



**Center for Global & Strategic Studies  
Islamabad**

**Indian Doctrine of using Water as a Strategic  
Weapon against Pakistan**

By Prof. Dr. Muhammad Khan, Member Board of Experts,  
Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS),  
Islamabad



*Published on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020*

Ever since Pakistan came into being, India started creating problems for its very survival as an independent state. In October 1947, India initiated war against Pakistan after occupation of Jammu and Kashmir. It refused to give its share of finances and other assets, as agreed in partition plan. In April 1948, India stopped



water flowing downstream from the head works to various canals which were supporting the vast agricultural network of Pakistan. The canal based irrigation system of Pakistan is considered as one of the oldest and the largest integrated water network in the world. The historical record shows that, the Upper Bari Doab Canal (UBDC) was originally built by famous Muslim Emperor of India, Shah Jehan in 1693. This canal system was used to carry water of River Ravi from Madhopur to Lahore.

Later in the history, improvements were made in the canals system under Sikh Rule in Punjab under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Maharaja Ranjit was the popular leader of the Sikh Empire in first half of the 19th century. The Sirhind Canal is yet



another large irrigation canal that carried water from the Sutlej River was inaugurated in 1882, during British era. During the British rule, the canal based irrigational was further improved and expanded. Under British India, Punjab became the largest canal based irrigation state and fruit basket, providing food to entire Subcontinent. During the British era, the areas forming part of west Punjab (Pakistani Punjab) had extensive and well-built canal network, thus used to produce maximum agricultural products. These canals were fed by the river water, channelled through several water head works. As a result of manipulated division of Punjab by Boundary Commission under Radcliff Award, all these water head works came under Indian control and India stopped the water from its controlled head works into the Pakistani canal system.



The stoppage of water, flowing into the canals of Punjab, which used to irrigate the vast agricultural created a crises situation in Pakistan. Pakistan had to pay for the water; it received from Indian controlled water head works. This was the first strategic usage of water by India as a weapon against Pakistan. Later on as a result of bilateral meetings between Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan and Indian Premier Nehru, temporary arrangements were made to resume water supply to Pakistan. Nevertheless, the control of head works remained under India for years until World Bank brokered the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) in 1960. Thereafter, Pakistan delinked its canals from eastern rivers and devised a new water feeding system from western rivers.

As agreed between Pakistan and Indian in IWT-1960, Pakistan was given exclusive rights over water of three western rivers; India, Jhelum and Chenab. Three eastern rivers; Ravi, Beas and Sutlej were given to India. Apparently, this was the best arrangement in the era of cold war. It was a unique agreement over water distribution, since world-wide there have been precedence of division of water, rather division of rivers between upper and lower riparian states. In order to manage the IWT, both states established Indus Commission which worked well till 1980s. Nevertheless, since India is the upper riparian state and also an illegal occupant of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, who inhabitants wanted to join Pakistan. In the late 1980s, India started manipulated with the water of western rivers, whose water was dedicated exclusively for Pakistan. It started planning and constructing dams, water storages and hydroelectric projects over these rives.



Over the years, India started manipulating with the water of Indus, Jhelum and Chenab against the essence of IWT-1960. It constructed over a dozen large and small dams on all three rivers



and water diversion of twenty kilometres on Neelum River a tributary of Jhelum River. It constructed two major dams and hydroelectric projects; Bagliar dam on Chenab River and Kishanganga at Neelum River. Construction of dams, hydroelectric projects and water storages, reduced the down-stream flow of water, which is a serious violation of IWT-1960. This all is being done by India through a well-planned strategy, which aims to exploit Pakistan, desertification of its huge agricultural land. The strategy will constrain and starve the agrarian economy of Pakistan. As an upper riparian, India is using the water as a strategic weapon to coerce its agrarian economy.

Since last few years, there is change in framing the water issue by New Delhi. In 2016, Indian Prime Minister Modi said “Blood and Water cannot flow at the same time” . This statement came immediately after the Uri terror attack, which Indian RAW planned to defame Pakistan, once Islamabad was planning to refer the massive human rights violations in IIOJK to United Nations, Human Rights Council. In order to subvert the Pakistani plan, the terror attack was planned on a military headquarters in occupied Uri area to blame Pakistan. Later on, it was revealed that, it was a fake attack by Indian spying network to stop Pakistan from making a reference at UN. It is worth mentioning that, sequel to the Shahadat of Burhan Wani, India massively used pellet guns and weapons of prohibited bore against the



innocent Kashmiri youth in IIOJK. Pakistan wanted to make a strong case against Indian violation of human rights in IIOJK.

Indian Prime Minister, Narindra Modi while addressing the peasants in Haryana state said in 2017 that, all water from Indus River System belongs to India thus, not a drop of it should flow to Pakistan. This was a clear threat to Pakistan, which can be inferred as a future Indian strategy to stop water of western rivers. All-together India has formulated an offensive strategy over the water of western rivers. India is using the IWT treaty as a bargaining chip against Pakistan for the consolidation of its illegal occupation of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Indian leadership has threatened many a times to abrogate the Indus Water Treaty.

Alongside many other problems, India has used the water as a strategic weapon against Pakistan. Water issues between India and Pakistan are taking dangerous shift in their bilateral relationship. Through manipulation of the water of western rivers, India aims at desertification of Pakistan. It is an indirect war against Pakistan where water is used as a strategic weapon. There is an immediate need to counter this Indian strategic usage of water to implement its hegemonic design against Pakistan. Pakistan must formulate a long-term counter-strategy to secure the water of western rivers as per IWT-1960. There should not be any renegotiations over IWT-1960, as some of the Indian leaders have been signalling since last few years. Besides, Pakistan must make arrangements for the security of water catchment areas and water sources within its geographical territories.