

Pakistan and india tensions over water resources essay example

[Technology](#), [Internet](#)



The country we call the Islamic Republic of Pakistan did not exist until approximately sixty five years ago when a political separation from India was established. The economies of both Pakistan and India are based on agriculture so water is a very precious resource. They also share the source of the water with China because all three countries rely on water from the melting glaciers in the Himalayas. This essay provides a brief history of the tensions between India and Pakistan leading up to the ' battle' over water. The reasons for the disagreements will be discussed and why it is essential to solve them. The shifting climate has added one more complication: China. It also relies on the same area of the Himalayas too. Without melt water from the Himalayan glaciers the people living on the Tibetan Plateau will not have enough water. There is no question that the Himalayan supply of glacier melt waters are essential to the three countries China, Pakistan, and India; but there is a worry that one day there will not be enough water for all three countries. This essay explores the idea that although military engagement may be threatened by one or other countries over the water; there exist better, easier and more probable ways to come up with a solution.

Map 1. Areas where water resource dispute are occurring.

Ref. From the World Bank, www.worldbank.org.pk, n. d.

The Himalayas are the main source of the water supply for the region providing approximately 190 billion cubic meters of glacial snow melt per year. The Hindu Kush in India is where the Indus River starts receiving the melted water. The river runs through Jammu, Kashmir and then through the rest of Pakistan until it reaches the Arabian Sea. On the Chinese side of the

Himalayas the water is the main resource for the Tibetan Plateau. Map 1 shows the boundaries and the river systems shared by India, Pakistan, and China. 1 The Indus River bed runs almost parallel to the eastern borders of Sindh and Punjab provinces. Abiding by the boundaries of the Sindh and Punjab provinces was deliberately part of the separation plan because they had majority Muslim populations. The main focus of the tensions between India and Pakistan for the past sixty-five years though, has been the Kashmir sitting at the northern boundary of Pakistan and India. Pakistan administers northern Kashmir and India administers the southern portion. Unfortunately the tensions within the Kashmir also result from disputes in Pakistan over political power. Militant groups holding extreme Islamic nationalistic ideas are located there.

The reason for the initiation of the idea for eventual separation was due to the disenchantment of some of India's Muslim leaders; they felt they would never hold any real power due to the Indian Hindu majority. In 1906 a forum called the Muslim League was formed. The Muslim League launched an idealistic idea to separate the population of India on the basis of religion with Hindus living in India and the Muslims living in Pakistan. The purpose of the forum was to discuss the idea and to promote Indian Muslim separatism. In 1940 the Muslim League endorsed the idea of a separate Muslim nation for the Muslim's living in India. Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders worked for years to find a way to avoid the partition of India. The Indian Hindu leaders who were opposed to dividing India tried to work within the political party system. Gandhi was only one of the Hindu leaders in the secular Indian

National Congress Party who tried to convince the Muslim members to stay in the party. Gandhi often stated publicly the fear that violence would result, “ The demand for Pakistan as put forth by the Moslem (sic) League is un-Islamic and I have not hesitated to call it sinful. . . Therefore, those that want to divide India into possibly warring groups are enemies alike of India and Islam.” (Gandhi and Fischer 307)

Other issues pressed in on the decisions for the future of India, perhaps making the partition inevitable. In the 1940s not only had the Muslim League officially endorsed the idea for a Muslim Pakistan breaking off from India, but there were also major political changes occurring in the world and India. As early as the 1930s Indians were seriously discussing declaring their independence from the British Empire. In the 1940s World War II was being fought by the Allies. The British Conservative Party of Prime Minister Winston Churchill had his hands full with WWII while at the same time India was ready to become independent from the strangle hold of British Colonialism. Finally WWII ended with an Allied victory but England had been drained and devastated by the war. A new Prime Minister was voted into position. England was facing two choices fighting India or granting India independence. The British government backed the formation of Pakistan. In 1947 was formed with Muhammad Ali Jinnah as its first head of state. A clear division between Muslims and Hindus was impossible. Fifty percent of Muslim Indians did not move to Pakistan but instead stayed in India.

After 1947 tensions have escalated to dangerous levels at least twice. (Jena 2010) Both in 1965 and in 1971 Pakistan and India were at war. The main

problem is the area of Kashmir and Jammu is partially controlled by India, but Pakistan points to a United Nations agreement that gives the people of Kashmir the right to choose between Pakistan and India. Pakistan has consistently stood by its claim that the incursion of India into the Jammu and Kashmir is illegal based (Pakistan's 2012). The political dynamics within Pakistan give a glimpse of how the situation over water resources could be inflated to another war.

Domestically, Kashmir has been used as the main rationale for a range of domestic and foreign policy choices, including the military's disproportionate role in political life and share of national resources; its patronage of India-oriented jihadi proxies; and its quest for dominance in Afghanistan, expressed through support for Afghan insurgents and often justified on the grounds of the "Indian threat." (Crisis Report 1)

Historically Pakistani attempts at transborder problem solving have been to use military strategies. When Prime Minister Bhutto wanted to negotiate peacefully she was kicked out of office by the President "at the military's behest" and in 1999 when (Crisis Report 2). When Nawaz Sharif negotiated an agreement for peace and non-interference with India he was ousted in 1999 (Crisis Report 2). On the one hand Pakistan's military has not allowed peaceful solutions to have a chance to work. On the other India has encroached on Kashmir territory and may be ignoring Indus Water Treaty agreements with Pakistan.

The Indus Basin Water Treaty was first negotiated in 1960. According to the treaty Pakistan has control of the main channel of the Indus River, the

tributaries, Chenab and Jhelum; India has control of the tributaries, the Beas, Ravi and Sutlej of the Indus River. (See Map 2) Remembering that the division between the two countries was made in 1947 and the Indus River Treaty was only agreed upon in 1960 gives an idea of how 'dividing' the water was made very difficult after the separation from India of Pakistan. And there is the question of how is a river 'controlled.' Because India has the higher reaches of the rivers it has more control of the whole system by building dams which divert water away from Pakistan and towards India. Hammeed Ullah, the Pakistani environment minister pointed out that "Upstream or downstream, we (India and Pakistan) are in the same boat" (Jena 2010).

Map 2. River Systems in South Asia.

Ref. Pakistan's Relations with India: Beyond Kashmir? Crisis Group
Asia Report N°224, 2012 May 3, p. 22

Jena (2010) has written about water resources as a security problem, "A 1960 trans-boundary water sharing agreement between India and Pakistan has stood the test of two wars and various periods of unease. Climate change, however, may prove the toughest test of the Indus River deal." Resource security refers to the problem that violence may start due to resource unavailability. Resource availability is now clearly a problem because of the decreasing amounts of water and the fear of the tensions between the two countries escalating. Conflicts over the rivers for water have become tense for about the last 3 or 4 years, especially since 2009. (Jena 2010). The United Nations has pointed out that if Himalayan glaciers

continue to melt at a steady rate due to global warming, then the problem will become far worse. (Unquenchable 2012) Jena (2010), writing for Sustainable Security quoted fruit farmer Muhamud Riyaz who is 65 years old “ when I was a boy, summer came but mounds of snow at the foot of thick foliage trees would sit there, melting slowly, keeping the soil moist until the summer rains came. Since the last two years, the snow is just a thin layer and it rains only in monsoons.” His fruit farm is located in Pakistan where for centuries farmers have relied upon glacier melt from the Himalayas for moisture, but now they face drought. On the other hand parts of Pakistan has faced the worst flooding the world has seen but that is primarily due to poor land use planning.

Problems have been escalating as India has been building more and more dams to create hydroelectric power and divert water to Indian farms for irrigation. Pakistan is suspicious that India’s building of dams in the Kashmir has allowed it to take“ an unfair share of the waters of the Jhelum, Chenab and Indus” (Jena 2010). In 2005 India built a large hydroelectric project on the ChenabRiver. The ChenabRiver is a tributary of the IndusRiver. In the past the ChenabRiver was considered neutral territory but the building of the dam and other infrastructure by India clearly violates this understanding. The Indian 2005 hydroelectric project is called the Bagilhar project. The project started in October 2009. The finished dam measures 470 feet high and 317 meters wide. Pakistani officials point out that a reduction in water for farming irrigation has been measured.

Photo 1. Baglihar Dam, India.

In January 2006 Sharjeel (2010) wrote for a World Bank strategy paper that Pakistan was “ moving from being a water stressed country to (being) a water scarce country.” Six years later the problem has become worse due to the loss of water in ground water reservoirs. The other problem linked to water scarcity is poor water quality. Sharjeel (2010) reported that in fact Pakistan is close to reaching the limit of its water resources. The lack of water to grow crops and the dried cake soil has caused an escalation of anger at India building dams. The dams are a big part of the problem to the farmers in the area, because the more dams that are built the less water they have available for irrigation.

Photo 2. Tawi River, Indian dam in Jammu city

Winter 2011.

Fortunately there are still some Pakistani water resources available but the resources must be very carefully managed to make the water useful for as long as possible and for as many people as possible. A bad cycle of behaviors is making the water problems worse. Because there is less water available and wells are running dry, more wells are being dug to reach the decreasing groundwater reservoirs. The quality of the water is decreasing because

“ 20 million tons of salt are accumulating in the system every year” (Sharjeel 2010). Sharjeel (2010) has listed the main problems underlying Pakistan’s water resource problem as (a) an old and deteriorating infrastructure, (b) the water system is non-sustainable financially, and (c) the people do not trust

the government to fix the problem because of governmental corruption.

India's main reason for increasing water use is based on its high rate of its continually increasing population. Farmers need to grow more food so they need irrigation for their fields. Linked to population increases is the increasing demand for more energy in the form of electricity. That is why the dams serve the two main purposes of diverting water to farms for irrigation and creating hydroelectric power.

India is reluctant to talk to the Pakistani government because it says terrorist's attacks from Pakistan must first stop. On the other hand India's repression of people in Kashmir has increased, even to the point of fascism. (Robinson 2011) Unfortunately, groups in India's military and in Pakistan's military take advantage of the trans-boundary tensions. (Robinson 2011) Trade is negatively impacted by the tensions " Despite geographic proximity and the resultant potential for reduced transportation costs, as well as trade complementarity for a range of goods, Pakistan's trade with India is only 1 per cent of its total global trade. It takes three forms: direct, indirect and illegal" (Pakistan's 2012). There is a strong sense that politics are the negative variable which only makes every situation worse. The worst case scenario if a military conflict begins would include not only Pakistan and India but also China because so much of China's water also comes from the glacier melt waters in the Himalayas.(Unquenchable 2011) Another added concern is that Afghanistan borders the Kashmir and may be route for militants and or mercenaries which could make the situation even worse. (Pakistan's 2012)

Positive action is possible and could be taken when the parties affected are able to sit down and collaborate together. Farmers would be able to work to find solutions with scientists and other water resource management experts if the opportunity presents itself. It is now 52 years later and an excellent time to renegotiate the terms of the treaty based on the water resource and population realities that exist today. (Miner et al., 2012) Repairing and modernizing the water systems would save not only water in the short run but also money in the long run. Both irrigation systems and irrigation canals must be included in national modernization and repair projects. Another way to lessen the problem in the Kashmir is for India to build hydroelectric water projects in other parts of the country. For example India may have a better relationship with Bangladesh and could build in that area of the country.

Soon the conflicts between the rich and the poor in India and Pakistan must be addressed. These are the issues within each nation that depend on good decision making so particularly the problem of flooding is reduced.

(Unquenchable 2011) One of the most important decisions will be to use land appropriately so that during monsoon season floods of poor district is not caused because the rich have diverted the water flow away from their homes and yards. Rich farmers within each country are blamed for taking their unfair share of water resources. These disputes are usually between provinces. For instance the Sindh province in Pakistan has disputes with the Punjab, a wealthier province, concerning the lowering of the groundwater reservoirs so that the poorer people of Sindh do not have enough for farming. The province Nepal is perceived as the rich villain in India.

The Economist has reported that the CIA predicts “ the likelihood of conflict between India and Pakistan over shared river resources is expected to increase . . . (but) the risks of armed interstate conflict is minor.” (2011) The Crisis Report (2012) suggests that India and Pakistan “ focus on short, medium and long-term measures to optimize the use of water resources, going beyond project-related disputes that the IWT can already address” (ii). This is good advice to use for dealing with China too, breaking the problem into smaller measures will bring results more quickly. The people living in the Kashmir need a safe and reliable solution to the water resource challenges they are facing today. It does not matter which side of the Indus River they happen to live on. The availability is not a religious issue and it is not a political issue. It is an issue of human survival and because of that water is a human right. India and Pakistan can choose peaceful ways because there are several choices available. An update of the Indus Water Treaty to include the recent developments in water resource needs would be a sensible first step. Also an agreement is needed over the use of the formerly neutral Chenab River. Water is a resource for everyone. Good water management can be planned so that each of the provinces and the countries involved has enough water. New ways of conserving and sharing water will have to be developed but there are many systems that have proven successful in other parts of the world. Once the politics are removed from the water resource problem solving puzzle there is a chance the problem can be solved. The main strategy is to put people together without guns and allow them a space to collaborate on problem solving.

Photo 3. Drought conditions: Saffron production 40 percent down, Kashmir, India, 2009, www. bbc. com

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