

Q- Amid accelerating climate change and increasing regional securitisation of water, how are emerging water disputes among Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan reshaping South Asian geopolitics? In this context, critically assess claims of Indian 'water terrorism', Pakistan's flood vulnerabilities (2022), and the shifting global discourse on transboundary water management.

→ Introduction

Climate change and hydropolitics are remaking South Asia's strategic map as rivers become sources of cooperation and contestation. The Indus waters Treaty (1960) once anchored India-Pakistan water relations but now faces pressure from upstream projects, political strain, and climate shocks. Pakistan's 2022 floods exposed acute vulnerability, while Afghan developments add a new upstream dimension. The result is a more securitised, contested water order across the region.

Climate change +
Rising demand +
Upstream
Dams

IWT Strain +
Politicized Rhetoric
Water Terrorism

Data-sharing Breakdown
+

Humanitarian Vulnerability
e.g. ~~2022~~ Floods

Greater Regional
Securitisation

+
Geopolitical Risk

→ Emerging water disputes & regional geopolitics : Pakistan, India, Afghanistan

→ IWT's historical role and current stress :-

The Indus Water Treaty provided durable technical mechanisms for sharing rivers despite political wars. Over decades it resolved disputes through the Permanent Indus Commission and neutral experts. Today rising demands, climate variability, and new dams test its flexibility. The treaty's survival now depends on political will as much as technical rules.

→ 2022 floods revealed acute vulnerability :-

The 2022 floods affected one -

third of Pakistan and exposed weak resilience. "The floods showed how deeply vulnerable states are when infrastructure and governance lag behind climate shocks", Akbar Zaidi. Issues in Pakistan's Economy (2020). Damage estimates and humanitarian crises highlighted water-security fragility. Pakistan's recovery remains incomplete and costly.

→ India's upstream projects in IOJK alter hydrology

Dams and diversion like Baglihar, Rattle and new works in IOJK increases India's control over seasonal flows. Upstream storage changes timing and peak discharges that Pakistan relies on for saving and flood control. Even without malicious intent, altered release patterns ~~rise~~ raise downstream

risk. This technical asymmetry creates leverage in tense political moments.

→ "Water Terrorism" rhetoric and Securitisation

Accusations of Indian "water Terrorism" reflect water politicized framing.

"When water becomes weaponised in discourse, technical disputes turn into security crises", Anshul Lieven, Pakistan: A Haas Country (2012).

Such rhetoric inflames public opinion and narrows diplomatic room.

Labelling elevates the stakes of otherwise technical disagreements.

→ IWT abeyance episode as precedent risk

India's 2025 suspension / abeyance moves around the IWT created a

dangerous precedent by pausing
cooperative mechanisms. Pakistan warned
that unilateral flow restrictions
would be treated as an "act
of war". Breaking routine data-
sharing increases misperception and
humanitarian vulnerability downstream. The
incident shifted water disputes
management from technical to political
terrain.

→ Climate Change magnifies
hydrological uncertainty :-

Climate driven glacier melt and
monsoon shifts change seasonal
river regimes. "Climate variability turns
predictable flows into strategic
uncertainty for riparian states."

Bruce Riedel, Deadly Embrace (2011).
Floods and droughts both become
more frequent and severe.

This multiplies the political and

humanitarian costs of any
water dispute.

→ Pakistan's internal mismanagement
compounds risk

Inefficient reservoirs, canal losses
and weak water governance magnify
the impact of upstream actions
and climate shocks. Low storage
per capita and delayed dam
projects reduce buffering capacity.
Conservation, modernisation, and inter-
provincial coordination are urgent to
raise resilience. Domestic reform is
as vital as external diplomacy.

→ Afghanistan introduces a third
~~mismanagement~~ upstream vector

Afghan dam building and river
works create a new upstream
dimension. New upstream riparians

can convert hydrology into leverage
and diplomatic bargaining chips,

P.R. Chahi, (2003). Kabul's projects
on Kunar and Kabul tributaries
affect downstream Pakistani flow.

Pakistan now faces simultaneous
upstream pressures from two neighbours.

→ Operational Risk: withheld
data and broken chat channels:-

When treaty bodies or data-
sharing are suspended, early
warning for floods and irrigation
scheduling fails. The 2025
disruptions showed how reduced
transparency endangers lives and
crops. Restoring continuous
hydrological data exchange is
therefore a humanitarian
as well as diplomatic imperative.

relate your headings and arguments to the qs statement.....

→ Political narratives harden
domestic audiences 3-

Domestic politics in both capitals amplify zero-sum frames. "Nationalist politics convert resource disputes into existential national issues, limiting compromise", Stephen P. Cohen, The Future of Pakistan (2011). Hardline rhetoric pressures leaders to take uncompromising stances. Public opinion thus constrains technocratic solutions.

→ "Water Terrorism" claim -
Merits & Limits 3-

Claims of deliberate water denial require evidence of intent, operational capacity and policy choice. While upstream control can be coercive, many flow changes reflect development choices and climate variability.

International law offers remedies,
but proving malign intent is
politically fraught. Broad accusations
risk inflaming conflict without
delivering remedies.

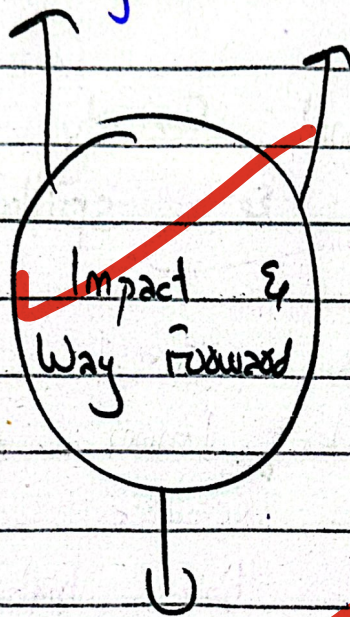
→ Regional Security
implications & spillovers

Water disputes intersect with
militancy, border tensions and great-
power rivalries. "Resource disputes in
insecure regions have higher chances
of militarisation and external
exploitation", Azeem Iqbal, Pakistan

Beyond the Crisis (2011).

Afghanistan's instability and external
patrons can magnify local
water tensions. Regional polarization
therefore increases escalation risk.

Immediate Human	Medium term
Humanitarian Crisis	legal disputes
Diplomatic Tit for Tat	Donor-Mediated
Disrupted Irrigation	Monitoring
	Strained
	Alliances



Way Forward

Treaty Adaptation

Independent Monitoring

Domestic Water Reform

Basin Cooperation

→ Global discourse shifting toward Cooperation

International water governance emphasises data-sharing, basin-wide science, and climate-adjusted rules rather than bilateral blame. Multilateral norms favour joint monitoring, benefit-sharing, and dispute-resolution mechanisms. Pakistan and India could learn on global practice to de-securitise disputes if political will allows.

→ Practical Confidence-Building Measures

Measures such as independent monitoring, joint flood forecasting, and emergency release protocols reduce misperception. Institutionalised cooperation and third-party monitoring can depoliticise shared-river management.

Katherine Adeney, Federalism and
Ethnic Conflict (2007). These tools
are low cost ways to protect
lives and build trust. Donor-
supported technical platforms can
bridge political gaps.

→ Trajectories: risk, adaptation,
and diplomacy.

Absent reform and credible cooperation,
water scarcity will fuel humanitarian
crises and geopolitical friction.

With domestic modernisation, treaty
adaptation, and basin-wide science,
the region can manage shared
risk. The future will hinge
on whether politics yields to
technical cooperation or whether
securitised narratives dominate
policymaking.

Conclusion

Emerging disputes among Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan combine climate shocks, upstream engineering, and politicised narratives to reshape South Asian geopolitics. Pakistan's 2022 flood trauma and India's treaty postures increased securitisation and humanitarian risks. De-escalation requires restoring data channels, investing in resilience, and adopting basin-wide, climate-aware governance. International norms and independent monitoring can help depoliticise rivers before water becomes a catalyst for wider conflict.

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good attempt. but the answer is lengthy and might affect your time management,