

Topic: The geopolitics of water sharing in the Indus-Basin

Outline

1- Introduction

Thesis Statement: The Indus-Basin is a home to many conflicts, with its complex geopolitical features. The problem of water sharing has emerged as a biggest threat to the region. If not dealt with iron hands, this threat may lead the two nuclear armed nations towards the ultimate annihilation.

2- Water: a weapon for regional conflicts

a) The origin of Indus Water Treaty (IWT) (1960)

Case in Point: The division of 168 (MAF) water between India and Pakistan

b) The violations of IWT by India
Case in Point: Construction of

Baghlihar, Kishanganga, and Ratle hydroelectric projects on western rivers.

- c) Use of water as a strategic tool by India

Case in Point: Threats to suspend IWT after Uri Attack (2016), Pulwama Attack (2019), Peshawar Attack (2025)

- d) IWT in the abeyance after false flag operation of Peshawar to harm Pakistan economically

Case in Point: Pakistan's 90% food and 65% economic opportunities are tied to Indus-basin along with 1/3rd power generation

- e) The Indus-basin dispute goes global after military escalation of 2025

Case in Point: Permanent Court of Arbitration orders to resume IWT

3- Implications of Indus Water Treaty (IWT) Suspension for Pakistan

- a) Increased possibility of water scarcity and food shortage for already water stressed country

Case in Point: Pakistan will slip into absolute water scarcity by 2035 (IOM)

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Case in Point 2: Pakistan's per capita water availability has plummeted to 5600 cusecs ^{in 1947} to 930 cusecs in 2023 (WWF-P)

- b) Water crisis go hand in hand with the climate change.

Case in Point: About 10000 glaciers to deplete soon in Pakistan

- c) Indo-Afghan Alliance and possible water shortage from north-western border

- r **Case in Point:** India to build Shahtoot dam in Kabul

4) Implications of "water sharing models" for India

- a) "Principle of harm to 'lower riparians'" might set a ~~wrong~~ precedent.

Case in Point: Construction of hydro-electric project on Brahmaputra river by China

- b) Regional unrest might harm India's economic ambitions

Case in Point: Pakistan's resilience and economic downfall of India

5- The Way Forward

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5-1) Resolution of disputes via
"Permanent Indus Commission"

5-2) Peace through dialogue and
third party mediation

Case in Point: Trump's offer
to restore peace between India
and Pakistan

6-Conclusion:

Exploitation of water resources
for geopolitical gains; 1.5
billion lives at stake due to
possible nuclear apocalypse

"Thousands have lived
without love, not
one without water"

(W.H Auden)

Water is considered the lifeline of human beings. Despite having the inherent desire of being loved, a human can live without love but cannot survive without water. In the context of Indus basin - a water river system which comprises of the Indus river and its five tributaries i.e: Chenab, Jhelum, Ravi, Sutlej and Bias; the water sharing formula has always been a bone of contention between India and Pakistan. The colonial masters did not bother to resolve important geographical and humanitarian conflicts and left the region into political squabbles. A standstill agreement was signed in 1947; between India and Pakistan for water sharing. An undue advantage was given to India for being an upper riparian as headworks were located in India. India

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Started taking this advantage and stopped the water supply to Pakistan in 1948. Since then, the Indus basin is a home to many conflicts; with its complex geopolitical features. The problem of water sharing has emerged as a biggest threat to the peace of the region. If not dealt with iron hands, this threat may lead the two nuclear armed nations towards the ultimate annihilation.

Owing to the growing animosity between India and Pakistan, the World Bank mediated a treaty named "Indus Water Treaty" between India and Pakistan. The Indus Water Treaty of 1960, proposed a water sharing model for the two countries. The control of Eastern rivers i.e.: Ravi, Sutlej and Bias was given to India while western rivers i.e.: Indus, Chenab, and Jhelum; were placed under Pakistan's control. Both the countries could use the waters from their respective rivers without disturbing the natural flow of rival's rivers.

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According to this treaty, 33 Million Acres Feet (MAF) water of Indus basin was given to India while the remaining 135 Million Acres Feet (MAF) given to Pakistan.

The Indus Water Treaty prevented the two countries to build dams on their rival's rivers to ensure transparency. However, India started violating the treaty with the construction of **Baglihar Dam** on river Chenab in 1999, **Kishanganga Dam** on Jehlum river and **Ratle Dam** on river Chenab. Pakistan ^{have} filed multiple appeals in Permanent Indus Commission -

established under "Indus Water Treaty; but all in vain. India even violated the rulings of the World Bank Group and Permanent court of Arbitration regarding the water rights of Pakistan.

The water terrorism of India and incapacity of third party mediators to enforce the provisions of the Indus Water Treaty have left Pakistan into extreme vulnerability.

Moreover, India has continuously

used water as a strategic tool against Pakistan. Pakistan and India have engaged in several wars including wars of 1948, 1965, 1971, 1999, and 2025. India has threatened Pakistan^{on} multiple occasions to stop the supply of water. Even after the false flag operations of Uri (2016), Pulwama (2019), and Pehalgam (2025); India has used Indus Water Treaty as a threatening tool against Pakistan.

The things got intense when India unilaterally suspended the Indus Water Treaty in the aftermath of false flag operation of ~~operation~~ Pehalgam (2025). India is well aware of the fact that Pakistan is heavily dependent on Indus basin as **90%** of the country's food while **65%** of economic opportunities are dependent on Indus river system. Additionally, the very river system is responsible for the **one-third** power generation of the country. In this way, suspending Indus

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Water Treaty means toying with 240 million lives.

The Indus basin dispute went global when both the countries engaged in a four day war, from May 7, 2025 to May 10, 2025. Pakistan declared India's announcement to suspend Indus Water Treaty as an "act of war" and announced to continue its struggle for the equitable share of water from Indus basin, even after the ceasefire. Pakistan went to Permanent Court of Arbitration to challenge India's unilateral right to suspend the bilateral Indus water treaty. On August 8, 2025, the court rejected the suspension of the treaty and ruled in the favour of the resuming Indus water treaty. However, Indian government seems to be reluctant about backstepping. Stepping back from its geopolitical move of depriving Pakistan from its lawful right to water access.

Although Pakistan reserves its right to the water of Indus

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basin but in the case of troubles created by India, Pakistan can suffer from the existential threat of water scarcity and subsequent food shortage. According to **The International Organization for Migration (IOM)**, Pakistan will slip into absolute water scarcity by **2035**, due to its continuously depleting water resources. **The World Wildlife Forum - Pakistan (WWF-P)**, has reported that per capita water availability in Pakistan has plummeted from 5600 cusecs water in 1947 to 930 cusecs water in 2023. As Pakistan is already a water stressed country, the blockage of water from western rivers can pose a life threatening danger to the lives of Pakistani people.

Additionally, water crisis and climate change always go hand in hand. Pakistan is a home to world's largest glacier reserves outside of a polar region, It is estimated that out of 13032 glaciers, about 10,000 are going to melt due to ^{the} global

warming. Pakistan is already a victim of unprecedented natural and man-made calamities which deprives the indigenous population from water availability. The persisting climate change ~~and~~ alongwith water scarcity can prove to be an ultimate danger for Pakistan.

Apart from this, Pakistan can suffer from a possible Indo-Afghan alliance and partnership for building water facilities. Afghanistan - a north west neighbour of Pakistan, has shown hostility towards Pakistan. In May 2025, a meeting between Indian and Afghan officials and the subsequent proposal for building **Shahroot Hydroelectric Power Project** in Char Asiab district of Kabul by India; can prove a game changer in the geopolitical context of Indus basin. India has aimed to spend \$ 236 million on this project. If this partnership bears fruit, India can disrupt the water supply to Pakistan from its northern border; leading the country

towards drought.

Though water sharing in Indus basin ^{may} ~~cause~~ create an irreparable damage to Pakistan, However India can be an originator of a wrong precedent of "principle of harm to lower riparians". Geographically, China is considered the uppermost riparian, with India as middle riparian and Pakistan being a lower riparian. As Pakistan is heavily dependent on Indus - basin, India is dependent on Brahmaputra river. The Brahmaputra river originates from Chemyungdung glaciers of China and ends at bay of Bengal. As China is not a signatory of **UN Watercourses Convention of 1997** - a convention which advocates for equitable water use and "no harm principle" to transboundary rivers, China reserves the right to take advantage of being an uppermost riparian by holding the waters of India. Especially after the construction of the world largest hydroelectric project on Brahmaputra river, China can follow the inhumane

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precedent of India to stop the water supply to lower riparians i.e.: India and Bangladesh.

Furthermore, the disruption of the current water sharing models, might harm India's economic ambitions.

India is currently the fourth largest economy of the world, mainly due to its population size and handsomely growing Gross Domestic Product. However, the inequitable division of natural resources, and aggression with two nuclear armed neighbours i.e.: China and Pakistan; can lead the country towards an inevitable war. AS instability complements poor economic conditions, India might be compelled to give up on its economic aspirations. Pakistan has already shown its deterrence in May 2025 and is constantly declaring the any disruption to water supply as an "act of war". AS Field Marshall Asim Munir said: "We will wait India to build dams, only to destroy them with the missiles later". It clearly depicts the resilience of Pakistan

to protect its dignity.

This is why, India and Pakistan should focus on the long term sustainable solutions for water sharing. Both the countries must seek a resolution of their ^{water} disputes via Permanent Indus Commission established under Indus water treaty. India should not indulge in any activity of setting a wrong precedent for the region.

The President of the United States of America, Mr. Donald Trump has offered to mediate between the two countries. However, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had shown reluctance in accepting an offer for peace.

In a nutshell, the geopolitics of water sharing in the Indus basin has entered into a crucial phase of aggression. India has repeatedly underestimated the power of Pakistan and its strong allies. India is on its way to set a wrong precedent for the upper riparians ^{by} ~~and~~ taking advantage of ~~this~~ ^{their} geography. The new alliances can be a threat for

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Pakistan and might lead a country towards absolute water scarcity. The already depleting water resources and the wrath of climate change can add insult to the injury for Pakistan. The matter of the fact that India is using natural resources for its geopolitical gains which might be a cause of future political and militaristic conflicts between the two arch rivals. The war over water might push the two nations into nuclear confrontation; leaving about 1.5 billion people into an ultimate apocalypse. As Plato said:

**"Only dead have seen
the end of war"**
