
Elite Discourse and the Securitization of Water in the Indus Waters Treaty Context (2014-2026)

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Abstract

The Indus Waters Treaty signed in 1960 is widely regarded as one of the worlds enduring agreements on sharing water between countries. Between 2014 and 2026 water became a big part of the political and military talk between India and Pakistan. Most studies have looked at the legal sides of the treaty but not much attention has been given to how important people in India and Pakistan talk about water as a security issue. This study looks at how water's seen as a security issue using the Copenhagen Schools Securitization Theory. It uses an approach to examine how important people in politics and institutions talk about water as a big threat to their countries. The study looks at what politicians and officials said, what was discussed in parliament, official documents and what the media reported from 2014 to 2026. It focuses on what was said during the Uri and Pulwama attacks the disagreements over the Kishanganga and Rattle India stopping cooperation on the Indus Waters Treaty and the issues with the Chenab River. The study finds that important people in India and Pakistan started to talk about water as a national security issue, which changed the way water was seen as a resource that both countries used to work on. The study says that talking about water as a security issue has made India and Pakistan trust each other less made tensions between them worse and challenged the framework of the Indus Waters Treaty. By using Securitization Theory, the study helps us understand how the stories that important people tell shape the way water is shared between countries, in South Asia. The Indus Waters Treaty is a part of this story and the study shows how the treaty is affected by the way India and Pakistan talk about water.

Keywords: Indus Waters Treaty; Water Securitization; Securitization Theory; Elite Discourse; Critical Discourse Analysis; India-Pakistan Relations; Water Security.

Introduction

Water is one of the most important strategic resources in international politics and is becoming a national security and geopolitical theme, in addition to being an economic and environmental necessity. In numerous parts of the globe, transboundary river basins are the locations where political competition, climate change, population growth and resource depletion converge. In this respect, the situation in South Asia is one of the most fragile, with water governance closely linked with historical conflicts, territorial disputes, and India and Pakistan's strategic considerations. In this wider framework the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) of 1960 is considered as one of the most successful bilateral water treaties of the world, having withstood wars, military crises and prolonged political tension that existed between both nuclear neighbors. (Salman, 2002)

Political and strategic challenges to the Indus Waters Treaty have never been so intense since 2014 till 2026. The period between 2014 and 2026 has seen unprecedented political and strategic pressure on the Indus Waters Treaty. In 2014 with the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, official rhetoric on the Treaty increasingly came wrapped up in national security concerns. The phrase "blood and water cannot mix" marked an important transition in the political discourse in India where the importance of water as a counter terrorism tool, strategic leverage and as a part of national sovereignty took precedence over water resource management (Haines, 2016). The Uri attack (2016), the Pulwama attack (2019), India's move to put the Treaty in abeyance after the attack on Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir in 2025, the ratification of the Jammu and Kashmir statehood by the Indian constitution, disputes over the Kishanganga and Rattle Hydroelectric projects and the Indian decision to place the Treaty in abeyance after the attack on Pahalgam in 2025 have all turned water into a major pillar of bilateral security politics. India has insisted that the treaty be kept under suspension until Pakistan responds to its concerns over cross border terrorism and Pakistan has said there is no provision in the treaty for unilateral suspension and the country continued to seek legal and diplomatic avenues under international law.

In parallel, the Pakistani political and military establishment has been patronizingly defining India's actions as a threat to Pakistan's water security, especially in the wake of the 2017-2018 flash floods. Concurrently, Pakistan's political and military establishment has been talking of India's actions as a threat to Pakistan's water security, particularly in the context of 2017-2018 flash floods. The previous governments and high-ranking military officials and diplomats have all argued that any attempt to manipulate, restrict or divert the western rivers, especially the Chenab, would be an infringement of international law and would have a devastating impact on the agriculture, economy, food security and national survival of the country. Pakistan's National Security Committee has declared water diversion as a hostile act with "serious implications" for the region on several occasions and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on several international platforms has pointed out that India is responsible for "weaponization of water."

These conflicts suggest the evolution of water securitization, in which political elites are producing water as a development or environmental resource, but increasingly as an existential security threat that demands extraordinary political responses. The Copenhagen School's Securitization Theory posits that a security threat is socially constructed by elite speech acts which aim at convincing relevant audiences of the issue as an existential threat and call for extraordinary measures to address it (Buzan, 1998). In this light, elite discourse plays an important role in comprehending the process in which political leaders transform common policy issues into issues of national security. Within the Indo-Pakistani context, speeches, parliamentary debates, press releases, military statements, diplomatic messages, and media narratives have all helped to transform the perception of the Indus Waters Treaty from a legal arrangement to a more fraught strategic policy. The years 2014-2026, then, are likely to be crucial in the development of Indo-Pak water politics. However, all of these factors combined, during these years, helped to raise the strategic competition, the domestic political priorities, the nationalist narratives, the level of water stress, the level of hydroelectric development, and the degree of military tensions, all of which helped to sharpen the securitizing discourse of the elite around the Treaty. The increasing attention to the projects on the western rivers, especially on the Chenab River, as well as the issues of water sharing, providing data, and implementation of treaties, has poisoned the waters of trust and led to the impression that water is increasingly being used as a tool of geopolitical coercion instead of cooperation.

While considerable scholarly work has focused on the legal aspects of the Indus Waters Treaty, hydro politics in South Asia and technical issues of river management, comparatively little has been written to systematically examine how elite political discourse has helped with the

securitization of water over the last few years. The existing literature on treaty implementation, international water law, or on hydro-technical issues is mostly concerned with treaty implementation or implementation by law, to the exclusion of the role of political narratives, strategic communication, or security framing in the shaping of bilateral perceptions. This study attempts to fill the void by studying the speech of political leaders, army chiefs, diplomats, and government institutions in India and Pakistan between 2014 and 2026 through the analytical lens of Securitization Theory.

Finally, this research concludes that elite discourse has been one of the main reasons for the shift from water governance as a cooperative institutional issue to a more securitized geopolitical one in the Indus Basin. This knowledge of the developing stories is key to examine the future of the Indus Waters Treaty, the state of regional stability and the potential pathways for sustainable transboundary water governance in South Asia. This work, which merges discourse analysis with securitization theory, helps strengthen the current scholarship on environmental security, hydro politics and international conflict and offers contemporary interpretations of one of the most strategically important transboundary water conflicts in the world today.

To analyze the trend in the political, military and diplomatic discourses of the elite between India and Pakistan regarding the Indus Waters Treaty in 2014-2026, to examine the securitization of water through elite discourse that portrays water as a national security and strategic competition problem, to analyze the implications of the securitization of water on implementation and future sustainability of the Indus Waters Treaty and regional stability in South Asia.

Problem Statement

The Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) has always been considered one of the world's most durable water-sharing treaties, but with recent developments in the geopolitics of India and Pakistan, water has come to be seen more and more as a strategic security concern. The Uri and Pulwama attacks, constitutional changes in Jammu and Kashmir, conflicts over the Kishanganga and rattle Hydroelectric Projects, and India's withdrawal from the IWT in 2025 have heightened security discourse on the IWT since 2014. Scholarships on the treaty has been largely focused on legal, hydrological, and institutional dimensions, but much less on how water has been securitized by elite political, military, and diplomatic discourse and how this has affected bilateral relations. Thus, the contribution of elite discourse to the construction of water as a tool of national security and strategic competition remains far from understood. This study aims to fill this void by investigating the securitization of water in the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) environment between 2014 and 2026 and its impact on the stability and transboundary water governance of South Asian countries.

Literature Review

Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) has been one of the longest-standing instances of water cooperation between two countries and it is said to have stood the test of many wars and years of political tension between India and Pakistan. Since the treaty was signed in 1960, it has served as a legal and institutional framework for dealing with the waters of the Indus River system-and minimizing the risk of direct interstate confrontation over shared water resources- (Salman, 2002). But modern studies seem to indicate that the treaty has started a new, and more contentious, stage. It is no longer just a technical tool of water distribution, but is increasingly seen as a national security, strategic competition, environmental change and geopolitical rivalry of water distribution (Mustafa, 2010).

The shift of water to security concerns has generated a lot of interest in international relations, security studies and environmental politics literature. The idea that water shortages themselves do not cause interstate conflict is the subject of debate, and conflict does not result from water shortages unless political leaders and key institutions present water as a life-threatening threat to

national security. Securitization is a process that focuses on the fact that security threats are not just a product of material conditions but are constructed from the elite discourse (Buzan, 1998). In this sense, speeches, official statements, parliamentary debates, diplomatic speeches and strategic narratives have become more and more important sources of understanding the process of water conflict escalation to national security.

The years 2014-2026 will mark a pivotal moment in India-Pakistan Water relations. The political discourse on IWT has significantly evolved during this period, influenced by the Uri attack (2016), the Pulwama crisis (2019), constitutional changes in India in Jammu and Kashmir (2019), ongoing disputes over the Kishanganga and Rattle hydroelectric projects, India's notice sent to Pakistan for the voluntary modification of the IWT in 2023, and the dramatic deterioration of bilateral relations that occurred in 2025-2026. In both nations, political elites increasingly started to view water as more than just a developmental tool, but as a means of national power, sovereignty and strategic leverage. Such changes have consolidated the securitization of water in the geopolitical dynamics of South Asia and increased academic interest in exploring the link between water and political discourse to inter-state water governance (Ahmed, 2021)

The present discussion of the treaty's legal context, hydrological features of the Indus Basin, and the technical aspects of river management have been discussed in detail in the existing literature. However, there has been limited focus on how elite discourse has helped to securitize water, which, especially since 2014, when bilateral relations faced unprecedented tensions, has been the case. The majority of research approach political statements as a dependent variable in the context of shaping national security narratives and policy responses. The present study, hence, brings together the main theoretical and empirical works related to securitization theory, elite discourse and the Indus Waters Treaty, and highlights the lacuna in the existing literature.

Theoretical Literature: Securitization Theory and Elite Discourse

The theoretical bases for this study are mostly from the Copenhagen School of Security Studies, including the Securitization Theory by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde. The Copenhagen School challenged traditional realist views of security based on military threats and proposed that security is a socially constructed concept. The view is that issues are not security matters per se, but when they are presented as such by key political actors, they become such (Buzan, 1998). That is, securitization is indeed a political and communicative process where language is strategically used to redefine policy priorities.

Ole Wæver (1995) has moved the concept of the speech act into the political arena, in which political elites, in their official discourse, try to shift an issue from ordinary political debate into the realm of "emergency action. This process can only be successful if it is accepted by the audience. The securitization process is therefore not just a process of threat identification, but also one in which influential actors are able to make domestic institutions, the public and the government see a need for special measures. This insight has greatly broadened the scope of security studies because of the fact that political discourse itself has the potential to become a security issue in itself.

Later researchers have fine-tuned the Copenhagen School framework by adding greater attention to the social and political environment in which securitization takes place. Balzac (2011) also suggests that securitization is not just a linguistic process but a strategy that is influenced by institutional contexts, historical experiences, media narratives and public perceptions. Thus, elite discourse has an influence not just from political power, but from the interplay with domestic political institutions, nationalistic ideologies, and communication networks. Historical rivalry, territorial disputes, and national identity have a significant impact on the political discussions related to water, especially in South Asia, where the broader understanding of this issue is relevant.

Elite Discourse is at the heart of constructivist views on International Relations. Constructivist scholars have suggested that the state's interests are not a priori but are rather socially constituted by ideas, identities and discourse (Hopf, 2002). The definition of national interests and the perception of external threats is shaped by the actions and words of the political elites, which include prime ministers, presidents, cabinet ministers, the military leadership, diplomats and senior bureaucrats. They deliver speeches, conduct interviews, participate in parliamentary debates, draft policies and documents and engage in diplomatic talks, which all contribute to the public perception of security concerns and governmental reactions. Thus, discourse is not only about description, but it also is an active production of reality.

In the field of environmental security research, the term 'securitization theory' has been used more and more with regard to natural resources, especially water. Water scarcity was often linked to an inevitability of interstate conflict and as such the popular and controversial notion of "water wars" emerged. But empirical studies by Aaron have undermined the deterministic view by showing that there are patterns of cooperation over shared river basins in history, rather than patterns of armed conflict (Wolf, 2007). While water may be a source of political tensions, Wolf contends that there are often diplomacy and institutional means to reduce conflict. His results highlight the need to look into political narratives, not necessarily violence, when real estate is in short supply.

Building on this research, Zeitoun and Warner (2006) added the term hydro-hegemony, which refers to the influence of unequal power relations on transboundary water governance. (Zeitoun, 2006) Dominant riparian states may use legal, political, economic and diplomatic tools to modify the treatment of rivers without infringing upon international law, their framework says. This analysis is important for the understanding of India-Pakistan relations in the sense that it reveals the fact that perceptions of fairness and security are not necessarily symmetrical even when the formal treaty obligations are still in place. The issue of the hydro-hegemony is often raised by Pakistani scholars pointing out that India is on the upstream side and hence enjoys the strategic benefits, while many Indian scholars claim that India's projects are technically compliant with the agreement. The contrasting interpretations highlight the impact of discourse on perceptions of threat irrespective of hydrological realities.

The securitization of transboundary rivers has increased in recent years because of climate change, as indicated by the recent literature on environmental security. Barnett and Adger argue that political stories of vulnerability and national insecurity are exacerbated by climate variability, glacier retreat, rising population and rising demand of food production. (Barnett, 2007) Likewise, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC., 2021) has singled-out the Himalayan region as being especially prone to shifts in precipitation and glacier melt, both of which have implications for the Indus Basin. Climate change does not automatically increase the likelihood of interstate conflict, but it does give political elites new discursive tools to use for articulating water as an existential threat and to justify more extreme measures by the state.

The theory of securitization can be applied to the IWT to have a nuanced understanding of the growing politicization of water since 2014. The Uri attack and Indian leaders' statements on the maximization of India's treaty-allocated waters and that "blood and water cannot come together" are examples of attempts to redefine water from a resource for development to one for national security. The Pakistani political and military establishment, on the other hand, has always considered any alleged change in the framework of the treaty as a direct attack on the agricultural economy of Pakistan, its food security and even its national survival. The securitization process has been responsible, through these reciprocal narratives, for the growing securitization of water and it has thus become clear how combining securitization theory with the analysis of elite discourse is able to explain this phenomenon.

In general, the theoretical literature suggests that the politics of water can neither be understood solely from hydrological data, nor by legal agreements. Instead, the nature of political

communication, strategic identity, institutional power and audience reception is a key to establishing whether shared water resources are viewed as a vehicle of cooperation or conflict. Thus, the Securitization Theory is used as the main analytical tool to analyze the process of securitization of water in the light of the Indus Waters Treaty between India and Pakistan from 2014-2026.

Research Gap

While there is a large body of scholarship that has focused on the legal, hydrological, institutional and hydro-political aspects of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), comparatively little work has been done on the role of elite political discourse in the securitization of water in the recent India-Pakistan context. The majority of previous studies focus on political rhetoric as something contextual rather than a central component that can influence perceptions of security and policymaking and responses. Few, if any, combine the Copenhagen School Securitization Theory with an analysis of elite rhetoric. This study is designed to fill this gap by exploring how political, military and diplomatic elites of India and Pakistan have turned water into a national security issue between 2014 and 2026, and to offer a theoretically informed perspective on the interplay between elite discourse, transboundary water governance and regional security in South Asia.

Research Methodology

This research utilized a qualitative, interpretive, theory-driven abductive method to analyze the securitization of water within the framework of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) between India and Pakistan from 2014 to 2026. The Securitization Theory from the Copenhagen School offered the analytical framework that directed the identification of securitizing agents, referent entities, existential dangers, audiences, securitizing actions, and exceptional measures. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used to explore how political and institutional figures represented water as a security danger through language and framing techniques. Data were chosen through purposive and critical-juncture sampling from official statements, speeches, parliamentary debates, government reports, diplomatic documents, credible media, and pertinent scholarly literature. The years 2014-2026 encompassed significant events, such as the political transition in India in 2014, the Uri (2016) and Pulwama (2019) incidents, India's 2023 notice for IWT modification, and the 2025 developments concerning the suspension after Pahalgam. Documents were considered when they directly pertained to water security, the IWT, or relevant securitizing discourse and actions, whereas duplicates, irrelevant, and non-credible sources were omitted. The completed corpus was recorded based on the number, kind, year, nation, and language of sources to guarantee clarity and comparative fairness. The research differentiated between securitizing actions and effective securitization. Elite discourse was analyzed to pinpoint securitizing moves, while audience approval or disapproval was evaluated through parliamentary debates, media narratives, public or societal reactions, and existing opinion evidence. Subsequent analysis focused on extraordinary or exceptional policy measures to assess if securitizing discourse led to significant securitization results. Due to varying data accessibility in India and Pakistan, source triangulation and comparable analytical categories were utilized instead of presuming identical source availability. Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, and English materials were taken into account, with a focus on original-language sources and consistent translations to maintain politically important meanings.

Regional Dynamics and Geopolitical Analysis

Securitization of water with the help of Indus Waters Treaty between 2014 and 2026 has to be looked at from a hydrological/environmental standpoint as well as a political standpoint. Instead, it is indicative of South Asia's security landscape, shifting geopolitical coalitions, domestic political discourses, and strategic rivalry in the region. In these days, political leaders in both

Pakistan and India began to view water as a national survival, sovereignty and strategic sense matter. As a result, the Indus Waters Treaty, which was once a shining example of transboundary water cooperation in the world, came to be seen as a space of geopolitical conflict.

India-Pakistan Strategic Rivalry and Water Politics

In the wake of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in India since 2014, water has become increasingly linked to the country's strategic discourse in the context of national security and counterterrorism. After the 2016 Uri attack, Prime Minister Modi said "blood and water cannot flow together," which has completely shifted the political narrative in India regarding the treaty. Water is no longer being seen as a developmental tool but a means of strategic pressure against Pakistan. Under the treaty, India has rights on western rivers and the 2019 Pulwama attack further strengthened this narrative, urging Indian policymakers to push for hydroelectric projects on western rivers and maximum utilization of India's rights under the treaty. Following the attack on Pahalgam which was launched in April 2025, India stopped participating in the Indus Waters Treaty, claiming the nature of the bilateral relations had changed due to the cross-border terrorism allegedly being sponsored by Pakistan. Indian government later confirmed the treaty would stay in abeyance until Pakistan resolves Indian security concerns. These developments in Pakistan were seen as a deliberate effort of weaponization of water. It was a common refrain in Pakistan that any interference with the Indus River system was an international law violation and if that was the case, then the agricultural economy and food security of the nation would be threatened, and Pakistan's very survival would be called into question. The security dimension of the problem was reinforced in various official statements by calling water Pakistan's "lifeline". The Pakistan government has recently accused India of cutting the flow in the Chenab River and said that unilateral measures are illegal under the treaty. (Gibran Naiyyar Peshimam, 2025)

Water as an Instrument of Geopolitical Leverage

The geopolitical landscape in the region shows that water is now increasingly becoming a 'weapon' used in addition to a natural resource. Classical geopolitical theories have set the focus on resource control to achieve the greatest national power. In this context, the geographical location of India, upstream, gives India a structural edge over Pakistan. The IWT limits India's ability to divert the water of the western rivers, but in political debates, hydroelectric projects like those on the Chenab and Jhelum are being portrayed as tools for strategic leverage. Pakistan views these projects as development projects more than anything else and as potential tools that could be used to influence flows in the downstream area in times of political sensitivity. The securitization framework formulated by the Copenhagen School provides some insight into this shift. In both countries, political elites have turned water into an existential security threat, making use of speeches, parliamentary debates, diplomatic statements and media narratives to achieve this. This has led to increasing national security and regional stability issues arising from technical issues in dam construction, reservoir management and data sharing. (Godara, 2024)

Regional Security Complex in South Asia

The theory of Regions Security Complexity (RSCT) of Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver is suitable to explain the current Indo-Pak water politics. The RSCT maintains this is because political, military, economic and environmental issues are all deeply intertwined and are most severe in states that are geographically close. South Asia is one of the most conflict-prone regional security complexes in the world, in which conflicts about Kashmir, terrorism, nuclear deterrence and water security reinforce each other. Water conflicts seldom arise alone, but rather in the context of wider patterns of strategic competition. The Indus Waters Treaty was brought into discussion again every time

there was a major political or military crisis, such as the Uri crisis (2016), the Pulwama attack (2019), the Balakot crisis (2019), the Pahalgam attack (2025) and the ensuing diplomatic crisis (2026). The frequent interdependencies point to a new reality of water security being a part of traditional military and political security in South Asia. (Botić, 2026)

China's Growing Strategic Role

China is becoming a major geopolitical player in the Indus Basin. Beijing has been able to create huge strategic and economic ties with Pakistan's infrastructure and energy sector under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Water security is fundamental for the development and expansion of agriculture, hydropower generation and economic development of Pakistan, which in turn will help CPEC to fulfil its objectives. At the same time, Beijing has a significant amount of hydrological leverage in Asia due to the upstream control over the Tibetan Plateau, the source of many major Asian rivers. China, which is not a signatory to the Indus Waters Treaty, has nonetheless changed the strategic landscape of South Asia in the region as a whole. India now sees the growing ties with Pakistan by China as a part of a large-scale geopolitical competition, whereas Pakistan sees China as a strategic and diplomatic partner to help balance the Indian influence in Pakistan. As a result, the water issue is no longer just an India-Pakistan issue but has become an Indo-Pacific strategic issue and a multifaceted power dynamic one as well. (Register, 2026)

Climate Change as a Geopolitical Threat Multiplier

The Indus Basin has become increasingly more geopolitically important with the occurrence of climate change. The glacier retreat in the Himalayas and Karakoram, shifts in precipitation, frequent flooding events, longer droughts and higher temperatures have added to the uncertainty about future water availability. In many countries, environmental stress has contributed to securitized political narratives, rather than to increased cooperation. Nationalist rhetoric is fueled by the political elite's increasing blame for domestic water shortages on outside forces rather than on governance problems. As such, water scarcity caused by climate change is a “threat multiplier” that exacerbates pre-existing political tensions and conflicts and does not generate new ones. With dwindling freshwater supplies, competition over transboundary rivers is expected to grow, unless there is strengthening of cooperative institutional mechanisms. (Molden, Shrestha, Immerzeel, & Maharjan, 2022)

International Institutions and the Future of the Indus Waters Treaty

The World Bank has never been a treaty enforcer but has served as a facilitator. But the recent conflicts over the Kishanganga and rattle hydroelectric power plants, arbitration cases and India's withdrawal from the agreement have revealed serious institutional shortcomings. The dispute has also been complicated by recent international legal proceedings with differing interpretations of the arbitration mechanisms and obligations set out in the treaty, which have exacerbated the diplomatic dispute between the two countries. Climate-related uncertainties are increasing the need for a treaty to be more effective in the future, which largely relies on the revitalization of diplomatic activity, institutional modernization, enhanced exchange of hydrological data, and the development of mechanisms to manage uncertainties. If those changes aren't made, the treaty could continue to be increasingly politicized and lose its value as a confidence-building arrangement between two nuclear powers. (Sanan, 2025)

Interpreting the Securitization Discourse

The analysis shows that securitization of water changed the geopolitical scenario within South Asia in an altogether different manner between 2014 and 2026. The idea of water as a proper tool of discourse was being propagated in elite circles in India, which linked it increasingly with the

nation's security and counter-terrorism efforts, while water-as-a-tool-to-save-the-nation was being propagated in elite circles in Pakistan, which attributed the protection of the Indus River system as an existential need for the nation's survival. A distinction between technical cooperation and political dimension of water was created in these securitized competitive narratives.

Additionally, regional geopolitics such as the Kashmir issue, nuclear stand-off, China's strategic presence through CPEC, climate change, and multipolar dynamics have combined to make the Indus Basin a strategic asset of paramount importance. The evidence indicates that water has become a multidimensional geopolitical asset, and affects water diplomacy, economic stability, regional security, and interstate relations. With the absence of mutual DE securitization by both countries in the form of confidence building measures, institutional dialogue and climate-oriented water governance, the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) is likely to be susceptible to political crises and regional instability.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the results of this study:

1. **Revitalize Bilateral Dialogue:** Pakistan and India should commence diplomatic dialogue on Indus Waters Treaty in a structured manner, despite the ongoing political differences. Governance over water resources should not be affected by military and political crises, in order to maintain regional stability.
2. **Strengthen the Permanent Indus Commission:** The Commission needs to be modernized through broadening its technical mandate, making the meetings more frequent, more transparent and adding the domains of climate adaptation, water management of groundwater resources, and disaster risk reduction.
3. **Promote Desecuritization of Water:** Water should not be treated as a weapon or an instrument of political pressure and coercion by political leaders or policy makers. Rather, the official discourse should focus on cooperation, water management and sustainability, and mutual dependence.
4. **Enhance Joint Scientific Cooperation:** Joint expert committees and academic ties between both countries should be developed to establish collaborative mechanisms for hydrological monitoring, glacier studies, flood forecasting, sediment management and adaptation to climate change.
5. **Develop Climate-Responsive Treaty Mechanisms:** There is a need to institutionalize the IWT to respond to new environmental issues such as glacier retreat, changes in river flows, long droughts, extreme flooding and water quality control.
6. **Strengthen Third-Party Technical Facilitation:** Neutral technical facilitation, accepted by both sides, by international organizations, including the World Bank and relevant United Nations agencies, can be used to enhance the process of building confidence, technical dialogue, and dispute resolution, within the framework of respecting the bilateral nature of the treaty.

Conclusion

This study analyzed the securitizations of water through the lens of elite discourse in the context of Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) for the timeframe between 2014 and 2026. Based on the Copenhagen School's Securitization Theory, the study concluded that the political and institutional power elites of both the countries (Pakistan and India) increasingly began to treat water as a question of national security instead of a natural resource that was shared. The treaty thus evolved from being considered a tool of technical cooperation to a matter of strategic and geopolitical dispute. The findings indicate that key political and security events such as the Uri attack (2016), the Pulwama attack (2019) and the Pahalgam attack (2025) had a significant impact on the elite

narratives on both sides. The leaders of both countries then began to associate water management with national security and counter-terrorism issues, while the Pakistanis constantly framed the Indus River system as a lifeline for the nation, in terms of food security and economic stability. The rival stories exacerbated mistrust and limited possibilities for positive bilateral dialogue. The study goes on to suggest that the securitization of water has been further bolstered by broader regional dynamics in South Asia such as Kashmir issue, climate change, population growth and changing geopolitical configurations in the region. Water scarcity has become a greater concern due to climate related challenges, making water security a more prominent topic of discussion rather than fostering positive cooperative management of water resources. Overall, the research conclusively highlights that though the Indus Waters Treaty has been one of the longest lasting transboundary water treaties in the world, the current political and institutional challenges that it is facing are unprecedented. The study puts forward a case for exploring collaborative, climate-responsive and institutionally robust water governance, and moving away from securitized narratives, if water security is to be achieved in the region over the long-term. The key to maintaining the IWT as a cornerstone of peace and water security between Pakistan and India is sustained diplomatic engagement, confidence building measures, and effective implementation of the treaty.

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