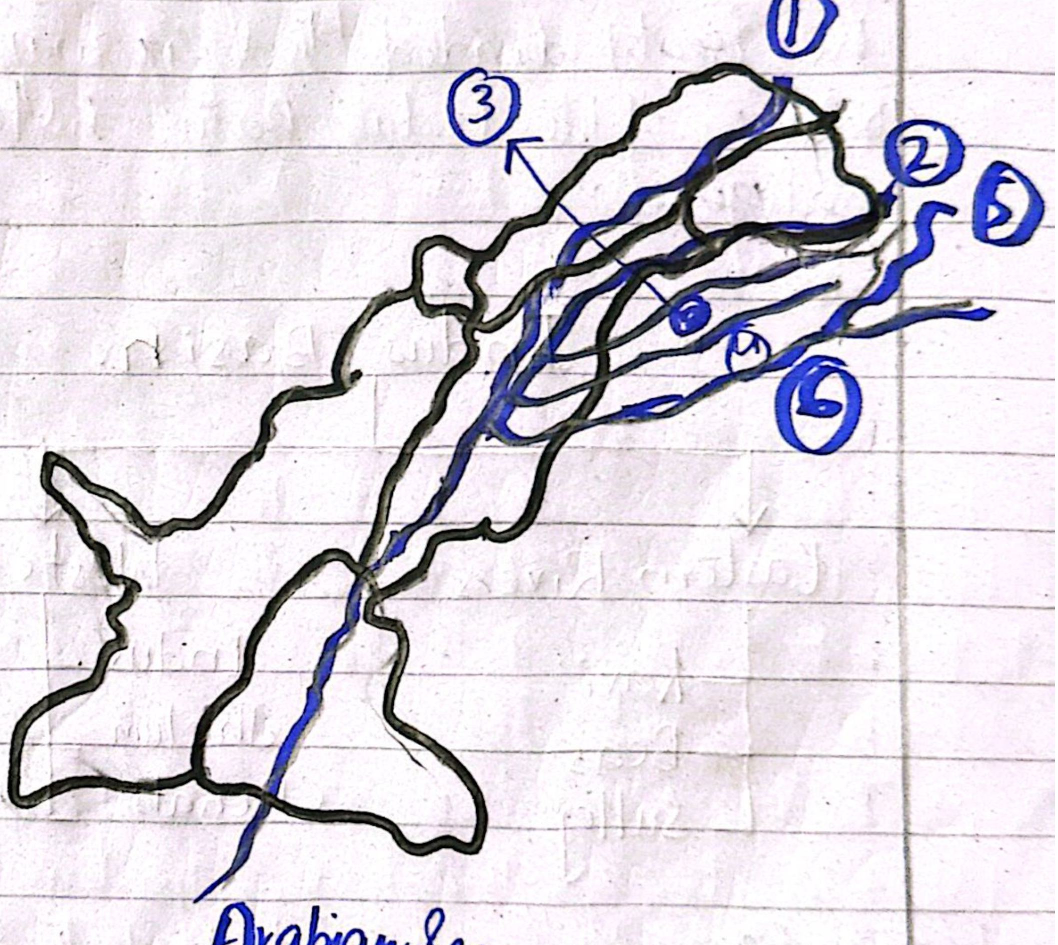
AQSA
KHAN.

Q.1. How did the Indus Water Treaty (1960) affect water distribution and relations between Pakistan and India?

Introduction

Water is a vital and sensitive issue between India and Pakistan, two nations that emerged from the partition of British India in 1947. The Indus River system, which flows across both countries, became a source of tension soon after independence. To resolve disputes over water sharing, the Indus Water Treaty (1960) was signed with the mediation of the World Bank. The treaty aimed to provide a fair and structured distribution of the rivers, ensuring water security and peaceful co-existence. Over time, the treaty has played a key role in managing bilateral relations and addressing water related challenges between the two nuclear-armed neighbours. However, it has also come under strain due to India's construction of dams such as Baglihar and Kishanganga in Indian occupied Kashmir. Islamabad sees these projects as violations of the treaty, fearing they could limit downstream water flow. Tensions further escalated after incidents like the Pahalgam attack (2025), after which India suspended the treaty as a form of diplomatic pressure. These developments have highlighted the treaty's fragile nature in face of rising geopolitical and environmental pressures.

B. The Background of the INDO-PAK Indus Waters Treaty 1960



1- Indus River
2- Jhelum River
3- Chenab River
4- Ravi River
5- Beas River
6- Sutlej River

The Indus Water Treaty was signed on 19th September 1960 between New Dehli and Islamabad, with the World Bank acting as a third party mediator. The treaty divided the six major rivers of the Indus Basin into two categories.

Indus Basin.

- Eastern Rivers
  - Ravi
  - Beas
  - Sutlej
- Western Rivers
  - Indus
  - Jhelum
  - Chenab

Eastern Rivers were allocated to India, giving it exclusive rights to use their waters; while, Western Rivers were allocated to Pakistan with limited rights given to India for non-consumptive uses, such as hydroelectric power, navigation, and some irrigation under strict conditions.

o support Pakistan in developing alternative water ~~evo~~ resources for the Eastern rivers, the treaty provided:

- A 10 year transition period for Pakistan to build necessary dams and link canals.
- Financial assistance worth £62 from India, as a part of a larger international funding.

3. Major water infrastructure projects in Pakistan, including the Tarbela Dam, Mangla dam, and extensive canal systems, were developed under this arrangement.

Additionally, the treaty established a Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) consisting of one commissioner from each country. Though the treaty does not allow for unilateral termination, it provides a dispute resolution framework involving bilateral talks, neutral expert review, and arbitration through international forums like the World Bank or the International Court of Arbitration

C. Impact on Water Distribution

The Indus Water treaty significantly reshaped the management and distribution of river waters between India and Pakistan

1. Division of Rivers between India and Pakistan

The treaty allocated three eastern rivers to India and three western rivers to Pakistan.

2. Water Security for Pakistan

Pakistan, being the lower riparian, recieved control over rivers that carried about 80% of the total flow. This ensured a lifeline for its agriculture-based economy and rural population

3. Transition and Infrastructure Development

A 10 year transition period (1960-1970) allowed Pakistan to develop dams and canals to replace water lost from Eastern rivers. Projects like Tarbela Dam, Mangla Dam, and link canals were built with Indian and international financial assistance.

4. Inadequate Water Storage in Pakistan

Despite its dependency, Pakistan has a low storage capacity - just 14.4 million acre-feet, about 10% of its annual entitlement. This makes it vulnerable during droughts or deliberate flow manipulation by India.

5. Seasonal and Strategic Vulnerability

Even though India cannot stop Pakistan's share its control over upstream structures gives it a tactical advantage in times of tension. This adds geopolitical risk to Pakistan's water distribution

D. Impact on India-Pakistan Relations - From cooperative engagement to strategic hostility

1. Sustained Cooperation Despite Conflicts

The Indus Water Treaty has remarkably survived three full scale wars (1965, 1971, and 1999) and multiple border skirmishes. It served as a rare example of functional cooperation between two hostile states, where diplomatic ties often break down, but water dialogue continue via the Permanent Indus Commission.

2. Strategic Weaponization of Water

After terror attacks such as the Pahalgam incident (April 2025), India blamed Pakistan without investigation and announced suspension of the treaty, a move that has no legal standing under Indus Water Treaty. Such threats to block or manipulate water flow, are seen by Pakistan as a strategic and coercive tool, turning water into a political weapon.

3. Escalation of Diplomatic Fallout.

Following India's suspension threat, Pakistan responded by suspending the Simla Agreement (1972). Diplomatic channels froze, military personnel were expelled, and tensions rose to a near crisis level, further damaging bilateral trust

4. Legal Constraints on India's Actions

Under Article 12(A) of the IWT, the treaty can only be terminated with mutual consent, not unilaterally. India's declaration to suspend the treaty was illegal and any such move is considered by Pakistan as an "Act of War", potentially escalating into a broader conflict.

5. Future conflict Potential

With climate change, population growth, and increasing water scarcity, water may become central cause of future Indo-Pak clashes. The treaty's politicization under Modi's government and dam-building ambitions in Indian occupied Kashmir, indicate a fragile future for water peace in South Asia.

Conclusion

The Indus Water of 1960 remains a landmark example of transboundary water governance, offering a structured mechanism of water sharing between two nuclear-armed rivals. It successfully divided the rivers of the Indus Basin, ensured Pakistan's water security, and created institutions for dispute resolution. However, overtime, growing Indian dam construction, climate change, and geopolitical hostility - especially after Pahalgam attack 2025 - Thave strained the treaty's foundation; New Dehli's attempt to politicize water and its threats to suspend the treaty challenge both international law and regional peace. As water scarcity intensifies in South Asia, the treaty's future depends on mutual restraint, diplomatic engagement, and respect for international commitments.

Q. Should Pakistan shift its focus from Geo-strategic to Geo-economics? Argue.

A. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, the global balance of power is increasingly shaped by economic strength, regional integration, and trade connectivity rather than traditional millitary alliances or strategic rivalries. For Pakistan; a country with uniquely advantageous geographical position linking South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East - this shift presents a critical thinking to realign it national priorties. Pakistan should now priortize geo-economics over geo politics to unlock its full potential for sustainable development, regional integration, and economic stability. This strategic shift is supported by several compelling factors: Pakistan's unique economic advantage as a regional trade and energy hub, a clear policy reorientation in the National Security Policy 2022, and global trends that favour economic diplomacy and cooperation over strategic confrontation. However, this transition is not without its challenges. Security threats, tense relations with neighbouring countries, chronic energy shortages, trade imbalances, lack of inclusive growth, and geopolitical pressures from initiatives like BRI and B3W complicate the path toward a geo-economic future. Nevertheless, these hurdles are surmountable. By strengthening regional connectivity, diversifying trade partnerships beyond China and the West, and actively promoting foreign direct investment, Pakistan can successfully operationalize a geo-economic strategy.

B. Pakistan's Geo-Economic

Imperative.

1. Unique Geo-economic Advantage

Pakistan's geographic location provides it immense economic potential. Situated at cross roads of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, Pakistan can serve as a natural hub for trade, energy transit and regional connectivity.

a. Projects that can turn Pakistan into regional trade and energy hub

$\boxed{\text{CPEC}}$ → $\boxed{\text{Gwadar Port}}$

$\boxed{\text{TAPI}}$ → $\boxed{\text{Iran-Pakistan Pipeline}}$

2. CPEC - A Symbol of Geo-economic Potential.

The China-Pakistan economic corridor is the most cherished fruit for

Pakistan's geography. Worth over $62 billion, CPEC is more than a road project - it is a comprehensive package of trade, energy, and industrial development. By linking Kashgar in China to Gwadar Port, CPEC not only facilitate China's trade ~~but also~~ with Gulf and Africa, but also revatilizes Pakistan's economy.

3. Gwadar Port as warm water port to energy rich central asian countries.

One of the most significant pillars of Pakistan's geo-economic strategy is the development and operationalization of Gwadar Port. Strategically located near the Strait of Hormuz, Gwadar offers the shortest and most economical route for trade between Central Asian Republics, Western China, and the Middle East. If managed effectively it can transform country into regional logistics and commercial powerhouse.

4. Economic Role in Regional Organizations

a. Pakistan and SAARC

Despite the political tensions, Pakistan has remained committed to SAARC's economic goals. The SAARC platform, if revatilized could help pakistan enhance economic cooperation with its South Asian neighbors, enhance exports, and reduce reliance on extra regional partners.

b. SCO and Pakistan

SCO offers Pakistan access to strategic markets, energy cooperation, and transport networks, and serve as a platform for economic diplomacy with both China and Russia. This closely aligns with Pakistan's geo-economic objectives

Pakistan can enhance economic integration with Central Asia, attract investment in infrastructure and energy, and strengthen its position in the emerging multipolar economic order.

c) ECO and Pakistan

Pakistan holds strategic position in ECO, as it provides only natural sea access for landlocked Central Asian States through Karachi and Gwadar ports. This makes Pakistan a vital gateway for trade and energy transit. By strengthening its role in ECO, Pakistan can enhance connectivity, expand regional trade, and advance its geo-economic ambitions.

5- IRAN - Pakistan Gas Pipeline

The Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline, also called the Peace pipeline, was launched to address Pakistan's energy crisis by importing natural gas from Iran. Despite its economic benefits, the project has stalled due to U.S sanctions on Iran and geopolitical pressure. If revived, it could significantly boost energy security and regional cooperation, making it an important but currently untapped geo-economic opportunity for Pakistan.

C. Challenges in the Shift to Geo-economics

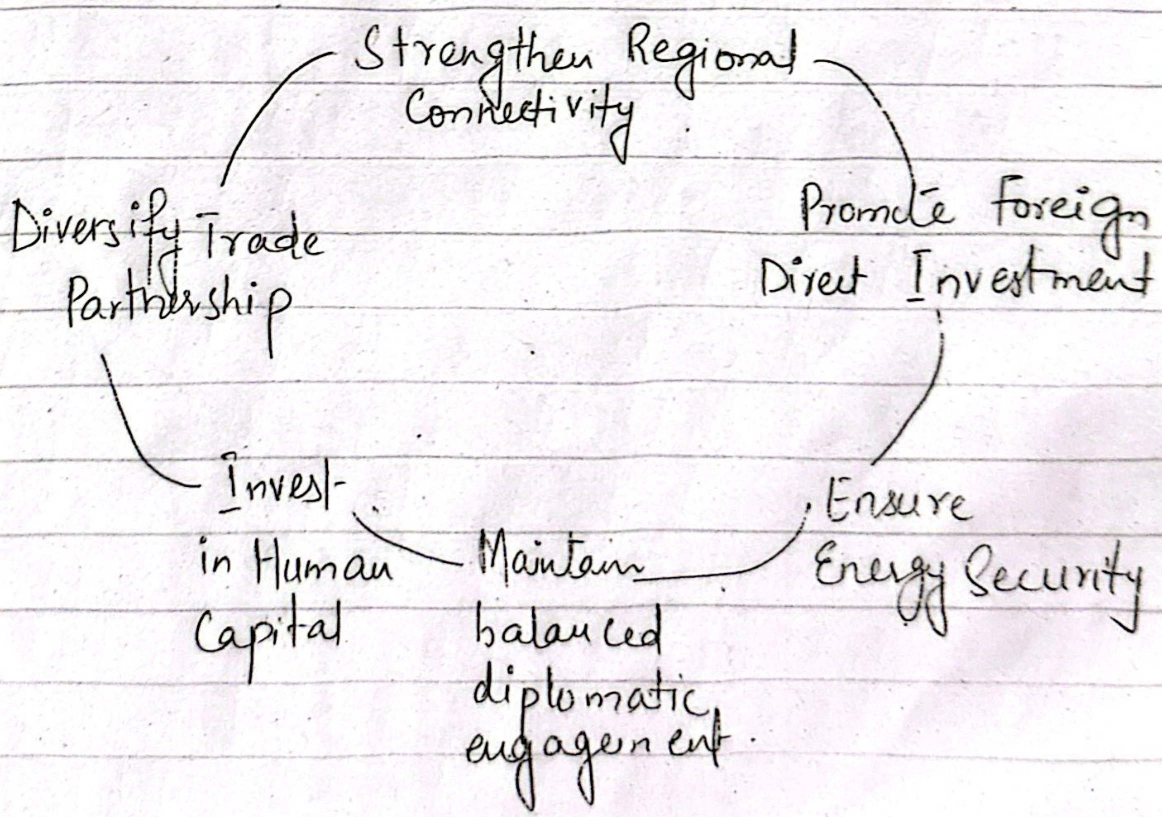
1. Security Issues
Persistent threats from terrorism, millitancy, and internal instability deter foreign investors and disrupt economic activities, especially in regions like Balochistan and the former FATA areas.

2. Energy Shortages
Chronic shortages of electricity and gas hinder industrial growth and discoura foreign investment, reducing Pakistan's attractiveness as a trade and manufacturing base.

3. Tense Regional Relations
Strained ties with India and Afghanistan, unresolved border disputes, and hostile episodes with Iran limit Pakistan's ability to build regional trade networks and economic corridors.

4. Global pressures from BRI and B3W.
Pakistan faces a difficult choice between China's BRI and the West-led B3W initiative. Aligning with one risks alienating the other, and mishandling this balance could create diplomatic and economic strain.

Q- Way Forward: Operationalizing Geo-economics in Pakistan



E. Conclusion

Pakistan's future lies not in the traditional pursuit of geopolitical leverage but in the pragmatic embrace of geo-economics. Its geographical location, policy direction and regional opportunities make this shift both necessary and achievable. While security challenges, diplomatic tensions, and structural weaknesses pose geniune hurdles, these can be addressed through regional cooperation, economic diversification, investment promotion, and institutional reforms. A well-executed geo-economic strategy will not boost Pakistan's economy but also enhance its influence and stability in a rapidly transforming world.