

Hydro-Hegemony in South Asia

⇒ (Indus Water Treaty)

1. IWT and Brewing Crisis in the Region:

“Water is the new
oil of the 21st
Century.”

(Ban-Ki-moon, 2010)

This statement has proved true in the South Asia, where rivers are the lifelines of billions yet also a potential trigger for conflict. The suspension of Indus water treaty by India, combined with the China's decision to build a dam on Brahmaputra has shifted

region to a hydropolitical territory. These developments threaten to transform the long standing water-sharing agreements into as a tool of political leverage, highlighting the tension between armed forces and placing food, economy and human security at risk.

2. Suspension of treaty:

On April 22, 2025, the peaceful valley of Pahalgam was shaken by a violence which sent shockwaves through South Asia's fragile geopolitical landscape.

A militant group attacked and consumed the lives of 28 tourists and left dozens wounded. In its aftermath, the India accused Pakistan of involvement and declared the suspension of Indus water Treaty.

It not only stunned Islamabad but also sent shockwaves through regional and global diplomatic circles. At the heart of escalating crisis lies - water a scarce and "weaponizable" resources.

India's proactive move threaten to transform the treaty once hailed as a model of the transboundary cooperation into a new threat of confrontation. The implications for Pakistan, who's intimately tied to "Indus River System", are essential. India's decision of suspension of treaty calling it,

"

Untenable under current hostility."

is not only irresponsible but also strategic destabilizing and morally untenable.

3. IWT: Lifetime to Collapse :

The IWT, ~~was~~ signed on 1960 brokered by World Bank, stands out as one of the world's most comprehensive and enduring water-sharing accords. It emerged from intricate hydropolitics that followed the 1947 partition, which split the Indian subcontinent, yet the Indus Basin interlinked the newly formed states of Pakistan and Pakistan.

Under the treaty, India had control over the Eastern Rivers - Ravi, Beas, ~~Chenab~~ and Sutlej and Western Rivers were reserved Pakistan, consisting of three rivers Indus, Chenab and Jhelum.

However, India's rights were limited for non-consumptive use such as hydropower generation.

This structure ensured Pakistan to receive 80% of annual water flow - a vital assurance for a downstream economy.

4. Pakistan's Dependency:

Pakistan is highly dependent on these rivers. 90% of its population lives within Indus Basin. The agriculture sector uses 94% of water withdrawal, contributes 23% to GDP and 38% of labor force.

Pakistan hydropower plants from Mo, Tarbela to Mangla to Neelum-Jhelum depends on these rivers. Despite this heavy reliance, Pakistan's water infrastructure remains underdeveloped. This limited capacity makes it vulnerable to situations like floods and droughts. In this context, India's action to suspend IWT is not only a

threat to Pakistan's sovereignty,
under international law but also
threatens human security and economy.

5. India's Powerplay:

India's argument for suspending
IWT draws upon the doctrine of
"rebus sic stantibus", a principle of
International law that:

"A treaty can be modified
or terminated if fundamental
circumstances change."

Citing the Pakistan's support
for terror lead attacks, India claims
that,

"The fundamental assumptions
of the treaty may no

Day: _____
" longer hold.

However, the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (1969) clearly states in Article 62 that "fundamental circumstances may not be invoked if the treaty holds transboundary regime and establishes arrangement."

In this view, India's precedent is not proved to have legitimacy. India and Pakistan are two rivals, shares a complicated history. India sees Pakistan as an enemy. It has always tried to destabilize Pakistan from its birth. India^x (sees) want to India aiming to pressure Pakistan, blamed if for terror attacks and suspended the Treaty, a vital water source for Pakistan.

6. Water Weaponization:

India's suspension marks the first time that a signatory has attempted to politicize the flow of water in south asia. Water unlike trade is not a tool for political gains but a lifeline for billions of people. Using it as a leverage or punishment against a downstream nation undermines the entire edifice of global water-sharing norms.

India have long floated the idea of weaponizing its water but not transferred into until now, shifting policy from deterrence to coercion. In the Uri attack, Prime Minister Modi said:

Blood and water
cannot flow together,

changing the water

dynamic in the region. If India try to manipulate water flow, Pakistan could interpret such moves as act of war, warranting military response. This is not hyperbole, under the military or armed conflict, targeting of civilian water infrastructure is considered as a "war crime". If Islamabad retaliates, the escalation would spiral beyond control.

7. Pakistan's response:

Pakistan called this act of India, suspending Indus Water Treaty a "non-serious and irresponsible action".

This action was met bilateral and Pakistan condemns the suspension of long-standing water treaty.

Pakistan's ambassador Usman Jadoon at the meeting of UN stated that;

"We will not bear any such moves."

He stated this action as:

Grave violation of international law including humans right law and treaty law.

Pakistan have called India on different foreign platforms for bilateral talks but India always denied. Pakistan wants peaceful talks with India to have a agreeable solution for ongoing crisis as both countries face serious threats from terrorism. Pakistan has denied the accuse of involvement in Pahalgam attack. As a result, the suspension of INT is not

acceptable.

8. Impacts on Pakistan:

Pakistan is an agricultural country. Its economy depends on agriculture and indirectly on rivers.

Agriculture sector is a backbone to Pakistan's economy. Suspension of IWT would result in reduction of water raising concerns for less yield of crops and outcomes for exports.

India's action would cause environmental problems to already struggling nation. Any disruption in water flow can lead to flood drought and would result in food insecurity, inflation, employment issues and declining livelihood in rural areas.

In the energy perspective, Pakistan is already going through severe energy crisis, less water can cause less energy production which can worsen the prevailing situation.

In this situation, Pakistan seek support from other countries increasing debt and causing reliance on IMF.

9. Recommendations:

Pakistan should ask support from international forums such as International of Justice and Arbitration.

It should raise this question on UN, OIC and different global South forums.

Pakistan should built water resilience infrastructure and flood-

resilient and water-efficient crops.

Pakistan should focus on building hydrological warning systems. and should try to have good relations with India.

10. China's decision to build dam:

India's unilateral suspension of IWT also casts a long lasting shadow over the relations with other countries.

Nepal and Bangladesh have already expressed concerns to India's hydro hegemony and upstream dam-building. By suspending IWT, India has set a precedent for other countries that water can be used as a weapon. China is building a dam on Brahmaputra river and controls this river and flood sharing data. This precedent of India can be used against it by the China. This would

cause severe tensions in the region.

11. Conclusion:

Water is essential component of life on Earth. It should not be treated as a weapon. India's abrupt suspension threatens to transform rivers of life into fault lines of war. Pakistan must not only defend its legal and moral rights but also frame the issue as a precedent on water security in the era of climate emergency. It's not the water it's about the peace, prosperity and coexistence in the South Asia.