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Name of the Topic: Understanding Water Diplomacy: A Case of Indus Water Treaty

Key words: Indus Water Treaty, Treaty provisions, Treaty revision, Cross-border rivers, Water Diplomacy, Water security, Power asymmetry, Water-centric disputes, Treaty compliance, Water negotiations.

Findings:

The IWT has served as a shining example of successful bilateral cooperation that has spanned decades. Notwithstanding the treaty's enduring framework, recent developments serve to emphasize the complexities and difficulties inherent in both nations' endeavours to calibrate their policies and approaches in response to emergent realities. Therefore, in light of the shifting geopolitical, environmental, and technological paradigms, a re-examination of specific treaty provisions is warranted, to enable both nations to effectively address contemporary challenges and ensure the agreement's continued relevance.

India exhibits a pronounced dominance in the tripartite pillars of hydro hegemony, leveraging its preeminent position in South Asia to exert considerable influence through its robust political, economic, and military capabilities, which highlights its regional hegemony. As a result, India's considerable capabilities in water resource utilisation are evident in its large-scale dam construction projects aimed at hydropower generation. Additionally, India's extensive territorial claims and geopolitical interests in the region's shared water resources confer upon it the largest stakeholder position in South Asia's transboundary waters, reinforcing its prominence in regional hydro-political dynamics. While India's neighbors may be wary of its influence, its approach in managing shared water resources is unique— it relies

on consent rather than coercion. India uses its soft influence and cooperation to overcome the fact of not being the upstream country for all the rivers flowing through its land.

With respect to Pakistan, India's behaviour can be characterised as hydro-hegemonic, primarily due to three key factors: firstly, its advantageous geographic positioning; secondly, its advanced technical capabilities enabling control over water resources; and thirdly, its power asymmetry, derived from its bargaining power, ideological influence, and structural dominance. Pakistan's geographical location downstream of India on the Indus River system, combined with its escalating water scarcity, renders it particularly vulnerable to India's hydro-political influence. A prevailing narrative within Pakistan posits that India's dominance over the Indus River's headwaters creates an exposure, wherein India could potentially manipulate water flows to Pakistan, consequently exerting significant economic pressure and undermining Pakistan's economic stability. The perpetuation of this perception highlights the significant soft power dimensions inherent in India's hydro-hegemonic status which yields considerable influence. As a result, water-centric disputes are likely to remain a persistent impediment to the realisation of a stable, sustainable, and long-lasting peace between India and Pakistan. Despite water being wielded as a strategic tool, the treaty's dispute resolution mechanisms have ensured that both India and Pakistan adhere to its provisions, effectively preventing the conflict from escalating into full-blown war, which in turn reinforces India's dominant position in the region's hydropolitics.

With its upstream advantage, India's suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty, in response to the deadliest Pahalgam terror incident, in Jammu and Kashmir is a landmark move, highlighting the critical role water will play in shaping the future of India-Pakistan ties. Now more than ever, the IWT's significance is clear. Placing the treaty in abeyance allows India to pause without permanently abandoning the agreement. This step can be viewed as a calculated diplomatic maneuver. Negotiated for over nearly a decade, the treaty has no formal exit

strategy. By invoking the term ‘abeyance’, India has created a legal ambiguity that is not covered by the IWT. India’s use of ‘abeyance’ instead of suspension sends a nuanced message, giving Pakistan room to reassess its actions, also conveys a subtle warning to Pakistan, while keeping open the possibility of reconciliation. The importance of treaty has never been more pronounced. What happens if a deal that has survived wars and diplomatic tensions fall apart? The region’s water security hangs in balance! Hence, a diplomatic dialogue will be essential for India and Pakistan to work towards reinstating the treaty. India has been pushing for treaty revisions to address its increasing water needs. If talks proceed, future discussions would probably center on reconfiguring the water sharing arrangement.

Both countries rely on a functional treaty for their water future as they are vulnerable to climate-related water shortages. However, the lingering tensions surrounding the treaty reflect deep-seated grievances, which in turn highlights the intricate interplay between cooperation and conflict in India-Pakistan’s bilateral relations.