

Committee: Special Political and Decolonization

Issue: The question of the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

Student Officer: Eleanna Chalaraki

Position: Co-Chair

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee,

My name is Eleanna Chalaraki and I am a 10-th grade student of Ekpaideftiki Anagennisi. It is my utmost honor to serve as the Co-Chair of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee in the 4th session of the Deutsche Schule of Thessaloniki Model United Nations. I am really glad that you have chosen this committee and I hope this experience is educative, constructive, and at the same time entertaining. I will do my best to ensure that all of you can be able to actively participate in the discussion and have the opportunity to express your opinion.

I have been active in the MUN community for quite some time and from the conferences, I have attended, I have gained precious knowledge that I will share with you through this study guide and of course the actual conference. My goal is to share my passion and enthusiasm for this activity with all of you and create the ideal conditions inside the committee so as you can manage to pass well-structured resolutions.

The present study guide will provide you with important information, key factors, and identified problems on the question of the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, which gravely affects the African continent as well as the international community. Except for the information that is being provided in this study guide, which will serve as a pretext to your investigation, I highly advise you to extend your research and that you research your delegation's policy thoroughly.

Should you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me via my email (aeahalar@gmail.com) and I will be more than happy to help you.

Sincerely,

Eleanna Chalaraki

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam is a gravity dam on the Blue Nile River in Ethiopia under construction since 2011. The more than 4-billion project is situated in western Ethiopia, on the Blue Nile, which converges with the White Nile in the Sudanese capital Khartoum before flowing north through Egypt towards the Mediterranean Sea (see figures 1 and 2)¹. It is about 15km east of the borders of Sudan. The primary purpose of the dam is electricity production in order to relieve Ethiopia’s acute energy shortage and for electricity export to neighboring countries. The dam will be the largest hydroelectric power plant in Africa, when completed, as well as the seventh larger in the world.



Figure 1-2: Maps of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

However, this highly expensive project has sparked a heated debate among Ethiopia and its neighbors mainly Egypt and Sudan. Ethiopia’s downstream neighbors worry the dam will restrict vital water supplies, which are essential for their countries. They are especially concerned about what might happen should there be a drought while Ethiopia is still filling the reservoir, a process that takes several years. Egypt depends heavily on the Nile for its irrigation and drinking water and it states that it has historic rights to the river. At the same time, Sudan shares many concerns with Egypt about this project, as its construction poses possible threats to the safety of Sudan’s dams.

¹ Dr-Yohannes Yihdego Woldeyohannes. “Map Showing the Nile River with Its Main Branches, White and Blue Niles, and the Site of the Dam (GERD).” ResearchGate, June 2017, www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-showing-the-Nile-River-with-its-main-branches-White-and-Blue-Niles-and-the-site-of_fig4_317372179.

Ineke Mules. “Ethiopia, Egypt, Sudan Make Slow Progress in Nile Dam Row.” DW, 16 Jan. 2020, www.dw.com/en/ethiopia-egypt-sudan-make-slow-progress-in-nile-dam-row/a-52015611.

In Cairo, on 23 June 2020, in an interview with AP, Egypt's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sameh Shokry said that if Ethiopia fills the Renaissance Dam reservoir in July, as it has previously announced, without reaching an accord with Egypt and Sudan, it will be breaching the 2015 Declaration of Principles signed by the three states, and that the resumption of negotiations will be ruled out. Less than a year later, on 2 July 2021, the United Nations Security Council stated that the following week it would meet about the Ethiopian Dam in order to discuss the dispute between the three countries, and Ethiopia's plans to fill the dam for a second time this summer without an agreement with Sudan and Egypt. Ethiopia is not keen on Security Council involvement and instead asked the body to defer the issue to the African Union. However, De Riviere, the president of the Security Council for July, said that "there was little the Security Council could do other than bring the parties together to express their concerns and then encourage them to return to negotiations to reach a solution."² It is meant to see what the consequences of this meeting will be as the issue continues to be highly ambiguous and may provoke further instability in the area.

After the announcement of the Security Council on 2 July 2021, on 8 July 2021 the Security Council organized a meeting under the title "Peace and Security in Africa", in order to discuss the problems that occurred due to the construction of the GERD. The main goal of this meeting is to establish an agreement for the dam during times of protracted drought. As Council members took the floor, some delegates noted that, despite the dam's significant potential to benefit the region, its construction has become a source of both misunderstanding and tension. Several speakers underlined the importance of constructive engagement and compromise, citing their own experiences of managing tensions with other States over water sources. Niger's representative urged Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan to continue to engage in negotiations and refrain from actions that will lead to instability in the area. Also, Sudan supported the dam's construction but pointed out that only with coordination the 74 billion cubic meter dam can work positively. Lastly, Ethiopia reaffirmed that they will continue to negotiate in good faith so as to reach an agreement with all member states.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Dam

² Michelle Nichols. "U.N. Security Council Likely to Meet next Week on Ethiopia Dam." *Reuters*, 2 July 2021, www.reuters.com/world/africa/un-security-council-likely-meet-next-week-ethiopia-dam-2021-07-01.

A dam is a structure built across a stream or a river to retain water.³ It is a barrier constructed to hold back water and raise its level, forming a reservoir used to generate electricity or as a water supply. Large hydropower plants, like GERD, fill up in the wet season and empty in the dry season, releasing water in a regulated manner throughout the year to ensure year-round electricity generation. This largely suppresses a river's natural flow.

Irrigation

Irrigation is the artificial process of applying controlled amounts of water to land in order to assist in the production of crops and help the growth of an area or a country. The Nile River is of paramount importance for Sudan, Egypt, and Ethiopia for their irrigation needs.

Hydroelectric power plant

A hydroelectric power plant is a generator that produces electricity driven by turbines that converts the potential energy of falling or fast-flowing water into mechanical energy⁴. Hydroelectric power plants are used in the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam for the production of energy.

Reservoir

A reservoir is a natural or artificial place where water is collected and stored for use, especially water for supplying a community, irrigating land, and furnishing power.⁵

Water Security

“Water security is the capacity of a population to safeguard sustainable access to adequate quantities of acceptable quality water for sustaining livelihoods, human well-being, and socio-economic development, for ensuring protection against water-borne pollution and water-related disasters, and for preserving ecosystems in a climate of peace and political stability.”⁶

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

³ Donald C. Jackson. “Dam.” *Britannica*, 2020, www.britannica.com/technology/dam-engineering.

⁴ The Editors Of Encyclopaedia Britannica. “Hydroelectric Power.” *Britannica*, 2020, www.britannica.com/science/hydroelectric-power.

⁵ “Reservoir.” *Dictionary.Com*, 2012, www.dictionary.com/browse/reservoir.

⁶ “What Is Water Security? Infographic.” *United Nations*, 8 May 2013, www.unwater.org/publications/water-security-infographic.

Historical Background

The site of the dam was identified when the US Bureau of Reclamation first made a survey of the Blue Nile River between 1956 to 1964, during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie. Due to the coup d'état of 1974, however, the project failed to progress. The Ethiopian Government surveyed the site in October 2009 and August 2010. In November 2010, a design for the dam was submitted by James Kelston. The Government of Ethiopia kept the project secret until one month prior to the laying of the foundation of the Dam. The planning phase of the project was carried out under "Project X", which was later changed to "Millennium Dam". On 15 April 2011, the Council of Ministers renamed it Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, as it is currently named.

On 31 March 2011, a day after the project was made public, a 4.8 billion dollars contract was awarded without competitive bidding to Italian company Salini Impregilo, and the dam's foundation stone was laid on 2 April 2011 by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. The expectation was for the first two power-generation turbines to become operational in early 2015. The dam is being funded by government bonds and private donations. It was slated for completion in July 2017. However, construction is nearing completion, and last year, at 2020, the reservoir behind the dam began to fill for the first time. Ethiopia at July, 2021 announced it has begun filling again provoking heavy tensions among Egypt and Sudan.



Figure 3: The Nile River Flow⁷

⁷ "Egypt Angry as It Says Ethiopia Has Resumed Filling GERD." ALJAZEERA, 6 July 2021, www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/6/egypt-angry-ethiopia-resumes-filling-gerd.

The controversy of the dam

The potential impacts of the dam have been the source of severe regional controversy. Ethiopia's downstream neighbors worry the dam will restrict vital water supplies. They are especially concerned about what might happen during a drought, while Ethiopia is still filling the reservoir.



Figure 4: Photo of the GERD

Egypt, located over 2,500 kilometers downstream of the site, opposes the dam, which it believes will reduce the amount of water available from the Nile. Ethiopians responded to this concern that the dam would not reduce water availability downstream and would also regulate water for irrigation.

The Government of Egypt, a country that relies heavily on the waters of the Nile, has demanded that Ethiopia cease construction on the dam as a precondition to negotiations. It is estimated that Egypt depends on the Nile for about 97% of its irrigation and drinking water and says it has "historic rights" to the rivers, guaranteed by treaties from 1929 and 1959. However, Ethiopia was not part of these treaties and does not see them as valid. As a result, Ethiopia signed a separate agreement in 2010 with other countries, which Egypt and Sudan boycotted, which allows irrigation projects and hydroelectric dams. Egypt has planned a diplomatic initiative to undermine support for the dam in the region as well as in other countries supporting the project, such as China and Italy. Ethiopia denies all the concerns raised by Egypt and has accused it of being unreasonable. Beginning in November 2019, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Steven T. Mnuchin began facilitating negotiations between Sudan, Egypt, and Ethiopia.

In recent months, Sudan has undergone a major shift in attitude. When discussing the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), Sudan's rhetoric has moved from being broadly welcoming to being suspicious and belligerent. This change, in large part, reflects the increasing influence of the military in the transitional government that is supposed to pave the way to a democratic system after the overthrow of long-serving leader Omar al-Bashir. In February 2020, Water Resources Minister Yasir Abbas talked about how the dam, Africa's biggest hydroelectric plant, would benefit Sudan. While acknowledging some issues that may be ironed out, he said that the GERD could make the flow of the Nile more predictable and could introduce a third farming season. Nevertheless, following the failed African Union-brokered talks between, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan, Mr. Abbas told journalists that it

would threaten national security if Ethiopia filled the dam without solving the outstanding issues. He stated, “Without an agreement, the Gerd is really a threat to the people downstream... both the environment and the livelihoods of the people”.⁸In this way, he highlighted the urgent need for the commitment to a legally binding agreement in order to end the great controversy.

The filling of the dam from Ethiopia

The row over the dam intensified in recent months as Ethiopia prepared to begin filling the reservoir, which can hold 74 billion cubic meters of water. Egypt and Ethiopia pushed for Ethiopia to hold off on this until the three countries agreed on how the dam would be managed and operated. But Ethiopian Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, has maintained that filling the reservoir is an essential step in the dam’s construction.

In this way, despite various delays over the past decade, progress at GERD is now tangible. Ethiopia’s Ministry of Water, Irrigation, and Energy on Friday, 21 May 2021 told reporters that GERD has now reached 80% completion. That includes the completion of 98.1% of civil works, 54.5% of the electric mechanical works, and 55.2% of the hydroelectric structure works. A 650-km transmission line has also been erected.

GERD’s first-year filling, which wrapped up on July 19, 2020, impounded 4.9 cubic kilometers (km³) into the massive reservoir, which is designed to hold 74 km³. Ethiopia’s Minister of Water, Irrigation, and Energy, Dr. Seleshi Bekele, last year described this achievement as “historic” claiming that the first filling was achieved without “interrupting the continuous flow of water to the lower basin.” The second-round filling, which is about to start this summer, is expected to boost the reservoir’s volume to 18.4 km³, enabling the operation of two of the project’s 16 turbines.

The significance of the dam for Ethiopia

The dam has long been a source of national pride in Ethiopia. The country broke ground on it in 2011 under Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who pitched it as a catalyst for poverty eradication. Civil servants contributed one month’s salary towards the project that year, and the government has since issued dam bonds targeting Ethiopians at home and abroad. Nearly a decade later, the dam remains a potent symbol of Ethiopia’s development aspirations.

⁸ “Gerd: Sudan Talks Tough with Ethiopia over River Nile.” *BBC*, 21 Apr. 2021, www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56799672.

Today, over half of Ethiopia's population of 110 million people lives without power. That power is much-needed, the country says. The landlocked country does not have a significant amount of groundwater resources or aquifers or access to seawater for desalination, and owing to climate change, drought, and erratic rains, famine is a constant threat to around 8 million people. The country's total power capacity is today only 4.5 GW, mostly derived from biomass, and rising energy demand is exacerbating its energy insecurity. In this way, Ethiopia is pinning its hopes of economic development and power generation on the dam that will overturn energy insufficiency and will be an engine to the industrialization of the country. Moreover, the dam's construction is expected to create up to 12,000 jobs and approximately 20,000 people will be resettled during the project.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

United States of America (USA)

From November 2019 until mid-2020, the United States and the World Bank were leading the mediation of the GERD between Sudan, Ethiopia, and Egypt. But Ethiopia felt the Trump administration was biased towards Egypt. When Egypt was about to move the issue to the United Nations (UN) Security Council, all three disputants were persuaded to instead hand it to the African Union (AU) – to ensure an 'African solution for an African problem.' However, the US stance has changed significantly under Biden. Whereas Trump's government was seen, by Ethiopia and others, to favor Egypt, the Biden administration has signaled it will be more even-handed. It has already resumed the financial aid to Ethiopia that Trump suspended after Addis Ababa declined to sign a proposed US deal in February last year that Egypt had signed. The U.S. has significant economic interests in the region and both countries, especially Egypt. Egypt controls 10 percent of the world's shipping through the Suez Canal, and the U.S. has spent copious amounts on military and economic aid to the country over the past four decades.

African Union (AU)

As AU chair for 2020, South Africa effectively took over the mediation. It was more impartial than the US, but it could not resolve the impasse either. And so earlier this year, South Africa referred the dispute to the AU for a decision on the way forward. Nevertheless, Egypt and Sudan proposed to transfer mediation from AU to the European Union, the UN, and the US. But Ethiopia's foreign ministry spokesperson Dina Mufti replied that "Ethiopia believes the AU-led negotiation over the GERD will bring an advantageous solution to all. The tendency to invite various parties as

mediators to the issue while the AU-led negotiation has not been finalized is demeaning the efforts of the AU.”⁹

European Union

The EU has been an active observer to the AU-led mediation since the first years of the construction of the dam. Nevertheless, the EU prefers continuing to defer to the AU if the continental organization wants to remain in the driving seat of the negotiations. EU officials were worried that if the mediation process changes significantly now, valuable time could be lost ahead of the second filling of the dam.

China

On March 6, the commissioner-general of the Ethiopian Federal Police, Demelash Gebremichael, signed a memorandum of understanding with the Chinese ambassador to Ethiopia, Zhao Ziyuan, regarding the establishment of a protection mechanism for the security of major projects implemented within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative in Ethiopia. This agreement will play an important role in enhancing the security and normal course of Chinese investments in Ethiopia.

Russia

Russian President Vladimir Putin signaled that Russia is on the verge of making new investments in the African continent. The Africa summit, held in Sochi — co-hosted by Putin and Egyptian President Abdel-Fatah el-Sisi, as the current head of the African Union — attracted representatives from every one of the invited 54 states, including 43 heads of state. At the summit, Putin offered to mediate the GERD issue with Egypt and Ethiopia, a move that the US did not expect.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of event
7 May 1929	The signing of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty
8 November 1959	The signing of the 1959 Agreement, a modified version of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty
1956 to 1964	The first survey of the Blue Nile river conducted by the US Bureau of Reclamation

⁹ PETER FABRICIUS. “Could New Mediators Resolve the GERD Dispute?” *Institute for Security Studies*, 5 Mar. 2021, issafrica.org/iss-today/could-new-mediators-resolve-the-gerd-dispute.

12 September 1974	Coup d'état, establishing Ethiopia as a communist state
October 2009 and August 2010	Surveillance of the site of the GERD by the Ethiopian Government
November 2010	A design of the dam was submitted by James Kelston
15 April 2011	The Council of Ministers renamed the dam to Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, its present name
2 April 2011	Starting day of the construction of the GERD
March 23, 2015	Leaders of Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan met in the Sudanese capital Khartoum to sign the Declaration of Principles.
23–24 October 2019	The first Russia- Africa Summit was held in Sochi
November 2019	U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Steven T. Mnuchin began facilitating negotiations between Sudan, Egypt, and Ethiopia.
2020	South Africa, AU chair effectively took over the mediation of the GERD
March 6, 2021	The signing of a memorandum of understanding with the Chinese ambassador to Ethiopia
May 21, 2021	The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam has reached 80% of its completion as Ethiopia's Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Energy said.

RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

Anglo-Egyptian Treaty

In 1929, an agreement was concluded between Egypt and Great Britain regarding the utilization of the waters of the Nile River. Britain was supposedly representing its colonies in the Nile River Basin. The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty covered many issues related to the Nile River and its tributaries. This treaty is highly relevant to the present discussion. Egypt was granted an annual water allocation of 48 billion cubic meters and Sudan 4 billion cubic meters out of an estimated average annual yield of 84 billion cubic meters. Moreover, the 1929 agreement granted Egypt veto

power over construction projects on the Nile River or any of its tributaries in an effort to minimize any interference with the flow of water into the Nile.

Treaty of 1959

In 1959, Egypt and an independent Sudan signed a bilateral agreement, which effectively reinforced the provisions of the 1929 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. The 1959 agreement increased water allocations to both Egypt and Sudan while Egypt's water allocation was raised from 48 billion cubic meters to 55.5 billion cubic meters and Sudan's from 4 billion cubic meters to 18.5 billion cubic meters, leaving 10 billion cubic meters to account for seepage and evaporation. Lastly, the agreement stipulated that in the case of an increase in average water yield, the increased yield should be shared equally between the two downstream riparian states. However, the treaty did make any provisions for Ethiopia, which depends on more than 80 percent of its water supplies from the Nile River.

The Cooperative Framework Agreement

In 1999, the Nile River riparian states, except for Eritrea, signed the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) in an effort to enhance cooperation on the use of the "common Nile Basin water resources." Under the auspices of the NBI, the riparian states began work on developing a permanent legal and institutional framework for governing the Nile River Basin. The Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA), as this agreement is called, formally introduced the concept of equitable water allocation into discussions about Nile governance, as well as a complicating concept called "water security". The framework was ready for signature beginning May 10, 2010, but Egypt and Sudan refused to sign it arguing that their "acquired rights" to the waters of the Nile River would not be protected.

Article 14-b

Article 14-b in the Cooperative Framework Agreement, which is being explained above, states that "The Nile Basin States, therefore, agree, in a spirit of cooperation: . . . (b) not to significantly affect the water security of any other Nile Basin State." But, afterward, this clause was altered and it was proposed with a different alternative.: "Nile Basin States, therefore, agree, in a spirit of cooperation: . . . (b) not to significantly affect the water security and *current uses and rights of any other Nile Basin State*,". This wording was rejected by Sudan and Egypt who argue that "the current uses and rights" phrasing could entrench the prior rights of these two countries over the Nile waters.

2015 Declaration of Principles

The 2015 Declaration of Principles agreement between Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan—with Sudan acting as an intermediary—represents an important but predictable shift in Cairo’s approach to the Nile River. Egypt perceives those colonial agreements as unsustainable, as it relies totally on the waters of the Nile River for all its needs. In this agreement, the three countries have committed themselves to principles concerning the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam such as the principle of cooperation, the principle of development, regional integration and sustainability, and the principle of not causing significant damage.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

The construction of the GERD has caused fierce debate not only between the countries of the African continent but it has sparked the attention of many countries across the world. First of all, the United Arab Emirates has invited the foreign ministers of Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia to Abu Dhabi on 20 March 2021 to resume talks that reached a deadlock in January. The Gulf country stressed the importance of working through related international laws to reach a consensus and preserve the rights of the three countries and their water security to achieve stability and sustainable development.

Egypt and Sudan are demanding that Ethiopia sign a legally binding agreement on the filling and operation of the GERD before it starts its second filling in July. Nevertheless, Ethiopia said it will proceed with the second filling whether it reaches an agreement with the two downstream countries or not.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Renewable Energy

Noticing the concerns voiced by Egypt and Sudan about the threat of using a lot of water during the dry season, renewable energy is key. Large hydropower plants, like GERD, fill up in the wet season and empty in the dry season, releasing water in a regulated manner throughout the year to ensure year-round electricity generation. This largely suppresses a river’s natural flow. Sunshine and wind are the solutions as the sun shines brightest and the winds blow strongest during the dry season. If GERD were operated to back up solar and wind power, this would mean producing less hydropower during the dry season, and more during the wet season. The Levelized costs of solar and wind power have fallen so drastically that developing these resources will lead to lower electricity generation costs.

Article 14-b

Egypt and Sudan should be encouraged to go further, negotiate and ratify the CFA making the necessary changes to Article 14(b) in order to guarantee their rights created by the Nile Waters agreements. With the CFA in place, all 11 riparian states can negotiate in good faith to agree on an allocation formula that is acceptable to all of them and considered fair, equitable, and reasonable.

World Bank

The World Bank, which has no interest or investment in the GERD, is the perfect international arbiter; not only is it impartial, it has the advantage of having arranged one of the world's most vital and long-lasting treaties on this subject: the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty, between India and Pakistan. The treaty fixed and delimited the rights and obligations of both countries concerning the use of the waters of the Indus River system. Considered one of the world's most successful water-sharing treaties, there is hope that it can help Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia reach a consensus about the GERD.

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