

The Indus Waters Treaty: India-Pakistan Tensions Persist

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Summary

Both India and Pakistan have differing interpretations of the 2025 suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT). The dispute over the shared waters, compounded by uncertainty over the treaty's current status, has further intensified tensions between the two countries.

According to [Stanley Wolpert](#), in August 1947, “India and Pakistan were born to conflict generated by the partition of British India”. Since then, the two countries have fought wars (1947-48, 1965, 1971 and 1999) and remained in a state of tension for a long time. In recent times, after a terror strike in Pahalgam in Jammu & Kashmir in April 2025, in which 26 people were killed, the two countries had a brief military confrontation between 7 and 10 May 2025. However, in the last 79 years, India and Pakistan have not only fought wars but also engaged in talks to improve their ties. The talks, however, have failed to [yield any significant results](#), primarily because “each side doubts the other’s commitment to good relations”. Nevertheless, they have, over the years, inked some important agreements. Among these are the agreement on the World Bank-facilitated Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) in 1960 and the exchange of lists of nuclear installations and facilities in 1991.

The IWT has been held in abeyance by India following the Pahalgam terror strike. Since then, the IWT has become a focal point of their bilateral tension. Pakistan has issued a military threat, and India warned it of [“painful consequences”](#). Pakistan has raised the issue at the United Nations and various other international forums. In its effort to present its side of the story on the shared rivers and the IWT, Islamabad organised a [seminar](#) on ‘Transboundary Water Resources: A Weaponised Global Common’ in Brussels on 18 June 2026 – jointly hosted by the Pakistan Embassy in Belgium, Luxembourg, the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, in collaboration with the Centre for European Policy Studies – and an [international conference](#) on the IWT in Islamabad on 30 June 2026.

As tensions mount over the IWT, it found mention at the 80th Independence Day celebrations by India and Pakistan. In Pakistan, [Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif](#), said, “I warn that every drop of water is our red line. If India does not keep on the right track, we will give it a direct response”. In India, in her address to the nation on the eve of independence, [President Droupadi Murmu](#) stated, “Suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty with the country that harbours terrorism is a decisive step in the interest of our nation, especially the farmers”. [Omar Abdullah](#), Chief Minister of the Indian Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir, added, “It [Indus River] is our lifeblood that is being drained. These are our rivers and we have first right on them. Pakistan claims to sympathise with Kashmiris, but they lose this sympathy when it comes to water.” He further stated that since the IWT was signed in 1960, “...we [India] are bearing the brunt of this arrangement.” He also pointed to the restrictions

in the IWT on drawing drinking water from the Chenab River, constructing the Tulbul barrage and building large dams on shared rivers to store water.

Tensions over the IWT are likely to further escalate because India, at least in the near future, seems not to be interested in talks with Pakistan. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) General Secretary, Dattatreya Hosabale, has, however, called for dialogue with Pakistan. Defending Hosabale's position, [RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat](#) stated, "...there are a lot of people in Pakistan who believe the partition of Bharat was wrong and many journalists there praise the RSS and its work. There is a distinct undercurrent there of people being anti-Pakistan and against the two-nation theory, and they say living together was better." Bhagwat, however, underlined that his organisation would follow the Union government's stand on the matter.

It has been reported that following the May 2025 military confrontation, at least four rounds of Track 2.0 backchannel talks have been held between India and Pakistan, with the last being held on the sidelines of a regional security conference held in [Colombo in June 2026](#). Apparently, the [Indian government](#) has not recognised or supported these talks. Speaking on the matter, [India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri](#) remarked that "Dozens of these kinds of events take place in dozens of places around the world on a whole variety of subjects...We really take no cognisance of these events. They really don't hold much value, as far as we are concerned." Meanwhile, a [Pakistani foreign office official](#) echoed a similar view, "No idea on anything other than Track 1".

Since the extent of the dispute over the IWT depends heavily on the prospects for India-Pakistan dialogue, a pertinent question arises: can the two countries still engage in meaningful talks? States, even when they are not on friendly terms, do not necessarily shy away from engagement when they perceive an individual or mutual benefit. A relatively powerful state is generally willing to engage with a weaker counterpart when it sees a strategic, political or economic payoff from doing so. In the case of India and Pakistan, however, it appears that India, as the considerably stronger [military, economic and diplomatic power](#), currently sees little benefit in engaging with Pakistan. Nevertheless, [Sanjay Kathuria](#) argues that both countries stand to gain from the resumption of trade and broader economic cooperation. However, it is left to be seen if New Delhi and Islamabad view this as sufficiently important for them to put their differences aside and start talking to each other.

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