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By Dr. Stephanie M. Burchard

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Borno State Governor Kashim Shettima visits the government secondary school in Chibok on April 21. (Source: AP.)

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Three years after the commencement of work on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), Africa’s largest hydropower project, located on the Blue Nile, the project is over [30 percent complete](#). When the dam is finished at the end of 2017, it will add 6,000 megawatts of electrical generating capacity to the African grid. Egypt, which depends on the Nile for 95 percent of its water supply, fears that the GERD will seriously threaten the health and livelihoods of its people by reducing the amount of water available to them. Nevertheless, Egypt, which briefly in mid-2013 seemed to be threatening military action, has so far not succeeded in gaining much traction in its campaign to sidetrack or delay the ambitious project. For its part, Ethiopia is busy creating facts on the ground while rejecting Egypt’s arguments. [more...](#)



Construction at the site of the planned Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam near Assosa in the Benishangul-Gumuz region of Ethiopia, near Sudan, some 800 kilometers (500 miles) from the capital Addis Ababa. (Source: AP Photo/Elias Asmare.)

Ambassador (ret.) George F. Ward is a Research Staff Member at the Institute for Defense Analyses and the editor of Africa Watch. He is a former U.S. ambassador to the Republic of Namibia.

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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.

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History of Vigilantism in Nigeria

Vigilante groups—also known as self-defense groups or informal policing groups—have frequently emerged in Nigeria as community-level initiatives meant to address chronic insecurity amid state failure to provide adequate and impartial policing services. During the 1980s and 1990s, in response to rising crime rates, there was a significant increase in the number of new vigilante groups, beginning in the southeast of the country, but rapidly spreading to other regions. Groups such as the [Bakassi Boys](#) in Abia, Imo, and Anambra states; the [Vigilante Group of Nigeria](#) in Kaduna; and [O’dua People’s Congress](#) in Lagos patrolled the streets at night in an effort to reduce crime in their local areas. These groups, which officially registered with the government as vigilante groups, were meant to augment existing security services. To this end, official vigilante groups had the ability to arrest suspects but not detain them; instead, they were required to immediately turn over suspects to local authorities. Because they often operated in parallel to the official government, many of these groups received [financial support from local and state](#) governments.

The Bakassi Boys were perhaps one of the best known of the vigilante groups. They formed in late 1990s in response to a series of violent robberies in the city of Aba, Abia state. Within a year, they had drastically reduced crime through their nightly patrols and by apprehending suspected criminals. The governor of nearby state Anambra invited the Bakassi Boys to establish operations in his state to assist in providing security. Initially, the Bakassi Boys were viewed as heroes and enjoyed [widespread popularity](#); however, after the group was accused of innumerable human rights abuses, including [“summary executions, torture, and unlawful detention,”](#) and committed several high-profile public executions, including of opponents of the then governor of Anambra, the federal government banned the group’s activities in 2002. It continued [to operate underground](#), and today, there are still [sporadic reports](#) of Bakassi Boys activity in southeast Nigeria.

The CJTF

The Civilian Joint Task Force is a more recent incarnation in the spirit of previous vigilante groups. Its name derives from the government’s Joint Task Force (JTF) currently deployed to Northern Nigeria to counter Boko Haram. The JTF is a mixed force that includes both military and police officers.

The CJTF has expressed a desire to [work with the Nigerian military](#) in its operations against Boko Haram. The CJTF reportedly counts at least 500 local males as members, all with varying [motivations](#) for joining, including revenge, the desire for peace, and employment. Governor of Borno Kashim Shettima, a member of the national opposition party, explicitly supports the CJTF, and the state government is reportedly paying members [approximately \\$113 per month](#) each

to continue their efforts. In fall 2013, Governor Shettima also sponsored the BOYES (Borno Youths Empowerment Scheme) program, which was established to train an additional 800 vigilante members.

Some have argued that the CJTF is [similar to vigilante groups from northeast in the 2000s](#), such as Ecomog, Sara-Suka, and YanKallare, all of which were assembled by local politicians and used for electioneering purposes. The CJTF reportedly burned down the home of the chairman of the ruling party in June 2013, accusing him of sponsoring Boko Haram activities. Boko Haram seems to take the CJTF seriously—it [declared war against CJTF](#) in a video statement released in mid-June.

Pros and Cons

It is obvious that counterterrorism efforts in Nigeria will take a multipronged approach, as [recent remarks by National Security Adviser](#) Mohammed Sambo Dasuki indicate. Vigilante groups are uniquely poised to contribute to local security because these groups form in response to specific issues and conditions; are staffed by local volunteers who have knowledge of the community; and often have the trust of the local community, something Nigerian police forces, organized and controlled remotely by the federal government, do not always possess.

But there is the potential for abuse and manipulation of these types of groups. Thus, their inclusion in the state security apparatus must be undertaken cautiously. In the early 2000s, domestic groups such as [CLEEN](#) (formerly the Center for Law Enforcement Education) established programs to connect informal policing services with official state security forces to curtail human rights abuses and the overt manipulation of these groups by political actors. In 2006, the British government, also [concerned about the rise in vigilantism](#) began working with various groups to train and educate them regarding the law and their role in providing justice in Nigeria. These types of programs are essential in preventing vigilantism from taking on less than honorable methods and purposes while promoting security in insecure locales.

If a country can learn lessons from its past, it is not doomed to repeat its mistakes. The inclusion of local communities in security provision is commendable and, given the difficulty Nigeria has had in providing such an essential service to its populace, even necessary. Efforts to properly train the vigilante groups and oversee their activities are crucial to ensuring that additional sources of insecurity are not being added to an already combustible situation.

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Compromise Remains Elusive

When IDA's *Africa Watch* [last looked](#) at the prospects for GERD in November 2013, it appeared unlikely that the dispute between Egypt and Ethiopia would result in conflict and somewhat more likely that some sort of regional compromise might resolve the issue. Almost six months later, the military option seems to have faded further, but so have attempts at finding a compromise. In January 2014, a third round of negotiations involving Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan ended in failure when [Egypt withdrew](#), accusing Ethiopia of failing to guarantee Egypt's share of the Nile waters. In April, the Ethiopian foreign ministry rejected an Egyptian proposal for [joint control of the GERD](#), an arrangement that might have involved provision of Egyptian financing for the project.

Egypt's Strategy

Having failed to negotiate a solution, Egypt is seeking international support in the dispute. Its strategy seems to be proceeding on three tracks. First, Egypt is seeking to cut off international financing for the GERD. According to a report based on [Arab-language media sources](#), the World Bank, the EU, and others have decided to refrain from financing the GERD. On April 9, 2014, the [EU's ambassador to Egypt](#) was reported saying that the EU is not funding the GERD. Although China has not provided financing for the dam, it has pledged to support construction of the [power transmission lines](#). Second, Egypt has [approached Italy through diplomatic channels](#) to ask that the Italian general contractor on the project be obliged to suspend construction until agreement can be reached on modifications to the project. This tactic has not yet been successful. Third, Egypt is exploring the possibility of taking the dispute to the United Nations, either through the Security Council or the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Neither of these two options appears promising, as the ICJ normally requires parties in a dispute to agree to binding arbitration, and the Security Council usually sets a fairly high bar before exercising its mandate to consider matters related to international peace and security.

Ethiopia Moves Forward

Ethiopia has responded effectively to Egypt's tactics, but in ways that carry some economic and political risk. First, Ethiopia has succeeded in winning the [support of Sudan](#), a country that, by the terms of existing treaties dating to 1929 and 1959, shares the rights to the bulk of the waters of the Nile with Egypt. Sudan has sided with Ethiopia on issues related to the structural safety of the dam. In return, however, Sudan may expect to be allowed to take additional downstream water for farm irrigation. If so, this would weaken Ethiopian arguments that the dam will not ultimately reduce the amount of water available to Egypt. Second, Ethiopia has made the decision to [pay for the dam itself](#) if no other sources of financing are available. Since the dam will cost over \$4 billion, roughly equivalent to 12 percent of Ethiopia's GDP, this is quite an

undertaking. So far, Ethiopia has been successful in meeting its financial obligations, having paid around \$1.5 billion. The risk here is that the government, which is requiring banks to lend it 27 percent of their loan books at concessional rates, is crowding out private credit needs. The IMF forecasts that public infrastructure projects such as the GERD have [reduced Ethiopian economic growth](#) by around 1 percent annually.

Expert Opinions Differ

The division between Egypt and Ethiopia over the GERD is paralleled by dissent among experts. Both countries have publicly asserted that the May 2013 report of the International Panel of Experts supports their position. [A leaked copy](#) of that report, however, suggests that the panel's experts neither fully endorsed nor completely condemned the project. Rather, the panel cited the need for more information on certain aspects and asked for further studies. Analysts at [International Rivers](#), an NGO that often opposes large-scale hydroelectric projects, have been critical of the GERD. On the other hand, [Dr. Ana Cascão](#), a researcher at the Stockholm International Water Institute and an expert on the hydro politics of the Nile basin, largely supports the Ethiopian position.

Conclusion

Considering the facts as they stand, it appears more and more likely that the GERD will be built, perhaps with some delay, and that Egypt will need to find a way to live with it. Under the historical treaty regime, Egypt has enjoyed rights to abundant water. A sizable portion of that resource has been used inefficiently in water-intensive types of agriculture. Egypt will bolster its case and its bargaining power to the extent that it is able to improve the efficiency with which it uses its increasingly scarce water resources. In addition, to salvage as much as possible from the current situation, Egypt may need to focus now on achieving agreement with Ethiopia on guidelines for filling the dam, to avoid creating shortages downstream, and on limiting use of the waters of the Blue Nile for irrigation.

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