

New Developments in the Ethio-Egypt Relations over the Hydro-Politics of Nile: Assessing the Challenges to Optimal Cooperation

Endalcachew Bayeh

Lecturer and Researcher at Ambo University, Department of Civics and Ethical Studies, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ambo, Ethiopia. Email: endbayeh@gmail.com; Phone: +251-9 21 59 71 52; P.O.Box 19.

Abstract

Nile is the longest river in the world, amounting 6,800 kms. It has eleven riparian states namely, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo(DRC), Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. These co-basin states have a considerably varying contribution to the Nile. The main contributor is Ethiopia, which is the source of Blue Nile, the major tributary of the Nile. Whereas the White Nile (the second tributary) originates from lake Victoria, shared by Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, still Ethiopia is a major contributor to White Nile flows as the waters from the Baro-Akobo and other streams in the southwest of the country contribute much to the White Nile. Generally, Ethiopia contributes 86% of the Nile waters, while benefiting almost none from it. Surprisingly, the least contributor, but the most benefited, riparian state is Egypt.

As the most contributor and user, the frictions in the use of Nile waters have chiefly been between Ethiopia and Egypt. The river has continued for long being a bone of contention between these two countries. Very recently, however, certain new developments have occurred as the two countries started to discuss on the Nile cases. The central objective of this study is, therefore, to examine the challenges to optimal cooperation between Ethiopia and Egypt/questioning the prospect of the recently established friendly relation between these two countries. To this end, the researcher employed a qualitative methodology. And, data were gathered from secondary sources mainly from books, journal articles, unpublished materials and websites.

Based on the data analyzed, following the coming into power of Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in Egypt, the two countries' relations seem turning into a better direction. Discussions on issues of common concern between governments of the two countries have come to be more regular and more frequent compared to what had been in the previous times. However, the study also came

up with findings which show a great suspicion on the sustainability of the newly established friendly relations between these two countries. The study outlined the following as basic challenges to optimal cooperation: the still persisting mistrust among Egyptians, the existence of anti-Ethiopia forces and Egypt's failure to stop the acts of destabilizing Ethiopia, absolute dependence of Egypt on Nile and the steadily increasing water demand in the basin states, the possibility of using visits by Egyptians for spying purpose, the possibility of buying a time, Egypt's inherent worry on the development of Ethiopia, Egypt's unwillingness to adhere to the principles of CFA, unchanged legal frameworks in Egypt, Egypt's refusal to cooperate in Eastern Africa Power Pool (EAPP), UAE's advent in the Horn of Africa, and lack of consistency as to the capacity of the GERD. Thus, the paper concludes that the new friendly approach of El-Sisi may be a new tactic to pursue the old objective. Following this conclusion, the study suggests that there is a need to work hard on the aforementioned core strategic areas by basin states.

Keywords: Ethiopia, Egypt, Nile, amicable relations, downstream countries, upstream countries, El-Sisi