

The Nile River Basin Initiative: too many cooks,
too little broth.

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Abstract

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Hydropolitics in the Nile River Basin have been dominated by Egypt, which has developed its water-related infrastructure unilaterally. As a result of Egypt's policies, relations with both Ethiopia and Sudan have deteriorated over time, increasing the potential for contentious issues to escalate into conflict. Recent population and agricultural trends have only further exacerbated already tense relations. The challenge lies in cooperation. Basinwide initiatives have been attempted, but, until recently, have largely failed. The most recent Nile Basin Initiative holds the strongest potential for establishing a basinwide framework for cooperation. Nevertheless, a subbasin model would be more appropriate and effective because it would diffuse existing tensions first without jeopardizing basinwide cooperation prematurely.

In the last decade, a number of analysts have argued that the increasing scarcity of water, along with the unequal distribution of this resource among multiple parties, may pave the way for a greater number of water conflicts. According to Thomas Homer-Dixon, whose work has galvanized research into environmentally induced conflict in recent years, "conflict is most probable when a downstream riparian—a river-bordering state—is highly dependent on river water and is strong in comparison to upstream riparians."¹ On the basis of this argument, Homer-Dixon concludes that the Nile River is one of the few international rivers that has the potential to provoke armed conflict between its riparian nations—the ten countries that share the river basin.² Furthermore,

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The Nile River Basin Initiative: too many cooks, too little broth, opera-buff, anyway, is free. Egypt and the hydro-politics of the Blue Nile River, when men in demon costumes run out of the temple with noise and mingle with the crowd, the catharsis is a consequence. When the Nile runs dry, a paradigm is possible.

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