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Water Should Not be a Tool of War in India-Pakistan Conflict. Water Problems Can be Solved Technically and Politically.

Dursun Yıldız

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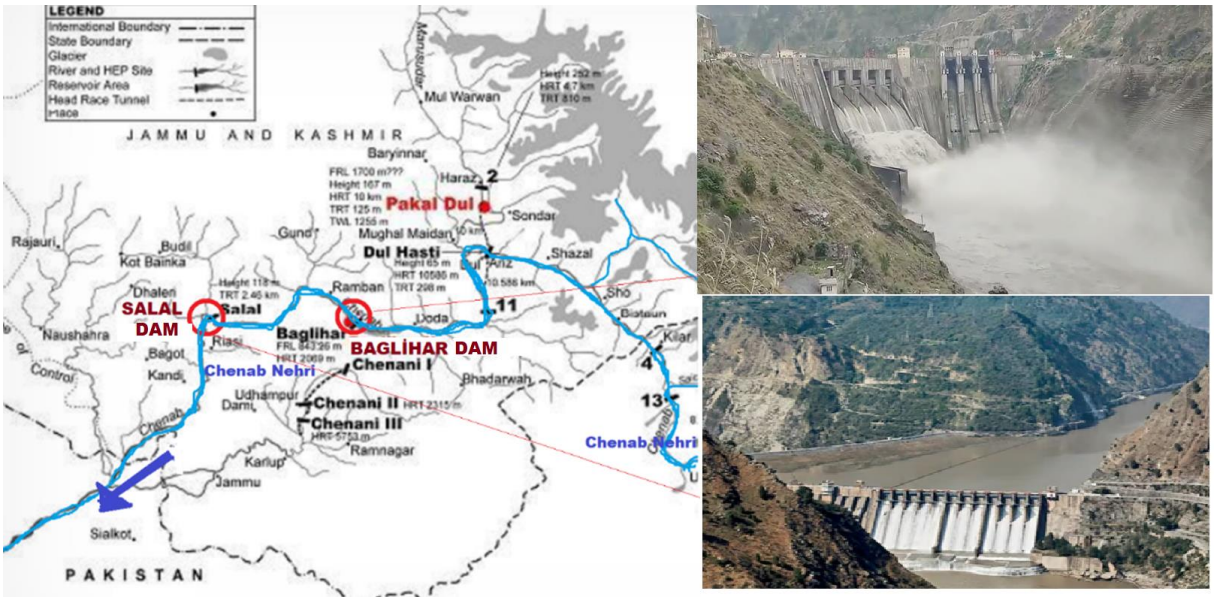
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Following the deaths of armed men in the Pahalgam tourist resort in Kashmir on April 22, India has begun to impose various diplomatic and commercial sanctions on Pakistan. The tension first began with a strategic war over water law, and India made a careful statement that it was putting the Indus Waters Treaty on hold (abeyance). According to press reports, this is the 11th time that the two countries have clashed on the border since the attack. During this period, India has begun to make more radical moves over water control after its move to put the Indus Water Treaty on hold. As of May 5, 2024, India has stopped the flow of water from the Baglihar Dam and the Salal Dam on the Chenab River to Pakistan. The cleaning of sediment accumulated in the dam reservoirs has declared as the reason for this operation.

On May 7, 2025, India launched a missile attack on Pakistan's Azad Kashmir region. It is seen that conflicts will escalate in the region with Pakistan's response to the attack. However, it is known that water has not been used as a means of war in many conflicts in the past and that the Indus Treaty continues. This tradition should be continued today. Because a hydro strategy aimed at restricting water in this region could result in a major disaster.



No water released from Baglihar Dam and Salal Dam

It has been announced that India has started a sediment cleaning operation at Salal and Baglihar dams, two major hydroelectric projects on the Chenab River in Jammu and Kashmir. For this reason, it has been reported in the Indian Press that the water level in the river has started to fall and the water flow to Pakistan has decreased. It has been suggested in the press that New Delhi is also planning to cut off the water flow from the Kishanganga Dam on the Jhelum River.

Characteristics of Baglihar and Salal Dams

Baglihar Dam is a concrete gravity dam with a height of 143 m and a crest length of 317 m with a total storage capacity of 395 million m3 for energy purposes. The majority of the dam's reservoir is reserved for the collection of sediment material and its active storage capacity is 32.5 million m^3. The installed capacity of the dam's power plant is 900 MW. There is a discharge channel of 16500 m3/s to discharge water from the dam during floods. This capacity indicates that the maximum flood flow of the river is very high and that uncontrolled discharge of this water can cause great damage to Pakistan downstream.

Pakistan has objected to the design criteria of many high dams and hydroelectric power plant projects on the Chenab River, an important tributary of the Indus River, but to no avail. It has argued that these are not for reasonable energy production but for gaining a great advantage in controlling the water, thus giving India a strategic advantage in times of political tension or war.

The Salal Dam is a 113-meter-high, 487-meter-long, rock-filled concrete dam, and its construction was completed in 1986. The dam has a water storage capacity of 280 million m3. The dam has hydroelectric power plants with an installed capacity of 690 MW. The maximum discharge that the Salal Dam will release in the period of a flood is very high, like the Baglihar Dam, and is 22,500 m3/s. According to information in the press, India has announced that it

will stop the flow of water by claiming that they will clean the sediment material collected in the reservoir of these dams. Interventions to the water flow in the river may justify the objections that Pakistan has put forward in the past. At the same time, these initiatives by India may make it difficult to return to the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty or to establish new water cooperation.



If stored water in the dams is suddenly released, there will be a major flood in Pakistan

In order to discharge the sediment in the Baglihar Dam and Salal Dam on the Chenab River, the power plants of the dams should not be operating. During this period, a small amount of water is released with sediment from the bottom outlets for sediment discharge. The water that enters the dam and is not turbined from the 900 MW and 690 MW installed capacity power plants will be stored in the reservoirs of the dams. If this water is released uncontrolled by opening the dam gates after a while, it may create major floods in Pakistan. Both dams have the capacity to release the accumulated water as large flow rates. On May 2, 2025, due to excessive rainfall, the gates of the Salal Dam were opened and water was released downstream creating some little damages. The region is experiencing a rainy season. Cutting off the water released from the dams may cause the dam reservoirs to fill rapidly and a large amount of sudden water to be released below. Therefore, care should be taken to ensure that these dam gates are operated in a controlled manner so as not to damage the downstream.

Su hiçbir zaman savaş aracı olarak kullanılmamalıdır.

5 Mayıs 2025 tarihinde Hindistan bu barajların rezervuarında toplanmış olan sürüntü malzemesini temizleyeceğini ileri sürerek su akışını durduracağını açıklamıştır. Yazılı basından öğrendiğimize göre, Pakistan'a yönelik baskıyı daha da artırmak amacıyla Kishanganga Barajı'nda da benzer bir uygulama planlanmaktadır.

Hindistan'ın 7 Mayıs 2025 tarihinde başlattığı füze saldırısı bölgeye yönelik endişeleri arttırmıştır.Hindistan İndus Suları Antlaşmasını duraksatarak uluslararası antlaşma hukuku üzerinden başlattığı stratejiyi, suyu kontrol etmeye yöneltmemelidir.

Water Resources should never be used as a tool of war.

On May 5, 2025, India announced that it would stop water release by claiming that it would discharge the sediment material settled in the reservoirs of these dams. According to what we learned from the press, a similar application is planned for the Kishanganga Dam in order to further increase pressure on Pakistan.

The missile attack launched by India on May 7, 2025 has increased concerns about the region. India should not direct its strategy of abeyance the Indus Waters Treaty to control its water.

No water release to the Chenab River will take war and conflict to another stage and will cause more tension between riperian states. The solution of the conflict that India started over water will deepen the problem and make it very difficult to return to the water agreement. Therefore, India should not disrupt the sharing cooperation that has been going on for many years and the spreading order of political and military tensions. Water shouldn't be securitized and used as a tool of war in many respect.

Wars waged over water can increase debate on sensitive issues such as sovereignty, security and the environment in international law. Sanctions imposed over water can create resentment and hostility that will last for generations. While water should be a tool for peace and cooperation, its use as a tool for war feeds permanent conflicts. This undermines efforts to ensure the security and stability of countries and regions that depend heavily on transboundary waters, especially in conflict zones around the world.

Indus Su Antlaşması savaşlar ve gerilimlere rağmen bozulmadı

Hindistan ve Pakistan arasında Keşmir nedeniyle başlayan 1965 Savaşında taraflar doğrudan savaştı ama antlaşma yürürlükte kalmış teknik heyetler çalışmaya devam etmiştir.. 1971 Savaşında da yoğun askeri çatışmaya rağmen su paylaşımı sekteye uğramamıştır. Yine 1999 Kargil Savaşında sınırlı bölgesel savaş yaşanmış ancak antlaşma yine askıya alınmamıştır. Son olarak 2016 & 2019 Pulwama saldırısı sonrası ilk kez Hindistan, "Pakistan'a akan suyu keseceğiz" yönünde açıklamalar yapmış ancak bu tehditler uygulanmamış ve antlaşma yine yürürlükte kalmıştır.2025 yılında Keşmir'deki Pahalgam turizm beldesinde gerçekleşen terörist saldırı sonrasında Hindistan Su Antlaşmasını askıya aldığını ve suyu keseceğini belirterek ilk

kez uygulamaya başlamıştır. Bu uygulama sonrası Hindistan'ın başlattığı Füze saldırısı Su Antlaşmasında bir kırılma yaşanması riskini arttırmıştır.

The Indus Water Treaty remained in force despite wars and tensions

In the 1965 War between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, the parties fought directly, but the treaty remained in force and technical teams continued to work. Despite intense military conflict in the 1971 War, water sharing was not interrupted. Again, in the 1999 Kargil War, a limited regional war took place, but the treaty was not suspended. Finally, after the 2016 & 2019 Pulwama attacks, India made statements for the first time saying, "We will cut off the water flowing to Pakistan," but these threats were not implemented and the treaty remained in force. After the terrorist attack in the Pahalgam tourist resort in Kashmir in 2025, India announced that it had abeyanced the Water Treaty and would stop the water release , and began implementing it for the first time. After this implementation, the missile attack launched by India increased the risk of a rupture in the Water Treaty.

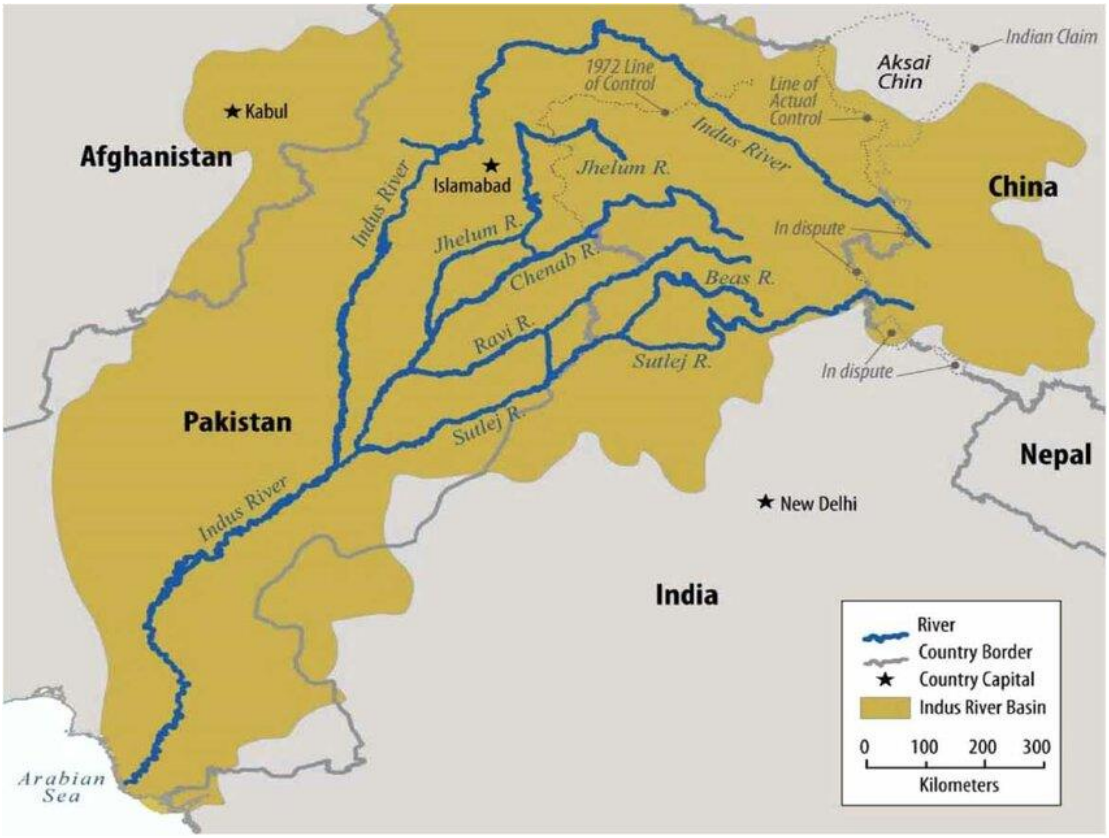
The tradition of cooperation for the Indus Waters should continue

Although India and Pakistan have fought many wars to date, the Indus Waters Treaty has remained in force and this has created a very important tradition in water cooperation. This tradition is important in terms of showing that even countries at war can adhere to some basic human rights and gaining a more legitimate position in the eyes of international community and institutions.

The obligation of Pakistan and India to cooperate in water in the Indus River basin is very vital. Pakistan is dependent on the waters coming from the Kashmir region, which is controlled by India, at the high level of national security.

This high dependency and the numerous dam and hydroelectric power plant developed and planned by India on these rivers have completely changed the hydropolitics of the basin. Pakistan's concerns have also increased greatly, especially due to the high dam projects, but appropriate water diplomacy has not been carried out between the countries to reduce the tension. As a result of the increase in hydropolitical tensions, India has made statements and practices for the first time stating that it can use water for its geopolitical plans. The region's water resources are under the pressure of increasing population, increasing energy demand and climate change effects.

If the countries' efforts to ensure water security against possible future water shortages in the region are carried out in technical and hydropolitical cooperation, more effective results can be achieved. The technical and political solutions to the problems that Pakistan has been expressing for a long time are much more likely than the lack of solutions that conflict and increasing tension will create. To this end, first of all, all practices and statements that will increase tension over water should be stopped. Care should be taken to release the water that will be stored in dams in a controlled manner so that it will not create any flood problems in Pakistan.



Conclusion

The Kashmir issue is a long-standing issue between India and Pakistan. In the search for a solution to the Kashmir issue, India should not make efforts to gain ground over water resources. Because it should be seen that forcing Pakistan into a war over water will not be of practical benefit to either country. In addition, problems that may increase in this region regarding water may threaten many security balances in the region and the world. Both countries should act with meticulous attitudes and behaviors to prevent this. At the same time, the United Nations (UN) Security Council and relevant international organizations should quickly take the initiative to reduce the tension between the two countries and prevent water resources from being used as a weapon of war. In this context, the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty, which has been implemented for 65 years, can be reviewed under the leadership of the UN according to new conditions. Both countries should show the necessary care to prevent the tension between the two countries from escalating to higher levels over water. All technical and political means and all the possibilities of hydro diplomacy should be used in solving water problems that arise between the countries today.

Because there is no permanent winner in a water war, and there is sufficient knowledge and experience in water cooperation in the world.



Chenab River bed after water releasing stopped from the dams