



OCP Policy Center Conference series

The Nile and the Nexus : The political economy of the two Egypts

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The New Geopolitics

- The salience of environmental issues
 - *Activist mainstreaming and the role of scholarship*
 - *Sustainable development and “The Nexus”*
 - *Product of our time: everything is (supposedly) connected*
- The Nexus as technocratic and solution oriented
 - *Positivist understanding of environmental change*
 - *Focus on the effectiveness of institutions*
 - *Resolutely a-political*
- But how is “The Nexus” constructed?
 - *Plasticity veils multiple, socially constructed ...
...and politically consequential nexuses*
 - *Origins and distributional significance of certain links*
 - *Role of power in framing the nature, intensity and frequency of connections between constituent factors*



The Nexus as a Political Commodity

- Nexus thinking and Africa's drylands
 - The long history of crisis narratives and state-building
 - African *political* agency and the leveraging of transnational economic/environmental trends for political consolidation
- The Politics of Permanent Crisis
 - The importance of extraversion
 - Normalising the exceptionalism and alarmism
- Limited Access Orders
 - Centrality of rent-seeking and rent-structuring
 - Elite rivalries shape water, energy and food linkages
 - The nexus as a function, despite relative autonomy
 - Modernisation and its paradoxes: the hydraulic mission



Elite Rivalry in Egypt

- Muhammad Ali's "hydraulic civilisation"
 - *The savants and the rewriting of history*
 - *Nexus thinking and the dominant development model*
- Dynastic Egypt
 - *Oligarchic rule and British imperialism*
 - *Hydro-engineering and the first green revolution*
- The Nasserite Revolution
 - *Aswan and land reform*
 - *The Nasser vs Amer power struggle*
- The era of reform and stabilisation
 - *Demilitarising the army and infitah*
 - *Food imports, land reclamation and inequality*



Regional Integration

“Many of Africa’s challenges can best be addressed through cooperation and integration at the regional level. Such an approach offers larger scale and lower unit costs in the provision of key infrastructure; more efficient risk-sharing; bigger and more competitive markets; and enhanced regulatory coherence, effectiveness, and credibility. Across the continent, momentum has renewed to expand internal markets and to work together on a regional basis to address common problems such as climate change, water resource management, food security, and peace and security.”

- The nature of domestic and regional order
 - *Imperialism’s long shadow*
 - *Limited access orders and zero-sum competition*
 - *Political economy and ideology*
- Gridlock and conflict
 - *Rethinking the nature of the state*
 - *The Two Egypts and the price of stagnation*



“The Egyptians have yet to make up their minds as to whether they want to live in the 21st or the 19th century”



“As President of the Republic, I confirm to you that all options are open...If Egypt is the Nile's gift, then the Nile is a gift to Egypt... If it diminishes by one drop, then our blood is the alternative.”

Conclusions

- Nexus thinking is inherently political
 - *The nexus is not what you make of it*
- A different approach to transboundary relations
 - *Comparative Politics & IR: Erasing artificial boundaries*
- Re-interpreting a “nexus approach”

“A conversation that is no longer blind to its own subjectivity but rather a fundamentally political debate about how to re-organise dryland societies and how to restructure their relationship with the outside world.”

