

IDE Research Bulletin

Research project summary based on papers for academic journals
with the aim of contributing to the academic community

Sudan-Egypt Relations Amidst Shifting Regional Dynamics in the Middle East

Project Leader

DARWISHEH, Housam

March 2020

IDE-JETRO

IDE Research Bulletin

Sudan-Egypt Relations Amidst Shifting Regional Dynamics in the Middle East

Period: April 2018 – March 2020

Members of the Research Project

Organizer: DARWISHEH, Housam

Co-researcher: ABDIN, Mohamed Omer

For many decades, Egypt has maintained a powerful hydro political position in the Nile River basin through an optimal combination of power resources. Recently, however, Egypt's regional stature as a regional hegemon has significantly declined due to crises at home, shifts in the regional balance of power in the Middle East, and a growing asymmetry in power relations in the Nile basin. This transformation has manifested itself clearly in Egypt's loss of influence over its southern neighbor, Sudan, which has previously been its only strong ally in the Nile basin.

How has Egypt's loss of influence over Sudan on the one hand happened, and how shifts in power relations between Egypt and the upstream riparian states in the Nile basin on the other hand occurred? How important was Sudan's support for Egypt in maintaining its hegemony in the basin and how has its positionality affected political and power relations and control of the Nile waters between upstream and downstream riparian states? In addition, the recent geopolitical shifts in the Middle East and the Nile basin have given rise to a strong and influential role played by non-riparian states in the Nile basin, exacerbating in the process the geopolitical contest over the Nile basin, particularly the current dispute between Ethiopia and Egypt over the former's Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. This research has utilized the framework of hydro hegemony to examine (1) the geostrategic imperatives and constraints that have shaped Egypt's relations with its southern neighbors, (2) the impact of Egypt's economic dependency on its foreign policy and regional stature, (3) and the impact of the volatile and unpredictable regional landscape on Sudan's relations with Egypt with regard to the hydro political shift in power relations between downstream and upstream riparian states in the Nile River basin.

[1] The Dynamics of Egypt-Sudan Relations over Hydro-politics in the Nile Basin

Housam Darwisheh

Egypt used to influence Sudan's foreign policy with regards to the utilization of the Nile River waters. However, internal crises and regional transformations in the Middle East and Horn of Africa since 2011 have led Egypt to lose its regional influence and created new hydro political landscapes that positioned Sudan and Ethiopia as influential actors in the Nile basin. This study utilized the theoretical framework of hydro hegemony to examine the Egyptian-Sudanese relations in light of the changing power dynamics in the Middle East and the Nile basin region. It examined the geostrategic imperatives and constraints that have shaped Egypt's relations with its southern neighbors, particularly Sudan, in light of shifting geopolitical alignments since the Arab uprisings of 2011. The article argued that Egypt's influence on Sudan and other Nile riparian states has declined because of (1) Egypt's diminishing material and ideational power in the Middle East and Africa, (2) its foreign policy options have been structurally constrained by economic dependencies on assertive powers such as the USA, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, and (3) its loss of hydro hegemony as the regional order of the Nile basin came to be based on power relations between upstream and downstream countries.

[2] Managing Sudan: How Geopolitical Shifts Shaped Bashir's Foreign Policy

Mohamed Omer Abdin

This study examined the durability of the Sudanese regime from 1999 to 2019 by examining the strategies of survival employed by Sudan's former president Omar Hassan al-Bashir. It demonstrates that Bashir's survival strategies developed as a result of divergent perceptions of threat and opportunity of a highly volatile power relations in the Middle East and North Africa region. The study further examined the impact of the unpredictable regional landscape on Sudan's relations with Egypt with regard to the hydro political shifts in power relations between downstream and upstream riparian states in the Nile River basin. The article concludes by arguing that, although the shifting geopolitical landscape helped Bashir stabilize his rule, his indictment by the International Criminal Court produced an intra-elite competition and a rift within the

regime that provided an opportunity for regime change.