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**THE PROBLEM OF NILE WATERS ALLOCATION IN THE CONTEXT
OF REGIONAL POLITICAL PROCESSES IN 2011-2020**

SUMMARY OF THE DISSERTATION

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Research context. Currently, the Russian Federation is actively implementing a strategy for dynamically building up political, trade, and economic ties with the countries of the African continent. A reflection of this line is the holding of two Russia-Africa summits in 2019 in Sochi and in 2023 in St. Petersburg. During this process, the special role that water issues can play in Russia's relations with the countries of the continent becomes obvious. On the one hand, this is due to the fact that the shortage of fresh water and the associated humanitarian and economic problems are today one of the most significant barriers to the development of these countries. On the other hand, disagreements between African countries regarding the division of water sources are intensifying, which affects, directly or indirectly, relations with the Russian Federation. Thus, when considering the location of the second Russia-Africa summit, it was water issues that became the main complicating factor in the development of proposals to hold the summit in Cairo (Egypt) and Addis Ababa (Ethiopia). The difficulty in determining the venue for the summit has become a marker of serious contradictions between the two countries, creating a barrier to effective economic interaction. In this regard, the question arises of taking into account all the nuances of the Nile water resources problem.

The waters of the Nile River have been a subject of dispute for quite some time, dating back to the era of the colonial partition of the African continent by European powers. In the arid region of northeast Africa, the Nile is the basis of the well-being of hundreds of millions of people. However, limited freshwater resources pose the problem of regulating its consumption. As early as the 19th century, colonial administrations made diplomatic efforts to guarantee a stable water supply to the territories they governed. Since the late 1950s, several large-scale hydraulic projects on the Nile and its tributaries have begun to be implemented in Egypt and the newly independent Sudan. In the 1990s, Ethiopian plans to build dams on the Blue Nile also emerged. The projects of the three countries complicated the creation of a water use regime and increased the conflict potential of the unresolved problem. During the

20th and early 21st centuries, several bilateral treaties were concluded between the Nile Basin countries, and unsuccessful attempts were made to create a comprehensive agreement on the sharing of water resources.

The key and most pressing event that increased the risk of a “water war” was the Ethiopian project of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), which raised serious concerns and objections from Egypt and Sudan. The negotiation process between the three countries to find a compromise did not lead to a solution to the issue: Ethiopia built the dam unilaterally without any agreements or guarantees for other countries. On the other hand, escalation and armed conflict over water also did not occur, although at first glance there was a deadlock situation when all parties refused to make concessions. In this situation, it is important to find out what predetermined this result and whether other options were possible. Failure to effectively cooperate could set a dangerous precedent for similar situations in other regions and lead to a humanitarian disaster or armed conflict.

Currently, the situation in the Nile Basin¹ is associated with the global environmental problem of shortage of fresh water resources. It is no coincidence that universal provision of clean drinking water is included in the list of UN Sustainable Development Goals², which is especially important for the North African region with its arid climate and low rainfall. Water shortage, in addition to negative humanitarian consequences, can lead to deterioration in the economic and social sphere, so it becomes a challenge for the sustainable development of the state, and therefore its *security*.

The transboundary nature of the Nile's water resources inevitably raises the problem of their equitable distribution and use by all states in the basin. Therefore, the water issue is not only associated with economic and social security, but also appears on the

¹ Hereinafter in this work, unless otherwise indicated, the Nile Basin refers to the “Blue Nile - Lower Nile” water system, since the main event under study is the construction of the GERD on the Blue Nile. Accordingly, the basin countries include only Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia.

² Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. Official UN website. URL: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/ru/water-and-sanitation/> (accessed 22.01.2023).

agenda of international relations in the Nile Basin region. In addition, it has a structural impact on international relations, determining the relative political and economic potential of states³.

Construction of the GERD dam in 2011-2020 became another event in the long history of water disputes in the Nile Basin, which particularly clearly showed the difference both in the official positions of the countries and in their approaches to defining water security. Moreover, during this period, the three countries experienced periods of political instability and worsening internal challenges, which could affect their foreign policies on water security issues. At the same time, the significance of these problems is determined by the political agenda that is formed or to which decision makers are forced to respond⁴. On the political agenda, through public discussion, issues acquire the status of serious ones that require an urgent solution.

Research problem. It is of interest to study the connection between the changing domestic political agenda in the countries of the region and their positions in the process of negotiations to resolve the dispute over the construction of the Renaissance dam. The dam itself has become a reality, but the water dispute remains unresolved; an agreement is required on the distribution of water resources, as well as on the coordinated operation of the dams. Determining the dynamics and nature of the development of the situation with GERD will make it possible to more accurately assess the possibility of changing the negotiating positions towards a cooperation strategy.

Literature review. A number of theoretical studies are devoted to the problem of transboundary water resources management, which can be divided into three groups based on the proposed concepts and approaches.

³ Likhacheva A.B. Water scarcity as a factor in modern international relations: a dissertation for the degree of candidate of political sciences. National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, 2015.

⁴ Mitrokhina T.N. Political agenda: concept, specificity, formation factors // Discourse-Pi. 2019. No. 1 (34). pp. 59-67.

The first group of researchers adheres to the concept of benefit sharing, which involves the gradual transformation of conflictual relationships into relationships based on cooperation and the possibility of playing a non-zero-sum game: A. Wolf, P. Gleick, S. Postel, C. Sadoff, D. Grey⁵.

The second group of scientists, in particular J. Waterbury, T. Homer-Dixon, S. Kiser, J. Allan⁶, considers political conditions to be the determining factor in the formation and resolution of water disputes. They are characterized by a realist approach, which considers the asymmetry of power among states to be the leading factor influencing water conflicts. In accordance with the concept of hydro-hegemony, used in the studies of such authors as M. Zeitoun, J. Warner, A.B. Likhacheva, A. Cascao⁷, hydropolitics is considered from the point of view of the power capabilities of states, but elements of a constructivist approach are also used. At the same time, some works use the concept of securitization of water resources, but it is given a secondary role.

The third group of researchers applies a mainly constructivist approach to international relations. Scientists such as Y. Woldemariam, I. Jacobs, F. Menga⁸ establish the relationship between domestic and foreign policies, and consider the

⁵ Wolf A.T. Criteria for Equitable Allocations: the Heart of International Water Conflict // *Natural Resources Forum*. 1999. Vol. 23. No. 1. P. 3-30; Gleick P.H. *Water and Conflict: Fresh Water Resources and International Security* // *International Security*. MIT Press, 1993. Vol. 18. No. 1. P. 79-112; Postel S. The politics of water // *World Watch*. 1993. Vol. 6. No. 4. P.10-18; Sadoff C.W., Grey D. Beyond the river: the benefits of cooperation on international rivers // *Water Policy*. 2002. No. 4. P. 389–403.

⁶ Waterbury J. *Hydropolitics of the Nile Valley*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1979; Homer-Dixon T.F. Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflict: Evidence from Cases // *International Security* 19. 1994. No. 1. P. 5-40; Kiser S.D. Water: The Hydraulic Parameter of Conflict in the Middle East and North Africa // *INSS Occasional Paper* 35. *Environmental Security Series*. 2000; Allan J.A. *The middle east water question: hydropolitics and the global economy* // I.B. Tauris, London and New York. 2002.

⁷ Zeitoun M., Warner J. Hydro-hegemony: A framework for analysis of trans-boundary water conflicts // *Water Policy*. 2006. No. 8. C. 435–460; Likhacheva A.B. *Water scarcity as a factor in modern international relations: a dissertation for the degree of candidate of political sciences*. National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, 2015; Cascao A.E. Changing power relations in the Nile river basin: Unilateralism vs. cooperation? // *Water Alternatives*. 2009. Vol. 2. No. 2. P. 245-268.

⁸ Woldemariam Y. *A critical assessment of international relations theories for managing transboundary water resources: The case of the Nile basin*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Massachusetts Amherst. 2007; Jacobs I.M. *Norms and Transboundary Co-operation in Africa: the Cases of the Orange-Senqu and Nile Rivers*. A dissertation ... for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in International Relations. University of St Andrews, 2009; Menga F. *Domestic and international dimensions of transboundary water politics* // *Water Alternatives*. Vol. 9. No. 3. P. 704-723.

possibility of using the construction of large dams as a tool for nation-building and identity formation.

The features of modern water diplomacy, designed to find a solution to conflicts over water resources in the context of new global challenges, are reflected in the collection of materials of the International Association of Lake Regions and the Geneva Water Center “Water Drama in the Context of Global Transformations”. One of the theses reflected in the articles of such authors as A.G. Baklanov, D. Turk, F. Munger⁹, is the need for multilateral diplomatic activity to solve water problems.

A number of scientific studies are devoted to modern problems of water use in the Nile basin. J. Waterbury, K. Haynes and D. Whittington¹⁰ in their works emphasize the critical importance of the Nile water resources for Sudan and Egypt, which shapes certain approaches in the foreign policies of these countries. N.B. Akinyemi and J. Kalpakian¹¹ argue that along with Egypt's hegemonic aspirations, political conflicts over issues of identity are the cause of the disputes.

It should be noted that a large number of studies have been devoted to the legal aspects of the distribution of Nile water resources since the 2000s. S. Mason, V. Knobelsdorff, Y. Endeshaw¹² examine both interstate treaties and the norms and principles of international law in terms of the effectiveness of preventing water

⁹ Baklanov A.G. Multilateral format in negotiations on water issues in the Middle East // International scientific and practical collection "Water drama in the context of global transformations". Moscow-Geneva. 2021. pp. 24-25; Turk D., Munger F. Global agenda on water and peace and water diplomacy as a proven solution to new challenges // International scientific and practical collection "Water drama in the context of global transformations". Moscow-Geneva. 2021. pp. 14-16.

¹⁰ Waterbury J. *Hydropolitics of the Nile Valley*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1979; Haynes K., Whittington D. *International Management of the Nile — Stage Three?* // *The Geographical Review*. 1981. Vol. 17. No. 1..

¹¹ Akinyemi, N. B. *Cooperation and conflict in international regimes: Water resource management in the Nile drainage basin*. University of South Carolina, 1994; Kalpakian, Jack. *Identity Conflict and Cooperation in International River Basins* // Dissertation, Old Dominion University, 2000.

¹² Mason S. *From conflict to cooperation in the Nile Basin*. Zurich, Switzerland: Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich, 2004; Knobelsdorf V. *The Nile Waters Agreements: Imposition and impacts of a transboundary legal system* // *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*. 2006. Vol. 44. No. 2. P. 622-648; Endeshaw Y. *A Legal Regime for the Nile Basin: The Relationship Between the Principles of Equitable Utilization and No Significant Harm*. Master thesis. University of Calgary, 2003.

disputes. Y. Yacob, Sh.D. Alak, W. Ferede and S. Abebe¹³ note the imperfection of the current legal regime in the Nile basin, as well as the need to bring it into line with the current situation.

The mutual influence of political processes in the region and the state of the water issue are the subject of a number of important studies. So, A.E. Cascao, F. Lawson, M.A. Rahman, D.B. Grafov¹⁴ identify the Ethiopian challenge to Egyptian hegemony as a major aspect of the changing political situation in the region in the 2000s. D. Chesire, Y. Yacob, B. Akwei, E. Ashebir¹⁵ conclude that Egypt's position prevents the establishment of a water use regime.

The GERD project as a new stage of confrontation on the water issue became the subject of a number of studies after 2011. In particular, in the works of E.A. Elkina, D. Whittington, J. Waterbury and K. Wheeler¹⁶ deeply examines the impact of the construction of the Renaissance Dam on the water policies of the three countries, and analyzes the negative impact of political uncertainty on the solution to the problem of water distribution.

Also, the work of a number of researchers representing these countries is devoted to the GERD factor in relations in the Egypt-Sudan-Ethiopia triangle. R. Tawfik, H.

¹³ Yacob Y. Equitable Utilization in the Blue Nile River Sub-Basin: Context, Problems, and Prospects. A dissertation ... for the degree of Doctor of Jurisprudence. Osgoode Hall Law School York University Toronto, Canada, 2002; Alak Sh. D. History of international regulation of Nile waters: political, socio-economic and legal aspects: abstract of thesis ... candidate of historical sciences. Institute for African Studies RAS. Moscow, 2008; Ferede W., Abebe S. The Efficacy of Water Treaties in the Eastern Nile Basin // *Africa Spectrum*. 2014. Vol. 49. No. 1. C .55-67.

¹⁴ Cascao A.E. Changing power relations in the Nile river basin: Unilateralism vs. cooperation? // *Water Alternatives*. 2009. Vol. 2. No. 2. P. 245-268; Lawson F.H. Egypt versus Ethiopia: The Conflict over the Nile Metastasizes // *International Spectator*. 2017. Vol. 52. No. 4. P. 129-144; Rahman M. A. Water Security: Ethiopia–Egypt Transboundary Challenges over the Nile River Basin / M. A. Rahman // *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. 2013. Vol. 48. No. 1. P. 35-46; Grafov D.B. Prospects for resolving the Egyptian-Ethiopian crisis due to the construction of the “Great Dam of the Ethiopian Renaissance” // *Bulletin of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences*. 2018. No. 6. P. 100-108.

¹⁵ Chesire D. K. Control over the Nile: implications across nations. A dissertation ... for the degree of Master of Science in defense analysis. Monterey, California. Naval Postgraduate School, 2010; Yacob Y. Equitable Utilization in the Blue Nile River Sub-Basin: Context, Problems, and Prospects. A dissertation ... for the degree of Doctor of Jurisprudence. Osgoode Hall Law School York University Toronto, Canada, 2002; Akwei B. A. Hydropolitics, Hydro-hegemony and the Problem of Egypt’s Securitization of The Eastern Nile Basin. A dissertation ... for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Howard University. Washington, D.C., 2015; Ashebir E. The Politics of the Nile Basin. A dissertation ... for the degree of Master of Arts in Hydropolitics Studies. University of the WitwatersRand. Johannesburg, 2009.

¹⁶ Elkina E.A. Hydropolitics in the Nile Basin // *Asia and Africa today*. 2015. No. 8 (697). pp. 30-33; Understanding and managing new risks on the Nile with the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam / Wheeler K.G, Jeuland M., Hall J.W, Zagona E, Whittington D. // *Nature Communications*. 2020. Vol. 11. No. 1. 10 P.; Whittington D., Waterbury J., Jeuland M. The Grand Renaissance Dam and prospects for cooperation on the Eastern Nile // *Water Policy*. 2014. Vol. 16. No. . 4. P. 595-608.

Nasr, M.S. Tayie (Egypt)¹⁷; D.Z. Mekonnen, W. Abteu, S.B. Dessu, O. Yohannes (Ethiopia)¹⁸; S.M. Saleh, A.M. Abdullah (Sudan)¹⁹. They pay attention to the negotiation process, analyze the positions of countries based on the antagonism of the interests of “their” country and “others”.

Of the latest studies, especially noteworthy are the works of M.K. El-Sayed and R.S. Mansour²⁰, who considered the issue of creating a water use regime based on the concept of securitization, F. Lawson²¹, who established the fact of desecuritization of water resources in Egypt, as well as research by J. Roozenbeek, N. Sanchez and J. Gupta²² on the impact of political changes in the region on water negotiations, including the emergence of South Sudan as a new actor. In addition to the emergence of South Sudan, a number of other large-scale political events took place in the region, which could not but lead to changes in the positions and strategies of the actors, and, accordingly, did not affect the prospects for reaching a compromise in the water dispute. Therefore, the development of this topic is a promising direction for research. The use of a constructivist approach to analyze the political situation in the region and explain the behavior of the main actors has also not yet found active application in the scientific literature devoted to the water issue in the Nile Basin.

Considering the connection between the water problem and the issue of state security,

¹⁷ Tawfik R. Changing Hydropolitical Relations in the Nile Basin: A Protracted Transition // *International Spectator*. 2016. Vol. 51. No. 3. P. 67-81; Nasr H., Neef A. Ethiopia's Challenge to Egyptian Hegemony in the Nile River Basin: The Case of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam // *Geopolitics*. 2016. Vol. 21. No. 4. P. 969-989; Tayie M.S. The Hydropolitics of the Nile River Basin // *The Nile River* / ed. by Negm A. M. The Handbook of Environmental Chemistry. 2017. Vol. 56. P. 599-654.

¹⁸ Mekonnen D. Z. The Nile Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement Negotiations and the Adoption of a 'Water Security' Paradigm: Flight into Obscurity or a Logical Cul-de-sac? // *European Journal of International Law*. 2010. Vol. 21. No. 2. P. 421-440; Abteu W., Dessu S.B. Dialogue and diplomacy through the construction of the grand ethiopian renaissance dam // *Springer Geography*. 2019. P. 131-146; Yohannes O., Yohannes K. Turmoil in the Nile River Basin: Back to the Future? // *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. 2013. Vol. 48. No. 2. P. 195-208.

¹⁹ Saleh S.M.K. Hydro-hegemony in the Nile Basin: A Sudanese perspective // *Water Policy*. 2008. Vol. 10. No. 2. P. 29-49; Abdullah A.M.A., Dyduck C., Ahmed T.Y. Transboundary Water Conflicts as Postcolonial Legacy (the Case of Nile Basin) // *Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Международные отношения*. 2020. Vol. 20. No. 1. P. 184-196.

²⁰ El-Sayed M. K., Mansour R. S. Water Scarcity as a Non-traditional Threat to Security in the Middle East // *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs*. 2017. Vol. 73. No. 2. P. 227-240.

²¹ Lawson F.H. Desecuritization, Domestic Struggles, and Egypt's Conflict with Ethiopia over the Nile River // *Democracy & Security*. 2016. Vol. 12. No. 1. P. 1-22.

²² Roozenbeek J. A New Stalemate: The Influence of South Sudan's Independence on the Nile Basin's Water Politics. Master thesis in Sustainable Development at Uppsala University, 2014; Sanchez N., Gupta J. Recent changes in the Nile Region may create an opportunity for a more equitable sharing of the Nile River Waters // *Netherlands International Law Review*. 2011. Vol. 58. No. 3. P. 363-385.

it is necessary to identify different theoretical approaches to defining the concept of security. From the point of view of structural realism, state security is the accumulation of knowledge and assessment of objective threats, mainly military, from other states²³. However, this theory, like neoliberalism, does not sufficiently conceptualize the concepts of security and insecurity in the context of the expansion of the list of threats to non-military sectors, including environmental ones. The constructivist approach avoids complicating the concept of security by presenting it as a product of changeable intersubjective knowledge, which is the result of the social interaction of actors²⁴. A number of contemporary studies in the field of security (in particular, the Copenhagen School) use the poststructuralist argument about the priority role of the discursive construction of security. In other words, only speech acts endow any issue with the meaning of possible challenges and threats²⁵. Accordingly, it is important to know what role water issues play in the formation of security policy and what are the features of the mechanisms for constructing water security in each country. Taking into account the dependence of the interpretation of the term on the subjective perceptions of actors, we can talk about water security as a *phenomenon*, that is, a phenomenon whose objective essence is questioned and requires research²⁶. A number of Russian authors (T.A. Alekseeva, Zh.A. Verkhovskaya, V.O. Bogdanova, O. Shakirov) supplemented the methodology of constructivism with research on agendas, framing and phenomenological analysis²⁷. Also, the constructivist approach examines countries' perceptions of their own security, taking into account the political, historical and social *context*, which is

²³ Walt, S. M. The Renaissance of Security Studies // *International Studies Quarterly*. 1991. Vol.35, No. 2. P. 221-239.

²⁴ Wendt A. Constructing International Politics // *International Security*. 1995. Vol. 20. No. 1. P. 73-74.

²⁵ Hansen, L. *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*. 2006. London: Routledge.

²⁶ E. Husserl's theory of phenomenology uses a reflectivist approach about the dependence of the object of knowledge on the knowing subject. A phenomenon is the result of sensory perception, processing by consciousness of objects in the real world.

²⁷ Alekseeva T.A. Thinking constructivistically: discovering a polyphonic world / T.A. Alekseeva // *Comparative politics*. 2014. No. 1. P. 4-21; Alekseeva T.A., Verkhovskaya Zh.A. Constructivism of the "third generation": framing and communication // *Bulletin of the Russian Peoples' Friendship University. Series: Political science*. 2023. T. 25. No. 4. P. 801-816; Bogdanova V.O. Constructivist models of philosophizing in their development and mutual influence // *Philosophical thought*. 2013. No. 3. [Electronic resource]. URL: https://nbpublish.com/library_read_article.php?id=323 (accessed September 15, 2023); Shakirov O. How is the international agenda formed? The answer of constructivism // *International processes*. 2012. T. 10. No. 3-4. pp. 83-90.

especially important for our case, where it is necessary to take into account the special role of the Nile for the countries of the region. Thus, the constructivist interpretation seems to us the most adequate for the study of water security in the Nile region.

The work will answer the following **research question**: “What are the principles and mechanisms for the formation of negotiating positions of the Nile basin countries in the negotiation process on the distribution of water resources and the construction of the Renaissance Dam?” **The object** of the study is water security in Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia. **The subject** of the study is the discursive practices that shape the interests of these countries in the negotiation process to achieve a mutually beneficial agreement on the division of water resources.

Aims and objectives of the study. The purpose of the study is to identify the essence and mechanisms of formation of negotiating positions of the Nile basin countries regarding water security, determined by the changing domestic political agenda during the construction of the Renaissance Dam (GERD project). To achieve this goal, it is necessary to solve the following tasks:

- 1) To substantiate the direct connection between fresh water scarcity and the threat to the national security of countries in the region;
- 2) Identify the features and shortcomings of the existing contractual framework for the distribution of Nile water resources;
- 3) Assess the cooperation and conflict potential of the GERD project in accordance with various conceptual approaches;
- 4) Determine the place of the water issue in the political discourse of Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia;
- 5) Identify changes in ideas about water security in the discourse and the impact on the foreign policy of states;

- 6) To identify changes in the positions of the parties under the influence of the current domestic political agenda and the main actors determining the essence of these positions;
- 7) Identify possible points of contact in the further negotiation process;
- 8) Explore the potential of using multilateral negotiation formats in new political conditions.

The hypothesis that we will test in this paper is that the concept of water security in Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia is a consequence of the securitization of water resources carried out through discursive practices. The way out of the crisis depends on the possibility of desecuritizing the water resources of the Nile River through a transition to a pragmatic assessment of the needs of each of the parties and mutual benefits. This can be facilitated by the stabilization of the internal political situation in these countries.

The chronological scope of the study is the period from 2011 to 2020. In 2011, Ethiopia announced the start of construction of the Renaissance Dam, which caused a new escalation of disputes over the water issue. The completion of construction in 2020 made the dam's existence a reality and marked the virtual end of discussions about canceling, delaying construction or changing its parameters. The negotiation process has entered a new stage - attempts to agree on the timing of filling the GERD dam reservoir. From 2020 to 2023 Ethiopia filled the reservoir of the Renaissance Dam and its phased commissioning without coordination with Egypt and Sudan. Although the direct selection of water to fill the reservoir was carried out in four stages in 2020-2023, the disputes surrounding the construction itself are more interesting for us, since at this stage it was possible to reach a compromise on adjusting the parameters of the dam, construction deadlines, and mutual guarantees.

Methodology. The constructivist approach in international relations was chosen as the methodological basis. In accordance with this approach, it can be argued that for the Nile Basin region, internal changes in political subjects (states) lead to the creation of their new identity, which affects foreign policy strategy, and in particular the position on the issue of water resource distribution. The Nile as a geographical factor is not in itself the cause of the conflict; its strategic significance is set and constructed by political discourse. Elements of the structural realism approach are also used within the framework of the concept of securitization.

Water scarcity is becoming an “existential threat” for Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia, so the study uses the concept of securitization, which focuses on actors framing an issue as a threat to their own security. The position of the state in negotiations depends on its interests, goals, and intentions. According to the concept of securitization, interests are inextricably linked with identity, which in turn is shaped by political discourse. Accordingly, this work is methodologically based on research in the field of security by scientists such as B. Buzan, O. Waever, L. Hansen, D. Bigo, J. Huysmans.

The main part of the work will be the study of political discourse in each of the three countries - Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan. This will allow us to determine the place of the water issue in political discourse. Next, it is necessary to establish whether securitization of water resources takes place in the political discourse of each country, that is, whether the unresolved water issue is positioned as a security threat.

Methods. In order to obtain objective data on the importance of the water issue for national security and classify the implemented methods to overcome water shortages, the work used the *method of analyzing official documents, scientific publications and statistics*. The need to study the legal regime of the Nile Basin necessitated the use of the *historical-genetic method* to identify the causes and prerequisites for the current

negotiation impasse that arose during the historical development of the situation in the transboundary water basin.

The main method is *poststructuralist discourse analysis*. According to this method, any social practice is part of discourse. The concept of discourse in the broadest sense means speech inscribed in the sociocultural context of extralinguistic factors²⁸. Accordingly, in this work, *discursive practices* are understood as the formation by actors of social reality, identities, and interests through public texts, which are co-constituted by the response of the audience. The same applies to security issues, which are also formed within the framework of political discourse.

In accordance with the methodology of Professor L. Hansen of the University of Copenhagen, this work uses an intertextual model of two types of discourse: official, created by government officials and politicians, and broader, including the opinions of the media, opposition politicians and academic experts. This will explore how official representations are reproduced or contested in wider public discourse.

At the next stage, it is expected to track the changes that have occurred in the discourse and their impact on the negotiation process. A *comparative method* was used to highlight common features in the discourses of the three countries and identify relationships between various political and social phenomena.

Selection of empirical data. All interstate agreements regulating the distribution and use of water resources and procedures for coordinating the interests of the parties are used as the main legal sources for analyzing the legal regime in the Nile basin: bilateral agreements on the division of Nile water resources (1902, 1929, 1959, 1993), multilateral agreements (Framework Agreement 2010, tripartite Declaration of Principles 2015).

²⁸ Klyuev Yu. V. Political discourse in mass communication: analysis of public political interaction. Moscow, Berlin: Direct-Media, 2016. P. 16-17.

The next group is the records of international organizations (reports, statistical data on water resources), which provide information about the dependence of three countries on the water issue, characterizing the severity of the issue for each country: the UN Water Resources program (data on water consumption and consumption resources in the Nile Basin), FAO AQUASTAT (state and use of water resources - country reports and statistics), World Bank (reports on water security in the Middle East and North Africa), World Bank Water Data (statistics on water use for all countries), International Water Resources Association (IWRA), materials of the International Non-partisan Eastern Nile Working Group, 2015²⁹.

Media materials were used as an empirical basis for discourse analysis. The selection principle is coverage of events in politics, economics, and the social sphere. All media resources are divided into several categories: state news agencies, other state media, private media within the country, private media based abroad. Another criterion is the pro-government or opposition nature of the publication, or certain political views. The main type of sources are texts in English, Arabic (the official language of Egypt and Sudan) and Amharic (the official language of Ethiopia).

It should be noted that sources in national languages are most often politicized and cause discussions, so we can use them to track the differences in the positions of different social groups within the country.

In this work, three countries are considered as the main participants in international interaction on the water issue - Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia - since 2011 to the present, negotiations have been taking place between them to overcome the crisis in connection with the GERD project. Therefore, the sources are classified according to these three countries.

²⁹ An expert report on the prospects for Ethiopian hydropower projects, their impact on the economies of Egypt and Sudan, and options for achieving mutually beneficial agreements. The group includes leading hydro-politics researchers (D. Whittington, K. Wheeler, M. Jeuland, etc.) from universities in the USA, Great Britain, Australia and South Africa.

The selection of sources is formed from texts published within each country, the content of which directly relates to GERD and negotiations with two other partners, interstate relations through the prism of the issue of water security.

Thus, the main part of the work was the research processing of a significant amount of data in the form of materials of a political, analytical, factual nature that are published in the media. This made it possible to draw conclusions based on primary data to a greater extent than on existing scientific research and fundamental works. As a result of the analysis of these sources, for each country the relationship between three components in the media discourse was determined: political motivation, reflection of public opinion on water issues and polemics among expert circles.

The results reflecting **original scholarly research contributions** to the subject field are:

- The discussions on the water issue in Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia in 2011-2020 are based on politicized approaches that are not related to the search for a fact-based compromise. The parties to the dispute rather imitate the negotiation process in order to resolve their domestic political issues;
- There is a connection between the current domestic political agenda in the countries of the basin and the change in position in the negotiation process: the need to consolidate society and smooth out internal divisions has led to the choice of an uncompromising position on water issues, as particularly acute and relevant for the population;
- The severity of water problems declared by the negotiating parties is exaggerated: if cooperation is refused, the critical scenario that threatens the very existence of nations will not be realized;
- Non-state actors - experts, public figures, the media - are also actively involved in the process of forming the political agenda, which is important for the development of water policy by state actors

- In conditions where the subject of negotiations - water deficit - is only declaratively existential, but in reality is not perceived as such by the participating countries, the effectiveness of the further negotiation process remains low, however, in the event of stabilization of the internal situation, a transition to a compromise strategy is possible.

Applied results of the research. The significance of the results lies in clarifying the real positions of the parties to the dispute, which in practical terms can offer new ways to find a compromise. In addition, the results of the study can be used in the educational process of master's students: a training course “Environmental Dimension of International Relations in the Middle East” has been developed, addressing issues of water security. In theoretical terms, the results obtained from the study of mechanisms for ensuring water security can contribute to the development of securitization theory in a non-European context. The inconsistency of the water alarmism of the late 20th century, which predicted the emergence of armed conflicts over disputed water resources, is also emphasized. The secondary and “façade” role of objective needs for fresh water before more significant political factors in interstate relations has been proven.

The summary of the findings and conclusions. A feature of the work, characterizing its scientific novelty and research nature, was the careful processing and analysis of an extensive empirical base - an array of publications on water policy in the media. These sources make it possible to determine the relationship between three components in the media discourse: relaying the official position of the political leadership, reflecting public opinion on water issues and polemics among expert circles. Moreover, we cannot talk about any purposeful manipulation of water problems by the ruling elites; it is rather the mutual influence of state and non-state actors.

Discourse analysis showed the dependence of the foreign policy position on the domestic political situation. Confrontational discourse is a tool of nation-building by creating an image of the enemy and an emphatically tough negotiating position. The current negotiation process is of a preliminary, requesting nature, when the parties exchange mainly politicized statements instead of developing technical and factually supported proposals for a compromise solution to the existing problem.

The two main parties to the dispute - Egypt and Ethiopia - have different approaches to defining and ensuring their water security, which leads all negotiations to a dead end.

The concept of benefit-sharing could become a guiding principle for cooperation, but its implementation is hampered by political contradictions and the commitment of each side to strong ideas about its own security. Studies show that filling the dam in the Ethiopian scenario would have a negative impact on Egypt and Sudan, but would not be catastrophic for them. Egypt is already implementing innovative water conservation projects that will allow it to use available resources with maximum efficiency and mitigate possible reductions in flow.

The Egyptian and Ethiopian examples show that the securitization of water resources is more a routine political technology for managing fears in society (reproduction of insecurity) to strengthen leaders' role as protector and divert attention from domestic policy failures, rather than legitimizing emergency measures.

The negotiation process to resolve the GERD problem is, at first glance, proceeding with great activity. Over more than ten years, several lengthy rounds of negotiations have been held both in a trilateral format and through the mediation of third parties. Both Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan have clearly declared their commitment to the principles of fair and reasonable use of water resources, respect for the other side's rights to development, and their intention to avoid causing harm to anyone in every

possible way. In order to prove the consistency of their positions on the continuation/transfer/termination of dam construction with the above declarations, they initiated the creation of technical commissions to identify the full range of impacts of the project on each country, conduct scientific research, and attract international experts. However, no significant result was achieved in the form of an agreement on the legal regime for water use and coordination of the work of all dams.

It seems that none of the parties attached decisive importance to this entire set of practices for further strategy. Ethiopia did not at all consider the option of not only stopping construction, but also adjusting the project. Egypt would not stop resisting the Ethiopian plans and would not give up articulating threats from a new dam. In fact, the results of research and assessment of real needs were neither needed nor interesting to anyone, even if they were ambiguous and could be interpreted in their own favor.

A much more important circumstance is the fact of this activity, the very *process* of discussing water issues, which we can call “framing of insecurity.” At the same time, insecurity is often labeled as existential, but the referent object is not the state, but the well-being of the individual. The goal is not for the audience to sanction emergency measures carried out by politicians, but to increase controllability and limit “excessive” freedom, to manage the fears of its population of hunger, thirst, war in conditions of overpopulation and existing conflicts.

Thus, the existential nature of water shortage is only an artificial construct created to solve internal problems. This further refutes alarmist views of water as the main cause of future conflicts in dry regions. Countries express their readiness to fight “for every drop” and may exchange bellicose statements, but real conflicts occur for quite traditional reasons: internal ethno-confessional strife, religious extremism and interstate territorial disputes.

The possibility of softening the positions of countries in the negotiation process on the distribution of fresh water and the further functioning of GERD depends on changes in the domestic political agenda. If the socio-economic situation improves, the severity of perception of the water issue may also decrease. However, we have a precedent for the successful unilateral implementation of a hydraulic engineering project without agreeing on its parameters and timing with other parties. If in the Nile region this only leads to a lack of significant economic benefits for all parties, then similar situations in other regions of the world and in other conditions can lead to more severe results, even leading to a humanitarian catastrophe. The priority of national interests over joint international work to resolve issues of global significance was also emphasized, which will complicate its further implementation.

The chances of desecuritization and transition to water diplomacy are still low, but objectively the situation does not look insoluble. The best solution would be to implement a benefit-sharing scenario (proposed by a number of researchers). At the first stage, it is necessary to implement small joint projects of a technical nature (exchange of data, technologies). The second is to conclude agreements on coordinating the work of all dams on the Nile and create damage compensation mechanisms. The third is economic agreements on the supply of electricity. The multilateral format in this case can fulfill an important goal - preserving the dialogue.

It is in Russia's interests to strengthen cooperation with African countries, so promoting the resolution of the conflict is an important task for it. In practical terms, Russia can directly participate in the development of new approaches in the field of basin management, facilitate negotiations as an unbiased source of hydrological data, and act as a guarantor of food security in the countries of the region.

Statements to be defended:

- 1) The negotiations between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia on the water issue and the GERD dam are preliminary and request-based, with the parties exchanging mostly politicized statements instead of developing technically and factually supported proposals for a compromise solution to the existing problem.
- 2) Maintaining the confrontational scenario of the situation's development in the absence of cooperation will not lead to a sharp increase in the water crisis: all countries will lose additional benefits, but the damage will not be critical and will not threaten national security.
- 3) During these negotiations, there is a disconnect between the parties' positions and the real situation with water resources and the real consequences of the construction of the GERD dam.
- 4) The official discourse of the Nile basin countries does not demonstrate any intention to resolve the conflict through negotiated compromise.
- 5) A feature of the securitization process is its routine nature, which does not aim to legitimize emergency measures to eliminate an existential threat. Maintaining a discourse of threats is a political technology aimed at increasing the governability of society. In the context of a whole range of internal problems, managing public fears becomes important.
- 6) The development of positions in negotiations is the result of the mutual influence of state actors, expert circles and public opinion, and not an exclusive technology of the ruling elites to manipulate water issues in their own interests.

Approbation of work

- 1) First international forum “Russia-Africa: what next?”, MGIMO Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, October 23-23, 2021. Report at the round table of the “Politics” section on the topic “Russia’s role in the process of resolving the conflict over the Nile water resources.” Also within the framework of the forum, during the “Renaissance Dam” brainstorm, possible options for resolving contradictions on the water issue in the Nile Basin were proposed.
- 2) IV International Conference “The world majority in the contemporary international realities: from fragmentation to new institutionalization”, National Research University Higher School of Economics, December 1-2, 2022. Report on the topic “Russian-Sudanese relations in the context of “Russia’s return to Africa.”
- 3) XXIV Yasin (April) international academic conference on economic and social development, National Research University Higher School of Economics, April 4-14, 2023. Report on the topic “Features of Egypt’s policy in the field of ensuring water security in the context of the crisis around the Renaissance Dam in Ethiopia” as part of the event “New frontiers of international relations studies”.
- 4) V International Conference “World Majority in New Realities: Regional Dimension”, National Research University Higher School of Economics, November 30, 2023. Participation in the discussion of the water issue as one of the pressing problems of the region within the framework of the round table “Countries of the Middle East and the new political, financial and economic world order.”
- 5) During a seminar organized by the Russian Ecological Society and the China Foundation for Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development on October 25, 2021, a report on international water cooperation was presented, which highlighted the experience of water resource allocation in the Nile Basin.

List of publications relevant to the thesis:

- 1) Otinov D. Wavering Sudan as Key to Resolving the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Conflict // *Journal of Asian & African Studies*. 2023. Vol. 58. № 7. P. 1222-1236.
- 2) Otinov D.A. Third round of GERD completion: is it possible to break the impasse? // *International life*. 2022. No. 8. P. 64-71. (in Russian).
- 3) Otinov D. A. Water security of Egypt in the context of the crisis around the Renaissance Dam in Ethiopia // *Vostok. Afro-Asian societies: history and modernity*. 2023. No. 6. P. 118-129. (in Russian).
- 4) Otinov D. A. Features of securitization of the water issue in Ethiopia within the framework of critical approaches to security research // *Bulletin of Perm University. Political science*. 2023. Vol.7. No. 4. P. 68-80. (in Russian).