

United States Moving into Africa's Nile River Basin: Securing Central and Eastern Africa via the Nile River

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"Rivers are political systems. Management of rivers is political and management of international rivers is very political. The Chinese got it right long ago: River + Dyke = Political Order."

Dr. Abdul Malak Ouda, writing for the Egypt State Information Service in 2002, [foresaw](#) the economic and military competition that would come to pass on the African continent between the G20 powers. Once again, the countries of Africa find themselves serving as sort of a soccer pitch for the matchup between the world's most powerful countries. United States' political, economic and military strategists have set their sights on the Nile River Basin (and Nile River) and the 11 countries of Central and Eastern Africa (and Egypt to North). The US instruments of national power (finance, military, intelligence, diplomacy) will be applied heavily on the countries and the people of the Nile River Basin.

"The power and influence of African countries, seen as individuals or as groups, is measured by the strength of their relations with the outside world. The military strategies of such big powers as the US, France, Britain and Belgium require a naval presence in African waters, as well as troop stationing on African ground. An answer should be found to the question of whether there is enough elbow room for Egypt to move, caught as it is between the US and France in competition over influence in Africa. In terms of national security, Egypt's African agenda should be divided into regions of concern. The first such region should include Libya and Sudan; the second the Horn of Africa along with the region south of the Red Sea, comprising Somalia and Djibouti; the last, though not the least, is the Nile basin stretching well into central and east Africa. With the growing US, European and Israeli involvement in the Nile basin, Egypt now faces serious problems in Africa, particularly that the US stands opposed to a central Egyptian role in Nile-basin countries or in the Horn-of-Africa region.

A new set of rules has been introduced which govern trade, investments and competition in Africa's now open markets. The competition between France and the USA in the fields of trade, investments, culture, education, and arms sales has sharpened to a razor's edge. New African English and French speaking pressure groups have emerged creating links with European countries. Changes have been introduced to Israeli policies, whereby the country now works under a US umbrella; concentrating its activities in certain African countries. Africa is in the position of a satellite region."

That competition will be most fierce in the Nile River Basin region which involves 11 countries: Egypt, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda and portions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Kenya and Eritrea. The Nile River Basin countries are expected to increase their collective populations to 654 million in 2030. In 2005 the population figure was 372 million according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Chinese Know Everything

David Shinn, Adjunct Professor, Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University, speaking at an AFRICOM sponsored conference, echoed American national security strategy/practice which sees water, infrastructure, and agriculture as sub-systems in an overarching national and global system of US national security.

"The problem of water cannot be separated from other security issues in the Nile Basin countries. Water contributes to conflict but has never been the sole reason for major conflict in the region. Water scarcity is the single biggest threat to food security in the region and the countries in the Nile Basin have increasingly been unable to meet local food requirements. Conflict is most likely when a downstream riparian is highly dependent on river water and is militarily and economically strong in comparison to upstream riparian's. This describes the situation between Egypt and upstream riparian's."

David Grey, Sr., Water Advisor, and Claudia Sadoff, Lead Economist, in a briefing titled The Global Water Challenge, put a fine point on the fact that water is political. *"Rivers are political systems. Management of rivers is political and management of international rivers is very political. The Chinese got it right long ago: River + Dyke = Political Order."*

In spite of the best efforts of the continent's [Nile Basin Initiative](#), the political and national security challenges for the Nile River Basin countries are extraordinary. Making matters worse (according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations', 2011 State of Food Insecurity in the World) for the 11 countries of the Nile River Basin is the harsh economics of globalization. *"Small import-dependent countries, especially in Africa, were deeply affected by the food and economic crises [of 2006-2008]. Some large countries were able to insulate themselves from the crisis through restrictive trade policies and functioning safety nets, but trade restrictions increased prices and volatility on international markets."*

The 11 Nile River Basin countries on the African continent have the greater misfortune to be the site where the USA will stake its claim to the Central and Eastern portions of the African continent (including Egypt in the North. The USA intends to check Chinese interests in Africa while at the same time pursuing its interests with or without the remaining G20 countries. Like the USA, all G20 members have slightly different visions of how they intend to exploit, and extract from, the African continent. The capitalist systems and practices used by all G20 countries demand exploitation and extraction so the methods used should not cause anyone to wince at their brutality; particularly given their recent military and economic actions in Yemen, Iran, Libya, Iraq and Bahrain, for example. So no matter how many times each G20 country employs the words peace and cooperation in their press conferences or strategic publications, the hard reality is that the fallout from the brutish competition will be scorched earth and human suffering.

In a world obsessed with violence, occupying space, and securing natural resources and

material things, global and national security casualties these days are as much economic as military. In 2011, loss of employment, benefits and prospects for living well is a form of torture; being vaporized by a Hellfire missile from a Predator is a quick merciful termination. Either way, the end result is the same.

In a world where nations actually cared for their people, truly cooperated and sacrificed some measure of national self-interest, human suffering would be minimized. That this is a radical statement is absurd.

And it is absurd to know that the people of Africa are going to suffer yet again as they find themselves reluctant hosts of economic and military competition between the non-African G20 countries.

It's Not the Economy Stupid: At Least Not Yet

According to information from the CIA's World Fact Book and the US Trade Representative's data, the 11 Nile Basin Countries were not significant trading partners with the USA; at least not yet. In fact, according to the US Census Bureau, the only African country on the continent listed as one of the top 15 US trading partners was Nigeria (US trade rank 12, for oil).

The CIA Fact Book, which broadly reflects US foreign policy, depicts nearly all of the countries of the Nile River Basin as unstable, undemocratic, economically insecure, managerially inept and highly corrupt. Border disputes and displaced populations are the norm. In terms of trade, according to the US Trade Representative's Office, US exports and imports (US trade rank) to/from the Nile River Basin countries in 2010 were largely insignificant: Egypt (US trade rank 47), Sudan (US trade rank 157), South Sudan (not available), Ethiopia (US trade rank 98), Uganda (US trade rank 149) and portions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (US trade rank 105), Rwanda (US trade rank 175), Burundi (US trade rank 189), Tanzania (US trade rank 138th), Kenya (US trade rank 102) and Eritrea (US trade rank 220).

Given the small trade numbers, why is the USA making the big push into the Nile River Basin?

Viewing a map of the African continent it is easy to see how the Nile River serves as a geographically perfect line-in-the-sand that American strategists and tacticians can utilize for geostrategic plans and operations in the Central and Eastern blocs of Africa (to include Egypt). The Nile River stretches from Egypt in the north to Tanzania in the south through Central and Eastern Africa. Arguably the Nile River Basin has Africa's most valuable resource: fresh water. Lake Victoria, one of the largest fresh water lakes in the world, is located in the Nile River Basin. Lake Victoria belongs to three countries; the northern half to Uganda, the southern half to Tanzania, and part of the northeastern sector to Kenya.

There are numerous other interconnecting lakes, rivers and streams in the Nile River Basin (including rail and river transportation systems). Moreover, The Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean are accessible to and from the countries of the Nile Basin.

The Indian Ocean is the world's third largest ocean. According to the CIA Fact Book, *"It provides major sea routes connecting the Middle East, Africa, and East Asia with Europe and the Americas. It carries a particularly heavy traffic of petroleum and petroleum products*

from the oilfields of the Persian Gulf and Indonesia. Its fish are of great and growing importance to the bordering countries for domestic consumption and export. Fishing fleets from Russia, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan also exploit the Indian Ocean, mainly for shrimp and tuna. Large reserves of hydrocarbons are being tapped in the offshore areas of Saudi Arabia, Iran, India, and Western Australia. An estimated 40% of the world's offshore oil production comes from the Indian Ocean. Beach sands rich in heavy minerals and offshore placer deposits are actively exploited by bordering countries, particularly India, South Africa, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand."

One of the Nile Basin countries may lend some of its geography to the newest geographic combatant command AFRICOM. It will not be long before AFRICOM has some sort of Bagram Air Base location in the Nile Basin region. Such a US military base will house USSOCOM-SOCAFRICA and CENTCOM units (Egypt remains in CENTCOM's AOR). The Nile Basin provides the perfect operational environment for the US Navy Brown Water Riverine Forces and USSOCOM Special Boat Teams. American special operators and CIA paramilitary forces will roam up and down portions of the Nile River and its Basin (and already are). Defense and non-defense contractors stand to make a fortune as the USA makes its economic and military move into the Nile Basin region which has become a focused concern of US national security.

President Obama's recent deployment of 100 American soldiers to support Uganda's internal defense in its fight against the Lord's Resistance Army (made up of many child soldiers) was clearly a statement and challenge to China and other G20 competitors: the USA is staking a claim, drawing a line. US national security interests exist within the Nile River Basin and the Nile River. The move has begun in earnest.

"Uganda has substantial natural resources, including fertile soils, regular rainfall, small deposits of copper, gold, and other minerals, and recently discovered oil. Uganda has never conducted a national minerals survey. Uganda is subject to armed fighting among hostile ethnic groups, rebels, armed gangs, militias, and various government forces that extend across its borders; Uganda hosts 209,860 Sudanese, 27,560 Congolese, and 19,710 Rwandan refugees, while Ugandan refugees as well as members of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) seek shelter in southern Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Garamba National Park; LRA forces have also attacked Kenyan villages across the border." (The CIA Fact Book)

Perhaps the new nation of South Sudan will house AFRICOM's version of Bagram Air Base. Who knows? Some African country will. Everyone has a price.

Ultimately, though, it may be that the USA and the rest of the G20 pay the heaviest price. No matter the version of capitalism—Asian, American, Turkish, German, British, Arab, et al—its success depends on creating and destroying, exploiting and extracting, costing and pricing and commodifying human existence and everything associated with that reality. The system will eventually digest itself like a cancer in a globalized-interconnected world where cooperation and sustainability within and between nations, tribes and communities is nothing more than theater.

The world has been warned about this before. Here is Leon Trotsky from 1926.

"The world struggle for oil between England and America has already led to revolutionary shocks and military clashes in Mexico, Turkey, and Persia. But

tomorrow's newspapers will perhaps inform us that England and America have arrived at a peaceful collaboration in the domain of oil. What will this mean? It will mean an oil conference in Washington. In other words, England will be invited to take a more modest ration of oil...The United States, you see, lacks many things of which others have no lack. In this connection American newspapers have published a map showing the distribution of raw materials over the whole globe. They now talk and think in terms of whole continents...

Americans think in terms of continents: it simplifies the study of geography, and, what is most important, it provides ample room for robbery. And so, American newspapers have published a map of the world with ten black spots on it, the ten major deficiencies of the US economy in raw materials: rubber, coffee, nitrates, tin, potash, sisal and other less important raw materials...But American capitalism is no longer self-sufficing. It cannot maintain itself on an internal equilibrium. It needs world equilibrium...In military art there is a saying that whoever moves into the enemy's rear in order to cut off, is often cut off himself. In economy something analogous takes place: the more the United States puts the whole world under its dependence, all the more does it become dependent upon the whole world, with all its contradictions and threatening upheavals.

Already today, revolution in Europe means convulsions in Wall Street; tomorrow, when the investments of American capital in European economy have increased, it will mean a profound upheaval...In order to maintain its internal equilibrium the United States requires a larger and larger outlet abroad; but its outlet abroad introduces into its economic order more and more elements of European and Asiatic disorder...We know that when its own skin is at stake, American capitalism will unleash the fiercest energy in the struggle. It is quite possible that all that books and our own experience have taught us about the fight of the privileged classes for their domination will pale before the violence that American capital will try to inflict..."

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