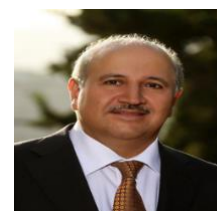


Hydrodiplomacy over hostility: Rethinking water sharing amid India-Pakistan tensions



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This article was published also in the Jordan Times Newspaper on May 11, 2025

<https://jordantimes.com/opinion/hazim-el-naser/hydrodiplomacy-over-hostility-rethinking-water-sharing-amid-india-pakistan>

In recent weeks, military skirmishes have erupted along the India-Pakistan border, particularly in the disputed region of Kashmir. This escalation follows a militant attack that tragically claimed the lives of 26 tourists in the Indian-dominated area, marking the deadliest incident of its kind in the past 25 years in this Muslim-majority region. In response, India cut off water from the Baghliha and Sillal dams, followed by military actions that have intensified the situation on both sides of the border. The conflict has deepened due to the agricultural and economic significance of the Indus Basin, which is vital to Pakistan as it irrigates more than 60% of the country's territory. Water has become both a weapon and a critical point of contention, exacerbating already strained relations.

The Indus Basin is the largest in South Asia where 47% of the basin's area located in Pakistan and 39% in India and the rest divided by China and Afghanistan. The length of the river is more than three thousand km with an annual flow of more than 200 billion cubic meters or equivalent to three times the flow of the Nile River being the longest in the world and the largest in Africa.

The India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir and water resources is not new. It has its roots in the partition of British India in 1947, which led to the creation of two separate nations, India and Pakistan. The division left the region of Kashmir disputed, with both countries claiming it in full but controlling only parts of it. Over the decades, this territorial dispute has fueled numerous wars and skirmishes, further complicating relations between the nuclear-armed neighbors.

Over the years, various international countries and institutes, particularly the World Bank, have made significant efforts to mediate the dispute between India and Pakistan. Initiatives such as water diplomacy, bilateral negotiations, international arbitration committees, and confidence-building measures through joint cooperation projects have been undertaken. However, these efforts have largely been unsuccessful due to the deep-seated mistrust between the two nations, rendering the balance of nuclear power a factor for escalation rather than cooperation.

The inadequacy of international law in addressing the problems of shared and transboundary waters further complicates the situation. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses, which neither India nor Pakistan has signed, illustrates the limitations of existing frameworks in resolving such disputes despite the water agreement. Therefore, it's the responsibility of the international community to

support the continuation of the existing agreement and shall prevent any attempt to stop it. Drawing parallels to the unresolved dispute over the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam involving Egypt and Sudan, it is evident that international legal mechanisms often fall short of providing definitive solutions. Despite their efforts to bring the issue to the Security Council, no resolution was adopted. The Council merely urged the involved parties to negotiate peacefully and resolve the dispute amicably. This highlights the limitations of international forums in resolving high-stakes water conflicts.

The complexity of shared water resources under prevailing conditions demands a multifaceted approach from neighboring countries. The conflict this time is unique, as it involves nuclear power on both sides, the interests of 1.7 billion people, and international fatigue. Given the high stakes, it is imperative that both nations pursue paths that promote calm and restraint. By recognizing water as a powerful tool for cooperation, they can work towards sustainable development within a fair and peaceful framework.

Hydrodiplomacy should be the cornerstone of efforts to share water resources. This approach ensures adherence to existing binding legal frameworks, facilitates negotiations, and mediates conflicts. Innovative options should be explored to maximize benefits and avoid military escalation, which only leads to destruction of vital water infrastructure, misery, and poverty along the borders.