



Institute for Islamic Strategic
Affairs



Lake Turkana, Kenya – Photo by flickr.com/internationalrivers

WATER POLITICS: LOOMING CONFLICT OR IMPROVED DIPLOMACY?

Resources, Militancy and Organised Crime

Jessica Best, July 2014

ABSTRACT

'When the well is dry, we know the worth of water'. – Benjamin Franklin

As a limited natural resource, water has the potential to create tensions within and between countries. In the last 10 years, countries have become active in realising the economic benefits of water, which has in many cases created disputes among riparian states. A combination of different factors including climate change and overuse of water, has led to speculations that water is the oil of the 21st century, hinting that wars over the resource should not be dismissed.

TRANSBOUNDARY WATER GOVERNANCE

The Nile

Water crises are not specific to any region and in addition to testing political cooperation between countries; they are also rapidly becoming globalised. Trans-boundary rivers include the Mekong river which runs between 6 countries in Asia and the Okavango river which crosses into Angola, Namibia and Botswana. For these riparian countries, guaranteeing a hold over water resources is crucial for economic development and political power. One river that is especially prone to volatility and is more likely than any to lead to heightened disputes is the Nile basin. The river is responsible for supplying water to 11 countries, including Egypt, Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo; many of which are extremely dependent on the Nile for agricultural and energy purposes. Recent hydropower projects have influenced strained relations between riparian countries, as the majority of governments will want a direct stake in the river's resources.

One major source of contention is the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), which began construction in 2011. As stated in *le Monde Diplomatique*, 'the GERD is a major issue of peace and war'¹. For instance, the Egyptian government has actively countered the GERD on the basis that it threatens the 1959 Nile Waters Agreement. According to the treaty, which initiated an alliance between Egypt and Sudan, the Nile is

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essentially divided between both countries allowing them access to the majority of the Nile's 84bn cubic metres of water every year, with Egypt entitled to the largest share². As progress on the GERD continues, Egypt fears that its requirements will be severely constrained by the dam's presence. More specifically, a reduction in the supply of water poses a major threat to its national security as the country's vast desert regions make it extremely dependent on the Nile's resources. Historically, Egypt has relied on the river as a source for irrigation, and until recently, its control has never been directly challenged. However, with Ethiopia expanding its role as an economic power, Egypt will have to brave the changing regional dynamics.



Figure 1 - Map of Nile riparian countries, Internationalwaterlaw.org

Some may argue that Egypt's reliance on the Nile unequivocally guarantees it access, whereas Ethiopia is motivated by prospects for power generation and would not be drastically compromised if construction on the dam ceased. On the other hand, the origins of the Nile Waters Agreement have been especially biased towards Egypt and Sudan, leaving other riparian states at a huge disadvantage.

Attempts have been made to reform the colonial era treaty: most recently, the tripartite technical committee has allowed Ethiopia to join Egypt and Sudan on matters relating to the Nile, and despite various disruptions, there is a sense that the process is progressing towards a more inclusive policy. Similarly, the Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) signed in 2010, aims to allow upstream countries to use the Nile for economic development, i.e. hydroelectric projects and/or irrigation³. However, whilst negotiations may seem productive, former Egyptian president Mohammed Morsi's opposition to the dam was strongly suggestive of future conflict. His speech at the 2013 water conference in Cairo stated that: "...if our share of the Nile water decreases, our blood will be the alternative"⁴. Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi has adopted a more diplomatic attitude and has been influencing dialogue between Egypt and Ethiopia, suggesting that the issue could be resolved without involving military

force. However, in the likelihood of the GERD threatening Egyptian resources on a larger scale, tensions could escalate and provoke a standoff between the two governments.

Lake Turkana

Another trans-boundary water issue raising tensions is Lake Turkana, which borders both Ethiopia and Kenya. Overexploitation of water in the region has caused the world's largest desert lake to 'largely disappear from Ethiopian territory, retreating south into Kenya'⁵. Since 2011, *water refugees* have been forced to cross into Kenya so as to continue benefitting from water as a means for survival. What is more, the current situation in South Sudan has provoked a large influx of Sudanese refugees looking for stability and security. Additionally, as water shortages lead to an increase in refugees, political and tribal tensions could provoke the Kenyan government to adopt a hostile approach, aggravating current military tensions.

A study by the African Resources Working Group claims that the GERD could have devastating effects on pastoralists who depend on the inflow of water for subsistence⁶. According to the study, the GERD prevents the river's natural flood cycle and could significantly reduce water levels. Poverty is already a feature of the arid region; therefore limited water resources will have massive implications for those living around the

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area. This has devastated farmers' livelihoods as crop irrigation, fishing, and water for livestock has become an increasingly difficult task⁷. The Kenyan government and international aid agencies have distributed aid, but a report by Oxfam and Save the Children finds that they are usually 'too slow to scale up their responses to the crisis, and many donors wanted proof of a humanitarian catastrophe before acting to prevent one'⁸. Waiting for the worst will commit thousands to starvation, fuelling current disputes between habitants and increasing the likelihood of water looting and criminal activities.

The hunger crisis in the region has forced habitants to eat stray dogs in an effort to survive the drought⁹. These struggles are not specific to those living in camps; Kenyans that have been living there for generations have been forced to relocate to Uganda to avoid the famine, and many have lost their lives on the way. As insecurity persists, women and children will be among the most vulnerable, and without the full assistance of aid agencies, their future remains uncertain.

There is some hope that this situation could improve: in September 2013, two aquifers were found in the Turkana desert, suggesting that water shortages would not persist¹⁰. The aquifers have the capacity to develop the region's agriculture and hydropower potential, giving Kenyans and refugees the opportunity to stay in the area. However, if Kenya wants to

prevent tensions, the government must make efforts to stabilise the flow of water as well as the number of refugees. Lack of such controls would provoke widespread disputes, and may influence *water warriors* to control the wells, thereby limiting water access for the weak and impoverished¹¹. What is more, unlimited access would indicate long-term issues for the region, and would eventually lead to water shortages, condemning Kenyans to another crisis.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Although dams could significantly alter economies by providing better prospects for development, the impact they have on human rights should not be side-lined.

The GERD will boost Ethiopia's status as an African power, but this will not prevent the mistreatment of minorities living around the area. For instance, the Gumuz indigenous people, who have been living off the land for

years, have been forced to relocate to an area much further from water sources¹². This could severely impact their security considering that their main source of income is from fishing.

Governments often adopt an impassive approach to the integrity of its citizens; however, they are not the only party responsible for the violation of human rights. International companies and investors have been crucial in promoting this behaviour. These groups are often unaffected by the outcome and continue to reap huge

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benefits regardless of the extent of human rights violations.

The Merowe dam in Sudan, which finished construction in 2009, was widely criticised by human rights groups for displacing 50,000 inhabitants, destroying many people's livelihoods¹³. Among international investors such as France and Germany, the Chinese, who have invested heavily in many parts of Africa, financed a large percentage of the dam. China's 'poor human rights record and its policy of "non-interference" on human rights violations in states it does business with' proved that it was insensitive to the ethnic conflict brewing in the country due to the dam's presence¹⁴. Unfortunately, the government made little attempt to provide alternatives for the Sudanese affected by the dam and quickly suppressed any objections. The Chinese have been immune to these disruptions, and are investing in multiple dams in the region, suggesting that human rights violations and forced relocations are unlikely to stop.

In regards to the GERD, Ethiopia needs to make every effort to prioritise human rights. Disregarding this, will influence feelings of alienation for Ethiopians, and could hinder the success and potential of the dam, disrupting peace and stability.

PROSPECTS FOR PEACE

Despite these problems, water treaties have at times been successful in influencing dialogue between states. Creating a point of interest has led to stronger relationships within Africa,

allowing trans-boundary Rivers to reach their full potential.

Uniting under the same banner, would allow African states to congregate over water resources and promote the development of 'poorer' countries. The Tripartite Technical Committee has been one instance where economies have joined forces to resolve tensions, and have so far led to improved political and diplomatic rapprochement of Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan. On a bigger scale, the Entebbe Agreement is also working towards sharing the Nile among all riparian states, prompting a more equal share of resources.

Dialogue is the key to resolving current and future conflicts over water; without this, tensions will continue to rise, and governments will turn to force. Countries such as Egypt and Sudan need to accept the changing dynamics that favour fairer conditions for all riparian states and better prospects for stability.

The future of water still remains largely uncertain, but governments remain wary of the value of the resource as a driver for development. With the recent rise of militancy in Africa, diplomacy is at a great disadvantage, however, if dialogue takes precedence, the probability of armed conflict may decline.

¹ Le Monde Diplomatique, “When Sisi met Desalegn” (25/06/14), <http://mondediplo.com/blogs/when-sisi-met-desalegn>

² Daily News Egypt, “We are committed to 1959 Nile after sharing agreement”, (21/02/14) <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2014/02/21/committed-1959-nile-water-sharing-agreement-egyptian-sudanese-officials/>

³ Voa News, “Tensions mount as Uganda proceeds with Nile river agreement”, (01/07/2013) <http://www.voanews.com/content/tensions-mount-as-uganda-proceeds-with-nile-river-agreement-cfa/1692986.html>

⁴ Daily News Egypt, “If our share of Nile water decreases, our blood will be the alternative”, (11/06/13) <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/06/11/morsi-if-our-share-of-nile-water-decreases-our-blood-will-be-the-alternative/>

⁵ Water Politics, “Quenching Kenya: Can new water discoveries save East Africa?”, (9/04/14) <http://www.waterpolitics.com/2014/04/09/quenching-kenya-can-new-water-discoveries-save-east-africa/>

⁶ Africa Resources Working Group, “Study Reveals Ethiopia's Gibe III Dam Would Cause Humanitarian Catastrophe and Major Cross-Border Armed Conflict” (01/05/12) http://www.arwg-gibe.org/uploads/Press_release_Gibe_III_Dam_Report_Catastrophic_Effects.pdf

⁷ Water Politics, “Quenching Kenya: Can new water discoveries save East Africa?”, (9/04/14) <http://www.waterpolitics.com/2014/04/09/quenching-kenya-can-new-water-discoveries-save-east-africa/>

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⁸ The Guardian, “Kenya's Turkana region brought to the brink of humanitarian crisis by drought”, (26/04/14) <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/mar/26/kenya-drought-triggers-fears-humanitarian-crisis>

⁹ NBC news, “South Sudan refugees flood Kenya only to face starvation”, (28/06/14) <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/africa/south-sudan-refugees-flood-kenya-only-face-starvation-n141581>

¹⁰ Water Politics, “The limited promise of Kenya's aquifer discoveries”, (17/10/13) <http://www.waterpolitics.com/2013/10/17/the-limited-promise-of-kenyas-aquifer-discoveries/>

¹¹ Water Politics, “Quenching Kenya: Can new water discoveries save East Africa?”, (9/04/14) <http://www.waterpolitics.com/2014/04/09/quenching-kenya-can-new-water-discoveries-save-east-africa/>

¹² The Guardian, “Ethiopia's Nile Dam project signals its intention to become an African power”, (14/07/14) <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/jul/14/ethiopia-grand-renaissance-dam-egypt>

¹³ International Rivers, “Merowe Dam: Sudan”, (2014) <http://www.internationalrivers.org/campaigns/merowe-dam-sudan-0>

¹⁴ International Rivers, “Big dams bringing poverty, not power to Africa”, (2014) <http://www.internationalrivers.org/resources/big-dams-bringing-poverty-not-power-to-africa-2006>

ABOUT OUR PROGRAMME: RESOURCES, MILITANCY AND ORGANISED CRIMES IN WEST AND HORN OF AFRICA

Brief Background and Scope

Africa's GDP is the most rapidly growing of any continent but corruption, crime, and militancy are rife. Much of this centres on the continent's wealth of natural resources, including petroleum etc. Foreign investment in Africa has grown exponentially over the last decade and will continue to rise. Consequently, foreign & African governments and criminal/militant groups' interests and sphere of influences will clash with increasing intensity over the coming years. This will have direct implications on energy, regional and global security agendas. Furthermore, areas such as West and

Horn of Africa regions are strategically located, which enhances their role in the international trade system through shipping routes and transnational linkages etc. The creation of AFRICOM reflects the rising global importance of the region, with the exportation of oil only expected to drastically increase from the continent by 2025. Yet with the region still lacking institutions of effective governance and reliable security structures, the levels of violent insurgency have jeopardised economic development in countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Mali and Nigeria etc. Different militant groups finance their operations through employment of traditional criminal enterprises, such as smuggling and drug sales. Resources are also exploited for revenue by both criminal organisation and militant groups. Militant organisations such as Al-Shabab and other Jihadists and nationalist movement operating primarily in Somalia & Sahel – have exploited the security vacuum that exists in the regions. In addition, issues such as piracy continue to effect maritime security whilst increasing costs for counter-piracy measures. The implications of above is severe on all three fronts i.e. Energy security, regional security and global security. To address these problems and develop solutions, we must now confront all three facets holistically, with due appreciation of their interrelated attributes.

Programme's Deliverables:

1. Mapping the interplay between resources, militant groups and the dynamics of organised crime in West/horn of Africa.
2. Conflict forecasting and risk analysis of the current and future dynamics of militancy, resources, organised crimes and their repercussions on energy security, regional and global security.
3. Situation analyses on above issues, regional positioning and global powers interests etc.
4. Alternative policy analyses that may serve in policy making on regional and global governance levels

5. Creating a useful guide and knowledge base for stakeholders and public for future oil, gas and aid endeavours in West/Horn of Africa.

ABOUT US

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