

The Nile Treaty – What Is At Stake?

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Abstract:

The Nile River has been the source of life and of conflict in the Nile Basin for centuries. The basin's three million square kilometres cover about 10 per cent of the African continent, shared among 10 countries: Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi, Eritrea, Kenya and Democratic Republic of the Congo. For centuries, Nile has been considered as a source of life by the Egyptians. They depend on the Nile for everything. For a long time, many Egyptians have stated that they would die fighting for the Nile if any country interfered with its flow. This way of life is under threat as the majority of the Nile countries are battling for the Nile water as well. In 1959, Egypt and Sudan signed a treaty which excluded all the other countries of the Nile from using the waters apart from the two. However, four upriver Nile countries, namely, Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda moved ahead with their plans and signed on Friday 14th a framework agreement in Entebbe, Uganda that would allow them a more liberal management of the Nile waters for irrigation and other developmental projects. The move came as negotiations with other stream river countries; Egypt and Sudan have come to a standstill. Kenya later joined the four and signed the treaty on the 19th May 2010. The other countries which did not sign the treaty include: Eritrea, DR Congo and Burundi. Eritrea has signalled its support for Egypt. Burundi is expected to back the new deal as soon as the current elections are over and DR Congo is expected to ignore lobbying from Egypt and follow suit. The document, however, remains open for more signatures until May 13, 2011. As a result of this new treaty, a fresh crisis has emerged to threaten Egypt's hegemony of this most political of rivers, as the new treaty would give the five of the 10 Nile basin countries a greater share of the waters as was not the case before. The Nile Basin Initiative 2, which had been spearheading the talks, will now become the Nile Basin Commission and will receive, review and approve or reject projects related to the Nile. It will further coordinate the equitable usage of the water. Countries will have to submit their intended projects along the Nile to the Commission for endorsement. "Under the framework, the River Nile Basin Commission shall be established to act as a forum for co-operation and a clearing house for the planned measures that could cause any harm to other riparian states