

In unusual rebuke, Saudi Arabia accuses Ethiopia of posing threats to Sudan & Egypt

February 26, 2013 (KHARTOUM) – A senior Saudi Arabian official unleashed a barrage of attack against Ethiopia saying that the Horn of Africa nation is posing a threat to the Nile water rights of Egypt and Sudan.

"The [Grand] Renaissance dam has its capacity of flood waters reaching more than 70 billion cubic meters of water, and is located

at an altitude of 700 meters and if it collapsed then Khartoum will drown completely and the impact will even reach the Aswan Dam," the Saudi deputy defense minister Khalid Bin Sultan said at the meetings of the Arab Water Council in Cairo.



Saudi deputy defense minister Khalid Bin Sultan (Al-Riyadh)

"Egypt is the most affected party from the Ethiopian Renaissance dam because they have no alternative water source compared to other Nile Basin countries and the establishment of the dam 12 kilometers from the Sudanese border is for political plotting rather than for economic gain and constitutes a threat to Egyptian and Sudanese national security" the Saudi official said.

The massive \$4.8 billion dam is under construction and is scheduled for completion in 2015. It lies close to Sudan's eastern borders and has a power generating capacity of 6,000MW and when completed it will enable Ethiopia to export more power to its neighbors.

Egypt fears that the Nile dam will reduce the flow of the river's waters further downstream and Addis Ababa has long complained that Cairo was pressuring donor countries and international lenders to withhold funding.

An international panel of experts is set to announce its findings on the impact of Ethiopia's Grand Renaissance Dam on the Nile's flow in May 2013.

The Saudi deputy defense minister went further saying that Ethiopia is keen on harming Arab nations.

"There are fingers messing with water resources of Sudan and Egypt which are rooted in the mind and body of Ethiopia. They do not forsake an opportunity to harm Arabs without taking advantage of it" Prince Khalid said.

"The establishment of the dam leads to the transfer of water supply from the front of Lake Nasser to the Ethiopian plateau, which means full Ethiopian control of every drop of water, as well as [causing] an environmental imbalance stirring seismic activity in the region as a result of the massive water weight laden with silt withheld in front of the dam, estimated by experts at more than 63 billion tonnes," he added.

The Saudi official added that Nile basin countries calling for reallocating Nile water shares is a "real threat" to Egypt's future.

"The information is alarming and it is important that we do not underestimate the danger at the moment and its repercussions in the future," he said.

It is unusual for Saudi officials known for being composed to make such damning criticism of other countries. It is not clear whether today's remarks indicates hidden tensions with Ethiopia.

Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo, along with Ethiopia, signed an agreement to overturn British-colonial-era agreements dating back to 1929.

These gave Egypt and Sudan 90 percent of the Nile's water flow and the power of veto over dam-building, even though 85 percent of the river's water flows from the Ethiopian highlands.

Ethiopia and the upstream states contend they need more water because of burgeoning populations, industrialization and agricultural projects.

Water needs are expected to rise as the Nile basin population is projected to reach 654 million by 2030, up from 372 million in 2005, according to UN estimates.

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