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Course: Pakistan Affairs

Batch: ISB OB 23

Topic: Weaponization of
Water - IWT violation
by India

I. Introduction: Water as a Strategic Weapon

“The 20th Century had witnessed wars for oil, the 21st Century will witness wars for water”

- World Order: Henry Kissinger

Water has become a strategic weapon in South Asia's geopolitical rivalry.

India being an upper riparian poses a great threat to Pakistan's water security and agriculture as 60% trade of Pakistan depends upon water - particularly the Indus Water System.

If it collapses, it would result in serious implications such as water scarcity, drought, humanitarian crises, blockage to supply chain, and majorly contributes to the destabilization of regional peace and prosperity.

Weaponization of water can lead to devastating consequences therefore resulting in a country's demise.

Hence, only through diplomacy and not deterrence, this water terrorism can be resolved.

II. Water as a weapon in South Asia causing geopolitical rivalry in context of Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan - A glimpse into the world of weaponizing IWT:

Indus Water Treaty brokered by World Bank in 1960

Indus, Jehlum, Chenab to Pakistan

Sutlej, Ravi, Bias to India

India being an upper riparian is using Indus water as a geostrategic weapon against Pakistan - Cutting off supply unilaterally

India violates the Indus Water Treaty by unilateral weaponization, construction of projects and thus by recent Peshawar attack, held Indus Water Treaty in Abeyance unilaterally.

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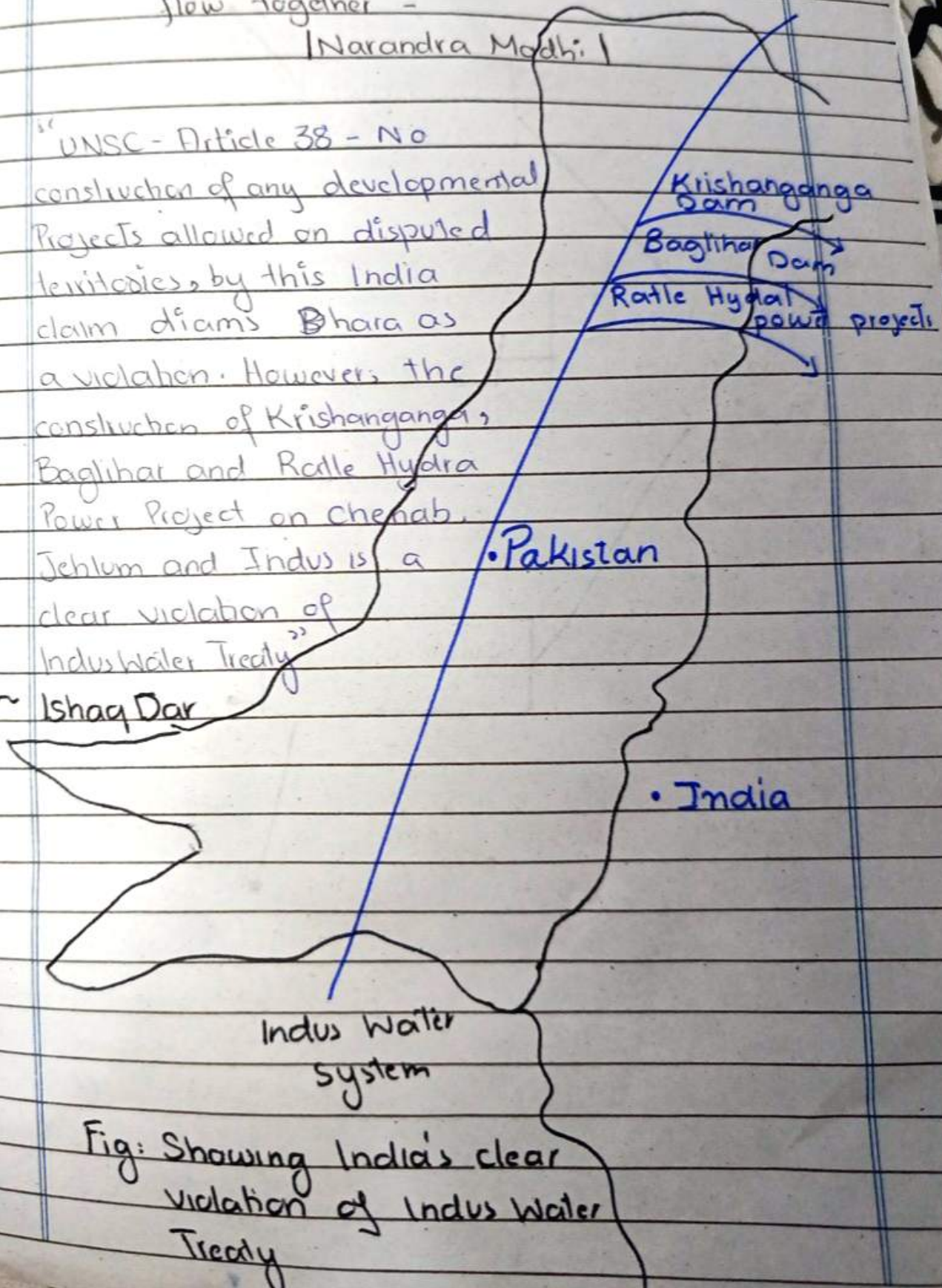
III. An insight into the violation of Indus Water Treaty by India:

"Water and blood cannot flow together"

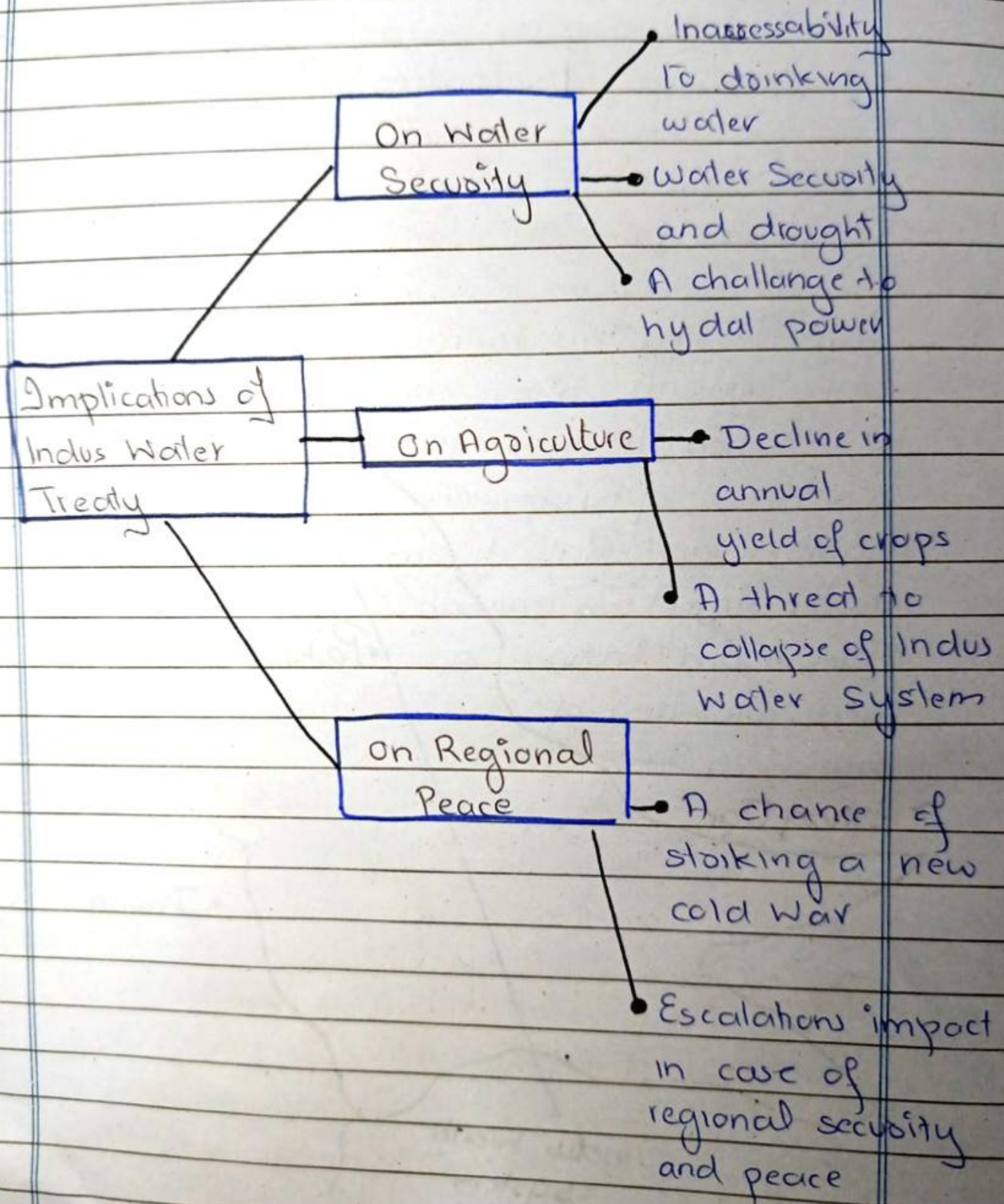
[Narandra Modhi]

"UNSC - Article 38 - No construction of any developmental Projects allowed on disputed territories, by this India claim dams Bhara as a violation. However, the construction of Krishanganga, Baglihar and Rattle Hydra Power Project on Chenab, Jehlum and Indus is a clear violation of Indus Water Treaty"

~ Ishaq Dar



IV: Implications of Indus Water Treaty on Pakistan's water security, agriculture and regional peace.



(A) On Water Security:

(i) Inaccessability to drinking water in many regions

By unilaterally violating Indus Water Treaty and holding it in abeyance, many regions of Pakistan became devoid of clean drinking water.

Many cities and regions in Pakistan are directly dependent on the Indus Water System. In rural Sindh, more than 68% of population directly depends upon Indus Water System for clean drinking water.

(ii) Food Scarcity and drought conditions

When India violated Indus Water Treaty and held it unilaterally in abeyance, it results in collapse of Indus Water System aiming food shortage and fostering drought conditions, especially in Sindh where rainfall is scarce and lack of Indus water contributes to loss of vegetation and fosters drought condition.

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(iii) A challenge to Hydal power plant projects

Before 1960, World Bank when signing the Indus Water Treaty forbade India of any hydal project's construction on Indus water and let Pakistan develop, forwarding to 1960-1980, India can only construct Hydal projects only when Pakistan has reached water capacity and has water in reserve i.e. in reservoir or dams. If India violates Indus Water Treaty, Pakistan being lower riparian will face devastating consequences.

(B): On the basis of Agriculture:

(i) Decline in annual yield of crops

When crop growth is affected, the annual yield of crops faces a significant backlash as the lower the yield, the lower will be its distribution.

In 2025, annual yield of crops declined plunging the country into agricultural crisis. Wheat faced a 8.8% decline from record harvest of 31.8 million tonnes in 2024-2025, whereas rice faced a marginalized decline of 11% after IWT abeyance and the flash floods.

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(II) A threat to collapse of Indus Water System

"Almost 60% of land of Punjab and Sindh is irrigated by using water of Indus"

~ Report by Pakistan Meteorological Department
PMD: 2025

More than 80% of the agricultural backbone of Pakistan depends upon the Indus Water System. With the shortage of Indus water, the entire system of agriculture may collapse.

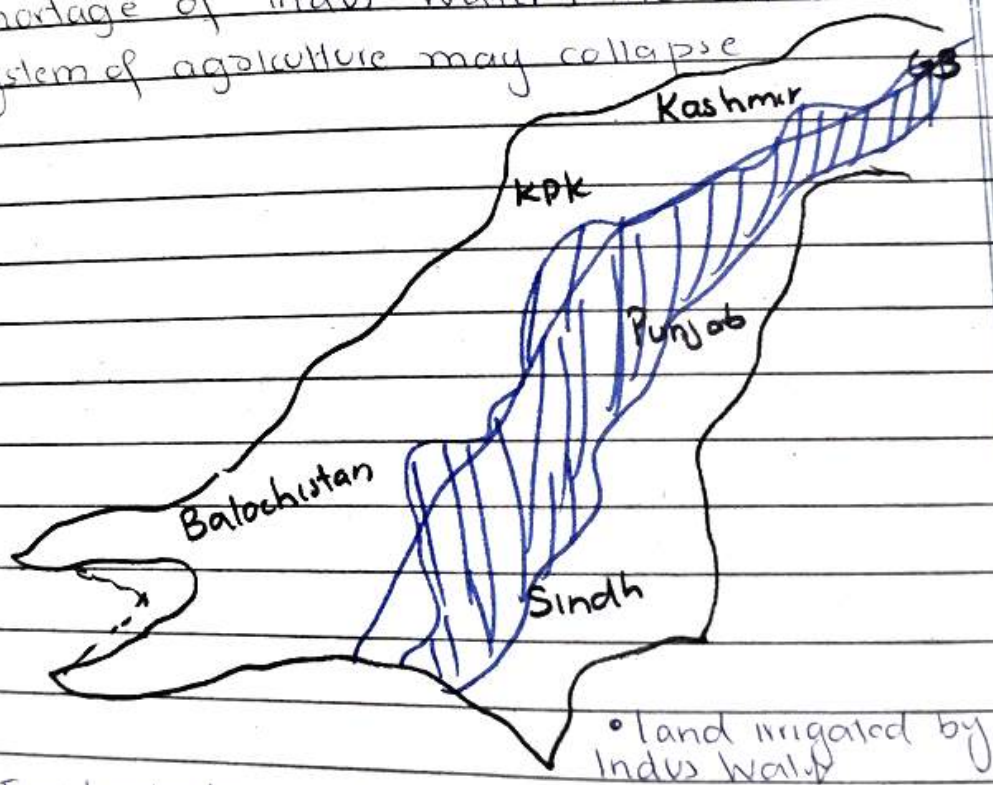


Fig: Implications of Indus Water System on Pakistan's Water Security system

C: On the basis of Regional Security
(1) Escalations of regional conflict: A threat to a new cold war era.

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A perpetual looming threat of the beginning of a cold war has now emerged by the water war between India and Pakistan. Since China is also an upper riparian and water of Tibet glaciers is used by whole

(D). Counters of Water Terrorism by diplomacy, not by deterrence

Why Diplomacy and not deterrence

• A fear of a nuclear war as both countries are nuclear powers

• Suffering of humans and casualties during war.

• A fear of humanitarian crises and International Sanctions

V Conclusion :

To conclude, water has become a strategic weapon, especially in the case of India and Pakistan. India's take of geopolitical advantage of being an upper riparian has caused significant consequences for Pakistan though uncalled. Therefore not by deterrence, rather by diplomatic talks, can we resolve the everlasting issue of the Indus Water Treaty.