

?地政学的変動の中のエジプト・スーダン関係

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EGYPTIAN-SUDANESE RELATIONS AMIDST CHANGING GEOPOLITICS

地政学的変動の中のエジプト・スーダン関係

Housam Darwisheh*

現代史の殆どの期間、共和国体制のエジプトと南に隣接するスーダンは緊張関係にあった。それはエジプトとスーダンの支配者の政治志向の違いや、中東・北アフリカ (MENA) 地域内での対立するブロックとの連携に起因していた。物質的・観念的および外交的な資源と影響力により、そして自らの政治的目標の追求のために、エジプトはスーダンや他のナイル川流域国家の行動を抑制し左右することができていた。それはとりわけエジプトの国家的存在と繁栄が依存するナイル川の水資源の利用に関わる問題について顕著にみられた。しかしながら中東およびアフリカの角における地域的・国内的な変動、とりわけ 2011 年以降の同地域の地政的な変化により、エジプトのスーダンに対する影響力は顕著に後退し、水資源を巡る新たな政治力学はスーダンをナイル河畔における地政的アクターとして登場させるに至っている。スーダンはかつてナイル川の水問題ではエジプトの忠実なパートナーであったが、現在では上流の国家との連携関係やナイル川の水資源の自国での利用についてより柔軟な立場を主張するようになっている。

本論は以上のような文脈でエジプト・スーダン関係を歴史的に回顧し、また 2011 年以降の中東およびアフリカの角地域の地政的な変動を概観しようとするものである。エジプトのスーダンおよび他のナイル川流域国家に対する影響力の低下の要因は、(1)エジプト国内の不安定化および中東地域全体への影響力の低下、(2)同国の体制維持と国内安定化のために地域の主要国にさらに依存するようになっている事、そして(3)同国のナイル川流域における覇権の喪失に拠ることを議論する。

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Keywords

Nile River, Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Hydro-hegemony, GERD, Middle East

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Abstract

For most of its contemporary history, republican Egypt has had strained relations with its southern neighbor, Sudan, prompted by the contradictory visions of the ruling elites and regime alliances with opposing power blocs in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). With a combination of material, ideational, and diplomatic resources, and in pursuit of its own goals, Egypt used to contain and influence the behavior of Sudan and other Nile River riparian states, particularly over issues pertaining to the utilization of the Nile's waters, on which Egypt's prosperity and very existence depends. However, the regional and domestic transformations in the Middle East and Horn of Africa, particularly the changing geopolitical landscape since 2011, undermined Egypt's influence in Sudan and positioned the latter as an influential hydro-political actor in the Nile basin. Once a strong and loyal partner to Egypt regarding the Nile water issues, Sudan has increasingly signaled a more flexible position on cooperating with the upstream states and harnessing its own water resources, away from Egypt. In this context, this article reviews the history of relations between Egypt and Sudan and deals briefly with the geopolitical shifts in the Middle East and Horn of Africa since 2011. The paper argues that Egypt's influence on Sudan's foreign policy and other Nile River riparian states has waned due to (1) Egypt's increased affinity for domestic unrest and waning influence in the Middle East; (2) its extended reliance on regional actors for regime security and internal stability; and (3) its loss of hydro-hegemony over the Nile basin.

Introduction

The modern political history of Sudan began with the Turco-Egyptian invasion of 1820 by Muhammad Ali Pasha who aspired to build an Egyptian empire. The goals of the invasion were to obtain slaves for military conscription, extract gold, and control the Nile Valley and Red Sea trade (Sanderson 1963; Robinson 1925). Situated at the confluence of the Blue and White Niles, Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, was founded by Muhammad Ali around 1820 as a permanent military camp (Hamdan 1960). Egypt's first period of domination over Sudan ended in 1885 when Muhammad Ahmad Ibn Abdullah, who proclaimed himself the Mahdi (Dekmejian and Wyszomirski 1972), led a Sudanese Mahdist rebellion to capture Khartoum, overthrew Egyptian rule, and established Mahdiyya (1885-98), or the Mahdist State. However, Egypt's rule over Sudan was restored with the Anglo-Egyptian invasion in 1898 that defeated the Mahdist state and declared a joint regime known as the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium in 1899. The Condominium rule lasted until 1956 when Sudan gained its independence (Daly 2003a). Until then, the control of Sudan expanded Egypt's influence from the shores of the Mediterranean deep into Sub-Saharan Africa. Colonization tied Sudan to a purely exploitative relationship with Egypt that regarded Sudan as part of an Egyptian homeland. In fact, Egypt under British control regularly demanded of Great Britain that Egypt and Sudan should be unified under the "Egyptian crown" (Abushouk 2010: 220). For example, on June 28, 1924, the leader of Egypt's nationalist Wafd Party, Prime Minister Sa'ad Zaghlul Pasha, stated in the Egyptian Chamber of Deputies:

This is our situation in respect to the Sudan: We spend money there, we shed blood there, we endure hardships there, and our fathers endured such before us, and we draw life from that river which pours forth from the highest reaches of the Sudan. In any case, it is impossible, unless we were a lifeless people, that we leave one speck of the Sudan for others (Mills 2014: 11).

In other words, a refusal to relinquish its control of Sudan was key to Egypt's strategic development as a geopolitical entity. For Egypt, mastery of the region came from its control of the sources of the Nile and Sudan's resources (Crabitès 1934). As John Waterbury correctly notes, "The Egyptian outlook on the Sudan has traditionally been colonialist...backed by its heavy military preponderance..., latent feelings of superiority and inferiority still underlie relations between the two states" (Waterbury 1979: 11). Egyptian nationalists claimed that Egypt's rule in Sudan aimed at developing Sudanese welfare and advancing its educational and infrastructural capacities. As such, Egypt maintained a paternalistic attitude toward Sudan that made it difficult for the two states to establish normal relations and genuine political partnership in the early and mid-twenty-first century (Powell 2003). Even after its independence, Sudan remained within the sphere of influence of Egypt, a regional heavyweight in the Nile Basin, with the power to influence the stability and sometimes survival of Sudanese regimes.

Egypt-Sudan relations after independence

Although Egypt-Sudan relations in the post-colonial era have mostly been uneasy and at times antagonistic, Egypt managed to shape and contain the behavior of Sudan with regard to its position on the waters of the Nile. Sudan gained independence on January 1, 1956, and became the first independent country in sub-Saharan Africa (Hasabu and Majid 1985; Warburg 2003; Daly 2003b). The overthrow of King Faruq of Egypt on July 25, 1952 by army officers, known as the Free Officers Movement, and the rapid decline of the British Empire after WWII as a global power made Egypt the dominant country in the Nile basin. The British colonial rule favored Egypt with regard to the Nile waters as an important agricultural asset because its Suez Canal was vital to Britain's economy and maritime power. Through water agreements, Britain guaranteed Egypt "historical rights" over the Nile waters. An agreement between Britain and Ethiopia in 1902 to settle the boundary between Abyssinia (former name for Ethiopia) and Sudan, stipulated that Ethiopia must not construct any infrastructural projects on the Blue Nile that would limit the flow of the waters without consent from Great Britain and Sudan. Another Nile Water Agreement (NWA) in 1929 between Egypt and Great Britain (on behalf of the Sudan) allocated 4 billion cubic meters of river waters per annum for Sudan and 48 billion cubic meters for Egypt. In other words, the 1929 NWA recognized Egypt's dominant position on the Nile. Crucially, the 1929 agreement awarded Cairo the right to veto any projects higher up the Nile beyond its national borders in order to secure the flow of the Nile. It also led to the construction of the Jebel Aulia Dam in 1937, south of Khartoum, to store and control water for Egypt. The dam was returned to Sudan in 1977 but became obsolete after the completion of the Aswan High Dam in 1971 (Yihdego, Rieu-Clarke, and Cascão 2017).

Soon after they seized power in Egypt and without informing the Sudanese government, the Free Officers decided to build the Aswan High Dam, one of the biggest dams in the world, close to the border of Sudan. Its reservoir, Lake Nasser, will eventually extend some 150 km into Sudan (Negm 2017) and flood Sudanese towns and villages along the Nile. During independence, the Republic of the Sudan was a parliamentary democracy. Colonial history and anti-Egyptian popular sentiments constituted a form of political capital for the Sudanese ruling elite and standing up to Egypt was a source of popular legitimacy. Soon after Sudan's independence, mistrust and resentment between the two states prevailed when the new Sudanese parliamentary government challenged Egypt's domination over the Nile waters. In the pursuit of securing more of the Nile

waters, the Sudanese parliament demanded the abrogation of the 1929 NWA, and refused to consent to Egypt's High Dam at Aswan.

After almost four years of dispute and tension, the Sudanese government surrendered to Egypt's pressure only after the military takeover by pro-Egyptian General Ibrahim Abboud (who served in the Egyptian military before independence), which overthrew the anti-Egyptian Umma government in 1958. The settlement was included in the 1959 Water Agreement between Egypt and the Republic of the Sudan to the exclusion of other riparian states in the Nile basin (Deng 2007). The Agreement was met with huge social opposition in Sudan. Abboud, whose rule lasted until 1964, needed Egyptian support for Sudan's first military regime at a time of severe economic difficulties and intense domestic power struggle. He hoped that good relations with Cairo would secure financial assistance from the World Bank for Sudanese hydro-infrastructure projects. Egypt also needed a new legal regime that would respond to the demands of the financiers of the High Dam (Saleh 2008: 39-41). The 1959 Agreement effectively enforced the provisions of the 1929 Agreement and granted both states larger quotas of the river flow (with Egypt taking 55.5 billion cubic meters and Sudan 18.5 billion cubic meters of the total 84 billion cubic meters, with 10 billion lost to evaporation). Crucially the Agreement secured Egypt's hydro-hegemonic position by reinforcing its claim to "natural and historic" rights in the Nile, and constrained and limited Sudan's future demands for more water and irrigation development. In addition, the 1959 Agreement sanctioned Egypt to construct the Aswan High Dam and other projects on the Nile, which submerged the old Sudanese town of Wadi Halfa and displaced tens of thousands of Egyptian and Sudanese Nubians on both sides of the state line (Wiebe 2001: 737). The Aswan High Dam was central to Egypt's progress towards development and economic power, providing energy and regular water supply for its agriculture and protecting Egyptians from the dangers of floods and droughts (Shama 2013: 27). Moreover, this Agreement granted Egypt with the power to monitor the use of the Nile water in Sudan and veto any water development projects that would impact the flow of its water allocation (Deng 2007). Since then, Sudan has sided with Egypt in issues pertaining to the Nile waters, which naturally undermined its capacity to be seen as a neutral actor by upstream states in future water disputes.

Sudan-Egypt relations reached new heights when President Ja'far al-Nimeiri came to power in a military coup on May 25, 1969. The Nimeiri regime identified itself as pan-Arab, modeled on Nasser's revolution in Egypt, while Egyptian support helped Nimeiri to consolidate his rule. A special relationship flourished under Egypt's President Anwar Sadat when Sudan and Egypt signed an agreement on their political and economic integration in February 1974, followed by a joint defense agreement, the strongest between Egypt and any other country (Khālid 2003: 173). This agreement was prompted by an unsuccessful coup against Nimeiri, which Libya's President Muammar Gaddafi was accused of backing (Ogunbadejo 1986: 38-39). A stalwart USA ally during the Cold War, Sudan under Nimeiri was one of the three countries, along with Oman and Somalia, which stood by Sadat after Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1979. Viewed by Egypt as critically important to its interests in the Middle East and Africa, hostility between Libya and Sudan stimulated Mubarak to send military forces and advisors to bolster the defenses of Sudan against Libya in March 1984 (Simons 1996: 303). Warm relations with Egypt and the US made Sudan the second largest recipient of US aid in Africa after Egypt. For many subsequent years, good relations with Egypt were essential for Sudan to secure US assistance and avoid regional and international isolation.

The containment of revolutionary Sudan in the 1990s

Egypt-Sudan relations hit a new low after the ascent to power of Brigadier Umar Hasan al-Bashir, who ousted the civilian government of Sadiq al-Mahdi in a bloodless military coup on June 30, 1989. The seizure of power by the National Islamic Front (NIF), which referred to itself as the Inqaz al-Watani (the National Salvation, a military-Islamist regime), marked a turning point in Sudan's foreign policy, particularly vis-à-vis Egypt, which still had the power to isolate the Sudanese regime during the turbulent 1990s and early 2000s. Like previous military generals, Bashir (a graduate of the Egyptian military academy) needed Egypt's support to consolidate his rule and quell the opposition. Bashir made his first foreign visit to Egypt, which was the first state to recognize his government. Egypt's support, in particular, was crucial for Bashir during the intense civil war that subsequently erupted in Sudan.

Later, however, the Egyptian leaders discovered that the coup was masterminded by the Islamists of the NIF, which evolved into the National Congress Party (NCP). Relations between the two states deteriorated when Sudan declared itself to be an Islamic Republic and Bashir's Islamist foreign policy led him to form an alliance with Hasan al-Turabi, who saw the Iranian revolution as a model (Burr and Collins 2003). Egypt's fear of Sudan exporting its Islamist ideology in the region coincided with Sudan's new alliance with revolutionary Iran and a resurgence of the militant Islamic Groups (al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya and al-Jihad) in Egypt during much of the 1990s. The regional realignment gave Iran a foothold in Egypt's southern borders. As Egypt's tourism industry was devastated by militant groups' attacks on tourists, Cairo watched with alarm as Khartoum imposed strict Sharia law on Muslims and Christians alike, hosted Al-Qaeda's Osama Bin Laden, and provided refuge and training to militant Egyptian Islamists, and under the pretext of Jihad, declared a brutal war with the south of Sudan (De Waal and Salam 2004). Egypt also accused Sudan of supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, the most serious and organized political opposition to Mubarak. In 1990, Egypt and Saudi Arabia were likewise alarmed by a Sudan-Libya agreement reached between Bashir and Gaddafi (Simons 1996: 277). The Sudan-Iran alliance was strengthened when Bashir was internationally isolated for supporting the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and lost US military and financial assistance. Iran became Sudan's most important ally in the region when the two states reached a security pact by which Tehran provided Khartoum with oil, weapons, and financial assistance (Tekle 1996: 503-04).

Meanwhile, Sudan's relations with neighboring African countries were damaged when Ethiopia, Uganda, and Algeria accused Sudan of helping rebels and training militant groups from their countries. To counter Iran, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia backed Eritrea in its conflict with Sudan, and the anti-Bashir states in the region increased their support to the south Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLA) and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), formed in 1989 by Bashir's opponents, including political parties, trade unions, and some officers of the Sudanese armed forces (Hassan 1993). With material aid from the USA and its allies, the SPLA increased its military capacity and strengthened its political and military alliance with opposition groups in northern Sudan (Haywood 2014: 151-52). Such developments weakened the Bashir regime, and alienated Sudan from its Arab and African neighbors, and cut the regime off from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and foreign investments (Kevane and Gray 1995: 274). Sudan-Egypt relations got palpably worse when a Sudanese-backed militant Islamist group in 1995 attempted to

assassinate the then Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak as the latter attended an African summit in Addis Ababa. Egypt accused the Sudanese leader Hassan al-Turabi while Ethiopia severed diplomatic relations with Sudan. Egypt managed to have the United Nations Security Council impose sanctions on Sudan while the USA added the country to its list of State Sponsors of Terrorism (to date) (Woodward 2016: 30-31). In 1998, the USA bombed the Shifa pharmaceutical factory in Khartoum in response to al-Qaeda's dual attacks two weeks earlier on US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya. Mubarak endorsed the US claims that Sudan was using the factory for manufacturing chemical weapons, and accused the Bashir regime of harboring terrorists trying to topple the Egyptian government (Associated Press, 30 September 1998).

Egypt's material and diplomatic powers succeeded in containing Sudan throughout the 1990s. When the tension between Egypt and Sudan led to a flare-up of an older border dispute, Egypt showed its readiness to use military force. In 1992, a Canadian oil company received a concession from Sudan to conduct oil exploration in the "Hala'ib Triangle" region, an area disputed by Sudan and Egypt. Cairo responded swiftly by deploying its troops to annex the area (Bartrop 2011: 115). Sudan complained to the United Nations Security Council but failed to restore its sovereignty over the region.

During the 1990s, Egypt kept the Sudanese regime isolated regionally and internationally, politically and economically. Egypt also undermined regime security in Khartoum by supporting the Sudanese opposition. In the short run Egypt succeeded in containing Sudan. Fearing Egypt's military response, Sudan failed to implement its threat of using the Nile water flow as a weapon against Egypt (Adar and Check 2011: 52). As a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, Egypt succeeded from January to April 1996 to have the Security Council require Sudan to extradite suspects in the attempted assassination of Hosni Mubarak, impose travel and diplomatic sanctions on the Bashir regime and members of the Sudanese armed forces, and later impose an air embargo on Sudan Airways, which shut Sudan off from airline manufacturing industries (Mikhail 2008: 99-100).

Bashir realized that Sudan had not gained economic and material benefits from its alliance with Iran and other anti-Egyptian states. The only way for Khartoum to manage its deteriorating economy and status as an international 'pariah' after years of isolation was to mend its relations with Egypt. Only then could Bashir de-escalate its conflict with the USA and secure funds from the wealthy Gulf states. In order to seek relief from Egypt's increasing regional and international pressure, Bashir had to reduce his hostility towards Mubarak. Furthermore, the Bashir regime believed that Egypt could use its strong ties with the USA to remove Sudan from the USA's list of terror states. Relations with Egypt improved in 1999, when Khartoum transferred to Cairo a suspect involved in the attempted assassination of Mubarak. To win the support of Egypt and the USA, Bashir cut ties with Hassan al-Turabi, removed him as the secretary general of the ruling party, and later arrested him. The removal of al-Turabi was also essential to holding peace talks with the SPLM/A that later led to the peace process in Kenya (De Waal 2004).

Egypt rallied the Gulf Arab states and other African countries behind Bashir's new alignments. While they previously supported rebels in Sudan, now Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Uganda tried to make peace with Sudan because they were themselves embroiled in wars. Sudan re-established contact with the USA, and the latter unfroze the assets of Salah Idris, the owner of the Shifa pharmaceutical

factory.¹In September 2001, with Egyptian support, the UN Security Council voted to lift its sanctions on Sudan.²

As discussed above, for decades, Egypt could exert considerable influence on Sudan's post-independent political developments because the former had various kinds of power. Egypt had the largest military in the Middle East and the Nile basin. Furthermore, Egypt has a history of centralized rule that allowed for state institutionalization and a high degree of national identity and social homogeneity, unlike Sudan, which failed to maintain a centralized post-colonial state with a long history of civil wars (Elnur 2009). Their superior force, coercive diplomacy, and strong relations with world powers enabled the Egyptian elites to influence Sudan's internal and external politics, and effectively kept Sudan as an important and compliant part of Egypt's sphere of influence. Yet Egypt will see its regional influence soon diminish due to domestic and geopolitical alignments in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. Moreover, Egypt's security approach to Sudan will, in the long run, make it difficult for Cairo to form meaningful strategic positions with Khartoum on the Nile waters.

The decline of Egypt's hegemony

Egypt's hegemony has declined, partly because of domestic, political, ideological, and economic transformation. Changes in the balance of power in the Middle East, growing asymmetry in power relations in the Nile basin, and great power competition in the Horn of Africa has had its toll on Egypt's stature as the principal regional actor. Two developments have been especially important in this regard.

First, with the death of Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1970, Egypt departed from pan-African ideas of liberation, regardless of how paternalistic Egypt had been toward the African countries. Egypt under Nasser offered refuge to African exiles, as well as logistics and political support for Africa's fighters (Akinsanya 1976). By supporting nationalist movements in Africa during the 1950s and 60s, Egypt tried to expand its anti-imperialist front against the British and gain influence in the then newly independent African states. However, Egypt lost its leadership position in the Arab world after its humiliating defeat in the 1967 war against Israel. As Egypt became the poorest Arab state (by per capita income), it ceased to be a model for development in Africa. As a result, Egypt's ideational power also dwindled. Under Anwar Sadat (1970-81), Egypt shifted toward the West and thereby received aid from the USA, obtained material benefits for his regime and military, and gained access to international financial institutions. Egypt made peace with Israel and broke ties with the Arab and the African worlds. In fact, Sadat dissolved the African Affairs Bureau and supported the US-backed movements in Africa. Egypt's projection of power ended with its economic collapse and increasing dependency on the Gulf states, besides other international events, which took their toll. The end of the Cold War marginalized Africa's position. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait divided the Arab world between those who

¹ "US admits Sudan bombing mistake," Independent, May 4,1999: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/us-admits-sudan-bombing-mistake-1091397.html> (accessed June 11, 2018).

² "Security Council Lifts Sanctions against Sudan," United Nations, September 28, 2001: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2001/sc7157.doc.htm> (accessed June 13, 2018).

supported the US-led campaign to liberate Kuwait and those who rejected it. Egypt increasingly relied on its coercive diplomacy as a foreign policy tool to get the Nile basin states into compliance for fear that upstream states might tamper with the Nile's water. Sadat is remembered for threatening to use military force against Ethiopia in 1978 when he stated:

(A)ny action that would endanger the waters of the Blue Nile will be faced with a firm reaction on the part of Egypt, even if that action should lead to war. As the Nile waters issue is one of life and death for my people, I feel I must urge the United States to speed up the delivery of the promised military aid so that Egypt might not be caught napping (Kendie 1999: 141).

After Sadat, Mubarak was preoccupied with maintaining regime security and his hold on power (Shama 2013). Egypt showed little enthusiasm for the African Union and viewed Africa through a security prism, especially after the Islamists took power in Sudan and the attempted assassination of Mubarak in Ethiopia in 1995. Mubarak stopped attending African summits (with the exception of Abuja in 2005) (Landsberg and Van Wyk 2012: 245). However, during those summits, Ethiopia mobilized the Nile basin countries over the need to review the 1929 and 1959 Nile water agreements. Lacking foreign policy agenda and occupied with grooming his son to succeed him, Mubarak relied on his intelligence services in his relations with African states. He showed little interest in economic integration with African countries, and the Nile basin states in particular (Tawfik 2016). With its diminished influence, Egypt had barely any role in the negotiations that led to the independence of South Sudan in July 2011. Indeed, South Sudan's secession marked the end of Egypt's influence in Sudanese politics.

Second, a new order emerged in the Nile basin based on power relations between upstream and downstream states. Nile basin states increased their cooperation while Egypt refused to join new initiatives regarding the distribution and utilization of the Nile waters. The result was an enhancement of power of the upstream countries. The Nile basin Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA), signed in 2010 by Uganda, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Tanzania, Kenya, and Burundi, enhanced the bargaining power of the upstream states, granting them autonomy in deciding Nile projects without prior consent from Egypt (Salman 2013).

In response, Egypt froze its membership in the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) that was formed in 1999 to develop the river in a cooperative manner. The NBI was the first cooperative agreement that included all riparian states, including Ethiopia and Egypt. By pulling out of the NBI, Egypt preempted the possibility of cooperation or negotiation with Ethiopia, which supplies up to 80 percent of the Nile waters annually. Egypt did not reach any cooperative agreement with the river basin states; nor did it try to find an alternative agreement to the cooperative framework established by other riparian states. Egypt's apprehension over losing its former veto power lies behind its reluctance to participate in new water treaties. Egypt appears oblivious to the passage of time and the changes in the power structure of the region since the 1929 and 1959 agreements with Sudan allowed it to be the hegemon of the Nile basin. Facing a changed balance of power, Egypt has lost its bargaining power and its past capacity to influence other riparian states.

Meanwhile, the upstream riparian states' increased material power, through their recent economic and political ascendancy, has facilitated their higher utilization of the Nile waters. They have raised their ideational power through different arguments. They asserted their right to water utilization for development (Egypt's rationale for building the Aswan High Dam) of which they were deprived under restrictive colonial agreements. They stressed the importance of the Nile for famine prevention. Additionally, they held out better prospects for peace and regional integration through hydropower projects that would bring electricity and prosperity to millions of Africans in the river basin and beyond. Egypt finds itself on the defensive, bereft of effective discursive responses.

Egypt-Sudan relations after the January 25 uprising

Egypt-Sudan relations after the Arab uprising of 2010-11 were affected by shifting regional dynamics in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa, and the ways in which the domestic politics of each country shaped its foreign policy. The fall of Mubarak presented Egyptian policy makers with an opportunity to reorient Egypt's relations with its southern neighbors in the Nile basin. However, the ensuing chaos exposed a severe weakness in the power structure of the Egyptian state. A period of severe political and economic volatility made Egypt more vulnerable to external intervention and dependent on its Gulf allies for the survival and security of the ruling elites. Thus, Egypt was limited in its abilities to be involved in Arab affairs as widespread turmoil in MENA intensified competition among regional rivals, particularly, Saudi Arabia and UAE, on the one hand, and Qatar and Turkey, on the other.

In addition, Mubarak was overthrown as President Barack Obama's administration announced its intention to reorient US grand strategy away from the Middle East and in the direction of East Asia (dubbed "Pivot to Asia") to rebalance its relationship with China. The USA's influence in the Middle East was already in retreat as was shown by the withdrawal of its troops from Iraq, which was completed in December 2011, and the signing of a nuclear deal with Iran (formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) in July 2015. Besides, the Egyptian military and police forces had, for more than eight years, failed to eliminate a Sinai Peninsula insurgency that was rooted in deprivation and local grievances (Aziz 2017). As a result, an insecure leadership looked inwards and eroded Egypt's stature as a major regional power.

Almost two weeks after Mubarak's fall, Burundi joined the Nile basin pact, which Egypt opposed, that planned to build two hydro-electric dams at Burundi's borders with Rwanda and Congo (Reuters March 2, 2011). The most serious threat to Egypt happened when Ethiopia announced plans in April 2011 to build the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), the largest hydroelectric power project in Africa, just 40 kilometers from its border with Sudan. The dam is expected to generate 5,000 to 6,000 megawatts, three times more than the capacity of Egypt's High Dam. Ethiopia had been preparing to construct a major dam for many years. Perhaps the announcement of the GERD two months after Mubarak's fall and three months before South Sudan's independence, indicated that Ethiopia thought Egypt's convulsions heralded a huge regional change and Ethiopia could build its dam without consulting Sudan or Egypt. In a leaked audio recording, Mubarak had once said of GERD, "I had then warplanes which made me able to hit the dam and destroy it in one strike." But when he was asked if that was still possible, he replied,

“not any more, you hit a dam now, you get in trouble with all Africans.” He added that “the whole world doesn’t take us seriously any more. All the world knows we have become a weak nation. Although we held a lot of weight previously.”³

Despite its problems of mass poverty, internal instability, and persistent food insecurity that threaten to fuel social unrest, Ethiopia has attained rapid economic growth and expanded employment in agriculture, services, and export-led industries. Ethiopia has double-digit annual GDP growth (although the figure is disputed) and major foreign investment in various fields (Hagmann and Abbink 2011). Just as the Egyptians placed their hopes in the Aswan High Dam in the 1960s, similarly the Ethiopians, with nearly 70 percent of the population lacking access to electricity,⁴ now saw the GERD as vital to the continued economic transformation and political stability.

Sudan: coping with changing geopolitics

In the aftermath of Mubarak’s fall in February 2011, Sudan increasingly aligned its views with Ethiopia with regard to the Nile waters. In addition to its rising inflation and depreciating currency, the Sudanese economy received an immediate shock when it lost much of its oil revenues after South Sudan’s secession in July 2011. During the previous decade, oil production in the south made Sudan one of Africa’s fastest growing economies. Although South Sudan’s secession ended decades of civil war, it undermined the Bashir regime’s ability to retain his ruling coalition by deploying state resources. To offset the loss of oil revenues, Sudan needed more than ever to raise productivity in agriculture, its only viable economic sector, and exploit other export possibilities, notably livestock. To do so, Sudan needs both a regular flow of water and an energy supply that would improve harvests throughout the year and safeguard long-term food security.

From GERD, Sudan hopes to gain cheap electricity and stable levels of water flow. This would alleviate the threat of annual floods and improve drought control, both vital to the development of Sudan’s agriculture, and its continued relations with the Gulf states.

In addition, in the wake of the 2007-08 economic and global food crisis, the Arab Gulf states searched for ways to reduce their vulnerability to shocks in the global food trade. They set up plans of foreign agro-investments and major land deals to develop Sudan and other southern neighboring countries as a “breadbasket” of the Gulf region (Lippman 2010; Woertz 2013). By the extensive use of its water and land resources, Sudan seeks massive agricultural projects in partnership with the Gulf Arab capital (Verhoeven 2012). Sudan now ranks first in Arab Gulf investment in agricultural projects and animal-based industries. The Gulf states’ investments in Sudan’s agriculture gave the latter confidence to chart its Nile basin policy away from Egypt’s concerns. Sovereign funds of Gulf countries or collective funds like the Islamic Development Bank have contributed greatly to those investments. Arab Gulf countries supported major hydraulic projects and food companies in Sudan like the Merowe Dam in 2009, the Roseries Dam in 2013, and the Kenana Sugar Company, a joint

³ “Mubarak: No One Takes Egypt Seriously Anymore,” Middle East Monitor, June 20, 2017: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170620-mubarak-no-one-takes-egypt-seriously-any-more/> (accessed March 20, 2018).

⁴ “Ethiopia’s Transformational Approach to Universal Electrification,” The World Bank, March 8, 2018: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2018/03/08/ethiopias-transformational-approach-to-universal-electrification> (accessed December 11, 2019).

venture between the Sudanese government, the Kuwait government, and other state and corporate partners.

Such investments have caused tension between Egypt on the one hand, and Ethiopia and Sudan on the other. The latter two states assert their right to exploit the Nile waters to boost agricultural production and strengthen ties with Arab oil producers. The changed balance of power, partly caused by the rising interests of the Gulf states in the Nile basin, favors Ethiopia and Sudan. In fact, the Saudis supported Sudan and Ethiopia on GERD when high-level Saudi officials visited the dam in December 2016. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has even discussed importing power produced by GERD to diversify their energy sources and save their petroleum for export.⁵ The lack of regional institutions and agreements that regulate the utilization of the Nile waters between riparian states has made it easy for the Gulf states to expand their influence in the basin through bilateral deals. All this has accorded Sudanese and Ethiopian leaders greater leverage and bargaining power vis-à-vis Egypt in their plans to build more hydroelectric stations on the Nile.

The Gulf investment schemes are not transforming African economies because their focus is not on industry, but rather, on water, land, energy, and other natural resources. This means that the Nile basin is under mounting pressure due to the increasing number of actors interested in utilizing its waters. Thus, Egypt has to contend not only with its southern neighbors but with new powerful actors in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa, mainly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and a region increasingly fractured by regional rivalries. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have steadily used their political and financial clout to secure their interests in the Red Sea and headwaters of the Nile River, both vital to Egypt's national security. The rise of Saudi Arabia and the UAE's leadership role in African-Arab joint actions were evident when, like Sudan, Djibouti and Somalia broke off ties with Iran in 2016 after the execution of the Shia cleric in Saudi Arabia and the resultant attack by protesters on the Saudi Embassy in Tehran (Aman 2017). Moreover, the Gulf Crisis of June 2017, which pitted pro-Brotherhood Qatar against Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt, also affected Sub-Saharan Africa, which was pressured to take sides in the conflict. Interestingly, Sudan and Ethiopia benefited from the crisis by staying neutral and continued to receive investments from both Qatar and other GCC states. Since the Arab Spring, Sudan has signed a number of defense and economic agreements and deployed thousands of Sudanese troops to join the Saudi-led war in Yemen. On the other hand, having to fight militancy in Sinai and on its western border with Libya, and recalling its costly casualties during its involvement in Yemen in 1962-66, Egypt has limited its participation in the current war on Yemen to the deployment of air forces and naval ships. Instead, in 2016, Egypt gave up its sovereignty over the two strategically located islands in the Red Sea, Tinar and Sanafir, to Saudi Arabia in apparent gratitude for the latter's support for Sisi's coup against Morsi and for future Saudi investments. Soon after that, Sudan called on Egypt to negotiate the status of two disputed port cities, Halaib and Shalateen, located at the Egypt-Sudan border on the Red Sea's African coast, or to refer their dispute to the International Court of Arbitration. Sudan claims that it holds documents that prove its sovereignty over the two cities.⁶

⁵ "Saudi Arabia eyes Ethiopian hydropower link to cut reliance on oil and gas," Climate Home News, September 27, 2018:

<https://www.climatechangenews.com/2018/09/27/saudi-arabia-eyes-ethiopian-hydropower-link-cut-reliance-oil-gas/> (accessed August 10, 2018).

⁶ "Sudan complains to UN over Egypt holding elections in Halaib triangle," Egypt Independent, April 19, 2018: <https://egyptindependent.com/sudan-complains-un-egypt-holding-elections-halaib-triangle/> (accessed January 5, 2019).

Egypt has also failed to influence Sudan's foreign policy, including its strong alliance with Qatar and Turkey, two of Egypt's regional enemies that are linked by their support of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt and the region. Egypt was alarmed when Sudan signed a 99-year lease of Suakin Island to Turkey, a key port in the Red Sea. The lease allows Turkey, which already has military bases in Somalia and Qatar, to enhance its strategic influence in the Red Sea area and develop military cooperation between the two states. These military bases give Turkey leverage over the freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and magnify Cairo's perception of Turkish foreign policy as a threat to Egyptian national security. During the Qatar-Gulf Crisis of June 5, 2017, Turkey came to the rescue of Qatar by establishing a humanitarian air bridge and sending more troops to its military base in Doha. The swift Turkish response to this crisis has solidified its relationship with Qatar and highlighted Turkey's resurgence in the Middle East. Egypt sees Qatar, Turkey, and Sudan as pro-Muslim Brotherhood states and views their alliance as a security threat. For Turkey, Sudan has a very strategic location, offers a market for its exports and has fertile land that Turkey can use. Besides security cooperation, Turkey and Sudan set up a joint agricultural and livestock company in Khartoum in November 2018. The company's presence adds to Turkey's regional influence as Sudan is an important gateway to areas in Central Africa.

In addition, President Erdogan of Turkey wants to curb the influence of Fethullah Gulen movement in Africa, which is accused by Ankara of orchestrating the military coup in Turkey on July 15, 2016.⁷ To some extent, Turkey relieves the Sudanese regime from relying too heavily on its unpredictable allies in the Gulf and represents a valuable counterpoint to Egypt. Cairo has repeatedly accused Sudan of harboring Muslim Brotherhood members who escaped from Egypt after the overthrow of Muhammad Morsi by the Egyptian military in July 2013. Tensions arose when Sudan banned the import of agricultural and animal products from Egypt in May 2017 and accused Cairo of supporting rebels to topple the government in Sudan (Reuters May 30, 2017). Being respectively embroiled in the war in Yemen and an insurgency in the Sinai have prevented Saudi Arabia and Egypt from confronting the emerging alliance between Sudan and Turkey. For that matter, Egypt needs Sudan to preserve its share of the Nile waters and cannot afford a deterioration in their relations. Innumerable factors, therefore, have eroded Egypt's domination of the Nile and its southern neighbor. The geopolitical transformations in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa have opened new alliance-building options for Sudan and relieved its leadership from being locked into its water agreements with Egypt. Finally, Sudan's potential for irrigation expansion has required it to play a more active role in the Nile basin and an alliance with Ethiopia to meet its export and commercial ambitions.

Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the history of Egypt-Sudan relations in the Nile basin. It has also examined the domestic and regional dynamics that have led Egypt to lose Sudan to Ethiopia with regard to the Nile waters. Sudan's importance stems from the fact that it has been the only country in the Nile basin that has a water agreement allocation with Egypt. Egypt's present geopolitical position in the Middle East and Africa reflects its harsh political and economic realities. Today, its

⁷ "Sudan hands over Gulen-linked schools to Turkish gov't," Sudan Tribune, May 14, 2017: <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article62455> (accessed January 2, 2018).

internal political and economic turmoil and the expanded influence of the Gulf states leave Egypt with little influence over a region torn by searing crises in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. Egypt is highly dependent on external aid and funding to stay economically afloat and politically stable. Unable to match the influence of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in the region, the post-Mubarak regimes in Egypt have sought regional opportunities to address domestic economic grievances and crush domestic opponents.

As a midstream country, post- “Arab Spring” Sudan has been interestingly more adept in playing different sides of the political divides in the region. Crucially, the demise of Egypt as a regional hegemon and the rising power of upstream states allowed Sudan to break ranks with Egypt in supporting its water agreements. Without Sudan, it is extremely hard for Egypt to rely on the 1929 and 1959 agreements to secure the flow of the Nile waters. Ethiopia has been able to persuade Sudan that the GERD will benefit Sudan and bring a stable inflow of Nile waters throughout the year. Sudan’s defection leaves Egypt isolated and vulnerable to shifting balance of power in the Nile basin. While Ethiopia has succeeded in drawing support from upstream riparian states for its hydro power projects, Egypt, despite being the Chair of the African Union, has reached out to the United States in 2019 to seek support for its talks with Ethiopia over the GERD. Nabil Abdel Fattah, an Egyptian political analyst and researcher in Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, correctly noted that “our diplomatic capacities in Africa have been shrinking for decades; we depended on the United States and Europe. We neglected the major changes taking place on the continent and had no scholars, diplomats or military personnel who really knew Ethiopia. We have even proved incapable of resolving this impasse by activating the Coptic networks when the churches of both countries are closely connected.”⁸ Egypt’s failure to formulate new national and regional strategies to adequately address the current shifting geopolitical landscape in the Nile basin will only grant Ethiopia greater leverage of regional influence and put the brakes on Egypt’s control of the Nile River as more dams are being built, populations are growing, and climate is changing.

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⁸ Alain Gresh, “Who is Losing the Nile,” *The New Arab*, February 27, 2018: <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/comment/2018/2/27/who-is-losing-the-nile> (accessed June 13, 2019).

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