

REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR- 59238

Title: Hydro-Hegemony or Institutional Cooperation? Evaluating the Role of the Indus Waters Treaty in Managing India-Pakistan Water Relations.

Recommendation:

Accept after minor revision

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality		✓		
Techn. Quality			✓	
Clarity			✓	
Significance	✓			

Reviewer's ID: Abdul Haseeb Mir

Detailed Reviewer's Report

The manuscript addresses a central debate in transboundary water governance: whether formal international agreements effectively constrain the hydro-hegemonic tendencies of powerful upstream states, or whether they merely provide a legal façade that disguises persistent power asymmetries. Using the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) between India and Pakistan as a primary case study, the author examines how institutional cooperation and hydro-hegemonic dynamics interact within one of the world's most politically charged transboundary river basins.

The paper adopts the analytical framework of hydro-hegemony developed by Zeitoun and Warner (2006), which draws on Gramscian concepts of hegemony and Lukes' three dimensions of power. This framework posits that dominant riparian states exercise leverage through a combination of hard and soft power, including geography, economic capacity, technical expertise, infrastructure control, and the ability to set the political agenda. Set against this theoretical backdrop is the literature on institutional cooperation, which argues that formal treaties, structured dispute-resolution mechanisms, and joint commissions can constrain state behavior, reduce uncertainty, and establish predictable operational rules even between asymmetric powers.

The main objective of the paper is to determine the extent to which the Indus Waters Treaty has successfully limited Indian hydro-hegemonic behavior while fostering durable institutional cooperation with Pakistan since 1960. Through a review of secondary literature, legal filings, arbitration awards, and historical accounts, the author traces the evolution of the treaty from its colonial origins and the post-

International Journal of Advanced Research

Publisher's Name: Jana Publication and Research LLP

www.journalijar.com

REVIEWER'S REPORT

Partition canal water crisis of 1948 to modern disputes over hydroelectric developments on the western rivers.

The study concludes that hydro-hegemony and institutional cooperation are not mutually exclusive; rather, they coexist within the Indus Basin. The treaty has imposed genuine legal and operational restraints on India through river-allocation formulas, mandatory data exchange, the Permanent Indus Commission, and third-party dispute settlement procedures. However, India's upstream geography, coupled with its superior financial, technical, and engineering capabilities, continues to grant it structural advantages that the treaty cannot fully offset. Furthermore, the paper highlights how emerging challenges—such as climate-induced hydrological variability, groundwater depletion, population pressure, and the growing securitisation of water—are straining the treaty's rigid, 1960s-era framework.

2. Comprehensive Evaluation of Content and Themes

Historical Context and Institutional Design

The manuscript provides a clear historical narrative detailing the origins of transboundary water tension in the subcontinent. It correctly emphasizes that the Partition of 1947 drew an international boundary through an integrated, colonial-era irrigation system without regard for hydraulic infrastructure. This geographic decision left critical headworks on the Indian side while downstream canals fed Pakistani agriculture, creating an immediate structural vulnerability for Pakistan.

The analysis of the early negotiations mediated by the World Bank accurately points out that the resulting treaty achieved peace through territorial separation rather than joint basin management. By granting India control over the eastern rivers (Ravi, Beas, Sutlej) and assigning primary rights over the western rivers (Indus, Jhelum, Chenab) to Pakistan, the treaty minimized the need for complex, daily cross-border operational coordination. The paper rightfully identifies this structural choice as both the treaty's greatest strength—enabling its immediate political feasibility—and its primary long-term limitation, as it built a framework centered on division rather than integrated river basin management.

Institutional Resilience Versus Structural Power Asymmetry

One of the paper's strongest sections is its nuanced appraisal of treaty resilience. The author documents how the treaty's core mechanisms, particularly the Permanent Indus Commission, survived three major wars between India and Pakistan (1965, 1971, and 1999) while maintaining routine administrative communications and data exchanges.

However, the paper avoids the common pitfall of equating mere survival with deep, collaborative governance. By applying the hydro-hegemony framework, the author illustrates how India's upstream position allows it to construct run-of-river hydroelectric projects on the western rivers that meet legal criteria while still generating anxiety downstream. The review highlights that information asymmetry

REVIEWER'S REPORT

remains a significant source of power: because India designs and controls the upstream infrastructure, Pakistan is frequently placed in a reactive posture, struggling to obtain sufficient pre-construction technical data to evaluate downstream impacts.

Case Studies of Hydroelectric Disputes

The manuscript effectively uses three major hydroelectric disputes—Baglihar, Kishenganga, and Ratle—to illustrate the operational limits of the treaty's three-tier dispute-resolution system.

1. **Baglihar:** The analysis details how the 2007 Neutral Expert determination settled specific technical parameters regarding dam design, serving as an example of the treaty's institutional mechanisms working as intended.
2. **Kishenganga:** The discussion of the 2013 Court of Arbitration award demonstrates how international legal mechanisms can balance upstream development rights with downstream environmental protection, such as setting minimum flow requirements.
3. **Ratle:** The examination of the ongoing Ratle dispute highlights a critical procedural vulnerability: the emergence of parallel, overlapping proceedings before both a Neutral Expert and a Court of Arbitration. The paper clearly explains how jurisdictional disagreements between the state parties threaten to undermine the coherence of the treaty's legal architecture.

Emerging Pressures and Securitisation

The paper offers a strong forward-looking assessment of contemporary challenges. It notes that the treaty was negotiated based on historical surface-water flow data and remains silent on crucial modern concerns such as climate change, glacier retreat, groundwater depletion, and basin-wide ecological health. The recent trend toward the securitisation of water—illustrated by India's decision to hold the treaty in abeyance following security events—is correctly identified as a strategic maneuver that links water governance directly to broader geopolitical relations.

3. Specific Recommendations for Improvement

While the manuscript is conceptually sound and well-organized, several targeted enhancements would significantly increase its scholarly rigor and policy relevance prior to publication.

Clarify Political Timelines and Recent Context

The paper references recent political developments and legal proceedings, including India's decision to hold the treaty in abeyance and the 2025 Neutral Expert rulings. The author should ensure that the timeline of these recent events is presented with absolute chronological clarity. Explicitly distinguishing between historical precedent, ongoing legal processes, and recent political announcements will prevent reader confusion regarding the active status of the treaty's institutions.

Expand the Analysis of Groundwater and Ecological Governance

REVIEWER'S REPORT

Although the author identifies groundwater depletion and environmental flow management as blind spots in the original 1960 agreement, these issues deserve a more detailed analysis. The manuscript would benefit from a dedicated discussion on how the massive over-extraction of shared aquifers in the Punjab region impacts overall water security. Expanding on the legal precedent set by the Kishenganga award regarding environmental flows would also strengthen the paper's discussion on modernizing transboundary water law.

Deepen the Critique of the Shared Responsibility and Data-Sharing Protocols

The manuscript repeatedly notes that data sharing is a point of friction. To make this argument more concrete, the author should elaborate on the specific gaps in the current data-exchange framework. For instance, discussing the lack of real-time telemetry, automated flow-monitoring stations, and standardized format requirements for project notifications would provide tangible backing to the theoretical claims about information asymmetry.

Provide Explicit Guidelines for Dispute-Resolution Hierarchy

The discussion on the Ratle project highlights the crisis of parallel proceedings between the Neutral Expert and the Court of Arbitration. The author should expand the analysis of how Article IX of the treaty can be interpreted or amended to establish a clear, mandatory sequence between technical expert determination and legal arbitration. Offering concrete procedural solutions to this jurisdictional deadlock will make the paper's conclusion far more valuable to international legal scholars.

Enhance Methodological Reflection

The manuscript currently relies entirely on secondary literature, legal documents, and news reports. Adding a brief, explicit paragraph in the methodology section acknowledging the limitations of relying on publicly available secondary sources—and discussing how access to primary diplomatic archives or field interviews with river commissioners might alter or refine the conclusions—would improve the paper's academic transparency.

4. Final Recommendation and Conclusion

Final Decision: Accept with Minor Revisions.

The manuscript presents a balanced, well-reasoned, and theoretically grounded evaluation of the Indus Waters Treaty. It successfully avoids binary conclusions, demonstrating instead how hydro-hegemonic power asymmetries and formal institutional cooperation continuously interact and adapt within the Indus Basin. The paper's structure is logical, its review of case studies is informative, and its theoretical framework is applied consistently throughout.

By addressing the recommendations outlined above—specifically by clarifying recent political timelines, expanding the discussion on groundwater and environmental flows, detailing technical data-sharing gaps,

International Journal of Advanced Research

Publisher's Name: Jana Publication and Research LLP

www.journalijar.com

REVIEWER'S REPORT

and refining the methodological reflections—the author will produce an impactful contribution to the literature on transboundary water governance and South Asian hydropolitics.