Learning from Africa

What Can Be Learned From Conflict Management In The Nile Basin

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What can civilian peace-building experts learn from Africa? The following article answers this question with four theses, based on lessons learned from international cooperation over scarce water resources in Africa.

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Conflict Theoretical Background

Three dimensions with which conflicts can be analysed will be presented below, to be used in section two on the Nile Basin: 1) Glasl's conflict escalation model, 2) the role of power, law and negotiations in conflicts, and 3) the multi-track approach to conflict management. These approaches and their underlying theories can be viewed as a distillation of experiences from practice. As in much of social science, they are debated. The reason why we use these approaches and not others is because they have proven to be useful by practitioners dealing with conflicts in the field. There are many definitions of the word "conflict". We will use the term "social conflict" in the following to mean a situation that arises when: 1) at least two parties interact in an incompatible way; 2) at least one of the involved parties intends or ignores the negative impacts on the other party stemming from the interaction; and 3) at least one of the involved parties experiences damage from the interaction.

1) Conflict Escalation Model

One of the main ideas of the above conflict definition is that there is a continuum from a simple debate to an all out war. The continuum or intensification of tension in a conflict is termed "escalation". Glasl differentiates between nine escalation steps. During this process, conflict parties capacity to differentiate decreases, "black and white" and "wrong and right", forms of thinking take over hand. Conflict parties start by wanting something, and end by also wanting to hurt the opponent. In order to make it acceptable to inflict suffering on other people, we go through a process termed "moral disengagement". The last escalation step is mutual destruction.

The aim of analyzing the escalation level is that the method of intervention should be adapted to the level of escalation. The more escalated the conflict, the more force is needed by a third party (person or organization who gets involved in the conflict to support de-escalation) to bring about change in the system. Thus military conflict management has a role to play in highly escalated conflicts, whereas civilian conflict management efforts have the key role to play in low escalated conflicts. An image should clarify the difference: a conflict between two people arguing with each other may be facilitated by an all-inclusive "fair" third party. If the two same people are hitting each other on the head, however, forceful separation is more appropriate.

Military, police and civilian conflict management needs to consider the differences and similarities between micro-level, and macro-level conflicts. It is, for example, misleading to think that micro-level conflicts are less escalated than international ones. 15 530 people were killed by intentional killing ("micro-conflicts") in the USA (86 in Switzerland) in 1999. A terrorist attack of the magnitude of September 11 (a "macro-conflict") would have to occur every two months to have a similar death toll in the USA. The impor-

tance given to international conflicts and terrorism is therefore disproportionate to their death toll, and can rather be explained by other factors, such as fear of the unknown and uncontrollable.

A key finding of escalation models is that no intentional murder or war occurred without one or both of the conflict parties beforehand going through all the escalation steps. The conflict parties, society and/or the international community would have signs to react on to de-escalate conflicts if they chose. Often, however, this does not happen.

2) Power, laws and negotiations

All relationships, be they in conflict or not, have elements of power, are regulated by rules and laws, and have elements of negotiations (a mutual give and take, considering the interests of those involved). According to Fisher, Ury & Patton, conflicts are likely when the mixture of these three elements do not fit the task at hand. Thus a military, fire brigade or hospital organization based only on negotiations would not work. Without some degree of negotiations, however, these organizations are also dysfunctional.

In 1996 the World Game Institute estimated the annual global military spending at about 780 billion USD. They estimated that 30% of this would suffice for global programs to solve major human need problems (see first figure). The comparison of the annual world military spending with the annual costs of programs to alleviate some of the major sources of human suffering, as mentioned above, indicates that the international community puts its trust in military power, and to a lesser degree in international law, negotiations and civilian conflict prevention. Why the world chooses what it chooses, however irrational this

Halbinsel Sinai (Ägypten).
Fotos: Albert A. Stahel
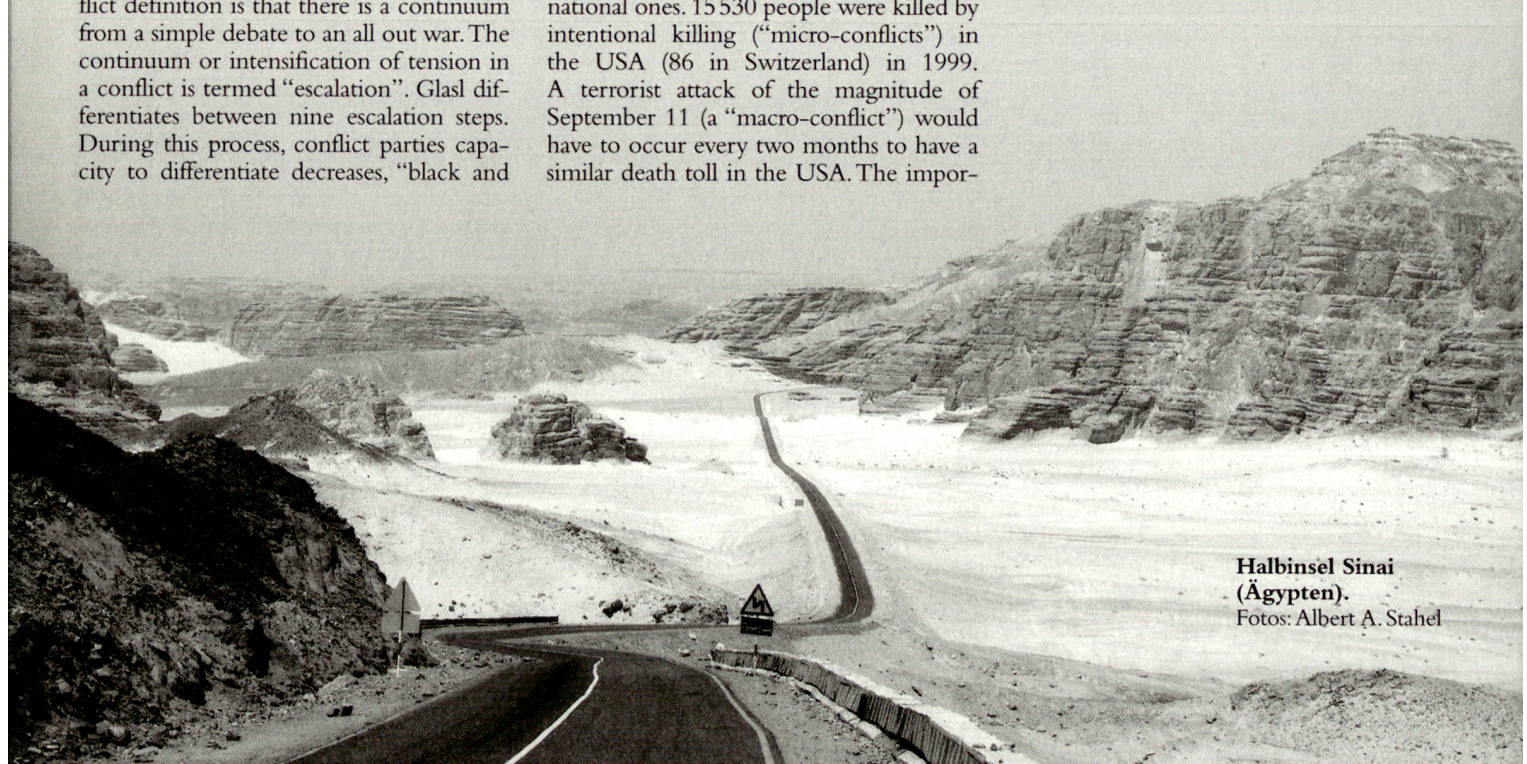
**WHAT THE WORLD WANTS
AND HOW TO PAY FOR IT USING MILITARY EXPENDITURES**

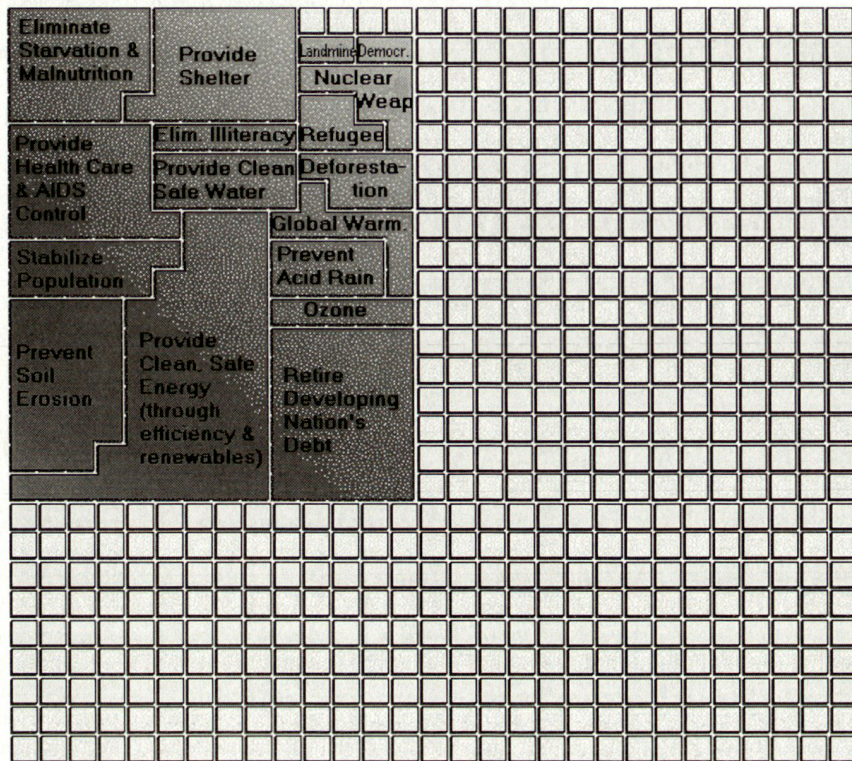Below are annual costs of various global programs for solving the major human need and environmental problems facing humanity. Each program is the amount needed to accomplish the goal for all in need in the world. Their combined total cost is approximately 30% of the world's total annual military expenditures. ■ $1 billion. ☐ Amount that was needed to eradicate Smallpox from the world.

Total Chart represents Annual World Military Expenditures: $780 billion

Eliminate Starvation & Malnutrition
Provide Shelter
Landmine
Democr.
Nuclear Weap
Elim. Illiteracy
Refugee
Provide Health Care & AIDS Control
Provide Clean Safe Water
Deforestation
Global Warm.
Stabilize Population
Prevent Acid Rain
Ozone
Prevent Soil Erosion
Provide Clean, Safe Energy (through efficiency & renewables)
Retire Developing Nation's Debt

Source: © 2000, Medard Gabel and the research staff of the World Game Institute <http://www.osearth.com/resources/wwwproject/index.shtml>

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ment focus on issues and often positional bargaining, Track 2 conflict management can often focus more on relationships and interest based interaction. The importance of Track 3 activities, as well as dialogue across tracks ("cross-track" conflict management) is important as no international peace agreement can be implemented without a wide acceptance in the society.
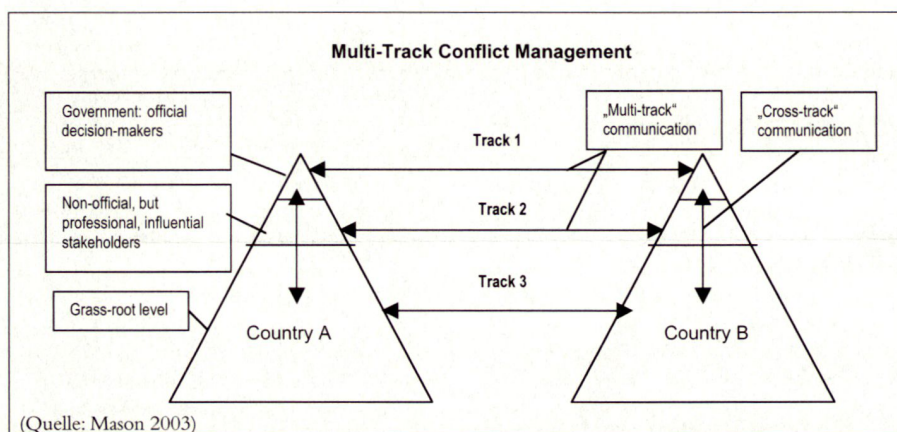
Water Conflict Management in The Nile Basin

With the above theoretical approaches in mind, we will now examine a real world case, specifically concerning water conflict management in the Nile Basin, where both civilian and military means were explored by the stakeholders to defend national interests. The section is divided into a part on the Nile conflict and a part on conflict management in the Nile Basin since 1999.

1) The Nile Conflict

The Nile River is shared by ten countries (Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda, D.R. Congo, and Kenya) and is home to more than 160 million people; the population is growing by 2-3% per year. Measured at Aswan, the Nile River has a yearly flow of 88 km³/year. 86% of the Main Nile's water stems from the Ethiopian highlands in the Eastern Nile Basin, the rest originates mainly from the watersheds of the equatorial lakes. Many countries in the Nile Basin are highly dependent on the Nile's water, as they are situated in an arid or semi-arid region. More than 95% of Egypt's water stems from the Nile, which means that it depends on rainfall outside of its territory. Egypt has therefore always closely observed Ethiopia's water development plans. Ethiopia's irrigation plans are of great concern since they could reduce the water flow in the Nile. Currently, Ethiopia's economic capacity does not yet allow full implementation of its irrigation plans. Ethiopia's present food production is dependent on rain-fed agriculture, which is unreliable because of the irregularity of the seasonal rains.

The national capacity to address the issues of water scarcity, erosion, sedimentation, floods and droughts is limited. Eight of the ten countries of the Nile Basin (Egypt and Kenya are the exceptions) are among the category of the 47 "least developed countries" world-wide. On the international level, the absence of a basin-wide water agreement has caused tensions between the riparian states and hindered access to international development support. Egypt and Sudan are committed to the only non-colonial water agreement in the basin, the

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may be for the welfare of humanity, is a question for further research.

3) Multi-track conflict management

Multi-track conflict management focuses on the synergies between conflict management by officials (track one), unofficial, informal representatives of society (track two), and efforts on the grass-root level (track three) (see second figure). Track two has been defined as "informal interaction between members of adversarial groups or nations which aim to develop strategies, influence public opinion, or organize human resources in ways that may help resolve the conflict". The advantages of each track are used in order to develop and implement solutions accepted by all levels of society. Unofficial experts, who meet each other in informal settings, are often more flexible about developing and brainstorming management options, as they do not need to defend fixed official policies. While Track 1 conflict manage-

Multi-Track Conflict Management

Government: official decision-makers
Non-official, but professional, influential stakeholders
Grass-root level
Country A
Country B
Track 1
Track 2
Track 3
„Multi-track" communication
„Cross-track" communication

(Quelle: Mason 2003)

Nile Countries

Jerusalem, Amman, ISRAEL, JORDAN, Cairo, LIBYA, EGYPT, Red Sea, IRAQ, IRAN, KUWAIT, Kuwait, BAHREIN, QATAR, Riyad, SAUDI ARABIA, CHAD, SUDAN, Khartoum, Atbara, ERITREA, Asmara, Sanaa, YEMEN, White Nile, Blue Nile, DJIBOUTI, Djibouti, Gulf of Aden, Adis-Abeba, Baro, Sobat, CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, ETHIOPIA, SOMALIA, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC CONGO, UGANDA, Kampala, KENYA, Mogadishu, Indian Ocean, Kigali, Lake Victoria, RWANDA, Nairobi, Bujumbura, BURUNDI, TANZANIA

0 km 300 600 900 km

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Agreement of 1959. The agreement allocates 55,5 km^3 water/year to Egypt and 18,5 km^3 water/year to Sudan, under condition that the Nile flow, measured at Aswan, remains the same (Agreement 1959). The upstream countries, however, do not consider the Agreement of 1959 to be relevant for them, as they were not invited to the negotiations that led to the agreement and did not sign it. Many international development banks require the consent of downstream countries before financing development projects on international rivers, thereby protecting the geographically weaker downstream states. A lack of consent from the downstream states can hinder development upstream, one of Ethiopia's main concerns.

The most escalated conflict is in the Eastern Nile Basin, between Egypt (the main runoff consumer), Sudan and Ethiopia (the main source).

The challenges posed by the water conflict in the Eastern Nile Basin can be summarized as follows:

1. A finite amount of water resources stands to be used by a population that is increasing by 2-3% annually.
2. The Nile countries' national socioeconomic and political capacity to find alternatives to present water use trends is limited.

3. There is no agreement on water allocation between the riparian countries that is accepted by all. Egypt and Sudan uphold the validity of the Agreement of 1959, the upstream countries seek to negotiate a new Nile waters agreement.
4. There have been diplomatic tensions and instances of threatening and concerned rhetoric between the countries of the Nile, especially between Egypt and Ethiopia.
5. International investment in water resource development has been blocked, due to disagreement between the countries.
6. The downstream countries are concerned about a decrease in water flow due to upstream water resource development.
7. The upstream countries are concerned about the downstream countries hindering their water resource development.

2) Successful Water Conflict Management

Cooperation in the Nile Basin started moving in the 1990s because Ethiopia accepted a project-by-project approach (an Egyptian proposition), and Egypt accepted talking about a legal framework (an Ethiopian proposition). The Nile Basin indicates that the shift from a focus on positions to interests requires a "this at the same time as that" approach, instead of a "this on condition of that" approach. A discussion and

negotiation forum was created in the "Nile Basin Initiative" to talk about legal issues, while simultaneously cooperation in the form of concrete projects has started, e.g. hydroelectric power production. Official and non-official representatives of the Nile countries met in different fora, e.g. in the series of Nile 2002 Conferences, enabling mutual learning about each other's perceptions and interests. These can be seen as examples of multi-track conflict management. A key point of multi-track conflict management on all levels in the Nile Basin is that by focusing on interests (underlying reasons for what people want) rather than on positions (fixed way of reaching what one wants) the number of options that can satisfy the different interests are increased and compatible solutions can be developed more easily.

A further contribution to the ongoing cooperation process was carried out by the Center for Security Studies of the ETH Zürich, together with the Swiss Federal Institute for Environmental Science and Technology (EAWAG), and the Conflict Prevention and Transformation (CO-PERT) section of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). In the "Environment and Cooperation in the Nile Basin" (ECONILE) project, they organized two Track 2 workshops between participants of the Eastern Nile Basin Countries. One of the outcomes of the first workshop was a publication written by the participants giving an all inclusive view of the different interests, perceptions, concerns and needs. In the second workshop at least one participant from each country was a member of the official negotiating teams, thus the workshop was a form of Track 1 and 2 conflict management effort, where officials interact on the Track 2 level.

Besides changes in the context, e.g. the end of the Cold War, the shift towards interest-based cooperation in the Nile Basin occurred, according to many of the experts interviewed in the ECONILE project, through a process of "dialogue accumulation". Dialogue accumulation refers to the result of numerous meetings between representatives from the different conflict parties over the years in various formal and informal settings. While one meeting may have little impact, together they have an influence. The coordination of the third party (the World Bank, UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) and Canadian International Development Agency [CIDA]) that supports the Nile Basin Initiative (Track 1 activities, but also capacity building and investment projects), has played an important role both in facilitating communication and in providing financial resources.

It is not obvious that the countries of the Nile Basin focus mainly on cooperative

Halbinsel Sinai (Ägypten).

conflict management. Egypt has frequently considered the role of military power when it comes to defending its water resources, the life line of Egypt, yet it also realized that negotiations and a consensual framework is more expedient to the present situation.

Some of the reasons why civilian conflict management could work in the Nile Basin are summarized below. These points also explain, in part, why Egypt's consensual communication strategy under President Mubarak's regime was more successful in securing Egypt's water than was the former military threatening strategy of President Sadat. The Nile example demonstrates that communication can lead to cooperation, even if a legal system is missing, as in the Nile Basin. It seems that the following pre-conditions for communication to work are needed: 1) there is a potential benefit for each actor, 2) there is a certain power symmetry, and 3) the conflict is not too highly escalated.

First, the benefits for the Eastern Nile countries is that they can more effectively deal with environmental issues, better access financial resources, and in the long term safeguard their water resources, through cooperation.

Second, the power symmetry is given to a certain degree in the Eastern Nile Basin in that Egypt is economically more powerful, and Ethiopia as the upstream country is geographically more powerful. It is important to note that the power of Ethiopia does not consist in military power, but rather in geographic power.

Third, the Nile conflict can be viewed as a low escalated conflict. According to the Glasl escalation model, level three is

reached when actors no longer believe that talking helps and when they go ahead with unilateral actions. While the Toshka project in Egypt and the micro-dam developments in Ethiopia can be seen as such unilateral actions, these are not directly aimed at harming the other party. Hindering development banks from supporting dam development upstream can, however, be viewed as an action indicating level three escalation. Ethiopians could also view the dominance of Egyptians in international water fora as an example of Egypt seeking to form coalitions supporting their downstream position. Images and coalitions are an indication that level four has been reached at times. Thus, the Nile conflict is viewed as being on a low level, on level one, two, to maximum four, where direct communication can be used.

The dimensions of power, law and negotiations also shape the intra-national arena. No major foreign policy change is possible without public support. At the beginning, the Water Ministries were viewed skeptically by the general public. With the change in strategy towards cooperation during the late 1990s, the media in both Egypt and Ethiopia criticized the Water Ministries for "selling out" to the other country, of being soft. Hardliners were seen as more patriotic than moderate experts, willing to cooperate. Only through an intensive public information campaign, could the Water Ministries of Egypt and Ethiopia convince the wider public that cooperation would serve the national interests better than sitting and waiting, or even than using military threats. The lesson learnt is that greater transparency and public informa-

tion is needed already at an early stage of a negotiation process. Besides these problems, Sudan faces the major obstacle of an ongoing civil war. There the success of the peace process is a key requirement for any long term stability and implementation of international water development projects. The case of Sudan goes in line with the global situation since the Cold War, where violent conflicts are intra-national, rather than international. Of the 25 major armed conflicts in the year 2000, all but two of them were internal.

## Conclusion

The following theses conclude this text:

1) Most international conflicts are of a low escalation level. In most cases Track 1 (official, diplomatic), Track 2 (international exchange between non officials) and Track 3 (grass root, civil society) conflict management efforts are more suitable to safeguarding national interests than military strategies.

2) Dialogue can lead to cooperation if there is a certain degree of power symmetry and mutual gains can be expected. Military power is only one aspect of a country's "power". Its importance is often over-estimated, especially in low escalated conflicts. The economic capacity, political stability, geographic position and international Track 1, 2 and 3 networks and participation in international organizations are other crucial aspects that give a country leverage.

3) Any national policy change versus the international community has major challenges to face from the internal public opinion. Media and public participation in this process can enhance acceptance for policy reforms. Peoples' fears need to be taken seriously. Elected leaders should not shy away from leading.

4) Highly escalated conflicts, where military intervention is required, are mainly found in the intranational arena.
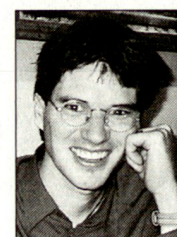
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