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Ethio-Egyptian Hydropolitical Relations on Nile River: Changes and Continuities Since 1999

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Abstract:

The main objective of the study was to identify the possible basic changes and continuities of Ethiopia and Egypt relations on Nile hydro politics. The researcher used qualitative research approach and case study research design. Purposive sampling was employed to select informants. The data were collected through interview. Documents were also used as source of data. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the obtained data from interview and document, which were triangulated side by side. The research found that Ethiopia's ability to develop water projects by challenging Egypt's status quo, Egypt readiness to sign CFA, the alliance of the Sudan and South Sudan with Ethiopia and the proliferation of hydrological experts in Ethiopia as changes after 1999. However, trust deficit, pending and delaying tactics to sign agreements by Egypt, Egypt's absolute dependence on Nile River are found to be the continuity of hydro political relation of Ethiopia and Egypt. Generally, the study implies that the Ethio-Egyptians relation over Nile is tending towards a shared utilization of Nile River by trying to solve the discrepancies they have.

Keywords: Ethiopia, Egypt, Nile, hydro politics, changes, continuities

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of the Hydropolitical Relations

Treaty and negotiations about Nile waters started during the colonial era as England tried to maximize agricultural productivity in the delta. These treaties were concluded by colonial countries directly or indirectly for the interest of their colonies and themselves (Carlson, 2013). There is no water sharing agreement between the basin countries for how the water should be distributed among them, Over the years, Egypt, the United Kingdom, and Sudan had determined Nile water allocations in exclusive treaties (Kassem 2016).

Cognizant of unsatisfactory utilization of Nile waters by the upper riparian states, they felt the remedy to the existing disparity on the usage of the water is through cooperation. Some of the states in the upstream of the water had sought for a common forum that would offer immense opportunities for optimum utilization of water (Waterbury, 2002).

However, it is for the first time in history, that all Nile basin countries have expressed a serious concern about the need for a joint discourse and all the riparian countries came together in formalized talks since 1999. The Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), launched in 1999, is headquartered in Entebbe, Uganda, and is mandated to develop a framework for regional cooperation for equitable distribution, integrated water resource planning, and reduction of potential conflict among the riparian nations of the Nile River (NBI website as cited in Yaekob, 2011). The self-proclaimed mission of the NBI is "to achieve sustainable socio-economic development through the equitable utilization of, and benefit from, the common Nile Basin water resources" (Ibd).

Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Burundi have signed the agreement and the Democratic republic of Congo is expected to sign in due course. South Sudan has also signed in June 2013 (Roozenbee, 2014). The NBI is comprised of the Strategic Action Program which is divided into two complementary components, one based on a shared vision and the other focused on action on the ground. These two pieces are embodied in the Shared Vision Program (SVP) to create an "enabling environment" for cooperation, trust and skill building, and the Subsidiary Action Program (SAP) which plans and implements investments and projects "on the ground" beginning at the most basic levels of society (Yaekob, 2011).

The objectives of the initiative include developing the water resources of the Nile Basin in a sustainable and equitable way; ensuring prosperity, security, and peace for all its peoples among others (Alebel et al, 2010).

The Nile basin initiative could be taken as a resilience of downstream states from earlier periods of silence. The initiative is a fair recognition from the downstream states that the "sanctioned discourse" is no longer feasible. In addition to that, the signing of the initiative is consonant with the increasing power symmetry of Egypt and Ethiopia. This could be explained by symmetry on the political, economic and military level (Tewodros, 2012). Despite the fact that the NBI has helped to relieve the tension within the basin, there are key issues that are yet to be addressed. It has delayed the most burning contentious issues of water allotment especially between Egypt and Ethiopia (Knobelsdorf, 2011).

Leaning on this threshold, the study explored possible change and continuity of Ethio- Egyptian hydro political relation focusing on hegemony and counter hegemony strategies employed by Ethiopia since 1999. The researcher investigated facts that were occurred between Ethiopia and Egypt hydro political relation since 1999. The investigator chooses this period for the reason that it was a period when the riparian states of Nile basin established the first initiative on the equitable utilization of the Nile water resource. Moreover, in this period, Ethiopia has endorsed its first policy on water resource managements. In framing the study, the following basic questions were raised.

- What are the possible changes in Ethio-Egyptian relation on Nile hydro politics since 1999?
- What are the continuities sustained from the pre-1999 Ethio-Egyptian relation on Nile hydro politics?

2. Materials and Methods

In this study qualitative approach is appropriate to investigate Ethio-Egyptian relations on the Nile River and the researcher employed a case study design according to the sample and participants of the study, officials who work in Ministers of Ethiopian Foreign Affairs particularly in the directorate of research and policy analysis, Ministry of water, irrigation and electricity particularly trans-boundary rivers directorate and NBI coordinator official, diplomat from Egypt Embassy in Addis Ababa and other scholars were served as key informant. The place of the interview was in Addis Ababa. The researcher conducted key informant interviews and available documents, which are written on the Ethio- Egyptian hydro political relations, were served as secondary data sources. The researcher employed thematic analysis to analyze different sets of data collected from various sources.

2.1. Changes in Ethiopia and Egypt Hydro Political Relations on Nile River

Over the last decade, the Nile basin region has experienced several political and economic changes that are expected to promote shifts in the current balance of power in the basin and bear on hydro political relations between Egypt and its upstream neighbors. Historically, upstream countries have been mainly characterized by colonial rule, economic underdevelopment, internal conflict and political instability, lack of external financial support, and an absence of concrete water policies or strong water institutions, combined with weak bargaining strategies. These structural weaknesses have undermined their position in the basin's hydro politics and affected their utilization of the Nile water. As result, until recently, the Nile's water upstream has remained mostly unutilized.

However, the last decade has witnessed significant changes. Currently, the Nile basin is characterized by a highly dynamic political environment, which has the potential to impact upon regional hydro political relations. This section identifies and analyses, the changes in Ethiopia, Egypt and in the region witnessed in the period after 1999. It also deals with how they have occurred and, furthermore, it discusses the ramifications of these dynamics in Ethio- Egyptian relation.

Based on the data, the following major changes are identified. The first one is unlike the previous periods; upper riparian states are increasingly demanding to develop their water resource to meet their national needs. Specifically, Ethiopia started to develop water resource projects without the influence of Egypt. The second one is Egypt's gradual readiness to sign CFA. The third one is geopolitical shifts in the region and its consequent change in hydro political alliance. In addition, the last one is ideational maneuvering of Ethiopia, which can be explained by, the increasing of hydrological experts in Ethiopia.

2.2. Contesting Egypt's Hegemony: Water Resource Developments in Ethiopia

The imbalance in power amongst Nile River riparian, a legacy of the colonial administration as well as more recent domestic politics, has created a basin system in which Egypt is the hydro-hegemony. Egypt has successfully constructed an internationally sanctioned discourse around the Nile River colonial water allocations, claiming that maintaining the entirety of this water source is vital to Egyptian national security. Egypt projects the discourse of "historical rights" to back up this claim, saying that a country should be entitled to the same amount and sources of water that its people have historically used (Petros, 2010). In this regard, Kindie (1999) explained that during the imperial regime, Ethiopia started to study the Blue Nile projects with the help of U. S Bureau of Reclamation and German Engineering team. However, Egyptian was aggressively lobbying the US and the Arab world to cut the Ethiopian water development projects. Hence, the Ethiopia's water resource development was faced many challenges and the country could not develop such projects easily.

However, an established hydro hegemony may often be challenged through various counter hegemonic strategies. In this regard, this study found out that one of the changes of Ethio- Egyptian relation on the Nile river basin since 1999 is that Ethiopia started to develop its water resource by challenging the influence of Egypt. For instance, the study revealed that Ethiopia have been utilizing Lake Tana, tributary of Blue Nile river, to develop TanaBeless hydroelectric and multipurpose

project. Currently, Ethiopia has been generating hydroelectric power from this project. In addition, Ethiopia also started to construct the GERD unilaterally by reversing influences from Egyptian government. A participant affirms this fact as "even though there were oppositions against the launching of GERD from Egyptians, Ethiopia started to construct the project to preserve its right to use water resources. Today Ethiopia is on the process of constructing the GERD" (Interviewee 01, 2016). In this regard the counter hegemonic strategy employed by Ethiopia against Egypt is accessing alternative financial support or boosting own resources. According to one informant "Most new financing comes mainly from China, a key external player in the basin. Such support was not available a decade ago" (interviewee 02, 2016). This indicates that Ethiopia is snatching this bipolar international order as a counter hegemony strategy. Overall, the Ethiopia's action signals that in the absence of cooperation, Ethiopia will actually move forward with further unilateral projects. This could be marshaled by the late PM speeches to BBC. In 2005, the Ethiopian Prime Minister was explicit in his declaration 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" (BBC, 3 February 2005).

2.3. Egypt's Gradual Readiness to Sign Cooperation Framework Agreement

In the Nile basin, the riparian states are progressing towards a more cooperative setting, in which efforts towards regional economic integration have been undertaken and issues pertaining to the development of water resources addressed. It was within this general framework the CFA came in to table.

However, unlike majority of upper stream states of the Nile basin, Egypt was strongly opposing the cooperation framework agreement (CFA) since country's divergence on article (14b), which stated that no appreciable harm to other riparian states (Kebrom, 2012). In the face of such resistance, this study comes up with certain signs that indicate Egypt's readiness to sign CFA. In this regard, country is signing of Declaration of Principles (DOPS) with Ethiopia and Sudan is the major one. The signing of DOPS clearly shows Egypt's readiness to cooperate with Ethiopia on water resource developments. Interview with official of Egypt embassy is worth quoting to amplify the above argument.

Egypt gets 86% of water volume from Ethiopia where the GERD is constructing and Egypt recognizes this project as Ethiopia's right and conclude agreements on this project the so called DOPS. Egypt gets only 14 % of its water volume from other riparian states of the Nile basin, which is too small compared to the volume of water that Egypt obtained from Ethiopia. So, no more challenge to enter in to agreement with other riparian states if Egypt concludes agreement with Ethiopia. Moreover, currently Egyptian officials are on the way of discussing on the issue of CFA. (Interviewee 03, 2016) The aforementioned idea is remarkable and dynamic shift of Egypt to recognize Ethiopia's development right to utilize the Nile in one hand and Egypt's readiness to inter in to cooperation with riparian states of the Nile on the other hand.

In line with this, liberal theory of international relation argued that international institutions and principles are important in promoting international cooperation among states (Keohane, 2005; Nye, 1988). In addition, the community interest doctrine of hydro politics argues that each state must utilize water resources based on the cooperation and permission of other riparian state (Kebrom, 2011). Hence, the signing of DOPS is the manifestation of cooperation between Nile riparian states. The signing of DOPS created the fertile ground that the world community is recognizing Ethiopia's right of water development on Nile since DOPS was based on the agreed principles. This principle also shows that Egypt's willingness for equitable and reasonable water resource utilization between other riparian states of the Nile River. Therefore, such events were indications for Egypt's readiness to sign the CFA

2.4. Geopolitical Shift: Alliance of Sudan and South Sudan with Ethiopia

Egypt and Sudan generally have a good political relationship, in part because of their shared history as states colonized by the British. Saleh categorizes Sudan's relations with Egypt as a major strategic alliance because of the reciprocal privileges and rights of free movement, ownership, employment and residence granted to citizens of both countries (Saleh, 2008).

In the meantime, Sudan's southern third of the country declared the republic of the South Sudan in 2011. This means Sudan is no longer the same country when it signed the 1959 Agreement. Republic of the South Sudan with a population of about 8 million roughly possesses 80% of the former Sudan's oil reserves. This geo political shift decreased the bargaining power of Sudan. Additionally, the creation of South Sudan has altered the future of the now-truncated Republic of Sudan in other ways. For nearly two decades, Sudan has depended upon the proceeds of oil exports, and Ethiopia has imported about 90% of its oil needs from Sudan. Currently it is not possible for Sudan to rely on oil exports as the motor of its economy to the same extent because of the loss of its major reserves to South Sudan. As oil revenues are decreasing, Sudan is turning once again to its agricultural sector to anchor its economy.

To do so, sympathizing with Ethiopia for stable water flow is the solution Sudanese currently choose. Hence, Sudan spearheaded to recognize the Ethiopian water development program in the Blue Nile for the last five successive years. This is mainly because Sudan will be benefitted from GERD and other water resource development project of Ethiopia (Interviewee 02, 2016). Similarly, a key informant at scholar stated, "It is clear that Sudan will be benefitted from the Nile River in hydroelectric power and agricultural development projects after the completion of GERD. Currently, there is better relation between Ethiopia and Sudan on Nile River" (Interviewee 03, 2016). An interview with other Ethiopian officials confirmed the

above narrative. The official stipulated that there are agreements between South Sudan and Ethiopia on BaroAkobo River for hydroelectric power and agriculture development. In addition to development programs, Ethiopia has played vital role for the stability of South Sudan. Sudan spearheaded to recognize the Ethiopian water development program in the Blue Nile for the last five successive years. This is mainly because Sudan will be benefitted from GERD and other water resource development project of Ethiopia (Interviewee 02, 2016).

From the above participants of the study, we can see that how the two Sudan's show their friendship with Ethiopia on the utilization of Nile and other water resources. To marshal the above claims, Ferha (2011) noted that water development programs between Ethiopia and neighboring states is highly increasing. For example, 296 km road was completed as a preliminary project to assist export of 230 kv electricity to Sudan. It costs US \$ 59 million to complete it in 2012. Generally, the result of this study showed that the align of Sudan and South Sudan with Ethiopia is one change in Ethio-Egyptian hydro political relations of the Nile basin.

2.5. The Proliferation of Hydrological Experts in Ethiopia

Hydro hegemony of a country is determined by many factors. Of which the role-played by top notch, well-groomed, and seasoned personnel, the degree of participation and the method of policy decision-making cannot be over-stated (Warner &Zeitoun, 2008). As a result, the Ministry of foreign affairs of Ethiopia and water and energy minister of Ethiopia opened up a definite career path to for qualified professionals, whether women or men, to enhance its capacity through professional staffing Previously there was lack of hydrological experts in Ethiopia who study on the water resources plans and projects. According to Kindie (1999), the hydrological experts from USA and German supported Ethiopia to design and study the water development projects in the Blue Nile. This opened the path for Egypt to convince other states to stop their assistance to Ethiopia. Egyptians were strictly arguing that the supports of other states to Ethiopia would result conflicts between Ethiopia and Egypt (Kindie, 1999).

However, the study found that today such discourses are not as such a challenge for Ethiopia since the country has its own hydrological experts to study and design the Nile water resource project. Unlike the previous regimes, currently Ethiopia has many experts that can assist its water resource development projects. This enables the country not to be dependent on other state experts. Moreover, this enables Ethiopia to save foreign currency that has been paid for foreign experts. (Interviewee 01, 2016) Here, we can see that the increasing of hydrological experts of Ethiopia is the other change in Ethio-Egypt hydro political relations on the Nile River. Ferah (2011) stated that knowledge increases the power of the states. Accordingly, Ethiopia has been developing its expertise and knowledge of water resources enables to counter Egypt's historic hegemony on the Nile River. Similarly, Cascao (2008b) argued that the developments of Egypt's hydrological experts were enabling the country to utilize the water resource of the Nile River.

2.6. Continuity of Ethio-Egyptian Hydro Political Relations on Nile River

Even though the above dynamic changes have occurred in Ethiopia and Egypt hydro political relation on Nile river water resources, still there is some continuity which maintains the previous hydro political situation in Nile Rivers, such as mistrusts on technical operation on GERD; dalliance in signing the CFA; Egypt's dependability on Nile water resources.

2.7. Trust Deficit

The Egyptians are known for their hydrological experts of knowledge and skill. Egypt has the need to follow the construction of GERD by their technical operation. this include supervising how the water will fill the reservoir and to have detail information about the building of the dam (interviewee,03,2016) but the Ethiopians have refused Egyptian stand on technical operation cooperation on GERD. Ethiopians argued that, Ethiopia has quite enough experts to follow bits and pieces of the whole process. In line with this Bayeh (2015) found in his study that even though El-Sisireengineered Egyptians approach towards Ethiopia in a right direction, the hostility has not been removed completely. In this connection, it is rightly noted that such an encouraging development, however, does not mean that animosity and mistrust have been rooted out. Some politicians and elites still spew out hatred and threats against Ethiopia. And, a sizeable portion of the people of Egypt continues to distrust Ethiopia (The Reporter as cited in Baye, 2015). In addition to this Bayeh explained that it is beyond doubt that even though there are Egyptians who have positive outlook towards Ethiopia, there are still individuals with misconceptions and manifest extreme nationalism which could have the potential of dragging the current developments to the opposite direction. The public diplomacy delegation was sent to overcome such doubts and mistrusts.

However, the researcher believes that even though it is significant, the possibility of utterly converting the deeply rooted pessimistic outlook of Egyptians towards Ethiopia is less likely. To root out the deeply rooted mistrust, hatred and animosity and create full trust and confidence among all Egyptians is not something to be achieved easily. Pending and Delaying Tactics to Sign Agreements Still Egypt has delayed two agreements which lead to cooperation on equitable and reasonable utilization of the water with upper stream states. This is the strategy Egypt follow for a long period of time to maintain its hydro hegemonic position in the basin (interviewee, 04, 2016).

In CFA Egypt opposed the agreement of article 14(b) which state that not to appreciable harm to the other riparian's of Nile basin. Even though "late is better than never". (MWIE, 2015). It intentionally makes the agreements were so late and even though agreements are conducted based on national interest. Still Egypt is late in signing the CFA Egypt's Absolute

Dependence on Nile Egypt has for long extremely been dependent on the waters of Nile. Herodotus attested this fact stating that "Egypt is the gift of the Nile". Nile means everything for Egyptians. Nile is not only the source of ancient Egyptian civilization but also the very existence of today's Egypt. Egyptians are 97 percent dependent on the Nile waters. They used Nile waters for millennia for agriculture, drinking, washing, transportation, energy, and other purposes. Egyptian official confirmed that "ground water is so expensive in the country; the only option is efficiently utilized the Nile water resource in recycling way up to three times." (Interviewee, 03, 2016) this shows that still Nile is oldest sources on water resources for Egyptians. Similarly, Bayeh (2015) explained in his study that Egypt's absolute dependence on Nile emanated mainly from its geographical location and climatic conditions. Egypt is located in the northeastern Africa. The country forms part of the Saharan desert. It is characterized by the climatic conditions of hot dry summers and mild winters and it received very low, irregular and unpredictable rainfall (Khalil cited in Bayeh 2016). Egyptians' maximum average rainfall is only 120mm per year which is the least in the riparian countries (Hassan and Al Rasheedy, 2007). This fact forced Egyptians to be absolutely dependent on Nile and to develop a deep sense of entitlement to the river. Without Nile one cannot think of the existence of Egypt. It is for this reason, successive Egyptian leaders strongly committed to safeguard the continuous flow of Nile waters to their land.

The aforementioned fact compelled the researcher to doubt the possibility of the current renewed relationship of the two countries to come to a good end. The fact that Egyptians are still without possible alternative to the waters of Nile blurs the prospects of the two countries viable future relationship. To meet the overriding needs of its population, Egypt has entirely dependent on overexploitation of Nile waters instead of finding alternative solutions President Mohamed Morsi rhetorically pronounced that "If it diminishes by one drop, then our blood is the alternative" (Bayeh, 2015). And he qualifies expression of El-Sisi that Nile is "the source of life" for Egyptians not merely for Egyptian development. These expressions show their absolute dependence on Nile and the nonexistence of another viable alternative.

3. Conclusion

This study is made in an attempt to portray the political and economic interests at the root of Ethio-Egyptian relations. The Nile as a major factor, which has tied the relations between the two countries, has remained a cause for conflict and political differences between the two countries. The Nile is a factor the utilization of which has created intense rivalry and served as a factor, which bestowed prosperity on one at the expense of the other. As decades passed without a workable arrangement for utilizing this great resource, factors that necessitated the recognition of equitable entitlement. In this regard the signing of NBI is a historic marker from the previous years of failed agreements and cooperation efforts. Leaning on this time threshold the study discussed change and continuity in hydro political relation of the two states.

The Study found that one of the changes of Ethio- Egyptian relation on the Nile river basin since 1999 is that Ethiopia started to develop its water resource by challenging the influence of Egypt. Ethiopia also started to construct the GERD unilaterally by reversing influences from Egyptian government. Even though there were oppositions against the launching of GERD from Egyptians, Ethiopia started to construct the project to preserve its right to use water resources. Ethiopia is challenging the historical right of Egypt to utilize Nile River unilaterally. This study showed that there are recent developments that indicate Egypt's readiness to sign CFA, of which country's signing of DOPS with Ethiopia and Sudan is the main one.

The study indicated the remarkable and dynamic shift of Egypt to recognize Ethiopia's development right to utilize the Nile in one hand and Egypt's readiness to inter in to cooperation with riparian states of the Nile on the other hand. This study showed that the alliance of Sudan and South Sudan with Ethiopia is one change in Ethio-Egyptian hydro political relations of the Nile basin. The study concludes that the increasing of hydrological experts of Ethiopia is the other change in Ethio- Egypt hydro political relations on the Nile River.

Even though there are Egyptians who have positive outlook towards Ethiopia, there are still individuals with misconceptions and manifest extreme nationalism which could have the potential of dragging the current developments to the opposite direction. There is also the mistrust between Ethiopia and Egypt on the technical operation of the GERD. Egypt delaying to sign cooperative agreements is continuity. Egyptians absolute dependence on Nile and their desire of developing a deep sense of entitlement to the river are continuities from the past.

To sustain such changes Ethiopia should cooperate not only with upstream states but also with Egypt. Ethiopia should also consolidate its political and economic power to embark on different water development projects. The previous status quo of Egypt is currently challenging by upstream states. The challenge is for equitable and reasonable utilization of Nile water. Thus, Egypt should ready herself for cooperation with Ethiopia which contributes the lion share of Nile water volume. Clear and soft diplomatic relations is vital for both states. Hard diplomacy is the old fashioned and unacceptable in the 21st century. Ethiopia and Egypt should prefer low politics than high politics. The Egyptians also should sign the CFA without resorting to delay. Egypt should also search out the ground water alternatives in addition to Nile like Libya.

Finally, it is in the interest of both upstream and downstream states of the Nile to enter into cooperative agreements. They should define the rights of all riparian states to equitably and reasonably use the resources of the Nile. They should develop a platform to protect the environment in the basin from further degradation and depletion. To this end a fresh start at the cooperative endeavor and establishment of a framework for cooperation particularly agreement on legal and institutional framework is critical.

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