



**Dahilon Yassin Mohamoda.** *Nile Basin Cooperation: A Review of the Literature.* Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2003. 41 pp. SEK 80.00 (paper), ISBN 978-91-7106-512-4.



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## **Water Conflict: The Dog That Hasn't Barked (So Far)**

Water Conflict: The Dog That Hasn't Barked (So Far)

Mohamoda's paper is, as its title states, a brief review of the literature on issues concerning control of the Nile River's water. Mohamoda provides a theoretical and comparative introduction into issues concerning potential conflict over water and then reviews both cooperative activities among the states along the Nile and its tributaries and the literature about them. He sets these activities within the context of international agreements over both the Nile specifically and the United Nations 1997 Watercourse Convention. This pamphlet provides a quick guide to the sources on the recent debates over the use of the Nile that researchers could find handy.

The story described by Mohamoda turns on Egypt's dependence on the Nile waters. Mohamoda provides only the sketchiest outline of Egypt's attempt to ensure the full benefit of the flood of the Nile (driven by rains in the Ethiopian highlands). He begins with the Anglo-Egyptian Water Agreement of 1929 in which Britain promised not to engage in any projects along the Nile or its tributaries that would reduce the flow of water to Egypt. That agreement is technically still binding on the

former British colonies. The matter occasionally leads to public debate in many of the countries of the region as sometimes the agreement is interpreted as preventing the development of irrigation in Tanzania or hydropower in Uganda.

The bulk of this paper focuses on two issues. One is the potential for conflict between Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia over the Nile's waters. Starting in the 1950s, Egypt used both threats and diplomacy to try to keep the other two nations from interfering with the flow of the Nile. In those two countries, which saw both civil unrest and grinding economic crisis, talk often came up of utilizing the Nile's waters to promote development. While Sudan signed an agreement with Egypt in 1959 on managing the Nile's waters, its various regimes have often planned irrigation projects, such as the Jonglei canal, but failed to create much in the way of a drain on the Nile. Ethiopia, on the other hand, has often taken an antagonistic stance towards Egypt's claims of preeminence over the waters of the river.

This volume itself is brief. Mohamoda begins with a short discussion of the theoretical literature on the po-

tential for water conflict. He concludes this section by noting that despite occasional discussion of the potential for conflict over water, no modern wars have ever been fought over water. He notes that despite the heated rhetoric that has come from Cairo or Addis Ababa, all the countries that share the Nile have generally found ways to work together. He does not provide a detailed history of the Nile, instead referring readers to other works such as Robert O. Collins, *The Waters of the Nile: Hydropolitics and the Jonglei Canal, 1900-1988* (1996).

He then discusses the issues that have emerged in debates about the Nile. In particular he notes the verbal sparring between Ethiopia and Egypt over the Nile. He also comments on the effects of the British sponsored agreement of the colonial era that sought to guarantee

Egypt's control over the waters of the Nile. The interlacustrine states sometimes complain about the agreement but none has developed proposals to tap water in any significant proportion from the Nile.

He concludes with a look at the major international and regional efforts to define rights to water in the river. He suggests that such efforts, both sponsored by the United Nations and amongst the local nations, have a good chance of continuing to prevent overt conflict over the waters of the river.

This paper is a decent guide to the literature. It will be useful for researchers who need a quick primer on the issue. Its briefness, however, militates against it having a broader utility.

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