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The Nile River and Egyptian Foreign Policy Interests

Introduction

Historically, Egypt was considered an African rather than an Arab state. Pharaonic Egypt was nothing but an African state, and its relations with south of the Nile valley and Central Africa have continued ever since.

It is possible to view the geopolitical regional relations between Egypt and the states of the African Horn and the Nile basin in such a way that they could be considered conducive to cooperation in peacetime, but a point of pressure that might threaten the Egyptian entity in case of war or the threat of it.

- The first aspect of this relationship resulted when the Red Sea became an important international waterway and centre of interest of the international powers, hence the necessity for Egyptian, Arab and African cooperation by virtue of the long African and Western shorelines on this very Sea.
- The second aspect was imposed by the water sources of the Nile, as Egypt relies entirely on the Nile River to supply her need for fresh waters. Ethiopia claims a monopoly of supply by consuming more than 80 percent of these sources. This is a fact that has set a permanent goal for the Egyptian leadership to ensure the present flow of waters of the Nile.
- The third aspect relates to the Nile River as an international river crossing the borders of ten states of the Nile basin. Such international nature of the river presents a grave challenge necessitating cooperation between all riparian states for the management of sources of the river to achieve the best utilization.
- The fourth aspect is reflected in the nature of protracted conflicts in the African Horn of Africa, and East Africa, particularly in Sudan, Somalia, northern Uganda, and the Great Lakes region.

Added to the preceding dimensions are the possibilities of future wars over water in the area after the end of the Cold War. As a number of studies indicate, a future war in the Middle East and Africa could well be based on conflict over water sources (Starr 1991). No doubt that this dimension has exerted new pressure on the Egyptian leadership as a national security issue, because not only does it threaten the entity of the state but also its social fabric as well.

This article aims to define the place of this dimension in Egyptian foreign policy vis-à-vis the states of the Nile Basin, with a special focus the Nile River water. The authors argue that Egyptian foreign policy behaviour as well as her desire to ensure a smooth and uninterrupted flow of the Nile River waters have historically been and will continue to be intertwined.

Egypt and the Nile Civilisation: Historical Context

The Nile River is the principal artery of life in Egypt. It is life itself. This basic fact does not apply to the same extent to the other riparian states. One well-known Egyptian writer articulated the external relations of Cairo around the Nile question by arguing that: 'the first civilization was the fruit of fortunate geographical marriage between Egypt and the Nile, hence if history was a father of Egyptians and Egypt was a Mother of the World the Nile is simply the great, great grandfather of human civilization' (Himdan 1987: 782).

Indeed, the Nile River has shaped the life of Egyptian people over the centuries, their habits and culture, and through its periodic flood was like a renewed life cycle. Ancient Egyptian history indicates that ancient Egyptians became used to the measurement of the level of the river and they considered it as an indication of the economic and civilised conditions of the country. While the river participated creatively in forming Egyptian civilisation, Egyptians also played an important role in preserving the water of the river. The former prime minister of Great Britain, Winston Churchill, discussed the challenge determined by the geography of the river when he compared the Nile River with a huge palm tree extending its roots into central Africa in Lakes Kyoga, Albert, and Victoria and its tall trunk to Egypt and Sudan, where its green upper part ends up in north Egypt. If you cut the roots the green upper part will dry out, and the whole tree would die (Churchill 2000).

No doubt one of the major strategic threats to Egyptian national security is in essence the existence of vital water sources lying beyond the Egyptian borders. On the other hand, the north of the Nile valley is a rich agricultural area, which relies solely on the waters of the Nile. The Nile River basin is composed of ten states preoccupied with the problem of demographic explosion, forcing thus an agricultural expansion. Hence a problem of organisation, distribution and investment in water sources arises (Barbour 1957 and Metawie 2004). Its solution is only possible through the establishment of huge dams capable of controlling the flow of water in the river. The huge dams are like a double-edged sword – especially with respect to Egypt. They allow states of the basin to effectively share the distribution of the water according to what was agreed on, it also allows for states of the source to control, to a certain extent, the flow of that water.

In addition, the issue of Nile water grows in gravity in regional relations for the states of the basin for a number of reasons (Hassan 1993). First, no real organisation exists among the states of the basin to allow for a dialogue to determine the distribution and exploitation of the Nile water. Second, there exists real competition among states of the Nile basin over the production of specific crops for export; especially cotton which needs enormous amounts of water. Third, the ongoing enmities and conflicts between states of the basin, and the intra-state civil wars, which have created opportunities for instability and frequent manipulation by external powers, continue to undermine their own interests and the interests of the area.

Bearing all this in mind, the importance of the Nile water to Egypt – particularly if a number of interrelated issues are addressed – cannot be underestimated. First, according to the statistics of the Egyptian Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources, the Nile alone supplies 94 percent of total water resources of the country. As Table 1 shows, of Egypt's total area of 1,001,450 sq. km, more than 326,000 sq. km. or 33

percent of the territory fall within the Nile River basin (FAO 1997). The percentage of Egypt's population in the Nile River basin accounts for more than 85 percent compared to the other basin states' population percentages such as Uganda (75 percent), Sudan (74 percent), and Rwanda (72 percent).

Table 1: Population Indicators of the Nile Basin States

COUNTRY	Basin Population Density (hab/sq.km)	Basin Population 1990 (millions)	Country Population (1990) (millions)	Country Population (1998) (millions)	% country's Population within the Nile Basin
BURUNDI	250	3.204	5.503	6.457	58
DRCONGO	88	1.838	43.901	49.139	4
EGYPT	163	47.599	56.312	65.978	85
ERITREA	36	0.918	3.082	3.577	30
ETHIOPIA	53	19.454	55.053	59.649	35
KENYA	178	9.129	28.261	29.008	32
RWANDA	278	5.731	7.952	6.604	72
SUDAN	11	20.893	28.098	28.292	74
TANZANIA	40	4.878	29.685	32.102	16
UGANDA	67	15.999	21.297	20.554	75
TOTAL		129.643	279.144	310.360	46

Source: Karyabwite, Diana Rizzolio, *Water Sharing in the Nile River Valley* (Geneva: UNEP/DEWA/GRID, January-June 2000), p. 33.

Second, Egypt is preoccupied with a shortage of water resources in addition to the increase in population and the adoption of economic development projects. The Nile waters can be considered the main resource for irrigation. It is also used for other purposes such as transportation, industry and tourism. It is estimated that an increase in population in three Nile River states namely, Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia, will reach more than 200 million in the year 2015, which means an increase in the demand for Nile water (World Bank 2002: 48-50). If the current water policies persist, each of these three states would seek to increase its share at the expense of the other states.

Third, the international dimension appears crucial in designing Egyptian water policies. Considering that Egypt's water resources mainly come from beyond its borders, the increase in these sources should be achieved within the framework of coordination with the other governments of the River states. There is no doubt that this places Egypt in a serious and vulnerable situation while designing her water policies, with respect to her inability to control the projects designed to preserve water along the banks of the White Nile. It is essential for Egypt's survival that there is an uninterrupted flow of the Nile water into Lake Nasser amounting to 18 milliard cubic metres annually. The flow of the Nile River waters can be utilised jointly with Sudan, after the application of four phases in Upper Nile, particularly in Jongli I, Jongli II, Machar Marches swamps, and Gazelle Nile. Egypt depends largely on the implementation of these projects in order to face the increasing demand on the water.

Egypt's vulnerability is also explained by the amount of rainfall the country receives in the Nile River basin, the main basket area for the country's agriculture since

Pharaoh's time. Table 2 indicates that Egypt receives the lowest amount of rainfall in the basin compared to the rest of the riparian states.

Table 2: Nile River Basin States' Average Rainfall

COUNTRY	Average Rainfall in the Basin Minimum (mm/year)	Average Rainfall in the Basin Maximum (mm/year)
BURUNDI	895	1,570
DRCONGO	875	1,915
EGYPT	0	120
ERITREA	540	665
ETHIOPIA	205	2,010
KENYA	505	1,790
RWANDA	840	1,935
SUDAN	0	1,610
TANZANIA	625	1,630
UGANDA	395	2,060

Source: Karyabwite, Diana Rizzolio, *Water Sharing in the Nile River Valley* (Geneva: UNEP/DEWA/GRID, January-June 2000), p. 25.

The maximum average rainfall of only 120mm per year is the least in the region, a situation, which over the centuries has forced Egypt to irrigate more land for its agricultural production. Table 3 shows that land irrigated by Egypt in the Nile River basin is almost twice the land irrigated by the other riparian states combined. Table 2 also shows that most of the Nile River basin countries namely, Burundi, DRC, Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda, Eritrea, and Ethiopia, have so far not adequately utilised the river for irrigation. However, these countries receive more rain as compared to Egypt.

Table 3: Present Use and Potential of Irrigated Area of Nile Basin States

COUNTRY	Potentially Irrigable Land in the Nile Basin (1000 ha)	Irrigated land in the Nile Basin/ total in the Country (1000 ha)
BURUNDI	80	0/74
DRCONGO	10	0/11
EGYPT	4'420	3'078/3'300
ERITREA	150	15/22
ETHIOPIA	2'220	23/190
KENYA	180	6/67
RWANDA	150	2/4
SUDAN	2'750	1935/1'950
TANZANIA	30	10/155
UGANDA	202	9/9

Source: Mason, Simon A, *From Conflict to Cooperation in the Nile Basin: Interaction Between Water Availability, Water Management in Egypt and Sudan, and International Relations in the Eastern Nile Basin*, PhD Thesis, Eth Zurich, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, 2004, p. 106.

Thus, it becomes clear that Egyptian national interests are closely related to the Nile resources region, which represents a strategic depth for Egypt. This heavy dependence on fresh water from the Nile River means that any threat to the flow of the water translates into a fundamental threat to Egyptian security. Therefore, the idea of securing the Nile resources is of paramount importance to the Egyptian foreign policy-making establishment, and a source of Cairo's geo-strategic interests and consistency in foreign policy behaviour vis-à-vis the riparian countries in the Nile River basin.

The Nile River Waters and Egyptian Southern Strategic Imperatives

Egypt's successive administrations have concentrated on a number of geo-strategic foreign policy areas in order to ensure the free flow of the Nile River waters. These policy areas have revolved around four interrelated underpinning national interests:

- Protecting the southern borders of Egypt.
- Protecting the southern area of the Red Sea.
- Insuring the flow of the Nile water.
- Insuring the vital interests of Egypt in the area.

In this context, we argue that the Nile River constitutes the central environmental factor, which influences the cognitive behaviour of the Egyptian foreign policy-makers (Sprout and Sprout 1965, and Sprout and Sprout 1969). Specifically, the Egyptian foreign policy-makers' minds are influenced by the geo-strategic and economic and political environmental factors within the Nile River basin and the behaviour of the riparian states. The limits that the geographical factors impose on Egypt positively and negatively cannot, therefore, be ignored and underestimated (Heikal 1978: 715). This could be ascribed into two factors: first, the river unites the ten African states including Egypt, with implications for the geo-strategic economic, political, socio-cultural, and legal relationships between Cairo and the countries of the basin (Erlich 2003).¹

As Tables 4 and 5 show, the Nile was and still is the valley's sole water source since ancient times. The Nile River supplies 55.5 milliard cubic metres annually. Ground water provides only 4.8 milliard cubic metres annually. On the other hand, the share of desalinated water is almost negligible (only 0.03 milliard cubic metres). The non-conventional sources of water like that from agricultural sewage and treated waters of the sanitary drainage only supply 4.6 milliard cubic metres (Hefny 1992 and Metawie 2004).

Table 4: The Total Sources at present

Sources	Water in km ³
Nile water	55.50
Ground water	04.80
Desalination of sea water	00.03
Non-conventional water	04.70
Total	65.03

Source: Hvidt, Martin, 'Water Resource Planning in Egypt', in Watkins, Eric, ed., *The Middle Eastern Environment. Selected Papers of the 1995 Conference of the British Society of Middle Eastern Studies*, Cambridge: St Malo Press, 1995, pp. 90-100.

Table 5: Present And Future Water Demand in billion cubic metres per year

Sector	Demand in 2000	2025
1. Agriculture	60.7	69.43
2. Domestic water	4.5	6.6
3. Industry	7.8	10.56
4. Navigation	0.3	0.3
Total	73.3	86.89

Source: Abdel Hay A. Farrag, 'The Hydraulic and Hydrochemical Impacts of the Nile System on the Groundwater in Upper Egypt', *Assuit University Bulletin, Environmental Resources*, Vol. 8 No. 1, March 2005.

Table 5 indicates that water demand in Egypt will continue to increase steadily in all categories, with agriculture being the main consumer. The Egyptian agricultural policy is guided by a number of underlying principles (MOA 2000):

- Gradually removing governmental controls on farm output prices; crop areas; and procurement quotas.
- Increasing farm gate prices to cope with international prices.
- Removal of farm input subsidies.
- Removal of governmental constraints on private sector in importing, exporting and distribution of farm inputs to comply with the Principle Bank for Development and Agricultural Credit (PBDAC).
- Removing governmental constraints on private sector in importing and exporting agricultural crops.
- Gradually diverting the role of the PBDAC to financing agricultural development projects.
- Limitation on state ownership of land and sale of new land to private sector.
- Confining the role of the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) to Agricultural Research, Extension and Economic Policies.
- Adjusting the land tenancy system.
- Adjusting the interest rate to reflect the commercial rate.

Observers of the development of the political relations between states of the Nile basin have noticed that there were numerous attempts from time to time on the part of some of these states to use the Nile water as a political weapon against Egypt. For instance, in ancient times, the Abyssinians often threatened to annihilate many of their own Muslims by diverting the course of the Nile away from Egypt so that its people could starve to death. Rulers of Abyssinia justified their actions as revenge against the Egyptians for their treatment of the Copts and their religious leaders (Erlich 2003).²

However, the water policy game and its utilisation as a counter weapon appeared only with the advent of modern colonialism, and with technological progress which increased the importance of the water factor in the economic life of the riparians. The Portuguese planned to dominate the sources of the Nile in order to strangle Egypt after they succeeded earlier in deflecting international trade routes to the Cape of Good Hope instead of the Red Sea routes. To achieve this aim, the Portuguese tried to convince the King of Abyssinia to dig a watercourse extending from the sources of the

Blue Nile – which is the principal tributary to the Nile – to the Red Sea, thus depriving Egypt of the Nile River waters with all the adverse implications for the people of Egypt (Himdan 1987: 926).

The British inherited this colonial practice from the Portuguese and attempted to implement the same schemes (Himdan 1987: 926-930). For example, the British, in collaboration with the Kings of Buganda in Uganda and the Emperor of Ethiopia, pursued strategies that were not in the interests of Egypt. Even when Britain moved to gain international endorsement from some local rulers, particularly the Ethiopian ruler, with the objective of maintaining the status quo on the Nile River question, attempts at isolating Egypt still remained the strategic imperatives of London. As such, the water issue was one of the major means developed by Britain in her struggle with Egypt regarding the Sudan after 1882. Indeed Britain tried to achieve two objectives namely, to threaten Egypt politically while it was under her domination and to separate and to isolate the Sudan from Egypt. To achieve these dual objectives, the British colonial administration concentrated on the construction of dams and barrages and other water projects in the Sudan while preventing their construction in Egypt, thus guaranteeing the isolation of Egypt.

In general, and with exception of some minor attempts, particularly the threat by Moise Chombe in the Congo and the Ethiopian rulers after the overthrow of Haile Sellasie, the flow of the Nile River waters to Egypt has remained steady (Hassan 1993: 320). However, what are the consequences of the attempts to use the Nile water as a political weapon against Egypt? Even if we assume that there were serious attempts to use the Nile as a tool of political conflict with Egypt, the gravity of these attempts should not be underestimated vis-à-vis the riparian Nile basin states.

A number of points can be adduced in this regard. First, international law is clear on the issue of legal claims and obligations on upstream member states in an international river and drainage system (Swain 1997). With respect to the legal claims, a set of criteria to organise the complete utilisation of the water of the international rivers by the member states of the basin, in a fair and just way, is essential. The criteria set out by the riparian states should take cognisance of the economy; the life of its people; and the size and distance traversed by the river within the borders of the riparian states (Sultan 1962: 535).

A riparian state should be obliged not to take any action or initiate any alternation that could cause a significant damage to any other state of the basin. Specifically, any attempt to manipulate water of the Nile that would affect Egypt's interests could be considered contrary to the spirit of the 1929 Egyptian-British and 1959 Egyptian-Sudanese treaties.

Second, most of the riparian states are not nearly as dependent on the Nile River waters compared to Egypt. Egypt depends on the Nile River waters for its socioeconomic survival. To ignore this reality in the region is to misunderstand and underestimate the complexities and realities with which Egypt finds itself confronted in the basin. The Nile River is distinguished from the other international rivers because it has numerous tributaries that traverse the upstream states and that feed the Nile River. An attempt by the upstream states would have serious implications on most of the states in the region (Himdan 1987: 925). What is also important to note is that Ethiopian highlands, with their massive natural flood waters feeding the Nile River,

are of such a nature that makes it inconceivable to control the sweeping waters (Brunnee and Toope 2002: 108).

Another important factor to emphasise is that notwithstanding a few incidents, Egyptian-Ethiopian historical relations have remained cordial. It has been maintained by some scholars that Cairo's foreign policy-making establishment has exaggerated the gravity of relations between Egypt and Sudan as well as the other riparian states on the use of the Nile River waters (Himdan 1987: 691). In comparison to the Mediterranean countries of the north and the Middle East, Egyptian foreign behaviour towards Sudan and the south in general has been a point of weakness. Perhaps this exaggeration also explains the fact that with exception of Mohammad Ali's attempt (and some of his successors) to control Sudan and the upper Nile, Egyptian foreign policy in these areas was not expansionist, but a defensive one geared towards the promotion of Egyptian strategic interests in the region (Sultan 1962: 535).

Egyptian Foreign Policy Approaches and the Nile River Water

The Egyptians through their long history of civilisation have grasped the importance of Nile waters as an inseparable resource for their lives and have in that respect alone maintained interests in the economic and political developments in the upstream riparian states in the basin. For centuries, Egypt has ensured through all means at its disposal that enough water flows to its territory. Egypt has guarded against any hostile power trying to control the sources of the Nile River waters. Cooperative diplomacy has, therefore, been one of the options and avenues used by the Egyptian leaders to prevent hostile decisions against its national interests. The policies pursued by Egyptian leaders have ranged from the strategy of obtaining complete control and influence as was evidenced during the time of Mohammad Ali and some of his successors as well as the governments prior to the 1952 revolution, to embracing cooperative diplomacy, particularly under the post-revolution governments. For example, Egypt initiated the UNDUGU (brotherhood), which brought together all the riparian states, with the objective of finding acceptable legal regime for the utilisation of the Nile River waters.

The Pre-1952 Scenario and Perspectives regarding Egyptian Water Politics

Prior to her independence in 1922, Egyptian water interests were principally determined by Britain, the colonial power since 1914. Egypt lost her sovereignty and legal personality that allowed her to speak as international legal person. As in other colonies governed by Britain (and other colonial powers), Egypt remained an object of international law with London becoming the centre of external relations on behalf of the country. Egyptian water politics during the colonial period was the domain of the British colonial power. The international conventions concluded between Britain and other contracting parties became binding on Egypt in the post-independence period. This is the general practice according to the rules of the international law, particularly with respect to state succession (McCaffrey 2003: 76-77).

Britain was not the only colonial power in the Nile River basin. The other colonial powers at the time included Italy, France, Belgium and Germany. After the end of the First World War, with the beginning of a decline in European colonial power regarding on the acquisition of title to territories in Africa, British decided to guarantee Egyptian

rights over the Nile Water by concluding international agreements akin to those concerning European international riparian navigation used for industrial and agricultural purposes (McCaffrey 2003: 76-77). The treaties, for example, set binding rules that control the utilisation of international waters among the riparian states (Brunnee and Toope 2002: 145-148, Caponera 1993, Collins 1991, and Okidi 1990). A few examples may help explain the attempts by Britain to internationalise the utilisation of such international waters, the Nile River included.

First, Britain and Italy concluded the protocol of Rome in 1891, which dealt with the issue of drawing borders between Eritrea and Sudan. In the protocol, Italy pledged not to construct any projects on the Nile Atbara tributary that could affect the quantity of water flowing to Egypt. Second, the 1902 Addis Ababa agreement concluded between Britain and Menelik II of Ethiopia committed the two countries not to construct or allow any construction on the Blue Nile, Lake Tana and the Sobat River which would affect the flow of their waters, except with express consent of the parties as well as Sudan.

Third, the London treaty concluded 1906 between Britain and Belgium (on behalf of Belgian Congo, now the Democratic Republic of Congo – DRC), which provided for, among other things, a commitment by an independent Congo not to establish or allow the establishment of any constructions on or near the river Semliki, a tributary of the Nile River, that would diminish the volume of waters entering Lake Albert. Fourth, the Tripartite agreement concluded in 1906 between Britain, France and Italy, also bound the contracting parties to maintain the unity of Ethiopia and to safeguard the interests of Great Britain and Egypt in the Nile basin, more specifically as regards the regulation of the waters of River Nile and its tributaries.

The agreement, among others, were entered into between the contracting parties to prevent the upstream states from diverting the flow the Nile River waters against the interests of the colonial powers and the colonies as well as Egypt. These treaties laid the foundation for the post-independence 1929 and 1959 legal instruments between Egypt and Britain and Egypt and Sudan respectively. The Egyptian foreign policy makers have consistently invoked the 1929 and 1959 treaties ever since they were ratified by the parties.

The 1922-1952 Period and Egyptian Foreign Policy Behaviour

It has been argued that the geographic location of the Nile River represents a major asset, which has naturally and historically shaped Egyptian foreign policy since the dawn of independence (Brunnee and Toope 2002: 148). Egyptian geo-strategic objectives during the period from 1922 to 1952 focused on three issues. First, there was an interest in establishing cordial bilateral relations between Sudan and Egypt. The Egyptian-Sudanese bilateral relations guaranteed uninterrupted flow of Nile waters and in the process protected Egypt's historical and acquired rights. Indeed, the idea of binding Sudan to Egypt is deeply rooted in Egyptian political history, which is premised on the desire for the historical integration between Egypt and Sudan. Specifically, the policy is based on the age-old view that whoever controls the Sudan, threatens Egyptian geo-strategic water policy interests.

Egyptian-Sudanese linkages date back to 1899 when Britain established a condominium over the control of southern Sudan. The question of Sudan became one

of the central issues in British-Egyptian relations during that period before the revolution of 1952.

Second, the Egyptian-British Nile River treaty of 1929 took cognisance of Egyptian historical interests with regard to the Nile waters (Caponera 1993: 657-659). The 1929 agreement provided for a clear sharing of the Nile River waters. For example, the treaty incorporated Egyptian historical needs by setting aside the bulk of the flow of the waters to Cairo, that is, by allocating to Egypt a share of 48 million cubic metres in return for four million cubic metres for Sudan.

The agreement concluded in London in 1934 between Britain (on behalf of Tanganyika) and Belgium (on behalf of Rwanda and Burundi) regarding the River Kagera, which flows into Lake Victoria, recognised the equitable utilisation of the river in such a way that would not jeopardise the interests of other fluvial states. Third, Britain and Egypt also entered into a bilateral agreement in 1932 on the use of the *Jabal el Awleya* reservoir. The storage capacity of this project was estimated to be 3.5 million cubic metres annually.

The Post-1952 Revolution and Egyptian Foreign Policy Interests in the Nile Basin

Post-revolutionary governments have remained intent on maintaining the economic, political and security interests of Egypt with regard to the Nile River basin question. However, it is important to observe that they were no longer limited to the narrow Nile River basin prism but focused on Africa and the major extra-continental factors. President Gamal Abdel Nasser, for example, during one of his speeches, reiterated the importance of Egyptian interests regarding the Nile River basin question by emphasising that the Nile River was an 'artery of life for our homeland' (Ghali 1982: 86).

However, Egyptian foreign policy was not solely shaped by the Nile basin question. Other salient issues that influenced Egyptian foreign policy included solidarity with the Palestinian people; assistance to African liberation movements; overcoming the Israeli infiltration attempts in Africa; and fighting racial discrimination in Southern Africa. It is in this context that Egypt has, over the years, attempted to develop cordial relations with other Nile basin riparian states, particularly Kenya, Sudan and Uganda (Himdan 1987: 936). As we have explained, the post-1952 Egyptian leaders pursued foreign policy issues on the Nile question based on historical and geopolitical considerations, especially those that promoted the goal of integration between Sudan and Egypt as well as regional security. The Sudan, like Egypt, relies on irrigation for its agricultural production, especially in the middle and northern regions, which in some respects places Sudan on the same footing as Egypt (Himdan 1987: 936). The Sudan is the only fluvial state in the Nile basin that enjoys immense natural resources consisting of arable soil suitable for agricultural production, exceeding those of any other state in the Nile basin (Heikal 1978: 718). The increase in the desertification and the aggravation of waves of drought and their implications for hunger and scarcity of food in many countries of the Nile basin region become a crucial question for Egypt, Sudan and the other riparian states (Himdan 1987: 937).

It is because of dependence on the Nile waters that the Egyptian foreign policy-decision makers have had special interest in Sudan since 1952. This special interest has

revolved around three interrelated issues. First, due to the desire for a long-term and durable stability in the Nile region, Egypt concluded an agreement with Britain in 1953 which called for the independence of Sudan in 1956 (Sultan 1962). Second, Egypt realised that for a viable and long-term stability to prevail between the two countries, the maintenance of the condominium in South Sudan was the best option. This would guarantee access to the Nile waters that would benefit the two countries. In order to solidify the bilateral relations between Cairo and Khartoum, the two riparian states entered into an agreement to construct a high dam in Egypt. However, Sudan was of the view that the 1929 treaty favoured Egypt and pushed for a separate treaty that would be favourable to the two countries, particularly with respect to the utilisation of the Nile River waters (Khaled 1988: 106).

The 1959 treaty largely reconfirmed the legal historical claims of Egypt on the use of the waters of the Nile. The treaty incorporated the 1929 provisions in which 48 million cubic metres and 4 million cubic metres were allocated annually to Egypt and Sudan respectively. The treaty also laid the basis for a more comprehensive legal framework that solidified Egyptian-Sudanese relations with respect to the question of the Nile River waters. A number of specific issues incorporated in the 1959 treaty need to be identified. First, Egypt was to construct a high dam south of Aswan, while the Sudan was to build the Rosiras dam on the Blue Nile. The high dam was to deliver 14.5 and 7.5 million cubic metres of water to Sudan and Egypt respectively. Second, the treaty provided for closer cooperation between the two countries on the Nile basin question. Third, it provided for 15 million Egyptian pounds for compensation to Sudan in return for water losses arising out of the construction of Lake Nasser. Fourth, irrespective of Sudan's internal civil war and strained relations with neighbouring countries in the region, Cairo maintained closer relations with Khartoum.

Due to domestic needs and the pursuit of a pragmatic foreign policy, Egypt avoided, officially at least, support for Sudan in the struggle against southern insurgents for fear that such support would negatively affect Cairo's regional and continental interests (Himdan 1987: 940). On the geopolitical and geo-strategic front, the active role played by Egyptian diplomacy in mutual understanding between Ethiopia and Sudan, which culminated into the normalisation of the two countries' relations, is a clear indication of Egypt's neutral position in the region. Similarly, it can be argued that a balanced and flexible policy pursued by Egypt with respect to the intra-state civil wars and inter-state conflicts demonstrate Cairo's pragmatism in the region.

In addition to the civil war in Sudan, internal Ethiopian conflict with the national movement for the Eritrean people, the Ethiopian-Eritrean war of 1998-2000, and Ethiopian direct conflict with and involvement in Somalia regarding the Ogaden area since the 1960s have necessitated careful consideration by the Egyptian foreign policy establishment. Specifically, Egyptian foreign policy-makers adopted positions that did not support one party against the other, irrespective of the legal claims. The decision by Egyptian foreign policy-makers to maintain regional peace and security is influenced by the desire to avoid any conflict with states of the Nile Basin, and especially with Ethiopia and Sudan.

Justification for the principle of *uti possidetis*, endorsed by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in Cairo in 1964 and accepted by the member states except Morocco and Somalia, became the central *modus operandi* in post-colonial Africa.

Attempts to deviate from this continental practice in cases such as Biafra (Nigeria) and Katanga (Zaire – later the DRC) were met with uncompromising rejection by the OAU member states. Eritrea is the unique case in Africa where its striving for self-determination in 1993 was endorsed by the OAU.

The adoption of cooperative diplomacy towards other states of the Nile basin does not mean that Egypt is not prepared to use other means at its disposal to protect its interests in the region. On a number of occasions, Egypt has demonstrated its preparedness to go to war if the situation so warranted. For example, in the 1970s when Ethiopia tried to establish projects in the Blue Nile without consultation with other fluvial states, Egypt warned Addis Ababa against such destabilising actions. Egypt made it clear to Ethiopia that Cairo was prepared to go to war to protect its national interests (Labeeb 1985: 5-15 and Hassan 1993). Egypt's interests in Sudan are centred on the desire for stability in Khartoum. Specifically, the successive governments in Egypt have been concerned with potential hostile leaders taking over the leadership in Sudan. Similarly, any internal or external threats to stability in Sudan are treated with great concern by Egyptian foreign policy-makers (Himdan 1987: 939-94).

Conclusion

The Nile River, the only major source of water for the country, plays a crucial role in the life of Egypt. As compared to the other riparian states, Egypt is the only country that is heavily dependent on the Nile River waters, making Cairo vulnerable to any actions that would jeopardise the flow of the Nile. The Nile River will always be the parameter that influences Egyptian foreign policy vis-à-vis the states in the basin region. The issue of the Nile River water and its significance for the survival of the peoples of Egypt has been clear in the minds of all political leaders in Cairo to the extent that no significant difference exists among the successive administrations over the decades. There were various attempts during the colonial period to utilise the Nile water as a political weapon against Egypt. However, these attempts never succeeded in undermining the lives of Egyptians. We argue that Egyptian claim to rights and to the utilisation of the Nile River waters is in conformity with the general practice employed in any internationally recognised drainage system. The best option in the Nile River basin is for the states in the region to engage in cooperative diplomacy to establish a comprehensive legal regime amenable to the utilisation of the waters. Specifically, stability in the region in the New Millennium is contingent upon the conclusion of a durable Nile River basin legal regime acceptable to all the riparian states.

Notes

1. There are many myths surrounding the historical relationship between Egypt and Ethiopia in particular. The suspicion that Ethiopia might obstruct the flow of the Nile water to Egypt clouded Egyptian-Ethiopian relations since mediaeval times. In more recent times, the former Ethiopian military ruler Mengistu Haile Maryam is said to have threatened the late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat with cutting off Egypt's water supply.
2. A letter from Emperor Tekla Haymanot I in 1706 to the authorities in Cairo confirmed the hostile relationship between Ethiopia and Egypt. The Emperor threatened that 'The Nile might be made the instrument of our vengeance, God having placed in our hands its fountain, its passage, and its increase, and put it in our power to make it do good or harm'. For more details see Yousuf Fadl Hassan, 'The historical Roots of the Afro-Arab Relations', *The Arab and Africa* (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1984): 31.

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