



# **Pahalgam Attack and India's Actions: A Strategic Analysis**

Special Report

prepared by India Program, with inputs from  
practitioners and experts.

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## Key takeaways

- *“Indus water treaty disproportionately favored India.” Dr. Hassan Abbass*
- *“Pakistan should see this crisis as an opportunity to renegotiate Indus Water Treaty with India” Dr. Hassan Abbass*
- *“Pakistan forfeited prior-use rights and legal recourse under pressure from the World Bank” Dr. Hassan Abbass*
- *“Pakistan’s narrative is not effectively reaching or persuading global audiences. Legal arguments in Pakistan’s defense are being undermined by the complex information environment, where manipulated content and edited statements—such as those of the Defence Minister—are distorting perceptions and making legal positioning more difficult” Dr. Serena Hussain*
- *“India’s aggressive posturing, including protests abroad (e.g., outside the Pakistani embassy in London) that weaponize religious identity (e.g., Israeli flags vs. Palestinian flags)” Dr. Serena Hussain*
- *“The Indus Waters Treaty contains no provision allowing for unilateral suspension or termination. Article 12.4 explicitly requires mutual agreement for any changes to the treaty, meaning India’s actions directly breach this core requirement”. Mr. Jamal Aziz*
- *“Termination of the Simla Agreement and provision of provincial status of Gilgit-Baltistan can be the policy options for Pakistan” Mr. Jamal Aziz*

- *“Understanding the flow of major rivers like the Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab requires a granular look at their tributaries in both India and Pakistan. Only through accurate, empirical tracking can we assess the impact of altered water flows and potential flooding.”*  
Dr. Waleed Rasool
- *Blocking water at Uri is geophysically unfeasible due to the area's flat terrain. Attempting to do so would result in massive flooding in Kashmir. While water flow before Uri is relatively calm, it accelerates after being joined by several tributaries—Verinag, Vishnu, Lidar from Pahalgam, and the Kauru River—near Udi before entering Muzaffarabad. These natural dynamics must be accounted for in any policy or diplomatic conversation regarding river management.* Dr. Waleed Rasool
- *The Kashmiri diaspora continues to face suppression and statelessness, with many unable to return home or even speak out. These individuals often live in limbo, facing statelessness, limited access to education, healthcare, and employment, and with no clear route to legal recognition or stability. Given the historical and political complexity surrounding Kashmir, it is crucial that international bodies—especially those representing the Muslim world like the OIC—take special steps to protect and support these vulnerable populations. They can play pivotal role in voicing concerns of Kashmiris”* Dr. Mubeen Shah
- *The recent incident in Pahalgam, South Kashmir, highlights a major security concern. Despite being located 137 kilometers from the Line of Control (LoC), militants managed to bypass dozens of checkpoints and cross-significant natural barriers like the Jhelum and Lidder rivers while armed”* Dr. Ashraf Wani

## 1. Introduction

The Pahalgam attack on 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 2025, marked the deadliest militant assault in IIOJK since 2019, killing at least 26 tourists, most of whom it is reported, were civilians enjoying the scenic valley. This brutality not only claimed innocent lives but directly challenged the Indian government's narrative of normalcy in the region. The attack's symbolic timing during peak tourist season highlighted serious security lapses in a territory under direct federal control.

In response, India swiftly launched a series of punitive measures against Pakistan, including closing the main border crossing, suspending the Indus Waters Treaty, and expelling Pakistani diplomats. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh vowed a strong retaliation, with analysts predicting options ranging from cross-border strikes to calibrated airstrikes. However, any military action comes with the risk of escalation between the two nuclear-armed neighbors, evoking memories of past conflicts like those in 2016 and 2019.

Investigations linked the attackers to safehouses in Pakistan's Muzaffarabad and Karachi, drawing parallels with the 26/11 Mumbai attacks. Intelligence agencies pointed to a state-supported conspiracy involving Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammad, with digital footprints and sophisticated weaponry underscoring an organized, remote-controlled operation. The militant group The Resistance Front (TRF), believed to be an offshoot of LeT, claimed responsibility for the attack. India's suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty could have serious long-term consequences for Pakistan, particularly affecting agriculture in Punjab, given the rivers' crucial role in irrigation.

Pakistan reacted sharply, calling it an act of "water warfare" and announcing its own retaliatory steps, including shutting down trade routes and airspace with India. The regional dynamics are further complicated by China's historic influence in Indo-Pak tensions, with strategic experts warning that any military escalation could invite Chinese posturing along the disputed borders, as seen historically during the 1965 Indo-Pak war.

Iran also offered to mediate between India and Pakistan, citing deep cultural ties. Meanwhile, Pakistan proposed an international probe involving Russia and China, rejecting Indian accusations. The attack has also triggered communal and particularly anti-Kashmiri backlash across India, with Kashmiri students facing harassment and violence in various states. The region of IIOJK, already strained by militancy and political tensions, now appears even more precarious, with the risks of conflict escalation looming heavily over South Asia. India Program at the Institute of Regional Studies held a roundtable discussion on the repercussions of suspending Indus Water Treaty and critical evaluation of claims made by India, on the basis of which India attacked Pakistan on May 7, 2025. In the following section, insights drawn from the roundtable are presented below:

## 2. The Indus Waters Treaty an Imbalanced Agreement: Historical Conflicts and Negotiation Challenges

Dr. Hasssan Abbass gave a detailed analysis of Indus Water Treaty. His insights are briefly discussed below. India unilaterally suspended or held in abeyance the Indus Waters Treaty, though such a term does not appear in the treaty, creating ambiguity about its legal meaning. The water dispute between India and Pakistan dates back to 1948 when India closed irrigation canals flowing into Pakistan after the expiry of a standstill agreement on March 31, 1948.

India's move, ordered by East Punjab's chief minister and supported by Nehru, effectively cut off water to Pakistani civilians and agricultural areas, which some argue could qualify as a war crime under the Geneva Convention. The Dominion Accord was signed later in 1948, temporarily restoring water flow to Pakistan in exchange for payment, with repeated threats from India to shut it down again.

The international dimension of the dispute grew when Pakistan threatened to go to the International Court, prompting India to engage in further negotiations. In 1951, David Lilienthal, a U.S. lawyer with high-level government experience, visited India and Pakistan and wrote two influential essays in Collier's Magazine that shaped international perception and policy.

Lilienthal dismissed the plebiscite in Kashmir and framed the water dispute as a technical and financial issue, suggesting it be resolved by engineers and financial managers, not political or legal channels. He proposed a Tennessee Valley Authority-style integrated river management system



for the Indus basin and emphasized the Cold War context, warning the U.S. not to "lose" India to communism.

Lilienthal also warned that if Pakistan went to court and won the water dispute, it could trigger a war, possibly drawing in global powers—a scenario he compared to the Korean War. Following Lilienthal's recommendations, he wrote to World Bank President Eugene Black, who then invited both India and Pakistan to use the Bank's offices for negotiations.

The World Bank imposed two key conditions for negotiations: country could neither go to international courts nor claim prior water use rights. After Liaquat Ali Khan's assassination in October 1951, the World Bank formalized these negotiation rules, significantly weakening Pakistan's legal advantage.

The initial positions in 1953: Pakistan wanted to keep all of the western rivers and allow India limited use of the eastern rivers; India demanded all of the eastern rivers and a share of the western rivers.

Critics argue the final treaty disproportionately favored India. Despite initially demanding only 100% of eastern rivers and 7% of western rivers, India also gained rights to release wastewater and floodwater into Pakistan without liability. India was granted the right to discharge untreated industrial and municipal waste through four major drains into Pakistan, worsening water quality and impacting agriculture and health.

Pakistan also had to maintain these wastewater drains and accommodate increased Indian discharge if needed, creating a long-term environmental and infrastructural burden. India had already constructed several water-diversion structures before the treaty was signed, violating international norms by altering river flows without the consent of the downstream country. India justified its claim over all eastern rivers citing future needs, including the massive Rajasthan Canal project for irrigating the desert, which the World Bank accepted as justification.

World Bank conditioned funding for Pakistan's major dams (Mangla and Tarbela) on Pakistan signing the treaty, effectively pressuring Pakistan into agreement. General Wheeler of the World Bank proposed a formula in 1954: India would get all of the eastern rivers, Pakistan all of the western. India accepted, and Pakistan reluctantly followed after further concessions were added in India's favor.

The treaty was finalized and signed in 1960, with Pakistan surrendering to most of India's demands and securing dam funding in return. The deal was counter-signed by the World Bank's vice



president. Many argue that this was not a genuine treaty with balanced negotiations but a politically coerced agreement heavily favoring India.

### 3. Navigating Perception Warfare: Pakistan's Strategic Challenges in the Global Narrative

Dr. Sernea Hussain, who represent Kashmiri diaspora in the United Kingdom stressed upon gearing up efforts to build Pakistani narrative. Her analysis is presented below:

The assumption "the whole world is with us" does not reflect the current global sentiment. International public discourse, particularly in Western media, appears largely unsupportive or neutral, and Pakistan's narrative is not effectively reaching or persuading global audiences. Legal arguments in Pakistan's defense are being undermined by the complex information environment, where manipulated content and edited statements—such as those of the Defence Minister—are distorting perceptions and making legal positioning more difficult.

India is actively shaping global optics through AI-altered images and emotionally charged media campaigns. This manipulation is feeding a dangerous narrative that portrays Pakistan in a highly negative light, often framing the conflict as religious rather than political or territorial. Indian mainstream and social media have amplified voices calling for hostility towards Pakistan, while balanced voices seem marginalized.

In contrast, Pakistan's response in terms of public relations and narrative control has been weak. There appears to be no unified, strategic PR campaign to challenge misinformation or to effectively present Pakistan's stance. Missed opportunities and a fragmented response have left Pakistan vulnerable to perception warfare.

The protests outside the Pakistani embassy in London illustrate the symbolic polarization at play, with Indian demonstrators displaying Israeli flags and "I am Hindu" placards, while Pakistani protesters display Palestinian flags. This reinforces a religious framing of the issue, positioning Pakistan as a Muslim state automatically aligned with terrorism—a narrative that obscures the legal and political complexities of the conflict.

Adding to this challenge, voices from within Kashmir, including academics and students, have echoed the Indian state narrative, either out of fear, caution, or misinformation. Some are even

sharing the same AI-manipulated content, which further dilutes the authenticity of local dissent and supports India's claim of normalcy. This weakens the argument that unrest in Kashmir is indigenous and rooted in genuine grievances, as India tries to externalize blame onto Pakistan.

On the ground, Kashmiris have expressed that post-abrogation frustration would inevitably lead to increased militancy. Many predicted a tipping point, describing the situation as a volcano waiting to erupt. This local unrest is being ignored by the Indian state in favor of a false narrative of peace and normalcy. The reality of widespread frustration, repression, and human rights violations in Kashmir continues to be an important yet under-emphasized aspect of the larger conflict.

Strategically, three areas need urgent attention. First, Pakistan must invest in a coherent, professional, and internationally resonant public relations strategy. Second, if India's retaliatory plans depend on infrastructure developments like dam construction, Pakistan may have a window of time to respond diplomatically or prepare strategically. Third, assumptions that China will prevent escalation might be overly optimistic; Pakistan must actively engage with China and also identify other potential allies to support, mediate, or balance the regional power dynamic.

Finally, while the mood in this discussion is sombre, diaspora perspectives reflect some cautious optimism that this could be posturing by India for domestic and international PR purposes. Nonetheless, Pakistan must act decisively on the diplomatic, strategic, and narrative fronts to mitigate risks and protect its position.

#### 4. Indus Water Treaty: Legal Options

Mr. Jamal Aziz's discussion focuses on the legal, diplomatic, and strategic dimensions of India's unilateral suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT). He emphasized that this move constitutes a clear violation not just of treaty obligations, but also of broader principles under international law, including customary international law, international environmental law, and the law of state responsibility. The Indus Waters Treaty contains no provision allowing for unilateral suspension or termination. Article 12.4 explicitly requires mutual agreement for any changes to the treaty, meaning India's actions directly breach this core requirement. The arguments presented by India—suggesting a material breach by Pakistan or a fundamental change in circumstances—do not hold up under the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. Allegations relating to demographic changes, climate change, or cross-border terrorism are vague and legally insufficient to justify

such a drastic step. In fact, previous instances of alleged terrorism and even wars have never led India to invoke treaty suspension, further weakening the credibility of its current stance.

Treaties concerning essential resources such as water have a humanitarian character and enjoy special protections. Under Article 65 of the Vienna Convention, even in the case of a material breach, such treaties cannot be suspended unilaterally. The Indus Waters Treaty, governing water access for tens of millions, clearly falls within this category. Additionally, customary international law continues to bind states even if a treaty is suspended. This includes principles such as equitable and reasonable use of shared water resources, prevention of significant harm to downstream states, and the duty of cooperation and notification. India's actions jeopardize these obligations, particularly with regard to Pakistan's environmental security and water needs. Efforts to justify the suspension as a countermeasure under the law of state responsibility are also flawed; such measures must be proportionate and based on a prior internationally wrongful act, neither of which applies here.

In terms of legal and diplomatic response, engagement with the World Bank—as a treaty facilitator—is essential. However, given India's influence, Pakistan must build an international coalition of states concerned with transboundary water management. This includes other downstream riparian states like Bangladesh, Egypt, and Vietnam, as well as NGOs and think tanks specializing in water law and climate justice. Highlighting the dangerous precedent set by India's actions can help mobilize global concern. Legally, the most effective course is to initiate arbitration under Annex G of the IWT. Even if India refuses to participate, the arbitration can proceed, and a favorable judgment would strengthen Pakistan's international standing.

Diplomatic efforts should also include raising the issue at the UN Security Council and General Assembly. Reframing the narrative from a regional dispute to one concerning global water security, humanitarian concerns, and climate change law can draw broader international support. An advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice, requested via the UN General Assembly or even through the World Bank, could significantly bolster Pakistan's legal position. Questions posed could focus on the legality of unilateral treaty suspension and its humanitarian consequences, providing global applicability to the case and limiting India's future legal options.

Strategically, the crisis presents an opportunity to recalibrate the longstanding narrative around Kashmir. India's decision to link the treaty to broader political tensions effectively internationalizes the issue, nullifying its previous insistence on bilateralism. This opens the door for Pakistan to consider formally suspending or terminating the Simla Agreement, creating a potent legal and political counter-narrative. Another strategic move involves granting provisional provincial status to Gilgit-Baltistan. This would both strengthen Pakistan's governance and send a strong message in response to India's actions. It would also allow the region to access national funding and infrastructure development, enhancing its resilience in the face of environmental and political instability.

Finally, challenging India's terrorism narrative is crucial. By presenting evidence of India's own alleged involvement in destabilizing acts and proposing a bilateral counter-terrorism mechanism, Pakistan can shift from a reactive to a proactive stance. Such a mechanism, aligned with international frameworks like UNSC Resolution 1373, would demonstrate a commitment to peace and rule-based order. This comprehensive legal, diplomatic, and strategic approach could significantly enhance Pakistan's credibility while exposing the inconsistencies in India's position.

## 5. India's 'intentional' Security Breach?

Dr. Ashraf Wani, being a refugee from Indian held Kashmir raised serious questions on 'intentional' security breach of India. The recent incident in Pahalgam, South Kashmir, highlights a major security concern. Despite being located 137 kilometers from the Line of Control (LoC), militants managed to bypass dozens of checkpoints and cross-significant natural barriers like the Jhelum and Lidder rivers while armed. This raises questions about either severe security lapses or the possibility of insider assistance. Such incidents challenge the narrative that military might alone can eliminate militancy, revealing persistent vulnerabilities on the ground.

Historically, the Kashmiri resistance—especially since the 1990s—has shown restraint in targeting civilians, particularly non-Kashmiris, despite having easy access to such targets. This selective targeting indicates a strategic and ideological discipline, contradicting claims that the movement is driven by indiscriminate religious extremism. The presence of non-Kashmiris in the region has rarely resulted in communal violence initiated by resistance groups, further underscoring this point.

Several past events underscore a recurring pattern of state-led narrative management. The 1971 hijacking of an Indian plane by two Kashmiris, one of whom was a BSF inspector, was allegedly exploited by India to ban Pakistani flights over Indian airspace. Similarly, in the 1992 Al-Faran kidnapping case, although intelligence agencies knew the whereabouts of the hostages, orders from higher authorities advised against any rescue operation, reportedly to politically exploit the situation on the global stage. Such patterns suggest that the Indian state has, at times, allowed crises to escalate in order to extract diplomatic or electoral gains.

The Chattisinghpura massacre, which coincided with President Bill Clinton's visit to India, is another event widely believed within Kashmir to have been orchestrated to malign the freedom movement. The victims were Sikh civilians who had never opposed the pro-freedom sentiment in Kashmir. This incident too is seen as part of a broader strategy to use tragic events to shape international and domestic perceptions.

Politically, the BJP has used the narrative of absolute control over Kashmir as an electoral asset. By projecting the suppression of both armed and political resistance as a major achievement, the party appeals to nationalist sentiments. Pakistan is portrayed as the primary cause of unrest in Kashmir, making it a constant theme in BJP's domestic political rhetoric. This narrative allows the government to deflect from the internal dynamics of Kashmiri discontent and package the conflict as a cross-border issue.

India has skillfully positioned itself as a victim of terrorism on international platforms, while avoiding discussions on the political roots of the Kashmir issue. The focus remains on managing the global image of India rather than resolving the core conflict. Events like the Pahalgam attack, despite contradicting claims of total control, are used to reinforce the need for continued military presence and justify harsh security policies.

There is a strategic shift in how India views threats in Kashmir. The state now considers both Pakistani institutions and Kashmiri non-state actors as part of a single threat matrix. With the weakening of indigenous resistance structures, a new approach is emerging that requires rethinking resistance strategies in Kashmir, especially in light of India's evolving tactics.

The "Pakistan factor" remains central to BJP's politics. It is not merely a foreign policy concern but an internal political tool. By keeping tensions with Pakistan alive, the BJP ensures that

nationalism and communal narratives continue to dominate the electoral discourse. The “Muslim factor” is similarly instrumentalized to rally votes and marginalize dissenting voices within India.

India’s strategic use of data and policy, such as hydrological studies on transboundary rivers like the Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab, shows a broader approach of using technical tools to assert control and influence. This reflects how India handles other contentious regional issues, including Kashmir, by blending policy, military, and narrative dominance.

Finally, the Modi government’s rhetoric reflects a pseudo-patriotic vision that frames itself as the custodian of India's security and legacy. It juxtaposes generational commitment with ruthless state power, claiming to build a secure future even as it dismantles the political and cultural autonomy of Kashmir. The coordination of state and non-state tools of control is presented as the future strategy to consolidate gains in Kashmir and suppress any resurgence of resistance.

## 6. From Reactive to Proactive Policy on J&K Needed

Dr. Mubeen Shah, a Kashmiri from Indian held Kashmir, who is living in exile presented a strong and passionate critique of Pakistan’s defensive legal and diplomatic strategy, particularly in the context of Kashmir and broader regional geopolitics.

Pakistan's traditionally defensive legal stance has led to missed strategic opportunities on the international stage, most notably in the Kulbhushan Jadhav case. Instead of taking the initiative, Pakistan allowed India to seize the legal and diplomatic high ground, reinforcing negative perceptions of Pakistan while deflecting scrutiny from its own actions. This cautious approach has contributed to the global mislabeling of Pakistan and Kashmiris as linked to terrorism, a narrative that could have been challenged more effectively through assertive legal and diplomatic channels. The failure to internationalize and legally contest India’s actions, especially in regions like Balochistan and Kashmir, has allowed India to reshape the narrative unchallenged.

Going forward, Pakistan must adopt a proactive legal strategy, particularly in supporting Kashmiri-led efforts to reopen the Kashmir issue at the United Nations. The Indus Waters Treaty, signed without Kashmiri consent, exemplifies how Kashmir’s rights to its natural resources have been ignored. Collective punishments, such as the demolition of homes without due process, are potential war crimes that warrant international legal attention.

Meanwhile, the Kashmiri diaspora continues to face suppression and statelessness, with many unable to return home or even speak out. These individuals often live in limbo, facing statelessness, limited access to education, healthcare, and employment, and with no clear route to legal recognition or stability. Given the historical and political complexity surrounding Kashmir, it is crucial that international bodies—especially those representing the Muslim world like the OIC—take special steps to protect and support these vulnerable populations.

A unified, confident narrative, backed by legal precision and diplomatic urgency, is essential to shift the global discourse and protect the rights of Kashmiris both at home and abroad.

The use of water as a strategic tool in geopolitics is no longer hypothetical. This was illustrated when India halted the flow of water, a development that confirms earlier predictions. Historical parallels reinforce this pattern: disputes over the Nile River and a notable legal confrontation between Mexico and the United States over the Hudson River exemplify how water control becomes a battleground. In the U.S. case, Justice Manuri ruled that America could only stop the river if it could do so permanently—an unfeasible condition—ultimately necessitating negotiation. These instances underline the reality that water is increasingly being wielded as a geopolitical weapon.

## 7. Call for International Alliance on Water Issues

Dr. Waleed Rasool, passionately talked about forging partnerships with likeminded countries on the issue of water. He said, India, like the United States asserts sovereign rights over water within its territory. However, when it comes to transboundary rivers, such claims are legally and morally tenuous. Sovereignty cannot override the principle of shared natural resources. Therefore, unilateral control over transboundary water bodies is not a sustainable solution. What is needed is cooperative management based on mutual recognition of shared rights and responsibilities.

Water disputes are a global phenomenon, affecting not just South Asia but regions surrounding the Tigris, Euphrates, Hudson, and Nile Rivers. The need for a global response is urgent. An international alliance dedicated to transboundary water issues could foster dialogue, exert pressure on domestic actors, and promote long-term solutions. Only through such collective action can nations move away from zero-sum approaches toward collaborative water management.



Lower riparian countries like Pakistan are at a strategic disadvantage due to their geographic dependence on upstream water flows. If upstream nations like India act unilaterally, they can manipulate water availability to exert political pressure or cause harm. This imbalance creates a situation where downstream states are subject to potential blackmail, highlighting the urgent need for diplomatic interventions and multilateral frameworks to ensure water equity and stability.

India's manipulation of river flows is not an isolated case. China, too, has withheld water from the Brahmaputra, showing a broader pattern of water politics in the region. These developments demand close examination, especially regarding their effects on Pakistan. Understanding the flow of major rivers like the Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab requires a granular look at their tributaries in both India and Pakistan. Only through accurate, empirical tracking can we assess the impact of altered water flows and potential flooding.

Robust policy responses require solid empirical evidence. Data from critical locations like Muzaffarabad, Neelum, and Jhelum must be analyzed and compared with inflows into reservoirs like Mangla Dam. Rivers such as the Kunar and Neelum contribute significantly to Pakistan's water supply. It is essential to quantify how much water reaches Pakistan after crossing strategic points like Uri. This data will form the backbone of any meaningful water-sharing negotiations or policies.

Blocking water at Uri is geophysically unfeasible due to the area's flat terrain. Attempting to do so would result in massive flooding in Kashmir. While water flow before Uri is relatively calm, it accelerates after being joined by several tributaries—Verinag, Vishnu, Lidar from Pahalgam, and the Kauru River—near Udi before entering Muzaffarabad. These natural dynamics must be accounted for in any policy or diplomatic conversation regarding river management.

A comprehensive study of the Indus River system is necessary to understand which tributaries contribute to Pakistan's dams and water infrastructure. Presently, discourse around this issue remains superficial and often ignores ground realities. Without a thorough hydrological and geographical analysis, policymakers are ill-equipped to respond effectively to upstream actions or negotiate future agreements.

The recurring water disputes and control measures are symptoms of a deeper geopolitical problem—the unresolved Kashmir conflict. As the Kashmiri freedom movement loses momentum, the focus of Indian strategy has shifted from countering non-state actors to directly confronting the

Pakistani state. This shift undermines Pakistan's strategic depth and highlights the need to address the Kashmir issue as a central element in regional stability and water politics.

## 8. Strategic Data Driven Approach to J&K

Pakistan urgently needs a strategic, data-driven approach to Kashmir, evaluating its geopolitical, economic, and resource commitments. The lack of a comprehensive plan, especially to counter India's moves in Kashmir and water control, has left Pakistan reactive and vulnerable. India's growing assertiveness calls for bold countermeasures—such as reconsidering the Indus Waters Treaty and the Shimla Agreement, or formalizing the Line of Control as the ceasefire boundary. Aggressive diplomacy may be necessary to reclaim strategic ground.

Kashmir is vital to Pakistan's identity, not just geopolitically but culturally and environmentally. The unchecked influx of 2.5 crore tourists threatens its fragile ecosystem; sustainable tourism capped at 10–20 lakh annually is crucial. India's repeated threats to revoke the Indus Waters Treaty are now materializing, with strategic water releases aimed at destabilizing Pakistan. Past warnings anticipated this shift; yet, Pakistan remains underprepared.

The recent Pahalgam incident reveals troubling security lapses: removed checkpoints, delayed response, and inconsistencies between official and eyewitness accounts. The quick blame on Pakistan—without evidence—highlights India's politically driven narrative. Destroying local homes despite no proof of Kashmiri involvement raises human rights concerns. India frames peace while enforcing repression, manipulating perception through media. Actions like arbitrary arrests and false militant labels (e.g., Altaf Lali) suggest targeted fear-mongering.

International silence enables India to act with impunity, following an Israeli-style model. India's conditional suspension of the water treaty—tied to dismantling alleged terror networks—deepens Pakistan's strategic dilemma: choose between supporting Kashmir's freedom or securing water resources. Pakistan's policy remains reactive, shaped by pressure and limited options, much like its past alignment in the War on Terror. Without a clear strategic vision, Pakistan risks further erosion of its position on Kashmir.

## Recommendations

- To address the complex and evolving challenges surrounding the Indus Waters Treaty and the broader geopolitical dynamics between India and Pakistan, a multi-faceted, assertive policy response is essential. Pakistan must move from a historically reactive stance to a proactive and evidence-driven approach. First and foremost, Pakistan should initiate arbitration under Annex G of the Indus Waters Treaty to legally contest India's unilateral actions. Even if India refuses participation, a unilateral decision from a neutral tribunal could strengthen Pakistan's global legal standing. At the same time, Pakistan should pursue an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice through the United Nations General Assembly, focusing on the humanitarian and legal consequences of unilateral treaty suspension. This would elevate the water dispute beyond bilateral framing, allowing it to be perceived as a global issue of climate justice, human rights, and water security.
- In the diplomatic arena, Pakistan must urgently build a coalition of concerned downstream riparian states such as Bangladesh, Vietnam, and Egypt, which face similar challenges. By internationalizing the water issue, Pakistan can shift pressure onto India and underscore the dangerous precedent being set. Simultaneously, Pakistan should work with environmental NGOs, climate advocacy groups, and legal think tanks to reinforce the legitimacy of its position. Engagement with the World Bank remains critical, not only as a treaty facilitator but also as an influential international actor capable of bringing moral and financial pressure to bear on India.
- On the narrative front, Pakistan must launch a coherent, professional, and sustained international public relations campaign. This campaign should challenge India's disinformation tactics and frame the Indus water issue within a broader context of environmental justice and international law. Pakistan should invest in modern media capabilities, multilingual content creation, and strategic partnerships with global influencers, journalists, and human rights organizations. Importantly, the narrative should decouple the conflict from religious framing and instead emphasize its humanitarian, legal, and geopolitical dimensions. Prominent Pakistani and Kashmiri voices in the diaspora should be empowered to represent this narrative on global platforms, especially in Western capitals and universities where opinion formation is most influential.

- To neutralize India’s portrayal of Pakistan as a security threat, Islamabad must establish a bilateral counter-terrorism mechanism rooted in UN norms, such as UNSC Resolution 1373. This would allow Pakistan to assert its commitment to peace and expose India’s refusal to engage on equal footing. At the same time, Pakistan should compile and publicize credible evidence of India’s own destabilizing activities in the region, including its actions in Balochistan and involvement in the past incidents of state-managed crisis escalation, such as the Chattisinghpura massacre and the 1992 Al-Faran case.
- Regionally, Pakistan should consider formally suspending the Simla Agreement, arguing that India’s actions—especially linking the water treaty to Kashmir—have already internationalized the dispute. In parallel, granting provisional provincial status to Gilgit-Baltistan would reinforce Pakistani governance in a strategically vital area while enhancing local infrastructure and access to state resources. This move would send a clear signal of state consolidation in response to Indian provocations.
- Domestically, robust water management policies must be underpinned by empirical hydrological data. A scientific study of river flows at strategic locations like Uri, Muzaffarabad, and Neelum is essential. These data points should inform not just reactive policies, but proactive planning for dam construction, water allocation, and flood management. Investing in satellite and AI-based monitoring systems will enable real-time assessments of water diversion and build evidentiary credibility in international fora.
- A coordinated effort by OIC member states to create pathways to residency or legal recognition for displaced Kashmiris, especially those without legal status or facing long-term uncertainty. This could include a “Kashmiri Protection Framework”, akin to temporary protected status (TPS) programs seen in other regions.
- Many Kashmiris fall into de facto statelessness due to ongoing geopolitical tensions. International organizations, including the UNHCR and IOM, should be encouraged to recognize and document these cases.
- OIC nations can be urged to sign and implement the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions to provide rights and protections for the stateless.
- Partnering with NGOs and international legal aid groups to help Kashmiris obtain, retain, or regularize their documentation in OIC countries. Mobile consular services or special identity programs under OIC oversight could ease this burden.

- Encourage the establishment of a dedicated Kashmir desk within OIC structures that tracks diaspora issues alongside territorial and political concerns. Amplify the voices of affected Kashmiris in forums like the UNHRC and regional conferences.
- In sum, Pakistan must adopt a comprehensive and assertive policy posture, one that integrates legal rigor, strategic diplomacy, narrative control, and empirical water governance. This multidimensional approach can transform the current crisis into an opportunity to recalibrate Pakistan's regional and global position.