

## Paix et sécurité (Chapitre 4)

# The Egyptian and Ethiopian perspectives on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

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The 2011 announcement of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam’s construction came at a critical time, as Egypt was in the midst of a revolution and relations between Egypt and Ethiopia were already tense. Despite initial Egyptian threats of undertaking military action, Ethiopia pursued the construction of what has been presented as an essential part of its national and, to some extent, regional development. Tensions between the Sudan, Egypt and Ethiopia have been extremely high for the past years, and despite having met several times, negotiations are at a deadlock. This chapter explores the Egyptian and Ethiopian perspectives on the issue, and analyses the points of contention and technical aspects that have impeded the two countries from finding a common solution.

### Introduction

Since the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) was launched in 2011, when a revolution was underway in Egypt, relations between Egypt and Ethiopia have been strained, and all diplomatic efforts have been dedicated to finding a compromise. The GERD is located in the Benishangul-Gumuz region, approximately 30 km east of Ethiopia’s border with Sudan. When completed, this \$4.8 billion project will be the largest hydroelectric power station in Africa and the seventh largest in the world. It is the biggest project in the country and a central asset in Ethiopia’s implementation of its Climate-Resilient Green Economic Strategy. Egyptian officials, however, are still concerned the dam may significantly decrease water flow downstream and reduce the country’s share of the Nile waters.

Officially, the GERD is almost finished. The largest freshwater reservoir on the continent will require 73 billion cubic meters of water, cover an area of 1,883 square kilometers, and stretch 246 kilometers upstream of the Blue Nile. Tensions around this megastructure have been extremely high for several years. Negotiations between the three riparian states of the Blue Nile are at a deadlock, and the Egyptian government insists this large hydroelectric dam will have a dramatic impact on its water supply. Serious concerns have even been raised about the possibility the situation could escalate to war between Egypt and Ethiopia.

This chapter focuses on both the Egyptian and the Ethiopian perspectives concerning the GERD. Talks on the Nile waters stranded as soon as the megaproject was launched and it is increasingly seen as a security issue by both sides. To understand the internal dynamics that shape the political

rhetoric around this project, we will outline Egypt's hard and soft power approach to the Ethiopian project, before presenting Ethiopia's position, taking into account its claim to exercise sovereignty rights over its natural resource and the national symbolism around this project. An analysis of the points of contention between the two countries will also be made to provide an overview of the technical aspects which prevent the two countries from finding a common solution. Finally, Sudan's role in the conflict is highlighted as recent political developments offer an opportunity for both Egypt and Ethiopia.

## I. Persistent crisis around the GERD project

### A. Egypt faced with a *fait accompli*

The construction of the dam remains at the heart of a diplomatic dispute involving principally Ethiopia and Egypt.

Egypt remains particularly critical of the construction of the dam, claiming it would reduce its legitimate share of the Nile waters, and thus threaten its water security. At a press conference in 2018 concluding a two-day summit in Cairo, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed was even asked by President Al-Sisi to swear to god that the dam would not harm Egypt. "I swear to god, we will never harm you" Prime Minister Abiy repeated in Arabic<sup>1</sup>. However, the construction of the Ethiopian dam is not only a matter of national security, as many Egyptian authorities have claimed, but essentially a matter of life or death. Egypt's media continue to state that military intervention could stop its completion, but the dam is now very much a reality.

Although the project is five years behind schedule, work on the dam has advanced and is almost finished. Addis Ababa has also reiterated on many occasions that the dam will not harm downstream countries once the reservoir is filled. According to recent statements by the Ethiopian Minister for Water, Irrigation and Energy, the construction of the dam is 70% complete and the filling of the reservoir should start during the 2020 rainy season (June-September).

### B. Tripartite negotiations deadlocked

In May 2012, a year after the official launch of the dam project, the three Blue Nile states, Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt agreed to establish a Panel of Expert to review the GERD design and provide a transparent assessment of the benefits and impacts on the two downstream countries. For a year, the ten experts—two from each of the three countries and four international experts selected by the six national experts—held six meetings and conducted four field visits to the site. Yet despite reporting a number of benefits to downstream countries, the International Panel of Experts that examined the dam called for "a more detailed assessment of the magnitude and extent of the trans-boundary impacts"<sup>2</sup>.

It took a further two years for the three Blue Nile countries

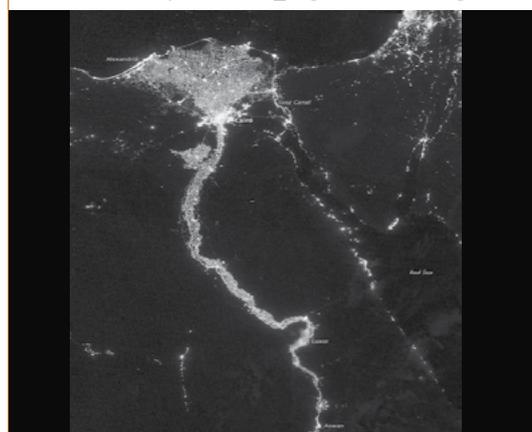
to sign a Declaration of Principles which emphasized the need for cooperation and compromise on sharing Nile resources. Under the provisions of the signed Declaration of Principle, and on the basis of the Panel's recommendations, two consultants were selected to conduct a more comprehensive assessment. BRL Ingénierie (BRLi), a French consulting group, and Deltares, a Dutch research institute for applied research in water and subsurface, were commissioned to study the potential effects of GERD operations. However, little progress was made towards diffusing the tensions between the Blue Nile's riparian countries. By September 2015, the Dutch institute withdrew from the study stating that "the conditions imposed by the three countries and BRLi did not provide sufficient guarantee for an independent high-quality study to be carried out"<sup>3</sup>. Deltares never shared details on what it meant by the 'conditions'. Shortly after, a French engineering firm, Artelia, was selected to undertake the impact study with BRLi.

Notwithstanding efforts to reach some sort of consensus, the parties never agreed on a single impact study. Aggressive rhetoric from both sides and historical mistrust have raised tensions over this project and brought technical discussions to a halt. In light of the deadlock in these negotiations, in 2017 Egypt submitted a proposal calling for World Bank mediation which was refused by Ethiopia. A year later, the three countries re-opened further rounds of discussions, but again it was in vain. The reports being non-binding, the three countries' representatives met many times without reaching a final agreement.

Building a consensus amongst the three Blue Nile countries over a final 'comprehensive' impact study has proven difficult, and until now still unattainable. Meanwhile, Ethiopia has refused to delay the construction of this pillar of its growth and development strategy. Discussions have remained deadlocked for years now, and as the filling phase approaches, each country continues to reaffirm its own vital interests.

## II. The Egyptian perspective - a smart power strategy

Nile River Valley and Delta\_ night satellite image, 2012



Source : earthobservatory.nasa.gov

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ozKlNxdgePE>

2. [https://www.internationalrivers.org/sites/default/files/attached-files/international\\_panel\\_of\\_experts\\_for\\_ethiopian\\_renaissance\\_dam\\_final\\_report\\_1.pdf](https://www.internationalrivers.org/sites/default/files/attached-files/international_panel_of_experts_for_ethiopian_renaissance_dam_final_report_1.pdf)

3. [https://www.africa-confidential.com/article-preview/id/11690/Dam\\_provocations](https://www.africa-confidential.com/article-preview/id/11690/Dam_provocations)

Cairo is worried about the expected impact on flow downstream. 98% of the Egyptian population lives on the banks of the Nile and it provides 95% of the water consumed.

Egypt owes its survival to the annual flooding of the Nile and the resulting deposit of fertile silt. The country depends entirely on the flow of the Nile river, a source of freshwater for more than 90% of the population who live within twelve miles of the river. Most Egyptian towns and cities were founded along the banks of the river and in the Nile Delta. Therefore, the priority, and challenge, for the Egyptian authorities is to ensure that the dam will not drastically reduce the water flow once it starts operating.

Egyptians firmly believe they have more rights to the Nile waters than any other country. In fact, the third sentence in the preamble of Egypt's 2014 Constitution is Herodotus' famous quote: "Egypt is the gift of the Nile". Article 44 of its Constitution states that "the State shall protect the River Nile, preserve Egypt's historical rights thereto (...)"<sup>4</sup> Egypt has historic rights to the river<sup>4</sup>.

Egypt supports its legitimate claims through international conventions signed in the early years of the twentieth century when most riparian countries were still not independent. Following the announced construction of the GERD, Egypt combined a hard power and soft power strategy to dissuade Ethiopia from pursuing the project. In recent years, Egypt has faced the fact that the GERD has been built and will soon start operating and has since concentrated its smart power efforts on trying to reach an agreement with Ethiopia on the filling period.

### A. Hard power and security approach

The Nile waters are closely linked to security in Egypt, and throughout the years, Egyptian leaders have tried to guard against threats on the river. Many Egyptian press articles have highlighted Egypt's military capacities and the point that the GERD constitutes a real national security threat. One former Egyptian cabinet minister<sup>5</sup> said the Egyptian authorities had done little to raise Egyptians' awareness of what the project means in reality, and instead focused on high-intensity diplomacy. Keywords used in their speeches include threat, war and national security, highlighting Egypt's security approach to the matter. As Abdulrahman (2018: 138) states, "the flow of the Nile has been considered a security matter and its obstruction a threat to the people of Egypt".

Indeed, the Nile waters dispute is such an essential element of Egypt's foreign and national policy that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website contains a section called "Egypt in Africa" which states that "Egypt seeks to reinstate its historic role in the continent through a strategic vision" and includes six important interests. Four of them

4. Article 44 of the 2014 Constitution states: "The state commits to protecting the Nile River, maintaining Egypt's historic rights thereto, rationalizing its benefits, not wasting its water or polluting it. The state shall also protect groundwater; adopt necessary means for ensuring water security, and support scientific research in that regard." Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 2014, unofficial translation, January 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.sis.gov.eg/Newvr/Dustor-en001.pdf>.

5. International Crisis Group interview, Cairo, June 2018.

are directly linked to the construction of the dam and the importance of maintaining close ties with relevant countries.

### B. Soft power - Nile river related diplomacy

Although Egypt has adopted a security approach to the Nile river dispute, it has combined its 'aggressive' rhetoric with a soft power strategy. The construction of the GERD has re-activated the river-related diplomacy first started during Gamal Abdel Nasser's presidency (1954-1970).

Aware of his country's high dependence on the Nile and the political changes in Africa after the Second World War, President Nasser started developing and strengthening relations with other African countries, earning support for the country's positions. However, Egyptian relations with several African countries deteriorated during Anwar al-Sadat's presidency. During the Ogaden War (1977-1978) between Ethiopia and Somalia, Egypt sided with the latter. Since Egypt under al-Sadat was aligned with the U.S., it claimed that its support to Somalia was part of Cold War geopolitical rivalries, as Ethiopia was governed by the Soviet-backed government of Mengistu Haile Mariam.

The almost-absent relations between Egypt and the rest of the African countries was also notable during Hosni Mubarak's long presidency. Egypt's relations with Ethiopia were further strained when diplomatic relations were cut off after Mubarak suffered an assassination attempt in Addis Ababa in 1995. Although Islamist militants claimed to have attempted to kill the Egyptian president, he accused Ethiopian authorities of having supported them. In response, Egypt sided with Eritrea in its secession process.

In this context, the 2011 announcement of the dam's construction came at a critical time. Egypt-Ethiopia relations were tense, Egypt was largely disengaged from regional diplomacy and it had frozen its participation in the Nile Basin Initiative. It is evident that the popular uprising in 2011 in Egypt that toppled Hosni Mubarak was key in allowing Ethiopia to make substantial progress on the GERD without fearing any fierce opposition. At a youth conference held in Sharm-el-Sheikh in December 2019, President al-Sisi stated that "no one can snatch food from you if you are strong", referring directly to the dam project.

During the short presidency of Mohamed Morsi, Egypt did not have a clearly defined strategy to stop the construction of the dam or, at least, to negotiate with Ethiopia. Although some Egyptian politicians called for military action, the country was in no position to declare war on its neighbor. A meeting between Morsi and other politicians discussing the possibility of taking military action or engaging in sabotage operations to stop the construction of the dam in June 2013 was broadcast live, apparently by accident<sup>6</sup>. WikiLeaks also published a cable in which military officials were even considering bombing and completely destroying the GERD<sup>7</sup>. It was also reported that former Sudanese president al-

6. "Egypt: 'All Options Open' in Nile Dam Row with Ethiopia", The Telegraph, 12 June 2013.

7. See WikiLeaks' Global Intelligence Files. Retrieved from [https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/docs/21/211372\\_re-egypt-source-.html](https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/docs/21/211372_re-egypt-source-.html)

Bashir agreed to let Egypt build a small airbase in Kusti to “accommodate Egyptian commandoes who might be sent to Ethiopia to destroy water facilities on the Blue Nile”<sup>8</sup>.

Since his rise to power, al-Sisi has embarked on concerted diplomatic efforts with African and riparian countries, and revived Nasser’s intense ‘water diplomacy’. His strategy is also an attempt to reassert Egypt as a regional power after years of absence under Sadat, Mubarak and Morsi. He has increased efforts to secure a deal with Ethiopia and Sudan, engaging in many tripartite talks that have proven the intense diplomatic efforts deployed by the Egyptian government, aware of the fact that the dam is a reality and cannot be stopped.

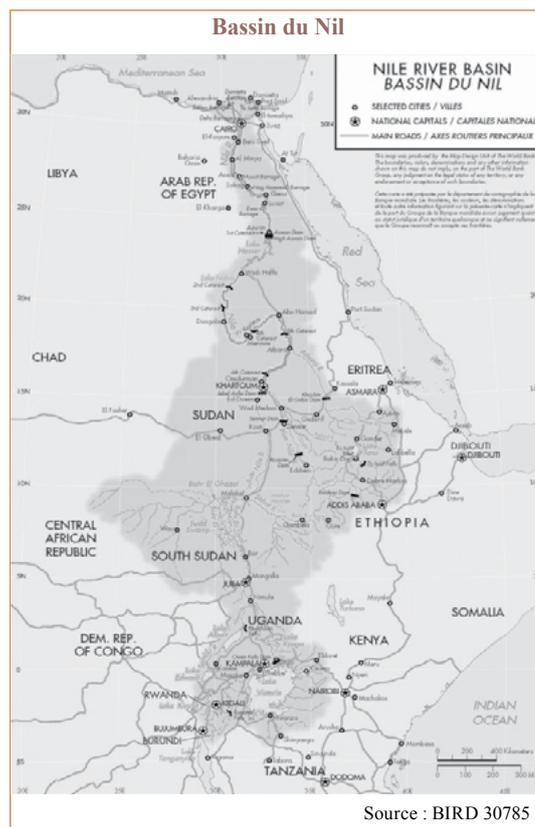
However, just like Nasser’s, al-Sisi’s strategy is not to win immediate support for Egypt’s positions on the GERD, but to secure allies for later negotiations over basin-wide water management. It is the case for example of Uganda and Burundi. Initially, Uganda backed the Ethiopian position and stated upstream countries’ rights to benefit from the Nile waters. However, Egypt increased its diplomatic efforts and financed projects in Uganda to help curb the invasive hyacinth weed on Lake Victoria which impedes fishing and managed to get Entebbe’s support. During Egypt’s term on the U.N. Security Council, it offered Burundi and the DR Congo help when there were calls for sanctions targeting their leaders. Aware of Ethiopia’s close ties to Kenya, the Egyptian president engaged in a counter-balancing strategy and engaged in many talks with Uhuru Kenyatta.

### III. Ethiopia’s Perspective

Faced with a *fait accompli*, Egypt has to witness and somehow accept that its historical monopoly over the Nile waters is evaporating. Nevertheless, at the source of the Blue Nile, Ethiopia is determined to advance this vital project for its development. The GERD project has a capacity of 6,000 megawatts of power. Ethiopia hopes the dam will allow it to meet the needs of its population and transform this second most populous country in Africa into a key regional and continental energy center.

#### A. ‘Historic rights’ vs. ‘shared benefits’ and ‘equitable use’

The increasing tensions between Ethiopia and Egypt over the GERD’s construction have fed into speculations about a major regional conflict over the Nile waters. In its essence, the critical situation surrounding the Dam demonstrates new regional realities and modern dynamics of power and influence around the Nile Basin.



The Nile and its tributaries flow through eleven countries: Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. For centuries, Egypt has enjoyed almost unrestricted use of all the river’s water.

A few years after its independence from Great Britain, Egypt signed an agreement in 1929, in which both parties recognized that Egypt has historical rights to the Nile waters, endowing it with a veto power over any construction project on the river. The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty also granted Egypt an annual allocation of 48 billion cubic meters of Nile waters, and 4 billion cubic meters to Sudan out of the estimated average annual yield of 84 billion cubic meters at that time.

Three decades later, after Sudan’s independence, a bilateral agreement between the two downstream countries was signed in 1959, ignoring again the rights of the other riparian states. It reinforced the provisions of the 1929 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty and increased the annual allocation of both Egypt and Sudan to 55.5 billion and 18.5 billion cubic meters respectively. These agreements had effectively limited the benefits from the Nile waters to only two states.

Dubbed the ‘Water Tower of Africa’, the Ethiopian highlands supply over 80% of the Nile’s waters, yet, the country had no share from the river. It was therefore only a matter of time before the upstream states demanded reconsideration of their own water and energy needs. As the decolonization process rapidly unfolded, the newly-independent upstream Nile states argued in favor of a new and more inclusive legal instrument for the governance of the Nile River Basin.

It was in 1997 that the UN Water Convention challenged the accepted idea of ‘historic rights’, and emphasized the

8. Ibid.

notions of ‘shared benefits’, ‘equitable and reasonable utilization’, and ‘prevention of causing significant harm’. This meant that all riparian states were entitled to share the benefits from the Nile’s waters, but for the two downstream countries, especially for Egypt, it equated with renouncing their historical rights for the sake of a co-development agenda.

### **B. New regional realities and modern dynamics of power and influence around the Nile Basin**

In 1999, the World Bank supported the Nile Basin Initiative. An all-inclusive basin wide initiative, with the exception of Eritrea, “to achieve sustainable socioeconomic development through the equitable utilization of, and benefit from, the common Nile Basin water resources». By joining, Egypt had actually demonstrated it could be willing to open the debate on what it considered to be its ‘historical rights’ over the Nile waters. A decade of negotiations between riparian states had resulted in the drafting of the Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA). The text was ready for signature on May 2010.

Egypt and Sudan categorically refused the text, notably the wording of Article 14, which states: “Nile Basin States recognize the vital importance of water security to each of them. The States also recognize that the cooperation management and development of waters of the Nile River System will facilitate achievement of water security and other benefits. Nile Basin States therefore agree, in a spirit of cooperation: (a) to work together to ensure that all states achieve and sustain water security; (b) not to significantly affect the water security of any other Nile Basin State.”

The discussion around the provisions of the CFA evolved in a new context. Through the negotiations, as the emerging Nile Basin upstream countries found themselves with more bargaining power, they continuously questioned the legitimacy of any prior rights. Also, in light of their modern development needs, they firmly reasserted their right to establish a more equitable basis for water sharing. The balance had clearly shifted upstream.

The rift over the Nile CFA was just the latest manifestation from downstream countries to acknowledge the fundamental shifts that are reshaping the dynamics around the Nile Basin. Tensions rose over the definition of ‘water security’. To downstream states it meant that their historical rights based on the pre-existing treaties which granted them 90% of the river’s waters should remain untouched<sup>9</sup>, but to upstream states, ensuring water security would require a re-definition of their own rights on the basis of an equitable use and a shared benefit amongst all Nile riparian states.

Without waiting for everyone’s approval and adhesion, four countries – Ethiopia, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda - signed the Nile CFA in 2010, and were later joined by Kenya and Burundi.<sup>10</sup> They thus granted themselves the right to consider and conduct projects along the river without the

consent of downstream countries. Egypt and Sudan never reached an agreement on the CFA with the other Nile countries.

With a large potential of 30,000 megawatts hydropower, Ethiopia had long planned to develop its energy production capacity. This has even formed the basis of a once fruitful cooperation between Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt. In 2003, under the Eastern Nile Technical Regional Office (ENTRO) of the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), cooperation between the three Blue Nile countries actively advanced around a Joint Multipurpose Project (JMP). The Council of Ministers of water resources of the Eastern Nile countries (ENCOM) had even commissioned a study to identify opportunities for joint investments, the first time that collective action was really taken in the Nile basin. Expectations were very high. A much smaller version of the GERD, in its same location, called the Border Dam was seriously discussed and considered under the JMP<sup>11</sup>. However, with tensions reaching their peak after the signing of the Nile CFA by upstream countries, ignoring Egypt’s reservations, and shortly after, Mubarak’s toppling in the midst of Egypt’s revolution, discussions with Egypt were halted.

### **C. The GERD, a symbol of ambition and national unity**

The Nile is Egypt’s existential lifeline, but it is also a central resource for Ethiopia’s growth strategy and symbolizes its ambition to take its development a step further, becoming an influential regional player. Addis Ababa has long argued that its two neighbors to the north share the entire course of the river without any regard to its needs and that the early agreements that have excluded upstream countries need to be reviewed in light of the countries’ modern development needs.

Recording double digit growth rates through most of the past two decades, Ethiopia’s population stands at approximately 110 million people. The lack of secure and reliable electricity is a major constraint to doing business in Ethiopia, but not the only one. A young working population also requires ever greater access to electricity.

It was the late Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi, who initiated the construction of the dam, called the Grand Millennium Dam when it was first revealed to the public on March 30, 2011. China, Ethiopia’s main trading partner, is financing some \$1.8 billion for the turbines and other electrical equipment while the remaining \$3 billion are to be financed by Ethiopians themselves via government-issued bonds, and the second Renaissance Dam Bond for Ethiopians in the diaspora.

The authorities have presented this project as a centerpiece, a decisive national project that will revive the country’s glorious past. In the national psyche, the dam is a symbol of national pride in the longest standing independent country in Africa which now aims to not only ensure its

9. <https://search.wikileaks.org/gifiles/?relid=409#searchresult>

10. <https://www.nilebasin.org/nbi/cooperative-framework-agreement>

11. <http://documents.banquemondiale.org/curated/fr/894541468193129830/text/650550PJPR0P110000Final0000Cleared.txt>

energy independence, but also become a regional energy hub by 2030. Ethiopians own the project, it is a national asset, a symbol of unity in a country in need of shared goals to overcome internal flaws and prosper.

#### IV. What are the points of controversy between Egypt and Ethiopia?

##### A. Egypt's demands

As the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) advances, most of the dispute between the Ethiopian and Egyptian sides is now centered around the technical aspects, principally the way in which the 73-billion-cubic-meter reservoir will be filled and the timing of this process. Besides the risk posed to its water supply, Egypt principally disagrees on the suggested three-year period to fill the dam's reservoir.

The areas of contention between Egypt and Ethiopia can be summarized in four main points:

1. Ethiopia wants to fill the dam reservoir within two to three years to run the turbines and then generate electricity, while Egypt requests a period of seven years for filling the reservoir as it would face huge losses otherwise.
2. Egypt proposes to establish an adaptive and cooperative framework for the filling and operation of the GERD, which should be in coordination with the High Aswan Dam in Egypt in order to adapt to the changing hydrological conditions, especially in times of drought.
3. There are fundamental differences between Egypt and Ethiopia over the annual flow of water that Egypt should receive and how to manage the flow during droughts. Egypt wants 40 billion cubic meters of water to be released annually to ensure that the High Aswan Dam reservoir remains at sustainable levels. Ethiopia maintains that only 29 to 35 billion cubic meters of water is to be released per annum.
4. Egypt would also like to establish a permanent joint coordination mechanism, but Ethiopia maintains that using its resource within its territory for development is a sovereign right and that it cannot allow Egypt permanent oversight.

Ethiopia says it is continuously coordinating with the two downstream countries and that it has made enough concessions. This has intensified the disagreement between both parties. Political rhetoric between Egypt and Ethiopia escalated during the past years. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has recently stated that «the Egyptian state, with all its institutions, is committed to protecting Egyptian water rights in the Nile waters.» In Ethiopia, echoes of a possible Egyptian attack neither discourage nor stop the finalization of the grand national project. The east African emerging energy hub is ready to mobilize one million people to defend its dam.

To avoid escalation towards a military conflict over the Nile waters, it seems that Egypt is only left with very few options that are mostly related to its own water management strategy. The three countries will gain nothing by intensifying

their verbal attacks against each other.

##### B. The pivotal role of Sudan in the GERD negotiations

Khartoum is at the confluence of two Niles. While Sudan shares Egypt's concerns over the GERD's impact on the downstream countries, the benefits from the energy supply promised by Ethiopia once the dam is finalized is also a big stake for its own development requirements. Sudan maintains that its prime responsibility is to protect its own interests.

With a somewhat bipolar foreign policy during Al Bashir's final years, tensions with Egypt mounted over the GERD with Cairo often demanding that Sudan be excluded from the negotiations because of its impartiality. In his last years in power, Al Bashir revived Sudan's claims of sovereignty over the Halayeb Triangle, worsening the dispute with its northern neighbor. This was not the only issue. Al Bashir's close relations with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and its strengthening links with Qatar and Turkey through the Gulf crisis, did not help in the least to reassure Egypt over its position in the tripartite discussion of the GERD.

Now the revolution in Sudan and 'change' in leadership offers new opportunities for both Egypt and Ethiopia. For both countries, the transition in Khartoum is being watched very carefully. What happens next in Sudan will have great consequences on the future of the discussions about each country's share of the Nile's water.

#### Conclusion

For several years now, the three Blue Nile countries have been unable to reach a compromise on the sharing of resources in the eastern Nile Basin. Tripartite meetings continue to end in failure. The last time being in February 2020, when the three countries' representatives met in Washington to negotiate a US-led proposal. While the Ethiopian government withdrew from the US-led negotiations calling on the biased US position, Cairo has rejected Ethiopia's views as an unjustified escalation and turned to its Arab League partners for support. In March 2020, Egypt managed to obtain a resolution from the Arab League backing its position. The Arab League statement expressed the Pan-Arab bloc's rejection of "any form of infringement on Egypt's historical rights to the waters of the River Nile" and stressed the need for Ethiopia "to adhere to the principles of international law," noting that "Egyptian water security is an integral part of Arab national security."

On one hand, Ethiopia is conscious of its leverage on the issue, and claims that the Nile waters dispute is an African issue and must have an African solution. Hence, it is most likely that it will keep rejecting every proposal made by non-African actors. On the other hand, Egypt is now faced with a new context in which the lower Nile countries are increasingly challenging its historical monopoly over the Nile waters. Nonetheless, neither of the two countries is willing to make concessions and the stakes for each country's internal stability are extremely high, which makes the possibility of finding a middle ground extremely difficult.

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the author.

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