

# The Nile River Dispute From Ethiopia's Perspective

by GPF Staff - February 14, 2020

## THE NILE RIVER DISPUTE From Ethiopia's Perspective

### Timeline of Events:

**1959:** Egypt and Sudan sign an agreement whereby each country is allocated a certain amount of Nile River water. The agreement also allows Egypt to construct the Aswan High Dam on the Nile and Sudan to construct the Rosaries Dam on the Blue Nile. Other Nile River basin states are excluded from the treaty.

**1978:** Ethiopia proposes a series of dams along the Blue Nile River that do not recognize colonial-era agreements or the 1959 agreement. Egypt strongly rejects the proposal and President Sadat implies Egypt would fight the project, if necessary.

**2010:** Upstream countries including Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda sign a cooperation framework agreement calling for equitable water allocation and water security among Nile basin states. The agreement makes the status quo vulnerable to change and both Egypt and Sudan oppose the deal.

**2011:** Construction on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam begins.

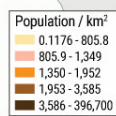
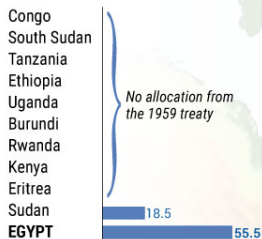
**2015:** The leaders of Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia sign a cooperation deal agreeing to a joint approach to balanced regional water supply.

>> **50% of the dam is already complete** <<

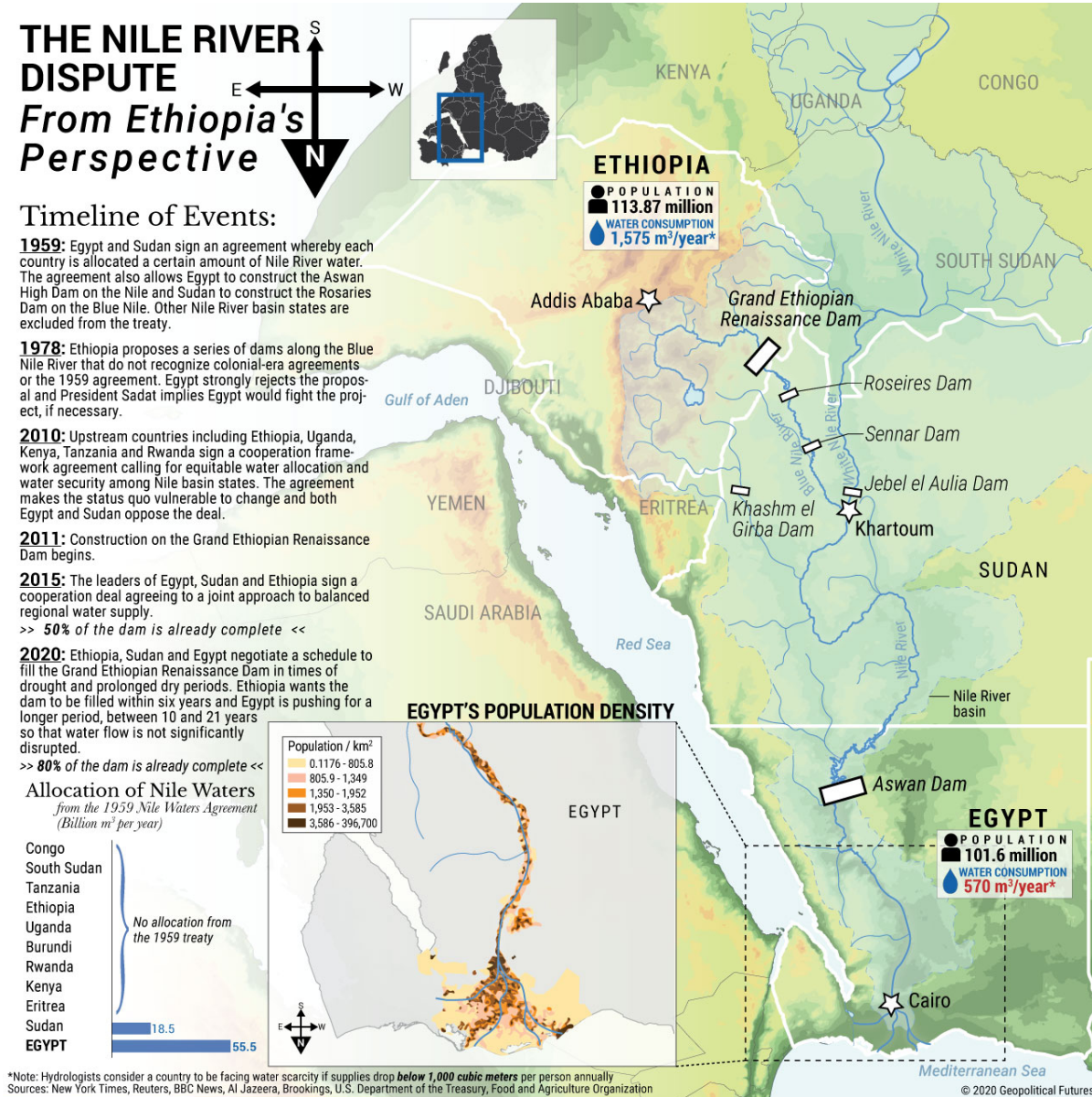
**2020:** Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt negotiate a schedule to fill the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam in times of drought and prolonged dry periods. Ethiopia wants the dam to be filled within six years and Egypt is pushing for a longer period, between 10 and 21 years so that water flow is not significantly disrupted.

>> **80% of the dam is already complete** <<

### Allocation of Nile Waters from the 1959 Nile Waters Agreement (Billion m<sup>3</sup> per year)



\*Note: Hydrologists consider a country to be facing water scarcity if supplies drop below 1,000 cubic meters per person annually  
 Sources: New York Times, Reuters, BBC News, Al Jazeera, Brookings, U.S. Department of the Treasury, Food and Agriculture Organization



[\(click to enlarge\)](#)

The Nile River and its tributaries have served as a lifeline for human civilization in the Nile River basin for centuries. Today, more than 300 million people from Burundi, Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia,

Eritrea, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda rely on this river system as their primary source of freshwater. For many of these countries, especially Egypt, ensuring the flow of water through the Nile River is a question of national security.

Cairo is in a very vulnerable position. Ninety-five percent of the freshwater consumed in the country originates beyond its border and is therefore out of its control. Approximately 85 percent of all water that flows through the Nile River in Egypt originates in Ethiopia. This explains why Egypt and Ethiopia – two countries that fought a war over this issue in the 1870s – have historically viewed each other as a threat. Egypt is concerned that Ethiopia may block the flow of water downstream; Ethiopia is concerned that Egypt may compromise its access to freshwater in an effort to secure Egyptian supplies.

Further complicating the issue is the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, a project that promises to deliver much-needed energy to the region. Talks are currently underway over how to fill the dam and manage water flows in times of drought. The project poses a potential threat to Egypt's water supply and strikes at core security issues for both countries. While talks have been progressing toward a final agreement, the reality of the situation is that the flow of water through the Nile River will remain a point of contention between Egypt and Ethiopia.

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