



Before we deviate from topics concerning our region, it may be recalled that there is no clear policy or consensus among the riparian countries with regards to the utilization of the Nile River's waters. Could you give us a broad perspective of the implications of this standstill and what, in your view, should be done to reach an agreement among the riparian countries?

The River Nile is crucial to the whole of Africa. Its significance has been a topic for discussion not only among regional but also international actors with varying interests. However, we must distinguish whether the whole matter pertains solely to the utilization of the Nile River or whether the issue has been manipulated for the purpose of public relations and grandstanding. On our part, we are firm in maintaining an objective stance on the issue while keeping our compass trained away from any deviant paths. In reality, the volume of water flowing in the Nile River is tremendous especially compared with our own meager water sources and our relentless effort to utilize them. The Nile River is a very important resource for this region and with the proper modern technologies the potential benefits that it offers are boundless. There are nine riparian states with tributaries that flow into the river. However, the issue must not be restricted to measuring the comparative contribution of the countries to the river's total volume; rather, the issue must be whether all the populations of these nine or ten countries can benefit from the water through practical and scientific ways and means. If the region assumes stability and the governments can agree to cooperate with each other, then the Nile River will not only benefit the current generation but has much in store for posterity.

There is no reason for disagreement on utilizing the Nile River proportionately among the people of the riparian states to bring about collective improvement in the quality of life. Indeed, there can be no quarrels about ways in which the people of the riparian countries can cooperate among each other. There would be no problem in the equitable utilization of the river's waters, had there been free movement of people among the riparian states, free trade and cooperation in the realm of trade, investment and technology. The countries only need to cooperate in order to ensure that the benefits will be everlasting and sustainable. Thus, it should not be a cause for conflict. Unfortunately, the reality on the ground has so far been unconstructive and tangential to cooperation. The matter has been inflated beyond proportion and threats have been exchanged, for nothing more than political posturing at the regional and international level. The affair has not been helped by external forces who continuously stoke the fires to further their

narrow aims and destabilizing interests.

Thus, the riparian states must negate the destructive external influences by taking the matter into their own hands. The solution can be reached without any external intervention, whether from the World Bank, the IMF, Europe, Japan, China or America. The internal solution can be reached if the governments educate their people, enhance their infrastructure, and develop a common strategy in a genuine spirit of cooperation. This spirit of cooperation has been ignored in the process of achieving political objectives through misinformation and posturing. Back in the days when Mengistu Hailemariam was in power in Ethiopia, the Nile was referred to in terms of a counterweight to the oil wealth of Arab states. The river was used to swagger and to boast in a bid to cover internal political problems. At the same time, it was employed as a tool to polarize the regional countries into two camps. One camp consisted of the countries that consumed or utilized the Nile's waters while the other camp consisted of the countries that contributed the water.

This polarization that has taken root is the biggest mistake from our vantage point as it has many ramifications. Therefore, it would be futile for Eritrea to join any talks, discussions or conferences wherever and whenever they are convened while this polarization and the divergent attitudes that it entails prevail. We may be referred to as the tenth riparian country; however, there is no mentionable water that we contribute to the Nile. The Setit tributary is insignificant relatively speaking. Everybody knows that Ethiopia contributes 80 percent of the Nile's water. Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda all have varying proportions of contribution as well. However, it is neither the respective contribution of the countries nor the tenets of colonial treaties that should determine the quota of water for each country. These arguments would lead to endless wrangling on the water source, population size, treaty rights, and so on. As such, the matter will not go beyond being a PR tool, which in turn exacerbates the tension and opens the door for external intervention.

It may be recalled that we were invited to join the Nile Basin Initiative. However, we did not wish to join the gathering without a clearly stated objective. We do not want to align ourselves with one camp against another in the already polarized grouping. That has been our firm stand on the issue in all occasions. However, we can participate in the capacity of observer provided that we can help steer the whole issue towards a more constructive and cooperative direction. We do not wish to participate just for the sake of participation, to ingratiate any party or to gain a seat in a forum for quarrelling and disagreement. However, our aims have not materialized and the problem has festered, providing ample excuse for external intervention.

If Ethiopia is the source of 80 percent of the Nile River's water, then inarguably, the Ethiopian people should benefit from the river. I say this without any pretension. The Ethiopian people have a right to utilize the river to improve their situation in any means conceivable, whether through the generation of hydroelectricity or otherwise. This right is not exclusive and is shared by the people of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Sudan, Egypt and the other riparian states.

Anyone who thinks that our differences with Ethiopian governments will compel us to work against the interests of the Ethiopian people is misguided and naïve. That being said, the people of this region must develop a common vision and strategy for the river and devise a

mechanism to implement it. Otherwise, the problem will prevail just as it has since the Mengistu era. Governments should not exploit this matter for political expediency in domestic issues or for posturing in the international arena. The tones must be adjusted and the handling must be restructured for this issue to come to a positive conclusion. The continuous inflation of the matter in the media and in various occasion must be substituted by a realistic policy that fosters regional stability, cooperation and interdependence.

Excellency, permit me to move on to questions regarding North Africa and the Middle East. The last three months have witnessed popular protests that have shaken regimes in the Middle East and North Africa. What is the correlation between these regional events and the larger international situation? And while the circumstances of individual countries vary from each other, let's consider the revolution in Egypt as a typical example. Can you offer your broad perspective of the background, the causes, the consequences and the future trajectories of the events that have unfolded in Egypt?

- Primarily, I welcome the news coverage of the revolutions and give credit to the information technology that has spawned them. The technology has indeed lent a voice to the oppressed populations. However, we need to exercise caution as we interpret the benefits of the media in light of the possibilities for manipulation by the powers that control it and their interests. Despite the extensive nature of the whole issue, I will try to gloss over the events in general.

The best approach that we could follow in assessing the events that took place in North Africa and the Middle East is by analyzing the situation in each country piece by piece. However, this must be done in direct correlation with the greater trend of events in the world. One cannot argue that the situation in one country is exclusive and unaffected by any external factors.

Of course, each of the countries that have experienced revolutions faced inherent or innate problems. Each country had its own unique set of problems that cannot be likened or compared with those of another country. Thus, we do not have the right to be judgmental on the countries and their problems.

Needless to say, the countries were affected by domestic, regional and international factors. Therefore, we must try to identify the driving factors behind the situation within Tunisia and how it in turn influenced the events in the region. We must also look at it in light of international events.

Primarily, the cause of the unrest in Tunisia was an improper or incompetent administration that vertically polarized the population along ethnic, tribal, religious and other lines. This policy cannot bring about any sustainable stability. It may have worked for a while, with the employment of many means and instruments to prolong the regime's life; but at the end of the day, unrest becomes inevitable.

Secondly, there were problems in wealth distribution. The wealth and resource of that country came under the control of increasingly shrinking circles of beneficiaries opening the road for indignant protests. 90 or 95 percent of the population cannot live in miserable penury while a minority enjoys prosperity and luxury. This fact is a sure ingredient for unrest. However, it must

be remembered that it is not confined to Tunisia but existent in many parts of the world.

The third dangerous factor leading to the revolution is the absence of political independence or sovereignty. The Tunisian regime was perpetually dependent on external powers. The regime attempted to prolong its stay in power not by stabilizing the country but by relying on external support. Yet, events have proven that external support can only sustain a regime for a while before its inevitable fall.

Finally, rampant cronyism and nepotism have added to the explosive mix in that country. For example, if you want to get a business license, you first have to gain the favor of some official's wife. Administering a country through your relatives and friends can only lead towards devastation. The whole meaning of the country is diluted and all grand plans and projects become lost in the midst of internal division and conflict. These characteristics are especially common in our region. Nonetheless, for so long, Tunisia was touted as a stable and developed country. But we must look at the reality behind the façade and ask who had been propping the regime for such a long time.

The Tunisian revolution is usually attributed to the singular incident of police violence against an unemployed student who was peddling on the streets. But that is a very narrow perspective. The underlying reasons must be unearthed from much deeper. It was external forces that created the ticking bomb in Tunisia. At one point in history, they were laying their red carpets for the leadership of that country and abetting them in their acts of corruption and plunder. Later, when the bomb exploded unexpectedly those very external powers began to stutter and turn back. This applies to all the revolutions and protests that have taken place in the wider region.

In the last four months, we have also witnessed the manifestation of Washington's policies of "Creative Chaos" at play. This policy has been pursued for a long time in the region. The previous US administration used to talk about the "New Middle East", which takes us back to what I mentioned earlier about their designs to control the whole world, especially the regions that have natural resources, while at the same time squashing anything that stands in their way. The war against terrorism is a case in point. Creative Chaos is also based on the philosophy of people like Friedman who postulate that chaos brings about gains. Thus, chaos has been further fuelled and exacerbated in a creative way to further their aims and interests.

With regards to the events in Egypt, we may recall that when the people took to the streets there were instant reports about government officials who were in the illegal possession of billions of dollars. First, we must prove the validity of these reports. Then, we must look back and see who used to support these government officials while they purportedly starved the population to enrich themselves. We must also remember who had been employing the regime as a proxy in the region. I am not saying this so as to incriminate or tarnish the regimes in Tunisia or Egypt. Judging Ben Ali of Tunisia or Mubarak of Egypt is not our main purpose here. However, the fact of the matter remains that the problem was caused by increasing external interference in the region. To get a better picture of the situation we must try to understand the dynamics of regional and international forces that have been hostile to the position of Egypt in the Middle East. The focus should not only be on Mubarak and his regime, rather we should look at the wider implications of economic homogenization and the network spread by the New

World Order. The financial crises that hit Wall Street and London have continued to change form and we are clearly witnessing their trajectories. On top of that, there have been the adventurous military blunders in the last two decades. These will suffice in illustrating the main causes behind the unrest and revolution in North Africa and the Middle East.

At first the external powers were caught by surprise by the sudden turn of events in Tunisia and soon after in Egypt. No one can claim to have foreseen the events as they unfolded and any attempt would only be presumptuous. Those who wield the media can manipulate the stories to suit their aims; but the reality is that no one speculated the uprisings in those countries. However, one can safely say that the hegemonic policies that they have promoted over the last 2 or 3 decades have taken their toll on the overall situation in the region. The ticking bombs that they planted all over have begun to explode. A dangerous trend has appeared with unrest gripping Syria, Libya and Yemen, as a result of their economic, political and military blunders. We are not arguing in defense of the regimes in those countries and we are definitely not disregarding the grievances and rights of the people who took to the streets. Yet, the fact remains that the situation has provided ground for more creative chaos. Unable to micromanage the events in those countries, the external powers are continuously adding fuel to the fires. The aim is to totally sabotage the situation so as to create exploitable opportunities, courtesy of the philosophies of Friedman, Fukuyama, Huntington and other so called philosophers. In the event of unforeseen events that deviate from their strategies and plans, the powers further complicate the crises in the belief that these will bring forward opportunities.

Then we must ask what are the intentions in Libya. Recently, we have seen much camaraderie and red carpet dramas between the opposite sides in the conflict. Libya was given positions in the Human Rights Council, moreover, it became a member of the UN Security Council. Indeed, there was a lot of support from America and Europe. Now, the situation has suddenly turned into the opposite direction. Who can tell what is the intention of the external powers in Libya or Yemen or Syria? Do they want to create republics? Do they want to create monarchies or emirates?

Of course, there are existing grievances among the population. But grievances are common all over the world so we must ask what is the ulterior aim, the strategy and the plan behind all this unrest? The explanations and analyses being forwarded by the external powers to explain the situation in Syria, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain, etc. only stem from the desire to further escalate the conflicts and then try to micromanage them. The problem should have been the sole concern of the aggrieved populations and their legitimate mobilization to address their problems. On the contrary, external powers have flouted international law and furthered their malicious objectives under the mantle of regional and international organizations. These powers are manufacturing crisis and fuelling existing ones to suit their agendas for the world and especially the sensitive oil-rich areas. Their action is devoid of all legitimacy or legality. How can one recognize a parliament confined to the urban borders of Benghazi? Even yet, how can one mount an invasion under the pretext that a certain number of civilians were killed? Is there a minimum number of civilian deaths to justify any military intervention? If the assassination of Rafik Hariri in Lebanon becomes a source of consternation and outrage for the whole world, then who will worry about the plight of ordinary people?

The uprising and disturbance that has gripped these countries is detrimental to their development and progress. Above all their problems are internal in nature, thus, obviating the need for external intervention. No one has the right to chart the political path for Libya, Syria or Yemen. And indeed no one, can label one party as legitimate and the other illegitimate or one side as revolutionary and the other side as counter revolutionary. All in all the developments have many lessons to impart. It has helped all of us to have a clearer picture of reality. It has also shown the consequences of external interference.

We have also seen how regimes became dispensable as in the case of Mubarak who was easily compromised to meet the popular demands of the uprising and unrest. This is a huge turnaround in policy. Similarly, in the case of Libya, the current turn of events is a great departure from the relationships that had been built in light of the power, capability, and wealth of that country. A little while back, Italy was promising to pay compensation for the colonial wrongs done in Italy from 1911 until the end of World War II. Ironically, Italian planes are bombing the country and doing more wrong on that country. Apart from the irony, we must question the legality, the mandate and the moral grounds behind the air strikes.

The fact remains that every people must solve their own problems according to their own convictions and without any external interference. If there is any external intervention, then it must be based on a solid legal foundation with adequate appreciation for the implications at the regional and national level. And above all, the illegal destabilizing external interference that is wreaking chaos must come to a stop.