

# India's Hydro-Hegemony



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**T**he partition of British India in 1947 not only marked the birth of two nations, India and Pakistan, but also laid the foundation for one of the most enduring and contentious disputes in the region—the Indus Waters conflict. As the newly formed states grappled with the aftermath of partition, diplomatic agreements over the utilisation and management of the Indus Basin's abundant water resources emerged as a major point of contention.

The geographical realities of partition left the headwaters of the Indus basin, the lifeline of Pakistan's agrarian economy, within the boundaries of India. This imbalance created a situation where Pakistan felt vulnerable to Indian control over the tributaries that sustained its agricultural lands. In the immediate aftermath of partition, India began reasserting the flow of water into Pakistan, heightening tensions between the two nations. Efforts to resolve the dispute through bilateral negotiations proved futile, leading to the Inter-Dominion Accord of 4 May 1948, which provided a temporary mechanism for water apportionment. However, this stop-gap measure failed to address the underlying issues, leading to further deadlock.

The turning point came in 1960 with the signing of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), brokered by the World Bank. Under this treaty, the waters of the Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab rivers were allocated to Pakistan, while India retained control over the Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej rivers. Despite this agreement, tensions have persisted, fuelled by India's unilateral actions such as the construction of the Kishanganga dam, which threatens Pakistan's water supply.

The Indus Waters dispute between India and Pakistan stands as a glaring testament to India's aggressive pursuit of hydro-hegemony, wielding water as a potent tool to manipulate and coerce its neighbours. At the heart of this conflict lies the Baglihar dam, a symbol of India's relentless drive to assert control over shared water resources and subjugate its neighbouring states.

Pakistani officials raise legitimate concerns regarding the design and construction of the Baglihar dam, pointing to violations of the Indus Waters Treaty. The dam's towering height and expansive storage capacity far exceed what could be deemed a "run-of-the-river" project, indicating India's blatant disregard for the treaty's provisions. Furthermore, the presence of multiple power intake tunnels and gated spillways also serves to reinforce India's ability to wield control over the flow of water, posing a direct threat to Pakistan's water security.

Expanding further, the hydro-aggression extend far beyond mere technicalities. Pakistani officials rightly warn of the dam's potential to economically strangle Pakistan or, worse yet, to unleash devastating floods. For strategic or military purposes, the Baglihar dam sets a dangerous precedent, signalling

India's intention to exploit its superior position in the region to the detriment of its neighbours. Any compromise on Baglihar would only embolden India to further encroach upon Pakistan's water rights, potentially plunging the region into further instability.

Moreover, India's hydro-hegemonic ambitions are not confined to the realm of geopolitics but also carry significant domestic political implications. The Baglihar dispute has become a rallying cry for opposition forces within Pakistan, who rightly question the government's failure to effectively address India's transgressions. By leveraging hydroelectric projects like Baglihar, India seeks not only to secure political support within Kashmir but also to sow discord between Kashmiris and Pakistanis, further exacerbating regional tensions.

In response to Pakistani objections, Indian officials offer feeble justifications, claiming that Baglihar is fully compliant with the treaty. However, their arguments are irrelevant in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary: India's insistence on pushing forward with projects like Baglihar, despite clear violations of international agreements, underscores its hegemonic aspirations and utter disregard for the concerns of its neighbours.

The Baglihar dispute represents a critical test for the arbitration mechanisms outlined in the Indus Waters Treaty. Pakistan's reliance on this treaty as a lifeline to its water resources underscores the urgent need for robust international intervention to hold India accountable for its hydro-aggression. Failure to do so risks emboldening India to further undermine regional stability and exacerbate the already dire water scarcity facing South Asia.

India's strategic use of water as a tool of coercion, demonstrated by its construction of dams and diversion of river courses not only within its borders but also in neighbouring countries like Nepal and Bangladesh, represents a significant threat to regional stability and the livelihoods of millions. The recent escalation of tensions, particularly exacerbated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's aggressive stance, underscores the urgent need for a renewed commitment to dialogue and cooperation among all stakeholders.

The Indus Waters dispute, with its complex technical objections to projects like the Baglihar dam, highlights the critical need for comprehensive resolution mechanisms that address not only immediate grievances but also the underlying root causes. Failure to do so address these issues not only perpetuates regional instability but also exacerbates the dire water scarcity faced by countries like Pakistan, heightening the risk of future conflicts over water resources.

addresses not just the immediate disputes but also the underlying socio-political and economic factors contributing to regional tensions.

First and foremost, diplomatic efforts must be intensified to encourage India and its neighbouring countries to engage in transparent and inclusive negotiations. All stakeholders, including affected communities and civil society organisations, should have a voice in decision-making processes related to water resource management. Additionally, the international community can provide technical expertise and resources to support the development of equitable and sustainable water-sharing agreements.

Moreover, mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing compliance with existing agreements, such as the Indus Waters Treaty, must be strengthened. This may involve establishing independent oversight bodies or utilising existing international organisations to ensure that all parties adhere to their commitments and refrain from unilateral actions that undermine regional stability.

Furthermore, efforts to address the root causes of water scarcity and insecurity, such as unsustainable agricultural practices, deforestation, and climate change, must be integrated into broader regional initiatives for the region. This requires coordinated action at both the national and regional levels to promote water conservation, improve irrigation efficiency, and enhance resilience to climate-related shocks.

Efforts to promote mutual trust and understanding among South Asian countries are essential for building a foundation of cooperation and goodwill. People-to-people interaction, cultural diplomacy initiatives, and joint water management projects can help foster greater solidarity and collaboration among neighbouring nations, reducing the likelihood of conflicts over shared water resources.

Ultimately, the goal should be to transform the narrative of water disputes in South Asia from one of conflict and insecurity to one of cooperation and shared prosperity. By prioritising diplomacy, mutual respect, and the implementation of fair and transparent dispute resolution mechanisms, the international community can play a pivotal role in mitigating the risks posed by India's hydro-hegemonic pursuits and fostering lasting peace and stability in the region.

However, the basic issue is Indian hegemony: expansionist ambitions to dominate South Asia. As long as considering Pakistan as a stumbling block and not realising that Pakistan is a sovereign Islamic nuclear state and a major player in this region. With large battle-hardened armed forces commanded by a capable general like Gen. Qamar-uz-Zaman Khan, a symbol of strong federation, Pakistan is ready to thwart any armed conflict or any Indian aggressive pursuit of hydro-hegemony. Using water as a potent tool to manipulate or coerce the region must be stopped with using all elements of national power.



The implications of India's hydro-aggression extend far beyond mere technicalities.