The Geopolitics of Water Negotiations succeeding the GERD Project in the Nile River Basin

Introduction

Water politics has come to be one of the central themes of debate and concern among different academic, political and economic domains in the globalized world. Thus, water geopolitics has sought to understand and analyze how water politics is imagined spatially. Though the Nile River runs through ten African countries, the main conflict over its waters is between Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia. Since Egypt depends on the Nile for its entire water supply, securing the downstream parts of the river has always been one of Egypt's national priorities. The dispute between the two states, Egypt and Ethiopia, is rooted in the legacy of British imperialism in North, Northeast and Central Africa during the 20th century. As Cascão (2009) discussed a declaration from 1929 by London granted the bulk of the water of this area of the Nile to Egypt and Sudan.

However, it has been less than a decade whereby Ethiopia's bargaining power has become much greater than normally acknowledged. To be sure, it is shored up by Ethiopia's geographic advantage as upstream riparian and provider of 85% of the Nile flows. Moreover, it is not until the last two years, where the discourse of water geopolitics moved away from being dominated by ideas like national security and power. Therefore, the paper focuses on the role of power and hegemony in particular, as a complement to the wide range of issues covered in negotiations. By doing so, the article analyzes the Egypt's position as the hegemonic power in the horn of Africa contested by Ethiopia. In order to simplify my argument and analysis, I focused on Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt to explicate the extent of water crisis in the North Eastern part of Africa. To accomplish these tasks, a critical geopolitical approach, practical discourse, has been used to analyze the geopolitical implications of speeches of politicians and leaders. Application of critical hydro-politics is thus useful for interpretation of the power plays that grease or block the cogs of the decision-making machinery. Since practical geopolitics describes the actual practice of geopolitical strategy (i.e. foreign policy), the paper look into the country's foreign policy in relation to the changing power relations in the Nile Basin, especially from the onset of the GERD project which witnesses tension among the three countries. Principally, the study attempts to analyze the geopolitical implications of the newly Egyptian president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi on regional water politics and speculated on whether it has reinforced or undermined the regional power of Egypt.

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