Balancing Out the Hydro-hegemon: An Outlook on Egypt-Ethiopian Nile Relations

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Paper prepared in fulfilment of the requirements of a Student Research Competition Award, an initiative of the Department of Political Science at the British University in Egypt, and for presentation at a research seminar held by the Department of Political Science, November 17, 2019
Introduction

The immutable global phenomenon of increasing demand unproportionally to the availability of natural resources pushes the world to continue falling in the dilemma of allocating scarce resources; and north-eastern Africa is certainly no exception to this Malthusian logic. Sharing resources equitably between groups of people is a struggle; let alone sharing transboundary resources. Sixty two percent of Africa’s land mass is covered by transboundary water basins (Verhoeven, 2013; Kimenyi, & Mbaku, 2015), and thus the food-water-energy nexus becomes a central area of conflict considering the “who gets what where when and how” question. Transboundary water basins on the banks of the Nile River hold multiple development potentials for different riparian state, and each state aims to direct its foreign relations to make the best out of its water status to further their individual national interest.

The nature of the Nile River, which runs through 11 basin states, is relatively short in water supply in comparison to other same-sized basins around the globe (NBI, 2012 as cited in Kimenyi, & Mbaku, 2015). This being considered alongside the rising demand on water for development projects and other daily consumption and hygienic uses, the issue of water in the region easily slipped to the centre of the interstate political tension; casting a security issue by default to all riparian states (Cooley, et al, 2013). Water insecurity is considered a direct threat to the livelihood and wellbeing of people within different sovereign boarders, interpretations of any threat to water accessibility is tied to national security of states (Gleick & Iceland, 2018); thus, creating a security dilemma.

1 Harold Lasswell’s 1936 definition of Politics.
Governments are keen to avoid political instability within their sovereign borders; and although instability does not occur as a result of one factor, water conflicts posit threat enough to capture a lion’s share of foreign policy objective of riparian states.

The main focus of this paper is to examine the interstate power relations over transboundary water management along the Nile River basin. Although numerous attempts have been initiated to ensure regional cooperation over water sharing, i.e. Nile Bank Initiative, power asymmetry between downstream and upstream states perpetuate for inequitable water sharing scheme. The paper thus highlights water-power nexus as new water events rise to challenge state’s economic, political and social security.

The paper theoretically approaches the political conundrum between Egypt and Ethiopia which are two dominant contenders on the issue of controlling the flow of the Nile River. This is through the hydro-hegemon theory; to describe the legitimacy of power asymmetry, and through the securitisation theory; to justify the transitioning of low politics to high politics issues during negotiations. The questions here are twofold, in lights of the rising Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), (1) is there a shift in power relations in the region, or is Egypt, the argued hydro-hegemon, still holds her political position among other riparian states despite the hydraulic project in the upstream states that could affect her water flow? And (2) is Egypt ready to find grounds in cooperation and ‘positive leadership’, rather than ruling the region in a ‘negative hegemonic’ approach as historically practiced?

The paper thus argues that there has been a power balancing attempt by Ethiopia through the initiation of the GERD construction. Ethiopia started to show success in leading a counter hegemonic movement through exploiting her growing bargaining power...
since 2011. The instigation of the national project of GERD improves her position against Egypt through geographic advantage; therefore, despite the Egyptian hegemonic blockade of Ethiopia’s Nile Status, Ethiopia has been successful in shifting the regional power relations in her favour. On the other end, While Egypt has failed to continue practicing her hegemonic dominance at an efficient level, as it has historically done to control all Nile projects throughout the basin, Egypt still dominates the hegemonic upper hand on the Nile issues through exploiting different forms of power in the region in comparison to Ethiopia.

Egypt is diplomatically proposing cooperation, however, there is still an underlying reluctance to giving up her the lion’s share of water for equitable sharing agreements. As Egypt views her national security in total regional dominance; which implies a negative form of hegemony. However, Ethiopia’s rise in power is attempting to corner Egypt into becoming a positive hegemon. Egypt must therefore reconsider a multilateral regional legal framework that secure her enough share of water, with a Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) that is not temporary; which will not happen unless there is an agreement on how to ‘fairly’² share the Nile. A new legal security through treaties is important in order to avoid escalation in the conflict.

This paper is divided into two sections. The first section covers a brief conceptual framework on basic terms used throughout the paper; water scarcity, water stress, water security and water conflict. Then moves on to establish a theoretical framework that tackles sub-points including: water-power paradigm, concept of hydro-hegemony and

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² Both states have different ideas of what ‘fair’ sharing of the Nile is. Ethiopia finds an equitable share of water is fair, while Egypt finds a share based on the water status, and water needs as fair.
positive-negative hegemonic leadership, hydro-securitisation and finally counter-hegemonic movement.

The second section of the paper is split to three sub-sections: The first sets a brief topography of the status of water in the region; from the Egyptian narrative and the Ethiopian narrative. The second subsection draws on the nature of the 90-year-old Egyptian hegemony, and the rise of Ethiopian power in the past decade through exploiting different political opportunities to max out on various aspects of state power. Finally, the paper concludes with the last subsection of this paper, suggesting a way in which Egypt could redirect the agenda setting of the region to favour ecological consideration of Blue Nile activity, in order to secure her long-term water share with a more positive regional leadership role.

Section 1

Conceptual framework

To distinguish between basic variables discussed in this paper, there are different terms that need to be clarified through definition: water scarcity, water stress, water security and water conflict.

Water scarcity describes the abundance, or lack, of water supply in ratio with consumption. It is a measurable calculation to volumetric availability of water (Schulte, 2014). Being in a state of water scarcity refers to the incapacity to meet needs of growing consumption due to quantity of water at hand; i.e. Egypt is currently classified by the UN World Water Development in a state of water scarcity/poverty (The United Nations World Water Development Report, 2018, p.12). While the condition of being ‘water stressed’, on
the other hand, takes into consideration the quality of water, as well as its accessibility and environmental flow. This being said, a geographical location could be severely water stressed yet not water scarce\(^3\) (See Figure 1 below).

![Diagram](https://pacinst.org/water-definitions/)

*Figure 1 Retrieved from https://pacinst.org/water-definitions/*

According to Gleick & Iceland (2018), water security indicates a nation’s capacity to ensure sustainable accessibility to water, and ability to be resilient to water-born pollution and water disasters; i.e. flooding/droughts. Water insecurity, therefore, threaten the human security and prosperity, directly or indirectly. An example of direct influence could be lack of water accessibility by the agriculture sector, while an indirect influence of scarcity in water could be natural conditions that affect pricing of food and products, which in turn could amplify to fierce increase in demand amongst people on scarce resources, thus prices and economic condition of state is being put at risk. Securing water to prevent

\(^3\) This could be a result of pollution, there is abundance supply of water, but contamination renders it useless. For more on understanding water risks, and effect of water scarcity on different actors visit: [http://awsassets.panda.org/downloads/understanding_water_risk_iv.pdf](http://awsassets.panda.org/downloads/understanding_water_risk_iv.pdf)
a scarcity is crucial, since water scarcity is presumed to have an impact in development and human security⁴ (Al-Sayyid, & Mansour, 2017).

The term ‘conflict’ refers to contested views of ideas or principles in which different actors support; that is aside from the military understanding of the word (Zeitoun & Warner, 2006). Knowing the measure of intensity over water is a crucial element in analysing rivalry over water control. Conflict and national security are commonly linked concepts in International Relations studies; if a conflict posits a threat to the peace and stability of citizens and national institutions; directly influencing a state’s survival, then it becomes a matter of high politics (Gleick & Iceland, 2018). The following section of the paper tackles whether, or not, a water security or status considered a direct threat to a state’s national security and interest.

**Theoretical Framework**

*Water and Power Nexus*

Power has a role in determining the flow of transboundary shared resources. When it comes to hydro-politics, riparian states showcase different forms of power that is not limited to military strength and full scale war⁵; the circulating political logic that ‘threat to water accessibility is threat to stability and security, therefore a form of war declaration’ is not entirely an accurate depiction of state relations. Zeitoun (2008) argues that water could be a victim or tool of war, but never an enough motive to wage a war⁶. Power

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⁴ Water has an impact on regulating food security through agrarian activity, sanitary health of population, livelihood, energy supplies, environmental and social adaptive capacity to water events and resilience to threatening water conditions (Suarez, 2011, pg. 456)

⁵ This does not deny the state’s desire to have military power to assert its capabilities in the region.

⁶ In Zeitoun’s explanation (2008), he mentions that around 20% of water is used for sanitation, drinking and industry worldwide. While 85% of usage is focused to agricultural use (pg. 20). Agricultural water holds economic value that
symmetry between states plays a role in state’s capacity to control its water share. Weaker states have less negotiation power, less influence or say on their water share and status. While status quo states set the agenda, and impose their water development plan on which other riparian states observe. 

Competition over resource ownership is organised by the rules that the powerful sets to the political game. Power is the ability to influence other actor’s to behave in a pattern that serves the interest of the dominant; even if those actors are acting against their will or best interest (Nye, 2009). Joseph Nye categorised different forms of power, into hard power and soft power (Wilson, 2008). Hard power is the ability to manipulate the physical capacity of the state; such as military force and economic power, in order to coerce other states to submission. In case of power imbalance between states, or in other words ‘asymmetry in hard power’, the stronger state becomes at an advantage in any conflict that arises between both states (Zeitoun, 2008).

Since physical power is not always the best foreign policy strategy, Nye described ‘soft power’ as the ability of a state to persuade other states into doing what it wants without the use of coercive means. A state’s soft power could reside in attraction to its culture, values, national policies, and any other intangible means to shape perception of

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7 Logically, upstream states enjoy the power of status quo countries as they are the gate-keepers and the source of river water in first place. However, power complex and hegemony are more complicated beyond theoretical logic in some cases; like the Nile River, where dominance over the flow of the Nile was presided by a dominant downstream state for decades on end, despite upstream states having a ‘natural advantage’ of their strategic geographic location. Other examples of different basin hegemons are Turkey and Israel, which both have different riparian positions, upstream and midstream respectively (Cascão & Zeitoun, 2010).

8 Hard power tactics include threatening to resort to a military movement, imposing economic sanctions, or using coercive diplomacy i.e. avoiding negotiations, and ignoring pressure to compromise its interest. (Wilson, 2008).
other states; which ultimately gives legitimacy to the state’s negotiation on a global scale by influencing behaviour of other actors through it’s bargaining power\(^9\) (Nye, 2009).

A depiction of power is delineated in Gramsci’s theory of ‘hegemony’, where he explains how the elite use force along with ideology to secure both consent and obedience of the masses\(^10\); economic threat and violence (hard power) on their own cannot rule people, but consent of the led is a *legitimising* factor to the rules set by the hegemon (Bates, 1975; Gupta, 1988). Colin Hay (as cited in Cohen, 2015), summarised three manifestations of power into: *decision making, agenda setting, and preference shaping*. When we attempt to analyse transboundary water management issues, elements of regional strength of a riparian state, hegemonic benefit and power to shape other riparian state’s water policies along with international support are canonical points to address.

*Hydro-Hegemony*

The term ‘*Hydro-hegemon*’ was thus conceptualised on a basin level to describe the predominance of one riparian state over other basin states in determining the transboundary water flow. The hydro-hegemon’s control over the flow, without direct coercion but rather usage of water strategies\(^11\), consolidates it’s ideological and legitimate right in creating conditions where it can unilaterally determine the outcome of competition

\(^9\) Nye, in 2003, later coins the term ‘smart power’ in which he refers to the strategies of combining both hard and soft power in smart policy decisions; in telling other states how to behave regarding a contested issue, and persuading them that a certain course of action is in their best interest (Nye, 2009). This combination is desired in order to mitigate the limits of each type of power when used on its own. Combining both types of power is easier said than done, however, since there are conceptual, institutional, political challenges within the state in order to balance out both power strategies. Wilson (2008) draws more on these challenges in his article "Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power" Follow this link for the article https://www.jstor.org/stable/25097997

\(^10\) Consolidating the hegemonic power and legitimacy as a ‘natural condition’

\(^11\) When a state expresses power beyond which force can bring, it could be described as hegemonic. Since hegemony is a mixture of consensual and intimidating means of controlling resources and setting outcome of competition (Zeitoun, 2008)
or redirect the conflict to political negotiations where it can exploit the regional power asymmetry in its favour (Selby, 2010; Zeitoun, 2008); this happens as the hydro-hegemon sets a normative compliance to its authority and rules (Cascão & Zeitoun, 2010; Selby, 2010; Zeitoun & Warner, 2006). Examples of hydro-hegemons in different regions are Egypt in north-east Africa’s Nile river basin, Turkey over Euphrates-Tigris river basin, and Israel over Jordan river basin. They preside the water politics, and use their power to affect any basin projects by riparian states, accessibility/share of water quality and quantity, and heavily influence cooperation negotiations.

Cascão and Zeitoun (2010) outlined 4 power domains that assess the strength of a hydrohegemon. Those are material power, bargaining power, ideational power and geographical location. Material power represents the ‘hard power’ position; where Economy, military capacity, international support, financial mobilisation, and human capital are well exploited in the political game.\(^{12}\) Asymmetry in material power could largely secure the hegemon position, Turkey for instance exploits her material capacity to build hydraulic projects on the Euphrates-Tigris basin; and seeing the geographical advantage it has as an upstream state, it manipulates the flow to serve its economic project. Egypt on the other hand, a downstream dry state, exploits her location into validating her rights in controlling the projects that relatively weaker upstream states plan to build on the Nile, she has been successful in doing that through projecting an ideological scenario of Egypt’s ‘right to the Nile’ (thus setting the agenda of the conflict),

\(^{12}\) Bargaining power plays on the card of ‘legitimacy’; rooted in agreements, obligations, moral high grounds, international water law and agenda setting. Ideational power focuses on shaping the perception of other states toward the water conflict, thus shaping the issue, setting the agenda and sanctioning the discourse, and justifying deterrence (Zeitoun, 2008)
backed by a bargaining power rooted in international law. This shows how the four categories of power are interdependent and used interchangeably to legitimise a hegemonic position. Figure 2 below shows Cascão and Zeitoun's (2010) hydro-hegemonic configuration of different basins.

![Diagram of hydro-hegemonic configuration of different basins](https://ueaeprints.uea.ac.uk/18873/)

The theory of hegemony defines how a state claims its regional dominance through power related strategies that are not limited to coercing. This supremacy in foreign relations determines if the interaction on transboundary water management beneficiary to other weaker states, or if policy implemented only focuses on the interest of the hegemon\(^\text{13}\). The leadership of a hegemon is conscious of the impact of policy decisions

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\(^{13}\) A good question to address here is if a state has already established a hegemon, why would it contemplate the benefit of other riparian states sharing its basin? To simply respond to this question, it is important to remember
on other riparian state; therefore, could be a positive form of hydro-hegemon; where the hydro-hegemon arranges regional agreements that share benefits with other riparian states, or allows other states to ‘free-ride’ on the advantages of the hegemon’s interest; highlighting an equitable allocation of water for instance. A domineering behavior, on the other end, is a negative form of hegemony; aiming to max out on resource capturing foreign policy under the umbrella of structural inequality. When weaker states are powerless in face of a negative form of hegemony, instability over water relations remains as inequity increases between states (Zeitoun & Warner, 2006).

**Hydro-Securitization**

The geopolitics of water, hydropolitics, has been theoretically exposed to observation of neorealism and neoliberalism thought on structural power relations\(^{14}\), yet very little has been explored on a constructivist approach to hydropolitics (Julien, 2012); constructivism dwells on the idea that ‘norms justify action’, therefore, what is considered a normal discourse in foreign relations is by default considered a legitimate pattern of behaviour by states (Furlong, 2006).

The bipolarity of the cold war kept the concept of security intact to the military scope in interstate relations, this security complex extended by time the cold war ended

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14 Classical IR theories relegate the hegemonic concept to myopic power asymmetry relations; perhaps abusing the ‘hegemony’ concept into scenarios of Keohane’s hegemonic stability theory HST (Menga, 2016).
to different discourses\textsuperscript{15}; including environment, economy, terrorism, and so on (Mustafa, 2007; Al-Sayyid, & Mansour, 2017). A typical realist understanding in resorting to violent conflict and war as a rational policy choice in the realm of international politics; including unabated aggressive policy decisions on water issues (Yohannes, 2009), explains why states have security problems with non-military related issues.

The theory of securitization postulates that ‘security’ is a socially constructed concept; implying that physical threat that demand protection may not exist in first place, but rather constructed by an actor (i.e. state) in an attempt to frame a security issue to give more attention to a subject of interest (Mirumach, 2013; Lenz-Raymann, 2014). The type of attention given is not limited to physical threat only, but to fictional threats that are propagated to audience (Al-Sayyid, & Mansour, 2017). Building a dramatic plot that climaxes with extraordinary measures taken to neutralize the expected danger. Securitization of an issue thus gives a legitimizing factor to extreme political procedures/decisions; owing to the depiction of a state of emergency that threatens the state’s national security and survival (Mirumach, 2013; Al-Sayyid, & Mansour, 2017). Hence, when a state’s national security is threatened, any course of action to protect the state is credible\textsuperscript{16}. This securitization puts some issues on a platform of non-negotiable red zone, and thereby legitimizes any course of action to fend against any conflict on that issue. This capacity to turn low politics issues to high politics issue is the focus of the Copenhagen School where the securitization theory emerged (Warner & Zeitoun, 2008).

\textsuperscript{15} Critical Security Studies entered the discipline of IR with a constructivist approach on different fields.

\textsuperscript{16} Securitization theory is an effective tool in creating persuasion, legitimacy and socially mobilising actors (Lenz-Raymann, 2014)
In light of transboundary water resources; an environmental and often economic related topic, influence on ‘state survival’ is not direct or significant per se\textsuperscript{17} (Mirumach, 2013). There are tools to create a securitization movement according to the Copenhagen School after identifying an issue to securitise. Al-Sayyid, & Mansour (2017) summarized it to 3 mechanisms: \textit{Structural mechanism, Institutional mechanism} and\textit{ linguistic mechanism}. Structural mechanisms are defined in infrastructure that protect the securitized resource location; i.e. protection of dams, or protection against contamination. Institutional mechanism justifies the importance of allocating states resources to protect the targeted issue, institutional mechanisms include having military representatives, foreign affairs missions for interstate agreements on contested transboundary resource, and finally, the linguistic securitization of an issue; where narratives are drawn from depicting news and official publications in lights of danger, urgency and threat of using violence.

Securitising the water discourse is a tool of powerful states that have the physical, institutional and linguistic capacities to influence other weaker riparian states. Being a regional hydro-hegemon, the capacity to coerce other states into uneven share of water agreements, while concurrently securitizing the water position at an international level to pile consent on using harsh and unfair politics in the region is a strategic form of

\textsuperscript{17} Al-Sayyid, & Mansour (2017) emphasize that ‘water wars’ have been referred to as a possible drive to a 3\textsuperscript{rd} world war in future, and is rising on the international agenda of concern. As the Malthusian concept of water scarcity in ratio to growing population sizes is an issue, and needless to mention water’s contribution to human wellbeing, health and development. National security could be potentially threatened in case of extremely deteriorating ecological condition. But then again, if political ecology is the main concern of states, security cannot be limited to transboundary water conflict, but to every geographically ecological struggle worldwide. Who determines if water is a primary security threat while deforestation, for instance, is not? The answer is Politics, and that is the postulation of the securitization theory. Certain actors determine which issues go on the security agenda and which ones do not according to different complexes of underlying interests.
securitization\(^{18}\) (Al-Sayyid & Mansour, 2017). Zeitoun et al (2006) referred to securitization as one of many hegemonic ‘compliance-producing mechanisms’; upgrading the water conflict to national-security matter to silence criticism to hegemony’s “thought control”\(^{19}\), and to downplay certain issues in the region (Cascão, & Zeitoun, 2010). The Nile water conflict, is on the vanguard of north-eastern African politics. The asymmetric distribution of power alongside the securitization of Nile by the regional hydro-hegemon overshadows that fact that water scarcity is not, yet, the problem of the region, but rather the political decision of transboundary water management (Yohannes, 2009).

\[\text{Figure 3 Water Resource Control Strategies and Tactics Retrieved from: } \text{https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/2775653.pdf}\]

\(^{18}\) Strategic securitization refers to linking the hydrology of basin states to economic, political and environmental complex. Forcing water to become an equal element of ‘national security’ (Al-Sayyid & Mansour, 2017).

\(^{19}\) This kind of control allows the hegemon to create what Zeitoun refers to as “knowledge construction”, where popular belief could replace science-based knowledge. In the case of Egypt, the ability to construct knowledge due to her highly securitised position on the Nile share, allows her to negotiate on different, and sometimes confusing scenarios, on her hydro-position to different audiences: including Egyptians, other riparian states, international donors and friends/foes. Thereby manipulating pressure on water conflict. (Zeitoun & Warner, 2006, pg 448). See Figure 3 for reference on Zetioun and Warner’s summary of water resource strategies and tactics.
Counter Hegemonic Movement

Any hegemonic design comes with a resistance movement, or at least an attempt to balance out relations. Power might be an element determining outcome of control over transboundary resources, but status quo is not a “static reality” (Cascão & Zeitoun, 2010); a hegemon might not achieve a 100% unabated consent of other actors. Strategic response to hegemony by different regional actors may seek a balancing outcome to the power asymmetry. One of the anti-hegemony tactics of a weaker state could be playing on bargaining power, or exploiting its political options (Zeitoun, 2008).

The remainder of this paper draws the hydropolitical conflict in the Nile Basin; specifically between Ethiopia and Egypt, in the lights of ‘hydro-hegemony’ ‘securitisation’ and ‘counter-hegemonic movements’ to explain the presumed shift in power asymmetry displayed over transboundary water management. The following section draws a big picture of where both states stand on the water conflict.

Section 2

Topography of North-eastern Africa: Nile basin states

The river Nile is the longest in the world, a 6,695km stretch that passes through 11 basin states. It houses land of over 360 million African citizens; prospected to be 850 million a generation from now (Yohannes, 2009). Various springs coalesce together to form rivers, there are two main components of the Nile: First the Blue Nile emanating from Ethiopian

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20 It is important to note that not because a hegemon is in the presiding power position, that other states are automatically ‘powerless’. As previously mentioned, each state has a different degree of power in different paradigms. Also, a negative form of hegemony is usually counter-hegemoned through non-coercive power strategies (i.e. framing, bargaining, soft power, international law, issue linkage) (Cascão & Zeitoun, 2010; Zeitoun, 2008). A hegemon must make sure that its tactical aim does not lead to demise of supremacy.
highlands at lake Tana constitute around 85% of the water body flow of the Nile that ends up on the Egyptian lands towards the Delta (Kendie, 1999). Second is the White Nile from Uganda’s Lake Victoria; it’s the source of roughly 15% of the Nile as bodies of water divert to swamp areas or evaporate on rigid landscapes at arid terrain (Kimenyi, & Mbaku, 2015, pp.7; Kendie, 1999). The Nile’s topography and geographical history inform us a lot on how outcomes of water conflict in the region are determined.

Downstream states, Egypt and Sudan, are both relatively tight on water resources in comparison to upstream states that have variegated source of water entering their sovereign boarders. Egypt sits at the most vulnerable spot on the basin, with having almost 97% of water accessibility coming from the Ethiopian Blue Nile flow. Sudan comes seconded to Egypt with 77% reliance on transboundary water for state nourishment, followed by Eritrea 68% (Adar, 2007). The Greek historian, Herodotus, back in the 4th century observed that “Egypt is a gift of the Nile”, the entire Egyptian civilization flourished by the banks of the Nile as shown in Figure 4 below; the Nile covers around 3% of Egyptian land, yet 96% of her population span around the river.

The Egyptian population is growing at a rapid speed, exceeding the annual increase in production of food. Most of the foreign currency deposits that Egypt earns is spent on food imports (Kendie, 1999). Egypt is water short, and the threat posited by this condition threatens agrarian and industrial production. By the year 2025, it is prospected that Egypt’s water availability drops from 1075 cubic meters in the 1990s, to a mere 620

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21 See Maps in Appendix A at the end of the paper
22 At this point, it is axiomatic that the Nile is a fundamental regional resource salient to development projects, wellbeing of nation, economic factor for agrarian and industrial, a source of energy and a basic life need for civilization prosperity.
cubic meters due to climate and ecological conditions only (Yohannes, 2009). Lowering of water level threaten government revenues, exports, public services, development programs, increased food import, state balance deficit, low economic growth and lower supply of hydroelectricity generated from Aswan High Dam (Kendie, 1999). Needless to mention, the instability within the state between farmers and the government; numerous incidents of protest have been demonstrated for pressuring the government to release water for drinking, irrigation and address pollution issue. Also allow water-thirsty crops to be grown and harvested\textsuperscript{23} (i.e. cotton, rice). A famous incident at Abu Simbel tourist attraction in 2012, where tourists were held hostage by farmers. Multiple other, occasionally violent, protests took place in different cities; i.e. Beni Suef, Minya, and Fayoum (Egypt Independent, 2012)\textsuperscript{24}.

\textsuperscript{23} Egypt tries to implement water management system within her boarders by consulting irrigation experts on balancing the growing food needs vs available water volumes. Egypt’s national policies attempt to manage crop-water consumption by restricting the type of crops legal to grow; based on how ‘thirsty’ the crop type is. (Shokr, 2009)

\textsuperscript{24} This is why any project built along the Nile River Basin is a potential explosive threat to Egypt. In lights of no clear agreements, Egypt expresses her willingness to go to extreme measures to resolve the problem (Kendie, 1999). Quoting the late Egyptian President El-Sadat that water is “the only matter that could take Egypt to war again” (Al-Sayyid, & Mansour, 2017).
The Ethiopian side of the story on the management of the Nile does not fall shorter than Egypt’s. Upstream states\textsuperscript{25} are not as dry as the downstream states are. Ethiopia is the source of the Nile, but rather than struggling for water availability\textsuperscript{26}, she struggles with increasing demand for developing water resource management to reach her production and economic potential (Swain, 2008). Unlike Egypt’s historical development of irrigation system, Ethiopia relied on ‘rain-fed’ agriculture (Yihun, 2014); thus, not utilising the river. Ethiopia has 290,000 hectares of agrarian land; which is only around 11\% of the economic capacity of the country\textsuperscript{27}. The Ethiopian agrarian activity accounts for 40\% of her GNP.

\textsuperscript{25} Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda

\textsuperscript{26} Figure 5 demonstrates a map of Ethiopian population density within her sovereign border.

\textsuperscript{27} Ethiopia has around 2.3 million hectares of uncultivated land, a great deal of untapped potential, with only 1\% of her economy developed (Swain 2008).
90% of her exports, 85% of her population employment (Swain, 2008). Yet the country suffers from frequent contemporary famine, and increased food import.

The population of Ethiopia is the highest in the region; around 86.5 million (Kimenyi & Mbaku, 2015) which is greater than Egypt’s. Like Egypt, on the long-term Ethiopia is to be put under environmental stress resulting from continuous erosion, deforestation and decreasing water availability (Verhoeven, 2013). Achieving self-sufficiency of food production, and mitigating the short coming of the unpredictable water cycle and weather events of her geographic location, Ethiopia aims to focus on water for developmental purposes not geopolitical (Verhoeven, 2013), at least yet.

In terms of physical need of the resources of riparian states, the increasing food demand, aim to develop and secure a stable share of power generated from water are common targets for everyone in the region. No need is more important than the other in a strict sense of the term.

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28 There is a saying that “Egypt is the Nile”, however, the “Nile is not Egypt”. There are numerous historical confrontations between ancient Egypt and ancient Ethiopia on water.
Regional Hydro-hegemon vs Riparian states

*Egypt’s Status quo*

Building on the display of Egyptian dryness, there is logic into why Egypt securitises her water conflict as a threat to national security. Egypt views her national security in the idea of regional dominance. Historical interaction over Egypt’s rights to the Nile built a sense of legitimacy in being in control of basin projects of other states. Cascão (2009) argues that the 1929 and 1959 water agreements allocated privileged water share to downstream
states\textsuperscript{29}; with Egypt securing more share than Sudan even. Besides international law privilege, Egypt was a hegemon on many power paradigms; she enjoyed most prosperous economic strength in the region, she had a geostrategic spot at the centre of international interest; thus, was involved in world politics, and had access to fund, economic relations and international support. Not to mention the military might, and capacity to control the water agenda, implement hydraulic projects, securitise her water stance and setting clear ‘red-lines’ to negotiation topics. A successful 90-year hydro-hegemon; using every tool of hard, soft and smart power to secure her water share.

Consent is also a tool of a hegemon, and cooperation to tame the inequitable sharing of the Nile by promoting socio-economic development throughout the basin was on the foreign policy agenda of Egypt in the 1990s. The establishing of Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) in 1999, the first cooperative step in the region\textsuperscript{30} (Cascão & Zeitoun, 2010). Implementing an institutional mechanism for water conflict, and negotiating with upstream states on new Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) to guide riparian states relations

\textsuperscript{29} The 1929 treaty was signed between Egypt and Great Britain under the colonialization era (Sudan, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania). This treaty naturalised the institutional legitimacy of “historical right to the Nile”; security of water to Egypt was of importance to Britain considering her interests in Egypt. The 1959 treaty was signed after sudan’s independence for the Aswan High Dam project utilisation; it determined volumetric allocation of the Nile to Sudan and Egypt (with Egypt getting the lion’s share). Ethiopia was not part of of either treaties and refuses to concede to the laws they bind (Cascão, 2009)

\textsuperscript{30} There are different reasons that compel a hydro hegemon to seek competitive water control policy than a cooperative one in the region. In the case of the Nile basin, being the regional hydro-hegemon but also the most vulnerable riparian, Egypt finds her interest in cooperative measures; in order to tame the nonhegemonic upstream state’s growing water demands (Cascão & Zeitoun, 2010). Aiming to shift her dominant negative hegemony to present herself as a regional leader to development of all basin states to share the benefits of the Nile. Not agreeing on a CFA is also a tool of a hydrohegemon as mentioned previously in the paper; process of delaying negotiations. It should also be noted that Egypt had a veto power in NBI negotiations. Upstream states revoke the 1929 and 1959 treaties, and vote on finding new legal grounds to build riparian equitable transboundary water management on. Egypt denies through international law aspect the illegality of those documents
were a goal. The negotiations on CFA lasted till 2007, till agreements halted on ratification process\(^{31}\).

*Ethiopia’s Power-Up*

The instigation of the NBI provided Ethiopia the platform to present her disposition on developmental goals. Bargaining power is a fundamental tool to counter any hegemonic power. Bargaining counterbalances the weaker states\(^{32}\). Egypt solidified her non-negotiable stance on water flow through 1959’s treaty. Egypt agreed to receive negotiations through NBI; multilaterally to create the CFA\(^{33}\) (Cascão & Zeitoun, 2010). A very important analysis point here is, the rise of bargaining power of weaker states does not threaten a hegemonic rule unless this bargaining power is backed by shift in other pillars of power too. Figure 6 below shows how Ethiopia gained more bargaining strength, but at the same time, the Egyptian loss in bargaining power was a result of other factors than the bargain capacity of upstream states.

Ethiopia attempted to challenge Egypt's status quo hegemony in many ways since the 1990s. Through Zenawi’s regime\(^{34}\), Ethiopia strived from market-based economy,

\(^{31}\) Yohannes (2009) notes that signing the CFA was halted over disagreement on article 14(B), as it reads an obligation for all states “not to cause significant harm to the water security of any other Nile basin countries”. Egypt and Sudan request a modification to this subarticle to “not to adversely affect the water security of current users and rights of any other Nile basin countries”. The upstreams reject this proposal as they see that it’s an attempt to perpetuate the unfair status quo. He also notes that geopolitics and international donor support influence the agenda setting and negotiation procedure at the NBI.

\(^{32}\) Initially, upstream states were poor on water policy, discourse, knowledge or agenda setting capacities. There bargaining centered around the notions of sovereignty and nationalist right to water; which Cascão & Zeitoun refer to as ‘reactive diplomacy’ (2010).

\(^{33}\) The creation of NBI as a permanent commission post signing of CFA, would benefit the region in capacity to raise fund for development projects, decrease power asymmetries of knowledge, information and legitimacy and bridge the power gap between states on ideational power and agenda setting (Cascão & Zeitoun, 2010).

\(^{34}\) Regarding military strength, the past decade for Ethiopia was full of aid on military stance, from countries like China for instance. This is due to her geopolitical location as she’s landlocked with states that have clashing interests in the region. This paper dwells more on Ethiopian military power and relation to Sudan and Eritrea. “Ethiopia’s Role and Foreign Policy in the Horn of Africa Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/41756936
expanded her international diplomatic exchange, ran studies on potential hydraulic projects with maximum utilisation of the Blue Nile, and attempts at unilaterally implementing projects (Cascão, 2009). Ethiopia also attempted to thwart the Egyptian threat through seeking diplomatic relations with Israel at a time where Egypt-Israeli relations were boiling during the 80’s (Yihun, 2014).

![Diagram](https://ueaeprints.uea.ac.uk/18873/)

**Figure 6**

_The Year 2011_

The status quo was challenged in the Nile basin in 2011; where 2 major events struck downstream states. First, Sudan’s cession into 2 different state, and second is Egypt’s 2011 revolution. Both incidents caught the foreign relations of downstream off guard. The state of Egypt has undergone a series of political changes; not on the stance of the Nile or the CFA, but on the approach to the conflict due to instability within her boarders

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35 The Egyptian response to these attempts were loud and clear, threat of military response to any changes in water discourse was serious. Newspapers condemned Ethiopia and linguistic choices were intimidating to Ethiopia. The extend of propaganda against Ethiopia was massive, that Ethiopia revoked her connection to Israel (Yihun, 2014). Egypt attempted from 1981-1985 to invite Ethiopia for joint proposal on the Nile; proposed around 59 invitations to Ethiopian government for scholarships in agriculture, water engineering, workshops, etc. but to no avail.

36 The once most politically stable and economically strong state was under turmoil of a revolution. Around 2010, Egypt was closely keeping ties with Burundi over the refraining on signing the CFA. Once Egypt got caught up in domestic business, Burundi signed the CFA on Feb 2011 to pledge allegiance to upstream allies.
(Nicol & Cascão, 2011). The minister of water resources and irrigation of Egypt has changed no less than 5 times (Cascão & Nicol, 2016), a substantial change in policy behaviour with riparian neighbours was visible during President Morsi’s term in the office; where confrontation and threat to military resort were used\textsuperscript{37}. At this point, a change in another pillar of power on the hegemon’s side benefited the growth of power to Ethiopia. The decision to instigate the building of the GERD, which was heavily contested before 2011, shows a power shift towards the upstream states; considering also their fund gaining to build larger structures on the Nile.

Ethiopia has been securitising her ‘national project’ of building the GERD, she uses public announcements to denounce fear of military confrontation by Egypt and frames Egypt’s lack of incentive to sign the CFA as a non-cooperative inequitable and delegitimate actor\textsuperscript{38}. All besides allying with other riparian states like Burundi. Ethiopia’s objection to Egypt’s status quo has not been stronger than now. Egypt did lose some bargaining potential, but it’s too soon for Ethiopia to get rid of her dominance in the region. Egypt has been playing on ‘regional integral capacity’; attempting to double the trading routes with Africa, and attempting to strengthen her relations on non-water related issues. Egypt still has very effective allies in the region and global support; seeing that, again, her water status is not an overly stated issue, but rather is a continues problem that will

\textsuperscript{37} One of the famous incidents of late President Morsi’s regime was the accidental broadcasting of a secretive meeting to discuss the state’s foreign policy agenda towards Ethiopia’s GERD plan. The meeting was planned to be broadcasted, but officials were not notified of this information beforehand. The meeting shows potential willingness of Egypt to use covert form of power to supress the rising Ethiopian power. It is argued that this was an intended accident to deter the the Ethiopian government through intentions of coercive means. Watch the live broadcast at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdRHH1Jr-dk&t=264s

\textsuperscript{38} Ethiopian PM in 2005 stated that “the current regime cannot be sustained. It’s being sustained because of the diplomatic clout of Egypt. Now, there will come a time when the people of East Africa and Ethiopia will become too desperate to care about these diplomatic niceties. Then, they are going to act” (Cascos 2009) in refence to Ethiopia’s long lack of tolerance to Egyptian hegemony over water conflict.
not fall into a secondary status in her foreign objectives. Egypt has been deploying former hegemonic tools of manipulation to the situation; including covert missions of reopening offices of Eritrean rebels and attempting to destabilise the Ethiopian regime, and manipulating her knowledge construction mechanism in order to switch sides on debating the benefits and threats of the GERD\(^{39}\) (Nicol & Cascão, 2011). Regardless of all that, the absence of legally binding cooperative measures puts Ethiopia in a unilateral position of action, and it is clearly stated that Ethiopia will further her own ends disregarding of downstream state’s objection to her decisions (Cascos 2009).

**Securitisation of Climate Change and Political Ecology**

Few decades in future and Africa is anticipated to be the most influenced region by changes in climate and extreme weather conditions; that could result in negative economic conditions i.e. famine. (Kimenyi, & Mbaku, 2015). By 2050 sub-Saharan Africa is assumed 10% less rainfall; which could posit a threat to agrarian activity as in Ethiopia which is majorly rain-fed (Brown, et al 2007). The UN announced that Egypt will approach a state of “absolute water crisis” by 2025, considering her current status of being below the threshold of water poverty\(^{40}\) (Gleick & Iceland, 2018).

The current water conflict resolves around the notion of water scarcity, or volumetric water issue, however, no actor on the political arena consider the water stress issue in the region. If quality of water, as well as quantity, get undercut due to human

\(^{39}\) For instance, failure to regulate Aswan dam flows with the GERD is a threat. The rate at which the reservoir fills is contested as a threat. While the hydro-power sharing of the GERD is considered an economic potential to Egypt, and the control of water stored in lake Nasser will result in less water evaporated

\(^{40}\) Egypt sustains a 54 billion cubic meters shortage of water, and requires 114 billion cubic meters of water to satisfy her basic agrarian, industrial and household usage (Gleick & Iceland, 2018).
activities that influence nature; i.e. deforestation among the Nile basin, pollution, climate change, etc. Egypt will be the most vulnerable state\textsuperscript{41}. Especially that dams are not environmentally friendly constructions; they influence the ecosystem, marine and animal life. Cultures, economy, societies are not divorced from nature (Lavers, & Dye, 2019). This section proposes that Egypt sheds light on environmental cooperation, and being a hegemonic actor, securitizing the ecological discourse could rewrite the rules of the game (Mirumach, 2013).

This campaign however, cannot be successful unless Egypt starts paying attention to the water situation within her boarders; on a regional level, she may push for policy decisions that considers the ecological impact\textsuperscript{42}, and direct focus of NBI towards such discipline; the quality of this cooperation, however, should not be ignored (Mirumach, 2013). This approach to water could shift the regional security agenda from ‘equitable sharing’ of resources to ‘benefit sharing’; with focus on ecological politics to push a regional initiative to avoiding a physical long-term scarcity, not only focusing on flow issues.

**Conclusion**

To conclude by answering questions posited at the start of this paper. There has been a balancing movement in the region into a less asymmetric relation due to the rise of upstream states; led by Ethiopia. For Egypt, resorting to full scale war is not a smart foreign policy strategy, however, this does not prevent Egypt from using covert means to

\textsuperscript{41} If, for instance, rainfall volumes lower in the season, other riparian states will fill their need from Nile water in reservoirs; which could eventually dictate a smaller share to Egypt; a dry downstream state. 

\textsuperscript{42} Or invest in technology, initiatives, etc.
display hegemonic power; i.e. destabilising Ethiopia’s regime. Cooperation over benefit sharing of the Nile is not a rejected thought by Egyptian officials, but imposing an equitable water sharing agreement that reduces the volume of water entering the sovereign boundaries of Egypt is a tough pill to swallow for a perceived hydro-hegemon. Egypt finds her national security by default of regional dominance over water control, the new condition of having to live with the existence of the GERD, Egypt could be exposed to potential threat of geopolitical pressures by Ethiopia in blocking the Nile's flow.

The author of this paper argues that future regional integration as a result of cooperation over GERD’s economic impact and NBI regulations could stir politics clear from possibilities of threat in the direction of coercive measures; if Egypt managed to recreate a new agenda in the region focusing the Nile issue on positive regional benefit instead of national security only. Proving the hydro-hegemony theory valid, a hegemon consolidates its power in consent as much as in coercion. The paper suggests that the Egyptian leadership focuses on the long-term looming danger of water-stress due to ecological mismanagement of the region. Which is an untapped issue that requires further studies both on scientific level and analytic political level.
First Map of the Flow of Blue and White Nile through basin states. (arrow points at the contested GERD location) Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TI6VaNG8_nE
Bibliography


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