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Water is a strategic resource in South Asia, and the Indus Water Treaty (IWT), signed on 19 Sep 1960 in Karachi by Pakistan's president Ayub Khan and Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, under the mediation of World Bank, remains one of the most significant transboundary water agreements in modern history. It allocated the Eastern rivers to India and the Western to Pakistan, thereby creating a framework for co-operation between two rival states. Despite surviving the wars and political crisis, the treaty today faces unprecedented stress due to climate change, hydropower disputes, and political developments such as India's 2023 notice for modification, its 2025 suspension of treaty following the Pahalgam terror attack, and the catastrophic 2025 Pakistan floods that tested the treaty's resilience.

The treaty divided the six rivers of Indus Basin into two categories: The Eastern Rivers - Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej - allocated exclusively to India, while the Western Rivers - Indus, Jhelum, and Chanab - were reserved for Pakistan, with limited India's use for non-consumptives such as run-of-the-river hydro-electric projects, navigation and domestic needs. According to Pakistan's Planning Commission (PPC) about 4.60 MAF (million acre-feet) of eastern rivers still flows into Pakistan, along with 3.33 MAF generated from local run-off. In total, Pakistan receives nearly 80% of Indus Basin waters,

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which underpin its Indus Basin Irrigation System - the largest contiguous irrigation network in the world.

Institutionally, the treaty established the Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) for routine coordination and provided a three-tier dispute resolution mechanism: bilateral discussion in PIC, referral to a Neutral Expert for technical issues, and submission to a legal court of Arbitration for legal or political disputes.

The Indus Basin sustains over 90 percent of Pakistan's irrigated agriculture, which in turn provides livelihood to millions, and supports the national economy. Large dams such as Mangla (1967) and Tarbela (1976) were built under the treaty's framework with fundings from the World Bank. The treaty, therefore not only ensure water security, but also food and energy security for Pakistan.

Despite its durability the treaty has been tested by disputes. Pakistan raised objections against India's Baglihar Dam (Chenab) and Kishanganga Project (Jhelum); both cases were resolved through neutral expert and court of Arbitration, albeit with partial acceptance of India's projects. Pakistan continues to express concerns over India's planned run-of-the-river projects on western rivers, fearing manipulation of flow at agriculture critical time.

The treaty became entangled between geopolitics following the Pulwama attack of

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14 Feb. 2019, in which 40 Indian personnel were killed. Indian ministers declared that the water from eastern rivers would no longer flow into Pakistan, signaling the intent to weaponize the treaty. Although no abrogation followed, this rhetoric marked a significant departure from treaty's apolitical tradition.

The most serious challenge emerged after the Pahalgarh terror attack on 22 April 2025, which killed 26 people. In response, India's Cabinet Committee on Security decided to suspend the Indus water treaty, holding it in abeyance, and formally communicated the decision to Pakistan. The Indian ministry of external affairs stated that sustained cross-border terrorism undermined the environment of trust required for the treaty's implementation.

Pakistan, however, categorically rejected the suspension. The National Security Committee (NSC) declared that the treaty is a binding agreement with no clause allowing unilateral withdrawal, warning that any attempt to obstruct water flow to Pakistan would be considered an "Act of War." This episode has brought the treaty to its most precarious position since 1960.

In 2025, Pakistan suffered devastating floods due to record monsoon rains and heavy inflow ^{in the} of Indus Basin. According to National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), over 900 people lost their lives, millions were displaced, and vast croplands in Punjab and Sindh were destroyed. The Federal govt officially declared climate

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and agricultural emergencies in Sept. 2025. The flood water particularly overwhelmed the Ravi, Chenab, and Sutlej Rivers - all part of IWT allocation System.

The flood exposed two critical treaty linked challenges. First: Data Sharing and early warning under the IWT are vital during the high-flow events. The treaty obliges India to share hydrological data of upstream rivers, but Pakistan has repeatedly complained of delays or insufficient details. During the 2025 floods, questions were raised in parliamentary committees about sudden release from Indian dams aggregated downstream flooding. Second: the flood highlighted Pakistan's low storage capacity - barely 30 days of water, - compare to India's far greater capacity. While the IWT secure flow it does not address Pakistan structural vulnerability to extreme floods. As such, the 2025 floods revealed that treaty protection alone is insufficient without domestic storage, modern forecasting, and institutional cooperation through PIC.

Thus, the 2025 floods not only underline the urgency of climate adaptation but also demonstrate how climate extreme test the operational strength of the Indus Waters Treaty itself, especially when political tensions already threaten its continuity.

Beyond political disputes of floods, severe structural challenges threaten the treaty's future.

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Climate changes are reducing Himalayan Glaciers reserve, altering river flow and increases flood risk. Population growth in both countries is intensifying the water demand.

Storage limitation of Pakistan leaves it vulnerable. Data sharing risk for due to treaty's suspension threaten flood forecasting and disaster management cooperation.

For Pakistan, any disruption in treaty would endanger agriculture, power generation and food security. It would also undermine the credibility of international agreements creating a precedent for unilateral abrogation of binding agreements. For India, suspension carries diplomatic risk, including potential challenges in international forums.

In conclusion, Indus Water Treaty was once hailed as a Model of transboundary water cooperation, surviving war and decade hostility. Yet its endurance is now in doubt. The 2019 Pulwama crises, ~~released~~ revealed treaty's politicalization, while 2025 Poonch aback and India's suspension of obligations pushed it into uncharted waters. The 2025 further revealed that the treaty, while necessary is insufficient to safeguard against Pakistan against climate drive extremes without robust domestic reforms. For Pakistan, safeguarding its water rights requires diplomatic resilience, enhanced storage and management capacity, engagement with international partners to uphold the sanctity of the treaty. The IWT's survival will determine regional stability and future water security for millions.