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Research Paper

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The Restraints on Egypt's National Security Towards the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)

Abstract: *Egypt regards the Nile as a vital "Life Line". As such, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam poses a significant threat to its national security, and thus, Egypt has to arrive at the most effective decision in order to remove this threat. Egypt embarked on a global diplomatic pressure designated to influence Ethiopia, backed by signals of relevant contributive acquisitions relevant to the Egyptian army's buildup: E.g., 30 Rafale jets from France in 2021 (following a former acquisition of 24 jets in 2015), 50 Mig-29Ms fighter jets in 2015 or 24 Sukhoi Su-35 in 2018, from Russia.*

This study finds that albeit the noted signals of massive quality acquisitions from new sponsors such as France or Russia due to a decrease of US armament from 47 percent of Egypt's arms imports between 2009-2014, to 14 percent between 2015-2020, due to sanctions by President Obama, following the deposing of President Morsi in 2013, the Egyptian army is bounded by military and economic restraints, effecting an arrival to efficient operative decisions in order to embark on a military response versus Ethiopia, should the diplomatic prism would not achieve its goal, of removing the potential threat on the Nile water flow. The identity of army buildup arms suppliers, weapons and markets, effects significantly the noted decision-making process.

Keywords: *Egypt, Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, National Security, Army Buildup.*

1. Introduction:

The Nile is considered as the “Life Line” of Egypt, since ancient times. As such, Egypt relates to any real or potential threat, as a potential conflict. Other water sources are scarce, and bound to be affected by climate changes, as noted by El-Nahry & Doluschitz (2010: 1498). Their study focused in the Egyptian coastal wetland ecosystems, such as salt marshes, which are particularly vulnerable to rising sea level. Rising sea levels are expected not only to effect sand dunes but fish catches in or near the northern lagoons, and the coastal zone (e.g., Alexandria) (El-Nahry & Doluschitz, 2010: 1505). The importance of preserving the Nile and its water quality, increases significantly, and thus the political sensitivity of Egypt.

Generally, decision makers calculate security interests in their policy making implementation, as an ability to allocate various resources according to any existing restrains. Egypt may refer to diplomacy in order to meet potential threats. Should the decision maker refer to military response, they ought to take into consideration some aspects: Egypt has to relay military units from arenas as the Libyan border, economic restrains as the army fulfills not only its military duties, but also civic projects and resources, etc.'.

This study will address the following research question:

What Restraints Does Egypt have on Its National Security Towards the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)?

This study will address some significant hypotheses which are arising from the noted question:

1. Egypt considers the Ethiopian GERD as a threat on its water sources hence, a threat on its national security.
2. As such, it will be willing to take any necessary decision in order to remove this threat, yet, it will be bound to military, economic and other restrains.
3. Egypt embarked on a global diplomatic pressure. Should the negotiations fail, it proclaims that a military option may be possible (which Egypt signals by accelerating relevant acquisitions vis-à-vis maneuvers etc.'). In reality, this option is bounded due to the noted restrains in hypothesis 2.

4. Army buildup acquisitions are significant to the military option, and thus, it serves as an accelerator for choosing new suppliers, markets and weapons.

2 .The Grand Ethiopian Dam (GERD) Current Escalation:

The case of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) (as was formally known as the Millennium Dam), serves a significant test case designated to review the noted hypothesis¹.



Throughout the 20's & 30's of the colonial 20th century era, Ethiopia began negotiating an imperial power concession to build a dam at the Blue Nile outlet from Lake Tana, while promising to allow Egypt and Sudan an increased irrigation of cotton (while financing the British Nile Valley administration) (McCann, 1981: 667).

As an upriver country it has the most power and an ability to cause environmental impacts on downriver countries as Egypt and Sudan, as their economy, agriculture and water sources are dependent of any project constructed by Ethiopia. All of parties are aware of that while negotiating future water rights.

The construction of a massive Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and Hydroelectric power stations along the Blue Nile River, began in 2011. It is located about 40 km east of Sudan. In July 2020, Ethiopia accelerated a filling process of the dam's reservoir, due to the oncoming rainy season.

¹ Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Project, Benishangul-Gumuz, Water Technology. Available At: <https://www.water-technology.net/projects/grand-ethiopian-renaissance-dam-africa/> (Downloaded: February 7, 2022).

In June 2021, Egypt had acknowledged receiving a formal notification from Ethiopia noting it had reached a targeted second filling of the dam. Egypt objected and allied with Sudan as the country is also dependent in the Nile².

In early October 2021, the U.N Security Council had issued a statement calling for “A mutually acceptable and binding agreement”, on the GERD. Egypt (as Sudan), responded positively, yet, Ethiopia said it will not recognize any claim raised on the basis of the aforementioned statement. As the mediations did not succeed, albeit interventions on behalf of the US, the African Union (and member countries as Tunisia) are making an effort to mediate the project continues to move forward. It is already reached the targeted second filling on July 19, 2021, while there were unusually heavy rainfalls during this rainy season in Ethiopia (Maher, 2021)³.

3. Egypt's National Security Restrains:

As the Egyptian decision makers calculated their national security options, they have to relate to the following prisms: Security and Economy. Since the toppling of President Muammar Al-Gaddafi, The Western Libyan border became a source of instability. Although the army had to allocate some units to combat ISIS in the Sinai Peninsula, the Libyan border, is considered as a significant arena demanding a relevant array of military units.

The army takes into consideration in its regular activities, notwithstanding a declaration of war, its budget which is the basis of any armament, day to day activities, or specific allocation of troops for a designated mission. Notwithstanding, should the army be invested in civilian economic projects, that can be influenced by the costs of war.

3.1 Libya:

A significant restrain on the Egyptian army's decision-making process, prior to any war option, is allocating resources from the Western Libyan border. As a disarrayed formal Libyan

² Economy of Ethiopia, Britannica. Available At: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ethiopia/Economy#ref1247424> (Downloaded: February 7, 2022).

³ The Struggle between Ethiopia and Egypt Escalates: The Filling of the Renaissance Dam had Begun for the Second Time (Hebrew), Maariv/Reuters. Online Available July 19, 2021. Available At: <https://www.maariv.co.il/news/world/Article-854014> (Downloaded: February 7, 2022).

army can no longer serve as a security force, in favor of a war-torn country, Egypt had to allocate resources to secure this Western border.

Hüsken, (2017: 897-915), noted that following the Arab-Spring revolution in Libya, smuggling among Egyptian- Libyan borderland Bedouin increased. This tribe is not the only smuggling group, as Following President Muammar Al-Gaddafi era, a prolonged civil-war contributed to tribal defiance over any central rule. The Egyptian army probably monitored and arrived at operative conclusions from previous cases, as the Tuareg tribe, which infiltrated the Libyan border, and advanced towards Chad and Mali, causing calamity as it collaborated with Al-Qaeda elements in the Sahel & Maghreb in order to control oil wails while damaging the local economy (Bouks, 2014). As Libya is enduring a stabilization process, should the western border be secured, then Egypt may relay relevant forces in favor of different tasks, as the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

3.2 The Economic Involvement of the Egyptian Army

One would relate to an army through a prism of security, yet, in Egypt, the military serves as a key protagonist in the economy. At the end of President Mubarak's era in 2011, there were army-controlled supermarkets, hotels, and the food industry. Advantages as tax exemption and cheap labor (soldiers), served as rationale explanatory of this military-economy combination.

Under President Al-Sisi's rule, the army is responsible for economic endeavors as widening the Suez Canal, is a partner with civil contractors (industrial zone and a harbor across the canal), and is involved in governmental constructions, roads and buildings (as a national initiative to build 1 million apartments across Egypt). Its officers serve as board directors or own private ventures. There is a shortage in basic commodities in 2016, due to a lack of foreign currency. The army sold subsidized food packages, provided baby food powder through pharmacies. All of the noted, can serve as a significant restrain prior to any decision to embark on any escalation.

4. We can Relate to Two Parallel Egyptian Political Lines:

1. Diplomacy.
2. Military Response.

1. The Diplomatic Prism: Is consisted of negotiations by key Egyptian governmental figures as Egypt's Water Resources and Irrigation Minister, Mohamed Abdel Aati, who promoted diplomatic negotiation with relevant parties as Inger Andersen, in order to illuminate the UN Environment Program official, with challenges that the Egyptian irrigation system is facing. On the other hand, Mr. Aati sent his Ethiopian counterpart a formal letter denouncing Ethiopia as violating an agreement from 2015, according to which any development of the GERD has to be based on mutual understandings or else it is violation of the law.

Other officials as the Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, met his Sudanese counterpart Mariam al-Sadiq al Mahdi, in order coordinate positions prior to a discussion at the UN security council. The Egyptian president Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, attempted to arrive at some arrangements regarding water division, yet did not succeed. He also requested the African Union to intervene (in a meeting with the union's chairman from Congo, Felix Tshisekedi) (Cogosovski, 2021).

2. Military Response: Egypt and Sudan maneuvered jointly in June, 2021. The exercise was titled "Guardians of the Nile". It was the third exercise in two years. Equivalently, Egypt issued a series of announcement, culminating with president Al-Sisi, who warned Ethiopia that "The Nile is a red line!" (Bar-El, 2021). Throughout 2021, Egypt bought 30 Rafale fighter jets from France, in a 4.5 billion dollars contract (following a former acquisition of 24 Rafale jet, in 2015). Through this buildup Egypt signals countries which may be in conflict, of its possible military retaliation to what is considered as a threat on Egyptian national security⁴.

These acquisitions are relevant to the Egyptian army buildup as a whole, vis-à-vis the quality of the traditional weaponry, as the former arms suppliers were diversified. The army does not acquire U.S. weapons, in favor of newer transactions with other sponsors. The last U.S. sale was of 20 F-16Cs in 2010. Following the elections which were followed by deposing of President Morsi in 2013 (as a consequence of the Arab Spring and the resignation of President Mubarak in 2011), President Obama's administration froze a significant sale of aircrafts, tanks

⁴ Egypt Acquires 30 Additional Rafale Fighters, Dassault Aviation. Online Available May 4, 2021. Available At: <https://www.dassault-aviation.com/en/group/press/press-kits/egypt-acquires-30-additional-rafale-fighters/> (Downloaded: February 7, 2022); "Egypt to Buy Rafale Fighter Jets Worth \$4.5bn from France", Al-Jazeera. Online Available May 4, 2021. Available At: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/4/egypt-buys-dozens-of-rafale-fighter-jets-worth-4-5bn-from-france> (Downloaded: February 7, 2022).

and missiles to Egypt for several years (e.g., denying advanced armaments as the AIM-120C air-to-air missiles).

It caused a dramatic shift from 47 percent of Egypt's arms imports between 2009-2014 (President El-Sisi's era) to 14 percent between 2015-2020. In order to compensate this decrease of quality armament, other countries as Russia became suppliers of the Egyptian army 50 Mig 29 Ms, fighter Jets, which were procures in 2015 from Russia, as well as 24 Sukhoi Su-35 in 2018 (Bowman, et.al., 2021; Defenseworld.Net, November 27, 2021).

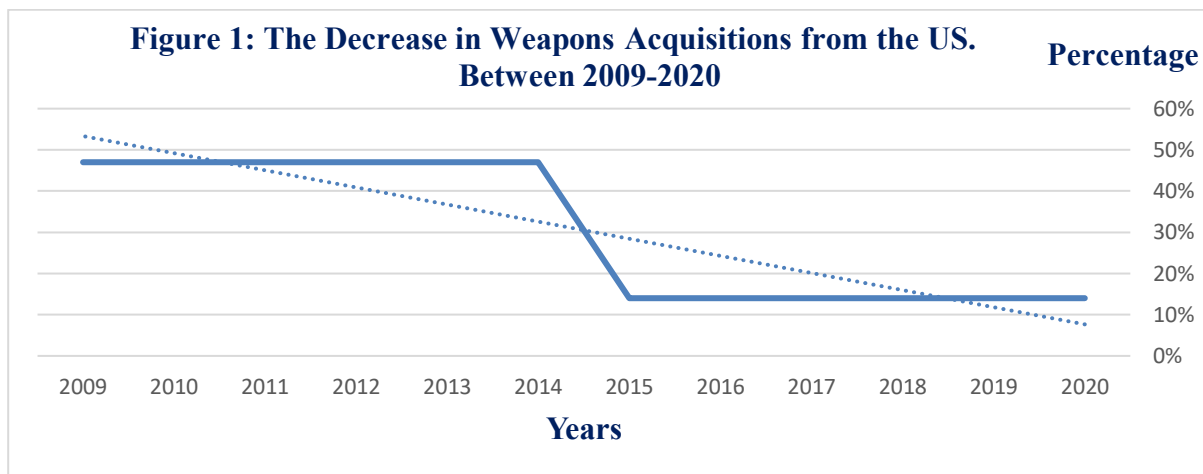


Figure 1 indicates the decrease in percentage of the Egyptian army buildup based on US. Weapon acquisitions, between 2009-2020. We can notice a significant decrease from 2014.

The new army buildup, has to present equivalent or even more, quality acquisitions in order to portray an effective signal to potential rivals of Egypt. There are high relevant abilities in the newly acquired MiG-29Ms which are equipped with an OLS-UE Infrared Search and Track (IRST) capable of detecting enemy aircraft by their infrared signature, plus sophisticated PPK targeting pod comprising thermal imager systems and laser rangefinders allowing the employment of precision-guided munitions. The addition of Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets to this

array, is an added value due to its new features as an Irbis phased array radar with a range of 400km and powerful AL-41F1S engines (14,500 kg of thrust), with thrust vectoring control. In addition, there is a significant contribution to this fighter jet's maneuvers, in the ability to carry the R-27 air-to-air missiles and the R-77-1 RVV-SD active radar-guided missile (DefenseWorld.Net, November 27, 2021)

Egypt signals with this buildup, it can potentially embark on a preemptive maneuver towards any threat. As it is equivalent to the diplomatic negotiations of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), the meaning is clear.

Although the US recently approved a massive arms sale to Egypt valued at 2.5 billion \$, defining Egypt as "a major non-NATO ally country that continues to be an important strategic partner in the Middle East", it does not indicate a new policy by President Biden. His administration allocated 1.4 billion \$ in bilateral military assistance for Cairo, exactly as the previous year. Congressional Democrats urged the administration not to release a much smaller package of military assistance which was withheld last year due to a demand that Cairo will improve its human rights conditions. Cairo had been given a deadline until January 30th 2022, to meet these demands. It was met by a decision to cancel a 130 million \$ in military aid to Egypt over these issues. Egypt continued with the pattern of signing arms deals with new suppliers as the South-Korean Hanwha Defense, to supply K9 self-propelled howitzers and other support vehicles to Egypt, yet, one has to take into consideration that the US is one of South-Korea's significant arms suppliers. One may interpret this in both ways: Either the US may interfere, or may use South-Korea as a third country and thus, may revive its former status as a significant supplier to Egypt as was following the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty⁵.

⁵ Al-Jazeera, (January 26, 2022). US approves \$2.5bn arms sale to Egypt, despite rights concerns, Al-Jazeera News Human Rights. Available At:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/26/us-approves-2-5bn-arms-sale-egypt-despite-rights-concerns>
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4. Conclusions:

According to this study, Egypt does consider the Ethiopian GERD as a threat on its water sources and on its national security.

Secondly, albeit proclamations to take any necessary decision in order to remove this threat, there are military, economic and other restrains, that will moderate any offensive.

Third, Egypt embarked on a global diplomatic pressure, which may produce positive results, as a military option will produce significant implications to various aspects of Egyptian economy and society. Egyptian signals of accelerating relevant acquisitions vis-à-vis military maneuvers are bounded in reality, due to the noted restrains in hypothesis 2.

To conclude, we cannot consider any cancellation of the US sanctions linked to human rights improvement in Egypt, yet, an option of a third-party supplier (as South-Korea), is more than feasible. This will affect the massive Egyptian army buildup acquisitions in some manner through former, yet, more new weapons through suppliers from new markets (Hypothesis 4).

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