



BREAKING THE INDUS WATER TREATY: STRATEGIC NECESSITY OR TREATY VIOLATION?

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ABSTRACT

“Terror and talks cannot go together; water and blood cannot flow together.” – PM Narendra Modi’s declaration encapsulates India’s policy pivot in response to persistent cross-border terrorism.¹ The Indus Waters Treaty, a landmark agreement signed in 1960, has long been hailed as a rare example of enduring cooperation between India and Pakistan, even amid repeated military and political confrontations. However, the recent Pahalgam terrorist attack of April 2025 has reignited debate over whether continued adherence to the treaty still serves India’s strategic and national interests.

This article examines the evolving geopolitical landscape and India’s internal security discourse that led to its unprecedented suspension of the treaty. It explores arguments advocating for treaty revision or withdrawal, citing strategic leverage, asymmetric usage and domestic developmental needs, while contrasting them with counterarguments grounded in international legal obligations, regional stability and reputational risks. Also, evaluating it against established principles of international water law, particularly the United Nations Watercourses Convention (1997)² and the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (1969)³, both of which emphasise equitable and reasonable utilisation, the no-harm rule, and limitations of unilateral withdrawal.

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¹ Narendra Modi, ‘Water and blood can’t flow together: PM Modi on Indus Waters Treaty’ (The Hindu, 27 September 2016) <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Water-and-blood-can%E2%80%99t-flow-together-PM-Modi-on-Indus-Waters-Treaty/article14629919.ece>

² UN Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational uses of International Watercourses (adopted 21 May 1997, entered into force 17 August 2014) UN Doc A/RES/51/229

³ Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (adopted 23 May 1969, entered into force 27 January 1980) 1155 UNTS 331

This article highlights the importance of a balanced approach, emphasising that national security must be pursued in a manner that upholds legal credibility and promotes regional peace. This study adds value to the discourse by providing a nuanced, evidence-based evaluation of one of South Asia's most sensitive and consequential transboundary issues.

Keywords: Indus Water Treaty, Violation, Pahalgam Attack, Kashmir.

INTRODUCTION

From divisions to diplomacy: the genesis of the watershed accord: Can a long-standing water-sharing agreement withstand the pressure of changing geopolitics? Is breaking the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) a strategic necessity for national security or a violation of the treaty? The Partition of British India in 1947 not only divided the land but also the military forces, financial assets, administrative personnel, and the natural resources, such as water, leaving behind more than just territorial disputes; it fragmented a shared and vital water system.

The Indus Water Treaty (1960), brokered by the World Bank to allocate the water of Indus basin tributaries between India and Pakistan, has long been hailed as the model of cooperation and a successful example of shared natural resources. Despite several wars and ongoing political hostility, the treaty has remained largely intact over the decades. It allocates the water of eastern rivers (Ravi, Beas and Sutlej) to India and western rivers (Indus, Chenab and Jhelum) to Pakistan with designated usage rights and operational boundaries for both Countries.

In recent years, however, growing tensions between the two nations, particularly in the wake of terrorist attacks such as the recent incident of the Pahalgam Attack (April 2025) and continued diplomatic deadlocks, have reignited debates in India to reconsider or even withdraw from the treaty. Proponents argue that turning water into a strategic lever could strengthen national security and signal strength. Critics, on the other hand, caution that breaking the treaty could invite international backlash, damage India's global standing and intensify regional tensions. This article explores whether challenging or withdrawing from the treaty serves strategic interests or risks violating international norms and escalating regional instability.

ORIGINS AND FRAMEWORK OF INDUS WATERS TREATY.

The Indus Waters Treaty, signed on 19th September 1960, stands as a pivotal accord between India and Pakistan aimed at resolving disputes over the shared waters of the Indus River system.

The root of the treaty lies in the aftermath of the partition of British India in 1947, which left the headwaters of the Indus River in India and the lower riparian regions in Pakistan. This geographical division led to immediate tensions over water, with both countries recognising the need for a formal and reliable framework to regulate and manage the allocation and utilisation of these crucial resources. This treaty's core objective was to ensure equitable water-sharing and to prevent future conflicts by creating a cooperative and well-defined framework for water utilisation.

This treaty was brokered by the World Bank and played a pivotal role, acting as a neutral broker in mediating and facilitating the treaty's agreement. Following almost a decade of negotiations, the World Bank not only brokered the agreement but also became a signatory to the treaty, reinforcing its commitment to ensuring compliance and facilitating dispute resolution.

Under the treaty's provisions, the six rivers of the Indus basin were divided between the two countries. India was vested with the exclusive rights to the eastern rivers-Ravi, Beas and Sutlej, while Pakistan was granted control over the western rivers- Indus, Chenab and Jhelum. India retained restricted usage rights over the western rivers for non-consumptive purposes, including irrigation, navigation and hydropower generation. Strict adherence to technical and operational guidelines was mandated.

To resolve potential conflicts, the treaty established a three-tier dispute resolution mechanism. Firstly, the Permanent Indus Commission (PIC), comprising representatives from both countries, acts as a primary forum for standardised communication and conflict prevention. Secondly, in instances where technical or legal disputes remain unresolved through PIC, either party may seek the intervention of a neutral expert, appointed by the World Bank. Lastly, if the conflicts remain unresolved, either party can seek recourse to the International Court of Arbitration, constituted under Annexe G of the agreement.

Despite years of wars and political hostility between the two nations, this treaty has largely functioned as intended. Exemplifying a rare and enduring model of cooperation between the two adversarial states. To fully understand the IWT's significance and mechanisms, it is valuable to examine it alongside other major transboundary water agreements.

The IWT derives many of its approaches from—and shares similarities with—other significant treaties worldwide, each offering unique perspectives on riparian governance and conflict resolution.

The Nile Basin Initiative (NBI): Like the IWT, the Nile Basin Initiative addresses complex multi-national water sharing. Launched in February 1999, the NBI aims to promote socio-economic development across ten riparian countries while ensuring proper utilisation of Nile waters. However, unlike the relative stability of the IWT despite bilateral tensions, the NBI has struggled during disputes such as Ethiopia's dam construction projects, highlighting the challenges of implementing broad regional water agreements.

The Mekong River Agreement (1995): The 1995 agreement between Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam presents a more institutionally robust approach than the IWT. Its framework emphasises comprehensive data sharing, commission-based dispute resolution mechanisms, and mandatory notification procedures for development projects—elements that could inform potential modernisation of the IWT's governance structure.

The Ganges Water Treaty (1996): This bilateral agreement between India and Bangladesh offers perhaps the closest parallel to the IWT. It specifically addresses the allocation of dry season flow of the Ganga River, emphasising equitable sharing during critical lean periods. Its provisions for data-sharing and joint monitoring closely resemble mechanisms within the IWT, though with notable differences in implementation and effectiveness.

GEOPOLITICAL SHIFTS AND NATIONAL SECURITY NARRATIVE.

The geopolitical landscape between India and Pakistan has experienced substantial changes recently, marked by escalating tensions, cross-border terrorism and military confrontations. These shifts have intensified national security concerns in India and influenced internal politics, leading to strategic policy decisions.

Water as a tool in hybrid warfare: The emerging paradigm of hybrid warfare, which combines irregular, conventional, cyber, informational and economic tools, now encompasses hydro political pressure as a strategic instrument. In the India-Pakistan context, the recent emphasis on water diplomacy following the Pahalgam terrorist attack illustrates this evolving paradigm. Although India has not formally breached the Indus Waters Treaty, the public discourse and policy adjustments suggest an intention to leverage policy instruments, including treaty obligations, to exert psychological and political pressure. As noted in the ORF Strategic review (2023), “water, once used as a neutral domain, is increasingly being reframed as a geopolitical lever. India’s signalling on the IWT forms part of a border coercive diplomacy

toolkit. This highlights the growing importance of geopolitical tools and the need for a nuanced understanding of their implications in international relations.

Escalations of tensions and military confrontations: On April 22, 2025, a terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, resulted in the deaths of 27 individuals, including 25 Hindu tourists, a Christian tourist, and a local Muslim, with over 20 others injured. The Resistance Front (TRF), a group linked to the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba, claimed responsibility for the attack. The attack sparked national outrage, fuelling demands for decisive action toward cross-border terrorism.

In a calculated and swift response, India initiated ‘Operation Sindoor’ on May 7, 2025. The precision military campaign struck nine targets across Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir, focusing on infrastructure linked to terrorist groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. The operation, lasting just 23 minutes, showcased India’s enhanced strike capability with the use of Rafale fighter jets armed with SCALP cruise missiles and AASM Hammer bombs.⁴ This tactical manoeuvre not only showcased military precision but also, strategically, it marked a significant shift in India’s posture, aiming to project strength while managing escalation.

Pakistan retaliated shortly after, claiming to have downed several Indian aircraft and launching limited strikes of its own. The situation intensified as Islamabad deployed advanced Chinese-manufactured military hardware, including the J-10C fighter jets, signalling an increasingly complex security equation involving third-party powers.⁵ This exchange highlighted the fragile bilateral relations and the complex role of international defence partnerships in South Asia’s security dynamics.

These events signalled significant escalations in India-Pakistan hostilities, drawing concern from the international community about the risk of uncontrolled conflict between two nuclear-armed neighbours.

⁴ <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/operation-sindoor-india-weapons-scalp-missiles-hammer-bombs-rafale-jets-pakistan-2720742-2025-05-07>

⁵ <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2025/05/09/indias-clash-pakistan-sees-use-of-chinese-missiles-french-jets-israeli-drones-and-more.html>
<https://www.firstpost.com/explainers/india-vs-pakistan-chinese-made-weapons-explained-13886956.html>

NATIONAL SECURITY IMPERATIVES AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN INDIA

The April 2025 Pahalgam attack and the subsequent escalation of military engagements have reignited deep-rooted national security concerns within India. Addressing the nation on May 14, 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi underscored India's uncompromising stance against terrorism and nuclear threats, particularly those emanating from Pakistan. "Talks and trade cannot go with terror," he declared, signalling a decisive policy shift toward a more assertive and security-first approach in bilateral relations.⁶

In a historic move, the Indian government announced the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) on April 23, 2025, citing Pakistan's continued support for cross-border terrorism as a material breach of the agreement's spirit. This marked the first suspension in the treaty's 65-year existence and reflected New Delhi's strategic recalibration, leveraging transboundary water as a geopolitical instrument.⁷

These policy shifts have been mirrored by a notable surge in public and political support. Key political figures, particularly from the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), have rallied around the government's actions. A symbolic Tiranga Yatra was organised in Arunachal Pradesh on May 14, 2025, celebrating the success of Operation Sindoor and expressing solidarity with the Indian Armed Forces.⁸

Collectively, these developments illustrate a transformation in India's national security doctrine shaped not only by external threats but also by evolving contours of domestic political discourse where assertiveness, sovereignty and deterrence are increasingly central themes.

INTERNATIONAL LEGAL CONTEXT OF INDUS WATERS TREATY.

International legal principles on transboundary water treaties: International water law establishes a foundational framework for the cooperative and equitable management of transboundary water resources. International water governance is underpinned by principles of equitable utilisation, no significant harm and cooperation enshrined in landmark agreements such as the 1997 UN Watercourses Convention and the 1992 UNECE Water Convention. These conventions stipulate that states sharing a watercourse must utilise them equitably and

⁶ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>

⁷ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>

⁸ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>

reasonably, taking into account geographical, hydrological and demographic factors that impact the water resources.

India's obligation under the Indus Waters Treaty: The Indus Waters Treaty, signed in 1960, brokered by the World Bank, delineates the rights and obligations of India and Pakistan concerning the Indus River basin. The treaty apportions the Eastern rivers (Ravi, Beas and Sutlej) to India and Western rivers (Indus, Chenab and Jhelum) to Pakistan, while establishing mechanisms for cooperation, data exchange and dispute resolution. Notably, the treaty lacks a provision for unilateral suspension or termination, stipulating that any amendment or termination necessitates bilateral agreement between the countries.⁹

Political consequences of unilateral withdrawal or breach: The announcement by India in April 2025 to suspend its participation in the Indus Waters treaty, citing national security concerns after the terrorist attack in Pahalgam, raises substantial legal and diplomatic implications. The World Bank, as treaty guarantor, has stated that no clause in the IWT allows for unilateral suspension by either party. Suggesting that such action may constitute a breach of legal obligations and precipitate legal disputes and democratic repercussions. Such actions may erode confidence in international agreements and set a problematic precedent for other transboundary water agreements.

TRANSBOUNDARY WATER LAW PRINCIPLES (UN WATERCOURSES CONVENTION)

The principles of transboundary water law, as codified in the UN Watercourses Convention (1997), provide the framework for understanding the obligations under the Indus Water Treaty. Articles 5 and 7 of the convention articulate the principles of 'equitable and reasonable utilisation' and the 'no significant harm rule', respectively. Under Article 5(1), watercourse states are obligated to utilise international watercourses equitably and reasonably within their territories. Furthermore, Article 7(1) obliges them to take all appropriate measures to prevent significant harm to other watercourse states. The unilateral act of suspending the treaty, if it disrupts flow or water access to Pakistan, could arguably constitute significant harm and contradict India's obligation under customary international water law. Particularly given

⁹ [https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/water-wars-how-india-is-planning-to-divert-water-from-indus-river-system-leave-pakistan-high-and-dry-waters-treaty/articleshow/121209850.cms?utm](https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/water-wars-how-india-is-planning-to-divert-water-from-indus-river-system-leave-pakistan-high-and-dry-waters-treaty/articleshow/121209850.cms?utm_source=ref&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=india-waters-treaty)
<https://www.britannica.com/event/Indus-Waters-Treaty>

Pakistan's substantial reliance on the Indus River system for agriculture, drinking water and energy, such actions could have significant and far-reaching implications.

Precedent from other international treaties: Historically, unilateral termination of water sharing agreements is uncommon and often discouraged in international practice. For instance, despite ongoing tensions, the countries sharing the Nile and Jordan rivers have generally refrained from unilaterally withdrawing from existing agreements, acknowledging the critical importance of cooperative resource management. The Vienna Convention on Law of Treaties (1969) stipulates that a party may withdraw from a treaty only under specific circumstances, such as material breach by another party or the occurrence of fundamental change of circumstances, neither of which is easily established. Historically, unilateral termination of water sharing agreements is uncommon and often discouraged in international practice.¹⁰

While National security imperatives are undeniably significant, any unilateral action regarding the Indus Waters treaty must be carefully weighed against international legal obligations and the potential for diplomatic fallout. Adherence to the established legal framework remains vital for ensuring the stability, predictability and cooperative management of shared transboundary water resources.

REASSESSING THE INDUS WATERS TREATY: STRATEGIC AND DEVELOPMENTAL IMPERATIVES.

India's decision to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) in April 2025, prompted by the Pahalgam terrorist attack, has revived debates on the treaty's utility and efficacy. This section assesses the multifaceted arguments advocating for the reconsideration or exit from the Indus Waters Treaty, encompassing the strategic, developmental and legal perspectives.

Strategic leverage and national interest: The Indus Waters Treaty has historically been viewed as a symbol of Indo-Pakistani relations, and has taken on a new strategic dimension following India's suspension. However, India's recent suspension of the treaty underscores a strategic recalibration in response to ongoing cross-border terrorism. By placing the treaty in abeyance, India signals its intent to leverage water resources to advance national security

¹⁰ <https://www.barandbench.com/law-firms/view-point/unilateral-abeyance-indias-strategic-pause-on-the-indus-water-treaty-in-international-law?utm>

objectives and exert diplomatic pressure. This approach reflects a border strategy to utilise available instruments to counteract hostile actions and safeguard national interests.

Asymmetry in water usage and perceived disadvantages: The Indus Waters Treaty allocates approximately 80% of the Indus basin's water to Pakistan, granting India restricted rights over the western rivers- Indus, Chenab and Jhelum. This distribution has been a source of contention, with Indian policymakers contending that the treaty disproportionately favours Pakistan, restricting India's ability to fully utilise its water resources for development projects. The asymmetrical arrangement of the treaty has led to calls for reassessment to achieve a more balanced and equitable distribution that aligns with contemporary realities.

INTERNAL WATER NEEDS AND DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES.

India's burgeoning population and escalating water demands for agriculture and energy necessitate optimal utilisation of its water resources. The IWT constraints on India's capacity to develop hydroelectric projects and irrigation systems on the western rivers. Revaluating the treaty could facilitate better alignment of India's water resource management and advance sustainable development goals.

The treaty's perceived obsolescence: The 1960 Indus Waters Treaty lacks provisions for contemporary challenges such as climate change, technological advancements, and evolving geopolitical landscapes. The treaty's inflexibility constrains adaptive water management, necessitating a modernised framework for current and future scenarios.

Ultimately, a comprehensive reassessment of the Indus Waters treaty is essential for addressing the complexities of transboundary water management. By incorporating equitable water sharing, national interests, and contemporary water challenges. India and Pakistan can foster sustainable cooperation and ensure effective transboundary water management.

POTENTIAL FALLOUT FROM A BREACH OF THE INDUS WATERS TREATY

India's decision to place the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance in April 2025 has ignited a multifaceted discussion on its legal, geopolitical, and humanitarian ramifications of altering a decades-old bilateral framework. While proponents view the move as a strategic assertion of national interests in response to persistent cross-border threats. It also raises concerns under

international law and raises alarms for the border consequences for regional stability, diplomatic credibility and environmental sustainability.

Environmental Consequences of Altered River Flows: The Indus River system sustains vital ecosystems and supports agricultural productivity in both India and Pakistan. Any abrupt alteration in water flows, particularly from the western rivers (Indus, Chenab and Jhelum), could have severe environmental consequences, including the degradation of wetlands, depletion of aquifers and loss of aquatic biodiversity in Pakistan's downstream provinces. Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) have extensively documented the risks associated with inter-basin transfers and hydrological modifications to fragile riverine ecosystems. For instance, reduced water inflow to the Indus delta, which is already experiencing salinity intrusion and mangrove loss, could exacerbate land degradation and coastal erosion, threatening the livelihood of thousands of people. As highlighted by the WWF Pakistan's Indus for all programme report (2010), the continued degradation of the Indus delta due to altered water flows constitutes one of the most pressing ecological crises in South Asia, underscoring the need for careful management and conservation of the Indus river system to prevent further ecological deterioration.

INTERNATIONAL BACKLASH AND REPUTATIONAL COSTS.

Unilateral suspension of international treaties can lead to significant reputational damage. India's decision to place the Indus Waters treaty in abeyance may be perceived as a breach of international law, given the treaty's lack of suspension provisions. Such actions may undermine India's credibility as a reliable partner in future international agreements. Scholars argue that violations of international commitments can result in reputational costs, affecting a state's ability to negotiate future treaties and diminishing its influence in international forums.

Political escalations and regional instability: The Indus Water Treaty has played a crucial role in maintaining relations between India and Pakistan, even in periods of significant geopolitical tensions. The treaty's abeyance could exacerbate regional instability, as water scarcity could become a flashpoint for conflict. Given Pakistan's substantial reliance on the Indus River system for its agricultural and hydropower needs, any disruption to the existing water management framework could have far-reaching economic and social consequences, potentially leading to escalated tensions and retaliatory actions.

Diplomatic isolations and weakening of legal credibility: Breaching or suspending a long-standing treaty like the Indus Waters Treaty may have far-reaching diplomatic consequences for India. Other nations may view such actions as a departure from international norms, potentially leading to strained diplomatic relations and decreased cooperation in other areas. Moreover, the suspension's legal basis under international law may be subject to scrutiny, which could undermine India's legal credibility as a reliable and law-abiding member of the international community, potentially impacting its ability to engage in effective diplomacy and negotiate future agreements.

Environmental and humanitarian concerns: The Indus River System not only supports agriculture and energy production but also maintains the health of diverse ecosystems. Any unilateral actions that alter water flow can have far-reaching and unintended environmental consequences, including disruptions of aquatic habitats and degradation of biodiversity. Moreover, communities that depend on the river for their livelihood may face humanitarian consequences, including water scarcity, reduced agricultural productivity and food insecurity, threatening their well-being and stability.

Ultimately, India's decision to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty may be driven by immediate strategic concerns. It is crucial to consider the far-reaching implications of such action. The potential consequences, including international backlash, regional instability, diplomatic isolation and environmental harm, underscore the need for careful deliberation and adherence to international legal frameworks.¹¹

INDUS WATERS TREATY: POLICY PATHWAYS AND ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES.

Following India's suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) in April 2025, it is imperative to identify alternative approaches that cater to the concerns of both nations while fostering regional stability. The following approaches provide pathways for modernising the treaty and enhancing cooperation between India and Pakistan.

Diplomatic renegotiation and modernisation of the treaty: Given the evolving nature of global geopolitics and the emerging challenges posed by climate change, this underscores the need to reassess and revise the Indus Waters Treaty provisions. Renegotiation of the treaty, as

¹¹ <https://www.barandbench.com/law-firms/view-point/unilateral-abeyance-indias-strategic-pause-on-the-indus-water-treaty-in-international-law?utm>

advocated by experts like A.K. Bajaj, would provide an opportunity to update its provisions to reflect contemporary realities, including technological advancements and increased water demands. Such negotiation could focus on modernising dispute resolution mechanisms, enhancing data sharing and promoting joint water resource management. A revised treaty framework would foster more effective cooperation and sustainable management of the Indus River System.¹²

Strengthening bilateral water management mechanisms: The enhancement of existing bilateral frameworks is essential for promoting effective water resource management and cooperation between nations. The Indus Water Treaty established the Permanent Indus Commission (PIC), a bilateral body comprising commissioners from India and Pakistan, which plays a vital role in overseeing treaty implementation and facilitating cooperation on water-related issues. By enhancing the commission's role and establishing joint technical committees, both nations can engage in continuous dialogue and technical collaboration. Proactively addressing concerns and preventing conflicts, such instrumental mechanisms have proven instrumental in maintaining communication and resolving disputes, even during periods of heightened tensions.

Regional cooperation frameworks: Fostering cooperation beyond bilateral agreements to include regional stakeholders can provide a more comprehensive and integrated approach to water management. The World Bank has highlighted the success of the Ganges water sharing treaty between India and Bangladesh as a model of regional collaboration, underscoring the potential benefits of multilateral engagement. The establishment of the South Asian Water Council or a similar regional platform could address transboundary water challenges, ultimately enhancing regional cooperation and national security.¹³

CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES THROUGH JOINT RIVER BASIN INITIATIVES

The implementations of joint initiatives can play a crucial for building trust and reducing tensions between India and Pakistan. The recent agreement under Operation Sindoor, which aims to continue confidence-building measures and reduce military alertness levels,

¹² <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2025/Apr/29/interview-renegotiate-indus-waters-treaty-former-cwc-chairman?utm>

¹³ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/events/2023/10/31/flowing-waters-harnessing-transboundary-rivers-in-south-asia?utm>

exemplifies the potential benefits of collaborative efforts in promoting regional stability. Similarly, joint river basin management projects that involve data collection and environmental monitoring can serve as platforms for sustained cooperation and mutual benefit, contributing to a more stable and cooperative relationship between the two nations.¹⁴

By pursuing these alternative approaches, India and Pakistan can work towards establishing a robust and cooperative framework for managing their shared water resources, promoting long-term regional stability, sustainable development, and mutual benefit, contributing to the economic, social and environmental well-being of both nations and the region as a whole.

CONCLUSION: BALANCING STRATEGY WITH RESPONSIBILITY

India's suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty in April 2025 in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terrorist attack has ignited a complex and nuanced discussion that encompasses issues of national security, international law, regional stability and environmental concerns. This unprecedented decision highlights India's strategic reassessment in response to cross-border terrorism. While also raising fundamental questions about the potential long-term implications for bilateral relations and the global community's perception of India's actions.

Recapitulating the core arguments: Proponents of the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty argue that it constitutes a necessary strategic response to Pakistan's alleged support for cross-border terrorism. By leveraging the Indus Water treaty, India seeks to pressure Pakistan into ceasing such activities, asserting the primacy of national security interests. This perspective views the suspension as a means to compel behavioural change and safeguard India's sovereignty. Conversely, the critics contend that unilateral suspension of the treaty undermines the principles of international law and risks destabilising an already fragile region. The Indus Waters Treaty, brokered by the World Bank in 1960, has withstood multiple conflicts and is a cornerstone of India-Pakistan relations. Suspension of the treaty could undermine trust, prompt international criticism, and establish a troubling precedent for transboundary water agreements. Moreover, given Pakistan's heavy reliance on the Indus River system for agriculture and hydropower needs, any disruption could have far-reaching and devastating humanitarian and economic consequences.

¹⁴ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/operation-sindoor-india-and-pakistan-agree-to-continue-confidence-building-measures-reduce-alertness-levels/articleshow/121192851.cms?utm>

The imperative of a measured, legally sound approach: While national security concerns are of utmost importance, the response to such concerns must align with established international legal frameworks to maintain global credibility. The Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties sets forth specific conditions under which a treaty may be suspended, requiring mutual consent or specific circumstances such as a fundamental change in circumstances. India's decision to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty, framed as holding it "in abeyance," lacks clear legal justification, potentially rendering the country vulnerable to international legal challenges and diplomatic repercussions. Furthermore, the suspension of the treaty risks heightening regional tensions, particularly in light of the potential for water scarcity to ignite conflict. The dismantling of cooperative mechanisms may also impede future negotiations on critical issues, highlighting the imperative of adopting a legally sound approach that upholds treaty obligations, with security concerns to prevent further destabilisation and promote regional cooperation.

FINAL REFLECTION: NAVIGATING STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND GLOBAL STANDING

India is navigating a critical juncture, where it must reconcile its strategic imperatives with its responsibilities as a regional leader and a global actor. The protection of national security is a paramount concern; however, this perspective must be pursued to uphold a country's commitment to international law and cooperative diplomacy. While pursuing a path of dialogue, seeking multilateral support, and exploring avenues for treaty modernisation, India can effectively address its security concerns while preserving the stability and integrity of established legal frameworks. The suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty serves as a reminder of the need for a balanced approach that aligns strategic objectives with legal and diplomatic responsibilities, highlighting the critical importance of sustaining this balance in India's long-term regional influence and global standing.

"When diplomacy flows through rivers, every drop counts."