

Forum: United Nations Security Council

Issue: Regulating the utilization of the Nile river and avoiding possible conflicts

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Introduction

The Nile is a 6,600-kilometer-long river located in East Africa. It flows from the South to the North of Eastern Africa, flowing through; Egypt, Burundi, Rwanda, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia. The principal tributaries of the Nile include the White Nile, the Blue Nile, and the Atbara. The Blue Nile originates from Lake Tana in Ethiopia. The White Nile , arguably, originates from Lake Victoria. These two tributaries converge in Khartoum, Sudan.



The Nile River and The Nile Basin



It contributes to the economic activities in East Africa, such as; agriculture, transportation, and industry. It is also used for providing drinking water and hydroelectric power. As a result, a total of 257 million live in direct proximity to the Nile river. This is about %20 of the total population in Africa. And the UN predicts that the number of people relying on the Nile for daily water supply will double by 2050.

Given the importance of the Nile, it is a cause for conflicts among the countries in the Nile Basin. The main reasons for these conflicts are; treaties and agreements signed in the colonial era, construction of dams and hydroelectric power plants, and the allocation of water resources.

One of the primary conflicts in the region is about the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). GERD is a project that is on the Blue Nile tributary, Ethiopian highlands. %85 of the Nile's flow flows through this dam. It is planned to be the biggest dam in Africa with a generating capacity of 5.15 gigawatts. It is anticipated to double Ethiopia's power output. The dam's surface area is 1680 km² which is larger than London. The project will stimulate Ethiopia's economy by creating new jobs and sourcing power to %60 of Ethiopia.

The major concern about this project is that the dam could bring drought to downstream countries, those being; Sudan and Egypt. Egypt and Sudan depend on the water of the Nile. Any decline in the flow could cause the arable lands in Sudan and Egypt to become arid lands.

This water allocation dispute is the fundamental cause of the conflict since the interests of mentioned countries are in opposition. There have been several attempts to solve the issue by agreements and fieldwork. Nevertheless, Sudan and Egypt are still against the dam.



Definition of Key Terms

Nile Basin Initiative (NBI)

The Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) is a collaborative endeavor among the Nile's riparian states, aiming to develop the river in a cooperative fashion, distribute significant socioeconomic advantages equitably, and foster regional peace and security. It was established in 1999 with the membership of; Egypt, Burundi, Rwanda, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia

Hydroelectric Power

Hydroelectric power is a renewable energy source that involves the conversion of the potential energy of water into electricity. It typically relies on the construction of dams or diversion structures to control the flow of water, creating a reservoir or channel.

Upstream/Downstream Countries

The term upstream countries is used to define countries that are closer to the source of a river while downstream countries are the ones that are closer to the outfall. In the context of the Nile River Egypt is a downstream country while Ethiopia can be considered an upstream country when compared with Egypt since the Nile flows from the south to the north of Africa.

African Union

"The African Union (AU) is a continental body consisting of the 55 member states that make up the countries of the African Continent. It was officially launched in 2002 as a successor to the Organisation of African Unity" (African Union). The African Union has initiated negotiations between; Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia on the conflict of the GERD.



Riparian States

Riparian states refer to nations that share a common boundary with a river, lake, or other water body. These countries have legal rights and responsibilities regarding the management, use, and protection of the water resources within their borders. Riparian states often engage in negotiations and agreements to address issues related to water allocation, conservation, and environmental management in the shared watercourses.

Background Information

The utilization of the Nile river is a multifaceted issue that has been a controversial topic throughout the history of Africa. Water politics is placing water in the larger context of interactions between nation-states sharing disputed waterways as well as between the state and society. The influence of drought and climate change illustrates the evidence of localized conflict over water.

Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) is a hydropower project located in East Africa, along the Blue Nile River. With a wealth of water resources at its disposal and rising energy needs, Ethiopia saw a chance to capitalize on the Blue Nile's potential to boost its economic development. As a result, work on what would eventually become Africa's largest hydroelectric complex began in April 2011.

While this project developed, Egypt had concerns, especially about the filling of the dam. Egypt argues that the dam should've been filled in at least 12 years in order to protect the agricultural lands and not bring aridness to Egypt.

Sudan is geographically placed between Egypt and Ethiopia. Since 2023 Sudan has been in a civil war and prior to that, there were severe inner conflicts. Due to their destabilized political landscape and their geopolitical location, Sudan's perspective is more neutral compared to Egypt. They acknowledge that the dam



would be beneficial both for Ethiopia and surrounding riparian states in the means of stimulating the economy of the Nile Basin, providing energy, and preventing floods. However, they are also aware of the limitations that this dam could bring.

Diplomatic negotiations continue, aided by international mediators and backed up by technical studies. The GERD remains a central point of regional diplomacy and hydrogeopolitics. In the quest for sustainable development and harmonic regional collaboration, the urgency of forming an agreement among Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan looms large, as they traverse the complexities of water resource regulation in the current day.

In March 2015, Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan signed a Declaration of Fundamentals (DoF) outlining the fundamentals of their GERD partnership. It established common understanding and mutual benefit bringing a sense of trust between the states.

The Tripartite National Committee (TNC), holds meetings with the assistance of technical experts to discuss issues such as the filling operation and water allocation.

The African Union (AU) facilitated negotiations on GERD conflicts between Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan. The AU has mediated several rounds of negotiations, with the goal of reaching a comprehensive agreement on the dam's filling and operation.

Similar conflicts: Tigris and Euphrates Dispute

The Tigris and Euphrates rivers are that both originate from Turkey. Tigris passes through; Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq. Euphrates passes through; Turkey, Syria,



and Iraq. They have been both crucial water resources for this region throughout history.



Tigris and Euphrates Rivers

The dispute about these rivers majorly originates from Turkey's Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP). The Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP Project), which was originally planned for hydroelectric power generation in the 1970s, has grown into a multi-purpose project with socioeconomic/rural development components since the 1980s. By 2019, Turkey built 19 new dams and hydroelectric power plants. This caused a similar conflict by causing a decline in the flow of the rivers and therefore affecting the water availability in Iraq and Syria. This project aims to harness water for agriculture and hydropower but has faced criticism for its ecological impact. Turkey's stance on water rights, viewing the rivers as national resources rather than international ones, has led to fluctuating water flows into Iraq, intensifying its water shortage.



Iraq's historical and cultural ties to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers underscore the severity of its current water crisis. With water levels dropping dramatically due to climate change and Turkey's extensive dam projects, Iraq faces a dire future. The United Nations ranks Iraq as one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change, predicting significant reductions in freshwater availability by 2050.

The future of Turkish-Iraqi relations remains uncertain, with water likely to remain a contentious issue. Iraq's inability to effectively manage its water resources or influence Turkey's decisions puts it at a disadvantage. Without significant changes in governance and water management, Iraq's water crisis is set to worsen, further complicating its relationship with Turkey.

Additionally, Syria is also stricken by the construction of the dams and faces the same consequences and risks with Iraq. However the internal crisis of Syria prevents Syria from prioritizing the water allocation dispute, considering the diplomatic relations of Syria and Turkey, Syria is in a vulnerable position to strongly oppose Turkey.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Egypt

Egypt is the country that is most affected by the GERD conflict. More than 90 percent of Egypt's land area is deserted, therefore, the Nile is the most crucial source of water in the country. As a result, the decline in the flow of the Nile can damage the economic and daily activities severely.

Agriculture is particularly vulnerable, as the Nile irrigates approximately 3.3 million hectares of land. This agriculture contributes to the country's food security. A reduced water flow could cause a decrease in crop yields, intensifying food scarcity and potentially leading to increased food prices.



The Aswan High Dam in Egypt supplies around %10 of the country's power. With the construction of the dam, the hydroelectric power generation in Egypt is also at risk. This could force Egypt to seek new energy alternatives that are often more expensive.



The Aswan High Dam, Egypt

In summary, the GERD conflict has profound implications for Egypt, threatening its agriculture, power generation, daily water supply, public health, and regional politics.

Ethiopia

The GERD is a milestone in the economic development of Ethiopia. It enables Ethiopia to decrease its dependence on fossil fuels that are often imported from other countries. It also helps with the industrialization of the country and is expected to create thousands of jobs.

The electricity access is limited in the rural areas of Ethiopia. With the construction of the dam, many households will have the chance to access electricity. Additionally, the surplus of electricity can be exported to neighboring countries.

In conclusion, the GERD is critical to Ethiopia because of its ability to stimulate economic growth, generate much-needed power, boost national pride, bring



environmental advantages, and foster regional collaboration. The dam is an important part of Ethiopia's ambition to raise living conditions, attain energy security, and emphasize its development goals on the African continent.

Sudan

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) is a major issue for Sudan, with both potential benefits and drawbacks. Sudan sees the GERD as a chance to improve its water management, as the dam could regulate the Blue Nile's flow. This means less extreme flooding and droughts, which would be great for farming and the overall economy. With more consistent water flow, farmers could rely on better irrigation, leading to higher crop yields and food security.

Electricity is another benefit. Sudan could get access to cheaper and more reliable power from Ethiopia, which would help address its energy shortages. This could lower energy costs, boost industrial growth, and reduce reliance on fossil fuels. The GERD could also help with sedimentation issues in Sudanese dams like Roseires and Sennar, extending their lifespan and improving their efficiency.

During the GERD's filling period, Sudan fears a decrease in water flow, which could bring drought to the country's arable lands. Any significant decrease in Nile water would affect crop yields and food security. There are also worries about dam safety. If the GERD were to fail, the resulting floods could devastate communities downstream in Sudan.

United States

The U.S. involvement in the GERD dispute began to intensify in 2019 when the Trump administration offered to mediate the ongoing negotiations between the three countries.



In November 2019, the U.S. Treasury Department, alongside the World Bank, facilitated a series of talks in Washington, D.C. These negotiations aimed to create a framework for the filling and operation of the dam that would be acceptable to all parties involved. The U.S. pushed for a balanced agreement that would allow Ethiopia to generate electricity while ensuring sufficient water flow downstream to Sudan and Egypt.

By early 2020, the U.S.-mediated talks produced a draft agreement outlining technical and legal guidelines for the dam's operation. However, Ethiopia did not sign the agreement, citing concerns over sovereignty and the perceived fairness of the proposed terms. Ethiopia's withdrawal from the negotiations led to increased tensions, with the U.S. expressing disappointment over Ethiopia's decision.

Under the Biden administration, the U.S. has continued to advocate for a diplomatic resolution to the GERD dispute. The current stance emphasizes support for African Union-led negotiations, reflecting a shift towards a more multilateral approach. The U.S. has offered to assist in facilitating dialogue when necessary. The emphasis is on achieving a sustainable agreement that respects the interests and rights of Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan, while promoting regional stability and cooperation.

Nile Basin Initiative

The NBI provides a platform for dialogue and cooperation among the Nile Basin countries. It aims to reduce tensions and foster mutual understanding and collaboration on water resource management. In the context of the GERD, the NBI has facilitated discussions to help Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan find common ground and address their concerns regarding the dam's impacts.

The NBI conducts technical studies and provides scientific data that help member countries understand the potential impacts of various water management projects, including the GERD. These studies are intended to inform decision-making



and support the development of cooperative solutions that consider the needs and interests of all basin countries.

One of the NBI's fundamental principles is the equitable utilization of the Nile's water resources. In the GERD dispute, the NBI advocates for a balanced approach that allows Ethiopia to pursue its development goals through the dam while ensuring that downstream countries, particularly Egypt and Sudan, do not suffer significant adverse effects.

African Union

The AU has maintained a neutral position, not favoring any one party over another. This impartiality is essential for its role as a mediator, as it seeks to facilitate fair and balanced discussions.

The AU promotes the idea that the Nile River should be a source of cooperation rather than conflict. It encourages Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan to view the river as a shared resource that can contribute to regional integration and mutual benefits.

The AU organized virtual summits in mid-2020, bringing together the heads of state from Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan. These meetings were crucial in maintaining open lines of communication and ensuring that all parties remained engaged in the negotiation process.

The AU recognizes Ethiopia's right to pursue its developmental goals, including the construction of the GERD to generate electricity and boost economic growth. At the same time, it acknowledges Egypt and Sudan's concerns about water security and the potential impacts on their own water needs.

United Nations

The UN Secretary-General has issued statements urging the countries to work together to reach a mutually beneficial agreement. The UN views the AU-led



process as crucial, given the AU's regional mandate and deeper understanding of the local dynamics. The UN has provided technical and advisory support to the AU and to Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia to facilitate discussions.

The GERD dispute has been discussed in the UN Security Council, especially by Egypt, which has brought international attention to the issue. In July 2021, the Security Council discussed the GERD situation. During this session, member states urged Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan to continue their negotiations and avoid actions that could escalate tensions. The Security Council did not take any formal action but emphasized the importance of communication and peaceful resolution.

UN agencies, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), have expressed concerns about the potential environmental impacts of the GERD on the Nile Basin countries. These agencies underline the importance of a fair and equitable agreement that ensures water security and sustainable development for all parties involved.

Timeline of Events

2 April 2011	The construction of the GERD started
May 2013	The International Panel of Experts (IPoE) releases a report suggesting further studies to assess the dam's impact on downstream countries.
2014	The Tripartite National Committee negotiations began



2 April 2011	The construction of the GERD started
5 March 2015	Declaration of Principles is signed
November 2019	The negotiations with the assistance of the United States and the World Bank
21 July 2020	The first filling of the GERD is completed
19 July 2021	The second filling of the GERD is completed

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

The UN has tried to assist meetings and send technical support while maintaining a neutral stance on the topic. The UNSC has debated the issue but they have not worked on any resolutions.

There have been several agreements and reports on the issue such as; the International Panel of Experts report, and the Declaration of Principles, that are both mentioned and explained in the background information part of this report.

There also have been efforts of the United States and the World Bank with the purpose of facilitating communication and negotiations. They also have had a neutral stance on the topic.



Possible Solutions

- Establishing a committee which can oversee the operation of the dam with granted authorities from Ethiopia in order to build trust
- Exporting a certain amount of the power that is generated by the GERD to other riparian states
- Overseeing already existing water allocation documents and agreements in order to resolve the complications and creating a comprehensive agreement
- Working on the environmental effects of the dam to reduce the possible danger of biodiversity loss, desertification, and food scarcity.
- Establishing information sharing systems throughout riparian states
- Creating development projects for the Nile countries to reduce dependency on the river

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