The Politics of Water Discourse in Pakistan

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The Political Narrative

- Distrust and Upper Riparian Fears
- Defence and Tactical Reasons
- Establishing prior Use
- Linkages to Kashmir
Distrust & Upper Riparian Fears

- India is constructing dams to control the waters flowing through its territory.
- Dams could reduce the flow of Chenab, during the rabi season—thus impacting agriculture and economy of Pakistan.
- Stoppage can be ‘well-timed’—linked to war mongering, forcing Pakistan to be an importer of essential agricultural products.
Defence and Tactical Reasons

- Indian intentions are directed towards flooding Pakistan—could destroy Pakistani defenses.
- Canals can be used as defence tools—strategic water obstacles.
- Water could be used as the bargaining chip to settle issues in other relate areas.

*Strategic Importance of Indian water projects in Kashmir is significant because the projects could wreak havoc if the dams in Kashmir were to collapse and mal-function.*

*DG, ISPR, Pakistan*
Establishing ‘prior use’ on Western tributaries is another concern.

The concept of prior use elevates the discourse to a strategic level, making dam construction a security competition.
Kashmir-Pakistan Nexus

- Alienates the Kashmiris from Pakistan, by projecting Pakistan as a state working against the interests of Kashmir.
- There is a general perception in Kashmir, that the division of waters on the basis of IWT was unfair.
- There have been motions passed by the state legislature, asking the central government to review the treaty and pay compensation to the state.
The Stakeholders

- Army
- Politicians
- Fundamentalist Groups
- Hardliners
  (Farmer Organisations & Engineer’s Fora)
Do we need to take the discourse seriously?

- Deteriorating water governance
- Tool for Domestic Mobilisation
- Elites Perception and Pakistan’s Foreign Policy
Impact

- Freeze India-Pakistan Relations.
- Jihadist Advocacy can be strategically used to attract media attention
- Integrated Water Management Approaches Take a back Seat--Domestic drive to build more storage sites.
Thank You