 voiced rejection of any infringement of Egypt's historical rights to the waters of the River Nile and reaffirmed that Egypt's water security is an integral part of Arab national security. "The Council announces rejection of any unilateral measures that might be taken by Ethiopia, including starting filling the GERD reservoir, without reaching a comprehensive agreement governing the dam filling process and organizing its operation," said an [Arab League resolution](#) issued following the meeting.

Also, the Arab League can assist Djibouti and Somalia in establishing local power stations and dispense with the GERD electricity to support the Egyptian position.

Conclusion

The Egyptian government move to use the "boycott" card against the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam's electricity that Ethiopia intends to produce and export across Egyptian territory, preventing its passage through Egypt, blocking it, and urging Somalia and Djibouti, members of the Arab League,

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to boycott the it – could be a useful card in the hand of Egypt to pressure the Ethiopian government to reduce the capacity of the dam's reservoir to its primary volume, namely 14 billion cubic meters, to protect Egypt's water security and maintain stability of the Egyptian people, whose current and future generations are likely to suffer from the dam's negative effects on their water, economic, social, security and political conditions.

