



# DENIAL AIN'T JUST A

[THE NILE]

# A RIVER IN EGYPT

UNITED  
NATIONS  
SECURITY  
COUNCIL

**TOPIC B: “THE SITUATION IN THE EASTERN NILE BASIN: THE GERD  
DISPUTE AND THE ESCALATING DEBATE OVER THE USE OF FORCE AND  
THE RIGHT OF SELF-DEFENSE AS AN INSTRUMENT TO PROTECT WATER  
SECURITY POLICY”**





## SECURITY COUNCIL

### **TOPIC B: THE SITUATION IN THE EASTERN NILE BASIN: THE GERD DISPUTE AND THE ESCALATING DEBATE OVER THE USE OF FORCE AND THE RIGHT OF SELF-DEFENSE AS AN INSTRUMENT TO PROTECT WATER SECURITY POLICY**

*“The next war will be over water, not politics”*

- Boutros Boutros-Ghali, former UN Secretary-General.

Stretching across eleven countries, the Nile sustains close to 300 million people and provides more than 90% percent of Egypt’s freshwater. It is the longest river in the world, running over 6,600 kilometers, and its basin supports major farming regions and cities. As populations grow and climate change makes rainfall less predictable, competition over this shared river has become sharper. Ethiopia's Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), officially inaugurated in 2025, is designed to produce about 5.15 gigawatts of electricity.<sup>1</sup> Egypt and Sudan, however, warn that if the dam is filled or operated without agreement, downstream communities could face droughts, reduced harvests, and water shortages.

The dispute has already come before the Security Council, which in 2021 urged the parties to continue African Union–led talks. The disagreement also reflects key agreements: the 1959 Nile Waters Agreement between Egypt and Sudan, the 2010 Cooperative Framework Agreement, and the 2015 Declaration of Principles signed by all three states.<sup>2</sup> As of September 2025, Egypt formally raised the issue again at the Security Council, sending a press release that accused Ethiopia of unilateral actions and urged stronger international involvement.

Tensions have escalated in recent years beyond the technical dispute over the filling and operation of the GERD. Since 2022, Egypt has increasingly framed the issue as a matter of national security, invoking its right to self-defense under the UN Charter and warning that unilateral upstream actions could justify the use of force. The conflict has become more complex as Ethiopia deepened ties with Somaliland,<sup>3</sup> supporting its breakaway aspirations, while Egypt expanded its military presence in Somalia to counterbalance this influence.

---

<sup>1</sup> For reference, this is enough to power millions of homes and allow energy exports across the region.

<sup>2</sup> Other treaties, such as the 1902 Anglo–Ethiopian Treaty, are sometimes cited in legal arguments but are contested in relevance and interpretation.

<sup>3</sup> Somaliland is a self-declared autonomous region in the horn of Africa that proclaimed independence from Somalia in 1991; while it has established its own government and institutions, it has not been internationally recognized as a Sovereign State, with few exemptions maintaining informal contact or ties with it.



## SECURITY COUNCIL

These moves have widened the scope of the Nile dispute into fragile security dynamics in the Horn of Africa, raising the stakes for both regional peace and international mediation.

Against this backdrop, international discussions about shared rivers usually focus on two main ideas: countries should use the water fairly, and they should not cause serious harm to others. This means States are expected to share information, talk openly, and cooperate before making big decisions. Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan signed the 2015 Declaration of Principles to recognize these ideas, and global rules like the UN Watercourses Convention also promote them. But new agreements in the region, like the 2010 Cooperative Framework Agreement that entered into force in 2024, are not supported by all countries<sup>4</sup> which makes it harder to create basin-wide rules everyone respects. So far, the Security Council has backed the African Union in leading talks, but if negotiations remain stuck, mistrust could grow and turn water into a security issue.

On one side, Ethiopia argues for its right to sovereign development. The Nile runs through its territory, and the GERD, as one of Africa's largest projects, is seen as key to producing electricity, reducing poverty, and supporting national growth. Ethiopia emphasizes that every state has the right to use its natural resources to improve the lives of its people, as long as this use is fair. For Ethiopia, the dam represents independence, modern development, and a chance to become a regional energy exporter.

On the other side, Egypt and Sudan stress the “no harm” principle. Egypt relies on the Nile for most of its freshwater, and Sudan’s agriculture also depends heavily on its flows. They worry that if the dam is filled or operated without agreements, they could face droughts, crop losses, or water shortages. From their perspective, the issue is not about stopping Ethiopia’s development, but about ensuring that one country’s project does not create serious risks for its neighbors.

Beyond Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan, other nations also have a stake in how the Nile conflict is managed. Countries in Africa and the Middle East depend on regional stability and may act as mediators or partners in technical cooperation. Major powers and donors can support investment in renewable energy, food security, and climate adaptation, reducing the pressure that makes countries think they must choose between their own needs and their neighbors. International institutions, including the United Nations, the African Union, and the World

---

<sup>4</sup> The Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) was signed in 2010 to establish a permanent Nile Basin Commission. However, Egypt and Sudan have not joined, mainly because they object to provisions that do not recognize their historical water shares from the 1959 Nile Waters Agreement.

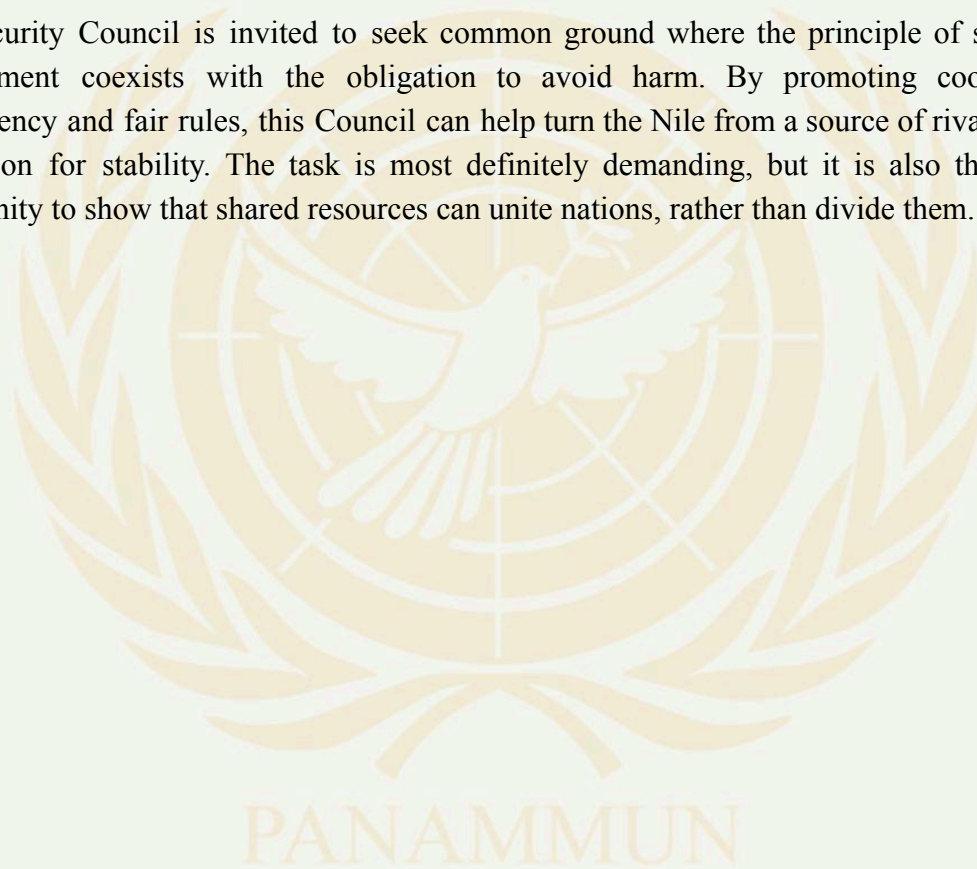


## SECURITY COUNCIL

Bank, can encourage dialogue, provide monitoring, and promote projects that benefit all sides.

The Nile is both a lifeline and a fault line. For Ethiopia it means the right to use its resources for growth and electricity, while for Egypt and Sudan it embodies the urgent need to protect their water security and food supplies. This tension is quickly growing, and the Security Council must recognize that water scarcity and mistrust can quickly become threats to peace.

The Security Council is invited to seek common ground where the principle of sovereign development coexists with the obligation to avoid harm. By promoting cooperation, transparency and fair rules, this Council can help turn the Nile from a source of rivalry into a foundation for stability. The task is most definitely demanding, but it is also the perfect opportunity to show that shared resources can unite nations, rather than divide them.







## SECURITY COUNCIL

### KEY QUESTIONS:

- What does the “no harm” principle mean in practice for shared rivers like the Nile based on international law?
- What counts as “significant harm” in practice? Is it only droughts and shortages, or also smaller risks like reduced farmland?
- What is meant by “equitable and reasonable use” of water, and how is “fairness” measured between countries with very different needs?
- How important is the Nile for Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia in terms of water, food, and electricity?
- What do past treaties and agreements say about sharing the Nile, and why do some countries disagree with them?
- How did the 2015 Declaration of Principles try to set common rules, and what are its main strengths and weaknesses?
- What role has the African Union played so far, and should the United Nations step in more strongly?
- Could new agreements include clear rules for times of drought and for sharing data about the dam’s operations?
- What benefits could cooperation bring, such as shared electricity or flood control, and how might these reduce conflict?
- How can international law help prevent the Nile from becoming a source of insecurity, while still allowing countries to grow and develop?



## SECURITY COUNCIL

### USEFUL RESOURCES:

- *UNSC Presidential Statement on GERD (2021)*
- *Declaration of Principles on the GERD (2015)*
- *Egypt's letter to UN Security Council on GERD / Eastern Nile Basin (2025)*
- *UN-Water Policy Brief: United Nations Global Water Conventions (2021)*
- *UN Watercourses Convention (1997)*
- *1959 Sudan–Egypt Nile Waters Agreement*
- *Nile Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement (2010)*
- *The principle of no significant harm in international water law (Susanne Schmeier & Joyeeta Gupta, 2020)*
- *Al Jazeera: Ethiopia inaugurates GERD amid downstream tensions with Egypt, Sudan*
- *Reuters: coverage of GERD inauguration (2025)*