

Great Power Politics in Greater Eurasia

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**Regional Alliances, Institutions,
Projects, and Conflicts**

Edited by Rahman Dağ and Özgür Tüfekçi

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Chapter Nine

A Century-Long Great Power Politics over the Nile River Basin

Mohammed Hashiru and Özgür Tüfekçi

Insecurity related to ideology before and after the Cold War is believed to be replaced by resource-related conflicts. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, a former UN Secretary-General, mentioned in 1985 that “mainstream” politics would not cause the next war in the Middle East but water. Researchers have focused on the issue of water wars since the 1990s. The Nile River is one of these waters that continue to attract the interest of researchers.

An estimate of about 300 million population occupies the Nile basin amidst the rapid growth of a population higher than the world average. In a wide gaze, eleven states share the longest river. They are Burundi, Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, Rwanda, Uganda, D.R Congo, Tanzania, Kenya, Egypt, and Ethiopia. Sudan and Egypt’s dependence are considered most attached to the Nile River. The Ethiopian state, on the other hand, is situated at the Blue Nile headwaters. It forms the basis of Nile’s yearly discharge of between 80–85 percent and is therefore recognized as the third player in Nile hydropolitics behind Sudan and Egypt (Waterbury, 1979: 179).

Meanwhile, nine out of the ten African states that share the Nile Basin have been putting pressure on Egypt for decades to help create a permanent body to manage water allocation along the 6,741 km Nile, the longest river globally. The way the Nile is managed and its politics have worldwide implications for deadly confrontations or harmonious partnerships in the past years and the years to come. Struggle over the waters of the has had world political repercussions in the previous years and has the potential to fuel emerging tensions in Africa’s eastern corner and its environs and determine the Middle East’s future balance of power. Meanwhile, the river is cited as considered among the world’s rare river basins having legal procedures for water sharing in terms of development and jurisdiction and has been described as a probable blueprint for many international water bodies (Teclaff, 1967).

development, and political stability of Egypt relied solely on the Nile control. To have total control over Egypt, the British, in 1902, annexed the Ugandan, Sudanese, Egyptian, and Kenyan states, including the whole region around Lake Victoria. Because they couldn't annex and colonize Ethiopia, they had an agreement with it that ensured they had an uninterrupted supply of the Blue Nile waters for Egypt and Sudan. Britain eventually coerced these Nile basin countries and became the ruler of the whole Nile basin. The British made it clear to other European competitors of the Nile control and Africa in about 1890 that Britain must be the custodian of the Nile basin. The other European powers duly acknowledged this, and hence the matter of competition came to a halt. Great Britain had political pacts with its European competitors admitting that the Nile basin was agreeably an interest of the United Kingdom at the advent of the 20th century. This was large because of the power possessed by the British. Britain happened to be an imperial state with colonial strategic purposes at the time. The British used the Nile to play power politics by bringing the Basin states under its imperial leadership and played great power politics with European powers in making sure the Nile was used in cultivating cotton to the imperial power's benefit, among other reasons.

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