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# THE 2025 INDUS WATERS TREATY "ABEYANCE" CRISIS: NATIONAL SECURITY THREATS AND POST-CONFLICT STRATEGIES

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**Abstract**
*This paper examines the implications of India's April announcement that it would place the Indus Water Treaty "in abeyance", Pakistan's rejection of that position, and the subsequent treaty-based proceedings. Using a convergent mixed-methods design, the study combines documentary analysis, descriptive analysis of an original survey of 201 respondents, and the thematic analysis of three expert interviews representing legal, defence, and diplomatic perspectives. Defence Minister of Pakistan Khawaja Asif described the Treaty as "merely a document which leaves no room for any unilateral initiative." Among valid responses, 67.5% perceived a water-security threat, 80.5% perceived increased political-military tension, and 74.5% regarded the issue as a national-security concern. On August 31, 2026, the Court of Arbitration held that the IWT remained in force and issued limited interim measures concerning specified works at the Ratle Hydroelectric Plant. India rejected the Court's jurisdiction and maintained its position that the Treaty was in abeyance. The findings integrate treaty law, securitization, hydro-hegemony, and hydro-diplomacy to explain how legal uncertainty, strategic perceptions, and institutional mechanisms shape the crisis, while highlighting the importance of domestic water resilience and sustained diplomatic engagement and cautioning against treating every political threat as evidence of water weaponization.*

## 1. Introduction

After nine years of negotiations with the assistance of the World Bank, India and Pakistan signed the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) on 19 September 1960 in Karachi. The Treaty allocates the Eastern Rivers-the Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej-particularly to India and the Western Rivers- the Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab-particularly to Pakistan, while permitting specified uses by each state of the rivers allocated to the other. It also established the Permanent Indus Commission and provides graduated procedures for addressing questions, differences, and disputes through the Commission, a Neutral Expert, or a Court of Arbitration (Alam; Indus Water Treaty, 1960; World Bank, 2023). The World Bank's role under the Treaty is limited and procedural, although it played an important mediating role in the negotiations that led to the Treaty.

Politically, the IWT is significant because it has continued to provide an institutional framework during war, militarized crisis, and prolonged

territorial dispute (World Bank, 2023). Nevertheless, power asymmetries, disagreements concerning hydropower projects, and strategic mistrust have persisted (Zawahri, 2009). Research on transboundary water politics therefore cautions against treating cooperation as something that eliminates bargaining, material asymmetry, strategic competition, and securitized discourse (Zeitoun & Mirumachi, 2008; Zeitoun& Warner, 2006).

The immediate crisis examined in this study followed the Pahalgam attack of 22 April 2025. India's Cabinet Committee on Security announced that the IWT would be "in abeyance" until Pakistan "credibly and irrevocably" ended what India described as its support for cross-border terrorism (Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, 2025). Pakistan rejected the announcement, maintained that the Treaty contains no provision for unilateral abeyance, and framed the continuity of the treaty-based water agreement as a vital national interest (Prime Minister Office, Government of Pakistan, 2025). This paper treats these formulations as opposing state positions rather than as independent facts.

The expert interviews illustrate how the crisis was perceived by Pakistani defence, diplomatic, and legal perspectives as extending beyond routine water management into questions of national security and resilience. Haseeb Gohar characterized the significance of water to Pakistan, stating that "water is not just water to Pakistan but also the lifeline of Pakistan" (H.Gohar, personal communication, November 1, 2025). Defence Minister of Pakistan Khawaja Asif rejected unilateral action concerning the Treaty and emphasized the importance of irrigation reforms, deterrence, and national resilience (K.Asif, personal communication, 21 July 2025). These interview statements provide evidence of Pakistani legal, diplomatic, and security perceptions but do not, by themselves, constitute independent interpretation of the Treaty or arbitral record. The institutional context subsequently developed further. On 31 August 2026, the Court of Arbitration issued an Award on the Status of the IWT and an Order on interim Measures concerning Ratle Hydroelectric Plant. The Court addressed the continued status of the treaty and issued interim measures concerning specified works at Ratle (Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2026b, 2026c). India maintained its position that the arbitral process lacked legal validity and rejected the authority of the Court in the proceedings, while continuing to maintain its position concerning the treaty "abeyance"(Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs,2026). The result is a contested institutional setting in which a treaty-based tribunal has addressed the status of the treaty while one party disputes the legal authority and effect of the proceeding.

Existing scholarship has examined the Indus Water Treaty in relation to treaty resilience, hydro-political conflict, hydro-hegemony, climate pressures, and cooperation conflict between India and Pakistan (Alam, 2002; Zawahri, 2009; Zeitoun & Mirumachi, 2008; Zeitoun & Warner, 2006). Recent scholarship has also begun to address the 2025 "abeyance" controversy and its legal and hydro-political implications. However, limited research has integrated the contested legal status of the Treaty with empirical evidence on national security and water security perceptions and perspectives from legal, defence, and diplomatic domains. In particular, the interaction among treaty law, securitization, hydro-diplomacy, and domestic water resilience during the 2025-26 crisis remains under-examined. This study addresses this gap through a convergent mixed-methods research design combining documentary and legal analysis, a descriptive survey of 201 respondents, and three expert interviews that illustrate how the crisis was perceived from Pakistani defence, diplomatic, and legal perspectives. It therefore contributes an integrated assessment of how the crisis has been legally contested, securitized, institutionally managed, and translated into post-crisis water resilience concerns.

Gohar also connected the basin's strategic significance to livehoods, stating that "more than 30 percent of Pakistan's workforce is related to agriculture, and our dependence on these waters

makes this issue a national concern"(H.Gohar, personal communication, November 1, 2025).

To address the three research questions, the study integrates documentary and legal analysis, descriptive analysis of survey responses, and thematic analysis of expert interviews.RQ1: How has the 2025 IWT crisis affected perceptions of Pakistan's national security? RQ2: Does the crisis signal a shift from cooperation toward strategic competition in hydro-diplomacy? RQ3: What legal, diplomatic, and domestic measures could Pakistan adopt to strengthen post-crisis water resilience? The study integrates law, security, power, and cooperation within a single analytical model assessed through documentary evidence, survey responses, and expert interviews.

**2. Methodology**

This study employs a convergent mixed-method design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative expert interviews and documentary analysis. The quantitative component is based on 201 responses to a 16-item questionnaire. Because the sample was non-probability and student-focused, the survey findings are used to identify patterns within the respondent group rather than to make population-level generalizations about Pakistan. The questionnaire included demographic items and Likert-type items, with items 7-17 measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Quantitative analysis was descriptive and included frequencies, valid percentages, means, standard deviations, and deleted gender cross-tabulation. Missing responses were handled on an item-wise basis, such that a respondent was excluded only from the calculation for the item that they did not answer. Prior to analysis, the survey data were cleaned and standardized. Free-text responses to Q4 (field study) and Q5 (country) contained differences in spelling, capitalization, and category labelling; obvious variations were standardized only where their intended meaning was clear. Two Q11 records contained the contradictory response"5. Strongly Disagree," in which the numerical value conflicted with the verbal response category. Because the intended response could not be determined reliably, both records were excluded from the Q11 summary statistics rather than silently recorded. Consequently, the valid sample size varied across the Likert items, ranging from 197 to 200. The qualitative component comprises three expert interviews conducted by the researcher. Defence Minister of Pakistan, Khawaja Asif, was interviewed in person on 21 July 2025 in Islamabad at the National Assembly Ministry of Defence office. Ayesha Malik, Deputy Director of the Research Society of International Law (RSIL), Senior Research Fellow, and Team Lead of its Conflict Law Centre, was also interviewed on 8 July 2025 via Google Meet. Haseeb Gohar, a diplomat from the Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was interviewed on 1 November 2025 via Google Meet. The interview transcript was analyzed through initial coding, grouping related themes into higher-level themes, comparison across participants, and mapping the resulting themes onto the three research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Statements concerning relative military strength, domestic motives, and responsibility for valence, diplomatic isolation, or "water aggression" were treated as participant-attributed perceptions unless independently supported by documentary or other evidence.

The documentary analysis draws on the text of the Indus Water Treaty (IWT), official Indian and Pakistani statements, World Bank materials, United Nations treaty-law sources, and decisions and press material relating to the Indus Water arbitration. The analysis distinguishes among (a) the text of the IWT, (b) findings of the Court of Arbitration, (c) India's jurisdictional and policy position, and (d) Pakistan's position on contested political and legal questions. This distinction is methodologically important because "abeyance is a political and legal characterization rather than an express term used in the IWT, while "water weaponization" is an analytical or rhetorical act, effect, or coercive signal (Indus Waters Treaty, 1960; Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2026b; United Nations, 1969). The mixed-methods design therefore enables the study to distinguish

between treaty-based legal findings and independently documented evidence concerning water security and the status of the Treaty.

Research ethics, participant consent, and data confidentiality were considered throughout data collection and analysis.

**Table 1. Demographic profile of survey respondents (N = 201)**

| Variable | Category | n | % of total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Female | 120 | 59.7 |
| | Male | 80 | 39.8 |
| | Prefer not to say | 1 | 0.5 |
| Age | 18–25 | 137 | 68.2 |
| | 26–35 | 28 | 13.9 |
| | 36–45 | 20 | 10.0 |
| | 45 and above | 15 | 7.5 |
| | Missing | 1 | 0.5 |
| Study level | Undergraduate | 102 | 50.7 |
| | Graduate | 57 | 28.4 |
| | Masters/MPhil | 37 | 18.4 |
| | PhD | 5 | 2.5 |

### 3. Integrated Analytical Framework

The analysis integrates four frameworks because no single one fully explains the crisis. Treaty law identifies the parties' agreed rights and obligations; securitization explains how water moves from routine administration into the realm of national survival; hydro-hegemony examines how upstream position, infrastructure, agenda-setting, and bargaining power shape outcomes; and hydro-diplomacy examines how interdependence can be managed through institutions, negotiation, technical cooperation, and third-party facilitation. Together, they connect legal constraint, strategic behavior, material power, and cooperative practice (Buzan et al., 1998; Sadoff & Grey, 2002; Zeitoun & Mirumachi, 2008; Zeitoun & Warner, 2006).

The embedded logic begins with the Treaty as the legal baseline. It defines river allocations, permitted uses, information exchange, the Permanent Indus Commission, and dispute-resolution procedures (Indus Waters Treaty, 1960). Yet these rules operate within an unequal geopolitical relationship (Zeitoun & Warner, 2006). Hydro-hegemony draws attention to the leverage associated with upstream position and infrastructure without assuming that a treaty-prohibited disruption of flows has occurred. Securitization explains why perceived leverage can acquire exceptional political significance: water may be framed as an existential interest, and ordinary technical questions may be recast as strategic-security issues (Buzan et al., 1998; Gleick, 1993).

Hydro-diplomacy provides a countervailing mechanism. Communication, data sharing, inspection, technical expertise, and adjudication can reduce uncertainty and preserve channels that survive broader political crises (Sadoff & Grey, 2002; Zawahri, 2009). The framework therefore does not assume a simple shift from "cooperation" to "conflict." Following Zeitoun and Mirumachi (2008), cooperation and contention can occur simultaneously: legal proceedings may continue while political relations worsen; technical channels may persist while security rhetoric intensifies; and states may contest institutional authority while still invoking the Treaty. This approach is operationalized with the conceptual model in Figure 1. An exogenous shock in politics gives rise to a treaty-status controversy. Treaty law dictates the legal claims that can be advanced; securitization and hydro-hegemonic power help frame the issue and shape how it is understood; evidence from surveys and interviews identifies the common interpretations that are emerging at the

domestic and elite levels; and the advancement of hydrodiplomatic mechanisms can be identified as limiting the nature of possible responses. This model is repeated throughout the Results and Discussion and presented as an integrated analytical framework rather than as a set of theories in isolation.

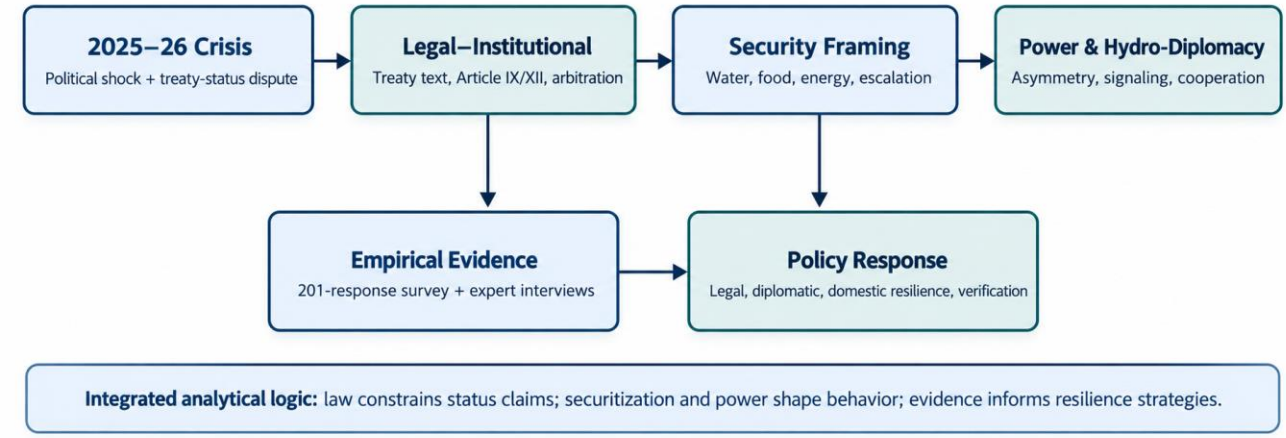



**Figure 1. Integrated conceptual model for the IWT crisis. Source: Author synthesis**.

## 4. Legal and Institutional Analysis of the IWT

### 4.1 Treaty architecture, Article IX, and Article XII

The IWT operates as a detailed legal mechanism for the Indus system between India and Pakistan. Article IX requires questions to be examined first by the Permanent Indus Commission; qualifying technical differences may be referred to a Neutral Expert, while disputes may be submitted to a Court of Arbitration under Annexure G. Annexure G directs the Court to apply the Treaty and, where necessary for its interpretation or application, specified sources of international law (Indus Waters Treaty, 1960, art. IX & Annex G). Article XII is central to the treaty-status controversy. Article XII (3) permits modification through a "duly ratified treaty" concluded for that purpose by the two governments, while Article XII (4) provides that the IWT remains in force until terminated by a "duly ratified treaty" between them. The text contains no provision labelled "abeyance" (Indus Waters Treaty, 1960, art. XII). That textual point does not answer every issue under general international law, but it does show that the Treaty grants neither party an express unilateral power of abeyance. This reading is shared by Ayesha Malik, a legal expert, who added that the modifications and termination clauses of the Treaty "can only be modified… by mutual consent of India and Pakistan" (A. Malik, personal communication, 8 July,2025. Malik summarized the treaty's modification rule directly. "If Pakistan does not consent, there is no notification; this cannot be used as a basis for suspending the treaty"(A.Malik, personal communication, 8 July 2025).

The World Bank's mandate should also be clearly defined. A contemporary function of the Bank in dispute settlement is limited and procedural in nature, though the Bank is a signatory for specified purposes. It is not a general supervisory body or a body that adjudicates the parties' substantive rights but rather performs the functions assigned to it, such as those in connection with Neutral Expert and Court of Arbitration proceedings (World Bank, 2023). Rather, Malik emphasized, the Bank is "not a party to the treaty… it's just brokered the treaty" (A. Malik, personal communication, 8 July, 2025).

**4.2 Vienna Convention principles and the legal meaning of "abeyance"**

There is generally a consensus on the meaning of the text. While the term abeyance is translated to mean "suspension," Malik noted that the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) didn't include any provisions for "suspension" (A. Malik, personal communication, 8 July,2025). The VCLT is relevant with an important qualification: India is not a signatory, while Pakistan signed it on April 29, 1970, but has not ratified it (United Nations Treaty Collection, n.d.). The parties are therefore not bound to each other by the VCLT solely as contracting parties. However, VCLT rules that reflect customary international law may remain relevant independently, and Annexure G permits recourse to specified international-law sources when necessary to interpret or apply the IWT (Indus Waters Treaty, 1960, Annex G; International Court of Justice, 1997).

Malik further explained that "the concept of suspension exists under the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties itself contains no provision allowing for suspension"(A.Malik communication, 8 July 2025).

Treaty suspension cannot be reduced to the proposition that it is possible only by mutual consent. VCLT Article 57 addresses suspension under the treaty's provisions or by consent of all parties, while Articles 60–62 address exceptional grounds involving material breach, impossibility of performance, and fundamental change of circumstances. These grounds are restrictive and fact-dependent (International Court of Justice, 1997; United Nations, 1969, arts. 57, 60–62). The central question is therefore not whether international law recognizes suspension in principle, but whether a legally sufficient ground exists and whether all substantive and procedural requirements have been met. Malik stated that the VCLT's "fundamental change of circumstances" standard would not be satisfied because climate change "is not an unprecedented change, but one that was predictable in 1960, when this Convention was adopted, when various demographic and development pressures were already present in the two countries. According to Malik, the "fundamental change of circumstances" standard of the VCLT would not be met because climate change "is not an unexpected change, but one that was anticipated in 1960 when the Convention was adopted, and at that time various demographic development pressures were present in the two countries(A.Malik, personal communication, 8 July 2025).

The same applies to interview evidence, too. Gohar and Asif rejected unilateral action (H. Gohar, personal communication, November 1, 2025; K. Asif, personal communication, July 21, 2025). The general international-law principles are applicable; those will need to be considered separately, but the provisions of Article XII, which stipulates modification and termination by a duly ratified treaty, apply to those positions. The Court of Arbitration did that analysis in its August 31, 2026 award and found that in this case, the grounds in front of it did not support suspension or termination (Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2026b).

**4.3 Dispute settlement, parallel proceedings, and contested institutional authority**

The treaty-status controversy is connected to the continuing Kishenganga and Ratle proceedings. India has argued that parallel resort to a Court of Arbitration and a Neutral Expert is incompatible with the IWT's sequencing and has consistently described the Court as unlawfully constituted, while maintaining that the Neutral Expert is the proper forum for the relevant technical differences (Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, 2026).

On the procedural distinction, Malik stated: "Technical differences go to a neutral expert, while legal go to the Court of Arbitration" (A.Malik, personal communication 8 July, 2025).

By contrast, the Court of Arbitration held in its July 6, 2023 award that it was properly constituted and competent to proceed (Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2023). After India announced abeyance in April 2025, the Court issued a Supplemental Award on Competence on June 27, 2025, followed by its Award on Issues of General Interpretation on August 8, 2025 (Permanent

Court of Arbitration, 2025a, 2025b). The institutional conflict therefore concerns competing interpretations of the Treaty's dispute-settlement machinery as well as the underlying design questions.

Analytical neutrality requires presenting both positions. The Court's awards are decisions of the tribunal constituted under Annexure G; India rejects the Court's legality, legitimacy, and competence and has not participated in the proceedings (Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, 2026; Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2023, 2025a). This gap between treaty-based adjudication and state acceptance limits what a legal award alone can accomplish in restoring routine hydro-diplomatic cooperation. There is no easy remedy with the International Court of Justice either. The ICJ, however, Malik explained, does not have jurisdiction as India has "pretty watertight reservations" to its jurisdiction, and Pakistan's claim would require India's consent (A. Malik, personal communication, 8 July,2025).

### 4.4 The 31 August 2026 Court of Arbitration Award

On August 31, 2026, the Court of Arbitration issued two decisions: the Award on the Status of the Indus Waters Treaty in Respect of India's Decision on Abeyance and an Order on Pakistan's application for interim measures concerning Ratle. The Court treated "abeyance" according to its practical legal effect, examined possible grounds for suspension or termination, and unanimously concluded that none of the grounds before it justified either outcome. It therefore held that the IWT remained in force and that India remained bound by its treaty obligations, including those governing hydroelectric projects on the Western Rivers (Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2026b, 2026c).

The interim-measures order was narrower than the treaty-status award. It restricted specified concreting works on the Ratle dam wall and power-intake structure until 90 days after the Neutral Expert's final decision, required reporting on the construction schedule, and rejected two other measures requested by Pakistan (Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2026c). These measures preserved the status quo on specified works and did not finally determine whether the Ratle project as a whole complied with the IWT.

India rejected both August 31 decisions, maintained that the Court lacked jurisdiction over India, and reaffirmed the abeyance position (Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, 2026). Pakistan, through its foreign minister, welcomed the award as confirming that the Treaty remained fully in force (Dar, 2026). The decisions are therefore legally significant within the Annexure G process, but they did not resolve the political and institutional dispute over the process's authority.

The award has three consequences for the law. First, it changes the nature of the status question from being one solely of political pronouncements to one of a treaty-based adjudicative process. Second, it reinforces the importance of the express Article XII regime and concepts of restraint that apply to general laws, and that cannot be avoided by simply assigning the term "abeyance." Third, the limited Ratle measures show that the different processes of the Court of Arbitration and Neutral Expert continued to coexist: the Court maintained the status quo in the specified matters but left the technical design questions to the Neutral Expert.

## 5. The 2025–26 Crisis Timeline

Figure 2 presents the crisis as two interacting tracks: political-security escalation and continuing treaty-based legal proceedings. This difference ensures that India's political declaration of "abeyance" is not mixed up with the legal question of treaty status (sources listed under Figure 2).




**Figure 2. Timeline of the IWT crisis, April 2025–August 2026. Sources: Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs (2025, 2026); Permanent Court of Arbitration (2025a, 2025b, 2025c, 2026a, 2026b, 2026c); Prime Minister's Office, Government of Pakistan (2025).**

## 6. Results: Survey and Expert Interviews

### 6.1 Respondent profile and treaty familiarity

The survey sample was relatively young and academically oriented. Of 201 respondents, 120 (59.7%) were female, 80 (39.8%) were male, and one preferred not to state gender. The largest age group was 18–25 (137; 68.2%), and 102 respondents (50.7%) were undergraduates. Such features restrict inferences for the population level but can help contextualize perceptions of the crisis within this relatively educated respondent group. The level of awareness about IWT varied. Among 200 valid Q6 responses, 20 (10.0%) were not familiar, 71 (35.5%) slightly familiar, 63 (31.5%) moderately familiar, and 46 (23.0%) very familiar. So, 45.5% were not familiar or were only slightly familiar. Security responses should therefore be interpreted as public-perception indicators within a heterogeneous-awareness sample, rather than as expert legal judgments.

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**Table 2. Familiarity with the IWT and the 2025 crisis (Q6; valid n = 200)**

| Response | n | Valid % |
|---|---|---|
| Not familiar | 20 | 10.0 |
| Slightly familiar | 71 | 35.5 |
| Moderately familiar | 63 | 31.5 |
| Very familiar | 46 | 23.0 |

### 6.2 Security, stability, and institutional perceptions

The highest agreement scores were for agricultural/economic risk, bilateral trust, and political-military tension. They show that there was widespread securitization within the sample, but at the same time there was a distribution over dimensions: a majority were in favor of a greater Defence role (63.0%) compared with an increased level of tension (80.5%) and, similarly, trust in civilian institutions (58.6%) was on the comparatively lower end.

**Table 3. Descriptive summary of Likert items (Q7–Q15)**

| Item | Valid n | Mean | SD | Agree + Strongly Agree (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q7 Water-security threat | 200 | 3.82 | 1.09 | 67.5 |
| Q8 Political/military tensions | 200 | 3.99 | 0.96 | 80.5 |
| Q9 Regional instability | 200 | 3.78 | 0.97 | 70.5 |

| Item | Valid n | Mean | SD | Agree + Strongly Agree (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q10 National-security concern | 200 | 3.90 | 0.97 | 74.5 |
| Q11 Agriculture/economy risk | 197 | 4.03 | 0.89 | 83.2 |
| Q12 Climate intensification | 199 | 3.96 | 0.92 | 79.9 |
| Q13 Trust/future conflict | 199 | 4.10 | 0.92 | 81.4 |
| Q14 Stronger Defence role | 200 | 3.67 | 1.04 | 63.0 |
| Q15 Civilian institutions capable | 198 | 3.60 | 0.94 | 58.6 |

Two of the "5. Strongly Disagree" results are incoherent and have been omitted from Q11. Means are presented on a 1–5 scale; percentages are the percentage of valid responses to each item. Gender cross-tabulations were descriptive, not inferential analyses. In the case of Q7, 62.2 per cent of valid responses from females and 75 per cent of valid responses from males felt that this crisis posed a threat to Pakistan's water security. The agreement rates for females and males for Q10 were 70.0% and 81.0%, respectively. Generalizations should not be made beyond the sample as the design is non-probability with unequal subgroups.

**6.3 Policy preferences**

198 respondents answered Q16, and infrastructure and domestic management came out as the preferred means. Thirty-nine per cent (79) thought that investment in new dams and water infrastructure was more important, and 30 per cent (60) thought that better internal water-management policies were more important. 32 respondents (16.2%) chose mediation by the international community, 16 respondents (8.1%) chose bilateral dialogue, and 11 respondents (5.6%) chose a defensive approach of national security. The numbers are based on the respondents' preferences, and not a policy ranking by the article.

**Table 4. Preferred post-crisis strategy (Q16; valid n = 198)**

| Strategy | n | Valid % |
|---|---|---|
| Invest in new dams and water infrastructure | 79 | 39.9 |
| Strengthen internal water-management policies | 60 | 30.3. |
| Seek international mediation (e.g., UN, World Bank) | 32 | 16.2 |
| Re-initiate bilateral dialogue with India | 16 | 8.1 |
| Adopt a defensive national-security approach | 11 | 5.6 |

**6.4 Cross-interview thematic findings**

The interview content falls under six higher-level themes, although there are significant differences in emphasis. The first was the stress on treaty continuity and dispute settlement based on the rule of law by both interviewees. Asif described unilateral action as “inconsistent with the IWT” (K. Asif, personal communication, July 21, 2025), and Gohar noted that treaty obligations are binding (H. Gohar, personal communication, November 1, 2025). Second, water is presented as a symbol of national resilience within the participants' securitized framing. In Gohar's “lifeline” formulation, politics has been given a prominent edge to Pakistan's reliance on the Indus. Asif brought up the issue of water security and talked about irrigation efficiency, reservoirs, rainwater harvesting, and preparedness in order to make it clear that water security is not only a military issue. Thirdly, the interviews do not

suggest that the treaty framework is abandoned, but that legal and institutional avenues are called for. Asif emphasized the arbitration process, and Gohar spoke about dialogue and facilitation by the international community. This common institutional preference is important because adjudicative proceedings under the treaties persisted in the midst of the political turmoil. Fourth, the interviews show that domestic adaptation is perceived as a national-security issue. The emphasis of Asif on effective irrigation and storage is similar to the points the survey emphasized on infrastructure and domestic water management. This juxtaposition of elite and respondent evidence further serves to underscore the notion that resilience is not just about signaling through diplomacy or military force, but also through domestic measures. Fifth, the interviewees draw parallels between water and the larger geopolitical discourse of Kashmir, great power equations, ideology, deterrence, and regional peace. Claims in this area MUST be handled with great care. The ideology, diplomatic isolation, military superiority, or culpability assessments are those of the participants and may not be reflective of the views of this study. Their analytical focus is on the interconnections of the water dispute with other security language that these approaches anticipate, namely securitization and hydro-hegemony. Sixth, Malik's testimony is an example of how caution and securitized framing are in dialogue with one another. She added that the water cutoff has already impacted the flow of rivers such as the Chenab, which could have implications for agriculture, but Pakistan's characterization of such an action as "an act of war" was "not a legally tenable argument," although she acknowledged that the framing was understandable "in a sense, because it is a crisis which is existential" (A. Malik, personal communication, 8 July,2025).

On diplomatic options, Gohar stated that "the international community has an important role in pushing India to the negotiating table"(H.Gohar, personal communication, November 1, 2025).

**Table 5. Cross-interview thematic matrix**

| Higher-order theme | Khawaja Asif (Defence) | Haseeb Gohar (Diplomatic) | Ayesha Malik (Legal) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Treaty continuity/legality | No unilateral initiative; legal recourse | Binding obligations; rejects unilateral abeyance | No provision for suspension; modification/termination require mutual consent |
| Water securitization/resilience | Deterrence + irrigation reform + storage | "Lifeline"; climate and escalation risks | Reservoir flushing already affects flows; "act of war" framing legally untenable but politically understandable. |
| Institutional response | Arbitration and strategic preparedness | Dialogue, mediation, Track 1.5/2 | World Bank is facilitator, not a party; ICJ jurisdiction unavailable without India's consent. |
| Regional geopolitics | Kashmir, China, capability balance | Kashmir, ideology, external mediation | Frames crisis as existential risk if infrastructure is completed |
| Post-crisis strategy | Domestic adaptation + deterrence | Hydro-diplomacy + international engagement | Legal/diplomatic recourse through arbitration; caution |

against overstating legal grounds

## 7. Discussion

### 7.1 RQ1: How has the crisis affected Pakistan's national-security perception?

Survey and interview evidence indicates that the 2025 crisis broadened perceptions of water security. Agreement was higher for increased political-military tension (80.5%) and risks to agriculture and the economy (83.2%) than for a larger Defence role (63.0%). This pattern indicates securitization without demonstrating a general preference for militarization (Buzan et al., 1998). Respondents linked water to national security, but their policy preferences emphasized infrastructure and domestic water management. The finding supports securitization theory while also showing that practical resilience remains largely civilian and developmental (Sadoff & Grey, 2002; Young et al., 2019). Asif also talked about deterrence and irrigation efficiency, reservoirs, and rainwater harvesting (K. Asif, personal communication, July 21, 2025); dependence on the Indus was also emphasized by Gohar (H. Gohar, personal communication, November 1, 2025). The most defensible interpretation is therefore multidimensional. The crisis increased uncertainty about treaty continuity, information exchange, infrastructure, and escalation; it did not establish that India had physically "turned off" Pakistan's water. "Water weaponization" should be used only when evidence identifies a specific hydrological act and effect, or a demonstrable coercive signal.

### 7.2 RQ2: Does the crisis mark a shift from hydro-diplomacy toward strategic competition?

The evidence points to a more conflictual form of hydro-diplomacy, not the disappearance of cooperation. India linked treaty cooperation to the broader security dispute after Pahalgam, while Pakistan framed continued treaty flows as a vital national-security interest (Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, 2025; Prime Minister's Office, Government of Pakistan, 2025). Both positions were expressed through securitized rhetoric (Buzan et al., 1998). Upstream infrastructure and the perceived value of this leverage fit in with the theory of hydro-hegemony (Zeitoun & Warner, 2006), and securitization offers a basis for understanding the political salience accorded to these capabilities (Buzan et al., 1998). At the same time, the legal and institutional track continued through Court of Arbitration decisions in 2025 and 2026 and the parallel Neutral Expert process (Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c, 2026a, 2026b, 2026c). This pattern supports the view that conflict and cooperation can coexist within the same basin (Zeitoun & Mirumachi, 2008). The post-2025 shift is therefore from relatively insulated technical cooperation toward more contested, institutionalized, and strategic hydro-diplomacy. The August 31, 2026 award sharpened that duality: the Court held that the Treaty remained in force, while India rejected the Court's authority and maintained abeyance (Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, 2026; Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2026b). In these circumstances, hydro-diplomacy depends less on rhetorical consensus and more on data sharing, verification, technical contact, and clear dispute sequencing.

### 7.3 RQ3: What strategies can strengthen Pakistan's post-crisis resilience?

The evidence supports a multidimensional approach to water resilience; no single instrument is sufficient. Legally, Pakistan should rely on the Treaty's text, technical evidence, and relevant decisions while avoiding claims that are not clearly binding or final. The August 31, 2026 award is significant within the Annexure G process, but India's rejection demonstrates that legal success does not automatically produce political compliance or renewed cooperation (Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, 2026; Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2026b). Diplomatically, Pakistan has an interest in preserving the Permanent Indus Commission and

other technical channels even during hostile political relations. Gohar's focus on Track 1.5 and Track 2 engagement (H. Gohar, personal communication, November 1, 2025) is seen as an additional complement to rather than an alternative to treaty institutions. International actors can facilitate communication and technical capacity, but the World Bank's formal role remains limited to functions assigned by the Treaty (World Bank, 2023). Domestic resilience also requires economically and environmentally appropriate storage, irrigation modernization, groundwater governance, telemetry, drought planning, and crop-water efficiency (Young et al., 2019). Finally, security planning should emphasize technical attribution before escalation: changes in river flow may reflect weather, snowmelt, reservoir operations, infrastructure, or intentional conduct. A water-security doctrine integrating hydrology, engineering, crisis communication, treaty law, agriculture, and security planning would be stronger than a military-centric approach.

The climate-security dimension also appeared in Gohar's interview: "Climate change is an existential threat, and intervening in international water obligations makes this concern even more serious"(H.Gohar, personal communication, November 1, 2025).

## 8. Policy Implications and Post-Conflict Strategies

In Pakistan, the priority should be institutional coherence through a standing IWT legal-technical coordination mechanism that brings together the Indus Water Commissioner, foreign ministry, water agencies, hydrologists, engineers, agriculture specialists, climate scientists, and security planners. It should maintain authoritative flow and project data, correspondence, evidence, and project-level communications for treaty submissions and crises (Young et al., 2019). The stabilizing objective should be to insulate technical water management, as far as possible, from wider political disputes. This does not require agreement on the overall bilateral relationship; it requires predictable data sharing, timely warnings, treaty-mandated inspections, and jointly understood procedures for resolving incidents. External actors can support climate science, glacier monitoring, flood forecasting, drought preparedness, and water efficiency within agreed mandates. Their contribution is most useful when it strengthens evidence, communication, and compliance rather than maximalist public positioning. The longer-term objective should be adaptive governance without sacrificing legal certainty. Climate and demographic pressures may justify negotiated modernization, not unilateral non-performance. Article XII (Indus Waters Treaty, 1960, art. XII) provides for establishing mutually agreed protocols with regard to extreme events, environmental data, climate adaptation, and new technical practices.

## 9. Limitations

The sample is a non-probability sample based on students, and targets the third age cohort (18-25 years). Hence, it cannot be extrapolated to the public, government institutions, farmers, or basin communities of Pakistan. The familiarity distribution also indicates that a large portion of respondents was not very familiar with the IWT. These findings should therefore be interpreted as descriptions of perceptions within the sample. The dataset also contained minor inconsistencies in free-text responses and two contradictory labels for Q11. Those were transparently taken care of in the study with item-wise valid denominators and omission of ambiguous records, but much like any descriptive statistic, the results depend on the wording of the question(s) and how the respondent interprets them. Causal inference is not made. The sample for the interview was small and purposive (three people). It does not contain the views of the Indian officials or experts, but it contains the views of the legal, diplomatic, and Defence circles in Pakistan. Interviews may contain statements that are politically charged, and these are marked as attributed claims. Finally, the August 31, 2026 award is recent, and its longer-term impact on how states practice can only be seen in the future, in the Neutral Expert proceedings and in real-time treaty implementation. The article may discuss the legal

substance of its text as well as immediate political impact and reception, but not the final contribution it may make toward compliance or renewed cooperation.

**10. Conclusion**

The 2025 Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) crisis expanded an existing technical and legal dispute into a border strategic contest over treaty continuity and the management of water-related risks. The survey findings indicate substantial perceived risks to water security, agriculture, and political-military escalation, while the expert interviews reflect concerns related to treaty compliance, deterrence, and hydro-diplomacy and domestic water resilience. On August 31, 2026, the Court of Arbitration held that the Treaty remained in force, while India continued to reject the Court's jurisdiction and maintained its position concerning the Treaty's abeyance (Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, 2026; Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2026b).

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