

Q- Evaluate the evolution of hydropolitics in South Asia with special reference to the Indus Water Treaty (IWT). How do India's upstream water projects in Indian occupied Kashmir, Pakistan's internal water mismanagement, and emerging Pakistan-Afghanistan water disagreements together shape Pakistan's long-term water security?

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Introduction

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Water scarcity has become a defining strategic challenge in South Asia, with rivers forming both sources of cooperation and conflict. The Indus Waters Treaty (IWT, 1960) historically managed India-Pakistan water sharing, yet evolving projects and political tensions have stressed its framework. India's upstream interventions, Pakistan's domestic mismanagement, and emerging Pakistan-Afghanistan disputes raise concerns about long-term water security. These dynamics have transformed

water into a critical dimension
of regional strategy and diplomacy.

→ Evolution of Hydropolitics
in South-Asia: India-
Pakistan, IWT, and Regional
Challenges

→ Historical Background:
Indus Water Treaty

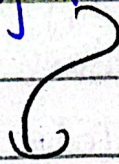
The IWT allocated eastern rivers
to India and western rivers
to Pakistan, creating a
cooperative legal framework. The
treaty has survived wars
and tensions, but its rigid
structure faces modern pressures.

Early disputes were resolved
through Permanent Indus Commission
mechanisms. IWT set the baseline
for South Asian hydropolitics
and interstate water management.

Historical IWI Framework
India's Upstream Projects

+

Afghan Dams

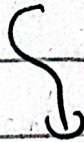


Pakistan's Internal
Mismanagement

Reduced Storage

+

Transmission losses



Hydro political Tensions

Downstream Scarcity +

Social / Economic

Stress

→ Treaty Resilience and Limitations :-

The IWT has endured despite bilateral conflicts. "Long standing treaties often survive political crises due to entrenched technical mechanisms and mutual dependence," Stephen Cohen, *The Future of Pakistan* (2011). However, growing water demand, climate change, and upstream ~~new~~ interventions test its adaptability. India's projects in Kashmir challenge interpretations of treaty clauses.

→ India's ~~treaty~~ hydro-engineering in IIOJK :-

India has launched multiple dams and diversion on western rivers in IIOJK, including Baglihar, Ratle, and Dul Hasti. These projects modify flows and increase

storage control upstream- Pakistan
expresses concerns over reduced water
availability and potential breach of
treaty provisions. Hydroelectric expansion
thus merges development with
strategic leverage.

→ Strategic ^{use} leverage of
Water as leverage

India can employ water projects
for bargaining and security
signalling. **Control over shared
rivers becomes a tool for
strategic influence in downstream
states**, Anatol Lieven, Pakistan: A
Hard Country (2012). Timing and
release patterns affect irrigation
and agriculture in Pakistan. Water
thus acquires a dual role:
economic and geopolitical.

→ Domestic Mismanagement in Pakistan

Pakistan suffers from inefficient water storage, transmission losses, and outdated canals. Agricultural overuse, urban demand, and poor maintenance exacerbate scarcity. Even without upstream pressure, structural mismanagement weakens national resilience. Investment gaps in dams and reservoirs limit adaptive capacity to fluctuating flows.

→ Policy gaps and Bureaucratic inertia

Institutional weaknesses undermine water planning. "Bureaucratic delays and fragmented governance amplify vulnerability to resource shocks," Akbar Zaidi, Issues in Pakistani Economy (2010). Coordination between

provinces and federal authorities is inconsistent. Internal reforms are critical to complement external treaty compliance.

→ Emerging Pakistan-Afghanistan Water Dispute 2.

The Kabul river and tributaries flowing from Afghanistan generate potential transboundary tensions, particularly as upstream dams emerge. Afghanistan's developmental ambitions affect Pakistan's flow reliability. This adds a new layer to South Asian hydropolitics, alongside traditional India-Pakistan concerns.

→ Afghanistan's Strategic Upstream Role 3.

Afghanistan can leverage water for regional influence. Upstream riparian

states increasingly see river control
as a diplomatic and economic asset,"
P.R. Chari (2003). Hydro-diplomacy
may intersect with security and
trade negotiations. Pakistan faces a
dual upstream challenge: ~~at~~ India
and Afghanistan.

→ Climate change and
monsoon variability :-

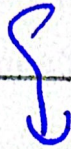
Shifts in rainfall, and glacier
melt affect river flow patterns,
amplifying uncertainty. Floods and
droughts stress reservoirs, irrigation,
and urban water systems. Climate
variability thus compounds political
and structural water
challenges. Planning for resilience
requires modern hydrological
forecasting.

Immediate

Water storages

Agricultural Stress

Political Friction



Medium Term

Interstate Dispute

Climate Vulnerabilities

Economic Strain



Way Forward

Treaty adaptation

Infrastructure Investment

Institutional Reforms

Multilateral Cooperation

→ Water as a Security and Foreign-policy tool

Water disputes influence diplomacy. "Hydropolitics often overlaps with broader strategic competition and national security priorities", Bruce Riedel, Deadly Embrace (2010).

Pakistan must engage multilaterally while managing domestic scarcity. Water projects upstream can become triggers for political and military signalling.

→ Interstate Cooperation Mechanisms

Permanent India Commission meetings and treaty boards allow technical dialogue. Despite tensions, these platforms have prevented escalation. However, they lack mechanisms to address climate change or Afghan water.

developments. Expanding cooperation frameworks could reduce friction.

→ Human and Agricultural Impacts

Reduced flows affect irrigation, crop yields, and rural livelihoods. "Human security in riparian states is inseparable from equitable and reliable water distribution", Stephen P. Cohen, *The Future of Pakistan (2012)*.

Drought or delayed water releases translate into socio-political discontent. Water scarcity can fuel internal unrest.

→ Economic Development Pressures

Pakistan's growing population and industrial needs intensifying water demand. Hydropower potential remains underutilised. Without structural reforms

and investment, economic expansion may aggravate security. Water stress could hamper food security and energy plans.

→ Regional Strategic Implications :-

Water tensions interact with India-Pakistan rivalry and wider South Asian security.

Control of key resources becomes intertwined with military posture and regional alliances. Arabi Lieken, Pakistan:

A Hard Country ~~not~~ (2012).

Shared river management will remain a source of negotiations, dispute, and occasional brinkmanship.

→ Long-term water Security Trajectory :-

Pakistan's ^{water} future depends on treaty compliance, domestic reforms,

upstream coordination, and climate adaptation. Without proactive management, scarcity may worsen interstate friction. Sustainable policies combining governance, diplomacy, and infrastructure, are critical. The Indus remains both a lifeline and a strategic asset.

→ Conclusion

Hydropolitics in South Asia reflects the complex interplay of legal treaties, upstream interventions, domestic mismanagement, and climate pressures.

India's projects in HOKR, Pakistan's governance gaps, and Afghan river development shape downstream vulnerability. Strengthening institutions, fostering dialogue, and investing in infrastructure are essential for long-term water security and regional stability. The Indus Waters Treaty continues to anchor cooperation but must adapt to emerging pressures.