

## ETHIOPIA MOVES FORWARD ON HYDROPOWER DAMS

By George F. Ward, Jr.

On March 10, 2016, Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn [announced](#) that his government would soon launch a new hydropower project, building a 2,000 megawatt dam in an undisclosed location. The new dam would be part of the 2015–2020 development plan, under which Ethiopian electric generation capacity would rise from the current capacity of just over 2,200 megawatts to over 17,000. This announcement comes as two other large hydropower projects are moving into their final stages, despite concerns voiced by environmentalists and the government of Egypt. [more...](#)



Ethiopia's Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn speaks to The Associated Press at his office in the capital Addis Ababa, Ethiopia Thursday, March 17, 2016. (Source: AP Photo/Michael Tewelde.)

---

Ambassador (ret.) George F. Ward is editor of Africa Watch and a Research Staff Member at the Institute for Defense Analyses.

---

## LEAVING NOTHING TO CHANCE: SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE 2016 REPUBLIC OF CONGO ELECTIONS

By Dr. Stephanie M. Burchard

On the day before the Republic of Congo's March 20, 2016, presidential election, the Ministry of Interior ordered a temporary shutdown of telephone and Internet communications for "[reasons of security and national safety](#)." The government was allegedly concerned about the premature publication of results. What prompted the government's decision and what was it really meant to accomplish? [more...](#)



In this photo taken on Sunday, March 20, 2016, Congo incumbent President Denis Sassou Nguesso casts his ballot at a polling station in Brazzaville, Congo. (Source: AP Photo/John Bompengo.)

---

Dr. Stephanie M. Burchard is a Research Staff Member in the Africa Program at the Institute for Defense Analyses. Her new book, [Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa: Causes and Consequences](#), is out now.

---

### About IDA

The Institute for Defense Analyses is a non-profit corporation operating in the public interest.

IDA's three federally-funded research and development centers provide objective analyses of national security issues and related national challenges, particularly those requiring scientific and technical expertise.

IDA's Africa team focuses on issues related to political, economic, and social stability and security on the continent.

# ETHIOPIA MOVES FORWARD ON HYDROPOWER DAMS

By George F. Ward, Jr.

On March 10, 2016, Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn [announced](#) that his government would soon launch a new hydropower project, building a 2,000 megawatt dam in an undisclosed location. The new dam would be part of the 2015–2020 development plan, under which Ethiopian electric generation capacity would rise from the current capacity of just over 2,200 megawatts to over 17,000. This announcement comes as two other large hydropower projects are moving into their final stages, despite concerns voiced by environmentalists and the government of Egypt.



Ethiopia's Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn speaks to The Associated Press at his office in the capital Addis Ababa, Ethiopia Thursday, March 17, 2016. (Source: AP Photo/Michael Tewelde.)

## Gilgel Gibe III Dam Threatens Lake Turkana

As reported in the [January 26, 2015, issue](#) of *Africa Watch*, the government of Ethiopia has forged ahead with construction of the Gilgel Gibe III hydropower project in the face of environmental concerns. Gibe III is designed to generate 1,870 megawatts of electric power. According to a [hydropower trade publication](#), in October 2015 the Gibe III dam began generating electricity at a reduced level. The project is not yet complete, however, as the reservoir behind the dam will take years to fill, and construction of electric transmission lines for export of the power to Kenya, Sudan, and Djibouti will extend to at least 2018.

Environmental activists have [campaigned](#) against Gibe III for years. They claim that the flow of the Omo River into Lake Turkana on the Kenya-Ethiopia border will be reduced by about two-thirds for three years, threatening the livelihoods of up to 300,000 people in Kenya. Lake Turkana, which has already been shrinking for some time because of drought and other factors, receives 90 percent of its water from the Omo River. The government of Kenya has largely been silent on these concerns, perhaps because of its desire to secure the 500 megawatts of power that it expects to receive from the dam.

For its part, the Ethiopian government has bluntly turned aside objections to Gibe III. In an [interview](#) published on November 17, 2015, Motuma Mekasa, Ethiopia's minister of water, irrigation, and energy, was quoted as flatly saying, "The Gilgel Gibe III Dam has no environmental or social repercussions on the local Kenyan population." This statement, which conflicts with the claims of environmentalists, is emblematic of the approach of the Ethiopian government to its program of hydropower development. While listening to objections and talking with affected governments, Ethiopia has denied the existence of problems and has never deviated from its construction plans.

## Egyptian Options Narrow as Nile Dam Nears Operational Capacity

The [Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam](#) (GERD) is the largest hydropower project in Africa. When complete, the GERD will generate 6,000 megawatts of electricity. The GERD's reservoir will be large enough to hold more than the volume of the entire Blue Nile, on which it is located. Egypt, which claims rights to most of the waters of the Nile under a colonial-era treaty, has voiced objections to the GERD since construction began in 2011. Egyptian leaders even considered [military action](#) as recently as 2013, but that alternative seems highly unlikely now.

In May 2013, an [international panel of experts](#) released a report that cited the lack of attention by the Ethiopian government to assessment of the potential effect of the GERD on Egypt's and Sudan's water security. Trilateral discussions on the dam's impact began in August 2014. In early 2015, agreement in principle was reached to commission studies by international consulting firms, one on the socioeconomic impact of the dam and another on the hydraulic impacts on the Nile River Basin. Subsequently, however, technical experts from the three countries failed to reach an agreement on the choice of consulting firms, and the studies have never been carried out.

In the meantime, the government of Ethiopia has remained on course with its construction plans. Reports on the state of progress differ, but journalists and experts seem to agree that although the dam has reached only around half its intended 145-meter height, it will be able to begin [generating electricity](#) as early as June 2016. Initial electricity production, which would come from only two of the planned 16 turbines, would generate only a bit more than 10 percent of the GERD's planned capacity.

### Ethiopia's "Three No's" Narrow Egyptian Options

According to one report, Ethiopia has raised "three no's" in its negotiations with Egypt and Sudan over the GERD: no to talks about stopping the work on the dam; no to negotiations about dam specifications, height, and storage capacity; and no to talks about dividing water quotas with Egypt and Sudan. Given these positions, Egypt's negotiators have been left to concentrate on salvaging what they can from a project that is fast becoming a fait accompli. So far, Ethiopia is reported to have [refused](#) Egypt's requests to extend the period of filling the dam's reservoir to 11 years (from 3 to 5 years) and to reduce the storage capacity of the dam.

While continuing to seek Ethiopian concessions at the negotiating table, the government of Egypt also seems to be seeking to manage the Nile waters issue domestically. The government's moves in this area have caused it some embarrassment. In January 2016, the Egyptian minister of water resources and irrigation announced the [discovery](#) of a large underground water basin that he said covers 85 percent of Egypt's area. After reports emerged that the ministry was merely recycling reports of an already known aquifer that is largely non-renewable, the ministry was obliged to issue a clarification. In another move, Egypt's National Authority for Remote Sensing and Space Sciences announced on March 16 that a new satellite would be used to [monitor](#) progress on the GERD. The satellite measurement, Egyptian officials said, would bolster that country's case should it become necessary to bring the issue of the GERD to international arbitration.

### Conclusion

Given Ethiopia's unwillingness to make concessions to Egypt at the bargaining table, steps by Egypt such as introducing satellite monitoring seem almost akin to rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. It is possible that problems in construction of the remaining portion of the GERD or its associated "saddle dams" could still significantly delay completion of the project. That would provide Egypt with more time to bargain and perhaps additional evidence that aspects of the dam's design should be re-examined and revised. Absent developments of this sort, the GERD project is likely to be completed on Ethiopia's terms, and it will be up to that country to manage the fill rate of the reservoir and the flow of the Blue Nile River in a fashion that respects Egypt's existential dependence on those waters.

---

Ambassador (ret.) George F. Ward is editor of Africa Watch and a Research Staff Member at the Institute for Defense Analyses.

# LEAVING NOTHING TO CHANCE: SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE 2016 REPUBLIC OF CONGO ELECTIONS

By Dr. Stephanie M. Burchard

On the day before the Republic of Congo's March 20, 2016, presidential election, the Ministry of Interior ordered a temporary shutdown of telephone and Internet communications for "[reasons of security and national safety](#)." The government was allegedly concerned about the premature publication of results. What prompted the government's decision and what was it really meant to accomplish?



In this photo taken on Sunday, March 20, 2016, Congo incumbent President Denis Sassou Nguesso casts his ballot at a polling station in Brazzaville, Congo. (Source: AP Photo/John Bompengo.)

## Elections in the Republic of Congo

President Denis Sassou Nguesso has been in power for approximately 32 nonconsecutive years. A former army general and minister of defense, Nguesso first came to power in a coup in 1979. He ruled the Republic of Congo until 1991 when, under international pressure, he allowed the introduction of multiparty elections. Nguesso came in third in the 1992 elections, losing out to Pascal Lissouba. Before the country's next scheduled elections in 1997, forces loyal to Nguesso clashed with government forces. A brief civil war broke out, and Nguesso's troops won. He was promptly installed as president. Having subsequently won multiparty elections in 2002 and 2009, both of which were [problematic](#) and marred by harassment, intimidation, and opposition boycotts, Nguesso ran for a third elected term in office.

## Term Limits Need Not Apply

A new constitution in 2002 introduced executive term limits (two) and an age restriction for presidential candidates (younger than 70). After years of speculation, President Nguesso announced on September 22, 2015, that a constitutional referendum was to be held that October to decide if term limits were still appropriate for the country. Five weeks later, Congolese voters passed a new constitution eliminating term limits—92 percent voted in favor—allowing Nguesso to run in 2016. The new constitution also grants lifetime immunity to former presidents. Some have termed Nguesso's maneuvers to consolidate power a "[constitutional coup](#)."

The elections were originally scheduled for July 2016, but on December 30, 2015, the government announced that elections would be held in March 2016 on an abbreviated electoral schedule to [accelerate](#) "Congo's march on the path of its development." International actors, including the European Union, refused to send [electoral observers](#) because of concerns that the process would be less than democratic. The government also banned the [use of motor vehicles](#) on Election Day nationwide, with [police checkpoints](#) erected to enforce it.

President Nguesso faced eight opposition candidates in the election, the strongest being retired General Jean-Marie Mokoko, a former ally. The government repeatedly brought [Mokoko](#) in for questioning in February and March, alleging that he was conspiring with military supporters to overthrow the government. The day before the elections, the Interior Minister ordered all telephone communications shut down, including text messaging and Internet traffic. The government spokesman, Thierry MOUNGALA, [said](#) the ban was "necessary to block people from manipulating public and international opinion on the good nature of the election." But blocking social media in particular has a secondary purpose: it prevents monitoring election fraud and mobilizing protesters.

[Preliminary](#) results indicated that Nguesso would be re-elected, most likely in the first round. On March 24, the Interior Ministry [announced on national television](#) that Nguesso had won 60 percent of the vote. The opposition had already indicated they would not accept the results but, due to the continuing communications blackout, was not immediately

available for comment. Security is reportedly very heavy in major urban areas and opposition strongholds, with reports that riot police and the military have both been deployed.

## Elections and Social Media

Technological innovations over the past few years have given social media a [prominent role](#) in helping civil society and opposition supporters reduce fraud and prevent election-related violence in elections around the world. In Africa specifically, crowd-sourced websites such as [Ushahidi](#) allow individuals to anonymously report electoral infractions. Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp have been used to share sensitive electoral information and to organize protests. During the weeks before the October constitutional referendum, Twitter was one of the [premier sources](#) for news on the protests and demonstrations surrounding the referendum. Unfortunately, like other forms of communication, these outlets have also been used to promote [hate speech](#) and [foment violence](#), giving repressive governments a ready excuse to shut down social media in the name of national security.

## Conclusion

Congo-Brazzaville is not the only country to take such preventive measures. Uganda, Burundi, Sudan, Central African Republic, Niger, and Democratic Republic of Congo have all imposed social media blackouts [during recent past elections](#). Furthermore, news and communications blackouts are not necessarily a new phenomenon in African elections. For example, during the 2007/2008 election crisis in Kenya, the government imposed a [ban on live broadcasts](#). Communication blackouts such as these allow the government to control the flow of information and decide what messages should be shared with domestic audiences. As social media continue to increase in prominence and usage in Africa, expect social media bans to increase as well.

---

Dr. Stephanie M. Burchard is a Research Staff Member in the Africa Program at the Institute for Defense Analyses. Her new book, [Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa: Causes and Consequences](#), is out now.

---