

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SEMINAR ON WATER SECURITY

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Seminar titled: ‘Pakistan’s Water Security Dilemma: Re-visiting the Efficacy of Indus Waters Treaty’, held at NDU on 19th January 2011, was a national-level assembly of academicians and policy-relevant experts to brain storm on the country’s interface with the neighborhood on river waters in as much as this impacts on national security. The exercise focused on studying the impact of climate change and unresolved political issues in the region on the country’s water security, and to identify constraints as well as openings in the way of the country’s strategic planning.

The discussion on the overarching theme was carried out in two thematic sessions with four topical presentations, besides the inaugural. The first thematic session was dedicated to the study of challenges and opportunities while the second dealt with possible way forward. The efficacy of Indus Waters Treaty remained in the backdrop of discussion in the two sessions.

Thematic Focus

The academic exercise was built on the premise that issue of water scarcity and management continues to overwhelm the contemporary international scene, serving as a critical reminder in the evolving concept of national security. The issue carries a double-edged significance as a propeller of the future ‘water wars’ and equally, as an impetus for conflict management strategies. In the South Asian context, the Indus Waters Treaty 1960 has sustained as an instrument for water

division. However, its efficacy has now come into question amidst imperatives of the climate change effecting the water reserves and continuing political disputes between India and Pakistan, Kashmir in particular. In this broader context, it is important to pay heed to calls to counter the possibility of using loopholes in the Treaty for political manipulation. Similarly, it is relevant to deal with questions now being unfolded to re-visit the treaty and/or take approaches on its rejuvenation.

Participation

Participation at the seminar, especially those piloting the discussion, was indeed commensurate with the need to revisit this issue of significance in the South Asian arena, with long-term implications for Pakistan. It was quite remarkable to witness an impressive reunion of policy-relevant experts and academia in terms of their professional standing: the two session chairs: Ambassador Akram Zaki and Ambassador Inam ul Haque; four presenters: Syed Jamait Ali Shah, Dr. Shaheen Akhtar, Mr. Sardar M. Tariq and Dr. Zaigham Habib; and four discussants: Dr. Ishfaq Ahmed, Mr. Shams ul Mulk, Dr. Kaiser Bengali and Ambassador Tariq Fatemi. Concurrently, the audience represented a broad spectrum of policy relevant circles, think tanks, academia NDU faculty and students. The interaction amongst presenters/discussants and the audience provided a stimulant for discussion on the occasion.

A Summary Record of Proceedings

At the inaugural, the President NDU delivered a keynote address on the conceptual frame of the water dilemma for Pakistan while underlining the importance of activating our strategic thought process and planning mechanisms. In this context, he invited particular attention to the imperatives of

climate change and unresolved political issues and the need to counter the possibility of using loopholes in the Indus Waters Treaty for any political manipulation. As the headwaters of the Indus Basin System remain within Indian control, we cannot allow ourselves to be hostage of a situation that relates to 'no war' or 'no peace'.

Session – One

Challenges and Opportunities

The first thematic session was chaired by Ambassador Muhammad Akram Zaki with two speakers: Syed Jamait Ali Shah and Dr. Shaheen Akhtar; and two discussants: Dr. Ishfaq Ahmed and Mr. Shams ul Mulk. The session was dedicated to challenges and opportunities in the South Asian water regime with particular reference to strains on the Indus Waters Treaty in the backdrop of climatic change and potential for political manipulation. Furthermore, It also evolved around Pakistani dilemma in the wake of varying ideas for 're-interpreting' or 're-visiting' the Treaty.

The Indus waters regime as envisaged in the IWT continues to take the brunt of Indian mindset and their inclination to interfere with the waters, exclusively reserved for Pakistan. The potential to interfere is widened if not actualized, in the backdrop of contentious issues between the two countries. The Pakistani case in the current setting should lay emphasis on achievement of the Treaty and dividing the rivers rather than the waters. Given the constraints of a 'lower riparian', ruptured basin and loss of leverage (i.e. Eastern rivers), Pakistan needs to adopt a multi-pronged strategy based on water rationale to protect its water rights within the existing parameters of the Treaty. Pakistan also needs to project its concerns on issues such as transparency in information sharing. The focus should be on implementation of the Treaty by India in letter and spirit.

The question of upper and lower riparian is essentially a misnomer in the IWT context. In the first place, Pakistan needs to stick to the Treaty, while emphasizing on its true implementation. Besides, we should put our house in order and take meaningful steps to enhance our storage capacity. Thirdly, climate change and behavior of glaciers melting needs a proper study so as to assess the water flow and uphold the upcoming disasters in an appropriate way.

Pakistan needs to follow an effective water diplomacy urging the World Bank, Western countries especially the U.S to assist Pakistan in improving its water infrastructure of Indus Basin irrigation system. China can also be helpful in this regard.

Session – Two

A Way Forward

The second session was chaired by Ambassador Inam ul Haque, with two speakers: Sardar Muhammad Tariq and Dr. Zaigham Habib; and two discussants: Dr. Kaiser Bengali and Ambassador Tariq Fatemi. The session unfolded thoughts on possible approaches to rejuvenate the Indus Waters Treaty and brought into sharper focus the questions related to water division and/or sharing the benefits. An impulse for discussion was provided by the conflict management perspective, together with primacy of Pakistani interest.

An overview of the existing water disputes between India and Pakistan shows that there are little chances of benefit sharing, therefore implementation of IWT in letter and spirit is needed. India insists on paradigm shift from water sharing to benefit sharing which places India at the epicenter of riparian politics but this process of benefit sharing has many constraints.

Meanwhile, World Bank summarized six mechanisms on benefit sharing, they being, issue linkages, good relations, large geographic scope, side payments, slack cutting and exercise of power which leads to three scenarios. First, India should control the Eastern rivers and Pakistan the Western rivers and in case of any contentious issue - guidance from the World Bank must be sought. Second, Pakistan has to develop a framework for equitable sharing of costs and benefits and thirdly, both Pakistan and India—to mutually develop and enjoy benefits from water resources of the Indus Basin.

Both Pakistan and India need to adhere to the IWT as a legal document and maintain a dialogue process for solution of the issue. On the internal front, Pakistan faces the issues of water management, overpopulation and disharmony among the provinces, which needs proper attention both on part of the government and people. Our success in addressing the domestic issues will place the country's moral position on a stronger footing in the International community.

Findings

The multi-faceted imperatives of the water issue as discussed at the seminar lead upto consensus with a four-fold focus: -

- Pakistan cannot hope to re-visit or re-negotiate the IWT because of a three-fold disadvantage: limitations on our capacity to assure any better results; risk of opening a pandora box that provides a leverage to India; and potential to thwart the peace process between the two countries.
- Pakistan needs to stay within the domain of Indus Waters Treaty while stressing on its implementation in letter and spirit. In this context, we need to bring out

with greater vigor that IWT is a river sharing Treaty, not a water sharing Treaty; and therefore the question of upper and lower riparian becomes irrelevant. The exceptions allowed to India in the upper reaches of Indus waters basin like agriculture use, limited storage for hydropower generation cannot be overstretched beyond the context envisaged in the provisions and the region in question.

- The country's water security dilemma is accentuated in the absence of an effective water storage capacity, water conservation and management strategy. The situation can be improved through a multi-pronged and time efficient management and a strong political will to translate plans into reality.
- The Indian elite while adhering to IWT, continues to toy with ideas for 'benefit sharing' in the wake of so called 'new realities'. Indian think tanks, IDSA in particular, have been carrying out in depth studies on water security issues with an eye on 'IWT-II'. Conversely, there are no comparable policy-relevant scholastic inputs in the Pakistani realm.

What Next?

The co-pilots of the seminar while reviewing the consensus points felt that the subject should remain on high deliberative agenda amongst the Pakistani think tanks in view of its critical importance for national security. In this context, it was agreed in broad terms that three aspects of actionable agenda merit special consideration. These are: -

- Pakistan should stay within the domain of Indus Waters Treaty. It should project the river sharing formula of IWT, not a water sharing Treaty.
- Three Task Groups need to be established to study issues in water security.

- Hydro-politics- study and analysis of the emerging issues in Indo-Pakistan water regime: NDU can possibly provide a platform.
 - Glaciers melting and its medium and long term impacts: SPARCO can provide the lead.
 - Environmental phenomenon and its impact on water regime: the concerned Ministry may initiate the study.
- The resource persons assembled for the seminar on water security may be asked to join a selected group of NDU faculty so as to brain-storm on the scope and modalities of the study on hydro-politics in South Asia.