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GRAND ETHIOPIAN RENAISSANCE DAM AND THE RISK OF A WAR IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

Abstract:

In the climate change context, controlling water sources is one of the most explosive challenges to the stability of the security environment. In its quasi-totality, human civilization was born in the basins of the great rivers, which provided humans with both the basic survival and development resources and natural protection against invasions. Such a watercourse is the Nile, in whose basin the great Egyptian, Nubian and Ethiopian civilizations were born. If, until recently, Egypt was the main beneficiary of the Nile's "gifts", Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) project, still in construction on the Blue Nile, will radically change the status quo in region. How will GERD going to influence the regional hydro-policy? Is there any risk for a regional war outbreak? And, if the answer to the previous question is a positive one, what could be the impact of an Egyptian-Ethiopian conflict on regional security?

Keywords:

Nile River, Blue Nile, Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, Ethiopia, Egypt, Muslim Brotherhood, Sudan, China, Horn of Africa, War, Migration

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Motto:

The only matter that could take Egypt to war again is water.

Anwar el Sadat, 1979

In their quasi-totality, the banks of the great watercourses have been the cradles of the mankind, from Tiger and Euphrates to Indus and Ganges, from Danube and Tiber to Amu Darya and Syr Darya, from Colorado and Mississippi to Amazon and Orinoco, from Yangtze and Mekong to Amur and the Volga, from Nile and Congo to Zambezi and Okavango. Within these riverbeds, the first human inhabitants of the planet found food and development resources as well as natural protection against invasions. In other words, human civilization was, and still is, a civilization of water, water sources' controlling imperative shaping the political behaviour of individuals and states.

This imperative acquires explosive connotations in semiarid and arid regions such as the Middle East and the Levant, where the main conflicts' stake has been the control of the rivers basins of Jordan, Tiger and Euphrates. Therefore, any intervention aimed at altering the flows of these watercourses in the exclusive favour of a riparian state automatically becomes a source of conflict. For example, the tensions between Turkey, from whose territory the Euphrates is springing, and the other two downstream riparian states, Syria and Iraq. These tensions ignited in 1983, due to Ankara government's unilateral decision to build the *Atatürk Dam* and subsequently to control river's flow in the lower part of the stream. These tensions are, even now, considered to hide Turkey's double game in the conflicts that ended up by the failure of both Arab states. So it becomes obvious, that the completion of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) hydro-technical project on the Blue Nile might become a "time bomb".

How will GERD going to influence the regional hydro-policy? Is there any risk for a regional war outbreak? And, if the answer to the previous question is a positive one, what could be the impact of an Egyptian-Ethiopian conflict on regional security?

Short hydrographic and economic data on the Nile Basin

The Nile – "father of the African rivers" springs south of the Equator, from a rainy mountainous region located in East Africa, between Rwanda and Burundi (see the map in the Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Nile River Basin



Source: *Nile River Basin* <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTAFRNILEBASINI/Images/map_full_size.jpg> (22.01.2018).

The Nile flows towards North, along the North-Eastern coast of Africa, and consists of two segments:

- the first one, called the White Nile due to the clay silts that give him a milky appearance, is delimited between the Nile springs and the place of confluence with the Blue Nile, his main affluent (at the North of the Sudanese capital, Khartoum);
- the second one, called the Nile, bounded between the confluence place and the shedding place.

The Nile crosses eight African states: Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Sudan, Egypt, and flows into the

Mediterranean Sea through a delta stretching over an area of over 24 000 km², where lives approximately 85% of the Egyptian population.

With a length of 4132 miles / 6650 km, the Nile is the longest watercourse in the world². Also, the Nile has an impressive basin, consisting of dozens of tributaries and lakes, covering a total area of 3 112 380 km², representing about one-tenth of Africa's total area³ (see the map in the Fig. 1). Among these tributaries, the most important are:

- on the left bank: Bahr al-Ghazal and Wadi al-Malik (Yellow Nile);
- on the right bank: Atbara (Black Nile), Blue Nile and Sobat.

The Nile is partially navigable due to cataracts, waterfalls and marshes generated by both the tectonic activity within the Rift Valley and the low river flow of only 2 830 m³ per second, which reaches only 2% of Amazon's flow and only 15% of Mississippi River's flow. At its shedding into the Mediterranean Sea, 86% of Nile's flow is fed from Ethiopia through the Blue Nile's waters. However, the rainfalls that feed Blue Nile's high flow⁴ are available just in the monsoon season and only over a part of the Ethiopian territory, which is why Ethiopia is often confronted with dramatic drought followed by famines and violence⁵.

More than 300 million inhabitants from the 11 riparian states (Burundi, RD Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda) live in the Nile Basin and another 140 million, from their immediate vicinity, are partially securing their water needs from Nile's affluents. The river is the water source for 32 major cities including Cairo, Alexandria, Khartoum, Kampala, Giza, Asyut, Mwanza, Juba, and the main water source for the Rwandan, Ugandan, Burundian, Egyptian and Sudanese populations. Demographic forecasts say that by 2025, the approximately 568,3 million inhabitants of this region will continue to be absolutely dependent on the Nile's water⁶.

Nile's waters are used for both household and economic activities, from irrigation and fishing to electric power generation, river transport and tourism. But the main use remains agriculture, either through the well-developed irrigation systems in Egypt and Sudan, or through the alluviums of its periodic floods, especially in the upper basin, where subsistence agriculture

² H. E. Hurst, C. G. Smith, M. M. El-Kammash, *Nile River*, Britannica, <<https://www.britannica.com/place/Nile-River>> (25.01.2018).

³ *Nile Basin Initiative: Water Resources Planning and Management Project*, <http://www.ess.co.at/WATERWARE/NILE/background.html>, (25.01.2018).

⁴ A. Carlson, *Who Owns the Nile? Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia's History-Changing Dam*, vol. 6, 06.03.2013, <<http://origins.osu.edu/article/who-owns-nile-egypt-sudan-and-ethiopia-s-history-changing-dam>> (25.10.2015).

⁵ D. Das Neves, *The food situation in Ethiopia is also of great concern*, UNDP, 30.05.2017, <<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/blog/2017/5/23/la-situation-alimentaire-en-Ethiopie-aussi-est-extr-mement-pr-occupante.html>> (25.01.2018).

⁶ *Nile Basin Initiative: Water Resources Planning and Management Project*, op. cit.

predominates. Since whole riparian states are predominantly agricultural, poor, underdeveloped and some them surrounded by arid areas, any change of Nile's flow, even on short run, can generate major economic, social and political consequences, with wide and profound impact upon the societal structure, upon the stability and security of the region.

Brief history of regional hydro-politics⁷

The race for Nile waters' control dates back to antiquity, when the Egyptian pharaohs conquered the Nubian kingdom⁸ and, along with it, the upper course of the river, becoming the indisputable hegemons of the region. Over time, this status has been perpetuated transforming itself into a custom, Egypt being associated within the collective mentality with the Nile and with the indisputable right to fully benefit from its waters. But the competition over Nile's waters has been reborn by the interference of colonial powers in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Although they partitioned Africa through the common accord of the Berlin Conference (that took place between November 1884 and April 1885), French colonists continued to be dissatisfied with the British dominance over continent's North-Eastern region, from Nile's springs to its delta. Therefore, they decided to build a bridgehead in Sudan. This agreement violation has generated a strong British reaction, which decided to send, in 1898, an expeditionary force near the Sudanese town of Fashoda to destroy the French military force cantonated there⁹.

A year later, the two colonial powers reached an agreement, with France taking control of the Congo River's basin, and England taking control of the White Nile basin. Besides region's control stakes, this conflict was amplified by British false impression that Nile's springs would be exclusively originated from Victoria, Edward, Albert, and Kyoga lakes. In fact, English colonists' interest in securing and extending the fertile areas within Nile basin's outskirts was a strictly economic one, explained by the dependence of the British textile industry on cotton imports. This economic interest was part of a much more important stake for the British Empire which aimed at the:

- control of the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aden, whereby the maritime route between the metropolis and India was halved – Egypt having an

⁷ Concept introduced by Dutch publisher Harry Verhoeven; see: H. Verhoeven, *Africa's Next Hegemon: Behind Ethiopia's Power Plays*, 12.04.2015, <<http://ogadentoday.com/?p=6991>> (27.02.2018).

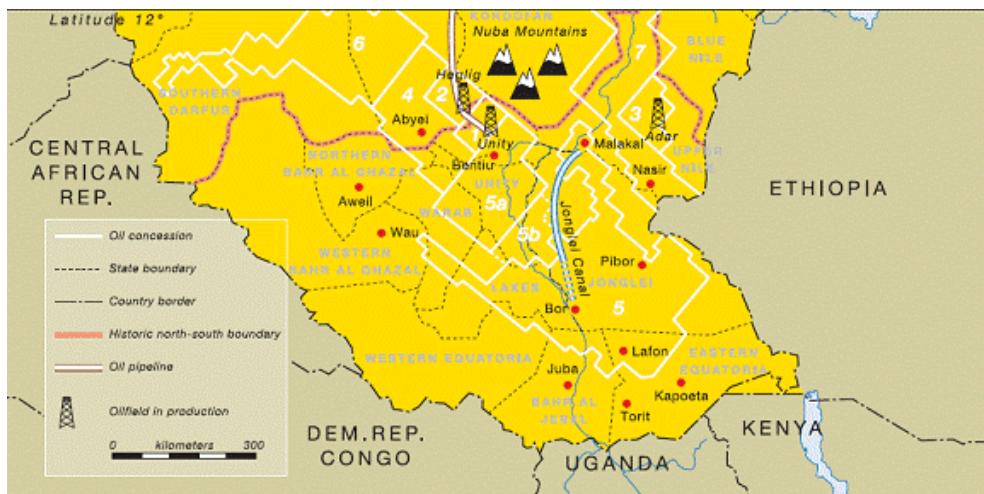
⁸ B. Trew, *Archaeologists' race to save Nubian history from Nile waters*, The Times, 6.03.2017, <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/archaeologists-race-to-save-nubian-history-from-nile-waters-q6r2rnckw>> (27.02.2018).

⁹ J. Jones, *The Fashoda Incident*, West Chester University, History, <<http://courses.wcupa.edu/jones/his312/lectures/fashoda.htm>> (27.02.2018).

exceptional strategic position in the middle of this distance, in the vicinity of the Horn of Africa (whose harbors were compulsory stopover places for ships and turntables for the regional trade);

- control of the Levantine Mediterranean, targeted by the Russian expansionism – which had become the main threat to the British supremacy in Asia.

Fig. 2. Jonglei Canal



Source: *Economic dimension of the conflict*, <<http://www1.american.edu/faculty/singerman/eagleeyeondarfur/economicdimensionsmain.html>> (12.01.2018).

But, as the White Nile's flow has never been an abundant one, due to intense evaporation within the marsh regions and scarce rainfalls, in 1930, the English colonists designed the Jonglei Canal¹⁰ (see the map in Fig. 2), which was meant to become one of the most expensive hydro-technical constructions on the continent. The channel would have had to cross the great marshes and to irrigate the arid lands of Sudan and Egypt. Initiated in 1978, the canal's construction was interrupted in 1984 following the outbreak of the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005). In 2008, canal's construction was theoretically resumed, with Egyptian technical support, without being completed yet.

Also, in 1929, during the colonial rule of the region, Egypt and other East-African British colonies signed the 1929 Exchange of note between His Majesty's government in the United Kingdom and the Egyptian government on

¹⁰ D. Doran, *The Jonglei Canal Project: A Case Study on Water Security in Southern Sudan*, Peace Operations Training Institute, <<http://www.peaceopstraining.org/cotipso/theses/the-jonglei-canal-project-a-case-study-on-water-security-in-sou/>> (27.02.2018).

the use of Waters of the Nile for irrigation, also known as the Nile Water Agreement¹¹. According to this agreement, Egypt has gained the *veto power* regarding all upstream hydro-technical projects and received the right to use 48 billion cubic meters of Nile's water annually and all the waters from the dry season, and Sudan received the right to use 4 billion cubic meters of water annually.

Patronized by the English colonists, the agreement was signed without consulting the Ethiopian side. Thirty years later, the deal was renegotiated. The new agreement, entitled the 1959 Agreement between the Republic of the Sudan and the United Arab Republic for the Full Utilization of the Nile Waters, was even more generous with the states of former Egyptian-Sudanese British condominium which have received 99% of the average river's flow. According to this new agreement, Egypt has received 55,5 billion cubic meters per year and Sudan has received 18,5 billion cubic meters annually. Also, three hydro-technical projects have been approved: the construction of the Aswan Dam (1971) in Egypt as well as the construction of the Roseires (1966) and Khashm al-Girba (1964) dams in Sudan.

But, the upstream states considered this new agreement an abuse. Once more, Ethiopia has not been among the signatories of the agreement. Moreover, as protest, Emperor Haile Selassie I (1892-1975) forced the separation of the Ethiopian Orthodox National Church from the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria¹². Also, the other sub-Saharan riparian states, based on the Clean Slate Doctrine or the Nyerere¹³ Doctrine of the Succession Treaty that relieves the successor state from the benefits or the obligations stipulated by the treaties of the predecessor state¹⁴, have challenged the obligation to apply the treaties signed under the rule of the former colonial power.

In reply, Egypt encouraged the Islamic secessionism in Eritrea and Somalia's claims over Ogaden region. Furthermore, in 1979, Egyptian President Anwar el Sadat (1918-1981) declared that whoever challenges his country's historical right to benefit from Nile's waters will have to bear the consequences of the war¹⁵. The tension increased in the 1980s when drought

¹¹ A. T. Wolf, J. T. Newton, *Case Study of Transboundary Dispute Resolution: the Nile waters Agreement*, Oregon State University, Institute for Water abd Watersheds, <http://www.transboundarywaters.orst.edu/research/case_studies/Nile_New.htm> (27.02.2018).

¹² M. W. Lewis, *Religious Change and Tension in Ethiopia*, GeoCurrentts, 21.06.2013, <<http://www.geocurrents.info/cultural-geography/religion/religious-change-and-tension-in-ethiopia>>, (27.02.2018).

¹³ Doctrine formulated by Tanzanian President Julius Kambarage Nyerere (1922-1999).

¹⁴ A. Bisima, *A critical review of the 'Nyerere Doctrine of State Succession'*, Graduates Brain – box, 24.02.2011, <http://graduatesbrain-box.blogspot.ro/2011/01/nyerere-doctrine-of-state-succession_24.html>, (27.02.2018).

¹⁵ P. Kameri-Mbote, *Water, Conflict, and Cooperation: Lessons From the Nile River Basin (No. 4)*, Wilson Center, <<http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/water-conflict-and-cooperation-lessons-the-nile-river-basin-no-4>> (27.02.2018).

decreased Nile's flow, hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians died of hunger and Egypt faced the hunger and energy collapse as a result of Lake Nasser decreased level.

On the other hand, Nile waters usage has been the subject of several international conventions and agreements¹⁶ that have used the *equitable shares* term. However, Egypt and Sudan continue to benefit of the “lion’s share” from the average annual river’s flow, with 85% of this water coming from the Ethiopian plateau.

Moreover, in the 1990s, Hosni Mubarak’s administration decided to build the Toshka irrigation Canal, a “second valley of the Nile”, and one of the most expensive hydro-technical constructions in the world, which uses over 10% of Lake Nasser’s water for irrigation within Western Egypt¹⁷. The completion of Toshka project has boosted tensions with Ethiopia and with the rest of the Sub-Saharan riparian states, which decided to sign a framework co-operation agreement¹⁸ on Nile water use called *the Nile Basin Initiative* (NBI).

This agreement has stipulated the establishment of a multinational commission with censor role and with *veto power* over future hydro-technical projects (canals, irrigation, dams) within Nile’s basin. The multinational commission, headquartered in Ethiopia’s capital, Addis-Ababa, was designated to work in co-operation with World Bank representatives, the main funding organization of this new structure. But the provisions of the new agreement have been rejected by Egypt and Sudan, becoming virtually inoperative.

Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

At almost 25 miles from the border with Sudan, in the Benishangul-Gumuz region, along the Blue Nile, Ethiopia is about to complete¹⁹ the largest dam on the African continent (1800 m long and 155 m deep²⁰), contesting Sudan’s and Egypt’s legal and historic right of almost exclusively use of Nile’s waters. Ethiopia’s decision was also supported by Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania, from whose territories other Nile’s tributaries spring.

¹⁶ It is the Helsinki Agreement of 1966, the United Nations *Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses* of 1997 and the Nile Basin Initiative 1999.

¹⁷ *Toshka Project – Mubarak Pumping Station, Egypt*, water-technology.net, <<http://www.water-technology.net/projects/mubarak/>> (27.02.2018).

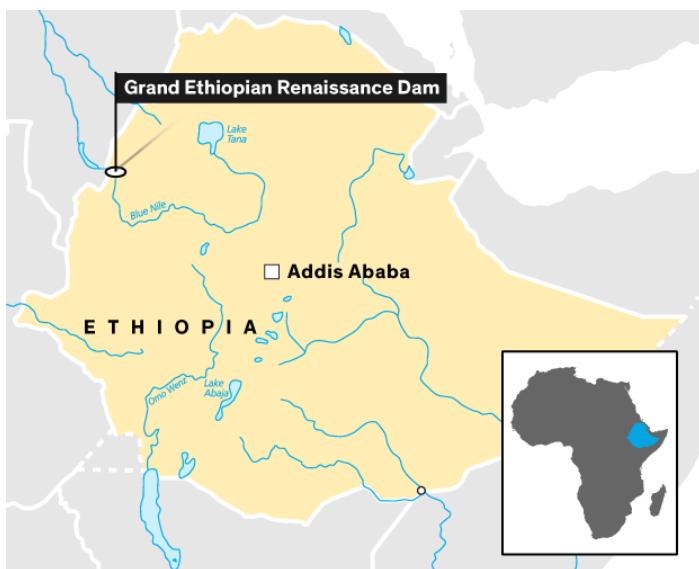
¹⁸ *Cooperative Framework Agreement*, Nile Basin Initiative, <<http://www.nilebasin.org/index.php/nbi/cooperative-framework-agreement>> (20.01.2018).

¹⁹ M. Xuequan, *Ethiopia’s Grand Renaissance Dam 60 pct completed*, Xinhua, 08.08.2017, <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-08/08/c_136506781.htm> (20.01.2018).

²⁰ *Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Project*, <<https://www.salini-impregilo.com/en/projects/in-progress/dams-hydroelectric-plants-hydraulic-works/grand-ethiopian-renaissance-dam-project.html>> (25.01.2018).

In 2011, the Ethiopian government announced its intention to build, in cooperation with China, several dams on the Tekeze, Omo and Gibe rivers. On the same occasion, Addis Ababa leaders announced their intention to build, with national funds, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile²¹ (see the map in Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Ethiopia's Map with GERD



Source: J. Kumagai, *The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Gets Set to Open*, IEEE SPECTRUM, 30.12.2016, <<https://spectrum.ieee.org/energy/policy/the-grand-ethiopian-renaissance-dam-gets-set-to-open>> (27.01.2018).

Considered to be the largest hydro-technical project on the African continent, estimated at about \$ 5 billion, GERD is going to include a 74 billion-m³ reservoir, which will be filled between 5 and 15 years²², and a 6000-megawatt hydro power plant²³. Projected to be completed in 2015, GERD construction encountered delays due to Egyptian lobby political pressure over potential international financiers (World Bank, European Investment Bank,

²¹ D. Nisman, *China's African Water Scramble*, Huffington Post, <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/daniel-nisman/chinas-african-water-scra_b_2248874.html> (27.01.2018).

²² J. Kumagai, *The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Gets Set to Open*, IEEE SPECTRUM, 30.12.2016, <<https://spectrum.ieee.org/energy/policy/the-grand-ethiopian-renaissance-dam-gets-set-to-open>> (27.01.2018).

²³ *Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Project*, *op. cit.*

African Development Bank²⁴). But it seems that the Ethiopians have received financial support from China through Exim Bank, which is playing this “ace” in relation with Egypt and Sudan²⁵. At the present time, over 60% of GERD project has been completed²⁶.

The geopolitical impact of GERD construction

Obviously, Nile waters’ problem has become a geopolitical one due to GERD’s long-term implications.

On one hand, Ethiopians claim that GERD will reduce Nile’s evaporation, will increase river’s flow, will control floods to the Sahel, will provide cheap energy to both Ethiopia and neighbouring countries (Djibouti, Kenya, Sudan, Yemen), becoming a prosperity’ vector.

On the other hand, Egypt argues that this dam will provide to Ethiopia a state power projection tool, especially in the context of the projected demographic growth in the Nile Basin of over 600 million inhabitants by the middle of this century²⁷.

Analyzing Ethiopia’s geopolitical rise of the recent years, it becomes obvious that GERD will radically change the power relations within the region, to the detriment of Egypt. The situation becomes explosive in the context of climate warming and of the anticipated demographic growth in the Nile Basin that might initiate Egypt’s strong reaction with major geopolitical and geo-economical impact, if we only take into consideration the Suez Canal, which connects the Indian Ocean with the North of the Atlantic one.

In 2015, Egyptian President’s, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, administration signed with Ethiopia and Sudan a preliminary agreement on GERD, stipulating parties’ commitment to avoid damaging each other and to offer reciprocal compensation in case of losses. But the Egyptian part continues to assert that the Ethiopian decision to build GERD violates the provisions of the 1959 Treaty in which Egypt had the right to *veto* every hydro-technical projects throughout the Nile Basin.

While president el-Sisi adopted a more diplomatic language, reminding the Ethiopians that Egyptian citizens’ lives are totally dependent on Nile’s waters

²⁴ A. Swain, Q. Jamali, *The China Factor: New Challenges for Nile Basin Cooperation, “New Routes: Water – a source of development and conflict”*, Volume 15, Life & Peace Institute, 3/2011, pp. 7-10, <http://ecopeaceme.org/uploads/New_Routes_March_2011_Published_Article.pdf> (27.03.2018).

²⁵ D. Nisman, *op. cit.*

²⁶ A. Aman, *Cairo taps World Bank to mediate Ethiopian dam dispute*, AL-MONITOR, 12.01.2018, <<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/01/egypt-world-bank-intermediary-ethiopia-renaissance-dam.html>> (27.01.2018).

²⁷ H. Verhoeven, *Africa’s Next Hegemon: Behind Ethiopia’s Power Plays*, 12.04.2015, <<http://ogadentoday.com/?p=6991>> (27.02.2018).

and that “no one can touch Egypt’s share of water”²⁸, Mohamed Nassr Allam’s speech, former minister of waters²⁹ has been different. Allam strongly condemned Addis Ababa government’s decision saying that GERD will have catastrophic effects on Egypt. In Allam’s opinion, the filling of GERD’s reservoir lake will considerably diminish the level of Nasser Lake of the Aswan Dam³⁰, will reduce electricity production, will lower river’s flow and will reduce soils’ irrigation capacity, causing erosion phenomena on hundreds of hectares, small farmers’ bankruptcy and a crisis of the drinking water supply of the Egyptian population. Or, in other words, “GERD will provide Ethiopia’s control over Egypt’s food and energy security, turning itself into a threat towards Egyptian state’s national security and into an undisputed regional power vector for Ethiopia”.

As much as the GERD building project is coming to an end, the Egyptian mass-media is revealing information about the Sudanese financiers of the Ethiopian project as well as the ones from Qatar³¹. However, it seems that the main financier is China, as it was revealed in a telegram published by *Wikileaks* in September 2012, where the Egyptian Ambassador in Lebanon was speaking about his country’s decision to attack the Chinese funded GERD³².

In this context, Meles Alem, Ethiopia’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson, pointed out that Ethiopia doesn’t have to ask anybody’s permission to benefit or not from its natural wealth, while rejecting the idea of GERD’s external funding from Qatar³³. Moreover, the Ethiopian representative criticized Egypt’s point of view, arguing that it is based on an act signed during the colonial period, when the British colonists have dictated the regional politics. In turn, Sudan, which is economically benefiting from GERD, has rallied to Ethiopia’s position and has begun, in turn, to challenge the validity of the old treaty.

²⁸ S. Magdy, *Egypt warns Ethiopia Nile dam dispute is ‘life or death’*, 18.11.2019, Times of Israel, <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/egypt-warns-ethiopia-nile-dam-dispute-life-or-death/>> (27.01.2018).

²⁹ G. Witte, *Egypt sees Ethiopian dam as a risk to water supply*, The Guardian, 18.06.2013, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/18/egypt-ethiopia-dam-blue-nile>> (27.01.2018).

³⁰ Placed at the Egyptian-Sudan border, the Aswan Dam was built by the Egyptians in the 1960s, with Soviet support, to regulate floods, generate electricity, and store water for periods of drought.

³¹ M. Asal, *Qatar funds Ethiopia’s dam to escalate crisis with Egypt*, Egypt Today, 14.11.2017, <<https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/2/32555/Qatar-funds-Ethiopia%2080%99s-dam-to-escalate-crisis-with-Egypt>> (25.01.2018).

³² D. Nisman, *op. cit.*

³³ *Ethiopia denies receiving funding from Qatar to build Renaissance Dam*, MEMO Middle East Monitor, 24.11.2017, <<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20171124-ethiopia-denies-receiving-funding-from-qatar-to-build-renaissance-dam/>> (25.01.2018).

In reply, the Egyptians called for World Bank (WB) mediation, as Nile Basin Initiative's funding institution, asking WB to validate the impact studies submitted by the Ethiopians and the Sudanese³⁴ and to initiate new tripartite negotiations with Sudan and Ethiopia³⁵.

But the situation is far from being solved. Every day, the regional "game" is getting more complicated due to the intervention of both state actors – as China, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the US, the Russian Federation, Israel as well as of highly influential non-state actors – as the World Bank and the Islamist organization of the Muslim Brotherhood, which seems to be one of the "keys" of the whole issue.

The pan-Islamic ultra-conservative political-social movement called *Jama'at Harakat Ikhwan al-Muslimeen (Ikhwan) – The Muslim Brotherhood*³⁶ (MB) was the initiator and the main beneficiary of the wave of anarchy that destroyed the secular Arab world, known as the "Arab Spring". In the 30th of June, 2012, MB became Egypt's official ruling force, due to Mohammed Morsi's victory in the presidential elections. Former associate professor of California State University, Northridge³⁷, with a doctorate in engineering, Morsi was the president of Liberty and Justice Party – affiliate to the Muslim Brotherhood. But Egyptian army – loyal to the secular values of the Atatürk-Nasser doctrine, with the support of Saudi Arabia and of other states in the region³⁸, was successful in removing Morsi from presidency on July 3rd, 2013, reinstating the Egyptian secular state. Therefore, MB's local militants have regrouped in "haven states" such as:

- Turkey – where, MB represents the leading force since 2003 through the *Justice and Development Party* (AKP)³⁹ and through Recep Tayyip Erdogan, former AKP president and current state president⁴⁰;

³⁴ A. Aman, *op. cit.*

³⁵ Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan to meet on Monday for Nile dam talks, MEMO Middle East Monitor, 28.01.2018, <<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180128-egypt-ethiopia-and-sudan-to-meet-on-monday-for-nile-dam-talks/>> (25.01.2018).

³⁶ F. Ozaygli, *Hassan Al-Banna: The man who started it all*, World Bulletin, <<http://www.worldbulletin.net/personage/115124/hassan-al-banna-the-man-who-started-it-all>> (29.03.2017).

³⁷ Mohamed Morsy Fast Facts, CNN Library, 23.06.2016, <<http://edition.cnn.com/2012/12/28/world/meast/mohamed-morsy---fast-facts/index.html>> (27.02.2018).

³⁸ D. Greenfield, *Muslim Brotherhood claims Saudi Arabia, Israel, America and Iran are behind coup*, Frontpage, 10.08.2013, <<https://www.frontpagemag.com/point/200089/muslim-brotherhood-claims-saudi-arabia-israel-daniel-greenfield>> (25.01.2018).

³⁹ A. I. Catrinel Popescu, *The decline of Kemalism and Turkey's „grey zone” destiny, „Geostrategic Pulse” Supplement*, no. 237, 20.05.2017, INGEPO-Consulting Brașov.

⁴⁰ P. Tremblay, *Muslim Brotherhood crumbling around Erdogan*, AL-MONITOR, 24.01.2018, <<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/01/turkey-muslim-brotherhood-last-bastion-crumbling.html>> (25.01.2018).

- Tunisia – where, in 2012, the *Ennahda Movement* and its leader, Rachid Ghannouchi⁴¹, were very influential;
- Sudan – where, General Omar al-Bashir's regime was brought to power and supported by the Sudanese branch of the Muslim Brotherhood⁴², despite the clashes between al-Bashir and MB's local leader, Hassan Abd Allah al-Turabi⁴³;
- Jordan – where, the Hashemite monarchy is subject to the pressure exerted, after 1948, by the Palestinians (most of them naturalized, which now exceeded 2 million out of total 9,5 million of Jordan citizens⁴⁴), many of them members and supporters of *Jabhat al-'Amal al-Islāmī - Islamic Action Front*, MB affiliated party⁴⁵;
- Morocco – where, after winning the 2016 poll, MB's affiliated *Party of Justice and Development* became the country's main political force, also obtaining the post of prime minister for Abdelilah Benkirane⁴⁶;
- Yemen – where, Islamic Reform Congregation *Al Islah* – the political branch of the *Islamic Front*⁴⁷ (a ultraconservative militia affiliated to the MB), has been a major actor during the 2011 Yemeni's "spring" and within the subsequent instability;
- Qatar – where is functioning one of the oldest and the most powerful subsidiaries of the organization⁴⁸, financially and logically supported by members of the al-Thani dynastic house. Actually, Qatar's constant support for the Brotherhood was the real cause of the fracture within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), between Qatar and the other monarchies aligned with Saudi Arabia and hostile to Doha's ambitions. Thus, in an unprecedented gesture, in July 2017, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the Bahrain, as well as Egypt, Yemen and the

⁴¹ H. Ibish, *Is this the end of the failed Muslim Brotherhood project?*, The National, 5.10.2013, <<https://www.thenational.ae/is-this-the-end-of-the-failed-muslim-brotherhood-project-1.478124>> (25.01.2018).

⁴² *National Islamic Front*, <<http://www.sudanupdate.org/WHOSWHO/NIF.HTM>> (7.07.2017).

⁴³ *Hassan al-Turabi, Sudan opposition leader who hosted Osama bin Laden, dies*, The Guardian, 6.03.2016, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/06/hassan-al-turabi-sudan-opposition-leader-who-hosted-osama-bin-laden-dies>> (25.01.2018).

⁴⁴ UNRWA, *Where We Work*, 01.12.2016, <<https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/jordan>> (25.01.2018).

⁴⁵ C. Ryan, *Jordan's Islamic Action Front Presses for Role in Governing*, Carnegie Middle East Center, 19.08.2008, <<http://carnegie-mec.org/sada/20919>> (7.07.2017).

⁴⁶ *Justice and Development Party: Morocco*, 26.02.2016, InternationalRelations.org, <<http://internationalrelations.org/justice-and-development-party-morocco/>> (8.07.2017).

⁴⁷ S. P. Yadav, *Yemen's Muslim Brotherhood and the perils of powersharing*, Brookings, 2015, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Yemen_Yadav-FINALE.pdf> (7.07.2017), p. 1.

⁴⁸ C. Alexander, S. Dodge, *Muslim Brotherhood Is at the Heart of Gulf Standoff With Qatar*, Bloomberg, 7.06.2017, <<https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2017-muslim-brotherhood/>> (7.07.2017).

Maldives interrupted diplomatic relations with Qatar due to Doha's support to the Muslim Brotherhood⁴⁹ and its global Islamic projects⁵⁰. At the same time, the Saudis published a list of 12 organizations and 59 persons affiliated to the MB and accused of terrorist activities, including some of the al-Thani dynasty members⁵¹;

- Palestine – where, the local Muslim Brotherhood was and is still headed by *Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyya - Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas*⁵², as well as in other states, where the MB subsidiaries were well represented and tolerated by the authorities.

Benefiting from influential positions in the “haven states”, the Muslim Brotherhood declared its hostility towards Egyptian President’s regime, both through political affiliated leaders from the hosting states⁵³ and directly within the conferences organized in Istanbul and Lahore⁵⁴.

In this context, it becomes obvious that, any revolt ignited by even a moderate economic impact of GERD on the Egyptian farmers will immediately be instrumentalised by the Islamists, who will try to stir up a new Egyptian “spring”. Hereby, Khartoum leaders’ decision to join Ethiopia in this potential conflict must be understood not only in terms of commercial benefits but also through MB’s intervention, which has officially been governing Sudan since 1993.

And things do not stop here. Among “haven states” leaders, who condemned the Egyptian secular putsch, the most vocal was President Erdogan, who decided to suspend diplomatic relations, at the ambassador level, between his country and Egypt⁵⁵. This decision must be taken into consideration in

⁴⁹ T. Qiblawi, M. Tawfeeq, E. Roberts, H. Alkhshali, *Qatar rift: Saudi, UAE, Bahrain, Egypt cut diplomatic ties*, CNN, 27.07.2017, <<http://edition.cnn.com/2017/06/05/middleeast/saudi-bahrain-egypt-uae-qatar-terror/index.html>> (7.08.2017).

⁵⁰ M. Kedar, *Why the Saudis and Muslim Brotherhood Hate Each Other*, Arutz Sheva, 13.05.2014, <<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/14994>> (7.04.2017).

⁵¹ *Terror list: 59 individuals and 12 Qatari-affiliated entities as listed in the Saudi, UAE, Bahraini, Egyptian statement*, Arab News, <<http://www.arabnews.com/node/1112391/saudi-arabia>> (7.08.2017).

⁵² N. Masalha, S. Hamid, *More than just the Muslim Brotherhood: The problem of Hamas and Jordan’s Islamic Movement*, BROOKINGS, 6.02.2017, <<https://www.brookings.edu/research/more-than-just-the-muslim-brotherhood-the-problem-of-hamas-and-jordans-islamic-movement/>> (7.07.2017).

⁵³ *International reactions to Morsi’s removal*, Al Jazeera, 5.07.2013, <<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/07/201373223029610370.html>> (7.04.2017).

⁵⁴ M. Al-Youm, *Brotherhood international organization meets to examine escalation against Egypt*, Egypt Independent, 26.09.2013, <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/brotherhood-international-organization-meets-examine-escalation-against-egypt/>> (7.01.2018).

⁵⁵ *Egypt downgrades diplomatic relations with Turkey, expels ambassador*, Hürriyet Daily News, 23.11.2013, <<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/egypt-downgrades-diplomatic-relations-with-turkey-expels-ambassador-58413>> (7.01.2018).

conjunction with the inauguration, in late 2017, of Turkey's largest military base⁵⁶ (outside the national territory) in Somalia, which will operate in conjunction with the already operational one in Qatar. In turn, Qatar has developed a tense relationship with Egypt and Saudi Arabia's allies in the GCC due to Doha's support for MB.

The situation is even more complicated by US foreign policy re-settlement on its traditional, pro-Israel, way. US President's Donald Trump declaration of recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of the Jewish state⁵⁷ has triggered a wave of hostility within the Muslim world, starting with the Palestinian leaders⁵⁸ and ending with their more or less conjuncture allies, including Turkey and Iran⁵⁹. This statement must be analyzed in the context of US administration's ongoing offensive against global Islamist network – identified with the MB, suggestively described by Riyadh Summit's group photography, from May 2017, with the US President Trump, Saudi King Salman and Egyptian President el-Sisi⁶⁰ (see the picture in Fig. 4).

⁵⁶ *Turkey sets up largest overseas army base in Somalia*, Al Jazeera, 01.10.2017, <<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/turkey-sets-largest-overseas-army-base-somalia-171001073820818.html>> (7.01.2018).

⁵⁷ M. Landler, *Trump Recognizes Jerusalem as Israel's Capital and Orders U.S. Embassy to Move*, The New York Times, 6.12.2017, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/06/world/middleeast/trump-jerusalem-israel-capital.html>> (7.01.2018).

⁵⁸ *Palestinians call 'days of rage' over US Jerusalem move*, Al Jazeera, 6.12.2017, <<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/palestinian-days-rage-trump-jerusalem-plan-171206103433314.html>> (7.01.2018).

⁵⁹ O. Beavers, *Iran votes to declare Jerusalem 'capital of Palestine'*, The Hill, 27.12.2017, <<http://thehill.com/homenews/administration/366601-iran-votes-to-declare-jerusalem-the-capital-of-palestine>> (7.01.2018).

⁶⁰ *Riyadh summit discusses ways of rooting out terrorism*, Al Jazeera, 21.05.2017, <<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/05/riyadh-summit-discusses-ways-rooting-terrorism-170521132843998.html>> (7.01.2018).

Fig. 4. Symbolic Photography of the Riyadh Summit



Source: B. Johnson, *Al-Qaeda Slams Trump as 'Hateful Crusader Master,' Issues Fresh Call for Jihad*, PJ Media, 23.05.2017, <<https://pjmedia.com/homeland-security/2017/05/23/al-qaeda-slams-trump-as-hateful-crusader-master-issues-fresh-call-for-jihad/>> (25.10.2015).

Also, it is important to remember that MB's Supreme Leader, Muhammad Badie, sentenced to life imprisonment for numerous offenses including terrorism, said before the Egyptian court that "Palestine is our primary cause. Liberate us and we will release Jerusalem and Palestine"⁶¹. And, it should also be noticed French President's, Emmanuel Macron, and other European leaders' firm attitude against Washington's decision⁶², as well as the pro-Palestinian street protests in Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania, Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey and Pakistan, countries where the MB is well represented.

Another "key" of the potential conflict belongs to Beijing. On one side, Chinese Banks are among the financiers of the master plan that will develop and transform Ethiopia into an East-African regional power. On the other side, the Chinese are interested in taking control over the commercial traffic through

⁶¹ A. A. el-Fetouh, *Jerusalem is lost only in the eyes of the insolent*, MEMO Middle East Monitor, 19.12.2017, <<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20171219-jerusalem-is-lost-only-in-the-eyes-of-the-insolent/>> (25.01.2018).

⁶² P. Beaumont, P. Wintour, *Macron tells Netanyahu that US recognition of Jerusalem is threat to peace*, The Guardian, 10.12.2017, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/10/benjamin-netanyahu-visits-europe-after-us-recognition-of-jerusalem-israel-capital>> (7.01.2018).

the Suez Canal and becoming Egyptian government's main partners in major sustainable development projects⁶³.

In fact, China's involvement in Nile's hydro-policy should not surprise anyone. Since 1991, the year of the unravelling of the Soviet Empire and of international system's reconfiguration, China has massively moved in Africa, taking over the areas formerly controlled by the Soviets, Romanians and by other competitors. Thus, through a supportive smart power policy that combined the economic, political and educational-cultural components with the military support, China has become a geo-strategically active player not only in the African states of the former Communist bloc, but also in the states known for the pro-Western views, such as Nigeria or South Africa, as a result of the, already traditional, US administrations' Afro-scepticism⁶⁴.

Consequently, Beijing's ambitions to turn the Sub-Saharan Africa into a second China, could not have bypassed Ethiopia, subcontinent's informal diplomatic pole, which hosts of the African Union headquarters and of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa⁶⁵. This special status of Ethiopia is an attraction for any geostrategic player interested in influencing the decision-making process of international institutions operating at regional level, a matter that could not have been escaped unnoticed by the Chinese diplomacy.

Besides, China's investments in Ethiopia are not just about hydro-energy infrastructure, they also target other economic sectors, from railways and telecommunications, to agriculture and mining sector⁶⁶, the African state being one of the pillars of "*One Belt One Road*" Initiative's Southern Corridor.

And, last but not least, we have to mention Chinese military presence in Djibouti (where Chinese owns a functional military base) as well as in other African states, military presence which I have described in a paper I published in 2017, entitled "*Control of Key Maritime Straits – China's global strategic objective*"⁶⁷. This military presence must be corroborated with Chinese need to secure their investments and domination of the Horn of Africa, as well as with Beijing's interest in taking control of maritime traffic in the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aden, an interest that has driven China's transformation into the main partner of the Egyptian government in implementing major sustainable development projects⁶⁸.

⁶³ A. I. Catrinel Popescu, *Control of key maritime straits – China's global strategic objective*, Geostrategic Pulse Supplement, no. 225, 25.11.2016, INGEPO Consulting.

⁶⁴ Afro-scepticism: the tendency to marginalize Africa's geopolitical and the geostrategic importance and to strictly reduce it to raw materials supplier status. It has been noticed since 1979 as a result of mutations in Islamic area, and has grown over the last 27 years.

⁶⁵ United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, <<https://www.uneca.org/pages/contacts>> (7.01.2018).

⁶⁶ H. Tibebe, *Ethiopia: Ethio-China Dynamic Economic Relations*, The Ethiopian Herald, 18.02.2017, <<http://allafrica.com/stories/201702180271.html>> (7.03.2018).

⁶⁷ A. I. Catrinel Popescu, *op. cit.*

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*.

Another “key” stands in Moscow, whose troops are stationed in the Sinai Peninsula, within the Multinational Force provided by the terms of the 1978 *Egypt-Israel Peace Agreement*. Also, Russia received the right to use Egyptian military bases for operations airplanes against Libyan Islamic terrorists/rebels and not only⁶⁹. In the mean time, Russia is one of Ethiopia’s traditional economic partners. Recently, in June 2017, Russia and Ethiopia signed a memorandum on nuclear cooperation⁷⁰.

A very important “key” can be found in Washington, where the Republican administration has declared its support for both the secular regime of President el-Sisi⁷¹ as well as for the development of the strategic partnership with Ethiopia⁷². It is important to mention that, besides the political and economic presence, the US also has a consistent military presence in the region, focused around Camp Lemonnier-Djibouti military base, which is subordinated to USAFRICOM.

Also, another two players should not be forgotten. One is Israel, usually a silent player, but very active in the region due to its direct security interests. Recently, through Prime Minister’s Benjamin Netanyahu voice⁷³ Israel declared its global political dimension. The second one is Iran, a declared adversary of the Jewish state and the Saudi monarchy. Iran is already projecting its force in neighbouring Yemen (through the Houthis rebels) as well as in Syria and Lebanon (directly and through the Hezbollah militia).

And, last but not least, the international organizations which are operating in the region, from the African Union and the Nile Basin Initiative to the UN, the Arab League or the Gulf Cooperation Council. Though they don’t have a “key” (due to the fact they don’t share the same interests as the state and non-state actors), these international organizations become influential players in the pre-conflict phase by providing the framework for political dialogue and mediation between the parties and, especially, in the post-conflict phase, when they provide peacekeeping troops, and are involved in the reconstruction.

⁶⁹ D. D. Kirkpatrick, *In Snub to U.S., Russia and Egypt Move Toward Deal on Air Bases*, New York Times, 30.11.2017, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/30/world/middleeast/russia-egypt-air-bases.html>> (7.01.2018).

⁷⁰ *Russia and Ethiopia sign a Memorandum of understanding on cooperation in peaceful uses of atomic energy*, ROSATOM, 19.06.2017, <<http://www.rosatom.ru/en/press-centre/news/russia-and-ethiopia-sign-a-memorandum-of-understanding-on-cooperation-in-peaceful-uses-of-atomic-ene/>> (7.01.2018).

⁷¹ R. Revesz, *Donald Trump praises Egypt President al-Sisi and plans trip to Cairo*, INDEPENDENT, 21.05.2017, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/donald-trump-praises-egypt-president-abdel-fattah-al-sisi-safety-visit-cairo-saudi-arabia-meeting-a7747171.html>> (7.01.2018).

⁷² *U. S. Relations With Ethiopia*, US Department of State, Bureau of African Affairs, 10.05.2017, <<https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2859.htm>> (7.01.2018).

⁷³ *Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu Full Speech at UN 9/19/17*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_JF9cWmjgEc> (7.01.2018).

However, it should be remembered that these international organizations have a limited capacity to intervene, due to the divergent interests of their key members, most of them among the active geostrategic players mentioned above.

Therefore, GERD's geopolitical impact exceeds the dimensions of a local dispute and the regional prospective analysis doesn't seem to be positive, at least if we take into account a report, published in 2010, by the Inter-Action Council (IAC) – a consultancy group of former heads of state and government from 40 states of the world. In that report IAC was drawing attention towards potential global water crisis which will have a "devastating future" impact on peace, political stability and future economic development of the planet⁷⁴.

What could be the impact of an Egyptian-Ethiopian conflict on regional security? There is only one answer: devastating. The interference of a multitude of geostrategic players with opposite interests among which some are Islamists and others are Middle East key players' interested in their own security imperatives, risk to transform Egypt and Ethiopia into failed states, as Syria and Somalia.

In such a situation, a regional instability quadrilateral would emerge. This quadrilateral would be delimited, on the northern side – by a hypothetic axis that unifies Syria and Libya, passing through Egypt, and on the southern side – by a hypothetic axis that unifies Yemen and Ethiopia, passing through Somalia and Eritrea. The emergence of the regional instability quadrilateral:

- would affect maritime flows through the Suez Canal, the Gulf of Aden and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait with all economic and strategic consequences,
- would export instability by amplifying inter-confessional tensions in Central Africa, which would create a Trans-African "belt of instability" by unifying with unstable Western and Northern African regions already under Islamists' control,
- would intensify the pressure of migration in Europe and would lead to EU's implosion due to the deepening of the already existing divergences between the European states.

Is it possible to witness the outbreak of a regional war?

In the short term (0-3 years), given the network of interests and, in particular, the consequences of such a conflict on the strategic balance in the Levant, Mediterranean Africa and the Horn of Africa, the answer is negative. But, however, the initiation of potential hybrid, non-kinetic actions cannot be ruled out, in order to increase tensions between the two countries or to ignite discontent among the Egyptian population.

⁷⁴ *Former world leaders, including Jean Chretien, sound alarm on global water crisis*, thestar.com, 10.09.2012, <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2012/09/10/former_world_leaders_including_jean_chretien_sound_alarm_on_global_water_crisis.html> (27.02.2018).

However, in the medium to long term (3-20 years), the risk of such a conflict increases, especially if the forecasted demographic pressure exerted by more than 600 million potential inhabitants of the area, will be amplified by the following favourable circumstances:

- a treaty on the distribution of Nile waters, accepted by all riparian states, will not come into force;
- Egyptian economy will continue to be predominantly agrarian, dependent on Nile waters;
- there will be no regional master plan of hydro-technical works designed to combat the evaporation of the Nile waters;
- climate change will accelerate desertification;
- Nile dispute will be amplified by inter-confessional and inter-ethnic connotations;
- political forces interested in creating the semicircle of instability in the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean will re-emerge.

Anyhow, GERD completion represents Ethiopia's birthday as regional power and the end of Egypt's domination in the Horn of Africa. Therefore, based on eco-crisis triggering mechanisms⁷⁵ analyzed by Thomas Homer-Dixon, it becomes obvious that in the absence of effective political, hydro-technical, economic and military measures, the Nile Basin might transform into a potential "clock bomb" – a "clock bomb", that could seriously affect the strategic, political and demographic balance in one of the "hottest" global areas.

Therefore, only more efficient water resource management and finding consensus formulas between group policies "will enable humanity to better respond to all the problems issued by the warming of the planet"⁷⁶ – as former Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien has stated, in 2012, during one of the IAC meetings.

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⁷⁵ T. F. Homer-Dixon, *Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflicts: Evidence from Cases*, Part 1, "Peace and Conflict Studies Program, University of Toronto International Security", Vol. 19, No. I (Summer 1994), pp. 5-40, <http://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu/dlc/bitstream/handle/10535/2855/Environmental_Scarcities_and_Violent_Conflict.pdf?sequence=1> (25.03.2018).

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