

# THE GEOPOLITICS OF WATER NEGOTIATIONS SUCCEEDING THE GERD PROJECT IN THE NILE RIVER BASIN: THE CASE OF ETHIOPIA, EGYPT, AND SUDAN

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## Introduction

Water politics has come to be one of the central themes of debate and concern among different academic, political and economic domains in the globalized world. Thus, water geopolitics has sought to understand and analyze how water politics is imagined spatially. Though the Nile River runs through ten African countries, the main conflict over its waters is between Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia. Since Egypt depends on the Nile for its entire water supply, securing the downstream parts of the river has always been one of Egypt's national priorities. The dispute between the two states, Egypt and Ethiopia, is rooted in the legacy of British imperialism in North, Northeast and Central Africa during the 20th century. As Cascão (2009) discussed a declaration from 1929 by London granted the bulk of the water of this area of the Nile to Egypt and Sudan.

However, it has been less than a decade whereby Ethiopia's bargaining power has become much greater than normally acknowledged. To be sure, it is shored up by Ethiopia's geographic advantage as upstream riparian and provider of 85% of the Nile flows. Moreover, it is not until the last two years, where the discourse of water geopolitics moved away from being dominated by ideas like national security and power. Therefore, the paper focuses on the role of power and hegemony in particular, as a complement to the wide range of issues covered in negotiations. By doing so, the article analyzes the Egypt's position as the hegemonic power in the horn of Africa contested by Ethiopia. In order to simplify my argument and analysis, I focused on Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt to explicate the extent of water crisis in the North Eastern part of Africa. To accomplish these tasks,



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a critical geopolitical approach, practical discourse, has been used to analyze the geopolitical implications of speeches of politicians and leaders. Application of critical hydro-politics is thus useful for interpretation of the power plays that grease or block the cogs of the decision-making machinery. Since practical geopolitics describes the actual practice of geopolitical strategy (i.e. foreign policy), the paper look into the country's foreign policy in relation to the changing power relations in the Nile Basin, especially from the onset of the GERD project which witnesses tension among the three countries. Principally, the study attempts to analyze the geopolitical implications of the newly Egyptian president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi on regional water politics and speculated on whether it has reinforced or undermined the regional power of Egypt.

## **Practical Geopolitics of Water Negotiations Succeeding the GERD Project**

### **1. Ethiopia: from “silent partner” to “influential partner”**

From the onset of the project, we found the speech made by the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia at the official commencement, ground breaking ceremony of the GERD project, “We have gathered here today at the largest of our rivers to witness the launch of this great project. It is the largest dam we could build at any point along the Nile. More importantly, the project will not only raise our own power-generating capacity and meet our domestic needs but also allow us to export to neighboring countries and mobilize the resources so necessary for the realization of objectives for our rapid development endeavors, efforts which are already yielding promising results.” The Prime Minister was sure that this project will play a major and decisive role towards the eradication of poverty. The plan allows for the generation of 5,250 MW. After completion, the dam is expected to hold 67 billion cubic meters of water. Equally, the benefits that will result from the dam will by no means be restricted to Ethiopia; instead, it will be clearly extended to

all neighboring states, and particularly to the downstream Nile basin countries, to Sudan and Egypt. There is no doubt that the dam will greatly reduce the problems of silt and sediment that consistently affect dams in Egypt and Sudan. Besides, communities all along the riverbanks and surrounding areas, particularly in Sudan, will be permanently relieved from centuries of flooding. In other words, through ideational power, the Prime Minister assured that the GERD will not only provide benefits to Ethiopia but also offer mutually beneficial opportunities to Sudan and to Egypt.

In addition to this, the government uses the case of International Criminal Court (ICC) as a “bargaining power” to use Sudan as leverage. Following the arrest warrant issued by ICC against Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, in 2009 the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Seyoum Mesfin, said “since Ethiopia does not believe that the latest step taken by the ICC is in the interest of peace and stability in the Sudan, in Darfur or in our sub-region in general, we strongly oppose the ICC warrant against the Sudanese president, Omar al-Bashir.” Here, what the Ethiopian government did for the Sudanese counterparts has a great contribution to the outcomes of any bilateral discussions between the two countries. Indeed, it also helped Bashir to boost his image abroad with Sudan helping to broker a deal in March between Egypt and Ethiopia to resolve a dispute over the sharing of waters of the Nile. Another strategy the Ethiopian government used is during President Mohammed Mursi's leadership, where the Egyptian politicians were caught live on TV proposing to sabotage the massive dam project, known as GERD. However, the Ethiopian Communication Minister, Bereket Simon, downplayed any potential military threat from the government in Cairo. Accordingly, Simon stressed that “Egypt doesn't have firm and justified reason to go to war with Ethiopia. Even if they have the willingness the question is do they have the capacity?” (Sudan Tribune, June 14).

Consequently, to counter Mursi's decision, the Ethiopia's defense minister, Siraj Fegessa announced on August 14, 2014, that it had reached

an agreement with its Sudanese counterpart to establish a joint military force. As Tesfa- Alem Tekle disclosed Ethiopians see the military agreement as a key defense strategy to avert any possible sabotage of a controversial dam project it is building on the Nile, some 40km from the Sudanese border. i.e. it is expected to guard against any potential attacks from Sudanese soil (Tekle, 2014). As stated in the Associated Press, Ethiopia says that the GERD project is necessary to not only provide power for the several contiguous states but to also reverse a British colonial-era law that deliberately divides Egypt from other states through the allocation of water from the Nile. While the Foreign Ministers from both countries met on June 17 in Addis Ababa, Dina Mufti, a spokesperson for the Ethiopian foreign ministry, said of the meeting with their Egyptian counterparts that “Our wish is that they would understand that the construction of the dam is not going to harm them in any way. We have always sought a win-win cooperation and relationship with Egypt” (quoted in Azikiwe, 2013). From these, we can understand that, through its bargaining and ideational power, the Ethiopian government convinces first the Sudanese counterparts and later the Egyptian ones. Indeed, I argue, the final success has been not only from the Ethiopians diplomatic effort but also from the newly appointed president of Egypt, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi who gives due attention to African’s in general and due to the water resource to Ethiopian’s in particular.

## **2. Egypt: from “unilateralism” to “co-operation”**

As discussed, the main shaping element of the conflict history of the Nile River Basin is the historic asymmetry between downstream Egypt as the hydro-hegemon of the basin on the one side and the upstream states on the other (Zeitoun and Warner, 2006). Hydro-hegemony rests on the three pillars of riparian position, power (military, economic, bargaining, ideational, political), and exploitation potential. Despite its downstream position, Egypt has been by far the dominating country in the other two dimensions and has

shaped the discourse and actions on water allocation in the Nile River Basin. This status of Egypt is due to its particularly important strategic geographic position, most importantly from Great Britain in colonial times, from the Soviet Union, which supported the construction of the Aswan High Dam, and the USA. It is also related to Egypt’s high dependence on the Nile waters, with basically no other sources of renewable water (Alan, 2009). Moreover, as discussed in the World Bank report, Egypt has been relatively safe since the down-stream countries have been too weak politically, economically and militarily to use their advantage over the Nile against Egypt (World Bank, 1995).

### **a. The Egyptians objection to the GERD: During the Mubarak regime**

During the Mubarak regime, we saw the Egyptians objection to any water project on the Nile. According to Boutros-Ghali, the former Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs, “national security of Egypt is a question of water.” As Ghali noted, assistance from international organizations and donor countries will be impossible to get “unless we have not only stability but also a consensus among us.” Despite years of effort, however, no formal protocol yet exists among all riparian for a Nile water-sharing plan. Ethiopia is torn by internal insurgency, as is the Sudan. The Ethiopians also have enduring fears that Egypt will misuse the waters of the Nile (Starr, 1991). Moreover, President Hosni Mubarak reaffirmed that “Egypt’s national security is closely linked to water security in the Horn of Africa region and the Great Lakes region.” Through this securitization process, Egypt has promoted a set of mainstream ideas favorable to its position. Simultaneously it has discarded any alternative sets of ideas, such as upstream water resource development. This self-reproducing Egyptian narrative has been, historically, a determining factor in the regional hydro-political relations (Cascão, 2009). Furthermore, under Mubarak regime, Egypt’s water minister called for Egypt and Sudan to have the right to “veto any projects

that may threaten their water security”(Keys, 2011). Accordingly, Egypt fears and considers the GERD a threat to its lifeline, the Blue Nile at Ethiopia’s Lake Tana upon which Egypt depends for over 85%of its Nile water flow. In sum, the Egyptian politicians under the Mubarak regime used their material and bargaining power and use their maximum effort so that Ethiopia will not develop any project on the Nile which might decrease the amount of water flow.

### **b. The Egyptians objection to the GERD: During a one year Mursi ruling period**

The paper argues that the Egyptian foreign policy during the one year Mursi regime was not insignificant towards the GERD, i.e as most viewed it was expected to lead more tension rather than agreeing to seat at the negotiation table. The revolution in Egypt and the toppling of President Mubarak in February 2011 opens the opportunity for a new Egyptian approach towards regional integration and cooperation over the Nile waters. However, until the current President, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi come into power, Egypt had a negative outlook towards the Ethiopia’s dam project. That is to say, the conflict reached its peak in 2013 following ousted President Mohamed Morsi’s threats, calming down later, accumulating in a series of meetings between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan’s ministers of water and irrigation. This heat over the Nile reached its high point when Egyptian elites in a televised consultative meeting that former President Mohamed Morsi convened in June 2013, discussed masterminding political unrest and even a military offensive against Ethiopia (Dersso, 2015).

According to Sadat “former Islamist president, Mohamed Morsi was autocratic from the beginning, listening only to the supreme guidance office of his Muslim Brotherhood group.” Sadat also said, “in some cases, Morsi met with political parties to explore their opinions on certain national issues such as the impact of Ethiopia’s new dam on Egypt’s quota of Nile water, but it was a disaster and only complicated the issue”(quoted in El-Din, 2015). Furthermore, several African states have

rejected statements made by Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi which have challenged the right of Ethiopia to utilize water from the Blue Nile in order to construct a hydro-electric dam. Egyptian leaders under the Muslim Brotherhood-dominated government has responded to the Ethiopian plan with threats of military action including sabotage. President Morsi said of the situation that “We do not want a war, but we are keeping all options open.” Also, he said, “We did not want war but we would not allow Egypt’s water supply to be endangered by the dam.” Though Ethiopia says the river will be slightly diverted but will then be able to follow its natural course, Morsi accused of diverting the water, and Egyptian politicians were inadvertently heard on live TV in 2013, proposing military action over the dam (Sudan Tribune, June 14).

### **c. From objection to cooperation: During the current regime, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi**

Unlike the Morsi’s Presidential period, under the current regime, the conflict calming down, accumulating in a series of meetings between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan’s ministers of water and irrigation. They reached consensus and filed a report to el-Sisi in March 2015, following which the president was set to visit Sudan and sign the agreement. The Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), which met in Khartoum, has called on Egypt to re-involve itself in the activities in the initiative, which both Sudan and Egypt left four years ago in protest over the signing of the Nile Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement by four Nile Basin countries (Rwanda, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Tanzania). Burundi and Kenya later signed onto the NBI , which removes Egypt’s veto power over upstream irrigation and hydro-power projects. It is bound to reduce Egypt and Sudan’s historically protected Nile water share.

Nevertheless, “Ethiopians detailing GERD agreement resurrect uncertainties, thus the Egyptian people need reassurance,” the President el-Sisi said. President el-Sisi held talks with Ethiopian President Mulatu Teshome where both agreed on opening a new page in relations based on con-



confidence-building and achieving mutual interest and benefit. And, Egyptian President el-Sisi said during an interview aired on Ethiopian TV, “We are taking about a new era between Egypt and Ethiopia.” Moreover, the president highlighted, “the peoples of Egypt and Ethiopia deserve a better life and the relations should be better than they are. We are suffering from tough circumstances... We share the same feelings,” el-Sisi said. As discussed, Egypt holds the “lion’s” share of the Nile’s water resources, of 55bn cubic meters, compared to the Sudanese share of 18bn cubic meters. el-Sisi said the current relations seek to remove all Egyptians’ uncertainties and worries concerning the water issue. “We are not talking about the development of life, we are talking about life itself, and we have no other option.” el-Sisi believes. Egypt and Ethiopia need to work together to attain prosperity, development, and sustenance of life in Egypt. The two parallel lines can meet “through negotiations”, el-Sisi pointed out, after years of diplomatic dispute between Egypt and Ethiopia over the GERD project. Finally, He had signed a “good intentions” agreement on 23 March in Khartoum. The agreement sets the principles of cooperation between the two downstream countries Egypt and Sudan, and upstream Ethiopia (Egypt daily news, 2015). Nevertheless, Ethiopians worrying about details would restore previous anxiousness, and “they should be addressed by officials who are keen to find the correct solutions”, el-Sisi asserted. “We are ready to cooperate with love and responsibility,” el-Sisi said. “We are restoring trust between the two peoples after a tough time between Egypt and Ethiopia; let’s take it step by step with the framework that the two peoples are predetermined not to hurt each other.” The Ethiopian’s contribution to the dam is similar to Egyptian’s contribution to the Suez Canal, el-Sisi said, adding that the Canal was funded by Egyptians, and the dam represents hope and the future for Ethiopians. Cooperation between Egypt and Ethiopia has improved after years of political dispute. Egypt’s main concern since the GERD’s establishment in 2011 is its water retaining capacity. Utilizing more Nile water

than any other country, Egypt fears the dam will have a detrimental effect on its share of the river’s water (Ibid).

#### **d. From ideology to pragmatism: Egypt towards “Africanization” project**

During the Abdel Nassir regime, Egypt’s relation to Africa was idealized and instead inclined towards the Middle Eastern countries. i.e the “Arabization” ideology was a dominant figure. However, the election of Sisi as president of Egypt in May 2014, become a major turning point to pragmatize towards “Africanization”. This has been approved by el-Sisi’s frequent speech, “We should not forget our African brothers and we need to turn our future relation to Africa”. Unlike Nasser’s marginalization of Ethiopia, I would say, the current president’s speech has a significant implication for our case study, i.e. water negotiation with Ethiopia especially after the onset of GERD project. As a result, we can conclude that the Egyptian foreign policy takes shape in the African countries, especially the ones that oversee the immortal river Nile. What Ethiopia is doing today and what the Renaissance Dam is going to become will definitely be the torch for the rest of those countries in terms of dealing with the issue of water and dams.

As Amin (2014) reported, in the speech of the new ruler, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi , “there is a true vision of Egypt for Africa.” el-Sisi looks to strengthen Egypt’s African ties with the Nile in mind and he does not deny Ethiopia and its people the right to development, growth, and prosperity. However, with all determination, justice, and trust, he expects Ethiopia not to deny Egypt its right to live. The Egyptian dream of Africa manifests itself within the Africans since el-Sisi spoke to them during his presidential campaign. He told them about his visionary and forward-looking view of the Egyptians’ relationship with their African brothers. According to Amin (2014), el-Sisi’s speech is not structural, but rather pragmatic in its most positive sense of calling the African countries to have a real and serious dialogue concerning their issues. In a departure from the

threatening rhetoric of Morsi's government and determined to restart the tripartite talks between the three countries, el-Sisi in his first meeting with Ethiopia's Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, on the sidelines of the African Union Summit in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea on June 26, reached an agreement to work on their differences regarding GERD and restart the tripartite process.

In August 2014, following the resumption of the tripartite negotiations, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt agreed to commission an international consultancy company to conduct a social, economic and environmental impact assessment of GERD. Alongside, the technical negotiations, the countries launched political level talks. This led to the March 3 meeting of the foreign and water ministers of the Eastern Nile countries of Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia at which the ministers hammered out the details of the declaration of principles. At the end of the three-day meeting, Sudanese Foreign Minister Ali Karti told reporters: "A full agreement has been reached between our three countries on the principles of the use of the eastern Nile Basin and the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam." (Cited in Dersso, 2015). One of the factors that formed the defining context leading to the signing of the declaration of principles has been the emergence of GERD as a new reality and Ethiopia's insistence on addressing Egypt's concerns through dialogue. Ethiopia has been keen for its legitimate right to undertake projects over the Nile for its development endeavors to be recognized. For this, it is backed by the completion of over 40% of the construction of the GERD and 24/7 construction work on the dam. For its part, Egypt, while continuing its engagement with the technical work that needs to be done under the tripartite committee, has sought to secure written political consensus assuring it that no significant harm would result from GERD. While the signing of the declaration of principles constitutes an acknowledgment of the shift in the regional balance of power in favor of Ethiopia, it represents a milestone in Egypt's concerted effort at containing the continuing loss of ground over the hydro-politics of the Nile. Within the Nile Basin Initiative, Egypt's

loss of influence came to light when most of the Nile riparian countries signed the 2011 Nile Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement. The move in the diplomatic power balance in favor of Ethiopia was reinforced when Sudan, abandoning its long-standing alliance with Egypt on the Nile, declared in December 2013 its support for GERD. While the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi finishes his address to the Ethiopian Parliament on March 25, 2015, he called this day for a "new chapter" in relations with Ethiopia, but nevertheless underscored his country's insistence on standing by its rights to tap Nile water. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's speech to the Ethiopian parliament marked the end of the first such official visit by an Egyptian leader in 30 years and comes amid a major easing of tensions over Addis Ababa's controversial Nile dam project. "I invite you today to jointly lay the foundations of a better future for our children and grandchildren, a future where all the classrooms in Ethiopia are lit and all the children of Egypt can drink from the River Nile as their fathers and grandfathers did," el-Sisi told Ethiopian deputies (Egypt Daily News, 2015).

### **3. Sudan: a "leverage" not a "bridge" between "hegemonic power" in Egypt and "silent partner" of Ethiopia**

As Whittington, Waterbury and Jeuland (2014) argued, Sudan has a big stake in Egyptian–Ethiopian reconciliation over the use of the Nile. Since Sudan's agricultural and hydropower interests now align with those of Ethiopia, there seems to be a formal agreement between Ethiopia and Sudan for the sale of hydro power from the GERD which directly depends on such agreements. Due to this reason, Sudan has leverage with both Ethiopia and Egypt to encourage this win–win deal. As discussed, due to its regional power which I mentioned before, the Ethiopian government successfully gets the heart of the Sudanese government particularly the issue of the GERD. After El-Sisi overthrew Morsi, Sudan returned to the NBI. Its new chairman also happens to be Sudan's Minister of Water Resources



and Electricity, Muattaz Musa Abdallah Salim. According to Agence France-Presse (AFP), Salim said at the meeting of Nile Basin water ministers, “I should like to place an appeal to our sister nation Egypt.” Before reaching the historic day of the final agreement, while the Sudanese vice-president Bakri Hassan Saleh attended El-Sisi’s presidential inauguration, he has reaffirmed Sudan’s commitment to the GERD; Ethiopia is also an important strategic alliance for Sudan. Accordingly, on February 18, 2014, the Sudanese foreign minister Ali Karti has criticized Egypt for its handling of a dispute involving the construction of a massive dam project in Ethiopia, which it has vehemently opposed over concerns it could disrupt water flows from the Nile River. Karti said Egypt was further inflaming the situation by making critical comments in the media, adding that Sudan would continue its efforts to bridge the gap between the two countries. “The position of Sudan is clear and we have already called on Egyptian officials to take advantage of the central role that Sudan could play regarding the crisis, but the arrogance of the previous government did not allow them to accept this idea,” he said. From these, it will not be difficult to understand the Sudanese stance towards Ethiopia’s project. To make clear, Karti further said, “If there is a room for a role that Sudan can play then the atmosphere must be clear away from the tensions and the cries over the media that do more harm than good.” As Alebel Gizaw reported for Ethioscoop, the Sudanese president Omer Hassan al-Bashir has pledged that his country will extend the necessary support for Ethiopia’s massive hydro-power plant project. Bashir made the remarks at a symposium of Ethiopian intellectuals held in Ethiopia’s northern city of Bahirdar under the theme “intellectuals on Ethiopia’s imperatives of utilization of the Nile for development”. In his keynote speech, the Sudanese leader said his country supports the construction of the GERD, which Egypt fears it could diminish its water share from the Nile River. Bashir lauded Ethiopia’s contribution to furthering regional integration through energy power. He pledged to push Sudanese intellectuals to jointly work with their Ethiopian counterparts

on Nile River and Ethiopia’s power plant project (Gizaw, 2014, Ethioscoop).

## **The signing of the “Declaration of Principles”: A “paradigmatic” departure**

In this section, I argue that, such a historic event would not be happened if the previous stance of the Egyptian government had not been reconciled and the Sudanese government had not been cooperated in the subsequent Nile water negotiations. The three countries, signed an agreement of principles on the dam, with the signatories promising “not to damage the interests of other states”. Three African leaders have signed an initial deal to end a long-running dispute over the sharing of Nile waters and the building of Africa’s biggest hydroelectric dam, in Ethiopia. The leaders of Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan signed the agreement in Sudan’s capital, Khartoum. As we can see from the Associated Press news agency reports, the three leaders welcomed the “declaration of principles” agreement in speeches in Khartoum’s Republican Palace. Mr Halemariam said he wanted to give an assurance that the dam would “not cause any harm to downstream countries”, Reuters news agency reports. Ethiopia wants to replace a 1929 treaty written by Britain that awarded Egypt veto power over any project involving the Nile by upstream countries. Mr Sisi said the project remained a source of concern to Egypt. He also added, “The Grand Dam project represents a source of development for the millions of Ethiopia’s citizens through producing green and sustainable energy, but for their brothers living on the banks of that very Nile in Egypt, and who approximately equal them in numbers, it represents a source of concern and worry.” “This is because the Nile is their only source of water, in fact their source of life.” While the agreement signifies a sharp drop in tensions, el-Sisi nevertheless signaled that his country’s underlying concerns remained even though he recognized upstream Ethiopia’s “right to development.” He also said Egypt “also has a right to development” pointing out that the Nile “remains (our) sole source of water”.

According to Dersso (2015), the signing of the declaration of principles regarding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam by Ethiopia, Egypt, and the Sudan on March 24 cannot be anything but a paradigmatic departure. As significant as the content of the declaration of principles is, the fact that Ethiopia and Egypt have agreed on the Nile is in itself historic. Certainly, this marks a significant step for both overcoming the long-standing tension between the two countries and beginning a more cooperative engagement regarding the development of the Nile waters. For Egypt, it represents a turn away from the threat of war that risked derailing the talks between the countries for addressing concerns over the impact of the GERD. For Ethiopia, the signing of the declaration by all three countries justifies its repeated declarations assuring Egypt and Sudan that it is committed to ensuring that GERD will have no adverse effect on the two countries. Significantly, the declaration affirms that the trend which emerged in Egypt's policy position since Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's rise to power towards recognizing Ethiopia's construction of the GERD as legitimate.

## Conclusion

The article examined water geopolitics which is engaged in understanding and analyzing how water politics is imagined spatially, by taking Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan as a case study. More importantly, the paper interested to analyze the developments in it and the negotiations over the water-sharing which escalate the situation into transboundary conflict involving emerging dominant states such as the tension between Ethiopia-Egypt over the Nile river basin. Egypt depends on the Nile for its entire water supply, and securing the downstream parts of the river has always been one of Egypt's national priorities. Thus, this paper further analyzes the Egypt's position as the hegemonic power in the horn of Africa contested by Ethiopia. To accomplish these tasks, the paper used a critical geopolitical discourse, practical geopolitics, which has been used to analyze the geopolitical implications of

speeches of politicians and leaders on the other hand. Since practical geopolitics describes the actual practice of geopolitical strategy (i.e. foreign policy), the paper look into the country's foreign policy in relation to the changing power relations in the Nile Basin, especially from the onset of the GERD project which witnesses tension among the three countries.

Following NBI, Ethiopia shifted from 'silent partner' to 'bargaining power' so that it involved through a successive water deal among the nine countries. Consequently, in 2009, the discussions among the Nile riparian are on establishing a cooperative framework agreement reached an impasse. As we already know, Egypt used its 'material power', 'bargaining power', 'ideational power' successfully and remained a hegemonic power for a long period in the region. However, on February 12 President Mubarak resigned and consequently on February 3, 2011 the Prime Minister of Ethiopia Meles Zenawi announced that his government had decided to construct the GERD on the Blue Nile near the Ethiopian-Sudanese border. Interestingly, the two incidents coincided with each other and it is considered as a historic event not only for Ethiopia but also for the members of NBI's. Transforming itself from "silent partner" to "influential partner," Ethiopia challenged the Egyptians hegemonic power. Furthermore, the paper attempts to analyze the geopolitical implications of the newly president, el-Sisi on regional water politics and speculated on whether it has reinforced or undermined the regional power of Egypt. Initially, Egypt did not welcome the GERD project; however, under the new president el-Sisi, Egypt has brought a different water discourse towards African countries which leads countries to have fruitful negotiations and changed Egypt's power from "unilateralism" to "cooperation." The paper argues this could not be achieved unless President el-Sisi put a diplomatic solution of the Nile issue as his first priority and had not brought a new discourse and strategy which has geopolitical implications. Though the water tension was between Egypt and Ethiopia, due to the reasons I mentioned above, Sudan has also a big stake in Egyptian-

Ethiopian reconciliation over the use of the Nile. Thus, Sudan has been used as “leverage”, not a “bridge” between “hegemonic power” in Egypt and “silent partner” of Ethiopia. Finally, the paper argues that such a historic event, a declaration of principles, would not be happened if the previous stance of the Egyptian government had not been reconciled and the Sudanese government had not

co-operated too. However, these days there is a new political discussion between Egypt, South-Sudan, and Uganda, who belong to the Nile river basin. Though it is not going to be attempted here, what can be suggested here is that the Egyptians stand might not be consistence and the discussions might be of the Egyptians interest of influencing on the Ethiopians GERD project.

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## Endnotes

On April 2, 2011, the former Prime Minister of Ethiopia Meles Zenawi announced to the Ethiopian Parliament that his government had decided to construct the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile near the Ethiopian–Sudanese border. see the website; <http://www.meleszenawi.com/ethiopian-pm-meles-zenawi-speech-on-launching-gerd-text-and-videos/>

Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), the first cooperative institution in the basin to include all ten riparian states. Its goal is “to achieve sustainable socio” economic development through the equitable utilization of and benefit from the common Nile basin water resources”. See <http://www.nilebasin.org/>