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FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG

FES-IPSS Breakfast Meeting Series

Session 2: “The Hydro-politics of the GERD in the Global and National Political Crisis: Negotiations, Mediation and Rhetoric of Conflicts”

4 August 2022|Hyatt Regency|09:30 a.m.-11:00 a.m. (EAT)

Concept Note

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) has been a center of regional political interaction in what is known as the Eastern Nile Basin. For a decade, the dam has shaped the hydro-politics of the Nile, particularly the tripartite political relation between Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt. Unprecedented negotiations unfolded inviting major global and regional powers, including the UNSC, AU and the US government to intervene in the search for an amicable solution. The dam also became a priority agenda in the national politics of the three states, mainly Egypt and Ethiopia.

Despite ongoing negotiations, lack of basin-wide agreement that defines the water share of the basin countries seriously arrests the process of negotiations. Although the Declaration of Principles signed in December 2015 could be taken as a positive step, the three countries could not manage to agree on a mechanism to guide the filling and operation of the GERD. The crisis of multilateralism at the global scale, the historic power competition and politics of mutual intervention and mistrust, as well as unstable politics in the riparian states has conditioned the negotiations process.

Ethiopia is determined to continue the construction and the filling of the dam, while simultaneously engaging in the tripartite negotiations. Ethiopia even allowed the downstream states to review the technical aspects and progress of the construction of the dam in early stages of the negotiations as a confidence-building measure. Ethiopia appears to de-politicize its interest, as such foregrounding technical aspects of dam filling and operation during negotiations, *inter alia*, as a means of garnering international legitimacy. As of mid-2020, Ethiopia opted for the African Union to take the lead in hosting the negotiations. Egypt is also actively participating in the negotiations process while inviting super- and regional powers to mediate. Egypt appears to adopt an over-politicized and securitized position in an effort to maintain what it calls to be its ‘historic rights’. Moreover, Egypt is also strengthening its bilateral relations with Sudan and South Sudan and other riparian states, a seeming encirclement policy of deterring Ethiopia’s hydro-political position over the Nile. Sudan stood in the difficult position of balancing between the two competing regional powers while maintaining its national interest in the hydro-political landscape of the Nile.

Considering that the third filling of the GERD is happening now without significant progress on the negotiations, it is worth having an in-depth discussion and analysis to make sense of the trend and dynamics of the hydro-politics of the Nile and its implication for peace and security of the greater North Eastern Africa. What grand strategies are the three major riparian states following, and did these remain consistent over the past decade? How does the negotiations over the filling and operation of the GERD get shaped and reshaped by national interest and strategies of riparian states? How do national, regional and global political trends affect the hydro-politics of the Nile, mainly the tripartite negotiations? What are the major challenges that arrest the possibility of a win-win agreement out of the tripartite negotiations? What are the major outcomes of the AU hosted negotiations over the past three years?



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