

**The Nile and Eritrea: The Nexus between Two Major Conflict Issues of Northeast Africa,  
1941–1991**

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**Abstract**

*This article attempts to analyze the nexus between the history of the hydropolitics of the Nile and the Eritrean question, the later armed struggle to secede from Ethiopia across time from 1941 to 1991. It advocates that the Nile issue and the Eritrean question were so intertwined that they needed to be considered to understand together conflicts in the Horn of Africa. The article elucidates the various ways in which the downstream states, mainly Egypt and the Sudan, employed to hamper Ethiopia's water-development programs these fanned the flame of the Eritrean question, which had the potential to develop into an armed struggle. It also argues that the two downstream states' moral and material support for the Eritrean secessionists was a direct outcome of the hydropolitics of the Nile. On the other hand, the political strife and wars that Egypt and Sudan helped to instigate inside the Ethiopian Empire, through their support of the Eritrean insurgents, induced Ethiopia to divert its scarce resources into security and defense. Such resources could have been better used to harness the waters of the Nile for development.*

**Keywords:** Nile, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Egypt, Sudan.

**Introduction**

The Nile was a primordial factor of interaction and interdependence among Ethiopia, Egypt and the Sudan. It has particularly played a pivotal role in the historic relationship between Egypt and Ethiopia. The Ethiopian rivers flowing into the main Nile provide some 86 per cent of the total annual water discharge and fertile soil, which have always been essential to the life and very existence of Egypt and the Sudan. Egypt was aptly described in the famous dictum of Herodotus, in the fifth century B.C., “the gift of the Nile.” Indeed, had it not been for the Nile and its annual flood, not only of the great Pharaonic civilization, with its pyramids and temples, but also the very existence of civilized human life in the land of Egypt or indeed Egypt as a state at all would not have been possible.

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Although the significance of the Nile waters issue has always been acknowledged in the context of the geopolitics and diplomacy of northeast Africa, the direct nexus of Nile–Eritrean issues has historically been perceived as being of less than primary importance. A growing body of research has examined the hydropolitics of the Nile and the armed struggle in Eritrea; however, few studies have actually analyzed how these two major issues of northeast Africa interact. A critical evaluation of the inception and consolidation of the Eritrean armed struggle through the support of Egypt and the Sudan, in particular, and other Arab countries, in general, reveals that the Nile factor was a significant factor.<sup>2</sup>

This article offers insight into how the Nile waters issue and the Eritrean question and later armed struggle to secede from Ethiopia were closely linked. It begins with a discussion of the dynamism of the Lake Tana Dam negotiations between Ethiopia, Egypt and Britain since 1941 in relation to Egypt's outright claim over Eritrea until 1950. The article also looks into the role of the hydropolitics of the Nile River in the 1950s and early 1960s behind the inception and consolidation of the armed struggle in Eritrea. It argues that particularly Egypt, which saw Ethiopia as a strategic threat to its national interests in the waters of the Nile, inspired the Eritrean secessionist struggle with the aim of incapacitating Ethiopia's ability to utilize the Nile waters. Other Arab countries and the Sudan, which formed a common cause with Egypt, also threw their weight behind Eritrea's armed struggle against the Ethiopian regimes of the emperor and the military from 1961 to 1991. Finally, the article provides some conclusions and points to a possible way forward. It reveals the paramount importance of the hydropolitics of the Nile in understanding the context in which the armed struggle in Eritrea was waged and its effects on the general security situation in the Horn of Africa.

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<sup>2</sup>Indeed, there were other geopolitical and strategic issues behind Egypt's involvement on the side of Eritrea but the purpose of this article is to show the link between the hydropolitics of the Nile and the Eritrean issue only. This article examines the role of the Nile waters issue in fanning the flame of the Eritrean question. It also looks at how the armed struggle in Eritrea in turn exacerbated and further complicated the hydropolitics of the Nile as well as how the prolonged war in Eritrea incapacitated Ethiopia's ability to harness its water resources. It is noteworthy that the research has dealt with this topic, not to cast blame on the lower riparian states of the Nile but to show how the Nile waters issue was and still is intricately connected to the history of conflict in Northeast Africa and to suggest the proper direction for the search for sustainable peace in the region.

### The Lake Tana Dam Issue and Egypt's Diplomatic Jostling over the Eritrean Question, 1941–1950

Shortly after the liberation of Ethiopia from Fascist occupation in 1941, the Nile became a major diplomatic issue with a strong bearing on Ethiopia's foreign relations with the outside world, in general, and with the powers in control of the lower Nile Basin, in particular. No sooner had Emperor Haile Selassie been restored to his imperial throne than the Egyptian government began to urge the British government to revive the question of a dam wall across the Blue Nile with the Ethiopian government. This dam was to be constructed at the river's outlet from Lake Tana; however, the negotiations on this matter had been interrupted due to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935.<sup>3</sup> In June 1941, the Egyptian ambassador in London reminded the British government that: "... recognition of [Egypt's] rights for the waters of Lake Tsana and Blue Nile must be proceeded [with] within the shortest possible time."<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, the British government hosted a conference at the Foreign Office on 30 October 1941<sup>5</sup> at which the two governments reached an agreement to conduct joint negotiations with the Ethiopian government on the construction of a dam across the Blue Nile.<sup>6</sup> The conference resolution also clearly declared that: "... the water should be shared equally by Egypt and the Sudan", who would finally share the cost of the construction of the dam.<sup>7</sup> However, this proposal was held in abeyance and was not submitted to the Ethiopian government until June 1943.

On 10 June 1943, Mr. Howe, the British representative in Ethiopia, finally submitted a memorandum to Emperor Haile Selassie communicating the aforementioned proposal concerning the concession.<sup>8</sup> Howe recorded the Emperor's immediate response to the issue of the Lake Tana dam as follows: "... His Majesty remained silent for some time and then replied that he would consider what I have said and give me a reply in a few days."<sup>9</sup> At that time it was noted that the British government would consider obtaining the Lake Tana Dam concession as "a

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<sup>3</sup> F.O.371/46081, Lake Tana: The Present Position, J709/643/1 20 February 1945.

<sup>4</sup>F.O.371/27536, Eden to M. Lampson, 13 June 1941. This file includes the memorandum of the Egyptian ambassador.

<sup>5</sup> F.O.371/46081, Lake Tana: The Present Position, J 709/643/1, 20 February 1945.

<sup>6</sup>F.O.371/27536, Foreign Office Minute by Mr. Baring, J 3450/979/1, 30 October 1941; David Hamilton, "Ethiopia's Frontiers: The Boundary Agreement and their Demarcation, 1896–1956" (PhD Diss., University of Oxford, 1974), 328.

<sup>7</sup>F.O.371/69303, Lake Tana: The Present Position, J709/643/1, 20 February 1945.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> F.O.371/35644, Howe to Eden, 11 June 1943.

fitting and practical expression of gratitude” for its role in helping the Emperor to gain his imperial throne.<sup>10</sup> The Emperor responded to Mr. Howe’s memorandum, after two months, on 12 August 1943.<sup>11</sup> In his response, the Emperor noted that Great Britain demanded the Lake Tana Dam concession from Ethiopia while the latter was still demanding “certain things” (unspecified) from the former.<sup>12</sup> This clearly indicates that the Emperor most certainly used the Blue Nile Dam project as a diplomatic bargaining chip to regain Ethiopia’s complete political independence, which had been under British political predominance in the immediate years after the liberation. Foreign Office sources also indicate that Emperor Haile Selassie was using the Lake Tana Dam issue as a bargaining chip for political, territorial, and financial gains from the British government. Therefore, British officials proposed a postponement of the Lake Tana Dam negotiations for an indefinite period until the end of the war.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, Egypt continued to urge Britain to resume negotiations with Ethiopia and to take into consideration its right of participation in the dam concession. For instance, in September 1943, the Egyptian Prime Minister, Nahhas Pasha, requested the British government to allow the participation of Egypt in the Lake Tana Dam negotiations on the basis of the 1935 J.G. White Engineering Corporation proposal.<sup>14</sup>

In 1944, one of the major obstacles to the re-opening of the negotiation process was overcome when the Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement was signed and the relations between the two countries became smoother.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, the Second World War was still raging and Britain obviously concentrated its attention on the ongoing war, not on the dam. It was only after the end of the war that the Nile issue occupied a more significant place at the top of the diplomatic agenda in northeast Africa. Britain resumed the Lake Tana dam negotiations with the Ethiopian government in February 1945.<sup>16</sup> This new round of negotiations were planned to commence with a conference at which the core parties – the Ethiopian, Egyptian, and Anglo-Sudan governments

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<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> F.O.371/46081, Lake Tana: The Present Position, J 709/643/1, 20 February 1945.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> F.O.371/35646, Howe to A. Eden, 29 October 1943.

<sup>14</sup>Hamilton, 328.

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed treatment of the Anglo-Ethiopian Treaty of 1944, see Harold G. Marcus, *Ethiopia, Great Britain, and the United States, 1941–1974* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 22–78.

<sup>16</sup>F.O.371/46081, Foreign Office Minute by Mr. MacGregor, 4 February 1945.

– as well as representatives of the J.G. White Engineering Corporation participated.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, however, Egypt's new strategy of securing her interest in the waters of the Nile hampered the negotiation process.

To further complicate the matter, shortly after the end of the Second World War Egypt, began to press a strong claim over Massawa.<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that Massawa was part of Eritrea, which was then under British control in the name of Occupied Enemy Territory since April 1941, but Ethiopia had already laid claim to Eritrea on the grounds of geographical, historical, ethnic, security, and a legitimate right of access to the sea. Egypt adhered to a policy of securing its interests to the whole of the Nile waters as its exclusive right through various diplomatic bargaining measures over the Nile waters. For the Egyptians' genuine interest behind their claim to Massawa and later to Eritrea, one can obtain a clue from a remark by a person named Kamil Bey Abdel Rahim, who was quoted as saying that "... about reaching agreement with us on the policy to be pursued: the Egyptians have always had an idea of using Eritrea as a direct bargaining counter in connexion with Tsana."<sup>19</sup> It is therefore not surprising that Egypt confused these two questions.

At the Paris Peace Conference of 1946, Egypt openly advanced its claim to Eritrea.<sup>20</sup> This was completely in contradiction of Ethiopia's age-old interest in obtaining its province which had been unjustly taken by Italy in 1890. Apparently, Egypt used a claim to Eritrea as a bargaining chip against Ethiopia in order to be able to exert diplomatic pressure on the latter regarding the Lake Tana dam negotiations. The alternative scenario was that if Egypt succeeded in gaining control over Eritrea, Ethiopia's only access to the sea, it would have a stronger bargaining position with Ethiopia, the source of 86 percent of the Nile waters.<sup>21</sup> In short, the crux of the matter of Egypt's genuine interest behind its claim to Eritrea was the waters of the Nile.

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<sup>17</sup> F.O.371/46081, From Foreign Office to Cairo, 7 June 1945.

<sup>18</sup> F.O.371/63130, Foreign Office Minute by D.M.H. Richer, J5240/326/1, 14 February 1946.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> John H. Spencer, *Ethiopia at Bay* (Algonac: Reference Publishers Inc., 1984), 188.

<sup>21</sup> The Eritrean coast was Ethiopia's only outlet to the sea through the ports of Massawa and Assab. It was this loss that made Ethiopia landlocked and forced the country to channel its imports and exports through neighboring Djibouti.

The Egyptian government seemed to have been confident enough about its new strategy. It unilaterally approached the Ethiopian government and demanded the dam concession without involving the British and Anglo-Sudanese governments. Hence, even violating its agreement with Britain, to negotiate jointly with Ethiopia, the Egyptian government directly sought the dam concession from Ethiopia.<sup>22</sup> In actual fact, however, the new strategy that Egypt pursued to reopen the Nile waters negotiations encountered stiff opposition from the Ethiopian government.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, there was strong disagreement between Egypt and Britain on the issue of the Lake Tana dam negotiations. As Campbell stated at that time: "... neither His Majesty's Government nor the Sudan Government would wish that the Egyptian Government should conduct the negotiations with the Ethiopian Government on behalf of His Majesty's Government and the Sudan Government."<sup>24</sup>

Under these circumstances, Ethiopia refused to enter into any kind of negotiation with the Egyptians concerning the waters of the Nile. In June 1947, the Ethiopian Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, *Ato* Aklilu Habte-Wold, made it clear to the British diplomat, Mr. Farquhar, that his country could not become a negotiator on the Lake Tana dam project for some indefinite time.<sup>25</sup> Reporting to the Foreign Office, Mr. Farquhar expressed Aklilu's feelings and intention: "... [Aklilu] did not disguise his feelings of hostility towards the Egyptian Government, whose claim to Massawa sticks in the Ethiopians' throats."<sup>26</sup> The Ethiopian government staunchly and consistently opposed the Egyptian approach instead of negotiating in the manner that Egypt calculated.

For his part, Emperor Haile Selassie also went on to say plainly that his government preferred to deal with the British, but not with Egypt.<sup>27</sup> The Emperor said: "The Egyptians were making a mistake in thinking that Lake Tana already belonged to them."<sup>28</sup> In addition, the Ethiopian Ministry for Foreign Affairs declared that hitherto Ethiopia had approached Egypt on the Lake

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<sup>22</sup> See F.O. 371/63130, R. Campbell to Ernest Bevin, 17 April 1947.

<sup>23</sup> F.O.371/63130, Foreign Office Minute by D.M.H. Richer, 14 February 1946.

<sup>24</sup> F.O.371/63130, R. Campbell to Ernest Bevin, 20 February 1947.

<sup>25</sup> F.O.371/63130, Mr. Farquhar to Foreign Office, 8 June 1947.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> F.O.371/63130, Mr. Farquhar to Foreign Office, Telegram No.435, 20 December 1947.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

Tana dam issue thinking that Egypt was jointly working with the British government.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, Egypt's miscalculation further deteriorated relations between the two countries and became a major obstacle to the resumption of the negotiations on the Lake Tana dam project.

Egyptian foreign policy conflicted with Ethiopian interests and became a hindrance to the realization of the project. The policy was clearly reflected in the protracted diplomatic jostling over the Eritrean question that went on between Great Britain, Egypt, and Ethiopia in the newly founded United Nations Organization. At first, the British government proposed at the Third UN General Assembly that the western part of Eritrea be united with Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.<sup>30</sup> This was rejected by the UN after the majority of the members of the special committee mandated to examine the matter voted against Britain's proposal.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, before the committee's decision was submitted to the General Assembly for final approval, the Egyptian representative advanced its claim by amending a phrase that the western part of Eritrea "be incorporated in the adjacent [Anglo-Egyptian] Sudan".<sup>32</sup> From 17 November 1947 Egypt claimed the whole of Eritrea.<sup>33</sup>

The Egyptian strategy was likely to be counterproductive, however. The Ethiopian government effectively used the Nile issue to secure Egyptian support for its efforts to regain Eritrea. In December 1949, *Ato Aklilu* toured Cairo to get Egyptian support on the Eritrean question. In his talks with King Farouk I (1920–1965) he referred to the Nile waters issue and said that Ethiopia had the right to interfere with the flow of the Blue Nile.<sup>34</sup> Although he never said anything about Ethiopia's plan concerning Lake Tana, in relation to Egypt's claim over Eritrea he indicated that Ethiopia had the power to interfere with the flow of the Nile.<sup>35</sup> Aklilu himself stated his diplomatic skill in Cairo in making the Egyptians renounce their claim to Eritrea and to support the Ethiopian case as follows:

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<sup>29</sup> F.O.371/69303, Foreign Office Minute by Mr.D. Scott Fox. J 56170/466/1, 30 July 1948.

<sup>30</sup> Wondimneh Tilahun, *Egypt's Imperial Aspirations over Lake Tana and the Blue Nile* (Addis Ababa: United Printers Ltd., 1979), 30–31.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Haggai Erlich, *The Cross and the River: Ethiopia, Egypt, and the Nile* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 2002), 128.

<sup>34</sup> *Sehafé-tizzaz* Aklilu Habte Wold, "Lemermari Komision Yaqerebut Sihuf", *Mesikerem* 10, 1967 E.C, 36.

<sup>35</sup> Erlich, *The Cross and the River*, 128.

First, I discussed with King Faruk in Egypt ... An appointment for me to discuss with the Minister for Foreign Affairs had been fixed, I told him about our position at length and about the rationale of our question and as Egypt consumes the waters of the Nile, it should assist us by giving advice to the British and other Arab countries in order to support our case. Finally, the king and his Government promised to support Ethiopia and also promised to me to transmit instructions to Dafawzi, their representative in New York.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, in 1950, the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also declared that the Ethiopian government could not authorize Egypt's involvement in the Lake Tana dam negotiations unless Egypt renounced its claim over Eritrea.<sup>37</sup> As a result, the Ethiopian government could not accept the idea of having Egyptian representation in the negotiations concerning the Lake Tana dam project even if they had consented to full British participation, unless they renounced their claim to Massawa.<sup>38</sup> Some days before the UN decided on the question of Eritrea, Emperor Haile Selassie reiterated that Ethiopia had the right to use the waters of the Blue Nile.<sup>39</sup> Finally, Ethiopia's counter-diplomacy that linked the Nile to the Eritrean question induced Egypt not only to abandon its claim over Eritrea but also to vote in favor of the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia in the UN General Assembly on 2 December 1950.<sup>40</sup>

### **Ethio-Egypt Confrontation over the Nile and the Inception of the Eritrean Armed Struggle, 1951–1974**

After the Eritrean question had been resolved, the relationship between Egypt and Ethiopia improved and the negotiations on the Lake Tana Dam resumed. On 20 July 1951, Britain and Egypt set up a joint Egypto-Sudanese delegation under Egyptian chairmanship, and came up with a technical proposal for the Lake Tana reservoir to discuss with the Ethiopian government.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, the discussions were soon interrupted since the Ethiopian government requested six weeks to examine the Anglo-Egyptian technical proposal for the dam project before it entered into the tripartite negotiations.<sup>42</sup> Above all, in 1952 an event occurred in Egypt that was to radically revolutionise the Nile waters utilisation strategy in Egypt. Young military officers led

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<sup>36</sup> *Sehafë-tizzaz* Aklilu Habte Wold, 36.

<sup>37</sup> F.O.371/80241, Mr. Lascelles to Foreign Office, Telegram No.139, 6 May 1950.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Erlich, *The Cross and the River*, 128.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> F.O.371/96805, Foreign Office Minute, by M. Busk, # JE 1421/57, 14 March 1952.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*



by Colonel Gamal Abd al-Nasser seized political power in Egypt through a successful military coup d'état that ousted King Farouk on 23 July 1952.<sup>43</sup> Within two months after it came to power, Egypt's new government opted to achieve an over-year storage capacity within its own borders by erecting the Aswan High Dam, abandoning all previous comprehensive water development proposals, which it considered due to British arrogance. As Collins puts it: "Overwhelmed by the propaganda for the Aswan High Dam the Nile Valley Plan was unceremoniously consigned to the dustbin of history."<sup>44</sup>

The Aswan High Dam Project, which had clearly showed Egyptian disregard for upstream states' water needs, encountered staunch opposition from Ethiopia. Thus the 1950s saw a difficult period of confrontation between Ethiopia and Egypt in the history of the Nile Waters issue. The Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a *communiqué* on 6 February 1956<sup>45</sup> in protest against Egypt for not consulting Ethiopia about the construction of the Aswan High Dam. The *communiqué* declared Ethiopia's legitimate right to put to use her water resources within her own territorial jurisdiction. Moreover, alarmed by the bilateral Nile Waters negotiations, the Ethiopian government handed over its official *aide-memoire* to the governments of Egypt and the Sudan on 23 September 1957.<sup>46</sup> This was to challenge future claims by Egypt and the Sudan using irrigation, hydroelectric power and water supply projects developed through the Aswan High Dam as the basis for the argument of historical or "prior use" water rights when Ethiopia decided to use the Nile Waters in its own territory. Therefore, the Ethiopian government once again informed Egypt and the Sudan about Ethiopia's quantitatively unspecified but reserved rights and projected need of the Nile Waters.

Nevertheless, all Ethiopia's efforts were in vain as Nasser arrogantly ignored Ethiopia on the Nile issue continued with his unilateral plan to construct the Aswan High Dam. Ethiopia's retaliatory response against Egypt's unilateral decision to build the Aswan High Dam and the

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<sup>43</sup> Anwar El Sadat, *Revolt on the Nile* (New York: The John Day Company, 1957), 14.

<sup>44</sup>Robert O. Collins, "The best laid Schemes O' mice and men": In Search for the Waters of the Nile, 1900–2000", Paper for July 1998 Training Program, Debre Zeit Workshop, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia", 12. (This paper is available at the Library of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.)

<sup>45</sup>"Communiqué Released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, 6 February 1956" in the Nile and Lake Tana File of the Imperial Government of Ethiopia, EMFA.

<sup>46</sup>Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Aide-Memoire", 23 September 1957, in Nile and Lake Tana File of the Imperial Government of Ethiopia, EMFA.

subsequent Egypto-Sudanese negotiations to divide the entire flow of the Nile eventually led to the involvement of the United States in the hydro politics of the Nile. In 1956 the Ethiopian government formally requested the American Technical Assistant Mission (Point Four) for help in the study of its water resources.<sup>47</sup> This became a prelude to the US–Ethiopian Cooperation for the Study of the Blue Nile Basin, which carried out a massive study of the water resources of the Blue Nile mainly for irrigation and hydroelectric power from 1958 to 1963.<sup>48</sup> The US government seemed eager to exploit the Nile as political leverage against the Egyptians, who had turned to the Soviets for support for the Aswan High Dam construction.

On the other hand, in the late 1950s, Egypt started radio broadcasts from Cairo that incited Ethiopian Muslims, especially those in Eritrea, against the Christian political hegemony of the imperial monarchy under Emperor Haile Selassie I. Through this medium, the Egyptian government politicized Christian-Muslim relations in Ethiopia.<sup>49</sup> Radio Cairo also called up thousands of young Muslim Eritreans for military training in Egypt.<sup>50</sup> Obviously, its aim was to create a chaotic situation in Ethiopia by dividing the people into two antagonistic religious groups and pushing them into an endless civil war.

Moreover, Cairo also began to provide scholarships to Muslim Eritreans at the Al-Azhar University and it soon became the center for the Eritrean Student Union in the Middle East.<sup>51</sup> Shumet Sishagne has described Egypt in relation to Eritrean exiles as follows: “Cairo became a haven for Eritrean dissidents, and their leaders were cordially received by Nasser in anticipation of using them to advance Egyptian interest in the region.”<sup>52</sup> On 16 May 1961, the Ethiopian Embassy in Cairo was overrun and stormed in broad daylight by some 50 individuals of Eritrean origin who opposed the Ethiopian government. These individuals caused considerable damage to

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<sup>47</sup> *News Items*, United States Information Services, Haile Selassie I Square, Addis Ababa, Monday, 2 July 1956, found in Folder No-1, File No-159/23 (EMFA).

<sup>48</sup> “*Sile Abbay Wenz Mastawesha*”, 12. This US withdrawal from the Aswan Dam Project and its increasing involvement with the Ethiopian government in studying the Blue Nile Basin were considered by the Egyptian government as an imperialist conspiracy against her anti-colonial struggle in Africa and in the Middle East. See John Bulloch and Adel Darwish, *Water Wars Coming Conflicts in the Middle East* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1993), 102.

<sup>49</sup> Daniel Kendie, “Egypt and the Hydro politics of the Blue Nile River,” *Northeast African Studies*, vol. 6, No.1 (1999), 154.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Erlich, *The Cross and the River*, 130.

<sup>52</sup> Shumet Sishagne, *Unionists & Separatists: The Vagaries of Ethio-Eritrean Relation, 1941–1991*, (United States: Tsehail Publishers and Distributors, 2007), 131.

the embassy. Following this incident, the Imperial Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through its *Aide Memoire* to the Embassy of Egypt in Addis Ababa, complained that during the course of the action “. . . the authorities of the Government of the United Arab Republic have unfortunately failed to safeguard the security of the Embassy although our investigation has now revealed that they had prior knowledge of the incident”.<sup>53</sup> Cognizant of Cairo’s overt and covert role in fomenting subversion, Emperor Haile Selassie time and again condemned Egypt for its instigation of the Ethiopian Muslims by secret channels and by provocative radio broadcasts.<sup>54</sup>

As the Imperial Ethiopian government made Eritrea the country’s 14<sup>th</sup> province by dissolving its UN-sponsored federal status in 1960,<sup>55</sup> Egypt became the key factor in creating the institutional climate that helped the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) to be established in Cairo in July 1960.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, Egypt opened a small military training camp for Eritreans near Alexandria, modeled on the Pan-Arab Algerian FLN, two years earlier in 1958, where it trained some of the future military commanders of the guerrilla movement.<sup>57</sup> It is noteworthy that the founders of the Eritrean armed struggle, such as: Idris Mohammed Adam, the former President of the Eritrean Parliament, Ibrahim Sultan, Secretary General of the Islamic League, and Wolde-ab Woldemaryam, President of the Eritrean Labour Unions, and others, reportedly received their guerrilla training in Egypt.<sup>58</sup> Wolde-ab Woldemaryam, a Christian who opposed the reunification of Eritrea with Ethiopia, was also given a special radio program by Radio Cairo to broadcast propaganda against the anti-Ethiopian government propaganda and to call upon young Christian Eritreans to take up arms and struggle for the independence of Eritrea from the Ethiopian Empire.<sup>59</sup> To realize their grand ambition over the Nile waters through supporting subversive groups in Ethiopia, Cairo’s senior cadres played a major role in organizing the

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<sup>53</sup>The Imperial Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Aide Memoire*, to Mr. Osman Tawfik, the Ambassador of the United Arab Republic, Addis Ababa, No: 10081/52/53, Date: 25/5/61, “Ethiopian Embassy Cairo Report”, in Folder No-1, File No-1/U (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive).

<sup>54</sup>*Afe Nigus* Eshate Gada, Vice-Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Hamle*30, 1952 E.C., found in “Ethiopian Embassy Cairo Report”, in Folder No-1, File No-1/U (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive).

<sup>55</sup> For the dissolution of the Eritrean federation see Tekeste Negash, *Eritrea and Ethiopia: The Federal Experience* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 143–147.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 148; Shumet, 128.

<sup>57</sup>Erlich, *The Cross and the River*, 130.

<sup>58</sup>Daniel, 154.

<sup>59</sup>Erlich, *The Cross and the River*, 130; Shumet, 131.

separatist movement and completing its preparations for armed insurrection against Addis Ababa in 1961.<sup>60</sup>

Egypt, as a front-line Arab state, also assisted the ELF in obtaining the support of the Arab states. Consequently, in April 1962, the Arab League, which the Arab countries had founded in 1945, promised full solidarity with and support to the ELF in its embryonic stage.<sup>61</sup> The Arabs took the Eritreans' struggle for independence as an integral part of the Arab-Israeli conflict and considered the Eritrean insurrection as a struggle against Zionism. In other words, the ELF was fighting against Emperor Haile Selassie,<sup>62</sup> who claimed descent from Solomon, the king of ancient Israel, and used the title: “. . . Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah.” Indeed, the Arab-backed Eritrean guerrilla leadership also presented Eritrea as a Muslim and potentially an Arab state. Thus, many of the Arab states saw Eritrea and its large Muslim population as an extension of the Arab world and tried their best to secure its eventual independence. Eritrea's strategic location also influenced the Arabs to realize their desire of turning the Red Sea into an Arab waterway after the establishment of an independent Arab Eritrean state. Therefore, Egypt effectively mobilized Syria, Iraq, Libya, Kuwait, Yemen, and other Arab countries to stand on the side of the Eritrean insurgents against Ethiopia.<sup>63</sup> Cairo hoped that helping Eritrea to achieve its political independence and eventually to join the Arab League would in turn help the creation of “Greater Egypt” by extending directly or indirectly an Arab–Egyptian unity with the Sudan to embrace other Nile states.<sup>64</sup>

Despite the fact that Ethiopia and the Sudan had not been in a serious confrontation over the issue of the Nile waters over the years, Sudan bolstered a sense of common cause with Egypt through the 1959 Nile Waters Agreement. The Sudan, being an Arab and a predominately Moslem country in the north, eventually became involved in Egypt's sabotage operations to destabilize Ethiopia so as to incapacitate the latter from using the waters of the Nile. In the early 1960s, it was clear that the Sudan, the closest country sharing the longest boundary with Ethiopia, had begun to serve as a proxy to implement subversive activities aimed at undermining

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<sup>60</sup>Shumet, 128–131.

<sup>61</sup>Daniel, 155.

<sup>62</sup>Shumet, 130.

<sup>63</sup>Daniel, 155.

<sup>64</sup>Haggai Erlich, *Ethiopia and the Middle East* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), 130.

the Ethiopian regime. The ELF launched an armed attack against the Ethiopian government using Sudanese territory as a military base in 1961.<sup>65</sup> Weapons from other Arab countries also began to flow towards Eritrea via the Sudan.<sup>66</sup> This marked a significant policy shift on the part of the Sudan.

After the insurgents had stepped up their armed insurrection against the Ethiopian government, using Sudanese territory as a rear base, in 1962 and 1963 the relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan began to take a clear turn for the worse. As a counter-measure against Khartoum's subversive activity, Ethiopia began to support an insurgent group in the Southern Sudan named *Anya Nya* (later renamed the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM)), which strongly opposed Khartoum's excessive Arab and Muslim orientation and fought for the independence of Southern Sudan.<sup>67</sup> Consequently, in the 1960s the Sudanese and Ethiopian regimes destabilized each other by supporting insurgent groups with the others territory. As Shumet Sishagne noted: "Although the Sudanese and Ethiopian governments signed no less than three agreements between 1964 and 1966 to extradite each other's criminals and rebels, none of them were implemented."<sup>68</sup>

It is important to note that the ELF also used the Nile issue to play off the Sudan against Ethiopia. To mention some cases: on 16 November 1963, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Sudan asked the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs whether the latter had granted the Italian Agricultural Company B.I.A. an agricultural concession near or around Ali Ghidir, in Eritrea, irrigated from the Gash River, intending to extend its cultivable area. It expressed its concern that the act would undoubtedly threaten the interests of Sudanese farmers on the Sudanese side of the border. Khartoum emphasized that no concession or extension of cultivable land depending on Gash waters should be awarded on the Eritrean plateau without consultations with and agreement on the part of the Sudanese authorities. The Sudanese government therefore demanded to be assured whether the information was correct or

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<sup>65</sup>Shumet, 131–132.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>67</sup>Douglas H. Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2003), 36; Regassa Bayissa, "War and Peace in the Sudan and its Impact on Ethiopia: The Case of Gambella, 1955–2008" (PhD Diss., Addis Ababa University, 2010), 85.

<sup>68</sup>Shumet, 132.

groundless.<sup>69</sup> Based on the Sudanese request, the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested the Eritrean Governorate General to ascertain whether Ali Gidir had in fact been given to the Italian Company B.I.A. or not.<sup>70</sup>

Moreover, the Ethiopian Embassy in Khartoum reported that the Sudanese government suspected that the Ethiopian government had given an agricultural land concession to the Israelis in Western Eritrea, particularly near the Gash River.<sup>71</sup> In August 1964, one of the Sudanese newspapers published in Khartoum, *Al Ray El Am*, also reported Ethiopia's agricultural land concession to Israel.<sup>72</sup> The Sudanese government repeatedly continued to request information from the Ethiopian Government about the offering of Ali Gidir to a foreign company.<sup>73</sup> Undoubtedly, the Sudanese government requested the Ethiopian government based on information it had obtained from the ELF. Indeed, at another time in August, 1964, the ELF also circulated a pamphlet claiming that the Ethiopian government had sold agricultural land at Adi Ali Gidir, which had been owned by an Italian Agricultural Company B.I.A., to Israeli company.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, no concession had been made to any company through the Office of the Eritrean Governorate General.<sup>75</sup>

In the final analysis, by sponsoring the Eritrean insurrection and instigating a Somali invasion of Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan forced the imperial Ethiopian government not just to abandon some of its activities in the Abbay Basin within its territory but also to renounce its voice for the

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<sup>69</sup>The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Sudan to His Imperial Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 16 November 1963, No.MFA/SCR/2.E.3, in Folder No-3, File No-145/1 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive).

<sup>70</sup>Mengiste Desta, General Director, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to Ethiopian Imperial Government, Office of the Eritrean Governorate General, Asmara, *Hidar* 18, 1956 E.C., in Folder No-3, File No-145/1 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive).

<sup>71</sup>Birhanu Bahita, General Director, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to *Fitawrari* Tesfatsion Berihe, Deputy Governor, Governorate General of Eritrea, *Megabit* 12, 1956 E.C., in Folder No-3, File No-145/1 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive).

<sup>72</sup>Salih Hinit, Ethiopian Ambassador, Khartoum, to *L'eul Dejjazmach* Asrat Kassa, *Nehassie* 13, 1956 E.C., in Folder No-3, File No-145/1 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive).

<sup>73</sup>Salih Hinit, Ethiopian Ambassador, Khartoum, to *Ato* Ketema Yifru, State Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Yekatit* 4, 1956 E.C., in Folder No-3, File No-145/1 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive).

<sup>74</sup> A pamphlet attached to a letter from L/General Kebede Gebire, Chief of Staff, to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Meskerem* 19, 1957 E.C., in Folder No-3, File No-145/1 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive)

<sup>75</sup>Akale Work Habte Wold, Minister to the Eritrean Governorate General, Asmara, to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Tahissas* 6, 1956 E.C., in Folder No-3, File No-145/1 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive); *Fitawrari* Tesfatsion Berihe, Deputy Governor, to *Ato* Ketema Yifru, State Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Hamle* 4, 1956 E.C., in Folder No-3, File No-145/1 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive).

principle of equitable and fair utilization of the Nile waters. In the 1960s, the Imperial government's attempt at fostering a friendly relationship with Egypt and the Sudan now took precedence over Ethiopia's national water security interests and concerns. This was, in part, a result of Egypt's subversive activities against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country but it also reflected the nature of the 1960s policy of the aging Emperor who tended more and more to avoid or to ignore thorny issues such as the Nile, and instead to concentrate on external diplomatic affairs that yielded immediate reward and prestige. In the 1960s, the Pan-African movement played a key role in contributing to diplomatic initiatives and helping to improve the relations between Ethiopia and Egypt. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) helped Emperor Haile Selassie and President Nasser to form a lifelong friendship and somewhat reduced Egypt's hostility to Ethiopia.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, the foundation of the OAU and the subsequent apparent rapprochement between the two leaders did not completely stop Egypt's support for the Eritrean insurgents<sup>77</sup> Egypt temporarily stopped its support for the ELF and it moved its base to Syria.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore the rapprochement did not make the Nile issue a source of cooperation between Ethiopia and Egypt. But apparently the Imperial Ethiopian government, which had faced a real threat to its security, sidestepped the agenda of developing the Nile River fearing that the issue would make its relations with Egypt more complicated and internal security problems worse.

From 1963 onwards, therefore, as the Emperor ignored the Nile issue and Nasser seemed to revise to some extent his policy of subversion against the Ethiopian government.<sup>79</sup> Emperor Haile Selassie made trips to Cairo in 1963,<sup>80</sup> 1966,<sup>81</sup> and 1969.<sup>82</sup> As reports now available about the two leaders' discussion indicate, they never raised the Nile issue, rather they focused on other current issues such as: strengthening the OAU and relations among African states, the Arab-Israel conflict, and other international issues. Particularly, during the emperor's official visit to

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<sup>76</sup> Spencer, 308–309.

<sup>77</sup> Shumet, 131.

<sup>78</sup> Erlich, *Ethiopia and the Middle East*, 139.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*; Spencer, 309.

<sup>80</sup> *The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. IV, No.561, 5 November 1963; *The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. IV, No.562, 6 November 1963.

<sup>81</sup> *The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. VI, No.546, October 16, 1966; *The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. VI, No.547, 18 October 1966.

<sup>82</sup> *The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. VII, No.446, 17 June 1969.

Cairo in 1966,<sup>83</sup> the two leaders seemed to reach a consensus not to raise issues, like the Nile, which would be likely to create a rift in the relations between African states. Emperor Haile Selassie also maintained close personal relations with Nasser's successor, President Anwar Sadat. Reportedly, the Emperor was also said to have promised Sadat during the Tenth Annual Summit of the OAU in May 1973 that he would not construct any work on the Abbay River without prior agreement among the basin states.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, during the October 1973 Arab-Israel war, the Imperial Ethiopian government, which was being pressured by Sadat and Colonel Gaddafi who were threatening to move the headquarters of the OAU away from Addis Ababa,<sup>85</sup> made a decision to break off diplomatic relations with Israel.<sup>86</sup> Apparently, in view of the growing armed struggle in Eritrea and the boundary problem with Somalia, Addis Ababa broke off diplomatic relations with Israel to show the Arab world that it was neutral regarding their conflict with Israel. However, the action did not solve these problems that Ethiopia still faced and the Arabs, to Ethiopia's dismay, continued to support the Eritrean insurgents.

Similarly, the Imperial Government of Ethiopia, which had sidestepped the Nile issue, was able to smooth over its relations with the Sudan. Since the middle of the 1960s, ignoring the Nile issue, the resolution of the boundary question and the establishment of good neighborly issues began to appear on the agenda of the diplomatic relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan. Accordingly, in almost all their meetings held in 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1971, and 1972, the delegates of the two countries stressed their desire to collaborate in solving particularly the boundary problem and to stop hosting insurgents from each other's territory.<sup>87</sup> It seems that both Ethiopia and the Sudan increasingly tried to resolve the border issue, as part of their effort to suppress domestic conflict with the support of the other.

Colonel Ja'far Muhammad Nimeiri, who seized power in Sudan through a military coup d'état on 25 May 1969,<sup>88</sup> made a tangible effort to improve the diplomatic relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan. Nimeiri promised the Emperor that he would respect earlier agreements between

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<sup>83</sup>*The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. VI, No.547, 18 October 1966.

<sup>84</sup>Erlich, *Ethiopia and the Middle East*, 173.

<sup>85</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press and Information Department, "News", 3 May 1973.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup>Regassa, 88–100.

<sup>88</sup>Biong Kuol Deng, "Cooperation between Egypt and Sudan over the Nile River Waters: The Challenges of Duality", *African Sociological Review* (11, 1, 2007), 51.



the two countries concerning eliminating subversive activities, i.e. the Eritrean rebels.<sup>89</sup> In return, obviously, Nimeiri implored the Emperor to do something about the settlement of the conflict between Khartoum and the Southern Sudanese Liberation Movement (SSLM).<sup>90</sup> Indeed, Emperor Haile Selassie played a key role in arranging the Addis Ababa Peace negotiations between Khartoum and the SSLM secessionists in 1972,<sup>91</sup> to end the 17 years' of bloody civil war (1955–1972) in Sudan.

### **Hydropolitics of the Nile and the Eritrean Armed Struggle, 1974–1991**

The early 1970s saw a complete shift of Cold War realignments of the Sudan, Egypt, and Ethiopia that became a landmark in the history of the hydropolitics of the Nile. President Jaafar Nimeiri of the Sudan completely broke off Sudan's alliance with the Soviet Union and turned to the United States in 1972.<sup>92</sup> In 1973, President Anwar El Sadat reoriented Egypt from being a close ally of the Eastern Bloc (1952–1973) toward the Western bloc.<sup>93</sup> On the other hand, the *Derg*, the military junta that brought imperial rule to an end in 1974, eventually shifted Ethiopia's alignment from the Western bloc to the Eastern bloc. These 180 degree Cold War realignments would have a tremendous impact on the Nile and the Eritrean issues.

Following the 1974 Revolution, the new Ethiopian government named the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PAMC) or the *Derg* followed more or less Emperor Haile Selassie's pattern of foreign policy. Therefore, the new Ethiopian government decided to maintain smooth relations with the surrounding Arab countries in general, and Egypt and the Sudan, in particular. This became abundantly clear when Addis Ababa sent a high-level delegation to Khartoum and Cairo in October 1974. Although the main objective of Ethiopia's delegation was to request the governments of the Sudan and Egypt to cease supporting the Eritrean insurgents and to restrain their attacks against the new government of Ethiopia,<sup>94</sup> it also reportedly assured Cairo and

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<sup>89</sup>*The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. IX, No. 254, 2 November 1971.

<sup>90</sup>*The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. IX, No. 305, 31 December 1971.

<sup>91</sup>*The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. XXIX, No. 354, 29 February 1972; *The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. XXIX, No. 378, 28 March 1972.

<sup>92</sup>Johnson, 36.

<sup>93</sup> Paul B. Henze, *Flexible Opportunism: Three Essays Examining Soviet Strategy as Applied to Egypt, the Nile Valley and the Horn of Africa* (Kansasville: Published by Foreign Area Research, Inc., 1986), 30–31.

<sup>94</sup>*The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. XXX, No. 1165, 24 October 1974; *The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. XXX, No. 1166, 25 October 1974; *The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. XXX, No. 1167, 26 October 1974.

Khartoum of the readiness of the new Ethiopian government to settle the Nile question peacefully.<sup>95</sup>

Nevertheless, in February 1975, the *Derg* launched a determined military offensive against the Arab-backed Eritrean secessionists, who held almost all of Eritrea and were besieging the city of Asmara.<sup>96</sup> During this period of transition, the *Derg* launched a continuous rhetorical propaganda campaign against Arab schemes for a holy war (*jihad*) aimed at destroying the Ethiopian state.<sup>97</sup> The *Derg* considered most Arab countries as reactionary and the pawns of imperialism as well as “historic enemies”. Therefore, the relations between Ethiopia, on the one hand, and Egypt and the Sudan, on the other, deteriorated. In 1976, the Ethiopian ambassador in Khartoum, Yilma Taddassa, explained the reason behind the *Derg*’s massive propaganda campaign against some Arab countries as follows: “Since these Arab countries keep on their threat to Ethiopia’s national security, rather than showing goodwill and understanding the Ethiopian government, as any government in a similar situation is obliged to do, first, preferred to make its people aware of external enemy plots against their unity.”<sup>98</sup> Undoubtedly, the fact that the two downstream countries of the Nile continued to threaten peace and stability in Ethiopia by providing the armed struggle in Eritrea with moral and material support was the motivation for the *Derg*’s propaganda rhetoric. As will become evident later, particularly President Anwar Sadat of Egypt and President Jaffar Nimeiri of the Sudan were regarded by the *Derg* as masterminding a new *jihad* against Ethiopia.

Indeed, in 1976, President Nimeiri’s policies moved away from neutrality to open hostility against the *Derg*.<sup>99</sup> It should be noted that Sudan’s foreign policy towards Ethiopia after the Revolution of 1974 had at first been characterized by vacillation and a lack of clarity. The Sudan had been forced to act as moderator between the Military government and the Eritrean insurgents

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<sup>95</sup>Yilma Taddesse, ambassador of Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopian, in Khartoum, to Ato Kifle Wodajo, Minister of Foreign Affairs, *Miazya* 7, 1968 E.C. folder no-3, file no-638. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive).

<sup>96</sup> Colin Legum and Bill Lee, *Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, (London: Rex Collings Ltd., 1977), 17.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>98</sup>Yilma Taddesse, ambassador of Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopian, in Khartoum, to Ato Kifle Wodajo, Minister of Foreign Affairs, *Miazya* 7, 1968 E.C. folder no-3, file no-638 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive).

<sup>99</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, “Press Release”, Addis Ababa, 1 February 1977.

from 1974 to 1976. That was why, at the beginning of 1977, the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs denounced Nimeiri as a leader “. . . lacking in good faith and indeed subverting the peace efforts of the Provisional Military Government while posing to the world as a mediator”.<sup>100</sup> As a result, the Ethio-Sudanese relationship became downgraded to low-level diplomacy in 1976. In that same year, the Ethiopian Foreign Minister was said to have explicitly warned the Sudanese Minister for Information, Mading de Garang, during his state visit in Addis Ababa, that unless Khartoum refrained from providing the Eritrean rebels with logistical support, as a counter-measure the Ethiopian government would be obliged to support the anti-Sudanese government forces that had rejected the Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972.<sup>101</sup>

For its part, in February 1976, Khartoum accused Addis Ababa of frequent acts of aggression by the Ethiopian air force, which it claimed had violated its airspace.<sup>102</sup> On 1 March 1976 the Ethiopian government acknowledged that there had been a few violations of Sudanese airspace by Ethiopian planes, though these had not been deliberate, and expressed its commitment to maintaining peaceful relations with Sudan.<sup>103</sup> On 29 May 1976, a leading member of the *Derg*, Major Birihanu Bayah, chairman of the Legal Affairs Committee of the PMAC, paid a three-day state visit to Khartoum to request Nimeiri’s assistance as mediator in the war in Eritrea.<sup>104</sup> However, Ethiopia’s initiative for peaceful neighborly relations quickly collapsed when some Sudanese officers, led by former Prime Minister Said Saddiq al-Mahdi, mounted an abortive coup against Nimeiri in July 1976 and Nimeiri subsequently claimed Ethiopian involvement in the plot.<sup>105</sup> After the July coup attempt, the rift between the Sudan and Ethiopia visibly widened.

Following the July 1976 coup attempt in Khartoum, President Sadat and President Nimeiri signed the mutual defense agreement known as the “Charter of Integration”.<sup>106</sup> In their joint

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<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup>Johnson, 59.

<sup>102</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, “Press Release”, Addis Ababa, 1 March 1976.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup>*The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 124, 30 May 1976; *The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 126, 2 June 1976.

<sup>105</sup>Legum and Lee, 67.

<sup>106</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, “Press Release”, Statement by Comrade Lt. Colonel Mengistu Haile-Mariam, Chairman of the Provisional Military Administrative Council of Socialist Ethiopia to the Fourteenth Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Union, Libreville, Gabon, 2–5 July, 1977.

statement, the two leaders declared that: “there are links between the security of the two countries in view of geographical and historical factors and the vital role played by the Nile valley . . .”<sup>107</sup> Mengistu, who denounced the agreement as an “unholy alliance” in his address to the nation, said that: “It has been clear . . . as to why this mutual defense agreement was signed and against whom it was directed.”<sup>108</sup> Mengistu also accused the Sudanese and Egyptian troops concentrated along the Ethio-Sudanese boundary of being there to reinforce the Eritrean insurgents with heavy artillery and tanks.<sup>109</sup>

Under the “Charter of Integration”, which was underwritten by an Egyptian guarantee of military support, Nimeiri began to denounce publicly the regime in Addis Ababa.<sup>110</sup> In January 1976, the two countries cut diplomatic ties and Addis Ababa and Khartoum recalled their ambassadors.<sup>111</sup> As a result, with Egypt openly supporting Sudan, the general deterioration in relations between Addis Ababa and Khartoum of 1976 reached the brink of war in January 1977. President Sadat, who called the Egyptian–Sudanese joint assembly in Cairo in 1977 the “Unified Congress of the Nile Valley”, stated at this congress that Egypt would openly defend Sudan against possible Ethiopian aggression.<sup>112</sup> In the middle of the 1970s and the early 1980s, Khartoum’s support for the Eritrean secessionists and other anti-*Derg* forces<sup>113</sup> was paralleled by the *Derg*’s support for the Southern Sudanese guerrillas known as *Anyannya-2*.

The *Derg* also claimed Ethiopia’s right to the waters of the Nile. It declared its hydropolitical position in March 1977 at the UN Conference on Water held at Mar del Plata, Argentina. The Ethiopian delegation to the conference stated that Ethiopia declared its readiness to negotiate an accord on the use of the Nile waters resources with the co-basin states; but if such an agreement

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<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Yacob Arsano, *Ethiopia and the Nile: Dilemmas of National and Regional Hydropolitics* (PhD Diss., University of Zurich, 2007), 91.

<sup>108</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, “Press Release”, Address to the Nation by Lt. Colonel Mengistu Haile-Mariam, Chairman of the Provisional Military Administrative Council of Socialist Ethiopia on Sudanese Regime’s Aggression against Ethiopia, 12 April 1977.

<sup>109</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, . . . 12 April 1977.

<sup>110</sup> *The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 302, 29 December 1976; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, “Press Release”, Colonel Dr. Feleke Gedle-Ghiorgies, Minister of Foreign Affairs handed to Mr. Eteki Mboumoua, Head of the Organization of African Unity, a Memorandum on Sudan’s Act of Aggression, 11 April 1977.

<sup>111</sup> Legum and Lee, 67.

<sup>112</sup> Yacob, 91.

<sup>113</sup> Johnson, 87.

could not be worked out, Ethiopia declared that it had the right to develop the Nile within its territory without consulting Egypt and the Sudan.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, in 1977 Ethiopia announced that over the short term as many as 90,000 hectares in the Blue Nile Basin and 70,000 in the Baro-Akobo Basin would be brought under irrigation.<sup>115</sup> However, it seems that Ethiopia's announcement of projected irrigable hectares of land in 1977 was more likely political rhetoric than national water-sector development plans supported by facts on the ground.

The change of ideology and alignment in Ethiopia strongly influenced Cairo's views on the Horn of Africa and, as a result, it forced the Egyptian leaders to pay more attention to developments in the country containing the source of the Nile. Naturally enough, Egypt was greatly worried about an increasing friendship between Ethiopia and the Soviet Union. It was equally concerned about the sources of its lifeblood, the Nile River, falling into the hands of the Soviets, who had been expelled from Egypt less than two years after the Aswan High Dam had been completed.<sup>116</sup> One should not discard the possibility that the Soviets might use the Nile card to threaten Egypt's leaders. Egypt, therefore, took an aggressive political stand and tried to topple the military regime in Ethiopia. Egypt played a major role in Ethiopia's politics from outside by arming, funding and providing logistics to anti-*Derg* forces – mainly the Eritrean insurgents and the invading Somali army. Nonetheless, although the Ethiopian leadership was reportedly in an optimistic mood concerning Soviet interest in the Nile and the hope of obtaining financial and technical assistance to harness the river, for a reason which is not known, nothing came out of the Ethiopian–Soviet alliance with regard to the Nile waters development projects.<sup>117</sup> As a result, the Soviets did not make Ethiopia a showcase for other African countries by harnessing the Nile River and hence boosting its economy rather than by flooding it with armaments.

The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), which had split from the ELF in 1970 emerged as the dominant rebel force as early as 1977, continued to receive moral and material support from Egypt, the Sudan, and other Arab countries. On 29 January 1977, Brigadier General Teferi

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<sup>114</sup>Izadin Ali, Minister of Mineral, Energy and Water Resources, to *Ato* Haylu Yimenu, *teqedami* Minister, Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopian, Office of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, *Hamle*7, 1970 E.C. folder no-1, file no-3-14/2 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive)

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup>Henze, 86.

<sup>117</sup>Erlich, *The Cross and the River*, 169.

Bante, chairman of the Provisional Military Administrative Council, in a long speech, denounced the Sudan for harboring insurgents fighting against the territorial integrity of Ethiopia. He further said that the “cloud of danger [was] hovering over the skies” of Ethiopia, masterminded by the United States and some reactionary Arab countries in the region.<sup>118</sup> After Colonel Mengistu Haile-Mariam had emerged at the top of the PMAC leadership in February 1977,<sup>119</sup> in his sensational speeches to the people of Ethiopia, he began to give disproportionate emphasis to allegations of “a big plot” against the Ethiopian state engineered by imperialism and reactionary Arab countries. On 1 March 1977, the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs commented on certain statements emanating from Khartoum on the occasion of the meeting of the three leaders of Egypt, Sudan and Syria, who were said to have worked to turn the Red Sea into an “Arab Lake”.<sup>120</sup>

On 19 March 1977 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs went further. It criticized Egypt and the Sudan as historic enemies of the Ethiopian people, using strong words: “. . . the reactionary Arab countries have now embarked on a make-belief [*sic*] course of action guided by no higher principle other than their venomous hatred for the Ethiopian people.”<sup>121</sup> The press release, citing the government-owned newspapers of Cairo –*Egyptian Daily* and *Al Akbar* – stated that two Egyptian parliamentarians and Central Committee members of the ruling party, Mohammed Redwan and Fetih Alkilani were visiting “liberated areas” of the Eritrean armed insurgents.<sup>122</sup>

In April 1977 the Ethiopian government, in its memorandum to the OAU, strongly denounced Sudan’s acts of aggression. The memorandum stated that Nimeiri’s government was continuing to provide dissident elements operating against the Ethiopian government with morale and arms support as well as training facilities and sanctuary.<sup>123</sup> At that time, besides the Eritrean

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<sup>118</sup>*The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 326, 30 January 1977.

<sup>119</sup>Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, Second ed., 2002), 253.

<sup>120</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, “Press Release”, Addis Ababa, 1 March 1977.

<sup>121</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, “Press Release”, Addis Ababa, 19 March 1977.

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, “Press Release”, Colonel Dr. Feleke Gedle-Ghiorgies, Minister of Foreign Affairs handed to Mr. Eteki Mboumoua, Head of the Organization of African Unity, a Memorandum on Sudan’s Act of Aggression, 11 April 1977.

dissidents, Khartoum had already begun to provide the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU) with military bases and propaganda facilities through Radio Omdurman.<sup>124</sup> Mengistu also accused Sudanese and Egyptian troops concentrated along the Ethio-Sudanese boundary of being there to reinforce the Eritrean insurgents and the Ethiopian Democratic Union fighters with heavy artillery and tanks.<sup>125</sup> According to one source, during the second half of 1977, Cairo dispatched more than 10,000 Egyptian troops to the Ethio-Sudanese border, particularly in the province of Kassala, with the aim of providing the Eritrean insurgents with rearguard support. Some of the Egyptian tanks as well as technicians were also later said to have fought inside Eritrea on the side of the insurgents against Ethiopian forces.<sup>126</sup>

After Ethiopia had gained its victory over the Somali forces in 1978, its army with its morale launched a counter-offensive against the Eritrean guerrillas and won back, for a time, most of the province of Eritrea. The new assertiveness of the Military government after the Ogaden War further indicated to Egypt that the Ethiopians wanted to turn to economic development using the Nile waters. Indeed, Egypt's suspicions were later shown to be well founded by the Military government's proclamation of the "National Revolutionary Development Campaign" in October 1978. The rationale behind the proclamation was stated as follows: "Whereas, the broad masses, having through great determination vanquished their external and internal enemies that had challenged their Revolution and unity, have declared . . . their readiness to carry out a revolutionary campaign in the field of development."<sup>127</sup> The Military government's "Green" *Zamacha* (campaign) was supposed to be realized by using the Abbay and other rivers for irrigation.<sup>128</sup> In practical terms, at that time the Military government had also already completed the establishment of the Valley Development Authority with the aim of planning the use of water resources within Ethiopian territory as well as empowering the Ministry of Agriculture to

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<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, "Press Release", Address to the Nation by Lt. Colonel Mengistu Haile-Mariam, Chairman of the Provisional Military Administrative Council of Socialist Ethiopia on Sudanese Regime's Aggression against Ethiopia, 12 April 1977.

<sup>126</sup>*The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 750, 16 February 1978.

<sup>127</sup>*Negarit Gazeta*, 38<sup>th</sup> Year. No. 4, Proclamation No. 156, Addis Ababa, 29 October, 1978.

<sup>128</sup>Izadin Ali, Minister of Mineral, Energy and Water Resources, to Ato Haylu Yimenu, *teqdami* Minister, Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopian, Office of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, *Hamle7*, 1970 E.C. folder no-1, file no-3-14/2 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive).

commence some irrigation projects.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, it was also reported that in 1978 the Ethiopian government had ordered its engineers and economists to carry out irrigation feasibility studies in the Lake Tana area.<sup>130</sup> Above all, at that time, it was said that Ethiopia needed 21.4 billion cubic meters a year to meet its increasing agricultural development activities and this had to be recognized by other states.<sup>131</sup>

It seemed that Egypt, which kept a watch on the sources of the Nile, was alarmed by the aforementioned developments in Ethiopia. In May 1978, the Egyptian Irrigation Minister, Abdel Azim Abul Ata, told the Egyptian weekly newspaper, *Akhabar El-Yom*, that his government: “Will not allow the exploitation of the Nile waters”<sup>132</sup> by Ethiopia. Moreover, the minister was also said to have called for Arab countries, such as Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, and Kuwait, to support Egypt in backing the Eritrean insurgents against the Ethiopian government,<sup>133</sup> which had planned to build dams around the source of the Nile. The newspaper also publicly characterized Ethiopia’s studies around the source of the Nile as a danger to Egypt and the Sudan. It also announced that Ethiopia’s move was being prudently studied by the two downstream states.<sup>134</sup>

After Cairo’s repeated threats that it would go to war with Ethiopia if the latter dared to decrease the flow of the Nile waters, the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a press release issued on 10 December 1978, once again expressed its grave concern about the statements of the Egyptian leaders. According to the ministry, the press release entitled “Egyptian War Cries Denounced” was issued in response to an address to the National Security and Mobilization Committee of the People’s Assembly of Egypt made by Egypt’s Defense Minister, Lt. General Kamal Hassan Ali. This was later given wide coverage by Egyptian newspapers. The Defense Minister was said to have stated that as part of “Egypt’s security and strategy” his government was helping the Eritrean struggle for independence. Moreover, he reportedly said that Egypt’s

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<sup>129</sup> Rowan Mactaggart, “River Basin Planning and Management in Ethiopia” in Ministry of Water Resources Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, *The Vth Nile 2002 Conference, Proceedings* (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 24–28 February 1997), 645.

<sup>130</sup> Daniel, 157.

<sup>131</sup> Izadin Ali, Minister of Mineral, Energy and Water Resources, to Ato Haylu Yimenu, *teqdami* Minister, Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopian, Office of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, *Hamle7*, 1970 E.C. folder no-1, file no-3-14/2 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive).

<sup>132</sup> *The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 822, 14 May 1978

<sup>133</sup> Daniel, 158.

<sup>134</sup> *The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 822, 14 May 1978



armed forces should be strengthened to encounter the serious situation in the region masterminded by the Soviet Union.<sup>135</sup>

The assassination of President Sadat on 6 October 1981 marked the beginning of the reduction of tension and confrontation between Egypt and Ethiopia. Sadat's successor, Hosni Mubarak, was quick to normalize the relationship between Egypt and Ethiopia. Indeed, Mubarak's attempt to correct Egypt's policy towards Ethiopia was later proved to be a foreign policy operation designed to pursue short-term tactical, not long-term strategic, gain regarding the Nile water question and the Eritrean issue.<sup>136</sup> Although Egypt and Ethiopia were not able to ameliorate the mutual deep-rooted suspicion and pretense between them, the overt hostility between the two countries was shelved after Sadat's assassination.

Under President Mubarak, Cairo proposed different forms of peaceful cooperation to safeguard its interests in the Nile waters.<sup>137</sup> In 1983, Egypt was the prime mover behind the establishment of the UNDUGU (a Swahili word for "brotherhood").<sup>138</sup> The apparent rapprochement between Egypt and Ethiopia culminated in the visit of Mubarak to Addis Ababa in July 1985.<sup>139</sup> Reportedly, Mubarak and Mengistu expressed their willingness to cooperate in many fields, including the Nile waters issue.<sup>140</sup> Mengistu, who was in a relatively stronger position internally than at any previous time in his 17-year rule, was said to have told Mubarak that Ethiopia's intention was not to harm Egypt but to exercise its right over the use of the Nile waters under international law.<sup>141</sup> However, in mid-1983 Nimeiri and Mengistu, who had not genuinely removed the causes of their confrontation, once again resorted to reciprocal mistrust and accusation, and so Ethio-Sudanese relations soured again after the rapprochement of 1980. From the time of the young SPLA's formation in 1983, Mengistu committed himself to delivering a

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<sup>135</sup> *The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. XXXV, No. 75, 10 December 1978.

<sup>136</sup> "Memo on Ethiopia- Egypt and Abbay" (Amharic) (no author name) *Megabit*, 1980 E.C, found in folder no-4, file no-12/3-14/2 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive).

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> Greg Shapland, *Rivers of Discord: International Water Disputes in the Middle East* (London: Hurst & Company, 1997), 76.

<sup>139</sup> *The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. XL, No. 258, 20 July 1985.

<sup>140</sup> "Memo on Ethiopia- Egypt and Abbay" (Amharic) (no author name) *Megabit*, 1980 E.C, found in folder no-4, file no-12/3-14/2 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive).

<sup>141</sup> Erlich, *The Cross and the River*, 170.

large supply of armaments as well as training facilities and a radio station to it.<sup>142</sup> On the other hand, the Sudan supported Ethiopia's opposition forces, mainly the Eritrean insurgents.<sup>143</sup>

It is noteworthy that in February 1987, with Sudanese–Egyptian relations having improved since 1985, the Sudanese Prime Minister, Sadiq al-Mahdi (1986–89) paid a state visit to Cairo to sign the “Fraternity Charter”, which replaced the “Integration Charter” of 1982, to enable bilateral cooperation between the two countries in various fields, such as politics, military matters and trade. At that time, in a public speech, the Sudanese Prime Minister reportedly said that Ethiopia took 90 percent responsibility for the South Sudan problem. On the other hand, Mubarak did not say anything about Ethiopia. Egypt's intention was evaluated by the diplomatic community as the Ethiopian ambassador in Egypt reported: “On the occasion, Egypt's reserve from speeches that touched Ethiopia clearly showed the vigilant policy of President Mubarak's government on Ethiopia as it was widely told around diplomatic circles.”<sup>144</sup>

Mengistu's first visit to Cairo from 9 to 12 April 1987 set the stage for a renewed rapprochement between the two countries.<sup>145</sup> At that time, facing Soviet reluctance to supply arms, Mengistu, who had declined Mubarak's repeated invitations, now sought rapprochement with Egypt, putting aside ideological constraints.<sup>146</sup> Secretary-General Mikhail Gorbachev (1985–1991) was said to have bluntly told Mengistu that the Soviet Union would close the pipeline for military assistance to Ethiopia and advised him to look for a political solution to the ongoing civil war in the north.<sup>147</sup> At that time, Mengistu seemed to hope that fostering friendly relations with Mubarak might serve as a deterrent to more open support from Cairo for his opponents, especially those in the north. In Cairo, Mengistu, who laid a wreath of flowers at the tomb of President Anwar

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<sup>142</sup> Wendy James, *War and Survival in Sudan's Frontier Lands: Voices from the Blue Nile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 29.

<sup>143</sup> Johnson, 88.

<sup>144</sup> Zemene Kasagn, Ambassador, Ethiopian Embassy in Cairo, to Minister of Foreign Affairs, *Yekatit* 26, 1979 E.C., found in folder no-3, file no-9/3-14/2 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive).

<sup>145</sup> Zemene Kasagn, Ambassador, Ethiopian Embassy in Cairo, to Minister of Foreign Affairs, *Tikimit* 17, 1981 E.C., found in folder no-12, file no-44/1-6/15 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive).

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*; *The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. XLIII, No. 171, 8 April 1987; *The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. XLIII, No. 173, 10 April 1987.

<sup>147</sup> Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 256.

Sadat, stressed the Nile as the most important factor in promoting bilateral relations between Egypt and Ethiopia.<sup>148</sup>

In April 1987 the two heads of state issued a joint official communiqué ending hostilities and resuming normal diplomatic relations between their countries. Indeed, President Mubarak, who openly declared that he would not interfere in the internal affairs of Ethiopia, reportedly closed military training camps and offices of anti-Ethiopian government forces that had been opened by Sadat. Moreover, he was also said to have prohibited these forces from hoisting their flags and displaying their logos as well as their other open anti-Ethiopian government activities in Egypt.<sup>149</sup> Mengistu and Mubarak also reaffirmed the strong political will of the two governments and the two peoples to enhance bilateral relations in the fields of economy, trade, science and technology, and culture.<sup>150</sup> During his talks with Mubarak, Mengistu had acknowledged Egypt's strategic interests in the Nile waters and promised not to use the river in a way that affected Egypt.<sup>151</sup>

In 1988, Addis Ababa also sent a delegation to Khartoum and Cairo led by Prime Minister Fikre Selassie Wogideres. The Ethiopian Prime Minister and Egypt's Prime Minister Dr. Atef Sedki spoke of bolstering cooperation between the two countries in different fields.<sup>152</sup> Moreover, during his stay in Cairo, Fikre Selassie asked President Mubarak to help Ethiopia find a solution to the Eritrean problem. Egypt in return asked the Prime Minister for Ethiopia's cooperation in the Nile waters matter.<sup>153</sup> Moreover, as the Prime Minister informed *The Egyptian Gazette*, at that time there was an Ethiopian team in Cairo specifically discussing the Nile waters issue with the Egyptian authorities.<sup>154</sup> But in August 1989 the Saudi Arabian newspaper, *Arab News*, is said to have openly reported the strong connection between Egypt and the EPLF and that President

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<sup>148</sup>*The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. XLIII, No. 174, 11 April 1987.

<sup>149</sup>Zemene Kasagn, Ambassador, Ethiopian Embassy in Cairo, to Minister of Foreign Affairs, *Tikimit* 17, 1981 E.C., found in folder no-12, file no-44/1-6/15 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive).

<sup>150</sup> "Memo on Ethiopia- Egypt and Abbay" (Amharic) (no author name) *Megabit*, 1980 E.C., found in folder no-4, file no-12/3-14/2 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive); *The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. XLIII, No. 175, 14 April 1987.

<sup>151</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup>*Al Ahram*, 113 year, No. 37265, 18 December 1988, Press Extract found in in folder no-1, file no-3/1.6/17 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive).

<sup>153</sup>Zemene Kasagn, Ambassador, Ethiopian Embassy in Cairo, to Minister of Foreign Affairs, *Tikimit* 17, 1981 E.C., found in folder no-11, file no-43/1-6/15 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive).

<sup>154</sup>*The Egyptian Gazette*, 109<sup>th</sup> Year, No. 33,640, 21 December 1988, Press Extract found in in folder no-1, file no-3/1.6/17 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive).

Mubarak and Isaias Afwerki were in consultations in Cairo about Eritrea's future since the Ethiopian army was suffering defeat and evacuating the region.<sup>155</sup>

Finally, the defeat of the Military government by the EPLF and a coalition of Ethiopian rebel groups paved the way for Eritrea's *de facto* independence in May 1991. Two years later, in 1993, Eritrea conducted its controversial referendum to provide legitimacy for its establishment as Africa's 52<sup>nd</sup> independent state. Indeed, Ethiopia played the SPLA card to neutralize the support of Egypt and the Sudan to Eritrean insurgents. These reciprocal destabilization policies of Khartoum and Addis Ababa eventually led to the partition of Sudan, and the evolution of South Sudan as independent state in 2011.

### **Conclusion**

The inception and consolidation of the Eritrean armed struggle was closely and inextricably linked to the hydropolitics of the Nile. It is evident, therefore, that any analysis of the Eritrean armed struggle for secession must be coupled with an evaluation on the hydropolitics of the Nile between Ethiopia and Egypt and the Sudan, in order to understand the entire security situation in the Horn of Africa. Egypt, which considered the Eritrean insurgents to be a potential instrument of its Nile card and the way out of its perceived security threat from Ethiopia, officially served as the midwife in the birth of the ELF. The Nile waters issue was the major factor that led Egypt and Sudan to support the Eritrean armed struggle, which in turn served to magnify Ethiopia's internal conflicts out of all proportion. The Eritrean question was one of the earliest security challenges to contemporary Ethiopia, which became one of the greatest driving forces behind other internal political challenges and conflicts in Ethiopia. In a nutshell, although political and ethnic considerations always represent the focal point of protracted civil wars in the Ethiopian region, the root causes, the dynamics and the complete picture of the conflicts in the Horn of Africa cannot be fully understood without a rigorous analysis of the hydropolitics of the Nile and the involvement of Arab countries.

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<sup>155</sup>Habtom Zerai Ghirmai, "The Contested Legitimacy of Eritrean Statehood: The Effects of Arab Intervention, (1941–1993)" (MA Thesis, the University of Witwatersrand, 2003), 92.

Egypt and the Sudan contributed to a protracted civil wars lasted for three decades, which had calamitous consequences for the Ethiopian Empire and the successive regime (1961–1991). The wars took the lives of hundreds of thousands of people and destroyed millions of dollars' worth of property. Ethiopia was obliged to spend substantial resources, which could have been used instead to harness the waters of the Nile for development purposes, on persistent inter- and intra-state warfare waged in a sabotage operation to undermine its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Nevertheless, although the protracted Eritrean armed struggle and its ensuing internal troubles in the horn of Africa undermined Ethiopia's ability to develop the Nile waters resource, Ethiopia has never undertaken its plan to develop the Nile waters within its territorial jurisdiction. Indeed, Ethiopia, the second most populous country in Africa, has to use its fair share of the Nile waters, without affecting Egypt and the Sudan, not just to meet water needs for energy sources and to achieve food self-sufficiency for its present population but also to meet the rising demands of its rapidly growing population. All this must be achieved without adversely affecting the water security of Egypt and Sudan. Egyptian strategists and foreign policy-makers in particular should therefore realize that proxy wars cannot completely prevent Ethiopia from using its water resources.

Ethiopia has now come to assert its legitimate right to use its fair share of the waters of the Nile through the construction of dams for hydroelectric power generation. Perhaps, therefore, the possibility of Egypt's giving recognition to the reality of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam being completed in the years ahead could serve as a *causa sine quanon* for the opening of a new chapter of genuine cooperation over the Nile waters between Egypt and Ethiopia. And perhaps this is also cause for hope for lasting peace in the Horn of Africa as a *quid pro quo*. There is no viable alternative to cooperation between Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia, the principal riparian states of the Nile, based on internationally accepted principles and commitment to a win-win solution. In the final analysis, meaningful and effective basin-wide cooperation for the development and use of the Nile waters resources is likely to be a more strategic choice that fosters regional cooperation and economic integration and brings enduring peace and stability to the volatile region of the Horn of Africa.

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