

Egyptian Foreign Policy and the Nile River: A Historical Analysis*

Abstract

Egypt has been one of the most significant countries in the Nile Basin in terms of the hydropolitics of the Nile River. Since Egypt is downstream and Ethiopia is an upstream country having main sources of the Nile waters in the basin, Egyptian water utilization has been highly dependent on the water resources that come from the Ethiopian highlands. Since Ethiopia lacked the financial and economic capacity to effectively utilize the Nile River, Egypt has been the leading exploiting country of the Nile waters. However, the Ethiopians' infrastructural projects, such as the construction of hydroelectric dams, have been considered a national security threat by the Egyptian foreign policy decision-makers. Therefore, the developments in the Nile River and Egyptian water security have been chief foreign policy concerns for Egypt. In this context, this study mainly addresses the role of the Nile River in Egyptian foreign policy based on international, regional, and domestic factors. Deploying the descriptive qualitative method, it analyses how the dam constructions and developments regarding water sharing and distribution in the Nile Basin have shaped Egypt's foreign policy throughout the historical process. It utilizes primary and secondary resources such as the original texts of the historical agreements, official statements, memoirs, and related books and articles in the literature.

Keywords: Egypt, Ethiopia, Nile River, Egyptian Foreign Policy.


Mısır Dış Politikası ve Nil Nehri: Tarihsel Bir Analiz

Öz

Mısır, Nil Nehri'nin hidropolitiği açısından Nil Havzası'ndaki en önemli ülkelerden biridir. Mısır'ın aşağı kıyıdaş, Etiyopya'nın ise havzadaki Nil sularının ana kaynaklarına sahip yukarı kıyıdaş bir ülke olması nedeniyle, Mısır'ın su kullanımı büyük ölçüde Etiyopya'nın dağlık bölgelerinden gelen su kaynaklarına bağımlı olmuştur. Etiyopya'nın Nil Nehri'nden etkin bir şekilde faydalanacak mali ve ekonomik kapasiteye sahip olmaması nedeniyle Mısır, Nil sularından faydalanan başlıca ülke olmuştur. Ancak Etiyopyalıların hidroelektrik baraj inşası gibi altyapı projeleri, Mısır dış politika karar alıcıları tarafından ulusal güvenlik tehdidi olarak görülmüştür. Dolayısıyla Nil Nehri'ndeki gelişmeler ve Mısır'ın su güvenliği, Mısır'ın başlıca dış politika kaygısı olmuştur. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma Nil Nehri'nin Mısır dış politikasındaki rolünü uluslararası, bölgesel ve yerel faktörler temelinde ele almaktadır. Betimleyici niteliksel yöntem kullanılarak, Nil Havzası'ndaki baraj inşaatları ile su paylaşımı ve dağıtımına ilişkin gelişmelerin tarihsel süreç içerisinde Mısır'ın dış politikasını nasıl şekillendirdiği analiz edilmektedir. Çalışmada, tarihsel süreçteki anlaşmaların orijinal metinleri, resmî açıklamalar, anılar ve literatürdeki ilgili kitap ve makaleler gibi birincil ve ikincil kaynaklardan yararlanılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mısır, Etiyopya, Nil Nehri, Mısır Dış Politikası.

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1. Introduction

Having an ancient history and strong connection, the Nile River has played a significant role in Egyptian social life regarding civilisation, culture, literature, faith, and economy. Even current Egyptian proverbs and idioms mention the Nile River, and Egyptian mythology often narrates stories and tales regarding the river. Besides, the ancient Greek philosopher Herodotus says “Egypt is the gift of the Nile” (Oestigaard, 2009: 143). In fact, the *Aida Opera*, composed by Giuseppe Verdi for the opening ceremony of the Suez Canal in 1871, even though not completed missed it, reflects the rivalry between Egypt and Ethiopia, considered the oldest geopolitical rivalry in the African continent (Gebreluel, 2014).

Since the Nile River has been one of the Egyptians' most significant sources of life, Egypt's foreign policy in the African continent, especially its relations with Sudan and Ethiopia, can be considered one of Egypt's crucial foreign policy parameters (Shama, 2021: 43). Such situations can also be found in the books and articles the decision-makers wrote. For instance, in the *Philosophy of the Revolution*, Gamal Abdel-Nasser indicates Arab, African and Islamic worlds as the most significant foreign policy circles of Egypt. In this regard, the Nile River, the artery of life that Abdel-Nasser defines, accounts for one of the reasons why Egypt required to get involve into the African affairs (Abdel-Nasser, 1955: 69–70).

On the other hand, Boutros Boutros-Ghali defines four foreign policy circles of Egypt: Arab, African, Mediterranean, and Islamic. To him, Africa is the most crucial circle due to the “challenge of the Nile” (cited in Erlich, 2015: 196). Moreover, Ahmeh Aboul Gheit, a servant of Egyptian diplomacy and foreign minister between 2004 and 2011, touches upon the importance of the Nile River as he defines it as “one of my chief concerns as foreign minister, and the most critical for our national security” (Gheit, 2020: 195). Finally, Nabil Fahmy (2020, p. 140) describes the Nile River as “both a national security and economic concern” for the Egyptians. Besides, to Fahmy (2020: 135), Egypt's relations with Sudan were existential since the Nile flows from Ethiopia and Sudan towards Egypt.”

Despite deep interests in Egyptian Foreign Policy and the role of the Nile River described by the decision-makers, such a situation can rarely be found in academic literature. For example, Hassan and Rasheedy (2007, 2011) analyze the Nile River and Egyptian foreign policy interests. They describe four main national interests: protecting Egypt's borders, the area of the Red Sea, ensuring water security, and Egypt's vital interests. However, once the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) began, academic studies increased. For instance, Cascão and Nicol (2016) questions “new norms of cooperation,” Tawfik (2016a) considers the developments in the basin as “protracted transition,” and İlkbahar and Mercan (2023) analyze how Egypt responded to the GERD.

Regarding the negotiations of the GERD, Seide and Fantini (2023) focus on the emotions in water diplomacy, Yimer and Subaşı (2021) analyze Trump's “speech act” during the negotiations, and Tawfik (2023) assesses the African Union's role in the negotiations. Nevertheless, the academic literature is still limited to have a collective study on the role of the Nile River in Egyptian Foreign Policy. In this context, this article mainly aims to analyse the role of the Nile River in Egyptian Foreign Policy in the domestic, regional, and international aspects. Deploying the descriptive qualitative method, it questions how the Nile River has played a role in Egyptian Foreign Policy from the British occupation until the GERD. Based on the primary

and secondary sources, this article argues that the intersection of the international, regional, and domestic developments has influenced the Egyptian Foreign Policy.

2. Pre-independent period and the age of Britain (1882-1922)

The Egyptian interests and policies on the Nile can be traced back to Muhammad Ali Pasha's era in the modern period since it underwent several political, economic, military, and social transformations, further contributing to the river's hydrology since some barrages and canals were constructed on the Nile to increase agricultural production (Özkoç, 2015: 69). However, the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 changed the Nile hydrogeopolitics and increased Egypt's dependence on the Nile waters. Although Britain occupied Egypt for geopolitical reasons such as securing the imperial road towards India and colonial competition with the other European great powers, it realized that "who controls the Nile, control Egypt" (Kendie, 1999: 143; Milas, 2013: 82), and who controls Sudan "held Egypt at her mercy" (Tvedt, 2010: 5). However, Britain was later aware that it was required to improve the Nile River system for the Egyptians' agricultural interests and to consolidate its power in Egypt. Besides, the British cotton factories supplied the cotton material from the Egyptian cultivated areas, which were highly dependent on the security of the Nile waters (Gebreluel, 2014: 26).

Moreover, due to the colonial competition in Africa, other colonial powers had specific interests regarding the Nile. Therefore, Britain also guaranteed the Nile waters' security while signing agreements with them. To conclude, these three main factors, which also demonstrate why the Nile was critical for the British administration in Egypt, directed the British administration in Egypt to develop three effective mechanisms through technology, military, and diplomacy in Egypt.

Firstly, in addition to canals and irrigation projects developed by Muhammad Ali Pasha and Khedive Ismael Pasha, which increased the agricultural revenue of Egypt (Tvedt, 2011: 177), British hydrologists and engineers from India studied to construct a modern version of them (Collins, 2008: 111). However, once the British hydrologists considered constructing a low dam at Aswan in the 1890s, they were later aware that they needed more information related to the Nile (Tvedt, 2016: 24–27). Such a situation led to the British military mechanism regarding the complete control of the entire Nile River Basin. The British army considered controlling the African lakes (Tvedt, 2011: 180–181), and considered the occupation of Sudan. The Egyptians also supported Britain's Sudan campaign for two reasons: the nostalgic dream of the Egyptians and complete control of the Nile (Tvedt, 2016: 26–32), and the British-Egyptian army ultimately controlled Sudan in 1899.

Britain launched the third mechanism after developing modern irrigation and canal systems on the Nile and realising the control. It established diplomatic contacts with the European Great powers such as Italy, Belgium, and France and regional countries such as Ethiopia and the Independent State of Congo (ISC) since they also had geopolitical interests in the region and were the main colonial actors in the basin. First, Germany in 1890 and Belgium in 1894 recognised the Nile as the British "sphere of influence;" however, France did not recognise it until the Fashoda Crisis in 1898 (Tvedt, 2016: 42–44). Besides these recognitions, Britain endeavored to guarantee the "free and secure flow of the Nile waters" through diplomatic contacts. In this regard, British agreements with Italy (1891), Ethiopia (1902), the ISC (1906), France-Italy (1906), and Italy (1925) can be examples (Kasimbazi, 2010: 720–726; Okidi, 2008:

321–327; Swain, 1997: 676). The central theme was primarily security of the Nile waters and providing a free and secure flow. Therefore, all tried to prevent countries from “constructing” or “allowing” any works on the Nile to be constructed. In this context, it can be argued that the British occupation positively influenced Egyptian water security and the emergence of the Egyptian dominance and hegemony on the Nile Basin.

It can be argued that the intersection of the international, regional, and domestic variables influenced Britain’s active policies regarding the Nile River in the pre-independent period of Egypt, as shown in the Table 1. In the international context, the security of the British imperial road towards India and colonial rivalry on the Nile paved the way for the occupation of Egypt. Regionally, colonial powers’ threat to influence the Nile River also threatened Britain and the security of Nile waters. This led to the occupation of the Equatorial Nile including Sudan, which led to the exchange of notes, agreements, and protocols among Britain, colonial powers, and Ethiopia. Domestically, the Egyptian economy mainly depended on cotton production for the industries in Britain, which was also related to the security of the Nile waters. Therefore, securing the flowing of the Nile waters meant the security and sustainability of the Egyptian economy, which also contributed to the continuation of the occupation.

3. Independent period under the British influence (1922-1952)

Once Egypt became independent in 1922, it could not implement an independent foreign policy due to reservations in the independence declaration, and its foreign policy was mainly restricted to its relations with Britain (Cleveland & Bunton, 2008: 196). Therefore, Britain continued to affect the foreign policy of Egypt regarding the developments in the Nile River. Similar to the British occupation era, it struggled for water security and the rise of water supply from the river. However, Egyptian-Sudanese relations deteriorated once the Gezira Scheme and Sennar Dam construction in Sudan came to the British agenda (Tvedt, 2016: 95). Since they were the first projects outside Egypt, the Egyptian nationalists considered they would jeopardise Egyptian water security (Mills, 2015: 40). Due to the Egyptian nationalists’ unrest and the news regarding the dam building in Addis Ababa on the Blue Nile by the Americans, which would undermine both Egyptian and Sudanese water security, Britain decided to provide “all possible assistance” to Egypt which would consider the Egyptian water security (Tvedt, 2016: 143–144).

Accordingly, “Exchange of Notes” was signed between Egypt and Britain in 1929, in which the latter signed it on behalf of Sudan and Equatorial Nile countries such as Kenya, Tanganyika and Uganda (Okidi, 2008: 326). Considering the articles, it can be argued that it “appeared to work solely for the benefit of Egypt” (Collins, 1996: 157) for several reasons. Firstly, it regulated the water distribution between Egypt and Sudan (Mills, 2015: 42), and the latest guaranteed 4 billion cubic meter (bcm), while the former guaranteed 48 bcm (Tvedt, 2016: 145). Secondly, Egypt became the “on-site inspector” around the Nile River while monitoring the workings of the Sennar Dam. Thirdly, connected with the second benefit, the agreement guaranteed “no works would be executed on the river or any of its tributaries which would prejudice Egyptian interests” (Waterbury, 1979: 67). In this context, Egypt had the right to veto the hydraulic projects which would harm its water security. In this context, Sudan’s Jebel Auliya Dam and Uganda’s Owen Falls Dam would be constructed based on Egypt’s approval and consent (Tvedt, 2016: 211–213). Finally, Britain and other Eastern African countries in the basin accepted Egypt’s historical and natural rights regarding water utilization (Collins, 1996: 157).

As indicated, it can be argued that the Exchange of Notes in 1929 would guarantee the Egyptians' water security.

Although Egypt guaranteed its water security in the White Nile Basin, the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie's Lake Tana Project at the beginning of the 1930s was conceived as risky for Egypt's water security in the Blue Nile Basin. Nevertheless, the emperor decided to carry out the project with the US firm, G.J. White Engineering Corporation of New York (Waterbury, 2002: 64), and they began surveying the dam sites. However, the project was never realized due to several developments related to Egypt, as Ethiopia's lack of financial and economic capacity (Tvedt, 2016: 161), Britain's intensive endeavoring to prevent it since it would harm the Sudanese agricultural production, which would influence the British cotton firms (Tvedt, 2016: 162–165), and Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. Just as Egypt was against the project since it would harm water sharing, it also considered that the Italian invasion would threaten its water security (Erlich, 2000: 184). Therefore, Egypt re-oriented its foreign policy towards Ethiopia and sent al-Azhar sheiks, Ethiopian-Egyptian volunteers, and medical experts to consolidate the Muslim Ethiopians against the aggression (Erlich, 2015: 104).

Once the construction of Jebel Auliya Dam started in 1933, the Egyptian nationalists were against it, arguing that Egypt should construct the dam first on its territory and that British sovereignty over the dams in Sudan would hamper the secured flowing of the Nile waters (Mills, 2015: 50). However, after the construction ended in 1937, it was argued that Egypt did not benefit from the dam effectively (Mills, 2015: 52). Regarding the Owen Falls Dam, Egypt experienced water shortages and extreme flooding in the mid-1940s and considered the dam construction in Uganda. Ultimately, the Exchange of Notes between Egypt and Britain was signed, and the construction began. According to the agreement, the dam had two significant aims: regulating Egypt's water flow and producing electricity for Uganda (Waterbury, 2002: 160). Therefore, Cascão (2019: 121) argues that the constructed dams under the influence of British colonialism, such as the Sennar Dam, Gezira Irrigation Scheme and Jebel Auliya Dam in Sudan, and Owen Falls Dam in Uganda, had only one aim: to regulate the free and secure flow of the Nile waters towards Egypt. In this context, though the Egyptian nationalists were against them, dam buildings and agreements regarding the water distribution in the basin benefited Egypt and constituted a status quo in the region. However, after the Free Officers' military coup in 1952, Egypt abandoned dam buildings outside its territory and began considering upstream developmental projects as a "national security threat" (Tvedt, 2010: 7).

In this period, international, regional, and domestic developments influenced the Egyptian Foreign Policy regarding the developments in the Nile Basin, as indicated in the Table 1. Internationally, American assistance regarding the unrealized Lake Tana Project and Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 directed Egypt and Britain to secure the Nile waters. Regionally, dam buildings such as the Sennar Dam, Gezira Irrigation Scheme, Jebel Auliya Dam and Owen Falls Dam were constructed based on the Exchange of Notes in 1929, mostly favoring the Egyptian interests regarding the Nile River. Domestically, although the Egyptian nationalists were first against the projects outside Egypt, they later accepted them since those ultimately favored Egypt, and it did not hamper the Egyptians' water utilization.

4. Abdel-Nasser and Internationalisation of the Nile Hydropolitics (1952-1970)

The Free Officers' military coup in 1952 and the subsequent developments in Egypt influenced the regional and international politics of the Nile Basin. Free Officers' focus on constructing the Aswan High Dam (AHD) proposed by the Greek-Egyptian Adrien Daninos, which would provide water storage and increase water supply (Waterbury, 1979: 96), ultimately altered the direction of Egyptian foreign policy. It can be argued that several reasons behind the construction of the AHD exist. Firstly, the Free Officers were mainly ideologically anti-imperialists. Therefore, they were against British imperialism in Egypt, and the AHD would symbolize anti-imperialism in Egypt. Considering the primary British strategy regarding the Nile River, which involves building the dams at the Upper Nile, building the AHD within the Egyptian borders would be against the British imperial strategy in the basin. Secondly, the Egyptian water security regarding the Nile ultimately depended on the other actors' behaviors in the basin since the water storage of the Owen Falls Dam and Sennar Dam were within the borders of Uganda and Sudan. Therefore, massive water storage at Lake Nasser would provide better water security for the Egyptians. Thirdly, taking the importance of the massive water infrastructure for the economic development of the countries into account (Hussein, Conker, & Grandi, 2022: 302), the AHD would provide better economic development and welfare for the Egyptian people, including electricity consumption, employment (Tvedt, 2016: 260–261). Fourthly, the Free Officers could not tolerate extreme drought and uncertainties of the River beginning in the late 1940s. Finally, Abdel-Nasser considered it would strengthen his position against General Naguib and legitimize the military coup to consolidate the new regime in Egypt (Swain, 1997: 680).

However, Egypt could not proceed with the construction and required financial, economic, and technical assistance. Therefore, Egypt began negotiating with the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the Federal Republic of Germany in 1953 (Waterbury, 1979: 101–102). Since Britain did not want to lose its influence on Egyptian politics and the Nile Hydropolitics, it insisted it would not be financial assistance from the IBRD unless Sudan and Egypt agreed on reallocating their water sharing (Tvedt, 2016: 268–269). Therefore, the IBRD determined a pre-condition that Egypt should first agree with the US and Britain, which also had several pre-conditions regarding the financial and economic aid for the dam construction.

Firstly, Egypt had to focus on the dam's construction, and it would divert one-third of its internal revenues to the construction for ten years. Secondly, the IBRD periodically would have the right to inspect and review the economy of Egypt. Thirdly, all the contracts and agreements regarding the dam construction and its financial requirements would be open to international bidding. However, the Eastern Bloc states and their communist allies would be prohibited from bidding. Fourthly, Egypt would not get involved in the engagements and foreign obligations regarding the economic issues unless the IBRD reviewed and approved it. Finally, concerning the British precondition, unless Egypt and Sudan signed a new agreement regarding the water allocation, the IBRD would not give the required credit to Egypt (Waterbury, 1979: 105). Considering the Free Officers' ideology regarding foreign intervention and anti-imperialism, these preconditions have detrimental effects on Egypt's foreign policy. As a result, Abdel-Nasser decided to nationalize the Suez Canal to use its revenues as financial and economic resources for the construction; however, such an attempt led to the Suez Crisis in 1956.

After the Suez Crisis, Abdel-Nasser successfully nationalized the canal. On the other hand, the AHD began to represent “revolutionary symbolism” (Meital, 2000: 219), since it represented the resistance against Western imperialism (Waterbury, 1979, p. 108). Therefore, the AHD went beyond agriculture, economic development, and water supply. It began to occupy public and private life, including street and square names, postcards, textbooks, and music life, such as Umm Kulthum’s famous song “Tahwil al-Nil” (Transforming the Nile in English) (Meital, 2000: 220–224).

The AHD’s construction affected Egypt’s domestic politics and foreign policy regarding the superpowers in the Cold War, in which the bilateral relations between Egypt and the Soviet Union developed. However, since the latter first desired the new agreement between Egypt and Sudan, how the AHD influenced their bilateral relations will be analyzed. After Sudan became independent, it announced it would not recognize the 1929 agreement due to the limited water allocation. Besides, the newly independent Sudan was against the AHD and proposed five pre-conditions for acceptance. These are mainly determining ultimate water sharing, freely constructing dams and irrigation canals, providing a new place for the people living in the Wadi Halfa region, which Egypt would burden, and extending the Gezira Scheme (Abdalla, 1971: 330–331). After negotiations failed, Sudan sent the army to the border with Egypt, and Egypt economically boycotted Sudan. However, the tension continued until Major General Ibrahim Abboud organized the military coup, which regarded the AHD and the Nile as an artificial problem (Khan, 1959: 147).

After the military coup in Sudan in 1958, Egypt and Sudan ultimately signed the agreement “For the Full Utilization of the Nile Waters” in 1959 (Collins, 1996: 266–268). While this agreement disregarded the other riparians, Egypt guaranteed 55.5 bcm, and Sudan’s portion was 18.5 bcm (Collins, 1996: 271–272). Besides, Roseires Dam on the Blue Nile would be constructed based on the 1959 Agreement for the sake of the Sudanese interests. Moreover, both agreed the Jonglei Canal’s construction to eliminate the swamp areas on the White Nile, and the Permanent Joint Technical Commission (PJTC) was established. Furthermore, since the AHD reservoir would influence the people around the construction site in the Wadi Halfa region in Sudan, Egypt would pay 15 million Egyptian pounds to Sudan (Okidi, 2008: 334–335).

The AHD also influenced Egypt-Soviet Union relations since Abdel-Nasser was eager to agree with the Soviet Union regarding the construction (Waterbury, 1979: 108). In this context, Egypt and the Soviet Union signed two separate agreements regarding construction costs. The latter granted \$100 million US dollars in the first stage of the construction (Dawisha, 1979: 170–171). Besides, the Soviet Union and Egypt signed another agreement regarding the second stage, and the former provided a \$120 billion US dollar credit package (Waterbury, 1979: 109).

On the other hand, the Ethiopian newspapers announced that Haile Selassie desired to construct a dam on the Blue Nile along with the US Bureau of Reclamation called the Abbay Master Plan Study (Collins, 1996: 277–278). The Bureau and Ethiopia surveyed most proper dam sites, proposing four major dam projects on the Blue Nile. Similar to the Lake Tana Project in the mid-1930s, Ethiopia never realized them (Arsano, 2010: 167). Nevertheless, Egypt considered such initiatives to be a national security threat. It began destabilizing Ethiopia by supporting the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), which assumed the secession from Ethiopia, and the Somalia Youth League (SYL), which assumed Greater Somalia, including some parts of Ethiopia (Erlich, 2015: 130–131). In this context, the primary motivation behind the Egyptians’

support of secessionists against Ethiopia was to destabilize Ethiopia and hamper the dam buildings on the Blue Nile (Gebreluel, 2014: 28). However, Abdel-Nasser also tried to promote cooperation in the basin. For instance, the Hydrometeorological Survey (Hydromet) in 1967 is the first example of the cooperative efforts which Ethiopia perceived as Egypt's Trojan Horse in the basin (Waterbury, 2002: 76–77). Considering the changing dimension of Egypt's relations with the superpowers in the international context and with Sudan and Ethiopia in the regional context, the construction of the AHD and the Nile Hydropolitics, in general, influenced the direction of the Egyptian foreign policy.

Before analyzing the Anwar Sadat period regarding the developments on the Nile River, it can be said that the Egyptian hydro-hegemony can be traced back to the AHD's construction (Zeitoun et al., 2022: 1008). Since then, upstream developmental projects that would significantly threaten the Egyptian water security have been regarded national security threat, and Egypt has focused on the protection of the status quo (Tvedt, 2010: 7). In this context, there are several reasons why Egypt has continued to prevail over the status quo in the basin. Firstly, considering more than 90 percent of the Egyptian population has resided on the banks of the river, it has been the only primary freshwater resource for the Egyptians to do agriculture, drink fresh water, and for other economic developments such as industry, transportation and tourism (Gebreluel, 2014: 25; Hassan & Rasheedy, 2007: 27). Secondly, the Nile River has constituted one of the most significant self-identifications for the Egyptians, along with the Coptic, Christian, Islam, Mediterranean, Arab, and African identities. Therefore, the continuity of the status quo also means the continuity of Egypt's biographical and ontological security of the Egyptian state (Gebresenbet & Wondemagegnehu, 2021: 88–89).

In this period, the intersection of international, regional, and domestic developments influenced Egypt's foreign policy in the context of the Nile River, as demonstrated in the Table 1. Internationally, the Cold War mainly affected both the developments in the Nile Basin and the Egyptian Foreign Policy. Therefore, Egypt's relations with the US and the Soviet Union were crucial. While the latter became the leading promoter and provider of aid for constructing the AHD, the former supported Ethiopia. Regionally, Egypt's relations with Sudan and the agreement "for the full utilization of the Nile Waters" were milestones in understanding water distribution. Domestically, the Free Officers military coup under Abdel-Nasser and their ideology based on anti-imperialism and prioritizing the development of Egypt mainly influenced Egypt's construction of the AHD and regional and international relations.

5. Anwar Sadat and the Radicalisation of the Nile Hydropolitics (1970-1981)

The construction of the AHD was completed in 1971; however, Anwar Sadat mainly focused on re-structuring Egypt's foreign policy. While Sadat sought peace with the US and Israel, he dismissed all the Soviet technicians in 1972. After the Yom Kippur War, the US, Israel, and Egypt were involved in the disengagement agreements, and the bilateral relations with the US and Egypt began to develop. On the other hand, Mengistu Haile Mariam overthrew Haile Selassie via a military coup in 1974, declared Ethiopia a radical socialist state, and caused the Soviets-Ethiopian relations to develop. Taking the periods of Gamal Abdel-Nasser and Haile Selassie, in which the Soviet Union supported the former, and the US supported the latter, into consideration, the US supported Egypt, and the Soviets supported Ethiopia in the periods of Sadat and Haile Mariam (Turhan, 2021: 71).

While the Cold War influenced their relations, Egypt's continuous support towards the ELF and the SYL and Ethiopia's initiatives regarding the dam construction on the Blue Nile worsened the relations. Besides, Sadat and Haile Mariam got involved in a verbal war against each other (Collins, 2002: 214). Furthermore, Egypt increased its support to the SYL in the Ogaden War between 1977 and 1978. Even Egypt organized a form of cooperation with Saudi Arabia in the Arab League while calling the US for help (Erlich, 2015: 166–167). Egypt was concerned about the Nile waters, and Anwar Sadat threatened Ethiopia, saying, "We depend upon the Nile 100 percent in our life, so if anyone, at any moment thinks to deprive us of our life we shall never hesitate to go to war because it is a matter of life or death" (Collins, 2002: 213–214). As these discourses shown, the Egyptian-Ethiopian dispute on the Nile continued and Sadat strongly emphasized the importance of the Nile waters for the Egyptian social, cultural and economic life.

The Nile question dominated the peace talks between Egypt and Israel, increasing the tension between Egypt and Ethiopia. While Sadat announced his intention to dig a canal from Suez towards the Sinai, he did not mention its last destination (Waterbury, 2002: 70). On the other hand, Ethiopia was against the project and considered Egypt the seller of Ethiopia's water (Erlich, 2015: 168). The verbal war between Egypt and Ethiopia increased, and the former threatened Ethiopia. Besides, Sadat offered a new deal for Israel regarding the Nile waters in the Camp David process: Egypt would supply 365 million cubic meters of water from the Nile to Israel in return for an independent Palestine state. While Israel rejected it, Ethiopia and the other basin countries criticized and denounced the offer (Swain, 1997: 683). Once Camp David concluded, Sadat stated, "the only matter that could take Egypt to war again is water" (Starr, 1991: 19).

Considering such statements and the developments, the Nile Hydropolitics and the Egyptian-Ethiopian bilateral relations severed and radicalized. Since Sadat utilized the "war rhetoric," opportunity of cooperation was limited in the Nile Basin. However, Boutros Boutros-Ghali tried to convince Anwar Sadat due to the importance of cooperation between Egypt and Ethiopia, since he believed the Nile River is related to Egypt's national survivals. According to him, Egypt's national security is depended on the southern regions rather than Israel, since the southern regions have the sources of the Nile waters" (Boutros-Ghali, 1997: 321–322). In this context, Boutros-Ghali visited Ethiopia and tried to find ways to establish a comprehensive cooperation mechanism in the basin; however, it was realized in the period of Hosni Mubarak.

In this period, the mainly domestic, regional, and international developments played a role in the Nile hydropolitics and the Egyptian Foreign Policy, as outlined in the Table 1. Internationally, the Cold War still sustained its influence on the Nile; however, superpowers-actors in the Nile relations changed. While the US began to support Egypt, the Soviet Union supported Ethiopia. Regionally and most importantly, Egypt increased its support towards the ELF and SYL to destabilize Ethiopia. Domestically, Anwar Sadat utilized harsh discourse and war rhetoric to securitize the Nile River.

6. Mubarak and the Promotion of Cooperation on the Nile? (1981-2011)

For the first decade of Hosni Mubarak, Egypt began to promote basin-wide cooperation mechanisms in the Nile Basin. Mubarak embraced Boutros-Ghali's opinions, which he assumed that the cooperation among the basin countries would serve the interests of all the countries

and the entire river system (Boutros-Ghali, 1982: 783). In this context, it began to support the other basin countries regarding technological infrastructure, engineering, and financial and economic assistance for two reasons. Firstly, hydrologists knew that the AHD began not to serve appropriately for the Egyptians' interests. Secondly, crucial desertification and droughts in the mid-1980s also increased the Egyptians' anxiety regarding the Nile River (Erlach, 2015: 199–200). Therefore, under Boutros-Ghali's efforts, the Undugu Group was formed in 1983; however, Ethiopia also considered it the new Egyptian Trojan Horse (Swain, 2002: 301). In the 1990s, Egypt's cooperation initiatives, including financial and technical assistance, continued (Tawfik, 2016b: 71). The Technical Committee for the Promotion Development and Environmental Protection of the Nile Basin (TECCONILE) was established in Uganda in 1993. While Egypt, Sudan, Rwanda, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) joined the organization, Ethiopia, Burundi, Kenya, and Tanzania became the observers (Swain, 2008: 209). As in the cases of Hydromet and Undugu, Ethiopia regarded the TECCONILE as Egypt's new legitimiser instrument in the basin and refrained from active membership (Cascão, 2008: 23).

While Ethiopia refrained from membership in these organisations, it began to sign new agreements with Sudan and Egypt. Once Mengistu Haile Mariam's socialist regime collapsed in 1991, Ethiopia and Sudan signed the friendship declaration in 1991. Besides, Ethiopia and Egypt signed a similar agreement in 1993 (Salman, 2020: 156–157). Nevertheless, neither included the most fundamental international law principle, appreciable harm, and articles regarding the 1959 Agreement and water sharing in the basin. Therefore, the Ethiopian delegation explained they “run into a stone wall” (Waterbury, 1997: 296) though they gained several concessions. Ultimately, Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia agreed on establishing a basin-wide organization (Waterbury, 2002: 82–83).

Accordingly, the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) was established in 1999 (Swain, 2008: 209). The NBI's primary aim was “to achieve sustainable socio-economic development through the equitable utilization of, and benefit from, the common Nile Basin water resources” (Nile Basin Initiative, 2022). Regarding the emergence of the NBI, the US and the World Bank (WB) played an essential role since they forced Egypt to support basin-wide cooperation. However, it is argued that though Egypt supported collective action and cooperation in the basin in the public eye and media, it rejected developmental projects in the NBI summits and meetings (cited in Tekuya, 2018: 13–14).

The NBI's main task was to form a new basin-wide agreement that would replace the 1929 and 1959 Agreements. Therefore, members focused on the Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA); however, Egypt and Sudan defended their water rights based on the 1959 Agreement in the negotiations. Despite this, ministerial negotiations advanced in 2006 and 2007 (Tawfik, 2016b: 72). However, Article 14 (b) became the main problem between upstream and downstream countries. While Article 14 (b) states “not to significantly affect the water security of any other Nile Basin States” (Cooperative Framework Agreement, 2010); however, according to Egypt and Sudan, the article should be “not to adversely affect the water security and current uses and rights of any other Nile Basin State” (Tekuya, 2018: 14). After negotiations failed, Egypt and Sudan's arguments were reserved for the annexation. Despite Egypt and Sudan's efforts, the CFA was finally opened to sign for the members of the NBI in 2010. While Ethiopia, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, and Burundi signed, except for Kenya and Burundi, all the

signatories also ratified the CFA; however, Egypt and Sudan suspended their membership status (Tawfik, 2016b: 73).

In the period of Hosni Mubarak, the intersection of international, regional, and domestic developments played a critical role, as reflected in the Table 1. Internationally, the US and the World Bank pressed Egypt to develop basin-wide cooperation with the other Nile Basin countries. Regionally, Egypt led the establishment of several basin-wide organizations, such as the Undugu Group, TECCONILE, and the NBI. Besides, after the communist regime collapsed in Ethiopia, Egypt, and Ethiopia signed an agreement significant for the Nile disputes. Domestically, Boutros-Ghali's ideas and worldviews mainly directed Egypt's approach towards the Nile Basin. However, the increasing effects of desertification and droughts and the AHD's undesired works also played critical roles in improving cooperation with the Nile Basin countries.

7. Morsi, Sisi and the Challenges of the GERD (2011-2022)

Once Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi announced Ethiopia's intention to construct the GERD in 2011, Egypt had to deal with the impacts of the Arab Uprisings and their ramifications in domestic politics. Accordingly, Egypt did not effectively respond to GERD for four reasons. Firstly, the changing power dimension between Egypt and Ethiopia in which the latest began to challenge the Egyptian hegemony through the NBI and the other diplomatic mechanisms (Cascão, 2009; Cascão, 2008) was turned into a "fact on the ground challenge" through the GERD (İlkbahar & Mercan, 2023: 5). Secondly, Egypt was one of the Middle Eastern countries that experienced the fall of the long-term president, interim government, revolution, and counter-revolution in the Arab Uprising. Therefore, Ethiopia turned the uprisings into an advantage to construct the dam, while Egypt had to deal with the effects of it (Za'bal, 2021).

Thirdly, although it was Egypt's long-term ally in the region, Sudan's changing approach towards the developments in the Nile Basin also contributed to Egypt's acceptance of the GERD. In 2012, Omar al-Bashir officially expressed Sudan would support GERD (Sudan Tribune, 2012). Besides, the report prepared by the International Panel of Experts (IPoE) in 2013 demonstrated the positive impacts of the GERD on Sudan. In this regard, Sudan considered that the GERD would benefit itself in terms of Sudan's electricity imports produced by the GERD, prevention of sedimentary and extreme floods, and regulation of the river's flows (Salman, 2020: 516–517; Tawfik, 2016c: 579). Finally, other than Sudan, other Nile Basin countries also played a crucial role. In this context, the changing discourse of the NBI and its member countries and their support of the GERD contributed to Egypt's acceptance of the project and prevented Egypt from taking unilateral action against the GERD (Cascão & Nicol, 2016: 558).

Once he became the president of Egypt in 2012, Morsi primarily utilized the pro-cooperative and dialogue rhetoric. However, the increasing tension between Egypt and Ethiopia and public pressure led Morsi to utilize the opposite discourse. For instance, while he proposed diplomacy and dialogue in one of his speeches, he also threatened Ethiopia, saying, "We will defend each drop of Nile water with our blood if necessary." After describing the Nile River as the "primary source of livelihood, history and civilisation," he says, "We do not want war, but we do not accept threats to our security" (Ahram Online, 2013). Besides, the Egyptian Foreign Minister of the Morsi government, Mohamed Kamel Amr, stated, "Egypt will not give up on a single drop

of water from the Nile or any part of what arrives into Egypt from this water in terms of quantity and quality” (Reuters, 2013). Considering such statements, Morsi also utilised coercive discourse regarding the dam construction on the Nile River.

Table 1: Domestic, Regional and International Factors and the Egyptian Foreign Policy regarding the Nile

	<u>Domestic</u>	<u>Regional</u>	<u>International</u>
1882-1922	Economy (cotton production) Mitigate Egyptian nationalism	Colonial powers’ regional threat Occupation of the Equatorial Nile Treaties with Ethiopia	Security of the British imperial road Colonial Rivalry
1922-1952	Egyptian nationalists’ anti-dams	Dam constructions (Gezira Scheme, Sennar Dam, Jebel Auliya Dam, Owen Falls Dam, Lake Tana Project) Exchange of Notes	Unrealized American assistance to Ethiopia Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia
1952-1970	Free-Officers’ anti-imperialism Economic development of Egypt (Aswan High Dam)	Egypt-Sudan Relations 1959 Agreement	Cold War and Suez Crisis Egypt-Soviet Relations American Assistance towards Ethiopia
1970-1981	Sadat’s war rhetoric	Egypt’s support to ELF and the SYL	Cold War
1981-2011	Boutros-Ghali’s ideas Desertification and droughts AHD’s failure	Regional cooperation (Undugu, TECCONILE, NBI) Egyptian-Ethiopian relations	The US and WB pressure on Egypt
2011-2023	Arab Uprising and turmoil in the Egyptian domestic politics Presidential elections and military coup	Ethiopian dam construction (GERD) Egypt’s support demand from the Nile Basin countries Egypt’s support demand from Arab countries	Egypt’s demand support from Russia and China The US Mediation Referring the GERD to the UNSC

Similar to Morsi, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi also signalled to the diplomacy, dialogue and cooperation as soon as he became president in 2014. In his first speech, he stressed the importance of Egypt’s relations with African countries, especially Ethiopia (Fahmy, 2020: 144). Accordingly, the Declaration of Principles (DoP) was signed among Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan in 2015. It consisted of a preamble and ten different principles. Only four are concerned with GERD, and the remaining six are related to the fundamental principles of international water law, such as no significant damage and fair and appropriate use (Salman, 2020: 166). The DoP included cooperation matters among three states, such as the purchase of electricity, exchange of information regarding the construction and operation of the dam, security of the dam, building mutual trust, the establishment of a coordination mechanism, conducting the required studies, and using them as bases for agreeing on the dam’s filling and operation (Declaration of Principles, 2015). However, Fahmy (2020: 144–145) considered that DoP’s misinterpretations and misunderstandings have weakened “Egypt’s strongest negotiating position” since the international financial contributions were opened for the GERD.

Although the repercussions of the DoP were primarily positive, and it has been regarded as an outstanding achievement for the cooperation regarding GERD, the first and second filling processes negatively influenced the trilateral relations between 2019 and 2021. In this regard, the Egyptians' discourse over the GERD became harsher, and Sisi began to deploy war rhetoric against Ethiopia. However, US President Donald Trump was also involved in the securitization process of the GERD. Once the US became the mediator, Trump's speech act mainly favored Egypt, and the negotiations failed (Yimer & Subaşı, 2021). Besides, Egypt requested support from Russia, China, EU members, and Arab and African states, and referring the GERD dispute to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) was the most successful achievement for Egyptian diplomacy. However, the UNSC decided the GERD dispute should be mediated by the African Union, which Egypt was disappointed (Aboudouh, 2021).

On the other hand, Egypt also tried to develop good relations with the Nile Basin countries, including Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, and Burundi. Accordingly, Egypt signed several economic and military agreements with them, and the president visited all these countries amidst the crisis regarding the dam fillings. In this context, Egypt also demanded support for dealing with the GERD (İlkbahar & Mercan, 2023). In this period, the intersection of international, regional, and domestic developments mainly directed Egypt's foreign policy to deal with the GERD, as outlined in the Table 1. In the international context, considering the positive relations between Egypt and the US and rapidly improving relations between Egypt, Russia, and China (Selim, 2020), it can be argued that Egypt's relations with them influenced the Egyptian Foreign Policy regarding the dam, and Egypt demanded support. On the regional level, Egyptian diplomacy played a relatively active role by improving relations with the other Nile Basin countries. Besides, Egypt endeavored to include its fellow Arab states in the process. On the domestic level, the Arab Uprising and the subsequent developments, such as presidential change and military coups, also played a critical role in this process. In addition, the Egyptian leaders deployed securitization and war rhetoric in their public speeches.

8. Conclusion

This study mainly focuses on how the Nile River has shaped Egyptian Foreign Policy based on domestic, regional, and international developments. In this context, from the British occupation in 1882 until the independency in 1922, colonial rivalry among the great powers and the British economic and political interests in the basin can be considered significant indicators of the international context. Besides, colonial powers' interests regarding the Nile waters and the British army's occupation of the Equatorial Lake regions were the regional developments. Moreover, cotton factories in Britain mainly depended on Egyptian agriculture, which also depended on the security of the Nile waters. Therefore, it can be argued that international, regional and domestic factors played a role.

From independence in 1922 until the Free Officers military coup in 1952, the Americans aimed to assist Ethiopia, and Italy's invasion of Ethiopia played a crucial role in the international context. While dam buildings in Sudan and the other Nile regions affected the Egyptian Foreign Policy, which ultimately ended with the Exchange of Notes between Britain and Egypt in 1929 were the regional developments, the Egyptian nationalists' anti-stance towards the dam buildings outside Egypt was the domestic ones. From 1952 until the death of Abdel-Nasser in 1970, the Cold War, Suez Crisis, Egypt-Soviet relations, and the American aims to support Ethiopia influenced the Egyptian Foreign Policy in the international context. The most crucial

regional indicators were the Egyptian-Sudanese relations and the agreement “for the full utilization of the Nile Waters” in 1959. Egypt’s requirement for economic development and Free Officers’ anti-imperial ideology can be considered domestic factors.

During the period of Anwar Sadat between 1970 and 1981, the Cold War, in the international context, still influenced Egyptian foreign policy regarding the Nile River. Egypt began to support ELF and SYL to destabilize Ethiopia due to the news and information that assumed Ethiopia planned to construct dams on the Blue Nile River, reflecting the regional dimension. On the other hand, Sadat’s harsh discourse and war rhetoric were the domestic indicators of Egyptian foreign policy. Once Hosni Mubarak came to power in 1981, internationally, the US and the World Bank began to press Egypt to establish or lead basin-wide cooperation in the Nile Basin, which assumes equitable water utilization. Regionally, Egypt began to lead such basin-wide organizations as the Undugu Group, TECCONILE, and the NBI. Besides, after the communist regime collapsed in Ethiopia, Egyptian-Ethiopian relations also changed positively. Domestically, increasing desertification and droughts in Egypt and not getting the desired efficiency from the AHD caused a change in the Egyptian Foreign Policy in the Nile Basin in a very positive way. In addition, Boutros-Ghali’s ideas and liberal worldview based on cooperation can also be considered domestic factors.

Egyptian Foreign Policy regarding the developments in the Nile River confronted the most significant challenge once the Ethiopian government expressed its intention to construct the GERD on the Blue Nile. To tackle the GERD question, Egyptian diplomacy has played a relatively active role and demanded support from global actors such as the US, Russia, and China. In the regional context, Egypt also demanded support from its fellow Arab states, and most crucially, it has improved relations with the other Nile Basin countries through signing economic and military agreements. Internally, the impacts of the Arab Uprising and the subsequent developments in the country mainly influenced Egyptian diplomacy regarding the GERD. Egypt’s intensive efforts to deal with the GERD have been unsuccessful as yet. Therefore, considering the positive impacts of the GERD and Egypt’s unsuccessful diplomatic attempts, signing an agreement will be a better solution for both regional stability and Egypt’s national interests.

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