

How did the Indus Waters Treaty (1960) affect water distribution and relations between Pakistan and India (CSS-2025)

1. Introduction

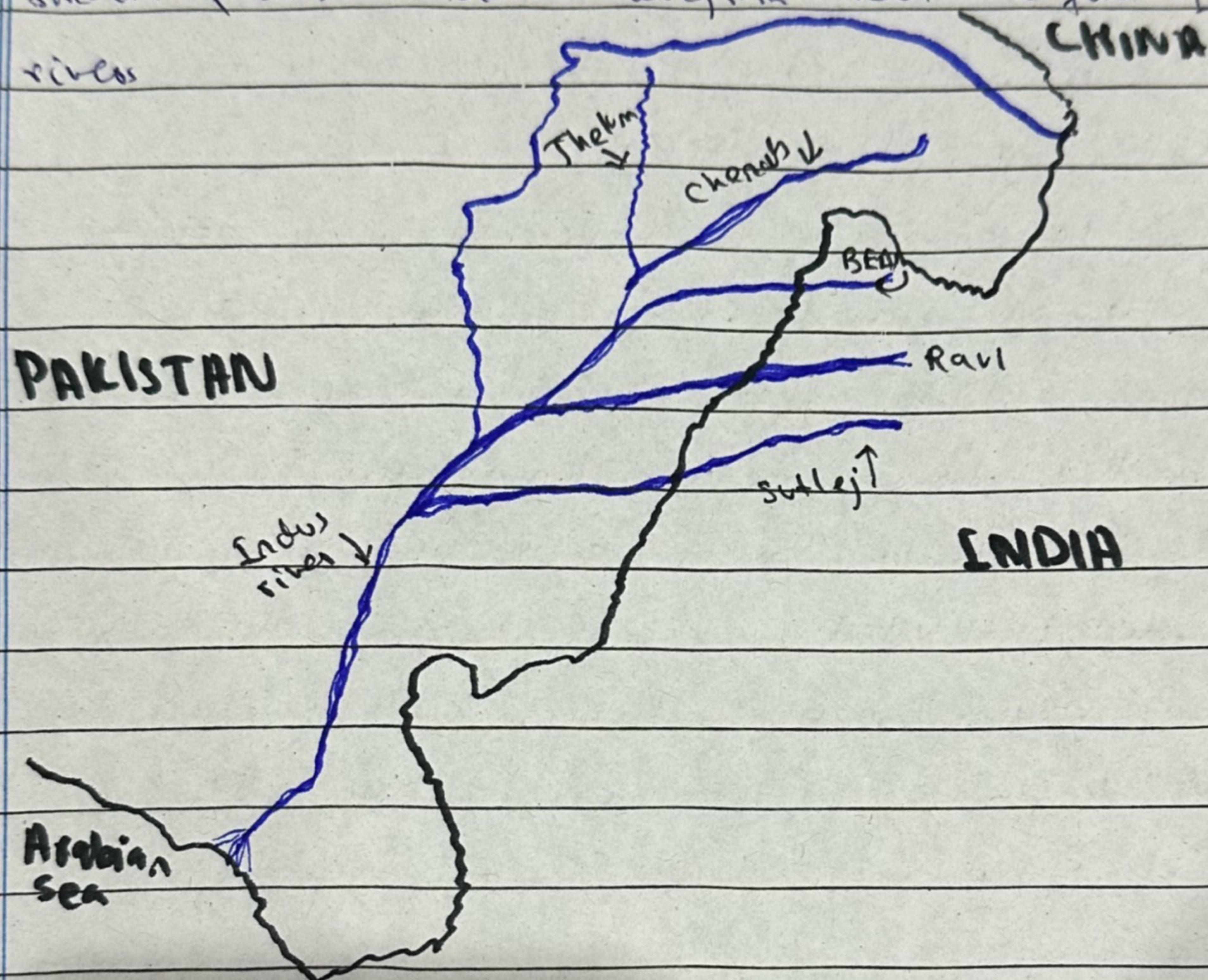
Pakistan being an agrarian economy, the Indus basin is highly crucial for the crop fields. After a war 1959 with India, India being an upper riparian ^{stopped} ~~stopped~~ the flow of water. Later on, a treaty was signed in 1960 that was brokered by World Bank. And that treaty became known as Indus Waters Treaty. Treaty restructured water distribution, created institutional mechanism but countries were and cross-border activities, both nuclear states have entered to a new crisis phase after India's 2021 suspension of Indus Waters Treaty (IWT).

2. Brief Background of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) 1960

According to IWT, Eastern rivers Beas, Ravi, Sutlej were allocated to India. However, Western rivers, Indus, Chenab, Jhelum were given to Pakistan. Approximately 80% of total basin flows to Pakistan and 20% to India as western river discharge more water. Pakistan was allowed to build link, dam, canals, barrages and dams, Mangla and Tarbela, that

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was financed by World Bank (WB). For dispute conflict resolution, Permanent Indus Commission was created to regulate data-sharing and boundary multi-lateral dispute resolution. Neutral Expert and Court of Arbitration were also supposed to be used for smooth flow. The below diagram shows the flow of rivers



3. Impact of the IWT on Water Distribution

A. Reallocation of Eastern and Western Rivers Between India and Pakistan

Eastern rivers (Beas, Sutlej, ^{Ravi} Beas) were fully diverted inside the India through canals like Indira Gandhi Canal to Rajasthan to reduce flows into Pakistan. Therefore, Pakistan became heavily dependent on western rivers for 80% of its ^{surface} water.

and 90% of the irrigated agriculture.

B. Upstream Control of Headworks and Perceived Vulnerability of Pakistan

Many headworks and control headgates lie in the Indian territory. It gives India hydro-leverage over the initial flow of river. Subsequently, Pakistan faces sudden reduction in flow and that ultimately impacted crops in Punjab and Upper Sindh.

C. Limited Penalties and weak Enforcement on Data-sharing

Treaty provides for data-sharing, but there is no strong mechanism to certify the data sharing process. Pakistan hydrological experts argue that late flood data from India has worsen flood preparedness, particularly in extreme monsoon season. Due to which Pakistan had to suffer 2010, 2014, 2022 and 2025 catastrophic floods.

D. Constraints and Disputes over Inspections and Monitoring

Pakistan often complains that site visits to Indian Projects on western rivers are delayed and obstructed by Indian authorities. However, Article VIII (4)(c) of the IWT requires both sides to undertake tours of inspection, once a year, alternatively in Pakistan and India to ascertain facts and promote cooperation.

E. Environment and Delta Impact: Indus Delta and Coastal Erosion

Massive diversion of flow upstream and poor inland management in Pakistan drastically reduced flows to Indus Delta. As a result, there has been coastline erosion in Sindh.

"In 1960, Indus River discharged 180-200 billion cubic meters annually into the delta. This has fallen to less than 10 BCM annually"
Indus Delta Report 2020

4. Impact of the IWT on India-Pakistan Relations

A. Conflict Management and Relative 'Water Peace'

Despite wars in 1965, 1971 and Kargil episode 1999, IWT continued to function as a peace keeping story in Indo-Pak relation.

"IWT reflects extraordinary cooperation between two rivals"

Harvard Water Security Study 2001

B. Growing Mistrust: Allegation of "Water Weaponisation" by India

Pakistani experts accuse India of using water as a strategic weapon through storage and run of river projects on western rivers.

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While, India rejected the claim that all projects are within the treaty's design criteria. After recent 16 May 2025 standoff, India ^{initially} suspended IWT sayings:

"Blood and water can not flow together"
Narendra Modi

C Data-sharing, warning systems and flood politics

Pakistan complains of inadequate flood warning by India, saying it complicates disaster management for Pakistani state.

"Data asymmetry is one of the biggest drivers of mistrust in the Indus Basin."

Toufiq A. Siddique (UNEP)

D. Disputes over Dams, Diversions and Rajasthan Canal plans

Pakistan fears that these moves are attempt to erode its historic share and create strategic pressure. India frames them as legitimate upper-riparian rights within IWT.

"India's dam-building spree is viewed by Pakistan as coercive hydropolitics."

Stimson Center Report 2024

F. Calls for Treaty Revision Vs. Treaty Preservation

India argues IWT is out date, given population growth, climate change and energy needs, and now it has suspended IWT after April 2019 Pulwama attack. While Pakistan says IWT is a binding international agreement can not be unilaterally suspended. Any termination is against of violation of Vienna Convention on the law of Treaty.

"Reters Any attempt to usurp Pakistan's water rights under IWT will be treated as an act of war"

DAISPR Pakistan

F. Hydropolitics and India as a perceived destabilising Actor in Pakistan's Narrative

In Pakistan's strategic discourse, India's moves like "water and blood" plans to divert water to Rajasthan are viewed as hydropolitical coercion. Conversely, India says Pakistan is linking terrorism with treaty goodwill averaging:

"Terror and talks can not be together."

Narendra Modi

G. Indus Waters Commission Under Strain

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Permanent Indus Commission have become infrequent and less productive, particularly after India's decision to suspend the treaty and forest water issue through political lens not technical channels.

"The Indus Waters Commission is strained by mistrust, unilateralism and legal gridlock."

UN University Report 2018

H. India's unilateral Abeyance of the Treaty 2025

India's cabinet committee on Security decided to suspend IWT in abeyance following Pulwama attack. Home minister ~~also~~ signalled it may never be restored in current form. While Pakistan rejects the legality of unilateral and unlawful suspension of treaty.

"We are deeply concerned about the suspension of treaty mechanism."

World Bank 2025

5. Conclusion

IWT brought a clear division of rivers that enable Pakistan to develop its canal and dam. But locked both ~~into~~ states into a rigid allocation that did not anticipate climate change. Moreover, treaty

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provided decades of conflict management and
against all-out ^{water} ~~water~~ war" but could not
remove deep mistrust in the red zone
Suspension: Both Nations need to restore some
cooperative framework over Indian climate responsibility
climate settlement.