

# Water Scarcity as a Non-traditional Threat to Security in the Middle East

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**Mustapha Kamel El-Sayed**  
**Rasha Soheil Mansour**

## Abstract

The article aims to explore the securitisation of water in the Nile basin. As in the wider Middle East, the securitisation of water occurred in the context of larger political grievances, inherited from colonial times. The trigger in all cases has been water scarcity. The securitising actors in all cases were decision-makers; in the case of the Tigris–Euphrates basin, NGOs and human rights activists have also emerged as securitising actors. The target audiences in all cases included the national public and international public opinion, as well as decision-makers in donor countries, especially in the case of the Tigris–Euphrates and Nile basins. Several securitisation mechanisms have been used simultaneously in all cases; in the case of the West Bank Aquifer, for example, resource capture (structural securitisation) went hand in hand with joint water management committees (institutional securitisation). In all cases, language played a crucial role in the securitisation of water resources, especially in the cases of Egypt and Israel, where the symbolic value of water and land are closely tied with religious traditions inherited from ancient times.

## Keywords

Middle East, Egypt, water resources, security, Nile, River Jordan

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**Corresponding author:**  
Mustapha Kamel El-Sayed.  
E-mail: [smostafa@feps.edu.eg](mailto:smostafa@feps.edu.eg)

## Introduction

In the post-Cold War period, the traditional security paradigm—with its focus on military threats, territorial integrity and state sovereignty—was challenged in two important ways: theoretically, through the contributions of a group of scholars including Mahbub ul-Haq and Amartya Sen, and institutionally, through the efforts of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Canadian government. These efforts led to the elaboration of a broader conceptualisation of security.

*Human Development Report 1994* published by the UNDP was the first international document to explicitly articulate the concept of ‘human security’. Closely associated with this idea from the beginning was Mahbub ul-Haq, former Pakistani finance minister and consultant of UNDP. His paper *New Imperatives of Human Security* published in 1994 provided the theoretical basis for human security and paved the way for its global acceptance. According to Haq, human security underlines security of individuals and not nation-states. He argues that

the world is entering a new era of human security in which the entire concept of security will change and change dramatically. In this new conception security will be equated with the security of individuals, not just security of their nations or, to put it differently, security of people, not just security of territory. (Haq, 1994, p. 1)

Before that, in 1991, a paper titled *Common Responsibility in the 1990s* was published by the Stockholm Initiative on Global Security and Governance. This identified common non-military threats to security, which among others included environmental degradation and water scarcity (Bajpai, 2000). The effect of water scarcity on human and State security has been widely researched and documented. The *Human Development Report 2006* provides a detailed account of the impact of water scarcity on communities’ survival and development. The report sheds light on how water scarcity exacerbates income and time poverty, gender inequality and income inequality, as well as its negative effect on child mortality rates and human health in general.

Some scholars have gone so far as to argue that water scarcity has become a threat to development (Ohlsson, 1995, p. 4). Others claim that water scarcity has become the ‘ultimate’ challenge to development, health, prosperity and even national security (Cooley, 1984; Falkenmark, 1990; Myers, 1993).

In the 1980s, Thomas Naff and Ruth Matson, while examining the role played by water in riparian state relations in the Middle East, asserted that ‘water runs both on and under the surface of politics’ (Naff & Matson, 1984, p. 181). Building on this argument, a number of important studies published in the following decade seemed to establish a causal link between water and security (Bullock & Darwish, 1993; Soffer, 1999; Starr & Stoll, 1988). This viewpoint was not confined to academic circles, but was also advocated by prominent political figures. In March 2001, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan declared: ‘if we are not careful, future wars are going to be about water and not about oil.’<sup>1</sup> Long before that, late

Egyptian President Anwar Sadat famously stated that ‘the only matter that could take Egypt to war again is water.’

Drawing on some of the above insights, and in light of the new developments in the Nile Basin and the Egyptian government’s response to them, this article will argue that under the rubric of securitisation, a new hydraulic strategy is now needed in Egypt.

## The Securitisation Theory and Water Security

In the early 1990s, the field of security studies witnessed the rise of what later came to be known as the Copenhagen School. The main proposition of the Copenhagen School is that security is not an ‘objective condition’ but the product of a ‘specific social process’. In other words, treating an issue, ‘referent’, as a security issue is a matter of political choice (Weaver, 2011, p. 251). This choice becomes actualised through ‘speech acts’—‘securitisation move’. However, for an issue to become securitised, it is not enough to be designated as such by a single individual. Securitisation is ‘essentially inter-subjective process’ (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998, p. 30). It is the continuous negotiations between ‘securitising actor’, who puts the issue on the agenda, and the audience, who has a choice to accept or reject a given agenda. It is not possible to impose securitisation. The consent of the audience is essential in justifying the resort to extraordinary measures, which include a violation of the rules of normal politics in order to counteract the threat. In this sense, ‘security... rests neither with objects nor with subjects but among the subjects’ (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 31).

Building on and refining the assumptions of the Copenhagen School, recent researches have broadened the conditions under which securitisation could occur, thereby providing more in-depth analysis of how environmental security is socially constructed (Davidsen, 2010; Warner, 2011; Zeitoun, 2007). Authors of this school examined not only the physical threat to and from the environment but also imagined threats based on socially constructed understandings of the environment. Environmental security includes questions of ‘who securitises what and how’ via an examination of narratives and discourses.

Obviously, the natural resource that is most likely to become securitised is trans-boundary water. According to Fischhendler (2015), there are two types of security: ‘strategic security’, associated with the hydrology of an international river basin that links all the riparian states in a complex network of environmental, economic and political interdependencies. In cases such as these, water is often elevated to a ‘national security’ status—a matter of life and death; the Nile water negotiations are a case in point. Fischhendler (2015) calls the second type of securitisation as ‘tactical securitisation’. This takes place when ‘low politics’ issues such as water, are linked with the ‘high politics’ issues of national survival, for example, the 1994 peace treaty between Jordan and Israel.

Once securitisation has taken place, extraordinary measures to neutralise the threat are often legitimised (Fischhendler, 2015). By placing issues beyond the realm of normal politics, securitisation constitutes a breach of regular political processes (Buzan et al., 1998). But how is an issue, in this case water, securitised?

Water is securitised through three main mechanisms known as structural, institutional and linguistic. Structural mechanisms are physical infrastructures that serve to protect the resource, given its importance to society. For example, potential threats to water systems could target infrastructures, making water systems vulnerable to terrorist attacks such as deliberate contamination. As such, a number of structural mechanisms are put in place to securitise these water systems, such as the setting up of demilitarised zones around water systems and installing early warning systems (Fischhendler, 2015).

However, structural mechanisms would not be justifiable without the institutional mechanisms that implement them. Institutional mechanisms may include having military representatives or foreign affairs officials in basin authorities. This is the case in the Nile Basin Initiative, for instance, and the Nile Council of Ministers. Another such mechanism is to embed water agreements in higher security-related agreements (e.g., peace treaties), as is the case with the water agreements included in Oslo peace accords between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Another manifestation of institutional securitisation is the exclusion of civil society and NGO's from governance (Fischhendler, 2015).

Finally, the centrality of language in recognising and portraying an issue as a threat and invoking a sense of urgency is called by Fischhendler as 'linguistic securitisation'. It includes metaphors, framings and narratives. Perhaps the most common metaphor is that of 'water conflict'.

Water resources have been identified as a national security issue in many international river basins in Southern Africa, for example, the Okavango River basin (Turton, 2003) and also in Tigris and Euphrates basin (Schulz, 1995), in the Nile basin (Mason, 2004) and in the Mountain Aquifer shared between Israel and Palestine (Katz & Fischhendler, 2011). These trans-boundary rivers are often described in terms of scarcity and embedded in concerns over 'water wars'. Since these water disputes have been largely 'contained' via the securitisation mechanisms discussed above, Mirumachi (2013) argues that securitisation has the effect of neutralising or 'solving' the perceived potential threat or conflict. He explains how, in its conflict with Nepal over the Tanakpur Barrage, India first resorted to linguistic securitisation followed by structural securitisation (unilaterally constructing the dam) before institutional securitisation took place in the form of a bilateral agreement, thereby putting an end to the actual conflict while at the same time 'containing' future conflicts (Mirumachi, 2013).

Zeitoun (2006) draws attention to the 'role that power asymmetry plays in creating and maintaining situations of water conflict that fall short of the violent form of war' (Zeitoun, 2006, p. 435). They argue that power asymmetry between the basin states largely determines the content and extent of water allocation agreements. Rather than resorting to hard power, discursive power is used to construct threats that produce agreements that favour water allocation to the most powerful basin state. These 'hydro-hegemons' can employ various strategies to ensure control of shared waters and compliance to these measures. The more powerful the riparian state is, the more strategies it has at its disposal, securitisation being one of many.

However, this article argues that it is securitisation that makes such strategies justifiable. The most powerful riparian state, by virtue of its position as a hydro-hegemon, is able to 'coerce' other riparian states into accepting inequitable water allocation agreements precisely because of the former's capacity to securitise its water interests within the international system, whereas the latter, due to their inferior power position, largely fails to do so. For example, by declaring any upstream dam building to be a *casus belli* should it negatively affect its water share, Egypt has for decades succeeded in pre-empting any serious attempt by upstream riparian states to initiate such projects. Ethiopia's viewpoint and pressing development needs went largely unheeded until fairly recently when the power balance in the region started to shift in its favour for reasons that will be discussed later on.

Similarly, the Palestinian protests over Israel's monopoly of the West Bank aquifers are drowned out by Israel's water security claims. Although these disputes are 'contained' to varying degrees by the securitisation mechanisms discussed earlier, the biased water arrangement resulting from such mechanisms seems to be accepted by the international community, which thereby assists in sanctioning the prevailing discourse while excluding the alternatives. Thus, in the absence of universally recognised overriding authority capable of enforcing international water law, the outcomes are necessarily determined by power relations.

In sum, the most powerful riparian state has the means—institutional, structural as well as linguistic—to securitise its water discourse often at the expense of weaker states, even though the latter could be facing an objective—as opposed to a constructed—crisis. The next section will look at some of the ongoing water disputes in the Middle East.

## Securitising Water in the Middle East

Rather than giving an account of water conflicts in the Middle East, a task aptly accomplished by many scholars (Allan, 2000; Allan & Mallat, 1995; Greco, 2005; Hillel, 1994; Selby, 2003a, 2005; Soffer, 1999), this section will attempt to touch upon some of the issues involved so as to shed light on the various ways water has been securitised in the region. This section will examine the conflicts in the Tigris–Euphrates River Basin, the Jordan River Basin, the West Bank Mountain Aquifer as well as disputes over Nile water. Given the arid or semi-arid nature of the region, the very survival of the states in question is dependent on their having access to these rivers. In these cases, competition for water among the riparian states is aggravated by political conflicts.

Israel controls 90 per cent of the West Bank's shared water resources, while the Palestinians, who are completely dependent on these sources, control a meagre 10 per cent. In 1995, an agreement was reached as part of the Oslo process whereby Israel recognised the right of the Palestinians to these two sources yet continues to get the lion's share of water. A major obstacle to a 'fair' solution to this ongoing conflict is Israel's need for 'national security'. Israel justifies its water policies by

linking 'water security' with 'national security' imperatives and claims that water pipelines and wells in the Palestinian territories are frequent targets of terrorist attacks and that Palestinians often 'steal' water meant for its settlements in the Occupied Territories (*BBC*, 2003). In all of the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinian water rights have been consistently referred to as a 'final status negotiations' issue (B'Tselem, 2000). This ambiguity has effectively blocked a viable agreement, especially with regards to Palestinian water rights to the Jordan River and the Mountain Aquifer, or with regards to water allocation and access. The 'final status' label is a persistent delay tactic which perpetuates current policies with the hope of a future solution that does not seem to materialise.

More importantly, the joint water management structure created by the Oslo II accords has been designed in such a way so as to reinforce the power imbalance between Israel and Palestine. In fact, the Israeli–Palestinian Joint Water Committee (JWC) has been described as a tool more of domination than of cooperation (Selby, 2003b). One of the responsibilities of the JWC is to review proposals for water projects and to issue permits for approved projects. However, this process has proved to be too slow and exceedingly complex. Permits are issued for each stage of individual projects and the process more often than not takes several months. The result is uncontested Israeli monopoly over water development projects in the area.

Going back to Fischhendler's typology, we can conclude that Israel has achieved uncontested control over the Jordan River and the West Bank Mountain Aquifer through 'strategic' securitisation by consistently equating water security with national security. In 1965, when Syria sought to divert the Baniyas River, Israel resorted to military action, forcing Syria to abort the project. After the six-day War, Israel sought to improve its hydro-strategic position by occupying the Golan Heights and the West Bank and refusing to withdraw to the pre-1967 borders in blatant defiance of international law. Decades later, the former Israeli Minister of Agriculture Rafael Eitan justified Israel's continued occupation of the West Bank on the basis of securing Israel's access to water (Wolf, 1995, p. 233–234).

The occupation of the Golan Heights blocked any attempt by the Arabs to divert the Jordan headwaters, and Israel was left in control of half the length of the Yarmouk River compared to mere 10 km before the war. In his memoirs, late Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, talking about the 1967 war, said, 'While the border disputes between Syria and ourselves were of great significance, the matter of water diversion was a stark issue of life and death' (Sharon, 2005, p. 166).

Moreover, Israel resorted to 'tactical' securitisation by incorporating 'biased' water agreements into the agreements it signed first with Jordan then with the Palestinians. Although those treaties served to 'contain' water conflicts with co-riparian states, the ultimate outcome is an inequitable allocation of the water resources and a protracted period of 'contained instability', which serves to further perpetuate Israel's water securitisation discourse.

Israel used all three securitisation mechanisms defined by Fischhendler. Military action and the occupation of the Golan Heights and the West Bank in

1967 effectively consolidated Israel's control over the resource and effectively established the era of Israel's water hegemony (Feitelson, 2000, p. 350). This was followed by institutional securitisation, where water agreements were embedded into peace treaties with the now weaker riparian states. Finally, linguistic securitisation pervaded and most notably preceded all the other strategies of water securitisation in Israel. This is clearly manifested in Israeli water discourse. According to Fröhlich (2012, p. 131):

Water was discursively connected to territorial domination, borders, Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories and the Zionist myth of a flowering desert, thereby stating an implicit threat to Israeli territory and/or Israeli values... Zionism rooted the idea of 'settling the land' and 'making the desert bloom' as one of the Jewish state's central concerns in Jewish collective memory. A sufficient water supply thus became a value in and of itself, a symbolic practice and a vital condition for Jewish–Israeli identity.

In 2002, Lebanese development of the reclaimed Wazzani Springs was considered by Israel as a threat to its national water supply and was thus portrayed in Israeli media as a national security issue that almost led to a military confrontation. The former Israeli minister of infrastructure commented on the issue saying that 'Israel cannot let this pass without a reaction. For Israel, water is a matter of to be or not to be, to live or to die' (Allouche, 2005, p. 16).

Israel's very survival was presented as constantly at risk by its officials and this discourse was picked up and propagated by the media. This legitimised extraordinary measures that inevitably led to violation of the rules of normal politics and in some cases violation of international law, as is the case with Israel's refusal to comply with a number of UN resolutions.<sup>2</sup>

As in the case of the Jordan River Basin, water disputes in the Tigris–Euphrates Basin is part of a larger political grievances that date back to the days of the Ottoman Empire. Turkey has many unresolved issues with Syria, including the contested province of Alexandretta which was given to Turkey by the French, as well as with Iraq, a lingering dispute over the oil-rich Northern Iraqi region of Mosul and Kirkuk, which Turkey was denied despite a considerable Turkmen presence there (Warner, 2008).

The Iraqi water discourse, like Egypt's, centres on the idea of 'historical rights'. Iraq argues that it has 'acquired rights' relating to its 'ancestral irrigation' from the Euphrates and Tigris rivers of ancient Mesopotamia, thus linking the rivers to Iraq's heritage and cultural identity. Moreover, Iraq has 1.9 million hectares of agricultural land in the Euphrates Basin, including the ancestral irrigation systems left from Sumerian times. During the initial impounding of the Atatürk Dam, Iraq accused Turkey of violating international law by not informing Baghdad in a timely manner and by reducing the amount of flow below the agreed level. Iraq also objected to the building of new dams and irrigation schemes perceived harmful to its agriculture and economic stability and demanded the rivers' waters be shared equitably.

Syria also resorted to the 'historical rights' argument. However, Syria sought to securitise the matter by linking it with other 'high politics' issues. The Syrian official discourse maintained that the Peace Pipeline Project and other water



selling schemes, in fact, signify Turkey's quest for political and economic domination in the region, economically and politically. Syria and Iraq, who came close to a military showdown with each other in 1975, put aside their water-related grievances to seek the support of the Arab League against Turkey's Great Anatolian Project known as GAP (strategic securitisation). Moreover, Syria resorted to pressure Turkey by supporting (until 1998) the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK)-tactical securitisation (Zeitoun, 2006).

Coincidentally, the Turkish heavy-handed repression of the Kurds served to strengthen anti-GAP sentiments abroad. Human rights activists, NGOs and the media protested the dam on grounds of human rights concerns, a discourse readily accepted by the targeted international audience. Other issues such as environmental and cultural concerns were also used in opposition to the Ilisu Dam. By labelling the resettlement to make room for the reservoir as a form of 'ethnic cleansing', for instance, the anti-dam coalition succeeded in further securitising the issue. Some went so far as to argue that the dam would lead to war in the Middle East rather than encourage peace and signaled a manifestation of Turkish imperialism at home and abroad (Warner, 2008).

To secure its interests, Turkey preferred to contain its neighbours through the use of 'soft power'. Its strategy was to deploy its water resources to political advantage. In the bilateral agreement signed with Syria in 1987, for instance, Turkey guaranteed a minimum annual flow of 500 cu m per second from the Euphrates Basin to Syria, while Syria promised to stop supporting the PKK within its borders (Warner & Zahrawi, 2012).

However, trans-boundary water politics among Turkey, Syria and Iraq improved markedly in the first decade of the 2000s (Beck, 2014, p. 7). In 2005, a track-two initiative (the Euphrates-Tigris Initiative for Cooperation [ETIC]) was set up, and in 2008, the co-riparians agreed to create a joint water institute (Beck, 2014). In 2009, Syria and Turkey also agreed to build a joint dam on the Orontes River, another trans-boundary watercourse in the region. Although this so-called 'Friendship Dam' has been described as 'a breakthrough in Turkish-Syrian hydro politics' (Beck, 2014, p. 7), no tangible achievements were realised. In 2009, a 'crisis summit' was held in Ankara to discuss the water issues and the drought that hit the region. Again no breakthrough was achieved, but the summit served to polish Turkey's image domestically and internationally (Oktav, 2009).

In short, water was and remains a highly securitised issue in the Tigris-Euphrates Basin. Both Syria and Iraq had resorted over the decades to various securitisation mechanisms with regards to their water conflict with Turkey, whereas the latter mostly resorted to 'contain' these securitisation moves via the use of 'soft power'. However, in January 1990, Turkey mobilised its forces when it cut the Euphrates to fill the Atatürk Dam, reducing the flow of water into Syria and Iraq by 75 per cent. Iraq had threatened to bomb the dam, which led Turkey to threaten to cut off the water flow to Syria and Iraq completely. Both Syria and Iraq resorted occasionally to strategic securitisation through framing their conflict over water in terms of regional security, and thereby mobilising regional and international support for their cause. Moreover, Syria resorted to tactical securitisation by linking low politics issues (water) with high politics (the Kurdish issue).



## Securitising Water in the Nile Basin

To understand the present conflict in the Nile basin, one must inevitably turn to the colonial legacy. Colonial Britain favoured Egypt over Sudan in 1929 (Waterbury, 2002), and favoured Egypt and Sudan over Ethiopia, Uganda and other Nile riparians on several occasions. This led to treaties signed between these parties being not simply skewed in favour of downstream riparians but rather excluded upstream riparians entirely (Zeitoun, 2006). Thus, Egypt has long held veto power over any upstream development of Nile waters. Supported by one of the largest armies in the region, and wielding considerable 'soft power' leverage, the Egyptian government has on various occasions declared any dam building upstream to be a *casus belli* should it lead to lower inflow into Egypt (Zeitoun, 2006).

Until fairly recently, Egypt's status as a hydro-hegemon could hardly be questioned. Recent developments, however, seem to reflect a shift in the hegemonic power balance. As a result, in 2010, upstream states openly defied Egypt by signing the Cooperative Framework Agreement. Furthermore, in 2011, Ethiopia announced its plan to build its hydroelectric Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile, 45 km east of its border with Sudan. This mega dam is planned to generate over 5,000 MW of electricity. It will create a lake with a volume of over 60 billion cu m, and its cost has been estimated at approximately US\$ 5 billion. The project is part of a larger scheme by the Ethiopian Government to expand its hydroelectric power capacity (Hammond, 2013).

The importance of the dam for Ethiopia cannot be overstated. Labelled as the 'water tower' of Africa, it has massive hydropower potential that could benefit not only Ethiopia but the whole region. However, the GERD could be harmful to Egypt in three ways. First, if the filling of the reservoir behind the dam were to take place during a sequence of years in which the Blue Nile flow was low and the Aswan High Dam reservoir itself was low, then Egypt might not be able to withdraw enough water to meet all of its agricultural needs. Second, Egypt could run short of water if the operation of the GERD was not well synchronised with that of the Aswan High Dam. Third, Egypt could also be negatively affected by upstream irrigation withdrawals. For example, Sudan could be tempted to increase its irrigation withdrawals because the GERD will provide increased summer low flows (Whittington, Waterbury, & Jeuland, 2014, p. 7).

Quite understandably, the dam was perceived by Egypt as a grave threat. It is worth noting that a comprehensive assessment of the precise effect of the dam on Egypt's economic development and political stability is yet to be produced. Opponents of the dam tend to stress the economic, political and humanitarian disasters that could result from the dam being filled and operated (see Cairo University's Report on Ethiopia's Great Renaissance Dam)<sup>3</sup>, while supporters of the dam tend to paint not so bleak a picture (see for example *Ethiopia's Renaissance Dam: A Dam of Mega-Benefits*).<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the announcement triggered a concerted multi-level campaign on the part of the Egyptian government to try and block the construction of the dam. Egypt initially resorted to the threat of using military force then to diplomacy, using its soft power to stop funding of the dam

on the regional level by enlisting the political and financial support of Saudi Arabia and intensifying cooperation with other African countries, particularly those of the Nile Basin and of Ethiopia's neighbours. On the international level, it lobbied against the demand labelled Egypt's water security, a matter of top national and regional security. Former President Mohamed Morsi declared that 'all options are open.' And Egyptian officials openly suggested resorting to military force.<sup>5</sup>

Historically, Egypt has consolidated its control over the Nile waters in three ways: through the existing treaties which date back to colonial times that gave Egypt the lion's share of the Nile water; by erecting massive hydraulic infrastructure such as the Aswan High Dam; and by containing co-riparians through the use of institutional structures that perpetuated her hegemonic power such as the Nile Basin Initiative. Underlying all of the above is linguistic securitisation. Statements such as 'the Nile is the bloodline of Egypt' and '[i]f our share of Nile water decreases, our blood will be the alternative', picked up and broadcasted repeatedly on national television created a sense of urgency and imminent danger, so did equating Nile Water with Egyptian blood. This discourse invoked a sense of war-like situation and called upon Egyptians to unite and rise against this looming evil that would deprive them not only from what is rightfully theirs but also to rob them of their *raison d'être*.

These statements are hardly exaggerations or poetic conjuring brought on by the heat of the moment so to speak. The Nile is deeply engraved in the Egyptian psyche that it is hardly possible to picture the Nile without Egypt and vice versa. Ancient Egyptians believed in the Nile God and made Him seasonal offering so as to obtain His blessings. The 'Hymn to the Nile', which is estimated to have been written around 2100 BC describes the Nile as the life that sustains Egypt (Thatcher, 1907, pp. 79–83). Herodotus famously described Egypt as 'the gift of Nile'. In modern times, one of the most famous songs that children learn early on starts with: 'Egypt is my mother, her Nile is my blood.' This song is virtually immortal. There is not a single Egyptian alive, young or old, who does not know it by heart.

In short, going back to Buzan's theory, in Egypt's case, the Nile water is the security issue: the referent. Ethiopia's decision to build the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam could be said to be the trigger of the securitisation move. The securitising actor or actors are Egyptian leaders and the targeted audiences are Egyptian public as well as the international community especially decision-makers in donor countries.

On 23 March 2015, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi signed the Declaration of Principles of the GERD with Sudan and Ethiopia. The move enjoyed relative public and official approval. Moreover, the Egyptian president gave a speech in the Ethiopian parliament in which he said that 'the Nile is like an umbilical cord that ties Egypt and Ethiopia,' in a metaphor that denotes the 'common fate' of the two nations. Perhaps it is worth mentioning that, in gesture of goodwill, the Egyptian president greeted in person 27 Ethiopian workers who arrived in Cairo in early May 2015, after being rescued by the Egyptian armed forces in Libya. Whether El-Sisi's diplomatic handling of the dam crisis constitutes

a move towards 'de-securitising' Egypt's water conflict with Ethiopia or whether it is an attempt to 'contain' the emerging Ethiopian power is not yet clear.

## Conclusion

The article has attempted to apply the theory of securitisation to the Jordan Rivers Basin, the West Bank Aquifer, the Tigris–Euphrates Basin and, finally, the Nile basin. In all four cases, securitisation of water issues occurred in the context of larger political grievances, inherited from colonial times. The trigger in all cases was actual water scarcity. The securitising actors were in all cases decision-makers, in case of the Tigris–Euphrates Basin, NGOs and human rights activists were also securitising actors. The target audiences in all cases included the national and international public, as well as decision-makers in donor countries (in the case of Tigris–Euphrates Basin and the Nile Basin). Several securitisation mechanisms were used simultaneously in all cases; in the case of the West Bank Aquifer, for example, resource capture (structural securitisation) went hand in hand with joint water management committees (institutional securitisation). In all cases, language played a crucial role in the securitisation of water resources, especially in the cases of Egypt and Israel where the symbolic value of water and land are closely tied with religious traditions inherited from ancient times.

*Mustapha Kamel El-Sayed is a Professor of Political Science at Cairo University and has published extensively in Arabic, English and French on the political economy of development, democratization and human rights in the Arab world.*

*Rasha Soheil Mansour is a Lecturer of Political Science at the British University in Egypt and holds a PhD in development studies. His research interests include human security, sustainable development and gender.*

## Notes

1. Address given by the UN secretary-general to the Association of American Geographers' annual meeting in New York held on 1 March 2000.
2. For a list of U N Security Council resolutions directly critical of Israel for violations of UN Security Council resolutions, the UN Charter, the Geneva Conventions, international terrorism or other violations of international law see Hammond, (2010). <http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2010/01/27/rogue-state-israeli-violations-of-u-n-security-council-resolutions/>
3. See <http://egyptianchronicles.blogspot.com/2013/06/cairo-universitys-report-on-ethiopias.html>
4. See <http://www.tigraionline.com/articles/article121230.html>
5. See Al Arabiya News at, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/analysis/2013/06/12/Damning-the-dam-Egypt-opens-floodgates-against-Ethiopia.html>; The Telegraph at, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/egypt/10113407/Egypt-all-options-open-in-Nile-dam-row-with-Ethiopia.html>; The Guardian at <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2014/apr/16/nile-dam-study-egyptian-indignation-ethiopia>

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