

Ethiopia: Trump's Securitization 'Speech Act' on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). A Risk on the Ethiopia-Egypt Water Diplomacy

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Abstract: The involvement of the United States in the negotiation process of the GERD was taken as a good step forward to end the belligerent water diplomacy between Egypt and Ethiopia. However, America's peace proposal which is named 'the Trump deal' ends up further complicating the two countries water diplomacy. Trump's securitization 'speech act' calling Egypt to 'blow up' Ethiopia's dam further escalated the risk of water war between the two states. Eventually, the Trump lead negotiation eroded the perception that the United States would generate a good proposal to halt the belligerency of the Ethio-Egypt relations. This article is intended to chart a new insight on the following questions: given the unpleasant water diplomacy between Egypt and Ethiopia how 'the Trump deal' and securitization 'speech act' further complicated the matter? Why President Trump worked in securitizing the construction of the GERD on the Blue Nile? And how does the nature of securitization and counter-securitization activities worked in the water diplomacy between Egypt and Ethiopia? In the process of analysis the Copenhagen School (CS) concept of securitization is employed.

Keywords: Egypt, Ethiopia, Nile, Dam, Trump, Securitization.

Introduction

Since the official inauguration of the GERD over the Nile River in 2011 the Ethiopia-Egypt relations have worsened more than ever before. In international stages

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the leaders of the two countries are heard overtly forwarding harsh criticism about one-another. The aggressive diplomatic campaign of Cairo, in particular, portraying Ethiopia's dam project along the Blue Nile as existential threat escalated the hostility between the two nations. Egypt's apparent belligerent campaign towards the GERD reflected at different international stages from the Arab League to the European Union and from the African Union to the United Nations. For instance, on the June 2020 security council virtual summit the Egyptian minister of foreign affairs, Sameh Shoukry, portrayed the construction of the GERD as 'A threat of potentially existential proportions... of over 100 million Egypt's' (Daily News Egypt, 2020). However, all along its counter towards the belligerent move of Cairo, Addis Ababa worked to justify that the dam is under construction not to harm any downstream nations including Egypt. Rather, Addis Ababa constantly and unwaveringly argued that the GERD is initiated solely to fight poverty without causing significant harm to the downstream states. Additionally, against Egypt's securitization rhetoric, Ethiopia over and over again insisted fair and equitable water sharing.

In the same vein, the 24 October 2020 unbalanced criticism and securitization speech act of President Trump against the GERD added fuel over the already complicated diplomatic strains of the two countries (i.e., Ethiopia and Egypt). In his speech, the outgoing president of the United States, Donald Trump, who is the only president in the history of America that was impeached twice, has sought to instigate Cairo to 'blow up' the GERD. Here it is vital to note that Ethiopia is one of the long standing security allies for Washington in the Horn of Africa. Apparently, Ethiopia is Washington's figurehead partner in the latter's anti-terrorism activity against the Islamic Militias in Somalia. However, President Trump undiplomatically and recklessly under legitimized Ethiopia's right to use its natural resources in the fight against poverty. The speech of Trump was a clear move of securitization 'speech act' against Ethiopia's GERD over the Blue Nile. The securitization speech act of Trump can be taken as a politically motivated one to use the GERD as a precious present for Cairo's role in facilitating Trump's normalization scheme between Israel and Arab states. Because it is apparent that despite the fact that the River continues its flow after generating electricity, Trump portrayed the construction of the GERD as an existential threat for Egypt. The securitization speech act of Trump reads that, 'it's a very dangerous situation because Egypt is not going to be able to live that way'. He added that 'And I said it and I say it loud and clear- they'll blow up that dam. And they have to do something' (BBC News, 2020). Trump delivered his securitization speech act while declaring the normalization of Israel's relation with Sudan.

The securitization speech delivered by the President further helped the authority of Egypt to consolidate their predisposed portrayal over the mega dam. In the same tone, the securitization act of Trump has helped Egypt to influence domestic and international audiences to support the belligerent attitude of Egypt over the dam and to secure Egypt's veto title over the Nile River. Here it is vital to remark that while the Ethiopia-Egypt

competition and/or rivalry is partly stemming from the interest of the two nations to emerge as dominant power in the politics of the Northeast Africa, the Trump administration was playing the card of Cairo to safeguard the interest of Washington over the Middle East. The United States under the Trump administration has also arranged a political scheme to normalize the relationship of Israel with the Arab League member states and/or to secure America's geo-political interest in the Middle East by means of Egypt, either through lobbying Ethiopia to recognize Egypt's demand over the GERD or through attracting international audiences by securitizing the construction of the GERD over the Blue Nile. At this point it is vital to note that even if Trump forwarded his securitization speech act from irresponsible and/or reckless political views denying the real fact on the ground, his securitization move was powerful enough to attract more audience for the cause of Cairo over the GERD. Yet, the inability of Trump to find solutions for the two strategic allies of America in the Northeast Africa region, is a clear manifestation of the diplomatic ineffectiveness of the United States under the Trump administration.

The aim of this study is: (i) to examine the unpleasant water diplomacy between Ethiopia and Egypt and America's involvement in the two countries' water diplomacy; (ii) to discuss the connection between America's geopolitical interests and Trump's securitization 'speech act' over the GERD and; (iii) to analyze the difference of the nature of the Ethiopia-Egypt securitization framing over the Nile issue. In other words, this paper has sought to address how the unpleasant water diplomacy between Ethiopia and Egypt invited and/or increased America's involvement in the two countries water diplomacy? To what extent geo-political interests instigated President Trump to securitize the GERD in favor of Egypt? Why President Trump worked in securitizing the construction of the GERD along the Blue Nile? And how does the nature of securitization and counter-securitization activities work in the process of the Ethiopia-Egypt water diplomacy?

Securitization 'speech act': The Copenhagen School

During the cold war era, security threats were associated with the field of nuclear weapon and military building. However, the growing dissatisfaction on the traditional definition of security threat has given ways for the rise of new conceptualization of security threats on wide verities of disciplines including international relations, environmental studies, economics, and great verities of academic scopes. Thus, the growing challenge on the understanding of the concept of security threat necessitated to 'widen the definition of threat away from a purely military to a more general formulation' (Buzan, Wæve, & de Wilde, 1998, p. 2). Against this background, for the Copenhagen School (the CS):

[A] public issue can be located on the spectrum ranging from non-politicized (when the state does not deal with the issue) through to politicized (when the

issue is part of public policy requiring government decision), securitized (when the issue is presented as an existential threat justifying going “beyond normal politics”) and desecuritized (meaning the issue is not defined as a threat and moved into the public sphere of deliberation). For the CS, “politicization means to make an issue appear to be open, a matter of choice, something that is decided upon and that therefore entails responsibility (Balci & Kardaş, 2012, p. 100).

Furthermore, Buzan, Wæve, and de Wilde argued that “if by means of an argument about the priority and urgency of an existential threat the securitizing actor has managed to break free of procedures or rules he or she would otherwise be bound by, we are witnessing a case of securitization” (Buzan, Wæve, & de Wilde, 1998, p. 25).

On the same token, for the CS, when an issue is accepted as a threat and sorted beyond the normal politics, it is labeled as a special kind of political complication that demands extraordinary measure. Meaning, according to the CS, issues are securitized, aiming to transform them from normal politics to state security issues through framing the matter as an existential threat that could not get solutions based on the normal established laws. Thus, ‘the invocation of security has been the key to legitimizing the use of force, but more generally it has opened the way for the state to mobilize or to take special powers, to handle existential threats’ (Gebresenbet, 2014, p. 65).

It appears that securitization speech act is done to convince the targeted audience and to employ extraordinary measures against the matter which is portrayed as a real existential danger. However, effective securitization ‘does not occur only through speech act, but also through historical narratives, social and political contexts, images, media, institutions, and physical acts such as protests’ (Olesker, 2014, p. 375). Moreover, although the securitization speech act is, therefore, ‘negotiated between securitize and audience’, the role of the audience is crucial, inasmuch as it is the audience that grants the securitize ‘permission to override the rules that would otherwise bind’ (Roe, 2008, p. 618).

Usually the securitizing actor (i.e. political elites, military leaders, government) securitize a certain matter through portraying as a threat to a referent object. In the CS a referent object can be an idea or something that is believed ‘to be existentially threaten’ (Balci & Kardaş, 2012, p. 100). Against this background, in the process of securitization the securitizing actor work to frame up a certain matter as existential treat for referent objects such as ‘traditionally, but not necessarily, the state, incorporating government, territory, and society’ (Buzan, Wæve, and de Wilde, 1998, p. 21).

In the case of this article the war mongering securitization ‘speech act’ of President Trump against the GERD is designated as a threat for Ethiopia’s sovereignty in particular and the Ethio-Egyptian water diplomacy in general. Thus, Trump’s securitization ‘speech act’ calling Egypt to ‘blow up’ Ethiopia’s dam further escalated the risk of water

war between the two states. Additionally, as never before, the Trump led negotiation ended up escalating the securitization and counter-securitization rhetoric between the two countries (i.e., Egypt, Ethiopia) and eroded the perception that the United States would generate a good proposal to halt the belligerency of the two nations' relationship.

The Ethio-Egypt belligerent relations and America's involvement

Ethiopia and Egypt are among the strategically important countries of the Northeastern African region. Given their strategic significance and inseparable dependence on the Nile water, the two countries' relations in the past several decades have been more belligerent than complimentary. The geo-political location of Ethiopia and Egypt along the crossroad of the three continents (i.e., Africa, Asia and Europe) together with the presence of the strategic water ways—Suez Canal, Red Sea and Gulf of Aden—further complicated the two countries' relationship by involving global actors. In this sense, the two nations post-World War II regressive foreign policy come up with trust deficit and uncomplimentary relationship that sometimes reflects itself in proxy war, verbal incursions, and non-consensus-seeking clandestine actions that apparently invite global actors' involvement. Likewise, Egypt's dominant political position over the post-colonial politics of the Arab world has helped to have the upper hand in attracting global actors such as America which has geopolitical, geo-economic, and strategic interests in the region. Thus, the current fragile relations between Ethiopia and Egypt have been substantially shaped on the post-World War II trust dearth eras. In this spirit, the post-World War II animosity and trust deficit relationship between the two countries possibly divided in to two major phases: (i) the phase of veiled animosity and hostility; and (ii) the phase of an overt challenge and aggressive diplomatic campaign.

Regarding the first phase of veiled animosity and hostility between Ethiopia and Egypt over the Nile water, at several political and social events Ethiopia showed its objection towards the dominant and superior position of Egypt over the Nile River since the mid-1950s. However, for almost three decades, until 1990s, the internal, regional and global political situations did not allow Ethiopia to overtly challenge the hegemonic position of Egypt over the Nile River. As a result, the coercive, discursive, and legal narrations that undermine 'equitable water sharing' continued having dominant position throughout the period between 1960s and 1990s and Egypt remained in its vanity associating the issue of Nile River with the so called 'historic right' which has colonial root. Accordingly, any move to use the water of Nile River has been followed by securitization speech act and military threatening from Egypt. Likewise, it is natural that if any Nile basin state starts a project on the River categorically denying the so called 'historic right', there is unbalanced propaganda campaign from Cairo and its close international allies. Usually the demand for the implementation of 'equitable water sharing' was portrayed as a 'threat' for the downstream nations. Trump's securitization speech act against the GERD has the same genesis with what is mentioned above.

In this sense, all along the cold war era while the Ethiopia–Egypt relations were progressive in the African anti-colonial movement, it was regressive and passive in halting bilateral animosity and trust deficit on water diplomacy. The trajectory of the veiled animosity and ill-will between Cairo and Addis Ababa throughout the cold war and its aftermath decades has partly stemmed from both nations headstrong and self-doubt diplomatic approach that had been due from the categorical senselessness of one for the seeks of the other. In the same vein, as mentioned prior, the categorical rejection of the so called ‘historic right’ over the Nile River by Ethiopia and the swaggering position of Egypt on the concept of ‘historic right’ also understood as boiling point and center of gravity for the two countries covert distrust and hostility throughout the cold war era down to present.

Apparently, Cairo has actively involved and continued to involve on the destabilization activities of Ethiopia using the unstable domestic political outreach and ethnic diversities of the latter as instrument. Cairo has also employed a ploy of Entrenching neighboring hostile states such as Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti through propaganda, financial and military assistances to isolate and weaken Addis Ababa. By the same token, to frustrate Ethiopia’s concept of ‘reasonable water sharing’ Egypt put forward alliances with global powers. For instance, in the 1950s and 1960s, Cairo was pro-Moscow whereas since 1970s Cairo has been closely attached with Washington and become the second largest military aid beneficiary of America next to Israel. Against this background, the Aswan High Dam is constructed from 1960 to 1968 with Moscow’s fund. All along this development, the critical part of which was that the diplomatic efforts of both the imperial regime and the military Derg were ill-fated to secure international funds either from the political “east” or from the political “west” to construct a dam along the Blue Nile. As a result, the less privileged nation (i.e., Ethiopia) ‘directly involve[d] in the affairs of neighboring countries to frustrate the Egyptian intervention’ (Yihun, 2014; Yimer, 2021).

From another point of view, on the process of the Ethiopia-Egypt covert animosity the latter cornered Ethiopia from the UNDUGU membership. As Belete mentioned, in Swahili dialect UNDUGU represents brotherhood. Against this background, several UNDUGU conferences were conducted from 1983 that was the first held in Khartoum to the last that was done at Cairo in 1988. In all UNDUGU conferences, except Ethiopia, countries such as Uganda, Zaire, Rwanda, Egypt, Sudan, Central Africa, Tanzania (as observer) and Burundi (as observer) were participated (Yihun, 2014, p. 86). The categorical denial of Ethiopia’s participation in the conference can be taken as a calculated isolation scheme from Cairo to impair the say of Ethiopia over the Nile issue.

In the same token, Ethiopia was not invited in 1967 when Egypt, Kenya, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda initiate a conference to assess the water of Lake Victoria where Egypt was the key player in the conference. Additionally, in 1992 the Technical Committee for

the Promotion of the Development and Environmental Protection of the Nile Basin (TECCONILE) was constituted at Uganda, Kampala. The contracting states of the TECCONILE were Egypt, Sudan, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zaire (DR. Congo). Yet, Ethiopia that contributes more than 85% of the Nile water was not part of the conference. The periodic isolation of Ethiopia from Nile conferences including the TECCONILE was deliberate and intentional that was stemmed from the 'interest of maintaining the superior-subordinate water order duality between Egypt and Ethiopia over the Nile River' (Yimer, 2020, p. 286).

However, the post-cold war era altered the political podium of the Northeast Africa belt. Both Ethiopia and Egypt become pro-America and pro-west in their political dispensation. The "east" and "west" ideological barriers for the commencement of bilateral negotiations between the pro-east Ethiopia and the pro-west Egypt were gradually evaporated. Subsequently, the water ministers of the Nile basin states met at Arusha, Tanzania in 1998. In their meeting the water ministers agreed on the necessity of an all-inclusive basin based cooperation to address odds over the Nile issue. The Arusha forum by the water ministers of the Nile basin states also set down the ground for the institution of the Nile Basin initiative (NBI) in 1999 at Uganda, Entebbe. Finally, TECCONILE that categorically excluded Ethiopia from the council was formally expired and substituted by the NBI (Swain, 2011, p. 692).

The initiation of the NBI in 1999 technically reflects the commencement of the second phase of the Ethiopia-Egypt relations over the Nile River where the two nations interplay over the River transformed from covert hostility to overt challenge. This is evident because in the NBI council the Nile basin states put forward the discourse of 'sustainable socio-economic development through the equitable utilization of, and benefit from, the common Nile basin water resources' (Swain, 2011, p. 692). Following the constitution of the NBI the Nile riparian states insisted the necessity of working on the concept of equitable and reasonable water sharing to curtail the trust deficit and to promote the culture of open political dialog. Against this background, in 2010 the Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) was introduced in Uganda, Entebbe. The remarkable development in the CFA was the shift of thinking over the Nile issue and the commitment of the CFA signatory states to achieve fair and reasonable water sharing. In this sense, 'the Entebbe agreement has shifted control over the Nile water from Egypt and Sudan, who previously had a monopoly over the river's resources as a result of colonial agreements' (Di Nunzio, 2013).

On the other hand, the CFA is rewarding in challenging the superior-subordinate binary over the Nile River between the upper and lower riparian nations. The agreement is also historical in challenging the veto title of Egypt over the Nile in a coordinated and organized fashion for the first time in history (Yimer, 2020, p. 287). Over this issue, quoting Zeitounetal Rawia pointed out that the CFA is a 'contestation of both the rules

of the game and the sanctioned discourse underpinning the previous and long-standing hegemonic arrangement maintained by Egypt' (Tawfik, 2015, p. 10).

The other point in focus that shows the overt challenge against the superior-subordinate duality dynamics over the Nile River comes in 2011 when Ethiopia publically commenced the construction the GERD over the Blue Nile. Ethiopia used the CFA as a legal leverage to commence to GERD. Once the construction of the GERD over the Blue Nile initiated the legal and verbal challenge from Ethiopia towards Egypt transform to practical one. Subsequently, the International Panel of Expert (IPoE) was constituted to study and report the design documents of the GERD. Finally, in its description paper, the IPoE has overwhelmingly agreed that the Renaissance Dam will not bring significant harm to the water security of Egypt and Sudan. At the same time, the benefits of the dam will be enormous; it will save more than 20 billion cubic meters of water from evaporation, prevent the damage caused on the riverbanks during over-flooding, and significantly reduce sedimentation on the downstream countries (Maru, 2013).

The other major development in the process of Ethiopia's overt challenge against Egypt's veto title over the Nile River registered in 2015 at Sudan, Khartoum. In the same year Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan signed the Declaration of Principles (DoP). The Khartoum settlement is the first convention that was signed so far by Egypt putting away the so called 'historic right'. In the Khartoum contract Cairo recognized the construction of the GERD over the Blue Nile for the first time in a legal document (Yimer, 2020, p. 289). Above all Article IV Paragraph I of the 2015 Khartoum agreement essentially undermine the superior-subordinate rhetoric fadders by Cairo. The Article reads that 'The Three Countries shall utilize their shared water resources in their respective territories in an equitable and reasonable manner' (State Information Service, 2017). Therefore, despite Cairo and its allies securitization move the growing overt challenge shows that the subordinate is working to be a new balancer against the hegemonic attitude of Egypt over the Nile River.

Geo-political interests behind Trump's securitization 'Speech Act' over the GERD

As from the date of the 1979 Camp David peace settlement America has established a strong security, economic and military partnership with the leaders of Egypt. The shared strategic and security interests that includes the Palestine-Israel peace talks in particular and the Arab-Israel peace in general have important place in the relationship of the two countries. Additionally, issues such as, among others, challenging the Soviet influence in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA); fighting terrorism and; obstructing any regional states from dominating the region are segments that have helped to further strengthen the Cairo-Washington partnership (Wittes, 2020).

On the other hand, it is apparent that the influence of America on the Middle East security is declining progressively where Russia and China are more comfortably entering to the region to fill the space left by Washington. Thereby, it is evident that the arc of American influence in the Middle East:

Started to bend downward at the end of the Clinton administration with the failure to achieve a breakthrough between first Israel and Syria, and then between Israel and the Palestinians at Camp David. And that was then followed by the outbreak of the intifada, which looked like anything but peace between Israel and the Palestinians, and by the American-led invasion of Iraq. And that is when American influence began to decline rather precipitously (Jones, 2018, p. 5).

America's gradual withdrawal from the Middle East security intervention enabled Russia to play an important role in the Middle East politics more than ever after the end of the Cold War era. Russia's comeback as an active actor in the region was perhaps considered as one of the big challenges of America's Middle East policy after the cold war era. What is more remarkable on Moscow's comeback to the Middle East is that unlike Washington the authority of Moscow is successful to build cooperative nexus with the 'region's main protagonists and antagonists: Israel and the Palestinians; Israel and Iran; Iran and Saudi Arabia; Turkey and the Kurds; both Libyan governments; and Hamas and Hezbollah' (Jones, 2018, p. 14).

Apparently, America's role in the Middle East is challenged by regional actors such as Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and UAE. In this sense, unlike Egypt other regional actors' trajectory on economic, political and military dominancy is remarkably increasing. The growing dominancy of regional actors frustrated the America-Egypt promise to obstruct any regional states from dominating the region. On the same manner, America's role in the Middle East is encountering challenge from China. In the process of all these developments, Egypt—which was one of the main actors of the region—has been losing its dominant status. So, why did Trump favor Egypt in his 'speech act' against the GERD? Here are the three major reasons:

First, despite the fact that Egypt is declining in the regional politics, Cairo is a major player on the matter of the Palestine-Israel peace talk. In this sense, in the scheme of Trump's move to normalize Israel's relations with the Arab states Egypt, it became one of the key players. Thus, one of the reasons for Trump to securitize the GERD and to show sense of guardedness for Cairo through securitizing 'speech act' that reads ' [Egypt] will end up blowing up the dam,' 'And I said it and I say it loud and clear ... they'll blow up that dam. And they have to do something' stems from Trump's aspiration to use Cairo as conduit for the Arab-Israel normalization scheme (Berger, 2020).

Second, even if the role of Egypt is declining as a major actor in the politics and security of the Middle East it is unlikely for a big country like Egypt to remain dormant for long time - meaning its historical background; geopolitical strategic position; political culture and; the changing nature of the regional politics will possibly help to reactivate the active role of Cairo on the regional politics because it is improbable for countries such as Egypt to remain a dormant regional actor much longer. So, in order to win back America's declining status in the Middle East, it is not unlikely that Cairo would be a more preferable strategic alliance for Washington than Ethiopia's strategic significance for Washington in the Horn of Africa. The other possible scenario that pushed America under Trump to betray Ethiopia on the issue of Nile stems from the projection that if America withdraws its political support to Egypt on critical issues like the GERD, Cairo would approach Russia and China closer, a fact which has a profound geopolitical and economic ramification for Washington.

Thus, the securitization speech act of Trump against the GERD perhaps indicates that the strategic meaning and weight of Egypt for America in the Middle East and Northeast Africa politics is more important than the strategic gravity of Ethiopia for Washington in the Horn of Africa.

Third, the personal diplomacy between President Al Sisi and President Trump could be the other reason that inspired the latter to forward a securitizing speech act against the GERD. The loyalty of Trump for Al Sisi's Egypt was reflected at different time. For instance, when Trump met with Al Sisi in 2016 before he was appointed to the presidential post Trump stated that 'the United States of America will be a loyal friend, not simply an ally that Egypt can count on' (Staff, 2019). In the same vein, Al Sisi was the first oversea leader that sent congratulations on Trump's election victory and made a state visit to Washington in April 2017 where he failed to gate invitation from the Obama administration. In other cases, during the 2019 G-7 meeting in France, President Trump mentioned Al Sisi as 'my favorite dictator' (Staff, 2019). Thereby, the close personal diplomacy between the two leaders substantially helped Cairo to use the political capital of Washington to securitize and portray the GERD as 'threat'.

The differing nature of the Ethiopia-Egypt securitization move over the Nile Issue

The primary issue for the rise of securitization and counter-securitization by the two highly populated African nations is Ethiopia's active engagement on dam project along the Blue Nile. The considerable political stability and economic development in Ethiopia in the 2000s enabled Addis Ababa to challenge the hegemonic cycle of Egypt over the Nile River. Cairo considered the growing challenge from Addis Ababa as a bad example for the other upper riparian states which have the same interest to use the River. In the same token, the construction of Africa's ever biggest dam, GERD, along the Blue Nile

will possibly enhance the hegemonic status and capacity of Ethiopia in the Northeast Africa region, where Egypt is literally accepted as the hegemonic actor. As a result, despite the hydroelectric dam over the Blue Nile do not significantly affect the flow of the Nile water; Egypt over and over securitize the construction of the dam claiming water security. For instance, on February 2, 2021 while explaining about the GERD to the US Congress aides, the Egyptian Ambassador to the US Moataz Zahran, argued the 'negative repercussions of the Ethiopian dam's construction on the water security of Egypt' (Ahramonline, 2021).

However, here it is vital to note that Egypt's securitization of the GERD mainly stems from power anxiety and hegemonic challenge from the new balancer of the region (i.e. Ethiopia in this case). Therefore, in terms of geopolitics:

The Nile dispute is not only the main "existential" threat for Egypt's national security—which could lead to growing domestic discontent as happened in May-June 2013, when President Mohamed Morsi was harshly criticized for his ambiguous position on the Nile crisis- but also a big gamble for the future of the alliances in the wider arena encompassing the Eastern Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and the Horn of Africa. It is a game with multiple geopolitical implications, in which Cairo is trying to position itself as a reliable and unavoidable player (Dentice & Corda, 2020).

In the pursuit of the rivalry, both Ethiopia and Egypt have their securitization instruments. For instance, Cairo associated itself as the 'gift of the Nile' citing 97% of its fresh water consumption from the River. This situation bestowed Cairo a striking leverage to securitize any project over the Nile River and to assert the so called 'historic right' on the River. In the same token, the availability of 70% of the surface water of Ethiopia on the Nile (Abay) derange and the issue of exploiting its water resources to fight poverty and to provide electricity for more than 60 million Ethiopians who are still living in darkness, allowed Addis Ababa to counter-securitize Cairo's veto claim and 'historic right' rhetoric on the River.

Apparently, the securitization and counter-securitization dynamics amid the two countries has been schematized through geo-economic, geostrategic and geopolitical instruments. Against this background, the foreign policy of Egypt for a long time has been operating to shape the order of the Northeastern African region and Nile riparian countries to secure Egypt's de facto 'historic right' on the River. In the process of systematizing the order of the region in favor of the concept of 'historic right', Cairo worked to obstruct the challenge from Addis Ababa, in particular, through means of isolation and destabilization. This is apparent because big dam projects like the GERD have a remarkable impact in revolutionizing the economic and political capacity of a country (i.e., Ethiopia in our case) that will possibly challenge the existing Egypt-led order which Cairo is not interested to see. Thus, to maintain the Egypt-led order in the

region, Cairo is extensively working on approaching the economically and militarily growing actors of the gulf (i.e., Saudi Arabia and UAE). Notably Egypt's partnership with Saudi Arabia and UAE has been rising since the counter-revolution in Egypt in 2013. However, the two gulf emerging regional actors' (Saudi Arabia and UAE) growing geo-economic, geopolitical and geostrategic interests in the Horn of Africa in general and in Ethiopia in particular could be formidable challenge for Cairo to further conceptualize its hegemonic interest over the gulf actors. Meaning, it looks not easy for a country like Egypt whose military, economic and political role is conventionally declining to lobby the gulf actors to abandon their interests in Ethiopia, which is considerably influential actor of the Horn of Africa. Thus, for the emerging gulf actors to support Egypt's scheme undermining the new balancer's (i.e., Ethiopia's) role on the geopolitical order of the Northeast Africa and the Horn regions could not be an easy task.

Egypt's anti-Ethiopia activism also possibly encounters a challenge from other emerging regional actors such as, among others, Turkey, Qatar, and Israel that see the activities of Cairo along the Eastern Mediterranean in a wary eye. Additionally, Turkey, Qatar, and Israel have remarkable strategic, economic and political interests in the Red Sea and Horn of Africa regions. For instance, Ankara has significant economic and strategic interest in Ethiopia and Somalia respectively. In this regard, the Egyptian media outlets time and again accuse 'the dam as a proxy war by Qatar, Turkey and Iran in their regional rivalry since the rift in GCC. Israel has also been drawn in, with accusations that it is supporting Ethiopia by providing technology and military support in securing the dam' (Maru, 2020). Thus, Egypt's securitization move to curtail Ethiopia's challenge seems an uneasy scheme because the former's interest to uphold itself as a significant regional actor is encountered by the above emerging actors. And the situation is effectively exploited by Addis Ababa to counter-challenge and counter-securitize Cairo as well as to emerge as a new balancer over the issue of Nile River.

Additionally, the comparative political stability among the upper Nile riparian states and the emergence of a multi-polar global political and economic order has helped countries like Ethiopia to counter-securitize and counter-challenge Egypt's claim and had enjoyed from the polity of global actors. In this regard Mehari Taddele Maru argued that 'in the past two decades, Ethiopia's influence on the regional and continental agenda (by extension its global role) has increased drastically so that it has become a major ally of the great powers'. In Mehari's argument the overall effects of Ethiopia's role on the regional and global affairs has 'brought a slight shift of vision by the international community, particularly in regard to global governance institutions and the emergence of China and other sources of developmental investment in various urgent projects such as infrastructure in the upstream countries. Assertiveness within the Nile basin countries has surged significantly. This has created tensions over the Nile that require a more robust legal and institutional framework to govern the various interests of the riparian countries' (Maru, 2020).

Yet, there are assertions that Egypt's inability to halt and influence the dam program on the Blue Nile is because of the internal political and economic crisis in the country. In fact, Egypt's inward shift of focus has its own reliable influence on its move to influence Ethiopia; but the most remarkable reasons that weakened Egypt's move to influence the dam project stems from the following three geopolitical related reasons: (i) as mentioned earlier Egypt's economic, political and military organizations are not as effective as the newly emerging regional and global actors in radiating influence beyond the national boundary. Meaning, for 50 or 60 years Egypt was the figurehead state in its geopolitical influence in the Middle East, Red Sea, Northeast Africa and the Horn of Africa regions. However, the current Egypt is comparatively weak and its influence is not effectively radiating beyond its boundary. This situation helped Addis Ababa to get leverage to form free alignment with the newly emerging regional and global actors to counter Cairo's geopolitical influence; (ii) the change of international attitude to accept and portray Egypt as the sole dominant actor on the politics and security of the Middle East, Red Sea and Northeast Africa regions in the past two decades had also been sharing its own stake for the reduction of Egypt's influence to halt the dam project over the Blue Nile. The growing economic and political multi-polarity as well as the employment of more assertive administration from Ethiopia in managing and handling the influence from Egypt also has its own stake here; (iii) time have changed a lot and many more new strategies, tactics and models are introduced to manage trans boundary resource crisis. Particularly, the strategy of transparent and trustworthy inter-state cooperation has given much value to avert trans-boundary resource crisis such as the case of the Nile. Yet, Egypt time and again asserts 'historic right' — a concept that has colonial origin and lacks the spirit of the current geo-economic and geopolitical shift of the world.

The other striking point in the dynamics of the Ethiopia–Egypt securitization and counter securitization rivalry is the dispute over the definition of expressions such as “drought”, “prolonged drought”, and “severe drought” in the process of the filling and administration of the GERD. It is apparent that these terminologies are used time and again in the process of negotiations from the side of Cairo possibly for two simple reasons: First, to further securitize the dam project along the Blue Nile through loaded expressions which do not go away easily; second, to influence the water negotiation process to Cairo's advantage through demanding the maximum water security.

The other instrument employed by Egypt to securitize the GERD is the 'safety of the dam'. In fact, the safety of the dam is confirmed by the IPoE after several discussions, field works, surveys and design analysis. The IPoE confirms that the dam project along the Blue Nile fulfills international standards. While explaining on its report, the IPoE stated that the 4.8 billion investments on the Blue Nile meet standards of the International Commission on Large Dams (International Panel of Experts [IPoE], 2013, pp. 20–21). The contractor of the dam is also explained as one of the world class companies that has 'designed and constructed over 200 large dams around the globe' (Maru, 2020).

On the same manner, the GERD which is around 1000 mile far away from Egypt is condemned and securitized for the 'lack of technical studies and assessments of the dam's environmental and social impact downstream' (Luck, 2021). Yet, the report of the IPoE on the GERD states that 'in terms of structure and content, the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) satisfies the recommendations of most international funding agencies' (IPoE, 2013, p. 39). Furthermore, while explaining the trans-boundary environmental impact of the GERD, the IPoE states that the dam has significant contributions for the down-stream nations on areas such as, among others, (i) to regulate and reduce flood in wet season; (ii) to improve water supply in dry season; (iii) to reduce sedimentation load on down-stream dams and; (iv) to increase irrigable area for Egypt and Sudan (IPoE, 2013, p. 41).

Conclusion

The insincere broker of the Trump administration on the GERD related matter further complicated the water diplomacy between Ethiopia and Egypt. On the negotiation process which is named 'the Trump deal' Ethiopia withdrew itself asserting Washington's bias on mediating the two disputing parties. Subsequently, Trump declared partial cut of the US aid to Ethiopia and he remarked that 'Egypt will eventually 'blow up that dam' (Africa Times, 2020). The speech of Trump is taken as leverage for Cairo to further conceptualize its securitization campaign against the growing challenge from Ethiopia on the water security issue. Yet, beyond the water security issues, Egypt's loss of the game will significantly challenge the prestige and the geopolitical role of Cairo on the Northeast Africa and Red Sea regions. To this matter 'Egyptian insiders privately say the prospect of Ethiopian control over the most populous Arab country's water and food security is viewed as "a humiliation" (Luck, 2021). Thus, behind water security, the issue of geopolitics, geo-strategy and prestige has significantly influenced the two nation's peace process over the GERD and paved the way for securitization and counter-securitization activities.

Apparently, the geopolitics of the Middle East, North East Africa and the Horn region Egypt is not as effective as 40 or 50 years ago because the economic and military capacity of the country is eclipsed by emerging regional actors such as, among others, Turkey, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and UAE. So, Cairo is focusing inward and its capacity is not radiating beyond its boundary sufficiently. Yet, on the geopolitics of the Horn and Northeast Africa, Ethiopia is becoming a good player and a 'real' nation with a huge number of population, a very wide and unexploited landmass, untapped natural resources, fast growing economy, indeed, the seat of the African Union (AU) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). All these dispositions make Ethiopia an important security, political and economic player of the Horn and Northeast Africa regions, where global and emerging regional actors are increasingly competing to secure their geo-economic and geopolitical interests. Against this background, in the

past two decades the above mentioned dispositions enabled Ethiopia to challenge the cycle of Egypt's dominant role on the Nile politics. The changing nature of the global community's attitude towards Ethiopia's role on the security and politics of the region and the fast changing regional dynamics could be asserted as additional impetus on the Ethiopia's move to challenge Egypt cycle of dominance in the Northeast Africa region. However, Egypt tried to counter-challenge the growing encounter from Ethiopia through securitizing the latter's dam project along the Blue Nile. Egypt's securitization move against the dam project uses every means from media outlets to individual activists and from religious leaders to international political leaders. Here it is vital to note that overplaying the securitization game is profoundly devastating on the negotiation process and the fragile relations of the two countries. When the securitization game is systematically advocated by international leaders such as Trump, the ramification is deep and possibly irreparable.

Yet again, Trump's securitization 'speech act' over the GERD, which is possibly stems from points such as, among others, (i) Washington's strategic attachment with Cairo; (ii) Cairo's role on the Israel-Palestine peace talks and; (iii) the personal diplomacy of President Trump and President Al Sisi, remarkably denied the principle of mediation and exacerbated the tension and hostility between Egypt and Ethiopia which is illegal, even, in the charter of the United Nations.

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