

Full Length Research

Public Diplomacy as Method of Conflict Prevention on Nile basin

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Ethiopia had turned a leaf in her foreign policy in the past two decades. The Foreign Policy and National Security Strategy has redefined and re-evaluated her priorities, identified the major threats to Ethiopia and indeed to its survival: economic backwardness and the desperate poverty affecting a large majority of the population. In particular, with regard to bilateral relations, the policy clearly stipulated that Ethiopia was pursuing engagement with all other countries on the basis of the principle of mutual interest and respect. Relations with all neighbors over the last two decades have been a testament to the seriousness with which the country has adhered to these principles. Importantly, Ethiopia believes that whatever differences countries may have, issues of common concern can only be addressed on the basis of constructive engagement, of dialogue and in a manner that allows for a win-win outcome for all. Ethiopia was determined that the Nile can and indeed should be a source of cooperation and mutually beneficial relations between Ethiopia, Egypt and other lower stream country in a whole number of ways. This has not, however, always been the case. Indeed, the issue of the use of the Nile water has often been a major sticking point in the relationship, a major stumbling block to any sort of robust bilateral link that might have enhanced the interests of both countries. Ethiopia attaches great importance to its relations with Egypt, over the Nile as in the area of security. It accepts that Egypt has legitimate interests in the use of the Nile River. Equally, it sincerely believes that the only way any controversy over the use of such a common resource can be settled is through dialogue and the principle of equitable utilization of the water, without causing significant harm to others. When it comes to foreign relations, countries will always pursue their national interests. A sober assessment of the methods used to do this, including the use of soft power and hard power, is indispensable to success. In the information age, soft power, which is the ability to shape what others want and projecting a positive image, stands tall as a technique to help achieve foreign policy goals? Indeed, public diplomacy through the employment of soft power has helped countries communicate values and achieve foreign policy objectives.

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INTRODUCTION

Diplomacy has existed since the beginning of the human race. The act of conducting negotiations between two persons, or two nations at a large scope is essential to

the upkeep of international affairs. Among the many functions of diplomacy, some include preventing war and violence, and fortifying relations between two nations.

Diplomacy is most importantly used to complete a specific agenda. Therefore without diplomacy, much of the world's affairs would be abolished, international organizations would not exist, and above all the world would be at a constant state of war. It is for diplomacy that certain countries can exist in harmony.

There has not been a documented start of diplomacy; however there have been instances ranging back to the 5th century where diplomacy arose in certain nations. Dating back to 432 B.C, the Congress of Sparta was an "illustration of diplomacy as organized by the Greek City States" (Nicolson 1). The origin of the word "diploma" comes from different sides of the earth. In Greece diploma meant "folded in two", while in Ancient Rome the word was used to describe travel documents. Often times the word diplomacy is given many meanings. Many times will the words "policy" and the word "negotiation" be seen as synonyms; hence the word "diplomacy" and "foreign diplomacy" are deemed to be similar (Nicolson 3). These "synonyms" of diplomacy are all faulty. While they may be very similar in some cases, they are not the exactly the same. Sir Harold Nicolson who was an English Diplomat born in Tehran, Persia, states that:

"Diplomacy is neither the invention nor the pastime of some particular political system, but is an essential element in any reasonable relation between man and man and between nation and nation" (Nicolson 4).

For the upkeep of the International System, diplomacy is used in every corner of the world. Without it many nations would not be able to conduct successful negotiations.

While many are not able to find a clear beginning or creation of diplomacy, modern diplomacy has become much more advanced and many aspects have changed over the years. The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 created the first modern diplomatic congress in addition to creating a new world order in central Europe based on state sovereignty. Much of Europe began to change after the introduction of modern diplomacy. For example, "France under Cardinal Richelieu introduced the modern approach to international relations, based on the nation-state and motivated by national interest as its ultimate purpose" (Kissinger 17). The New World Order began to bloom in all of Central and Western Europe.

Great Britain argued for the "balance of power" which kept European diplomacy alive for the next 200 years (Kissinger 17). Every country in Europe contributed a little to the diplomacy the world has today. The balance of powers theory that many famous realists such as Francesco Sforza, Machiavelli, and Guiciardini argued was and still is an essential component of modern diplomacy. Many could argue that diplomacy is a product of society and history itself. As countries progress different aspects are added to diplomacy. Separation of

powers, national interest, and a country's sovereignty are only a few elements that were added to modern diplomatic history. Therefore, diplomacy can be seen as an ever-changing concept, the same way International Relations between countries fluctuate. Author of *The Pure Concept of Diplomacy* José Calvet De Magalhães stated that "continuity of the diplomatic institution throughout thousands of years and in all known civilizations shows that diplomacy is an institution inherent to international life itself, one that may undergo transformations or may be used with more or less intensity, but cannot be dispensed with" (Szykman).

There are in fact many functions of diplomacy that make diplomacy an essential ingredient for any peaceful and efficient change. The reason to negotiate with other persons has always been the same, to have better relations. Over the course of diplomacy being in existence, the structure of diplomatic posts has changed from a loose one to an organized institution made for a specific purpose. While the structure of diplomatic posts has changed, the functions always remained the same. There are four functions of diplomacy. The first function involves "representing a state's interests and conducting negotiations or discussions designed to identify common interests as well as areas of disagreement between the parties, for the purpose of achieving the state's goals and avoiding conflict" (Ameri 1). Representations of a state as well as negotiation are the most important functions of diplomacy. Negotiations between two representatives are a key component in diplomacy, because in doing so the representatives find a common interest. Finding a common interest is vital in conducting negotiations because with a common interest representatives are able to devise a solution that is in the interest of both sides. G.R. Berridge that negotiation "can produce the advantages obtainable from the cooperative pursuit of common interests; and it is only this activity that can prevent violence from being employed to settle remaining arguments over conflicting ones" (Berridge 1).

The second function of diplomacy involves "the gathering of information and subsequent identification and evaluation of the receiving state's foreign policy goals" (Ameri 1). Diplomatic posts are concerned with gathering information; however when the information is sent back to their native country a Foreign Ministry analyzes the data and determines what foreign policy should be enacted. Political leaders choose what path is right for their country then. The third major function of diplomacy is expansion of political, economic, and cultural ties between two countries (Ameri 2). For example, after WWII countries such as the United States and Britain aimed their foreign policy at the extermination of communism. In present day, the United States State Department engages international audiences to speak about politics, security, and their values to help create an environment receptive to US national interests. In

addition, “the State Department annually sponsors more than 40,000 educational and cultural exchanges” (Diplomacy). Finally, the fourth function of diplomacy is that “diplomacy is the facilitating or enforcing vehicle for the observation of international law” (Ameri 2). It is the diplomat’s job to promote the country’s national interests and keep ties with other countries open. The emphasis put on diplomacy is not just dominant in today’s world, however it was a developing concept in the Renaissance as well.

Great thinkers such as Machiavelli, Guicciardini, Grotius, Richelieu, Wicquefort, Satow, Nicolson, and Kissinger had a profound impact on diplomacy. For Machiavelli diplomacy was a tool of deception to grant more power to the state (Beridge 24). Machiavelli’s impact on leaders was a major one because he argued for leaders to be headstrong as well as reserved. Guicciardini promoted the upkeep of good relations; to be careful with whom one deals with and that reputation is key in a negotiation (Berridge 43). His contribution to diplomacy was that diplomatic posts are given to people who can be trusted and can promote their country’s state interests. What these great thinkers contributed to diplomacy was immense. All of them contributed a different element to the ever-growing concept of diplomacy. Since the subject of diplomacy is always growing and changing, it can be said that because of its vast effect on the world, everybody needs diplomacy to survive. It has become such a vital part of everyone’s life that is indirectly becoming a trait for survival.

Throughout the course of history diplomacy has been a paramount element in the upkeep of peace and in the creation of positive change. Without diplomacy much of the world’s affairs would not exist. There are many examples of how diplomacy has affected countries, and even individual citizens. An example of how negotiation positively can affect someone is Clinton’s negotiation with Kim Jung Il in North Korea. Their peaceful negotiation resulted in the release of two American citizens. An example of how power can corrupt diplomacy is Libya and Switzerland. With the introduction of power, in other words oil, countries such as Libya with the leader Ghaddafi are able to have a stronger presence in the world and say things that can normally not be said. Power corrupts, however diplomacy seeks to rid corruption and reinforce the international system as well as international law. It is for diplomacy that international organizations can exist. In a diplomatic way, an international organization is merely a many members finding a common ground on a particular subject. In the United Nations for example, all the members try to find a common interest for positive change. Although it is sometimes perceived to be slow change, the method of diplomacy causes fewer casualties than any other one. If diplomacy were not in existence, international organizations would not exist. The world would be at a

constant state of war, and war would in fact never end because they normally end with diplomatic negotiations.

Ethiopia and Egypt have long and historical relations. Both are recognized internationally as being ancient and replete with history. And they have centuries-old religious ties through the Orthodox Christian and Islam religions. Above all, however, their tie largely revolves around the Nile. While this tie should have been positive and one of collaboration, it has been characterized by mistrust and misgiving.

Until recently Egypt has been using both directly and indirectly all available means to exert security-related and other forms of pressure on Ethiopia with the aim of guaranteeing its continued dominant and sole use of the waters of the Nile.

In the wake of the announcement by Ethiopia of its plans to build the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) the government of former president Mohammad Morsi went apoplectic and even went as far as threatening to bomb the dam.

Following the toppling of the Islamist government of Mohammad Morsi the ascension to the current president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, has said that Egypt’s relations with Ethiopia must be informed by cooperation and love, not hatred and belligerence. His government is transitioning Egypt from throwing about threats to forging cooperation. Such an encouraging development, however, does not mean that animosity and mistrust have been rooted out. Some politicians and elites still spew out hatred and threats against Ethiopia. And a sizeable portion of the people of Egypt continues to distrust Ethiopia. Similarly, the Ethiopian public cannot be said to have a proper appreciation of the feelings and views of their Egyptian brethren.

Public Diplomacy

The practice of public diplomacy has largely been the domain of the rich and powerful states for the large part of its history. The United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany and Russia are known for their vast application of public diplomacy in complementing their foreign policy objectives. It is not only the practice, but also academic researches and literatures also largely focus on the experiences and practices of these same nations. Melissen notes that “the origins of contemporary public diplomacy, and the current debate on the need for more public diplomacy, are dominated by the US experience” (Melissen, 2005).

However, unprecedented development of communication technologies, global and instantaneous reach of satellite news broadcasts and a broader change in international relations have made it necessary for countries, rich or poor, big or small, to engage in public diplomacy to further enhance the effective

implementation of their foreign policy objectives. Melissen underlines that "both small and large countries, ranging in size from the United States to Belgium or even Liechtenstein, and with either democratic or authoritarian regimes, such as China and Singapore, and including the most affluent, such as Norway, and those that can be counted among the world's poorest nations, for example Ethiopia, have in recent years displayed a great interest in public diplomacy" (Melissen, 2005).

In light of the foregoing development, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia had adopted public diplomacy as an important tool for the attainment of its foreign policy objectives.

Why Public Diplomacy for Ethiopia and Egypt?

State-to-state relations have historically been conducted through designated state representatives. States conduct diplomacy to put across and establish understanding and support to their foreign policies. States follow a set of established practices and protocols dictated by international legal instruments like the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. Following the Congress of Westphalia in 1648, missions as in today's embassies were institutions mandated to conduct international business between sovereign states (Denza, 2008). Sole actors of international relations were sovereign states and the players for the conduct of state-to-state relations had mainly remained to be diplomats and designated state envoys (Melissen, 2005).

Following the end of World War II, a bipolar world was created along ideological lines of Socialist and Capitalist camp led by the Soviet Union and the United States respectively. Deep ideological confrontation between the two camps prompted both sides to explore ways of directly addressing each other's public. Public diplomacy practiced at this stage mainly used radio broadcasting (Radio Free Europe) and cultural diplomacy as a major tool to reach out to people in communist countries (Nelson & Izadi, 2009; Schnieder, 2005).

Times have passed since sheer military and economic powers were the main instruments of asserting one's point of view. In a world that is much more characterized by multiple international and local actors other than the state, persuasion and influence have become important tools of winning friendship and understanding of foreign publics (Fisher & Brockerhoff, 2008). Important developments of communication technology, advancements in satellite TV and internet as well as change in international relations that resulted on the proliferation of non-government actors were crucial factors in enhancing the need and importance of public diplomacy (Gilboa 2008; Evans and Stevens 2008).

In a context of multiple actors that play important roles in a way nations and their policies are perceived, it

becomes ever crucial for governments to explain themselves to others. Failure to explain and engage with these actors through public diplomacy would mean risking to be defined by others as they please (Taylor, 2010). The emergence of these new actors in the international arena have caused the creation of new structures of 'networks' that are in competition with the more traditionally established 'hierarchies' (Hocking, 2005). Heine comments on the changing of traditional diplomacy to a new form of diplomacy where what he terms as 'club model' of diplomacy has to be changed to include new multiple players calling for a new and less regimented 'network model' of diplomacy (Heine, 2006, p. p.4). public diplomacy is defined "as a government's process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and current policies" (Tuch, 1990). Melissen defines public diplomacy as "the relationship between diplomats and the foreign publics with which they work" (Melissen, 2005). Other scholars broaden the actors practicing public diplomacy, to include not only diplomats but other non-state international actors and multilateral organizations such as the United Nations and NGOs. Nicholas Cull defines public diplomacy as "an international actor's attempt to manage the international environment through engagement with a foreign public" (Cull, 2007, p. p 12).

A common theme of the desire to influence others runs throughout the different definitions of public diplomacy shown above. The nature and goal of an activity to influence others, not only by governments but by many different actors, seems to constitute the core activity of a public diplomacy. This leads us to the conclusion that, despite narrower or broader definitions offered by governments or scholars alike, public diplomacy's concerns boils down to influencing and creating positive attitude and perceptions towards what you do.

The objective of public diplomacy of Ethiopian is to building trust and fraternal relations between the peoples' of Ethiopia and Egypt. It comprises prominent academicians, former Ambassadors, religious leaders, artists and other prominent personalities drawn from various sectors.

It is expected to that the visit of the Ethiopian Public Diplomacy to Egypt will have a vital role in strengthening people to people relations between the peoples of the two nations and conveying Ethiopians desire for mutual growth, strong bond and genuine cooperation to several Egyptian officials and religious leaders.

The visit of the delegation is timely as it would have a positive impact in building on the positive momentum between the leadership of the two countries exemplified in the resumption of the tripartite talk over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) and other issues.

Indeed, the public diplomat is not a minor event rather a landmark. It is a culmination and a showcase of Ethiopia's commitment towards genuine regional cooperation in general and the efforts of the past three and half years.

Ethiopia had turned a leaf in her foreign policy in the past two decades. The Foreign Policy and National Security Strategy has redefined and re-evaluated her priorities. Identified the major threats to Ethiopia and indeed to its survival:

economic backwardness and the desperate poverty affecting a large majority of the population.

In particular, with regard to bilateral relations, the policy clearly stipulated that Ethiopia will pursue engagement with all other countries on the basis of the principle of mutual interest and respect. Relations with all neighbors over the last two decades have been a testament to the seriousness with which the country has adhered to these principles.

Importantly, Ethiopia believes that whatever differences countries may have, issues of common concern can only be addressed on the basis of constructive engagement, of dialogue and in a manner that allows for a win-win outcome for all.

Ethiopia's relationship with Egypt is one of the many bilateral relations that the government of Ethiopia has been working hard to develop along these principles. Ethiopia and Egypt, of course, have a long relationship, dating back several thousand years. Apart from the cultural and historical ties that have bound them together for centuries, both countries have been closely involved in the cause of African unity over the last five decades. Central to any relationship however has been the Nile river which has been the strong bond tying the two countries and their peoples together for millennia.

Ethiopia was determined that the Nile can and indeed should be a source of cooperation and mutually beneficial relations between Ethiopia and Egypt in a whole number of ways. This has not, however, always been the case. Indeed, the issue of the use of the Nile water has often been a major sticking point in the relationship, a major stumbling block to any sort of robust bilateral link that might have enhanced the interests of both countries.

One of the first and fundamental demonstrations of Ethiopia's effort towards cooperation was the Nile Basin Initiative and now the Nile Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement.

The Nile basin countries, except Eritrea and South Sudan, founded the Nile Basin Commission, later Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), in 1999, with funds from World Bank, aiming 'to establish a diplomatic protocol for evaluating the fair use of the river for agricultural and energy projects'. The Commission paved the way for the

drafting the 'Nile Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA), for the equitable sharing of the Nile waters.

The CFA was signed by six countries from May 2010 up to February 2011 (Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Kenya and Burundi). Ethiopian Parliament passed a law to ratify the CFA and make it part of the domestic law with a unanimous vote. There by establishing the first genuinely multilateral treaty regarding the Nile, stipulating for the equitable sharing and utilization of the waters.

Ethiopia attaches great importance to its relations with Egypt, over the Nile as in the area of security. It accepts that Egypt has legitimate interests in the use of the Nile River. Equally, it sincerely believes that the only way any controversy over the use of such a common resource can be settled is through dialogue and the principle of equitable utilization of the water, without causing significant harm to others.

Why Ethiopia's Public Diplomacy over Nile Works

When it comes to foreign relations, countries will always pursue their national interests. A different method has applicable to do this, including the use of soft power and hard power is indispensable to success.

In the information age, soft power, which is the ability to shape what others want and projecting a positive image, stands tall as a technique to help achieve foreign policy goals? Indeed, public diplomacy through the employment of soft power has helped countries communicate values and achieve foreign policy objectives.

In this regard, Ethiopia's public diplomacy has made great strides in making the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) project an engine of national renewal and an emblem of regional economic integration. It is also a stellar example for the creation of green economies in the Horn of Africa and the Nile Basin.

Ethiopia's public diplomacy over the ongoing construction of the GERD project has delivered a clear signal that the dam's existence is only to help drive poverty eradication and regional integration, based on a win-win approach. It encourages equitable and reasonable utilisation of water resources and causes no significant harm to lower riparian nations. Furthermore, it engenders genuine cooperation amongst all basin countries. Ethiopia's principles in utilising the resources of the Nile River, including the construction of the GERD, speak of sustainable, inclusive, comprehensive and far-sighted development policies, rather than myopic definitions of developmental domestic and foreign policies.

Other basin countries, including Sudan, have subscribed to Ethiopia's construction of the GERD and are supportive of the project, so as to jointly embody

regional integration through the development of green, renewable hydropower trade. This glaring fact is quite telling that Ethiopia's GERD narrative has won in the hydro-diplomatic battle.

In fact, at the start of the construction project, the uproar engaging media personnel, politicians, diplomats, engineers, academicians and other analysts, portrayed the GERD as a death-knell to the Egyptian people. Ethiopia's struggle to reduce poverty through the development of renewable energy infrastructure projects, including the GERD, was seen as extremely provocative, as it was claimed it would cause water insecurity in Egypt.

These assertions revealed the unilateral and unsubstantiated Egyptian voices claiming exclusive utilisation of the Nile, while abandoning the concerns of other basin countries, which include poverty, water shortages, energy deficits and food insecurity. Fortunately, these assertions have not attracted much attention as they are self-serving and uncorroborated, and aim to encourage mistrust and rancor among the peoples and governments of Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan, as well as other basin countries.

Ethiopia's public diplomacy has effectively and efficiently prevented campaigns that intended to discredit the dam through the provision of adequate information on its practical and tangible benefits to downstream countries, including: energy trade, the reduction of sedimentation, enhancement of regional and economic integration, regulated and increased flow of water, avoidance of evaporation losses and increased flood control. Ethiopian diplomats have persistently explained and detailed the report of the International Panel of Experts (IPoE), its recommendations, four successive Tripartite Water Ministers Meetings held in Khartoum, Sudan, over the implementation of the recommendations of the IPoE on the construction of the GERD, with a view to sowing the seeds of trust, mutual benefit and win-win results within basin country peoples.

This positive result has come with Ethiopia's astute employment of public diplomacy as a platform to create enabling trust, understanding and dialogue, with a view to tapping the opportunities and overcoming challenges. The praxis of Ethiopia's public diplomacy in the making of GERD is based on scientific findings and evidence rather than emotion and propaganda.

Institutional cooperation and the engagement of scholars and researchers with basin countries is one of the manifestations of Ethiopia's hydro-diplomacy. A three day symposium held last year in Khartoum, Sudan, organised by the University of Khartoum's Faculty of Engineering and Addis Ababa University's Institute of Water Resources, can be considered as the making of the Nile as a source of interdependence rather than tension and confrontation, based on evidence rather than myth.

Yet another symposium held last year in Sudan, organised by the Sudanese Engineering Association, embodied the dam's construction as the future development of Sudan, and concluded with a largely positive attitude towards it. The symposium outlined the benefits of the dam. These include the reduction of alluvial silt reaching Sudan, provision of water at a fixed and stable rate, reduction of soil erosion, and a supply of electricity at a much cheaper rate. Mohamed Akod Osman (Prof.), dean of the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Khartoum, specified that construction of the dam will bring a "stable rate" of water to the Nile throughout the year.

These, and other demonstrations of Ethiopia's cooperation with regard to water policy, have compelled basin countries, including Sudan, to cherish the GERD as a source of regional sustenance. Sudan's support to the construction of the dam have been borne of practical discussion, trust, evidence and tangible benefits from the recently completed Tekeze Hydropower project. This can be regarded as the fruit of making diplomacy public, that is, going beyond government-to-government ties to communal discuss interests with the people, scholars, analysts, consultants, engineers, strategists, students and media personnel of basin countries.

It is worth mentioning the works of the nation's public diplomacy in association with the Office of the National Council for the Coordination of Public Participation for the Construction of the GERD. It spearheaded the responsibility of the self-financing mission in raising funds locally and internationally. The country's extraordinary demonstration of public diplomacy made headways in bringing national consensus to making the dam a source of peace and development.

It has promoted the cooperative hydro-diplomacy in the basin and made all Ethiopians in the country and outside "the architects and financiers of the dam". It has also expedited environmental conservation and other re-greening programs over the Blue Nile Gorge to extend the life span of the dam and protect the ecosystem. It has also contributed to the advancement of scientific and research cooperative partnerships among the basin's universities, as well as elevated the motto "Abay for Unity." It has helped the Office in launching numerous fund-raising programs, including selling of bonds sales, savings and the setting up of a short message services (SMS) lottery, to mobilise the people.

Ethiopia has started an extensive journey of national renewal through the promotion of a cooperative foreign policy that defines the shared interests of the countries of the Greater Horn of Africa and North Eastern Africa. Public diplomacy is at the heart of this application of foreign policy objectives that promote comprehensive and forward-looking security architecture in all developmental activities of the region.

Despite the achievements gained so far, though, the

public diplomacy of the country has a long way to go. In the words of Professor Yacob Arsano there is “a legacy of net distrust between the upstream and downstream countries...[and entrench] equitable and reasonable utilisation and sustainable benefit sharing.” Beyond the construction of the GERD, the public diplomacy of the nation needs to scale up efforts to deepen the people-to-people, government-to-government, business-to-business ties, exchange of scholars and students, institutional cooperation and other ways, within the basin, to engender vibrant and all-rounded cooperation in various fields.

The upshots in institutional cooperation and people-to-people relations with Sudan need to be doubly cherished and expanded with other basin countries. It needs to engage Ethiopian Diasporas as bridges for the nation to access know-how, resources, expertise and markets. As Ethiopia is heading to the mutual development and common security praxis, other basin countries, most notably, Egypt, need to follow suit. It is a viable alternative to promote sincere dialogue with the aim of eroding mistrust and misgivings and seeking of common ground for the avoidance of differences and the ultimate human need to live in harmony.

The Egyptian People’s Diplomatic Delegation

Ethiopia and Egypt have long and historical relations. Both are recognized internationally as being ancient and replete with history. And they have centuries-old religious ties through the Orthodox Christian and Islam religions. Above all, however, their tie largely revolves around the Nile. While this tie should have been positive and one of collaboration, it has been characterized by mistrust and misgiving.

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Following the toppling of the Islamist government of Mohammad Morsi the ascension to the current president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, has said that Egypt’s relations with Ethiopia must be informed by cooperation and love, not hatred and belligerence. His government is transitioning Egypt from throwing about threats to forging cooperation.

Such an encouraging development, however, does not mean that animosity and mistrust have been rooted out. Some politicians and elites still spew out hatred and threats against Ethiopia. And a sizeable portion of the people of

Egypt continues to distrust Ethiopia. Similarly, the Ethiopian public cannot be said to have a proper appreciation of the feelings and views of their Egyptian brethren.

It’s in cognizance of this stark truth that it was deemed that the customary diplomatic relations need to be complimented by a people-to-people diplomacy and the Ethiopian public diplomacy delegation was sent to Egypt.

The first and crucial step taken after the launch of the project was the reception of the Egyptian People’s Diplomatic Delegation. In mid-2011, Egypt sent a 48 person delegation named “Egyptian People’s Diplomatic Delegation”.

The delegation was headed by Moustafa El Gendy and comprised three presidential candidates, independent political activists, representatives of different political parties and movements, members of parliament, politicians, jurists, public figures, members of the academia, media representatives and members of the Youth Movement of the Egyptians Revolution former parliament members, community leaders, journalists from Egypt and other Arab countries and other public figures from Egypt.

The Public Diplomacy Delegation met with the late Prime Minister of Ethiopia Meles Zenawi and received the following pledge (as reported by Ahram Arabic in May/2011):

The Prime Minister stressed that he had seen several models of dams and that he was keen to choose the model that generates electricity only and does not remember running water in irrigation of agricultural land.

“I say to the Egyptians that this dam is beneficial to Egypt and the Sudan and will not hurt in any way. Yet, in order to reassure the Egyptian people and thereby eliminate all the doubts created by former regime of Egypt, I accept the formation of a committee of experts, consisting Ethiopians, Egyptians, Sudanese and other foreign experts, to examine the dam project and to make sure it will not cause any damage to Egypt and Sudan. Although I am sure of that, I sure you I am ready to modify the project if the Committee concludes to the contrary. “

Ethiopia gave Egypt time to elect a new government, though it was made it clear that the formation of the Experts Panel should not be taken a decision to stop or delay the dam.

The International Panel of Experts was established months later and started work, while Ethiopia continued building the dam 24 hours a day and seven days a week. It is to be recalled that the IPoE’s Final Report reconfirmed that:

"The design and construction of the Grand Ethiopia Renaissance Dam has been properly based on international design criteria and standards, codes, guidelines and engineering practices. The Panel's report also showed that the GERDP will not have a significant impact on the downstream countries and that it will in fact, provide major benefits to all three countries.

The Panel did also recommend two further studies be carried out in the context of the Eastern Nile System. These were a water resource system/hydropower model and a trans-boundary environment and socio-economic impact study. It suggested these should be done through an agreed arrangement of the three countries, employing international consultants chosen through an international bidding process."

Even though, there has been reluctance at the beginning, Ethiopia patiently insisted on going ahead with the panel's report and eventually Egypt started talking about setting up a mechanism for following up on the implementation of the recommendations of the Experts' Panel.

The Outcome of public Diplomacy

Ethiopia and downstream countries especially Egypt and Sudan are necessarily participate in any concerns of Nile water. They all have agreed up on conflict is not the option any any disagreement especially on Nile basin.

Needless to say, it is naïve to expect centuries-old suspicion and anxiety to be allayed overnight. The biggest achievement of the public diplomacy is the softening of Egypt's age-old hostility towards Ethiopia and its willingness to engage in constructive dialogue.

The public diplomacy delegation however acknowledged that the mistaken views expressed by some among its ranks and the general public as well needed to be set right. That is why it is of the belief that Ethiopians must also abandon their mistrust and fear of Egypt and evince solidarity with their Egyptian compatriots.

For their part the Egyptians are beginning to show signs that it is in their interest to reach a shared understanding and take confidence building measures. This is an encouraging start which gives rise to optimism.

Aside from this accomplishment, the public diplomacy created an opportunity to draw lessons from Egypt about the benefits of think tanks and the imperative to translate Ethiopia's history and heritages into a reliable revenue stream.

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