



Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam: An Existential Threat

Executive Summary

Water security along the Nile River has come sharply into focus when Ethiopia unilaterally, and in violation of international law, announced the construction of the \$4.8 billion Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile without prior consultation with Egypt and/or Sudan.

Egypt firmly believes that finalizing a legally binding agreement on the filling and operation of the GERD is the only way to guarantee Ethiopia's developmental objectives while preventing significant harm from befalling Egypt and Sudan's water security.

After nearly a decade of failed negotiations during which Egypt offered numerous pathways and concessions that were not reciprocated, no solution is in sight and water insecurity in Egypt looms. Ethiopia started unilaterally filling the dam during summer 2020 in violation of the 2015 Agreement on Declaration of Principles.

Despite repeated statements by US officials committing to Egypt's water security, including during the meeting between Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi and President Biden and in Jeddah, Ethiopia announced the unilateral start of the third filling stage in July 2022.

The statement by the President of the Security Council on 15 September 2021 instructs the three countries "to finalize expeditiously the text of mutually acceptable and binding agreement on the filling and operation of the GERD, within a reasonable time frame."

The continued unilateral filling and operation of the dam will have significant economic, environmental, and social repercussions. An equitable tripartite agreement must be reached to prevent the loss of Egyptian livelihoods and irreversible environmental damage that would constitute an intolerable threat to Egypt's security and survival and would jeopardize regional peace and security.

Egyptian Security & Livelihoods at Stake

Egypt is the driest country in the world. While Ethiopia enjoys multiple renewable water resources (8100 cm/pc annually; eight times as much as the U.N. water poverty threshold), Egypt is a desert oasis that is almost entirely dependent on the Nile for renewable water (560 cm/pc annually). Although Egypt is highly efficient in using its water, this does not sufficiently address its abject water poverty, or bridge the gap between its expanding water needs and scarce water resources.

Egypt's over 100 million population relies on the Nile for more than 95% of its renewable water resources.

According to an independent study on the GERD by Deltares, a decrease of only 1 bcm of water could eliminate more than one million jobs and \$1.8 billion in economic production annually in all economic sectors. Urbanization would skyrocket due to rural depopulation, which would lead to an increase in unemployment, crime rates and transnational migration, causing serious ramifications in the Middle East and Europe.

An Existential Threat

A Loss of 1 Billion Bcm would cost Egypt:



290,000
Egyptian incomes lost



\$150 Million
increase in food imports



130,000
hectares of lost cultivated land



\$430 Million
of lost agricultural production

Concern Over Ethiopia's Unilateral and Illegal Action

► An Unreliable Negotiating Partner

Over ten years of faltering negotiations, Ethiopia refused to allow any impartial parties to attend the talks, even as silent observers. In November 2019, Ethiopia reluctantly accepted an invitation to take part in U.S.-brokered negotiations. Ethiopia insisted, however, that the role of the U.S. and the World Bank should be confined to that of an observer. In February 2020, when the United States brought the parties to the verge of agreement, Ethiopia decided to abandon the process at the eleventh hour. It has also thwarted every attempt to agree on the rules for the dam's filling and operation, in accordance with the 2015 Agreement on Declaration of Principles on the GERD.

► Patterns of Illegal Unilateral Action

Ethiopia commenced the construction of the GERD unilaterally in 2011 without informing or consulting with Egypt or Sudan in advance—a breach of its obligations under international law. This is not the first time Ethiopia has broken this law. The World Bank in 2020 faulted Ethiopia and Kenya for the extinction threat of Lake Turkana in Kenya after Ethiopia unilaterally exploited the Omo Basin. Human Rights Watch, National Geographic and International Rivers, among others, have also reported on the significant economic and security hazards inflicted due to these unilateral developments. Ethiopia also proceeded with unilateral developments in the Juba-Shabelle basin, negatively impacting water access and security in Somalia.

► Failure to Conduct Impact Studies

Ethiopia has not provided any socio-economic and environmental impact studies of the dam on downstream countries – a requirement under international law. Ethiopia has also blocked every attempt to conduct such studies, whether through an impartial party, or jointly with its co-riparians.

► Refusal to Take Up Binding Agreement

Even though the African Union called for a binding agreement on the GERD's filling and operation, Ethiopia announced that it is not seeking a binding agreement, but rather guidelines that can be modified any time at Ethiopia's discretion.

Recent satellite imagery has revealed that cracks have formed along the length of the concrete façade of the saddle dam that is associated with the GERD. **This raises serious concerns regarding the structural stability and safety of this facility and the main dam.** This poses an immediate risk to downstream communities in Egypt and Sudan.

Ethiopia Repeatedly Aborts Compromise Agreement

The February 2020 compromise-deal aborted by Ethiopia guaranteed that the GERD would generate hydropower efficiently and sustainably in all hydrological conditions, while providing downstream countries with the bare minimum protection from ravaging droughts. Even in the worst prolonged droughts, Ethiopia was guaranteed that it would generate hydropower at optimum levels. The compromise-deal did not in any way impose water allocations on Ethiopia, nor has it in any way been a water-allocation agreement. It also clearly recognized Ethiopia's right to undertake future projects on the Blue Nile in accordance with international law and allowed the parties to revisit the agreement in ten years.

Ethiopia also rejected an MIT recommendation for coordination between the GERD and the Aswan High Dam to ensure equitable risk allocation. Sudan also warned repeatedly that millions of lives will be at "great risk" if Ethiopia unilaterally fills and operates the GERD without reaching an agreement with its downstream neighbors. Even though Egypt conceded to the Ethiopian position, Ethiopia, lacking the political will to conclude an agreement, aborted the talks.



Seeking an Equitable Solution Through Cooperation, Not Unilateralism

Egypt firmly believes that finalizing a legally binding agreement on the filling and operation of the GERD is the only way to solve the issue. Following U.S. leadership in negotiations, Egypt urges the United States to double down on the issue and help facilitate a fair resolution.



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