

MASTER'S THESIS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

# The competition for freshwater

**An analysis of the water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt**

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## ABSTRACT

For several decades, Ethiopia and Egypt compete for the access to the freshwater resources of the Nile River. The construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam intensified the tensions in the Nile Basin, as the water security was already affected by climate change, populations growth, industrialization and urbanization. This thesis performs a qualitative document analysis with a process-tracing method on the water conflict between the Ethiopia and Egypt. This thesis analyzes the extent that the international relations theories, such as structural realism, neoliberalism and foreign policy analysis, can identify the conditions that promote or hinder a water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt. This thesis analyzes that structural realism identifies that states serve their water security interests in the anarchic system, which results in promoting the water conflict. Furthermore, neoliberalism can identify that in the water conflict are relevant institutions, frameworks and mechanisms, however it cannot explain that these international institutions have no influence in facilitating long-term cooperation in the water conflict. Foreign policy analysis identifies that the interests of relevant domestic actors in Ethiopia diverge from the interests of relevant domestic actors in Egypt, making it more likely to have a water conflict. Last, the approaches of structural realism and foreign policy analysis complement each other, because each approach focuses on a different level in the system, namely the international and the domestic system.

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## ACRONYMS

AMCOW	African Ministers' Council on Water
ANBO	African Network of Basin Organizations
AU	African Union
CFA	Cooperative Framework Agreement
EU	European Union
FPA	foreign policy analysis
GDP	gross domestic product
GERD	Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam
IOs	international organizations
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
JWC	Joint Water Committee
NBI	Nile Basin Initiative
NGOs	non-governmental organizations
OMVS	Senegal River Development Basin Organization
U.S.	United States
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNWC	United Nations Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. THE PUZZLE

Climate change affects regions all around the world. The global temperatures are rising, rainfall patterns are changing and sea levels are rising. These changes pose numerous threats to humanity, because they will impact the foundational resources that people need for survival and security, particularly food and freshwater (Werrell & Femia, 2017, p. 104). Environmental and resource issues have an impact on the national security of a state, because they can create resource scarcity and soil degradation (Koubi, 2019). Therefore, climate change can lead to geopolitical changes that can destabilize vulnerable regions and induce conflicts (Nordås & Gleditsch, 2014). Climate change is now a security issue for some states and communities (Barnett, 2003). For example, climate change, population growth and the construction of dams have negatively affected the conflict over the Euphrates-Tigris between Turkey, Syria and Iraq (Al-Ansari et al., 2018, p. 191). This increases the droughts that dominate the region, especially in Syria and Iraq, the downstream states, which causes tension and conflict with no cooperation in sight (Al-Ansari et al., 2018, p. 207). Additionally, in India and Pakistan's case, India constructed a dam to control the water flow of the Indus River, affecting Pakistan's access to limited water resources. Thus, India increases its security while diminishing Pakistan's (Abas et al., 2019).

Traditionally, conflicts have been fought over territory, political sovereignty, and natural resources, such as iron, oil, and gas (Koubi, 2019). However, as the global population continues to grow, freshwater has emerged as a critical resource and a potential source of conflict in many regions of the world. Climate change has a serious impact on the world's water systems through droughts and flooding (Melese, 2016, p. 18). This is problematic, because freshwater is essential for sustaining life, food production and energy generation. Its scarcity, contamination, or mismanagement can lead to social, economic, and environmental challenges, creating tensions between different groups and nations.

In this context, the likelihood of a water conflict among states whose water security is endangered is increasing. Consequently, it can be contended that the most significant risk of militarized interstate conflict is expected to occur in international water systems located in poor and politically unstable areas (Bernauer & Siegfried, 2012). Moreover, it can be argued that water-related conflicts should be contemplated in a broader political context where freshwater seldom serves as the primary cause of the conflict, but can intensify existing tensions (Wolf et al., 2017). The conflict's root cause may be attributed to water governance and management, rather than freshwater scarcity and inadequacy (Wolf et al., 2017, p. 109). Institutions can serve as the mediating factor in water management, with parties choosing to enter cooperative agreements to mitigate the risk of not cooperating. Different international relations theories have different interpretations of the phenomenon of water conflicts. Structural realism focuses on the balance of power between states, while neoliberalism focuses on the influence of international institutions and foreign policy analysis focuses on understanding the influence of domestic pressures in water conflicts.

The conflict regarding the water of the Nile River has been ongoing for several decades. Treaties and agreements were established during the 20th century to regulate the diplomacy

between the Nile Basin states (Paisley & Henshaw, 2013). These agreements have always been challenged and contested by upstream riparian countries, namely Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. While downstream riparian states, mainly Egypt and Sudan, insist on protecting their share of freshwater, the upstream riparian states believe that these agreements are unfair and hinder their agricultural and development plans (UN Press, 2021). They argue that they are not obligated to abide by these agreements as they were signed by colonial powers (ibid). As the populations of the basin countries have grown, so have their development needs, leading to increased tension and disagreement among the treaties. Ethiopia built the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) to produce electricity, which could spur the development of the state (BBC News, 2022). Water insecurity is a threat to Egypt, meaning this dam increases the tension even more between the nations. The mistrust between the Nile Basin states run deep and creates obstacles for reaching an accord.

It is debated whether water scarcity enhances the incentives for riparian states to cooperate, or whether it increases the chances for conflict to occur (Dinar et al., 2015). The interconnection between states strengthens the case for the need for a cooperative framework to manage the transboundary waters (Zarei, 2020). Additionally, it can be argued that there is not much evidence for climate change as an important driver of violent conflict (Gleditsch, 2012). Others argue that severe non-militarized international conflicts over water issues exist and are expected to increase in the future (Bernauer & Kalbhenn, 2010). River basins in transitional tropical climate zones, especially parts of the Nile, Lake Chad and Euphrates-Tigris, are more at risk of experiencing conflict and reduced cooperation in the future (Dinar et al., 2015).

This will be illustrated by analyzing the case of Ethiopia and Egypt. The focus lies on the conditions regarding the limited accessibility to freshwater resources, exacerbated by climate change, which could result in conflicts between states. This results in the following research question: *'To what extent can international relations theories, such as structural realism, neoliberalism and foreign policy analysis identify the conditions that promote a water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt?'*

## 1.2. SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Answering this question is important for understanding the importance of international relations theories, such as structural realism, neoliberalism and foreign policy analysis, for a better comprehension of the conditions that cause cooperation or conflicts over shared water resources. The thesis will determine if these international relations theories can identify the dynamics of water conflicts, in particular between Ethiopia and Egypt. In addition, the thesis could also determine to what extent international relations theories are complementary in accounting for water conflicts. By examining the underlying causes of conflict and the barriers of cooperation, international relations theories could help to unearth the dynamics and potential solutions that may lead to a reduction of tensions. Moreover, it could give a better understanding to whether water scarcity can be an incentive for riparian states to cooperate or whether that it will promote conflict.

### 1.3. SOCIETAL RELEVANCE

This thesis' societal relevance is grounded in its focus on understanding the dynamics of water conflicts and the potential for cooperation among states, because freshwater is a crucial resource that is essential for human survival and economic development. Many regions around the world are facing water scarcity due to various factors such as climate change, population growth, urbanization, industrialization and unsustainable water use practices. Water scarcity and related conflicts can have significant impacts on societies, including reduced access to drinking water, food insecurity, and social instability. This thesis can provide insights into the conditions that drive conflict over shared water resources and why it is not possible to reach a treaty over transboundary water. Additionally, the three international relations theories used throughout this thesis could explain the role and the interaction of the relevant actors and their power motives in water conflicts (Frey, 1993, p. 57). Understanding the nature of the water conflict is crucial for water management, therefore each international relations theory focuses on different actors in the system. Understanding the nature of this water conflict is crucial for water management, therefore this thesis focuses on different actors of each international relations theory. The insights that derive from the theories can provide information for stakeholders to formulate new policies and institutional frameworks for water governance and management (Funder et al., 2010).

### 1.4. METHODOLOGY

This thesis uses a qualitative single case design to answer the research question. It involves the process-tracing method of an in-depth analysis of the real-life system of the Ethiopia and Egypt in the water conflict. This makes it possible to identify unique patterns and underlying factors within the context of the case by using international relations theories, such as structural realism, neoliberalism and foreign policy analysis. The study is based on a document analysis of primary and secondary sources to describe the academic debate and the current situation regarding the water conflict. This research aims to analyze the explanatory and complementary power of the international relations theories in understanding the conditions that promote or hinder the water conflict in Ethiopia and Egypt.

### 1.5. THESIS STRUCTURE

This thesis is structured as follows. The theoretical chapter examines the impact of climate change on interstate conflict. The focus lies on the explanation of water conflicts through international relations theories. The methodological chapter discusses the research design, case selection, research methods, and the operationalization of the hypotheses. The empirical chapter contains the analysis. Lastly, the final chapter summarizes this thesis' main conclusions and limitations, and provides recommendations for further research.



## CHAPTER 2: THEORY

This chapter provides a definition of climate change within global environmental politics. It also illustrates the influence of climate change on security and conflicts, with a particular focus on water conflicts. Furthermore, it discusses the international relations theories used throughout this thesis, structural realism, neoliberalism and foreign policy analysis, both in relation to the effects of climate change on water resources and their potential to explain water conflicts among states.

### 2.1. CLIMATE CHANGE IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

The United Nations (UN) defines climate change as prolonged changes in temperatures and weather patterns caused by human activities, primarily the burning of fossil fuels such as coal, oil, gas since the 1800s (United Nations, n.d.). In the late 20th Century, climate change became a topic of global concern and a salient foreign policy issue. (Below, 2017). The UN established the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that was designed to provide the world with scientific knowledge on the current state of climate change and its environmental and socio-economic consequences (IPCC, n.d.). The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was signed by more than 150 countries with the aim of preventing dangerous human interference with the climate system (UNFCCC, n.d.). The Kyoto Protocol (1992) and the Paris Agreement (2016) were built on this Convention.

Global concern about the environment started in response to the expanded scientific understanding of humanity's impact on the climate. Climate change became part of the global political agenda for governments (Pralle, 2009). Global environmental politics involves the actions of states, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other actors that transcend a given region that affects the environment and natural resources of the planet (Porter, 1991, p. 35). GEP is multi-disciplinary and gives a better understanding of the relationship between societies and their natural environment in global politics (Falkner, 2014). It addresses the growing number of transboundary environmental problems, focusing on negotiating and implementing multilateral agreements that protect the environment and natural resources (Porter, 1991, p. 35). This has resulted in the creation of an increasingly complex set of international environmental institutions, the condition of international environmental law and the emergence of multilateral environmental diplomacy (Falkner, 2012, p. 503).

Climate change is firmly on the global and scientific agenda. Since 2008, climate change has become the primary focus of analysis in international climate politics. Beforehand, major publications on international relations only lightly touched on it as a topic (Cass, 2020). There has been a growth in research on the relationship between the consequences of climate change, security and conflict.

### 2.2. ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY

Security refers to the state of being safeguarded from harm or risk (Barnett, 2003), providing individuals with the confidence to pursue important aspects of life that ensure their survival. In the Cold War era, security studies predominantly concentrated on matters related to military statecraft and the territory of sovereign states. Any situation where military force held relevance was deemed a security concern. Situations in which this was not the case were categorized

as low politics or would be overridden by security concerns in the case of conflict (Baldwin, 1997, p. 9). The end of the Cold War intensified the search for a more inclusive concept of security, spurred by a growing awareness of the adverse impacts of environmental degradation (Graeger, 1996, p. 109). This sparked the debate on whether environmental issues should no longer be categorized as “low politics” concerns and instead be elevated to the level of “high politics” security problems (Barnett & Dovers, 2001, p. 158). The survival and security of some states depends on the impact of climate change, making sustainability a national interest. For example, the island nation of Tuvalu is slowly sinking into the Pacific Ocean due to the rising sea levels caused by climate change (De Jong & Gallagher, 2022). In this context, environmental issues directly affect the survival of this state. In this context, environmental security refers to the peaceful reduction of human vulnerability to the effects and risks associated with human-induced environmental degradation. The goal is to treat the underlying causes that lead to environmental degradation (ibid). The concept of security is broadened from military to non-military collective threats, such as environmental problems (Krahmann, 2008, p. 381).

However, it can be argued that the term security should only be associated with the state and military, and therefore, needs to be kept separate from the environmental debate. It can lead to confusion as to which means may be used to pursue security (Baldwin, 1997, p. 16). The institutions concerned with national security are inadequate to deal with environmental problems, making it possible that the concept of security introduces a zero-sum rationality to the environmental debate. This can create winners and losers, which makes harder to solve environmental problems (Trombetta, 2008, p. 586). The concept of security may entail problematic implications, which makes it better for realists to consider environmental problems in the realm of ‘low’ politics (Trombetta, 2008, p. 587).

However, it is argued that there has been a shift in policy priorities with more attention being given to environmental problems. This increased awareness acknowledges that environmental concerns can play a significant role in the international political system, creating possibilities for defining who needs protection and by whom (Trombetta, 2008, p. 588). The world may become more vulnerable to serious international frictions as population growth and environmental pressure continue to increase, leading to possible social unrest (Allenby, 2000, p. 10). Environmental issues may create concerns that extend beyond the boundaries of a state and can be posed at the global political system (Dalby, 2017). The decisions that are made by one state will in one way or the other affect other states. Climate change, combined with economic globalization, is leading to an increasing demand for natural resources such as food, land, water and fossil fuels. Eventually, these resources will reach their limits to supply growth, which will trigger competition or even conflicts over scarce resources (Evans, 2011, p. 2). Climate change and resource scarcity are perceived as threats that heighten existing societal problems, such as poverty, inequality, social insecurity, violence, or civil war (Froese & Schilling, 2019). Thus, the environmental problems have far-reaching and interconnected impacts on human well-being, social stability and national security.

The impact of climate change on pre-existing issues such as political instability, poverty and limited resources can be seen in Syria. Some say the Syrian civil war has been triggered by climate change, as a severe drought from 2006 - 2010 displaced nearly two million people who migrated to the cities (MedGlobal, 2022). These environmental conditions brought by climate change led to increased economic instability and social unrest in Syria, contributing to the civil

conflict. In addition, Bangladesh is one of the countries most affected by climate change, with rising sea-levels, temperatures and floods. The country's poverty levels and underdevelopment make it difficult for the state to adapt to environmental challenges, generating insecurity (Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies and Saferworld, 2009, p. 10). These environmental problems have led to the loss of agricultural land, affecting the well-being of millions of people living in coastal areas, causing migration, food insecurity and social unrest (ibid., 2009, p. 12). These examples demonstrate how climate change increases insecurity through increased competition for resources, economic instability and political unrest.

### 2.2.1. WATER CONFLICTS

Climate change has the potential to intensify existing conflicts or create new ones, because it can lead to changes in resource availability and distribution, migration and shifts in power dynamics. Eventually, freshwater is the most critical natural resource on earth. Freshwater is a vital resource for human survival and economic development, thus competition for this resource may lead to tensions or even conflict. Climate change and population growth put increasing pressure on vulnerable areas that suffer from limited water resources (Chalecki, 2010). Inadequate access to freshwater is a severe problem in countries with a high population that share a major source of freshwater with other states. When river basins cross political boundaries it gives rise to hydrological, social and economic interdependencies among states, which complicates transboundary water management (Munia et al., 2016, p.1). States located upstream in the river basin have the power to control the water flow to downstream states, potentially increasing water scarcity. Building dams, reservoirs or other large-scale projects intensify sociopolitical tensions among states (Levy & Sidel, 2011). In addition, inadequate access to freshwater could increase by a range of factors including dependency on one major water source, urbanization, industrial pollution, poor political and economic relations among riparian states and weak international institutions focused on water management (Bernauer & Kalbhenn, 2010, p. 5803).

There are several views on the relation between water insecurity and conflict. First, water can become a strategic concern for countries all over the world. In this thesis, the term 'transboundary water conflict' is defined as verbal, economic or military hostile behavior that occurs between stakeholders that share international water resources (Petersen-Perlman et al., 2017, p. 106). The access to water resources can be a military and political goal in interstate conflicts, particularly in situations of water scarcity, fishing rights, access to ports, transportation or sovereignty disputes (Yoffe & Wolf, 1999, p. 200). Water scarcity may trigger interstate conflict, especially if there are pre-existing tensions in water-stressed areas (ibid). Thus, when the interests of the upstream and downstream countries often clash (Petersen-Perlman et al., 2017, p. 107). The risk of interstate conflict is likely to materialize in the transboundary water systems located in poor and politically unstable areas (Bernauer & Siegfried, 2012, p. 227). For example, European Union (EU) and the United States (U.S.) used water scarcity as a strategy to condemn the war between Ukraine and Russia over sovereignty, while banning Russian flagged ships from entering their ports (Council of the European Union, n.d.).

Secondly, water scarcity can lead to intrastate conflicts (Dinko, 2022). Such conflicts can arise from the use and targeting of freshwater resources, which can lead to violent riots or terrorist

and rebel movements aiming to control or target freshwater sources within the country. Especially countries with dry climate regions tend to have more cases of intrastate conflicts triggered by water-related issues (ibid). Countries with weak institutions and low economic development are at a higher risk of intrastate conflict (Gizelis & Wooden, 2010). It matters how governments react to the pressure of freshwater scarcity, because institutional capacity and water distribution can undermine the stability and security. In the end, intrastate conflict could even lead to interstate conflict. For example, in 2021 the Mexican governments failed to manage the freshwater supply in Chihuahua, which resulted in illegal pumping by cartels and some farmers (Kinard, 2023). This resulted in an increase in intrastate tension and protests around water insecurity.

Lastly, (international) cooperation over shared water resources can also be the norm to solve interstate and intrastate water conflicts. Some strands of literature state that freshwater scarcity could increase the chances for parties to negotiate, rather than to fight over resources (Chalecki, 2010). Due to the complexity created by diverse economies, ecosystems, climate, politics and cultures within watersheds, the management of transboundary freshwater resources can be viewed as a form of intrastate and interstate conflict management and/or prevention (Petersen-Perlman et al., 2017, p. 106). For achieving successful transboundary water management, it consists of building institutions, the establishment of equity and fairness, and the fulfillment of needs that align with both parties' cultural values (ibid). For example, the Sava River Basin turned from the largest river the former country of Yugoslavia into an international river that supplies multiple countries in Southeastern Europe with water (Komatina & Grošeli, 2015, p. 3). These states developed the Framework Agreement on the Sava River Basin, building an institution to ensure transboundary water cooperation to improve sustainable development, raising living standards in the region (Komatina & Grošeli, 2015, p. 9).

## 2.3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis aims to use the international relations theories of structural realism, neoliberalism and foreign policy analysis, to identify the underlying conditions that contribute to tensions, conflicts, or cooperation among states with regards to water scarcity. Structural realism focuses on the role of states within the international anarchic system and how these structures could determine the conditions that foster conflict. Neoliberalism focuses on the role of international institutions in facilitating cooperation among states over freshwater resources. Lastly, the foreign policy analysis will determine the influence of domestic actors on prioritizing national interests, and how this impacts water conflict or interstate cooperation.

### 2.3.1. STRUCTURAL REALISM

Structural realism is an approach to international relations that was developed by Kenneth Waltz. It is derived from classical realism, which was introduced by Hans Morgenthau. Both approaches argue that states are seen as the most important actor in international politics, where the state is the primary unit that needs to be secured against outside threats (Lundborg, 2019, p. 232). Classical realism argue that power is always the immediate aim, where it is in human nature to strive for political power in order to realize its goals in international politics (Morgenthau & Thompson, 1993, p. 29). This comes from the condition of anarchy: the lack of an ultimate international authority makes security a public good (Kirshner, 2012, p. 55).

Structural realism focuses more on the systematic factors that shape international politics, while, according to Waltz, classical realism focuses on individuals that have the desire for power, especially for scarce goods (1988, p. 616). The structure of the international system, which is characterized by anarchy and the distribution of capabilities across states, leads to a self-help system where states are forced to provide for their own security (Waltz, 1990, p. 29; Parent & Rosato, 2015, p. 52). For Waltz, the international system is defined by the organizing principle that anarchy, or the absence of a central authority, determines how a set of units, in this case states, are related to each other (2010, p. 81; 93). This system is formed by the self-help principle of states, where states strive for survival (Waltz, 2010, p. 92). In addition, the distribution of capabilities across states affects the structure of the international system (Waltz, 2010, p. 98). A system can change when the structure changes, which will be a result of change in the distribution of capabilities. This affects the power distribution among states which in turn determines the uni-, bi-, or multipolarity of the international system (ibid). Therefore, the distribution of power among the strongest states is the most powerful explanation for patterns of variety in the international system (Mansfield, 1993, p. 107). In this thesis, as with structural realism, a distinction is made between bilateral, regional and global power balances in the international system.

This approach holds two major theories of state behavior within the system. On the one hand, defensive neorealism argues that the international system provides states with almost no incentives to increase their power; instead they want to focus on maintaining (or restoring) the existing balance of power (Snyder, 2002, p. 152). Waltz argues that the first concern of states is to maintain their position in the international system, because their goal is to provide security (2010, p. 126). States do not want to maximize their power, because that could lead to counter-coalitions that would undermine their longer-term security (Collard-Wexler, 2006, p. 400). On the other hand, offensive neorealism believes that a balance of power rarely occurs in world politics, because the international system creates incentives for states to look for possibilities in order to gain power at the expense of competitors (Snyder, 2002, p. 152). According to Mearsheimer, this theory is based on the security dilemma where a state increases its own security by diminishing that of others (2001, p. 36). A state wants to maximize its relative power, therefore only being concerned with the distribution of material capabilities in order to gain a power advantage over other states (ibid). States will even aggressively seek to maximize power to prevent challenges arising from competitors (Collard-Wexler, 2006, p. 400), therefore the ultimate goal of states is to be the hegemon in the system in order to survive (Snyder, 2002, p. 152). Thus, to an offensive realist, anarchy creates incentives for states to expand their power

Critics argue that structural realism cannot explain foreign policy, because it cannot explain the effects of internal forces (Waltz, 2004, p. 3). It cannot predict the future of international relations, because it fails to provide a prediction of state behavior (Elman, 1996, p. 26). Foreign policy can operate on different levels while the structure of the international political system is based on the system's level (Waltz, 2004, p. 4). However, according to structural realist, foreign policy is driven by its place in the international system in which the capabilities have an impact on foreign policy (Telbami, 2002, p. 162), meaning that the external force shape state behavior (Waltz, 2004, p. 3). Waltz argues that international system theories can predict the behavior of states and its outcomes due to the dynamics of the system (2010, p. 72). He acknowledges that states who do not perform according to the self-help system will face

danger and suffering, therefore states are stimulated to create the balance of power (Waltz, 2010, p. 118). This thesis focuses on the structure of the system that determines the power relations between states, which are characterized by anarchy and the distribution of capabilities across states. Resulting that states will react according to the self-help system to create their own security.

According to structural realism, competition and conflict among states occur under conditions of anarchy, because states in an anarchic system must provide for their own security (Waltz, 1988, p. 619). States focus on identifying dangers and counteracting them. The relations between states remain tense, because states are suspicious and often hostile by nature, even though they have no reason to be so (ibid). This is due to the security dilemma, which measures that an advancement in the security of one state, diminishes that of others. Conflicts are frames in terms of self-preservation, in which states fear to be dominated or even destroyed by other states (Schweller, 1997, p. 929). Therefore, the goal is survival. States do not know the intentions of others and are aware of the anarchic system, thus need to provide for their own security (Parent & Rosato, 2015, p. 52).

According to structural realism, the strategies for the survival of states to create more security are internal and external balancing (Parent & Rosato, 2015, p. 54). In the self-help system, states want to survive while they create a balance of power. Balancing is a countervailing policy designed to improve military capabilities to deter or defeat another state (Vasquez & Elman, 2003). By internal balancing, the state focuses on strengthening its military power. States increase their military spending, weapons production, troop levels and/or they will imitate successful military practices of other states, such as technological innovations (Parent & Rosato, 2015, p. 56). States will mostly focus on internal balancing with their strong (regional) competitors (Parent & Rosato, 2015, p. 61). States prefer internal balancing, because it minimizes reliance on others (Parent & Rosato, 2015, p. 54).

Secondly, external balancing focuses on forming military alliances to deter or defend against common rivals (Parent & Rosato, 2015, p. 56). States rely more military deterrence and successful military practices and rarely resort to alliances for their security, thus states balance more through internal means than through external means (Parent & Rosato, 2015, p. 52). Interstate cooperation is difficult in an uncertain international system (Collard-Wexler, 2006, p. 400). States rely on their own capabilities, but they also need to align in flexible alliances to bring international power into balance (Waltz, 2010, p. 164; Parent & Rosato, 2015, p. 53). Alliances are driven by the system which in turn reflects the military capability within the anarchic international system (Siverson & Starr, 1994, p. 147). Flexible alliances are built to counter threats by other states, where states cannot be sure that others will commit to their agreements (Parent & Rosato, 2015, p. 85). To preserve the balance of the system, states will join or defect from an alliance to maintain their security (Waltz, 2010, p. 164). However, in alliances where there is an imbalance of power, the contributions of weaker members relatively are less important, and leaders of the alliance do not concern themselves with the commitment of their partners as they have little choice (ibid). Thus, the help of other states could still improve a state's position.

Structural realists do not believe in long-term interstate cooperation, because it is not flexible. Alliances are seen as a flexible reflection of the balance of power, therefore states believe that the opponents' alliances are also unreliable (Parent & Rosato, 2015, p. 80). However, a

structural realist believes that states create international organizations (IOs) to help further their interests. These scholars argue that IOs are instruments created to serve state interests rather than international interests (Barnett & Finnemore, 1999, p. 703). Inside international organizations can be the place where states exercise their power in political battles. The IOs are seen as the solution to problems of incomplete information and high transaction costs (ibid). States will cooperate through international organizations that are based on their self-interest where the distribution of power is maintained (Maier-Rigaud, 2008, p. 8). The most powerful states create institutions so that they can maintain and/or increase their power in the international system. Therefore, according to structural realism, international organizations are no autonomous actors, but state agencies that dominate the struggle for power (Maier-Rigaud, 2008, p. 9).

Critics argue that international institutional history does matter, because once institutions are established it will be too costly to change it or create a new one (Powell, 1994, p. 342). As a result, an institution will remain the same even when the distribution of power shifts, unless the shift in power serves to acquire the benefits of a new institution, which would reflect the new balance of power (ibid). However, due to the high costs of establishing new institutions, existing ones are more flexible to power shifts. This creates possibilities for states who have limited power compared to the most powerful states in the international system (Krasner, 1983, p. 506). Weaker states can increase their influence in these institutions, which undermines the theory of the distribution of power according to structural realists. Institutions can change the underlying power capabilities of their members by reinforcing or diminishing their resources by exhibiting particular behavior (Krasner, 1983, p. 507). At first, the export of capital and technology serves the interest of the hegemon, however over the long term it can undercut the hegemon's positions by increasing the position of weaker states (ibid). Critics would argue that the approach of structural realism does not focus on the influence institutions can have in the relationship and power capabilities among their members, because structural realists believe that institutions are the reflection of the balance of power.

#### 2.3.1.1. STRUCTURAL REALISM AND WATER CONFLICTS

Finally, structural realism argues that foreign policy should be examined in the structure of the international system. If conflicts or competitions between states occur, states will use balancing behavior, internal and external, in order to restore the balance of power. In the context of water, both states want to gain control and avoid that the other state has an advantage over their shared water resources. A security dilemma can arise when a state has a location upstream of transboundary water resources, giving it the ability to control the river through dam constructions. The downstream state perceives this power as a threat, because it may create scarcity within their own territory (Zawahri, 2008, p. 280). The discussion surrounding international water resources and geopolitical positioning happens especially in the case of India and Pakistan. India, an upstream state, constructed dams in the Indus, thus threatening Pakistan's position as a downstream state by being able to control the water flow into Pakistan (Abas et al., 2019). This dynamic has given rise to tensions and distrust, as Pakistan is heavily reliant on the Indus for freshwater. India has the ability to increase its security while diminishing Pakistan's security, should it so choose.

On the one hand, by internal balancing a state focuses on strengthening its military force as response to the dispute over the river (Mitchell & Zawahri, 2015, p. 188). States can use

military power as a threat to manage the disputes over rivers, or use water as a political leverage in non-riparian issues with military power. For instance, in 2000, a militarized dispute arose between Suriname and Guyana on the Courantyne River over the issue of sovereignty (Donovan, 2003). The Surinamese navy evicted Guyanese workers that were in Surinamese territorial waters, which was a violation of Suriname's sovereignty. The dispute over the Courantyne River stems from the desire of each state to dominate the other. The river is highly important for both countries, providing access to natural resources such as oil and gold, and making it possible to regulate the passage of ships (ibid). On the other hand, through external balancing, the alliances reflect the distribution of power among states. Through cooperation, the strongest state may exploit the weakest state by prioritizing its own needs for access to water resources. For instance, in the Israeli-Palestinian water arena, the Joint Water Committee (JWC) was principally created to serve Israel's needs over the Palestinians' needs. This allowed Israel to dominate over the region's water resources, systems and projects, further diminishing the Palestinians' position (Selby, 2003, p. 137). Hence, according to structural realist reasoning, interstate cooperation serves the interests of one state over those of another.

Hypothesis 1: States are more likely to cooperate over limited water resources, the more it serves their security interests.

### 2.3.2. NEOLIBERALISM

Neoliberalism, also known as neoliberal institutionalism, emerged around the 1980s to challenge the dominance of structural realism. The approach argues that the possibility and sustainability of cooperation between states can reduce competition and conflict despite anarchy. Both structural realism and neoliberalism share the assumption that an anarchic system, the absence of a sovereign authority to enforce agreements, creates possibilities for states to pursue their own interests, thereby complicating cooperation (Powell, 1994, p. 320). However, unlike structural realism, neoliberalism is optimistic about the potential for long-term interstate cooperation in an anarchic system.

To neoliberals, the international system is a complex interdependent network of actors, in which international institutions can provide cooperation among states on the basis of likely absolute gains. Interdependence affects world politics and the behavior of states, by creating rules, procedures and institutions that can help governments to regulate interstate and transnational relations (Keohane & Nye, 1973). Interdependence highlights the emergence of states becoming more interconnected by multiple issues, such as social, economic and political relationships, instead of just focusing on military capabilities (Rana, 2015, p. 290). Relations between states are becoming more deep and complex, which lead to increased interdependence that can undermine state power and which increase the influence of transnational non-state actors. Also, it can create more opportunities for economic growth and increase security due to military cooperation (Keohane & Nye, 1973). Although the state is the most important actor in the international system, the concept of complex interdependence challenges the independent authority of states, because they cannot always influence international outcomes.

Neoliberals believe that states want to secure their own self-interest, which under anarchy leads to mixed interests, especially in situations that are characterized by the prisoners'



dilemma (Grieco, 1988, p. 493). This dilemma illustrates that two actors have common interests but do not end up cooperating together due to mistrust, asymmetrical information and the lack of transparency (Keohane, 2005, p. 69). This creates problems when states wish to cooperate, since they seek to maximize their power and preserve their autonomy (Rana, 2015, p. 293). Realists believe that anarchy constrains the willingness of states to cooperate, unless it pursues their own interests, creating a zero-sum game. Neoliberals argue that states can work together with the help of international institutions, a positive-sum game (Grieco, 1988, p. 486). An anarchic system can lead to defection or the desire to cheat. Therefore, establishing international institutions could manage the challenges posed by defection. Within the school of neoliberalism, international institutions are defined as a collection of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures, which align with actor expectations in a given area of the international system (Krasner, 1983, p. 2). By creating institutions that reduce uncertainty, monitor others, provide transparency on state behavior, and alter transaction costs, the likelihood of compliance can be increased.

Institutions offer information and mechanisms that encourage states to compel specific binding commitments, making it harder for them to defect (Keohane & Martin, 1995, p. 42). Interstate cooperation is more attractive to states if the costs of ensuring each other's compliance and of sanctioning cheaters are low compared to the benefits of cooperation (Grieco, 1988, p. 495). Institutions reduce verification costs, foster repetition and make it easier to punish violators. International institutions reinforce and institutionalize mutual cooperation, and delegitimize defection by making it costlier (Axelrod & Keohane, 1985, p. 250). This makes it easier to establish a reputation for practicing reciprocity, which can become an important asset for a state's position in making agreements. States are more willing to make agreements with governments that have a good reputation in cooperation (ibid). Institutions can promote a government's good reputation by facilitating interstate cooperation, reducing the uncertainty produced by the condition of anarchy. International institutions are able to help regulate the behavior of states by helping to create treaties, agreements and conventions that are based on their rules, norms and principles (Haggard & Simmons, 1987, p. 493; Mitchell & Keilbach, 2001, p. 893).

International institutions can overcome the self-serving nature of states in instances of diplomatic cooperation, as mutual cooperation can be in states' best long-term interest (Grieco, 1988, p. 493). States can accept the short-term costs, because their position is expected to improve in the long-term. According to neoliberalism, states focus on maximizing their absolute gains and are not concerned with the gains achieved by other states (Berejekian, 1997, p. 790). Large absolute gains occur through joint action. Cooperation between states leads to beneficial agreements where they exchange information and monitor each other's behavior, leading to reduced concerns about their intentions and the risk of being cheated on (Grieco, 1988, p. 495). A large shadow of future is an important aspect of institutions, because repeated mutual interstate cooperation is the best outcome with a strategy of punishing defection (Powell, 1991, p. 1306). It makes the likelihood of long-term cooperation more certain. However, structural realists argue that states are concerned that forming an alliance and pursuing joint gains could lead to the emergence of more dangerous and potential rivals in the future. Thus, the focus is to prevent other states from advancing their relative capabilities (Grieco, 1988, p. 487). Therefore, the pursuit of relative gains is a problem for cooperation, because states fear for their own survival in an anarchic system. However, neoliberalism argues that states with common interests should be less concerned about potentially engaging

in conflicts in the future, and therefore have the fewest concerns about the rising of their relative gains from their cooperation (Grieco, 1988, p. 504). In an alliance, states should see the success of their partners as beneficial to their collective strength, becoming stronger military allies.

Neoliberalism argues that institutions have an independent impact within the system, in contrast to the structural realist view that insists that institutions are just an instrument of statecraft (Jervis, 1999, p. 54). Structural realists argue that institutions are based on self-interest and the international distribution of power, thus the most powerful states shape the institutions to maintain their power (Mearsheimer, 1994, p. 13). However, neoliberals argue that institutions matter, because they have the incentive to regulate how states behave in certain ways, such as focusing on long-term community goals instead of short-term, self-interest goals (Schweller & Priess, 1997, p. 3). In this way, institutions make it possible for states to achieve mutual gains from cooperation; a positive-sum game. It does not focus on relatively higher gains compared to other states, meaning neoliberals are not concerned with the gains of other parties. Rather, they focus on strengthening their own position in the international system. Complex interdependence makes conflict costly and impractical as an instrument, resulting in a preference for interstate cooperation and negotiation.

Constructivist critics maintain that institutions are created by international behavior of epistemic communities (Haas, 1992, p. 4). These communities have the expertise and authoritative knowledge of specific issue areas, therefore they are able to influence policy by framing the political issue in their beliefs, defining states' interests and setting standards (Adler & Haas, 1992, p. 375). Thus, epistemic communities have the influence to create new international practices, or to change international practices and institutions to resolve or manage problems (*ibid*). The communities with more mainstream ideas have the possibility to acquire more influence than communities harboring more alternative ideas (Adler & Haas, 1992, p. 382). In addition, the influence of the communities depends on the degree of consensus among community members. International organizations benefit from a shared consensus among community members, because this allows their values to turn into national interests (Adler & Haas, 1992, p. 384).

Neoliberals argue that the shared ideas of epistemic communities are embedded in transnational advocacy networks who can be important players in regional and international politics (Keck & Sikkink, 1999, p. 89). Major actors in advocacy networks are international and domestic NGOs, social movements, foundations, media, trade unions, intergovernmental organizations and parliamentary branches of governments (Keck & Sikkink, 1999, p. 91). Eventually, the values of transnational advocacy networks are their essence. Yet, their aim is to gain influence at several different levels, such as the agenda setting and policy creation level (Keck & Sikkink, 1999, p. 98). Neoliberals focuses on the impact of these networks on public affairs in the international system, increasing the interaction between several actors, not only the state (Keck & Sikkink, 1999, p. 99). Actors have been observed to integrate in advocacy coalition who have shared beliefs and who act together. Together they create a strategy to ensure policy change, which depends on the strength of the network, and its ability to achieve leverage (Keck & Sikkink, 1999, p. 98; Sabatier, 1987, p. 652). It is important to determine the influence of these actors in the international system.

Neoliberals argue that strong institutional capacity in the form of agreements and treaties can help reduce the likelihood of conflict (Petersen-Perlman et al., 2017, p. 3). It is important to establish institutional capacity, because it is resilient over time and it can mitigate the dangers of the anarchic system. Institutions can play a role in securing an agreement among rival states cease ongoing conflict or to make credible commitments to foster domestic order (Hoddie & Hartzell, 2005, p. 26). If institutions cannot facilitate secure and equitable agreements there is a possibility that conflicts may arise (Jervis, 1999, p. 50).

#### 2.3.2.1. NEOLIBERALISM AND WATER CONFLICTS

Liberal institutionalists have perceived interstate cooperation as a more likely outcome of competition for limited freshwater resources than violent conflicts (Brochmann & Gleditsch, 2012). Competing freshwater demand among river basin's users makes it difficult to find consensus, unless there are diplomatic and institutional precedents (Petersen-Perlman et al., 2017, p.106). According to neoliberalism, it is important to create and maintain an epistemic community in regions with limited water resources, because it could increase the possibilities of cooperation or maintaining consensus over agreements in river basin institutions. Creating river basin organizations can reduce the likelihood of water conflict, because agreements can give states a level of certainty, trust and predictability that is often not present otherwise (Petersen-Perlman et al., 2017, p. 110). It is important that these organizations are strong enough to balance the interests and that mismanagement is limited and that the presence of mistrust, asymmetrical information and misunderstanding is ruled out (Petersen-Perlman et al., 2017, p. 108, 110). To ensure effective water management, it is important to involve all relevant actors in the decision-making process and provide them with equal access to information. During negotiations, it is important to consider all potentially conflicting interests and create trust in order to reach mutually beneficial solutions and achieve consensus (Wolf et al., 2017, p. 91). Cooperative water institutions through treaties have proven to be remarkably resilient over time, even between hostile riparian states, and even when conflict is existing on other matters (Wolf, 2007, p. 247). Shared interests and interdependency over water resources seem to consistently outweigh water's potential to provoke conflict.

Demographic growth and increasing urbanization have resulted in an increased demand for water, leading to increased conflicts over transboundary water resources. The Senegal River Basin Development Organization (OMVS) was established to manage access to the Senegal River, shared by Mali, Mauritania, Guinea and Senegal, in order to solve water-related conflicts (Ayaa, 2012, p. 2). These countries cooperate through joint management of the services and sectors fed by the river, thus they share costs and benefits that are accumulated from the river and its development projects. Water diplomacy involves cooperation among riparian states, including exchanging information, settling disputes peacefully and developing projects together (Geneva Solutions, n.d.). However, in the late 1980s, Senegal and Mauritania experienced tension due to extreme desertification and drought that disrupted the water flow for local communities. Although conflict broke out, the governments remained in contact through OMVS. Eventually the countries recognized their interdependence regarding water resources. The stability of the organization was maintained thanks to revenue from hydropower projects and the implicit agreement that all projects must receive approval from all four states (ibid). This leads to a win-win situation.

Hypothesis 2: The more international institutions are involved in a conflict over limited water resources, the more likely it will be that long-term interstate cooperation is achieved.

### 2.3.3. FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS (FPA)

Foreign policy analysis is developed as a separate approach within the discipline of international relations. It is concerned with understanding the foreign policy process, which involves identifying the actors involved, their motivations, the structures of decision-making, and the broader context of the international system (Alden & Aran, 2017, p. 3). Other theories of international relations focus on larger systemic factors that influence foreign policy outcomes, because they want to interpret the broad features of the international system. Foreign policy analysis seeks to understand the decision-making processes and actions of how states, institutions, non-state actors and people engage with one another within the international system (Alden & Aran, 2017, p. 1). This subfield focuses on the factors that shape a country's foreign policy by unpacking the black box of the state to show state interests, such as national interests, domestic politics, leadership, and ideology. Foreign policy is the behavior of states mainly towards the external environment of the states in the international system through authorized actors (Tayfur, 1994, p. 114). These actions are shaped by experiences, traditions and aspirations of each society. Sovereign states create foreign policy in order to establish their position in the international system, because it is designed to be implemented outside its territorial boundaries in order to create an identity and a voice in the system (Tayfur, 1994, p. 115).

Critics argue that foreign policy analysis is less relevant in the interdependent world of today, as these systematic patterns have effect on the actions of actors in the international system (Kaarbo, 2015, p. 193). Systematic patterns, such as the changing norms, alliances or the influence of great powers, challenges the state's ability to create its own foreign policy, as it is interdependent on actions outside the individual and domestic level (Kaarbo, 2015, 194). However, foreign policy analysis scholars argue that there is an unstable and unpredictable system in the international arena, whereas it is even more important to analyze actions from specific actors, focusing on leaders, in the international system (Hudson & Vore, 1995, p. 212). The real-time international problems cannot be dealt with on the system level, thus the focus must be on the actors to understand the complexity of the situation (ibid). The foreign policy analysis decision-making approach deconstructs the notion that states are single and unified actors, instead emphasizing that people and actors can comprise the state (Hudson & Vore, 1995, p. 210). Decision-makers respond to their domestic and international environments which are influenced by psychological, societal, ideational, political, institutional and material factors (Kaarbo, 2015, p. 207). These factors shape the societal context in which decisions are made and these domestic political and decision-making factors affect the policies and choices of actors (Hudson, 2005, p. 10; Kaarbo, 2015, p. 189). FPA has an actor-specific focus where important actions happen between states and across states that is based on human decision-makers acting alone or in groups (Hudson, 2005). The role of the decision-making actor is central and the perceptions of leaders act as filters for other international and domestic factors, including the institutional and societal factors (Kaarbo, 2015, p. 191). Thus, foreign policies and domestic politics are interdependent, and all these factors help to understand the policy process.

According to the “two level” game of Putnam, state decision-makers play the games of both domestic and international politics (Hudson & Day, 2019, p. 7). At the national level, there are domestic pressures on the government to create favorable policies for their interest, and the political leaders want power by creating coalitions among those domestic groups (Putnam, 1988, p. 434). At the international level, the national governments want to create an environment where they are able to satisfy their domestic pressures. The goal is to limited the adverse consequences of their foreign policy (ibid).

while they are minimizing the adverse consequences of it (ibid). Both games are interdependent of each other, thus each national political leader needs to play the game of domestic and international politics simultaneously. This thesis focuses on the game board of domestic politics, because the domestic pressures in water conflicts also affects international politics, where political leaders choose to give primacy to domestic pressures. The theories of structural realism and neoliberalism both focus more on the structural level and the role of actors in the international system, therefore it is important to include factors in domestic politics to understand the whole picture that results in the conditions that lead to water conflict or interstate cooperation.

The main focus of this thesis will be on the internal factors on the individual and domestic level that affect the decision-making process for foreign policy. Firstly, at the individual level, it is important to understand the specifics of the individuals who make foreign policy decisions in order to comprehend their choices (Hudson & Vore, 1995, p. 214). Individual policy makers can influence foreign policy choices, in which their personality, policy preferences, decision-making styles and relationships to advisers are crucial elements (Dyson, 2006, p. 290). Decision-makers are influenced by its societal context that is shaped by culture, history, geography, economics, political institutions, ideology and other factors (Hudson & Vore, 1995, p. 217). The important actors that make foreign policy are heads of states, heads of government, foreign ministers, parliaments, parliamentary committees, political parties, and so forth. All these politically responsible decision-makers are acting internationally on behalf of the polities they represent (Carlsnaes, 2008, p. 114). Under certain conditions, uncertainty, stress and its position in the foreign policy decision-making process, the individual characteristics of leaders can become central in understanding the choices that are made (Hudson & Vore, 1995, p. 218). The interests of each actor in foreign policy can vary from the goal of remaining in office, defending the government's credibility and policies, or optimizing a country's economic gains (Alons, 2007, p. 215).

At domestic level, foreign policy is shaped by the nature of the political institutions of the state, the features of its society and the mechanisms that connect the state and society and channel societal demands into the political systems (Alden & Aran, 2017, p. 67). Domestic institutions and interest groups operate within the constitutional framework of the state, formulating coalition-building strategies that demonstrate the potency of domestic influences over foreign policy. Thus, political participation can influence formal politics and the approach of political parties towards international issues (ibid). The structural power relationship between decision-makers and societal groups determine the influence of public input to state foreign policy (Hudson & Day, 2019, p. 148). This determines the government's ability to ignore societal demands, or its ability to influence the government (Alons, 2007, p. 218). In addition, the regime type, ranging from authoritarian to democratic, can influence the power of the decision-maker. It can put constraints on the control they have on policy or it can use foreign policy to

distract from domestic difficulties (Hudson & Day, 2019, p. 40). In addition, it is important to consider that natural attributes of a state can affect the direction of foreign policy across all levels. These characteristics include natural resources, geography, population characteristics, size, and all other factors which determine a state's power (Hudson & Day, 2019, p. 170). Natural resources, whether abundant or scarce, can influence foreign policy as they are vital for a state's development and energy needs, making them an interesting target for foreign policy. Additionally, environmental degradation can become a national security threat to states (Hudson & Day, 2019, p. 172). Moreover, strategically important geographical features can also affect foreign policy, just as the level of military capabilities of a state, since possessing superior arms can lead to a foreign policy approach based on coercive diplomacy (Hudson & Day, 2019, p. 176). Thus, domestic factors can influence the external behavior of governments.

Eventually, political leaders in any system are motivated to strive to retain political power and build and maintain policy coalitions (Neack, 2008, p. 109). The interest of the national leader is the survival of their own government, therefore national leaders are more inclined to put domestic interests ahead of international ones. No leader is immune to domestic pressures (Neack, 2008, p. 98). The decision-making process of foreign policy is therefore influenced by the interests of several domestic actors, such as societal groups, media, businesses, ministries and political parties. In addition, at the international table there are diplomats and international advisors that influence the decision-making process of national leaders (Putnam, 1988, p. 434). Yet, they are not able to directly influence domestic policy when the main goal of the leader is to be obedient to domestic pressures. Therefore, this thesis focuses on how domestic pressures cause international effects instead of focusing on how international pressures cause domestic effects. The focus of national leaders on domestic pressures makes it harder to reach consensus at the international level.

### 2.3.3.1. FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS AND WATER CONFLICTS

Foreign policy analysis aims to identify the important actors, their motivations, the structure of decision-making and the broader context of the international system in order to understand a state's foreign policy for water conflicts. Firstly, FPA looks at how national governments make foreign policy decisions within their separate contexts. In this thesis, the focus is that the national governments want to maximize their ability to satisfy domestic pressures in order to maintain in office. Therefore, it is important to analyze the interest, goals and strategies of the different domestic actors involved in the conflict, including the ministries, institutions, societal groups and private actors. All these actors are shaped by the political, economic, social and environmental factors that contribute to the conflict. It is important to identify the drivers of the conflict, such as resource scarcity, population growth, or climate change, and argue how these factors affect the actors' interests and decision-making process. Water can be seen as an important natural resource that influences the direction of foreign policy. A state's dependency on others, either as a result of a dam or its location downstream, can undermine its power and affect foreign policy, turning it into a potential vulnerability.

For instance, the Rogun Dam in Tajikistan generates a large amount of hydroelectricity. The Tajik government framed the building of this dam as a source of national pride and a significant stride towards development, making the dam is a symbol of national cohesion and patriotism (Menga, 2016, p. 715). At the domestic level, the dam helps legitimize those in power. The dam diverts the focus of the public towards it, while fostering on the creation of a national

identity (Menga, 2016, p. 716). This process is increased at the international level, especially when a country's rival is against the dam, such as Uzbekistan, a downstream state. In this case, the dam becomes a means to defend national interests, increase regional influence and establish territorial sovereignty. Dams can intensify existing international tensions, which legitimize the actions of the governments that undertake their construction. Thus, framing a national issue as a foreign policy issue can help to gain more popular support (ibid). Foreign policy analysis examines the strategies, interests, and goals taken by the countries in response to the conflict and how domestic pressure can influence them.

Hypothesis 3: The more the interests of relevant domestic actors in one riparian state diverge from the interests of relevant domestic actors in another riparian state, the less likely an agreement between these states over access to limited water resources will be reached.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter addresses the research design, case selection, research methods, sources, layout and the operationalization of the hypotheses. This chapter also contains a justification for the methodological choices and it explains how the in-depth analysis will be conducted in the next chapter.

### 3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

The aim of this thesis is to research the conditions that promote an interstate water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt. The result will give a better understanding of the larger phenomenon of water conflicts and the conditions that trigger conflict among states, according to international relations theories, such as structural realism, neoliberalism and foreign policy analysis. A qualitative single case study design will be used to answer the research question. This thesis will study the case of the water conflict in Ethiopia and Egypt to gain insight into a particular phenomenon. A qualitative single case design involves an in-depth data collection of a real-life system where the focus is on the subunits Ethiopia and Egypt over time (Gustafsson, 2017). By using within-case analysis, it provides the opportunity to identify the emergence of unique patterns within the context of the case, especially when the puzzle of interest lies within the case (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, p. 299). This is driven by the empirical puzzle of why the conflict in the Nile River Basin escalates into a substantial interstate conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt. This offers a wider exploration of the research question and provides a theoretical understanding of the conditions that can drive water conflict. This research attempts to compare the explanatory power of three approaches and therefore it is important to determine which approach can identify the conditions that may lead to understanding of the conflict. The in-depth analysis of the single case will help develop the international relations theories to explain general explanations or regularities in water conflicts. In addition, the international theories each analyze different conditions of the water conflict, resulting that the theories could also complement each other. This does not necessarily mean that theories need to be ruled out.

In addition, it is important to consider the external validity of this research design. This refers to whether the conclusions of the research are generalizable to a broader context. Case studies have the problem of representativeness as they typically involve a small number of cases, especially single case designs (Gerring, 2006). The findings of this thesis can be generalized to the entire set of interstate water conflicts, while it could provide a better understanding of the conditions that foster conflict over limited water resources among states. The single case has the attention where all the facts and interpretations are gathered from various sources to understand the conditions that may lead to interstate conflict or cooperation over the access to limited water resources (Tellis, 1997).

### 3.2. CASE SELECTION

This thesis focuses on analyzing the conditions that create tension around the access to limited water resources between Ethiopia and Egypt. Climate change poses severe challenges to freshwater management, raising the expectation that tension between the states will increase rather than cooperate. The expectation is that the more severe conditions of climate change lead towards interstate water conflict instead of cooperation. This thesis wants to identify the



conditions that may lead to water conflict or cooperation by using international relations theories, whereas the focus is on the structure of the international system and relevant actors. The case study of Ethiopia and Egypt is chosen for this thesis, because the conflict has escalated in recent years and failed to reach an agreement. The effects of climate change, urbanization, population growth and the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam has put a lot of pressure on the region, affecting its stability. The tensions over the water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt have escalated more since the dam's construction in 2011. This thesis begins its research in the period of 2009, hence that a comparison can be made of the impacts before and after the construction of the dam. Therefore, using international relations theories, his thesis aims to study the conditions under which this water conflict has led towards a more militarized escalation between Ethiopia and Egypt from the period of 2009 until May 2023.

### 3.2.1. ETHIOPIA AND EGYPT

The selected case that will be discussed is the water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt. This case is of particular interest, because the Nile River is shared by ten countries and is home to more than three hundred million people (Seide, 2014). More than 95% of Egypt's water supply comes from the Nile, making it heavily dependent on the water flow beyond its territory. This could be affected by the water development plans of Ethiopia (Shamrukh & Abdel-Wahab, 2010, p. 97). On the international level, the absence of the basin-wide agreement has led to tension among the riparian states. Egypt has upheld the principles of the colonial Nile Water Agreement 1959, which granted it acquired rights to the waters of the Nile. However, this has been rejected by most upstream states, as they did not receive any specific rights and/or were not part of the negotiations. The colonial treaties of Egyptian dominance over the Nile River are being challenged by Ethiopia through the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam in 2011 (Pemunta et al., 2021, p. 1).

The GERD can provide opportunities and challenges as the main important hydropower infrastructure in the region (Pemunta et al., 2021, p. 2). It can create interstate cooperation, reduce climate change uncertainties and integrate markets and trade, which can improve the development of riparian states. However, it also has the power to control water flows, which can threaten food, energy and national security interests of downstream states (Pemunta et al., 2021, p. 9). The heightened tensions between Ethiopia and Egypt stem from fears of a reduction in the water flow. The construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam has changed the security dynamics around freshwater in this region, as the Nile a strategic element in their foreign and domestic policies (Pemunta et al., 2021, p. 10). In 2020, Ethiopia began filling the dam's reservoir, because it can then start generating hydroelectric power. However, if the reservoir is filled too quickly, it could affect Egypt's water supply. Therefore, Egypt has labeled the GERD as a threat and insisted on a legally binding agreement on filling the dam. In response to the GERD's filling, Egypt and Sudan held joint military exercises in order to boost partnership and military cooperation (Tekle, 2023).

### 3.3. RESEARCH METHODS

This thesis uses a process-tracing method. Firstly, process tracing is used to trace causal mechanisms. Process-tracing seeks to identify the causal mechanism between the interaction independent variables from three hypotheses and the outcome of the dependent variable

(Beach & Pederson, 2019, p. 1). This makes it possible to locate the underlying factors that exist between the cause and the effect. In this study, the dependent variable is the degree of the water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt. In order to enhance conflict, it is important to identify the independent variables, the conditions. These conditions are derived from international relations theories such as structural realism, neoliberalism and foreign policy analysis. Therefore, it is important to determine whether water is perceived as a geopolitical asset, whether international institutions can promote cooperation, or if relevant domestic actors can influence the interstate tension or cooperation around the limited water resources. Understanding the causal mechanisms will help to develop international relations theories, making it possible to compare the conditions with other interstate water conflicts.

In addition, the process-tracing approach involves deducing a theory from the existing literature and then arguing whether there is evidence to support hypothesized causal mechanisms in a specific case (Beach & Pederson, 2019, p. 3). The aim is to analyze whether the evidence supports that the hypothesized causal mechanism linking the independent variable and dependent variable can be generalized to the phenomenon (Beach & Pederson, 2019, p. 11). This thesis aims to study the general phenomenon of water conflicts between states through the lens of international relations theories, such as structural realism, neoliberalism and foreign policy analysis. The goal is to ascertain the extent to which the conditions outlined in these theories can impact the outcome of water conflicts, potentially resulting in increased tension.

### 3.4. OPERATIONALIZATION

The theorized causal mechanism needs to be operationalized, which involves translating theoretical expectations into case-specific prediction (Beach & Pederson, 2011, p. 14). Furthermore, the international relations theories, such as structural realism, neoliberalism and foreign policy analysis, need to be operationalized to create expectations for the escalating water conflict in the case of Ethiopia and Egypt (2009 – May 2023). Translating the abstract hypothesis from the theory chapter into case-specific operational hypotheses related to the water conflict yields the following set of expectations. The expectations from the international relations theories will be divided into hypotheses related to the case of Ethiopia and Egypt, which will identify the conditions that may lead to conflict in cases with limited water resources.

#### 3.4.1. HYPOTHESES BASED ON STRUCTURAL REALISM

Hypothesis 1: The more Ethiopia and Egypt prioritize their security interests, the more likely an interstate water conflict will escalate.

This thesis aims to determine the bilateral relationship between Ethiopia and Egypt in the context of the regional balance of power around the Nile River Basin. The context of the regional balance of power focuses on the Blue Nile states, Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan. In addition, to understand the complete security situation, the role of Eritrea must be discussed as it affects the hydro-politics of the Nile between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan (Bekele, 2022, p. 111). Furthermore, the bilateral relationship of Ethiopia and Egypt will be analyzed, while it is important to determine the distribution of capabilities and security interests in the self-help system. Therefore, this thesis determines if there is a power imbalance in the region by analyzing the riparian position (upstream or downstream), their power position (economic, political and military) and the potential for resources exploitation (Zeitoun & Warner, 2006, p.

451). This thesis focuses on examining these items of each state and how they relate to each other, affecting the security interests of both states. The expectation is that the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam has affected the balance of power and increased Ethiopia's power. This means for Egypt that it has less power over its dominance over the Nile waters, which is now more in the hands of a potential competitor in the region. Therefore, both states want are expected to seek to increase their power position by strengthening their distribution of capabilities. To accept this hypothesis, Ethiopia and Egypt both prioritize their security interests by increasing the distribution of capabilities across them, making interstate cooperation impossible.

The structural realism hypothesis has as dependent variable the degree of water conflict, which will be measured by the independent variable, the security interests of Ethiopia and Egypt. Security interests will be analyzed in the relationship of the bilateral balance of power between Ethiopia and Egypt that is influenced by the context of regional balance of power. Security interests will be measured by comparing the distribution of capabilities among the two states, focusing on riparian and power positions and the potential for resource exploitation. The power position will be analyzed by comparing the military and economic power of both states.

#### 3.4.2. HYPOTHESIS BASED ON NEOLIBERALISM

Hypothesis 2: The more institutions are involved in the water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt, the more likely it will be that long-term interstate cooperation is achieved.

Firstly, this thesis aims to determine the facilitating role of the international institutions, such as the United Nations and the African Union (AU) and the 2015 Agreement on Declaration of Principles on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Project, in the water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt. Their involvement in the conflict will be analyzed by focusing on their role in facilitating long-term cooperation between Ethiopia and Egypt. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze official documents of the negotiations, statements and reports of both the UN, AU and the 2015 Agreement regarding the aim of long-term cooperation in the water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt. According to neoliberalism, the expectation is that the more institutions involved in the cooperation process it can reduce uncertainty by improving transparency on the state behavior of Ethiopia and Egypt. The expectation is that there is enough institutional capacity that establishes a large shadow of future. The state will focus on long-term community goals instead of short-term, self-interests goals regarding access to freshwater. To accept this hypothesis, there are many international institutions that can reduce the insecurity between Ethiopia and Egypt, resulting in the possibility of long-term cooperation between the states.

The neoliberalism hypothesis has as its dependent variable the degree of the water conflict, which will be measured by the independent variable, the influence of the international institutions to ensure cooperation between Ethiopia and Egypt. This will be measured by the influence the international institutions, such as the UN, AU and the 2015 Agreement, have on facilitating negotiations and the degree of compliance with treaties or norms of the institutions. To ensure interstate cooperation, there is consensus among the states in the negotiations and compliance with treaty standards.

### 3.4.3. HYPOTHESIS BASED ON FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS

Hypothesis 3: The more the interests of relevant domestic actors in Ethiopia diverge from the interests of relevant domestic actors in Egypt, the less likely an agreement between these states over access to limited water resources will be reached.

Firstly, this thesis aims to determine the extent to which interests of relevant domestic actors influence the foreign policy decision-making process of Ethiopia and Egypt. Therefore, the social context of both states is relevant, focusing that both national governments want to retain in office. Both states are dependent on the access to freshwater resources, resulting that the expectation is that various domestic actors of the states consider it important. In addition, the effect of climate change, population growth, urbanization and the construction of the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam put more domestic pressures on foreign policy. In Ethiopia, the construction of the GERD increases its hydropower that improves the state's development. The relevant domestic actors are interested in promoting the possibility of economic growth. In Egypt, the expectation is that the domestic actors oppose the construction of the GERD. As a downstream state, the dam has negative impacts on their access to freshwater. To accept this hypothesis, the interests of the relevant domestic actors in Ethiopia diverge from the interests of the relevant domestic actors in Egypt, hence that there is no possibility for cooperation over access to the freshwaters of the Nile River.

The foreign policy analysis hypothesis has as its dependent variable the degree of the water conflict, which will be measured by the independent variable, the degree of the influence of the interests of domestic actors in both states. This will be measured by the influence of domestic actors, such as the society, military and media, have on the foreign policy of the government. The interests of the relevant domestic actors in Ethiopia are opposed of the interests of relevant domestic actors in Egypt. The political leaders of both states have as goal to retain in political power by implementing the interests of relevant domestic actors as foreign policy. Both states have different domestic interests that will result in conflicting international policies.

### 3.5. DATA AND SOURCES

This study is based on document analysis of primary and secondary resources. Firstly, this study analyzes primary sources such as news articles and journalists who describe current affairs and power dynamics related to the influence of limited water resources in the water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt. This will describe the current situation regarding the distribution of capabilities among the states that result in water conflict. Additionally, the study focuses on secondary sources, such as academic articles, books and reports, which describes the academic debate about the conditions that result in cooperation or conflict over limited water resources according to international relations theories, such as structural realism, neoliberalism and foreign policy analysis. In addition, these sources also provide information about the water conflict in Ethiopia and Egypt, in general.

## CHAPTER 4: EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the conditions that promote or hinder water conflicts by using international relations theories such as structural realism, neoliberalism and foreign policy analysis. This is driven by the empirical puzzle of why the Nile River Basin conflict is escalating into a substantial interstate water conflict. By the discussion of the hypotheses, the case of Ethiopia and Egypt will be analyzed over the period from 2009 until May 2023. The empirical evidence will help to assess the plausibility of the hypotheses and answer the research question.

### 4.1. HISTORY OF THE CONFLICT

The 1959 Nile Waters Agreement promoted the rights of Egypt and Sudan to utilize the Nile waters for decades, while not recognizing the Ethiopia's water rights, was the cause for the first tension that arose over the access to the Nile's freshwater resources. Ethiopia perceives the treaty as colonial, unjust and unequal that prevents the state from using the Nile waters (Paisley & Henshaw, 2013). Egypt focuses on maintaining its historic rights of the Nile waters. In the past, tensions were mostly nullified by Egypt's (hydro-)hegemonic position.

The Blue Nile origin is in the Ethiopian Highlands and flows through Sudan and Egypt before flowing into the Mediterranean Sea (Nile Basin Initiative, n.d.). For Ethiopia, rapid industrialization, urbanization and the growing population have greatly increased the nation's freshwater demand. In addition, these conditions combined with absent rainfall lead to environmental problems such as deforestation, soil degradation and the use of inappropriate farming techniques. (Slegers, 2008, p. 8). This has shrunk the amount of land in Ethiopia. Climate change exacerbates these environmental challenges while increasing the demand for land and freshwater even more (BBC News, 2005.). In the region, the Sahara Desert is expanding, further increasing the water insecurity (National Science Foundation, 2018). For decades, Ethiopia did not exploit the natural resource of the Nile waters, making the state even more dependent on seasonal rain and food aid. Prior to the construction of the GERD, tensions over Nile River in the region were already building due to environmental problems and population growth in both Ethiopia and Egypt. Former Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi declared that Ethiopia, which supplies 85% of the Nile waters, cannot use it, while Egypt can turn the Sahara Desert into something green by using the Nile River (Swain, 2008, p. 206). Ethiopia declared that it needs to develop the use of freshwater resources for the benefit of its people and will not be intimidated by Egypt's threat to use force. The construction of the GERD gave Ethiopia the opportunity to utilize the use of Nile waters by generating electricity and the ability to regulate the water flow, increasing development and reducing water insecurity (BBC News, 2009). To protect the dam, Ethiopia modernized its fighter jets to counter attacks and banned flights entering air space above the region (BBC News, 2020b).

Egypt's foreign policy and relations with other riparian upstream states have always been influenced by its dependence on the Nile waters (Swain, 2011, p. 691). Egypt wants to preserve its historical rights by protecting its dependency on the Nile, seeing that the majority of the population lives along the Nile River. Climate change, population growth and infrastructure puts more demand on the need for freshwater, making the state more vulnerable to water insecurity. Therefore, Egypt is opposed that other riparian states exploit Nile River to maintain its own freshwater and food security (Swain, 2011, p. 695). At first, Ethiopia did not

pose a threat to Egypt's use of water, but since Ethiopia declared its desire to build dams and exploit the Nile's water resources, tension rose. Egypt tried to block funds that could help Ethiopia build projects that would exploit the Nile River. The construction and the filling of the GERD further increased tensions, because there had been no consultation with Egypt (Mutahi, 2020). President el-Sisi declared that Egypt will take all necessary measures to protect its right to access the waters of the Nile. The dam is seen as a threat to Egypt's sovereignty as the filling period will affect the water flow of the downstream states (Al Jazeera, 2021).

Climate change, population growth and urbanization increased the tensions in the region for the access to the Nile waters. The construction of the GERD caused the possibility of a militaristic escalation of the water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt.

## 4.2. STRUCTURAL REALISM

The case of Ethiopia and Egypt will be analyzed using international relations theory, structural realism, focusing on the regional and bilateral balance of power by determining the distribution of capabilities and the security interests of the states.

### 4.2.1. REGIONAL BALANCE OF POWER

The Nile Basin conflict is characterized by an historic power asymmetry between downstream Egypt and the other upstream states Ethiopia, Sudan, Eritrea, South Sudan, Kenya, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Burundi and Uganda (Tsega, 2017, p. 3). In these paragraphs, the regional balance of power between Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan and Eritrea will be analyzed. The (hydro-)hegemonic position of Egypt is related to its high dependence on the freshwaters of the Nile. This makes it important for Egypt to protect its water security interests. Egypt's control over the Nile's water is rooted in historical treaties, agreements and the construction of dams, whilst gaining support from various states. Examples of such supportive states are the United Kingdom during colonial times, the Soviet Union, which supported the construction of the Aswan High Dam and the United States (ibid). The regional hegemonic position of Egypt also emerged due to its strategic geographic location as it contains the Suez Canal. This increases its economic importance and political influence in the region and at the global level. This resulted in Egypt's control over the Nile Basin. However, the independence of upstream countries, climate change, population growth and political developments the riparian states, especially Ethiopia, pressured to challenge the geopolitical relations over the Nile River (Rahman, 2013, p. 36). Accordingly, Egypt is focusing on strengthening its relationship with states in the region, such as Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia and Sudan. The goal is to isolate Ethiopia in regional politics and to maintain its hegemonic position (Yimer, 2022, p. 82). Additionally, Egypt is a military power with close ties to Sudan's military, whereas the states perform joint military actions (Tekle, 2023).

Ethiopia has no historical rights to the access of the Nile River. The Ethiopian water demand increases, thus it confronted Egypt regarding the access to the freshwaters of the Nile River. Ethiopia can compete with Egypt over the freshwaters, because it is an important regional power due to its economic growth, large population and its geographic location as an upstream state (Andualem et al., 2021). In addition, the construction of the GERD also strengthens the power position of Ethiopia, as it uses water to secure power in the region (Zeitoun & Warner, 2006, p. 436). Additionally, Ethiopia has no access to the sea, determining its foreign policy,

resulting that the former dispute with Eritrea was a pressing issue (Steves, 2003, p. 121). In the region, Ethiopia increases its influence by being the actor that combats international terrorism (Klosowics, 2015, p. 92). Ethiopia also aims to play a leading role in regional undertakings to stabilize its region, for example with Somalia and South Sudan. However, the relationship of Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan is based on mistrust. For example, Ethiopia accused Egypt and Sudan of supporting the rebel Gumuz militia that were responsible for attacks against Ethiopian minorities in the region of the GERD (Attia & Saleh, 2021, p. 7). Ethiopia made this accusation, because the upstream states benefit from social unrest in this region. Also, Eritrea questions Ethiopia's role in the region.

Sudan, a downstream state, also has colonial rights to the access of the Nile waters, resulting in the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam being viewed as a threat to its national security. However, Sudan acknowledges the advantages of the dam, because it creates cheaper and more reliable electricity and can prevent flooding in the future (Chen & Swain, 2014, p. 16). The state has shifted several times its position regarding the construction of the dam. Firstly, Sudan expressed concerns over the potential impacts of the dam regarding the access to freshwater resources, whereas it also recognized the potential benefits of the dam (Lawson, 2016, p. 133). However, Sudan aligned with Egypt, because the relationship between Sudan and Ethiopia has become strained. Their ties are characterized by the disagreement over the cross-border issues, such as the Al Fashage territory, Tigray War and the GERD (Soliman, 2023). Presently, Sudan is in an intrastate conflict, affecting the regional balance of power and destabilizing its position (Fulton & Holmes, 2023). Sudan is at this moment no reliable partner in the water conflict, diminishing the position of Egypt in the region.

Eritrea has an important geographic position along the Red Sea. Eritrea gained its independence from Ethiopia after a long civil war, leading to a strenuous relation between the two (Klosowics, 2015, p. 83). In 1998 – 2000 there was a war between the two states, which was followed by a period of no-war-no-peace (Müller, 2019, p. 280). In 2016, Ethiopia accused Eritrea and Egypt that both states were involved in the anti-government protests (Al Jazeera, 2016). Additionally, Ethiopian security forces reported that they had prevented an attack on the GERD by an armed dissident group that was sponsored by Eritrea (Lawson, 2016, p. 135). Directly after the construction of the GERD, Egypt increased its military and economic connection with Eritrea, partly to rile the Ethiopian government and Eritrea backed Egypt's historic right to the access of the Nile waters (Lawson, 2016, p. 139). In 2018, the both Ethiopia and Eritrea signed a peace agreement to formally end the border war.

Concluding, in the regional balance of power there are tension between the countries, with Ethiopia and Egypt directly opposed. Since the construction of the GERD, the security interests and distribution of capabilities across Ethiopia and Egypt have changed in the region, resulting that it affects the states' relations with Sudan and Eritrea. Sudan and Eritrea complicate the relations, since both states hold important positions in the region, mostly in favor of Egypt, that influence the water conflict.

#### 4.2.2. BILATERAL BALANCE OF POWER

In the following paragraphs the bilateral balance of power between Ethiopia and Egypt will be analyzed. According to structural realism, the upstream, economic and military power will be determined.

#### 4.2.2.1. THE POWER OF AN UPSTREAM STATE

The 2011 Egyptian revolution and the toppling of President Mubarak served as an opportunity for Ethiopia. It could use these domestic challenges to announce the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam project, further deteriorating the relations between Ethiopia and Egypt (Tayie, 2018, p. 486). Constructing dams is usually used by non-hegemony as leverage to compete with the power of the hegemon (Tawfik Amer, 2015, p. 6). The dam challenges the (im)balance of power, resulting in competition for freshwater (Zeitoun & Warner, 2006, p. 444), or it shared control over limited water resources (Tawfik Amer, 2015, p. 6). In general, dams can help with the water management during droughts and floods, but they can also alter the hydro-political relations of the basin where they are built, causing downstream states to fear water insecurity (De Stefano et al., 2017). Constructing dams by upstream countries affects riparian countries in many ways (Uddin & Uddin, 2018, p. 7). The GERD will provide electricity, stimulate economic growth and give Ethiopia more control over the Nile River Basin. This affects the regional balance of power is now controlled by Egypt, changing the status quo (Tsega, 2017). This hydropower project is strengthening the political position of Ethiopia, forcing Egypt to become more dependent on Ethiopia and other upstream countries (Tawfik Amer, 2015, p. 17). Egypt is not able to prevent Ethiopia from implementing such projects. The project shows that Ethiopia has the determination to use the water of its own rivers, even if it has political and financial costs (Tawfik Amer, 2015, p. 22). Therefore, Ethiopia has focused on using public relations strategies to promote the benefits of the dam in terms of flood control and hydroelectricity export (Meredith & Givental, 2016, p. 163). However, Egypt still sees the dam as a threat to national (water) security

The construction of dams in rivers are interrelated with economies, cultures and societies, affecting food, water, transport and energy (Sadoff & Grey, 2002). According to structural realism, the construction of the dam can be seen as a means for Ethiopia to survive in the self-help system, as it can be used as a resource for development and as a geopolitical asset. Therefore, it affects the distribution of capabilities among Ethiopia and Egypt, for Ethiopia gains more political power, affecting the bilateral balance of power.

#### 4.2.2.2. THE POWER OF THE ECONOMY

Since the early 2000s, Ethiopia has rapidly become one of the fastest growing economies in the African continent, due to the rapid urbanization and industrialization (Hundie, 2021). It has improved its economy by attracting foreign investments and conducting business trade with China (Aljefri et al., 2019). However, in 2022, the Ethiopian economic growth stalled, because of several factors including high inflation, currency depreciation and lingering conflict (World Bank Group, 2023). The recent peace agreement between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front can boost economic activity again, for example through increased investment (ibid). Egypt is one of the three largest economies of Africa (World Economics, n.d.), but it has been negatively affected by political instability since the 2011 uprising (Zaki, 2011). However, in 2021, Egypt experienced a growth rate of 3.3 percent, whilst Ethiopia's growth rate was 5.6 percent (World Bank Open Data, n.d.-b). It is important contextualize this comparison. Considering the gross domestic product (GDP) of both states, Ethiopia falls short of Egypt. Egypt's economy size is more than 3.5 times Ethiopia's GDP. Despite the higher growth rate, Ethiopia has a lower gross domestic product, which can be seen as a true indicator of how the economy performs in a state.



According to structural realism, the construction of the GERD affects the distribution of economic power across Ethiopia and Egypt. Ethiopia gains an economic power advantage over Egypt. However, Egypt's GDP is higher, which reflects the true economic power of a state. Large dams, such as the GERD, are not just focused on the domestic energy markets but are designed to export its products to regional energy markets to generate foreign exchange earnings (Lavers & Dye, 2019, p. 10). For Ethiopia, the dam is key economic priority, because it could increase economic benefits and trade, notably by increasing export earnings and strengthening regional alliances (Yihdego et al., 2016, p. 506). The dam could also be a catalyst that leads to greater integration of markets and trade in the Nile River Basin (Yihdego et al., 2016, p. 504). This affects the regional balance of power. For Egypt, the Nile plays a vital role in the economy of the country, with the agriculture sector accounting for 23 percent of employment (Basheer et al., 2021). The changes of the water supply, for example by the GERD, will impact the output of agriculture, the livelihoods and employment of millions of Egyptians. In addition, the changes in the access to irrigation water affects other economic activities that rely on agricultural products due to the economic linkages. The changes in water flow could also reduce the own hydropower generation of the Aswan High Dam, resulting that Egypt has to invest more into other energy sources (ibid). Eventually, the economic benefits resulting from the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam are mostly gained by Ethiopia. Primarily from the impact of changes in capital stock, domestic savings and the increase in hydropower production (Kahsay et al., 2015). The economic growth of Egypt will remain stable, while the GERD could have a slight negative effect on its own generation of hydropower.

#### 4.2.2.3. THE POWER OF THE MILITARY

Both states have a history of military has influence on the political system, although it must be noted that both states have different military capabilities. In 2019, in terms of military expenditure, Egypt spent 5.17 billion dollars, while Ethiopia spent approximately 500 million dollars (World Bank Open Data, n.d.-a). Additionally, considering military size in terms of personnel, Ethiopia records 138.000 officers whereas Egypt has a larger number of 836.000 military personnel. Both states focus on strengthening its military capabilities, however Egypt possesses more military power compared to Ethiopia.

The Egypt's military is the political power center for several decades, as well as being a powerful economic actor within the state (Kuimova, 2020, p. 1). By the time that former military chief Abdul Fatah el-Sisi came into power in 2014, in almost every sector in the domestic economy there were companies owned by the Egyptian armed forces. The military created a business empire that dominates the economy, establishing and bolstering its economic position and political power (Roll, 2016, p. 24). In addition, Egypt has one of the largest military forces in the region. President el-Sisi invested to modernize and train its armed forces in order to secure Egypt's power position within the region (Kuimova, 2020, p. 1). Egyptian President el-Sisi stated that he would consider violent means as deterrent as he consulted with its military advisors after Ethiopia began filling the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (Al Jazeera, 2021). In 2021, Egypt and Sudan started to conduct several military exercises in Sudan. Both states also reportedly signed a military cooperation agreement with the aim to achieve national security for both countries (Tekle, 2023). Egypt uses its military power as a warning for the filling of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam in order to preserve its share of the Nile River water. As a response, the Ethiopian military has pledged to confront any military actions on the dam (Alvarez, 2021).

Ethiopia has a strong military force, as the nation focuses on investing and modernizing its military capabilities (Military Firepower, 2023). The state is also involved in regional security initiatives, for example serving in peacekeeping missions in Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia (Klosowicz, 2015, p. 92). In 2016, the state of emergency was declared in Ethiopia due to anti-government protests, which resulted in the authorization of the military to enforce security nationwide (Ferrás, 2022, p. 207). This enabled the military to exert political influence with minimal control from political powers (Ferrás, 2022, p. 208). When Abiy Ahmed became Prime Minister of Ethiopia he replaced military heads with civilians who were accepted by the entire hierarchy, therefore establishing distance from the institutions (Ferrás, 2022, p. 209). Additionally, different regions in Ethiopia have their own military, which is a legal base to contest the authority of the state (Caruso & Akamo, 2023, p. 8). The Ethiopian government has declared that it intends to integrate these armies into the national army (Al Jazeera, 2023). The Ethiopian government wants to build a strong and centralized military force, while diminishing the authority of the regions.

Following structural realist thought, both states have highlighted their military power in the water conflict. According to internal balancing, Egypt has the largest army in the region and spends at least ten times more on military expenditure than Ethiopia. Moreover, Egypt's military has political power and the state has declared that it will take military action against Ethiopia, if necessary. Ethiopia's military is divided into several regions, making it difficult to unite the military without the interests of the different regions. Both states compete over the access to freshwater resources, but on paper Egypt has more military power. Egypt has not yet actualized its threat of using power towards Ethiopia. Both states fear being dominated by the other, prioritizing self-preservation.

#### 4.2.3. CONCLUSION OF STRUCTURAL REALISM

According to structural realism, state's security interests focus on maximizing their relative power by increasing their capabilities to gain an advantage over other states. Both Ethiopia and Egypt want to gain control over freshwater resources, because it can be a crucial means for development as well as being a geopolitical asset. Therefore, it is important that the other state does not gain an advantage over the other. In this context, a security dilemma arises, because Ethiopia, an upstream state, constructs the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam to ensure its own financial security by gaining a hydroelectric resource for economic development. This affects the balance of power in the region, as Ethiopia gains the advantage over Egypt by controlling the freshwater resources of the Nile River. As a result, Egypt started to use survival strategies to create more security familiar to what structural realism claims, namely internal and external balancing. Firstly, by internal balancing, Egypt already has the largest army in the region, whereas it has more military power than Ethiopia. Moreover, since 2017, Egypt started to increase its military expenditure. Also, by external balancing, Egypt focuses on forming a military alliance with Sudan to deter their common rival, Ethiopia, by joint military drills to counter the threat of the GERD. The current conflict in Sudan affects regional cooperation in managing the access to freshwater from the Nile River. The power struggle in Sudan affects the structure of the system as Egypt loses a stable alliance, diminishing its external balance. According to structural realism, (military) alliances are flexible, hence the expectation is that Egypt seeks for other alliances in the region, such as Eritrea, while the power struggle in Sudan is determined. Additionally, in the anarchic system, the states need

to provide for their own security in an unstable region, increasing the internal balancing to make unilateral decisions in the GERD-dispute.

In this case, structural realism posits that both states are in a self-help system with a security dilemma. In this region, freshwater has emerged as a potential source of conflict, because it is essential for sustaining life and hence the continuation of the state. Ethiopia had the opportunity to increase its own security by constructing the GERD, which put pressure on the balance of power in the region. Egypt uses the strategies of internal and external balancing to challenge the new distribution of capabilities, regarding access to limited water resources, of Ethiopia. This did not deter Ethiopia in the water conflict. Eventually, both states focus on their own security interests as they conflict in the self-help system. The distribution of capabilities among the two states creates the security dilemma, making it less likely to cooperate over limited water resources.

## 4.2. NEOLIBERALISM

Secondly, the case of Ethiopia and Egypt will be analyzed using international relations theory, neoliberalism, focusing on the ability of international institutions to facilitate long-term cooperation. The emphasis will be to what extent the international institutions are able to reduce insecurity, mistrust and asymmetrical information in order to facilitate long-term cooperation. This thesis will analyze the United Nations, African Union and the 2015 Agreement on Declaration of Principles on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Project.

### 4.2.1. UNITED NATIONS

These paragraphs discuss to which extent the United Nations established relevant organizations and treaties or played a significant role in promoting and achieving long-term cooperation between Ethiopia and Egypt in the water conflict.

In 1997, there was an increase in the number of transboundary water conflicts that eventually led to the UN establishing the first legal framework for regulating the allocation and management of water, the “UN Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (UNWC)”, the UN Watercourses Convention (Gari et al., 2020). This Convention created guiding principles on the protection and management of water resources within a framework of conflict resolution between states on water management issues, including negotiations and mediation (Obenga, 2016, p. 100). The aim of the UN is to forge harmonized cooperation between states based on trust, which will lead to improved relations. However, Nile Basin states are divided over the UNCW, considering both Ethiopia and Egypt abstained their vote and did not ratify it (UNTC, n.d.). Egypt expressed that it was concerned that the equitable use of freshwater was not directly linked to the “no harm” principle (Stoa, 2014, p. 1357). Egypt did not feel protected enough from the water use of upstream states. Ethiopia disagreed on this topic, stating how the right of equitable use of water could not be forced. The UN was not able to enforce cooperation between Ethiopia and Egypt through the UNCW, which is it did not lead towards a positive-sum game.

Furthermore, the United Nations established UN-Water, a coordination mechanisms to ensure that members and international organizations collaborate to have a coordinate response to water-related challenges (UN-Water, n.d.). The international organizations that are part of UN-

Water are actively involved in water issues, ergo they possess expertise on the subject. By 2030, the goal is to implement water resources management at all levels, including transboundary cooperation (UN-Water, 2021, p. 56). In the report, Ethiopia and Egypt have limited implementation of basin management plans in the transboundary basin area (UN-Water, 2021, p. 53). In addition, there is no information on the website of UN-water regarding the water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt, or the impact of the construction and the filling of the GERD. Hence, UN-Water, the coordination mechanism, has the expertise of the international organizations on improving transboundary basin cooperation. However, there is almost no information on improving the cooperation between Ethiopia and Egypt in their water conflict.

In addition, since the construction of the dam the three states; Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan, are in discussion about a possible Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Agreement. The discussion centers around the goal to cooperate, hence that all states benefit from the dam's opportunities and manage the negative impacts on the downstream states (UN Press, 2020). The United Nations did not participate in the negotiations so far, but stands by in order to assist with technical and expert support if required. The United Nations is focused on promoting its aim of cooperation over the GERD. It wants to reach a win-win solution with genuine political will, compromise and good neighborliness between Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan (UN News, 2021). This international organization promotes the values of neoliberalism, focusing on long-term cooperation, trust and transparency. However, all the negotiations on the GERD failed, because the parties disagreed over the filling period of the dam. As result that Ethiopia made the unilateral decision of continuing to fill the dam (UN Press, 2021).

The United Nations provides principles, expertise and decision-making procedures that could align with the interests of Ethiopia and Egypt to achieve long-term cooperation. However, the UN is unable to use this set of actions to create certainty and transparency for both states, resulting in a zero-sum game. Ethiopia in particular focuses on short-term, self-interest goals when it began filling the dam without first reaching an agreement. This results in no prospect for a long-term cooperation between the states facilitated by the UN.

#### 4.2.2. AFRICAN UNION

These paragraphs discuss to which extent the African Union established relevant organizations and treaties or played a significant role in promoting and achieving long-term cooperation between Ethiopia and Egypt in the water conflict.

In 2002, the African Union established the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW) to promote cooperation, security and economic development through effective management of the continent's water resources (AMCOW, n.d.). The AMCOW is the most senior political institution that deals with water issues on the African continent (Ani et al., 2018, p. 22). The institution's ambition is to encourage sustainable use of natural resources and stimulate economic growth on the African continent. In 2008, the African Union mandated the AMCOW to develop strategies for achieving present water and sanitation goals in the continent (African Union, 2016, p. 2). The AMCOW report of 2009, focused primarily on expanding Africa's water infrastructure to stimulate economic growth (AMCOW, 2009, p. 6). The AMCOW stated a region's hydropower potential should be managed by Regional Basin Organizations, promoting cooperation with transboundary benefit-sharing (AMCOW, 2009, p. 12). At that time,

only 7 percent of Africa's hydropower potential had been realized, while the goal is to exploit a lot more (AMCOW, 2009, p. 10). Ethiopia was one of the states with a majority of unexploited energy resources (AMCOW, 2009, p. 11). The 2022 report stated that it is difficult for states to effectively plan water resources development and management due to limited information. However, states reported progress in effective transboundary water governance (AMCOW, 2022, p. 4). Overall, Africa's viable hydropower potential from 2015 to 2020 was up to 20 percent (AMCOW, 2022, p. 4). However, Ethiopia did not provide information and data to the AMCOW, preventing the institutions from monitoring water, hydropower and sanitation for this region. Egypt states that it is on track with the cooperation in the transboundary basin, but the report gives no further explanation. However, both reports did not address the conflict in the Nile Basin or the specific potential for cooperation between Ethiopia and Egypt, focusing more on improving access to freshwater resources and stimulating economic growth.

The African Network of Basin Organizations (ANBO) was also established in 2002 to coordinate and strengthen cooperation and management of water resources among African basins (ANBO, 2000). This is an umbrella organization within the framework of AMCOW and the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) is also part of this network, which is relevant to this case. The NBI manages relations among states along the Nile River, enhancing long-term cooperation. In 2010, the institution created a treaty, the Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA), for long-term development and equitable management of water resources (Elbarbary, 2021, p. 8). Nonetheless, the downstream states, Egypt and Sudan, did not sign the CFA (Salman, 2011, p. 160). This shows that the distrust was too high to find a mutually beneficial solution. However, the NBI created the opportunity for the riparian states of the Nile Basin to address the issues of water insecurity and development during negotiations with expertise (Cascao & Nicol, 2016, p. 561). In addition, the ANBO, NBI and AMCOW created the Declaration on Transboundary Water Resources Management in Africa, leading to opportunities for closer cooperation among the institutions (Rutagwera, 2023).

In 2019, the first negotiations about the filling of the GERD were mediated by the United States and the World Bank. Ethiopia refused to sign the agreement, because it wanted an African Union led process due to its dependency on the US and WB for aid and loans (Messele, 2021). Since 2020, the conflict is mediated by the AU under the concept of "African solutions for African problems", applying continental mechanisms (UN Press, 2021). Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan all agreed to resume to the negotiations, indicates the willing to cooperate. However, the official negotiations stopped in April 2021, when the states failed to reach a consensus over the continued filling of the dam. Ethiopia expects that the filling process takes four to seven years, while Egypt demands a twelve to twenty-year filling process (PSC Report, 2021; Johnson, 2020). Ethiopia declared that it will only sign an agreement over the GERD with Egypt and Sudan when it will serve its national interests and promote development on utilizing the Nile waters (Ethiopian News Agency, n.d.). Egyptian Foreign Affairs Minister Sameh Shoukry stated that Ethiopia showed bad faith when it made the unilateral decision to fill the dam, which shows that the negotiations of the GERD possesses insecurity and intransigence. Egypt still prefers that the negotiations will be resumed with the African Union as mediator.

The African Union created institutions and a framework it determines the principles, expertise decision-making procedures that could align the interests of Ethiopia and Egypt to order to achieve long-term cooperation. The AU even tried to mediate the negotiations over the filling of the GERD, but failed. This means that the relationship between Ethiopia, Egypt, Sudan and

the African Union is based on insecurity, where the distrust prevents the parties to reach future long-term cooperation.

#### 4.2.3. AGREEMENT ON DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES ON THE GRAND ETHIOPIAN RENAISSANCE DAM PROJECT

Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan signed the 2015 Agreement that defined the principles of cooperation on the GERD (Tawfik Amer, 2015, p. 575). This agreement is created to solve the tensions and insecurity, with all states agreeing on the rules of the first filling and annual operation of the GERD. The states accepted principles of international law, such as the “no harm” and “equitable and reasonable utilization”, but not additional principles that were related to the filling of the dam and the exchange of information (Cascão & Nicol, 2016, p. 565). The 2015 Agreement is in line with the principles of the UN Watercourses Convention. Furthermore, the agreement explained how the benefits of the dam would be shared and the negative impacts prevented (Yihdego et al., 2016, p. 505). The agreement recognized that the GERD could provide a positive-sum game, as it invests in energy production and trade, sustainable utilization of water resources and economic development (Yihdego., 2016, p. 509). It created a framework for a set of norms that could promote long-term cooperation in the Nile River Basin (Cascão & Nicol, 2016, p. 565).

The 2015 Agreement states that the states should agree on the guidelines for the first filling of GERD (Agreement on Declaration of Principles on the GERDP, 2015). However, in 2020, Ethiopia began filling the reservoir of the dam without reaching an agreement that would protect the downstream states, Egypt and Sudan (BBC News, 2020a). Ethiopia stated that the filling of the dam will take five to seven years, whereas Egypt demanded that the reservoir be filled over a period of twelve to twenty years (Johnson, 2020). This unilateral decision of Ethiopia resulted in the validation of the 2015 Agreement. The failure of Ethiopia to comply with the 2015 Agreement shows that the institution was unable to create a framework that would achieve long-term interstate cooperation in the water conflict. However, it does give Egypt and Sudan the opportunity to use it as a legal ground to internationalize the GERD dispute (Messele, 2021, p. 528).

#### 4.2.2. CONCLUSION OF NEOLIBERALISM

According to neoliberalism, international institutions can provide with information and mechanisms to reduce the insecurity of the anarchic system, focusing on maximizing absolute gains to achieve cooperation. The UN, AU and the 2015 Agreement on Declaration of Principles on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Project have as goal to help the states, Ethiopia and Egypt, to achieve long-term interstate cooperation. The international institutions have developed frameworks and institutions that help to regulate the access to freshwater, focusing in this case on the interstate cooperation in the Nile Basin. The United Nations and the African Union are unable to reduce uncertainty of the anarchic system. Hence, there is no prospect for long-term interstate cooperation between the Ethiopia and Egypt. Even though these institutions created a framework of principles, expertise and decision-making procedures, their efforts were unfruitful. In addition, the African Union, as mediator, led the negotiations over the filling of the GERD. However, it was unable to transform the short-term, self-interests goals into long-term cooperation goals. Lastly, the 2015 Agreement is an important framework of recognizing the “no harm” and “equitable and reasonable utilization”

principles, however it could not regulate the filling process of the GERD due to the unilateral decision of Ethiopia.

Neoliberalism explains that the international institutions can create clear mechanisms and produce information that could help to reduce the uncertainty of the anarchic system. However, in this instance these institutions are unable to manage long-term cooperation between the states, because in reality the states, in particular Ethiopia, focuses on its short-term self-interest goals preventing a change of mutually beneficial cooperation. This means that there is still mistrust, asymmetrical information and a lack of transparency between the states. This creates the problem of cooperation that cannot be solved by the international institutions.

#### 4.3. FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS

The case of Ethiopia and Egypt will be analyzed using foreign policy analysis, focusing on the domestic pressures within both states that influence their foreign policy. The focus will be on the extent to which domestic pressures can influence the foreign affairs policy of the governments, seeing that the latter's goal is to remain in office.

##### 4.3.1. ETHIOPIA

The pursuit of development is a major goal for every state in Sub-Saharan Africa, as for Ethiopia (Quinn & Akyol, 2021, p. 1101). Ethiopia moved away from a Marxist-Leninist state with a weak legitimacy base to a state of growth and development based on electoral authoritarianism. Ethiopia focuses on economic development as well as regional security. In this case, threats to weak regimes are more often domestic than foreign and concentrating on economic development can help governments to stay in power (Quinn & Akyol, 2021, p. 1096). For Ethiopia, with high levels of poverty and the infancy of its democratic system, development is important to solve domestic problem. This surfaces in foreign policy as well.

A possible threat is the resource scarcity of freshwater in the Nile River Basin, which is affected by the population growth of the riparian states, reducing the amount of water available per capita. The population of Ethiopia continues to grow, now coming up to 120 million people (World Bank Open Data, n.d.-c). Moreover, Ethiopia's urban population is growing at 5 percent per year, putting even more pressure on water management, because urban populations tend to generally consume more water per capita than rural populations (El-Fadel et al., 2003, p. 107). Growing GDP per capita is also accompanied by increased demand for water. Population, urbanization and economic growth are the drivers of environmental degradation in Ethiopia. The state depends on their natural resources, such as water, land and forests (César & Ekbohm, 2013, p. 4). Therefore, Ethiopia's economy and ecological system are vulnerable to environmental challenges, such as climate change, soil degradation, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, pollution of land, air and water. In this case, to ensure development and provide sufficient water supplies to its rising population, Ethiopia needs to utilize the Nile River waters.

Due to the domestic pressures, such as poverty, the GERD was constructed to increase hydropower that gives the ability to solve these problems (Verhoeven, 2021, p. 166). The construction of the dam will provide industrial development, jobs and cheap electricity for the population (Quinn & Akyol, 2021, p. 1109). In Ethiopia, the dam is portrayed as the weapon that will win against poverty. The dam is presented as an image of national pride, because it

can rally and unite the country behind it, who are also financially favorable (Menga, 2017). Ethiopians have been encouraged to support this dam through lotteries, beauty pageants, athletic events and bonds (Verhoeven, 2021, p. 167). It is seen as a nation-building project, because the dam is a symbol of national power that provides sustainable energy, water for irrigation and flood control (Quinn & Akyol, 2021, p. 1109). The state uses this project to penetrate society, as to have social and spatial control to implement policies (Verhoeven, 2021, p. 161). The Ethiopian population is most if the time deeply divided over any policy issue, except on the issue of the GERD, which has created consensus (Verhoeven, 2021, p. 170).

Ethiopian leaders also use this support to frame the GERD as a foreign policy issue, which distracts the population from its negative effects (Menga, 2017). The construction of the dam has huge financial costs, environmental impacts and societal impacts. For example, people need to relocate. These negative sides are concealed by the foreign policy success of the GERD, which was built in spite of the opposition from the upstream states. Solving and/or concealing the domestic pressures is more important than the international pressures of the upstream states. The dam can legitimize the ruling of the leaders and create more popular support by battling domestic problems. Ethiopia fits the pattern where the interests of its leaders and their domestic political needs dominate their foreign policy (Quinn & Akyol, 2021, p. 1103). The leaders want to remain in office, thus focus domestic pressures. Hence, their attention is turned to creating development growth and reducing poverty. The dam solves the energy shortage in the country. This creates the possibility for the government to make Ethiopia the power hub for its region, which will increase development (Bleischwitz et al., 2021). In addition, Ethiopia signed the 2015 Agreement with the intention to cooperate about water management, however during droughts the first focus of the Ethiopian government is to meet its own needs.

Also, the Ethiopian media mostly serves as a conduit of the government where it tends to reproduce the official discourse. Particularly, the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, the news program of the main Ethiopian television channel, played a crucial role in positioning the GERD as a foreign policy issue, as the channel is state-affiliated (Menga, 2017, p. 2). The Ethiopian media describes the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam as a symbol of national unity, sovereignty and pride, not presenting any critical narratives on the dam (Belay et al., 2020, p. 42). The Ethiopian media frame Egypt mostly as uncooperative in the negotiations and as trying to hinder the socio-economic development of Ethiopia (Von Gienanth, 2020, p. 46). Additionally, Ethiopian media have contested the claim that the state only started constructing the GERD as a response to the Egyptian uprising in 2011 (Von Gienanth, 2020, p. 47). The media presents a positive image on the intentions and the influence of the construction of the GERD, while Egypt is depicted as the state who hinder the development process of Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian government focuses on satisfying domestic pressures by making the GERD a foreign policy issue that will promote development. The domestic interests are put ahead of the international interests. Ethiopian leaders are concerned by retaining political power, thus they make policies that are in the interests of relevant domestic actors.



#### 4.3.2. EGYPT

The water resources of Egypt mainly originate from outside its borders, therefore any outside threat to the water flow is a threat to its security (Hassan & Rasheedy, 2007, p. 136). Egypt has no rainfall and is being challenged over the control over the Nile River, which is undesirable as millions of farmers and citizens are dependent on the river for their living. Egypt depends on the Nile River for its socio-economic survival. In Egypt, as well as in Ethiopia, the increase of its population and the development of economic projects puts more pressure on the water demand from the Nile River (Hassan & Rasheedy, 2007, p. 134). The Nile waters are the main resource for irrigation, transportation, industry and tourism in Egypt. The state has the history of protecting its interests, ergo it considers the use of the Nile River by other riparian states as a national threat.

Egypt uses the threat of war in order to protect itself in case that other upstream states take actions that could affect the water flow. Egypt has been the longstanding regional (hydro-)hegemon. This results that the state can utilize the water resources of the Nile River at the expense of upstream countries (Lawson, 2016, p. 2). Egypt portrays the Nile River as part of its national identity, leading to the current commitment to protect its historical rights (Wheeler & Hussein, 2021). Egypt's policy prescribed the rejection of the principle of equitable distribution of the freshwaters, because the access to freshwater was already protected by its historic rights (Lawson, 2016, p. 2). Egypt did pursue a foreign policy of destabilization in rival states to maintain its regional hydro-hegemony (Gebreluel, 2014). It could rely on providing support to armed rebel groups in Ethiopia, or in Somalia who were fighting Ethiopia as well. Besides, it used diplomacy to pressure international donors and prevent them from investing in hydro-development projects in the upstream states (ibid). After the construction of the GERD, the foreign affairs policy of domination over other riparian states changed to the reconsideration of cooperation (Lawson, 2016, p. 3). All these measures were intended to prevent other riparian states from affecting the water flow and challenging Egypt's power position and security.

In Egypt, the GERD can result in resource scarcity, which could lead to a potential risk of social unrest (Passell et al., 2016, p. 3). The dam has resulted in fears among Egyptians and politicians that their access to freshwater will be affected, leading to water insecurity (Passell et al., 2016, p. 10). Egypt's economic development also dependent on the Nile, affecting business who are mostly owned by the military. This makes the military an important interest group that the government has to deal with. The announcement of the construction of the GERD was seen as a direct threat that challenged regional hegemonic control, affecting the national security of Egypt (Hudson & Roach, 2019, p. 81). Egypt uses its military power as a threat in foreign policy. There were high tension moments where military action against Ethiopia was considered. Such as when former President Morsi threatened to use military force if Ethiopia did not stop the construction. In 2013, tensions rose even more when Egyptian politicians were caught on camera while publicly threatening with military actions to destroy the dam (Menga, 2017).

The Egyptian President el-Sisi began the historic de-escalation of the conflict by signing the 2015 Agreement, which supports the construction of the GERD (Kehl, 2017, p. 40). He initiated a new relationship with Ethiopia that was based on cooperation and negotiation. This fragile new relationship was heavily impacted when the duration of the filling of the dam was not in

the agreement. Ethiopia wants to fill the dam within five to seven years, but according to Egypt this timeframe will impact the water supply even more (Salameh et al., 2021). This domestic pressure, the access to freshwater, resulted in the fact that President el-Sisi declared that he would take a firm stance to protect the historical rights of Egypt to the Nile waters (Mbaku, 2022). The president wants a legally binding agreement about the filling, hence that it cannot open the door for other riparian states to act similarly. This firm stance as the hegemon is necessary, for otherwise it would be hard to protect the dependent livelihoods of Egyptians on the Nile River. For President el-Sisi, the goal is to preserve national security. In addition, the president wants also to focus on the survival of its own government, since constitutional amendments were approved that he can remain in office until 2030 (BBC News, 2019).

Additionally, the Egyptian Media portrays Egypt as a powerful state with good intentions, praising President el-Sisi's diplomatic actions and role. For a short time with the signing of the 2015 Agreement, the media shifted the portrayal from a water crisis, threat and dispute to a solution with a win-win game (Elsoufy & Ibrahim, 2023, p. 82). However, the situation escalated when Ethiopia was accused by Egypt of obstructing negotiations. Moreover, the Egyptian media dismissed the unilateral actions of Ethiopia when it began the filling of the dam in 2020. Egyptian news reports portray Egypt's actions positively and Ethiopia's attitudes and actions negatively (Elsoufy & Ibrahim, 2023, p. 81). The media portrays the GERD as a water and diplomatic crisis and a security threat. Ethiopia's position is represented as a violation of previous Nile River Basin water treaties.

The government focuses on protecting the water security of Egypt, which is threatened by the construction and the filling of the GERD. The foreign policy affairs are driven by domestic pressures to preserve the (hydro-)hegemonic position of Egypt. There are pressures from the several domestic actors, such as society, the military and media that wants to promote protecting Egypt's water security. Resulting that the national government focuses on its national security. The government's drive is to retain political power as it changed the constitutional amendments, hence that the president can remain in office until 2030.

#### 4.3.3. CONCLUSION OF FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS

According to foreign policy analysis, both states focus on satisfying the interests of their domestic actors. The construction of the GERD legitimizes the ruling of the Ethiopian leaders as it creates development and reduces poverty. Domestic interests are priority to the international ones, because reaching an agreement with Egypt means neglecting Ethiopia's own domestic problems. Egypt has the motivation to keep its (hydro)hegemonic position in the region, whilst it strives for reaching an agreement over the filling of the GERD with Ethiopia. The Egyptian leaders are driven to preserve their own national security, which in turns is driven by domestic pressures from society, the military and media. Additionally, the Egyptian president's interest is to guarantee the survival of its government as it adopted the constitutional amendment to remain in office until 2030. The relevant domestic actors in Ethiopia have different interests than the relevant domestic actors in Egypt.

#### 4.4. CONCLUSION EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

First, this thesis shows that structural realism can identify the conditions that promote the water conflict in Ethiopia and Egypt. Both states consider themselves to be in a self-help system with

a security dilemma, where freshwater emerges as a national security interest. Ethiopia and Egypt serve their own security interests, for both states want to have the control over the Nile River, making that cooperation is impossible. Egypt focuses on maintaining its historic right to the Nile waters by presenting itself as the regional hegemon, even though this is contested by Ethiopia due to the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. Ethiopia focuses on its interest in developing its state economy by constructing the GERD and while doing so does not consider other states' security interests. Concluding, the hypothesis of structural realism is supported, for the more Ethiopia and Egypt prioritize their own security interests, the more likely interstate water conflict will escalate.

Secondly, this thesis shows that neoliberalism cannot identify the conditions that promote the water conflict in Ethiopia and Egypt. The international institutions cannot facilitate cooperation between the states, as the countries do not feel obliged to comply with the norms to achieve long-term mutually beneficial cooperation. The institutions created several mechanisms to increase the information that will reduce the insecurity of the anarchic system. However, these frameworks are unable to transform the short-term, self-interest goals into long-term community goals of Ethiopia and Egypt. Concluding, the hypothesis of neoliberalism, the more international institutions are involved in the water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt, the more likely it is to achieve long-term cooperation, is not supported.

Lastly, this thesis shows that foreign policy analysis can identify the conditions that promote the water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt. Each state has relevant domestic actors that have different interests than the relevant domestic actors of the other state. The political leaders of Ethiopia and Egypt focus on their own national security interests, meaning that the different foreign policies are in conflict at the international level. Ethiopia promotes the construction of the GERD as it increases development and national pride. Ethiopian political leaders translate this into their foreign policy to retain political power. Egypt is a powerful state that focuses on transforming the protection of water security into foreign policy. Concluding, the hypothesis on foreign policy analysis is supported, considering the more the relevant interests of domestic actors in Ethiopia diverge from the interests of relevant domestic actors in Egypt, the less likely an agreement between states over access to limited water resources will be reached.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The concluding chapter of this thesis summarizes the findings of the previous chapter and relate them to the research question. Additionally, it will follow up with reflections, discussions and recommendations for further research.

### 5.1. ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

This thesis attempted to gain insight into the conditions that promote or hinder water conflicts by using international relations theories. More specifically, it analyzed the following research question: *'To what extent can international relations theories, such as structural realism, neoliberalism and foreign policy analysis identify the conditions that promote a water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt?'* Through process tracing of the single case study of the water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt (2009 – May 2023), this thesis found, first, conditions that promote the water conflict are based on structural realism and foreign policy analysis. Second, the thesis found that the empirical evidence did not support the expected outcome derived from neoliberalism.

### 5.2. ASSESSMENT OF HYPOTHESES

This thesis is structured along one research question with three hypotheses. The first hypothesis is based on structural realism and focuses on the security interests of Ethiopia and Egypt in the water conflict. The structural realist hypothesis predicted that if the states serve their security interests, the less likely it is to cooperate over the Nile waters. The analysis of the case identified that the structural realist approach provides a strong explanation for the conditions that promote the water conflict. The regional balance of power of the Blue Nile states puts more pressure on the relationship between Ethiopia and Egypt. Both countries are eager to play an important role in the region to promote their own security interests. The main focus in this thesis was to analyze the bilateral balance of power between Ethiopia and Egypt. It can be concluded that the distribution of capabilities across the states is in Egypt's favor, because it has more political, economic and military power than Ethiopia. However, as a downstream state, it is vulnerable for variation in the water flow. Ethiopia has a weaker position in the distribution of capabilities compared to Egypt, although the construction of the dam gives the state the opportunity to develop. This gives Ethiopia a stronger position in the regional balance of power. The anarchic system ensures that states must provide for their own security, in this case water security, hence the security dilemma causes the states to focus on self-preservation. Egypt focuses on preserving its historical right to the Nile River, while Ethiopia uses the waters to ensure development. Both states have as goal to increase their own water security, diminish that of the other state, hence increasing the likelihood of conflict. In sum, the hypothesis of structural realism is supported.

The second hypothesis is based on neoliberalism and focuses on the influence of international institutions in the water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt. The neoliberalist hypothesis predicted that if many international institutions are involved in the water conflict, the more likely it is to achieve long-term interstate cooperation. The analysis of the case study showed that the neoliberalist approach provides a weak explanation for the conditions that promote water cooperation. The United Nations, African Union and the Agreement on Declaration of Principles on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Project are institutions that created a

framework and mechanisms of principles, expertise and decision-making procedures to decrease the insecurity, asymmetrical information and lack of transparency. The institutions help to establish formal agreements on the distribution of freshwater, setting a precedent for compliance and long-term cooperation of water governance. Both states were open to AU-mediated negotiations on the filling of the GERD. However, the states did not reach a consensus, hence Ethiopia unilaterally decided to continue with the filling of the dam. This shows that the international institutions could not provide the incentives for long-term cooperation, because it could not reduce the uncertainty among the states. The states focus on their short-term, self-interest goals. The international institutions are able to set a precedent of principles for future long-term cooperation. However, the institutions cannot reduce insecurity to promote long-term cooperation. In sum, the hypothesis of neoliberalism is not supported.

The last hypothesis is based on foreign policy analysis and focuses on the influence of relevant domestic actors in the water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt. The foreign policy analysis hypothesis predicted that the more the interests of relevant domestic actors in Ethiopia diverge from the interests of relevant domestic actors in Egypt, the less likely an agreement between states over access to limited water resources will be reached. The analysis of the case identified that the domestic actors of each state focus on their own national security interests. The political leaders translate the domestic interests into foreign policy to retain political power. Ethiopia's leaders turned the GERD into a foreign policy success and established it as an image of national pride. The domestic pressures of poverty and the infancy of its democratic system can be solved with development and this surfaces in foreign policy as well to gain popular support. Egypt's leaders have made water insecurity a foreign policy issue. As the regional hydro-hegemon, the president takes a firm stance of protecting its rights to the Nile waters. The president wants to retain political power because he is driven to preserve the domestic issue of water security and he has approved the constitutional amendments. Both states focus on translating the national water security interests of their relevant domestic actors into foreign policy to retain political power. The interests of relevant domestic actors of Ethiopia diverge from the interests of relevant domestic actors in Egypt, hence increasing the likelihood of conflict. In sum, the hypothesis of foreign policy analysis is supported.

### 5.3. DISCUSSION

The approaches of structural realism and foreign policy analysis are suitable for identifying the conditions that promote the water conflict in Ethiopia and Egypt, while neoliberalism is not.

This thesis demonstrates that the structural realist analysis of the water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt shows that the approach provides insights into understanding the foreign policy of the states in the anarchic system. Structural realism argues that states serve their own security interest in the anarchic system, while focusing on the influence of the systematic factors. Therefore, it explained that the balance of power in a system can change when the distribution of capabilities among states changes. The results of the case study show that the event of the water conflict is in line with the approach of structural realism, because the construction of the GERD creates a security dilemma. The security of one state increases while that of another diminishes.

In addition, this thesis also demonstrates that neoliberalist analysis cannot identify the conditions for the water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt. It cannot explain the inability of international institutions to provide a framework that ensures cooperation between the states. It should be noted that the international institutions did provide a framework of principles and norms for the access to limited freshwater resources. However, states did not adhere to this, demonstrating a lack of institutional capacity. In this case, international institutions are unable to reduce uncertainty and transparency on states' behavior. The focus of the states is on the short-term, self-interests goals instead of long-term cooperation. In this case, long-term cooperation means that the states have to sacrifice much of their own security. This makes it difficult to achieve the goal of a win-win situation, especially when the institutional capacity is weak.

Furthermore, this thesis demonstrates that the foreign policy analysis of the water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt shows that the approach provides insights into how domestic pressures affects states' foreign policy. The domestic actors influence the decision-making process of national leaders, seeing that the latter's goal is to retain in office. The national interests are transformed into foreign policy. At the international level, the leaders are able to satisfy their domestic pressures, as they are motivated to gain popular support.

The hypotheses of structural realism and foreign policy analysis are complementary, because each approach focuses on a different level in the system that identifies the causal mechanisms of the water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt. Structural realism assumes that the international system is characterized by distribution of capabilities across states and anarchy, forcing states to provide for their own security. Foreign policy analysis assumes that the domestic system is characterized by national leaders being influenced by relevant domestic actors to transform their domestic pressures into foreign policy to retain political power. The approaches, structural realism and foreign policy analysis, complement each other by explaining the conditions of the water conflict from the international and domestic system. Structural realism explains that the uncertainty between states in the anarchic system increases the likelihood of a water conflict. Foreign policy analysis explains why national leaders make the choice to escalate the conflict further, which may not necessarily come from uncertainty in the system. The leaders can be driven by the motivation to stay in power. Future research can focus on the approach of neoclassical realism for identifying the conditions that promote or hinder water conflicts, especially in the case of Ethiopia and Egypt. This approach also focuses on the international and domestic levels that can explain states' foreign policy (Rose, 1998, p. 152).

The analysis relied on a single case study to infer a theoretical mechanism, which is a shortcoming of the methodology. This affects the external validity of the measurements. However, precisely because there are relatively few water conflicts in the world. This thesis argues that the findings can be used to generalize in which climate change puts more pressure on tensions between states over the access to freshwater resources, resulting in water conflict. Future research could be focused on testing the causal mechanisms on different empirical cases, using multiple case design or cross case analysis. In particular, the multiple case design could help to understand similarities and differences between cases. Future research could conduct a similar case design with contrasting outcomes in tension around limited freshwater resources. This could provide an explanation for what conditions promote different outcomes related to water insecurity, resulting in cooperation or conflict between states. For example,

the water governance of Mexico and the United States could be compared to the escalating water conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt. Both cases involve from climate change consequences, a balance of power, institutions and domestic pressures that affects the region. However, the one leads to water cooperation and the other to water conflict. The result would provide a better understanding of the conditions that trigger water conflict or cooperation among states. Especially in the case of the United and Mexico, neoliberalism could identify the conditions that promote interstate water governance.

Moreover, during this thesis the focus was mainly on the bilateral balance of power in the regional context between Ethiopia and Egypt. Future research could study the regional and global balance of power among the states that are involved or put pressure on the water conflict. During the analysis of this thesis, the intrastate conflict in Sudan broke out. Future resource could analyze the impacts of the intrastate conflict on the regional balance of power in the Nile River Basin. Furthermore, China's influence on the construction of the GERD and in the water conflict could be analyzed as it supports Ethiopia's position. Lastly, this thesis recommends further research on the concept of water insecurity, as the impact of climate change could negatively affect the competition for freshwater resources. Freshwater resources are essential for sustaining life, therefore it is important to understand the conditions that promote water insecurity, possible resulting in water conflicts.

This thesis recommends the governments to focus on identifying the underlying causes of the water conflict and the barriers of cooperation. The governments should avoid military escalation by understanding the structures and dynamics of the other state's actions. In this case, there is insecurity and Ethiopia's domestic interests diverge from Egypt's domestic interests. This arises from mistrust and the urge to secure national interests. To solve this, both governments could engage in confidence-building measures to address and resolve the tensions and uncertainties between the states (CSIS, n.d.). The governments should prioritize open communication and transparency to build trust, making state behavior in the water conflict more predictable. The states could be more open about the use of military forces and/or the dam filling process, eliminating the elements of secrecy.

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