

LINKING POLITICAL WILL AND WATER  
DIPLOMACY: A CASE STUDY OF PAKISTAN-  
AFGHANISTAN TRANSBOUNDARY WATER  
GOVERNANCE



Pakistan Institute of Development Economics

*By:*

**Ambreen Shabbir**  
**PIDE2019FMPHILPP01**

**Supervisor: Dr. Idrees Khwaja**  
**Co-Supervisor: Dr. Najam-uz-Zehra Gardezi**

**M.Phil. Public Policy**  
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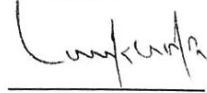
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Supervisor:

Dr. Idrees Khawaja

Signature:



Co-Supervisor:

Dr. Najam uz Zehra

Signature:



External Examiner:

Dr. Muhammad Ishaq

Signature:



Head,

PIDE School of Social Sciences: Dr. Mariam Mohsin

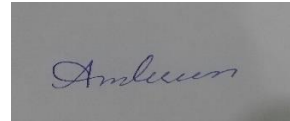
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At any time if my statement is found to be incorrect even after my Graduation the university has the right to withdraw my MPhil degree.

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ambreen".

Date:10-11-2022

Signature of Student

Ambreen Shabbir  
Name of Student

## ***Dedication***

*To my parents who kept encouraging me to study despite their own circumstances, an existential crisis that led me to start MPhil, and chronic procrastination with a blend of liking for reading that landed me on the concept of political will.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Political will remains an abstract concept. Academic literature mostly mentions it as an ex post facto and a latent factor. It is deemed a cause of many public policy failures, but mostly without any tangible assessment. The literature on Pakistan-Afghanistan transboundary water governance manifests the same gap. This research attempts to fill the gap by developing a framework of political will while benefitting from literature on the subject as well as contributing to it. The literature on political will frameworks does not account for the foreign policy explicitly. This thesis contributes to the existing literature by introducing the foreign policy aspect into the political will framework. Using the framework, it assesses the political will for transboundary water cooperation on Kabul River in Pakistan and Afghanistan. It further explores the avenues for generating political will on the subject between the two countries and linking it with water diplomacy.

Keywords: Transboundary Water Governance, Kabul River Treaty, Political Will, Multitrack Diplomacy

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

IRB Indus River Basin

IRSA Indus River System Authority

ISKP Islamic State of Khorasan Province

KRB Kabul River Basin

KRT Kabul River Treaty

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Political will is crucial to the attainment of desired policy outcomes (Hammergren, 1998a). The idea of any public policy intervention begins from agenda setting stage, as evident from the public policy cycle (Knill & Tosun, 2011). However, not every intervention comes to fruition or fulfills the intended goals. Among many other factors, lack of political will is deemed as the major one for unfulfilled objectives of a policy intervention. The same premise can be explored in the context of Pakistan-Afghanistan transboundary water governance. The said states share the Kabul River Basin (KRB) but do not have a water-sharing agreement. Despite several attempts, no such effort has come to pass. The major reason is distrust between the two entities, which is deeply entrenched in their political and historical landscape. To overcome this distrust, scholarly literature proposes diplomatic interventions or soft politics to be an icebreaker for striking a deal (Huntjens et al., 2016). However, even to have a diplomatic structure, the countries need to agree to negotiate or at least recognize the need for a water-sharing deal. Pakistan's Water Policy does not mention water-sharing with Afghanistan (Water Policy of Pakistan, 2018). Whereas in Afghanistan, the narrative is divided and the intent to have a water-sharing treaty with any riparian is marked by skepticism and hesitation (Khan et al., 2020). Inclusion of the creation of political will in the water diplomacy interventions may render the diplomatic efforts more effective. The relevant literature does not account for this aspect, which seems to be a potential prerequisite to reach even an initial understanding. This thesis has explored the political will aspect and attempted to apply it to Pakistan-Afghanistan Transboundary Water Governance. Using qualitative methods, the research has explored whether there is a need for a treaty and if so, why no such attempt could come to fruition.

While the literature draws attention to the fact that there should be a water treaty between Pakistan and Afghanistan, this research deals with the 'why' aspect of a Kabul River Treaty (KRT)—Why should there be a KRT and why could not it get materialize hitherto?

## **1.1 Background**

Pakistan and Afghanistan share nine rivers at Kabul River Basin with water flows reaching the 22.6 billion cubic meter mark annually. Located in eastern Afghanistan and north-western Pakistan, Kabul River sprawls over 700 km where 20 percent of the river is situated in Pakistan while the remaining 80 percent is in Afghanistan (Hayat, 2020). The reduction in Indus River's flow has impacted the flow in this basin as well (since it is a part of the IRB). Kabul River provides for 17 percent of the Pakistan's total water supply (Ahmadzai & McKinna, 2018). Before entering Pakistan, Kabul River passes through numerous important cities of Afghanistan including the capital city. Kunar River is the largest tributary to this basin, as it contributes over 50 percent of the water flow. This river starts from Pakistan's District Chitral and merges into Kabul River near Jalalabad in Afghanistan. Kabul River adds 26 percent to Afghanistan's annual water flow. Once the river enters Pakistan, it covers several settled areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. This characteristic makes both states upper and lower riparian, which is a unique phenomenon in transboundary rivers. The KRB has huge hydropower generation potential. Its Kabul River can generate up to 3100 megawatts of electricity (Abeygunawardena, 2005).

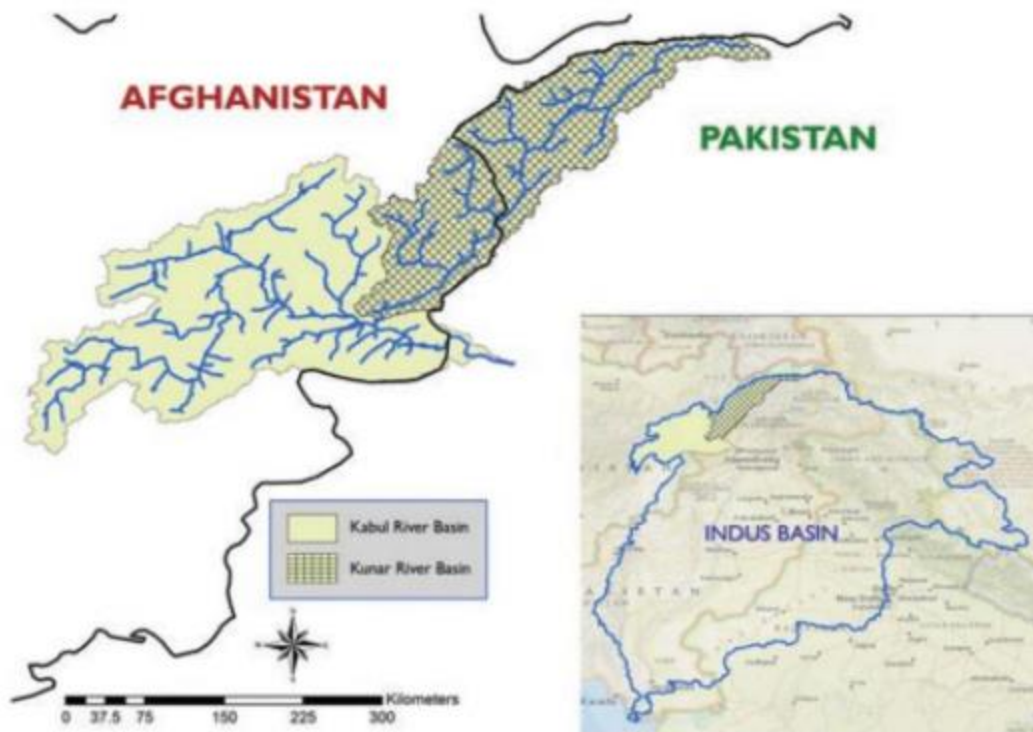


Fig. 3.2 Kabul and Kunar basins, sub basins of Indus Basin. (Source: Khan et al. 2020)

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### **Figure 1: Kabul River Basin**

## **Pak-Afghan Transboundary Water Governance**

Both Afghanistan and Pakistan are dependent on KRB for agriculture predominantly, industry, livestock, and domestic use (by locals). Both countries are heavily dependent on agriculture for subsistence, and both are facing accelerated population growth. Water quality is also deteriorating because of anthropogenic factors, which will increase the pressure on the available resource-quality. Moreover, the freshwater resources in this basin are under threat from climate change and weather variability that have caused floods and droughts in the past (Hayat, 2020). All these issues can be a driver for conflict between the two countries if they do not agree on a water-sharing setup. Currently, Pakistan is taking up most of the water flow from Kabul River because of Afghanistan's limited storage capacity. However, Afghanistan redirected its focus on building storage structures during the previous regime, which was long overdue given the country has been underutilizing its share in the transboundary rivers. The country started several hydropower projects, some of which



were a concern for Pakistan, as they could have disrupted the water flow downstream. Pakistan wants to have a water-sharing treaty to render its water flow certain and gather information about the flows in Kabul River to prepare for any variability. It has already raised concerns on Afghanistan's announcement to build hydropower dams with the help of India. It expressed its plan to divert water from Chitral River if any such project comes to pass. In this situation, a Kabul River Treaty is need of the time. It will not only remove the uncertainty and risk of conflict but also promote cooperation between the two countries (Ahmadzai & McKinna, 2018; Hayat, 2020; Salman et al., 2018)

Despite various efforts in the past, no such arrangement has materialized up till now. There has been longstanding political baggage and the resultant distrust between the two states in the previous Afghan regimes. Several researchers have suggested diplomacy and benefit-sharing approach to eliminate the distrust and rationalize the process respectively. While both approaches are highly effective, in Pakistan-Afghanistan context, the two states must be willing to negotiate first. Right now, the states have zero-sum approach where one's gain is being considered as the other's loss (Nori, 2020). Due to the frequently tense political relations between the states, even if an agreement is chalked out, odds are high it may become ineffective over time or with regime change. To turn around this situation and ensure sustainable water-sharing mechanism for these states, there must be strong political will in both countries. Hence, inculcating political will into a water-sharing framework is crucial to its efficacy.

This articulation proposes to assess the level of political will in both countries for developing a water-sharing mechanism vis-à-vis Kabul River Basin. It further propounds to include agenda setting, which is crucial to generate and strengthen political will, in the diplomatic-institutional frameworks to ensure the agreed conditions for water-sharing keep working.

## **1.1 Problem Statement:**

Joint transboundary water resource management can be a catalyst for cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan and for regional peace. While water is generally perceived as a source of conflict, evidence suggests that it can be a potential for cooperation even between rival or conflicting states. However, that is possible only when politics does not supersede the rational thinking of decision

makers and the objectives seeking zero-sum outcomes do not overshadow the benefit-seeking rationale. Even if the potential for cooperation is taken with skepticism, potential of conflict over water issues is un-deniable. To minimize the risk of conflicts and aggravation of not too good relations, establishing preconditions and a set of rules for water sharing becomes incumbent. The same applies to the context of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The two countries share the resources from Kabul River Basin. So far, there exists no relevant treaty between them. The same situation cannot prevail for long. After the demise of first Taliban regime in October 2001 and the advent of a proper political setup in Afghanistan, efforts started to pave way for reaching a transboundary water sharing agreement. However, these efforts did not reach fruition. In 2013, the two states agreed to formulate a water-sharing arrangement with major focus on energy. But the proposition has not undergone any development after eight years. Whatever political arrangement becomes final in the future (be it a coalition government with Taliban or the current one), water issues are projected to intensify.

Currently, Afghanistan has limited water storage capacity and infrastructure due to which Pakistan can utilize the watershed as it needs. But that scenario is going to change, as the previous Afghan administration expressed commitment to initiate work on water management. Any activity on the river will impact the water flow in Pakistan (where Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, especially the erstwhile FATA region is heavily dependent for its water needs). Along with the water needs, there are several issues that need to be addressed like the impact of climate change river's resources and water quality.

A joint water management framework can not only avoid a potential conflict between the two already struggling states but also pave the way for cooperation and regional peace. The major hurdle in this regard is the prevailing political issues that can render making both states to get on the table and negotiate difficult. The prevalent issues appear to lessen the political will for reaching an agreement on a water-sharing arrangement on KRB. However, this claim cannot be substantiated or rejected with the existing literature on the subject. There is no in-depth analysis of political will in Pakistan and Afghanistan for a transboundary treaty. The concept of political will needs to be dealt and studied as a technical term to figure out the cause of political inertia in the said states.

Transboundary water governance is understood through conflict and cooperation continuum. States can move on from conflict to cooperation through institutions. However, in case of conflicting/rival states, this cooperation might be jeopardized by regime change and time lapse. Also, to get the conflicting states on the table and reach an agreement, there must be a level of urgency (a threat to economic growth etc. as it was in the case of Pakistan and India) and political will. Creating political will within a state is important, and this is what Pakistan and Afghanistan lack—especially in the case of Afghanistan, where a survey and multiple statements show that the prevailing narrative is that claiming water of Kabul River is their due right and should not be limited by any treaty (Thomas et al. (2016). Pakistan is interested in this treaty because it needs information sharing to plan for any change in the water flow. Water diplomacy has proved to be an effective solution for sustainable agreements between conflicting states. However, even for that to work out, there must be a will to honor the agreement. Hence, lineation of both water diplomacy and political will might help achieving the desired outcome, i.e., cooperation over flows in Kabul River Basin under an institutional setup.

The prevailing literature applies different approaches to comprehend and address the challenges of water politicization and securitization. However, the existence of political will is rarely addressed as a main factor or indicator. Some of the scholarly literature mentions political will but in more of a rhetorical way than a technical term. In Pak-Afghan context, political will needs to be given due focus while analyzing the stumbling blocks for a Kabul River Treaty. Agenda-setting stage where narrative generation or transformation and political will creation takes place is not deliberated on. It should be explored while discussing the solutions to address inertia in the Kabul River Treaty process. With the advent of the current regime in Afghanistan, multitrack diplomacy can be utilized to reach a water agreement. This will be possible if the other side has the understanding of the issue and the potential benefits offered by water cooperation.

## **1.2. Research Objectives**

- Develop a political will framework that is tangible and cognizant of foreign policy. .
- Assess the state of political will for a Kabul River Treaty in Pakistan and Afghanistan?
- Explore the potential of introducing the concept of political will in the water diplomacy to work towards Pak-Afghan water governance mechanism.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

- How can the concept of political will be rendered tangible to assess the state of political will for a certain policy?
- How can be the level of political will determined for Kabul River Treaty in Pakistan and Afghanistan?
- How to introduce political will into water-diplomacy framework to render the process of water cooperation effective and sustainable?

### **1.4 Organization of the Thesis**

Rest of the thesis is organized as follows. The second chapter reviews the literature on different propositions and possible solutions for Pakistan-Afghanistan transboundary water governance. The conceptual underpinnings for finding a solution have been examined in this chapter and the gap in literature has been identified. Research design and methodology has been discussed in chapter 3. Chapter 4 examines the concept of political will and includes the framework to assess the will for different policies. Chapter 5 discusses the state of political will in Pakistan and Afghanistan for Kabul River Treaty and includes analysis and findings of the interviews. Chapter 6 includes the water diplomacy framework and concludes the thesis.

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

Both Pakistan and Afghanistan can benefit from a joint water management mechanism on Kabul River Basin. However, they focus more on political issues and attaining relative gains. The attempts to contribute to the literature hydro-diplomacy, benefit-sharing approach, and multi-level governance by adding political will framework for foreign policy issues, including transboundary water cooperation. Moreover, it adds to the hydrodiplomacy concept by developing a multitrack diplomacy framework with due focus on political will through the role of non-state actors. This

research has also tried to explore the reasons and prevailing situation viz-viz Pak-Afghan water cooperation and analyze political will logically instead of just discussing it as a rhetoric, which is lacking in the literature currently. Creating institutions that are mindful of political will's significance in public policy and have the capacity to create/fortify that will through agenda setting will help render the transboundary water cooperation sustainable. Cooperation on water issues can have a domino effect on other issues as well and promote regional peace. Practically, this research is useful for other researchers who can employ the political will framework to gauge the political will for any policy, be it domestic or foreign. The idea of centralizing political will in water diplomacy can be replicated in other conflicting riparian states as well.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The prospect of a transboundary water governance arrangement between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been discussed through a variety of lens in the existing literature. Vick (2014) maintains that negotiations on shared transboundary water management between Pakistan and Afghanistan would entail complex networks of societal, natural, and political systems. The societal system includes agrarian economy, natural being influence of climate change, and political system implies insecurity and turmoil in the states. The interactions of these complex networks can lead to uncertain outcomes for bilateral discussions. These complexities need to be accounted for while reaching a solution to water-sharing mechanism. The author suggests, inter alia, creating institutional arrangements for dialogue and information exchange to eliminate the aforementioned uncertainty.

Nori (2020) acknowledges the limited capacity of Afghanistan in governance structure due to persistent war and insecurity. This fragile system makes the transboundary water governance and related bilateral or regional cooperation difficult and unapproachable for Afghanistan. There have been limited hydro-meteorological data, technical knowledge, strategic planning capacity, and economic growth. Over time, Afghan government has given due focus to water management including hydro-meteorological data acquisition and formulating a transboundary water-sharing mechanism.

The major factors impeding bilateral cooperation efforts in Pakistan-Afghanistan context include distrust, border disputes, and power asymmetry between the two states as well as decades-old

instability in Afghanistan. Another factor preventing the states from reaching an agreement is the risk of perceived loss in the bilateral dialogue, which renders the process as a zero-sum game. Both states are focused on gaining relative advantage instead of reviewing the benefits of the cooperation. Some scholarly literature maintains that cooperation on nonpolitical aspects of water sharing like creating technical capacities, information sharing, and cooperation on other policy issues can help develop trust between the states (Nori, 2020; Salman et al., 2018). A number of authors suggest institutionalizing the cooperation on transboundary waters. They suggest formulating institutions to cooperate on transboundary waters and implement the agreed set up through laws and legal enterprises.

For instance, Hayat and Elci (2017) suggest creating commissions to monitor the implementation of legal treaties while proposing an initial strategic framework for transboundary water management. They propound that Afghanistan should eliminate acrimony with neighbors on water issues by formal discussions, dialogue, and legal treaties with mediation of a third party. However, they recognize that the legal treaties alone would not be sufficient to render sustainable cooperation. So, the implementation of these agreements should be looked over by commissions with members from technical, judicial, environmental, and political spheres for dispute resolution and mitigation. Akhtar and Iqbal (2017) propose the content of a Kabul River Treaty while assessing the prevailing hydrological, water quality, and temporal changes in land cover. They maintain that effective flood management, enhanced mutual cooperation, and equitable benefit-sharing must be a part of this treaty. They also emphasize cooperation on water management as a key to optimal utilization of resources. The paper also suggests a joint institution for conflict resolution to fortify the treaty's efficacy.

Building on hydro-institutionalism, many authors like Salman et al. (2018) have suggested hydro-diplomacy as a stimulus to attaining a joint mechanism for transboundary water governance. They propound that professional diplomats can help break the ice by engaging the stakeholders via formal and backchannel diplomacy. They can render the two countries come to the negotiating table by building trust and confidence. This school of thought also suggests shifting from techno-centric governance to hydro-diplomacy. Khan, Yang, and Wi (2020) link both technical and cooperative aspects of development on transboundary watershed, i.e., Kabul River. They acknowledge the

hydro-politics in the region while evaluating the impact of Afghanistan's potential hydropower infrastructure development to meet its energy requirement. The study assesses both unilateral and joint development scenarios and establishes the benefits of joint development of water infrastructure for both Afghanistan and Pakistan. It maintains that each country will be impacted by the action of other in case of unilateral resource capture. Iqbal (2020) explores the hydro-diplomacy potential of Pakistan and Afghanistan regarding transboundary water governance and maintains that it can help with water cooperation between both states.

Ahmadzai and McKinna (2018) identify the absence of a water-sharing mechanism of Afghanistan with its neighbors as an obstacle, inter alia, for optimal utilization of its hydropower potential. The authors state that cooperation can be achieved through communal interests. Although the article focalizes on energy resources as vistas for regional cooperation, it deems transboundary water governance agreements as a precondition. The literature suggests employing benefit-sharing to promote cooperation. Focusing on mutual interests can help avoid conflicting factors. According to the benefit-sharing approach, collaboration on non-problematic issues that offer common interests while temporarily leaving the issues with a potential of conflict can build trust between the states. These mutual interests can pave the way for cooperation on development and improvement of the transboundary watersheds.

Sadeqinazhad et al. (2018) build on this approach to formulate a benefit-sharing framework that will include the agreed benefits for Pakistan and Afghanistan that will lead the situation from a zero-sum game to positive sum (or win-win). The authors propound that in order to enable sustainable cooperation on transboundary rivers, efforts should be made to identify the benefits and how both countries would go about them. Atef et al. (2019) acknowledge the unique scenario of Kabul River Basin where Pakistan and Afghanistan are both upper and downstream riparian. They deem it a promising factor, as it will remove the need of unproductive debates on the rights of upstream and downstream states. While doing so, the paper employs the conflict transformation approach to assess Pakistan and Afghanistan's relations on water. It targets the government's decision-making capacity as a solution and recommends a decision support tool to render the process easier vis-à-vis formulating a mechanism for conflict transformation into cooperation. Hayat (2020) employs multilevel governance and inclusive development approach to transboundary



water management. The author uses institutionalism as a base and propounds that a cross-boundary water management framework should involve the various tiers of governance and include the social, political, local and ecological factors to ensure sustainable and inclusive development on Kabul River Basin.

## **2.1 Evidence from Other Water-Sharing Mechanisms**

Evidence from the internationally prevailing water-sharing mechanisms indicates that despite the circumstances leading to conflicts, many rival states managed to transcend the conflict stage to reach cooperation over transboundary waters. These states have signed treaties to delineate the terms for sharing transboundary rivers, the details of which would be explained later in this section. In Pakistan-Afghanistan context, it is important to take a look at such treaties and the conditions that led to their materialization. One such treaty is the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) signed between the arch-rivals Pakistan and India. Soon after partition, water issues started to emerge between the newly formed states. Prior to partition, the subcontinent had a cohesive irrigation system covering six rivers, i.e., Ravi, Chenab, Sutlej, Beas, Jhelum, and Indus. After a hasty partition, the river water was being divided as per the political boundaries. India, being the upstream state, started building structure on the water channels after the culmination of the existent water-sharing agreement that impacted the flow in Pakistan's canals (Mirza, 2016). They share Pakistan is lower riparian with major reliance on agriculture. The heavy influx of Muslim migrants into the country was already putting pressure on its already meagre resources. With disruption in the water flow, the food basket became a concern for Pakistan. The already strained relations due to Kashmir intensified further. However, the heads of the states agreed not to resort to war over 'bilateral issues' and find an amicable solution. After several proposals being presented and rejected, the issue got international attention. It was discussed that Pakistan would be able to win the legal battle, but the issues of both states, i.e., development and resources would not be resolved. It is better to find technical and institutional solutions to this issue. The mediation of World Bank was accepted by both parties, which led to a lengthy process of negotiations sprawling over nine years. A treaty was signed between Pakistan and India in 1960 (Biswas, 1992), which is deemed as one of the most successful water treaties so far, as it survived three wars and many severed-relation spans (Mirza, 2016). However, the treaty is unique in the way that it actually divides the water flow between the states. The standard practice is to employ integrated approach to utilizing water basins. But the idea of

integrated utilization was rejected by both Pakistan and India. Currently, the treaty required revision, as it does not contain the impacts of climate change, environmental degradation, and sustainable utilization. However, due to the tense relations between the two states, the existence of the treaty is deemed as relief amid India's construction of of-the-river dams, which is deemed by Pakistan as unilateral modification or misinterpretation of the treaty. Notably, in the context of Indo-Pak shared waters, the riparian states are conventional, and the downstream riparian can be impacted by the actions of the upper riparian. To maintain a deterrent, disruption of Indus River waters or its capture is one of the nuclear thresholds in Pakistan's first-use policy (Tertrais, 2012).

The second treaty on water is between Israel and Jordan, another example of rival states struggling over disputes ranging from land, water, and Palestine issue. Water issues led to the 1967 Arab-Israel war. The need to have a water-sharing treaty was recognized, especially by the Jordan River riparians. However, the Arab states had not recognized Israel, which was one of the major impediments in water cooperation between the riparian states. Jordan and Israel share Jordan River with the former being downstream while the latter upstream. The two states signed a US-brokered peace treaty in 1994 that included water-sharing clauses as well. The treaty provided for the establishment of joint institutional bodies to monitor agreed water-sharing mechanism and handle the disputes (Haddadin, 2000). Notably, the treaty was a compromise by Jordan, as the absence of a water-allocation plan would have caused difficulties for the downstream state. The flow from Upper Jordan river was crucial for the state, as the Lower Jordan had polluted saline water mostly, which was discharged by Israel. Israel, being an upper riparian is still manifesting hegemonic behavior on the said river basin. A revision of this treaty is also required, but the political issues as well as current situation favoring the upper riparian state (the hegemon) are making the treaty's revision unlikely (Borthwick, 2010). Notably, in both instances, a few commonalities can be identified. Apart from being the conflicting states, both scenarios have clearly defined riparian states, which is not the case with Pakistan and Afghanistan. The fact that both Pakistan and Afghanistan enjoy the status of upper and lower riparian simultaneously creates a deterring factor itself. If one state's actions impact the other, the latter can exhibit the same behavior on the other river channel where it is upstream. It removes the element of urgency or survival, which was the stark feature of both Israel-Jordan and India-Pakistan scenarios. It makes the Pak-Afghan water governance multi-layered, complex, and unique.

## **2.2 Conceptual Underpinnings**

### **Hydro-politics**

While the term hydro-politics has been defined in a variety of ways in the literature, Jankielsohn (2012) summarizes it as the politics of water that denotes the complex interactions and relations among the states sharing river basins. The term refers to struggle between the states over water resources. Water issues are deemed as fault lines for conflict and have potential to cause confrontation.

Another thing observed by many researchers is that water issues alone might not cause conflict, but they can exacerbate a situation and lead to escalation. Similarly, the political acrimony can intensify the water issues, which eventually aggravate the relations further. In fact, Wolf, Yoffe, and Giordano (2003) found in a study that countries who cooperate otherwise cooperate on water while countries disputing over other issues tend to have conflicts over water as well. It means politics on water is subject to the ‘bigger’ political scenario.

Just as it is a source of conflict, water can be a source of cooperation as well. Cooperative water regimes or institutions can not only quell the risk of conflict over water but also have a spill over in other venues (Wolf, 1999).

### **Conflict and Cooperation**

Conflict is generally presumed as confrontation or severance of relations between states (Wolf, 1999). Technically a conflict might be deadlock or stalemate over something, like shared waters arrangement. This situation signifies absence of violence with lack of any constructive collaboration. Water conflicts vary in intensity, ranging from absence of dialogue or discussions to public hostility. Wolf, Yoffe, and Giordano (2003) maintain that the odds and intensity of risk increases when any change surpasses the institutional capacity to assimilate that change. However, in case of Pakistan and Afghanistan, any formal or informal institutional setup is lacking. Other factors like both states being upper and lower riparian also change the outlook or understanding of the term conflict.

Cooperation is perceived as creation of institutions and agreements on a bilateral or a multilateral level. While these institutions denote and sustain the amicable relations between states, they do not represent cooperation alone. Just like conflict, cooperation also varies across levels. It can range from countries initiating dialogue on an issue to signing a treaty and formulating joint transboundary water governance commissions. Transboundary water management is not predetermined. Efforts are made to reach cooperative setup between the riparians, but how things would pan out in the long run cannot be decided or projected earlier. Hence, transboundary water management is deemed a way of conflict management (Earle, Jägerskog, and Öjendal 2013). Moreover, conflict and cooperation do not operate in a continuum. They are likely to coexist and are far from being antonyms to each other (Mirumachi and Allan 2007).

|          |      | Cooperation        |                                       |
|----------|------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
|          |      | Low                | High                                  |
| Conflict | Low  | Little interaction | Stable and comfortable                |
|          | High | Unstable relations | Unstable, intense, sometimes creative |

**Fig. 1.** Relationship between Co-operation and Conflict  
Source: Adapted from Craig 1993: 16

(Mirumachi and Allan 2007)

### Political Will

Post, Raile and Raile (2010) define political will as “The extent of committed support among key decision makers for a particular policy solution to a particular problem.” They further explain that to establish political will, following factors must be present:

- Sufficient set of decision makers
- Committed support
- Common understanding of the issue that is listed on the formal agenda
- Common perception about the potential effectiveness of the policy solution.

## **Agenda Setting**

Political will solidifies when the issue comes to public attention and is considered a potential public policy matter. That is where agenda setting comes in. Agenda setting makes an issue prominent in the public's eyes and public will is generated for its resolution. Agenda setting works on two principles, i.e., scarcity and subjectivity. Scarcity refers to the limited space available for attention garnering avenues like the media. Hence, there is a fierce competition among the interest groups and other entities pursuing differing goals to grab that space. Subjectivity refers to the fact that the issue is not defined objectively, i.e., there is no inherent definition of it. The issue is defined and described by certain groups to make it appealing to the public and gatekeepers (Christensen, 2014).

## **Water Diplomacy**

Water diplomacy promotes cooperation between two states and helps with conflict management. It encompasses all actions taken by the state and non-state actors to prevent or facilitate conciliatory resolution of conflicts and promote cooperation vis-a-vis water allocation, availability, and utilization within and between states as well as among public and private stakeholders. Any water diplomacy framework would include multi-level interactions including highly official diplomatic communications and unofficial dialogues between researchers, academia, media persons, and other members of civil society (Huntjens et al., 2016).

## **2.3 Literature Gap**

The prevalent literature prescribes various approaches for a transboundary water governance for Kabul River. However, it does not either discuss at all or just skips over the concept of political will. The term is generally used as a rhetoric rather than a proper concept. Political will is critical to materializing a transboundary water governance mechanism between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is a technical term with several pre-requisites that need to be fulfilled for a claim that political will exists or lacks for a public policy issue. Whether the two states need to discuss the benefits offered by a certain policy solution (benefit-sharing approach) or creating institutions to cooperate over an issue, they need to come at the negotiation table first. The same goes for the issue of

transboundary water governance between Pakistan and Afghanistan. To initiate a dialogue between two countries and then to materialize the outcomes of that dialogue, commitment by the political actors of these countries is a sine qua non. While there have been several discussions on the issue, there is no practical initiative after these claims. This pattern needs to be observed thoroughly as to why no progress can be made despite several attempts at the dialogue. The apparent reason for that seems to be political issues and power struggle superseding the perceived benefits of an agreed arrangement on the KRB. That raises the question whether there is absolute and persistent commitment by the decision makers in both countries. While several approaches have been used to determine solutions for a stalemate or political inertia (Salman et al., 2018), the probable/culpable cause of this inertia has not been discussed. The literature does not discuss political will as a technical concept. Without having concrete evidence, the lack of political will cannot be ruled out or identified as the major cause of the inertia/no progress made for Afghan-Pakistan transboundary water governance.

The proponents of various approaches for water-sharing riparians, be it benefit-sharing, hydro-diplomacy, or technical solutions, do mention that the initial step for these to work is communication/dialogue between both states. It is possible only when the states recognize the need to communicate. Once communication is established on this aspect political will can come only then.

A few authors like Hayat (2020) state that political will for developing an arrangement for water sharing in Kabul River Basin exists in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Atef et al. (2019) mention that political will is there in Afghanistan to increase the water sector's capacity, which can be a driver for a water-sharing agreement. Thomas et al. (2016) conducted a survey of Afghan parliamentarians and academics to gauge the narrative on the prospect of a water-sharing arrangement with the country's neighbors. The survey gives mixed results. Some of the MPs were in favor of a treaty with Afghanistan, some (mostly academics) participants strongly supported the idea while others rejected it staunchly. Such evidence is not sufficient to claim or negate the existence of political will. Political will is necessary for any issue to become a public policy matter. In case of Pakistan and Afghanistan, the announcements (which is generally deemed as political will by several scholars) have been made multiple times to cooperate on transboundary rivers. However, that

cannot be defined as political will. There are sporadic follow ups after these announcements, but the projects or any material outcome has not come out yet. Especially in the case of Afghanistan, there is reluctance to have a dialogue on this issue. The reason of which can be attributed to lack of commitment in the country. Another reason, which can play role in the low commitment level as well, is the perceived level of urgency, i.e., the necessity to have a water sharing agreement. When a state is lower riparian, the effect of the upper riparian's operations on the river basin can be drastic for the lower riparian state. To minimize the externality, the lower riparian strives to have a water-sharing treaty where its rights are secured.

Pakistan and Afghanistan enjoy unique status vis-à-vis Kabul River. They are both upstream and downstream riparian on the same basin (although different rivers). This hinders the perception about urgency or the necessity to chalk out a water sharing treaty. This factor has been emphasized profoundly in the literature. However, the fact that it can play into the countries' sense of complacency is not discussed. The reason Pakistan and India went for a treaty was that the former faced high risk of losses (both economic and otherwise) from the latter's actions.

Pakistan engaged the international community, which proved to be a catalyst for the water-sharing agreements. Interest by the international community and organizations is deemed as a huge capital for the said cooperation. In case of Kabul River Basin, high interest from the international community is available for a joint water-sharing framework. The World Bank has proposed various solutions to address the issue and break the stalemate (*South Asia Water Initiative (SAWI)*, n.d.; World Bank, 2010). The only factor missing here seems to be the perceived urgency and political will. An urgency or necessity of something is a major stimulus for creating political will. Therefore, introducing this urgency, i.e., the need and benefits of agreeing to joint water management, into the national and social narrative can help achieving the desired result. This hypothesis can be validated or negated only when concrete evidence for the level of political will in both countries regarding water-diplomacy and joint water management is available.

## CHAPTER 3

This chapter elucidates the methodology, methods and tools used for the research. It justifies the choices made regarding data collection and analysis as well.

### **Methodology:**

#### **Research Design**

This research is purely qualitative and aims to identify the current situation on Kabul River Basin and the cooperation level between Afghanistan and Pakistan on transboundary waters. The research employs inductive approach to thematic analysis. This approach is suitable for the subject of this research, which seeks to derive themes from the data without any preconceptions (as is the case with deductive approach).

The research applies the case study method. It uses a multi-faceted and unique case study to understand a complex transboundary issue and an abstract concept within the public policy nomenclature. The case study method is applicable in this context because this study attempts to understand the how and why of the Pakistan-Afghanistan transboundary water cooperation. According to Yin (2018), this method is appropriate for examining the how or why questions. This study revolves around the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of a potential Kabul River Treaty. The research design is explanatory, as it focuses on the phenomena prevailing in the real-life situations (Yin, 2018).

#### **Data Collection and Analysis**

- For the first research objective, i.e., development of political will framework, literature on political will has been reviewed to find common aspects of the concept and build on the existing frameworks. The literature has been accessed through Google Scholar using BOOLEAN Operators (AND, OR, NOT, AND NOT).



- For the second research objective, i.e., gauging political will for transboundary water cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan – semi-structured interviews have been conducted from Pakistan, Afghanistan and international water experts.

### **Sampling:**

The sample size is 15 based on the saturation in the responses. The interviews have been analyzed to examine the state of political will, using the political will framework developed in this study. 4 international experts have also been interviewed to widen the perspective. The criteria for selecting the interviewees from both sides was individuals either having ample research work on Pak-Afghan transboundary water sharing or public officials/dignitaries who have been associated with the transboundary waters and bilateral relations<sup>1</sup> within the government organizations.

Six in-depth interviews have been conducted from Pakistan. The respondents were selected based on their expertise and relevance to the topic. Two were former ambassadors to Afghanistan, three were water experts with research on Pak-Afghan transboundary water governance while one was from the foreign ministry.

As for Afghanistan, nine in-depth interviews were conducted. Four of the respondents were government officials from water and energy ministry and foreign ministry (transboundary waters section). One of them is associated with the current regime as well. The remaining five were water experts and development practitioners. For interviews in Afghanistan, snowball technique was also applied to an extent. The respondents were asked to refer to another one having the required characteristics, such as experience in working on transboundary issues either as a researcher, project manager, or public official.

### **Rationale:**

Purposive sampling is useful when information-rich cases (individuals or groups) are needed to conduct research (Patton, 2002). For this study, the issue of transboundary water governance between Pakistan and Afghanistan needs to be understood thoroughly. Given the multiple layers of

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<sup>1</sup> Interviews from politicians could not be conducted due to the prevailing situation in Afghanistan.

this issue, i.e., political tensions, internal issues, uncertainty, etc., a detailed discussion with the experts and individuals in the government that are associated with Pak-Afghan relations would help attain the inside inputs and identify the issues curtailing water cooperation between the two riparian partners.

### **In-Depth Interviews**

Given the security situation in Afghanistan and the resource constraint at the researcher's end, interviews from Afghan respondents were conducted on Zoom. The interviewees were approached through email, LinkedIn, and Facebook. As for the Pakistani respondents, most of the interviews were conducted in-person, some at their offices while some at the local cafes. A few were also conducted through the Zoom call. The duration of the interviews ranged from 30 to 70 minutes.

The interviews were designed using the inductive approach, which means that they were not guided by the theme or sub-theme. Rather, themes and sub-themes were extracted from the responses. The questions remained broad to garner sufficient insights on the subject. The interviews started from the introductions and friendly exchanges between the researcher and the interviewee to build trust and lay ground for a candid discussion. Consent to record the interviews was sought at the beginning. The interviews started from simpler questions and then moved to more complexed, nuanced ones.

### **Analysis:**

As mentioned earlier, thematic analysis of the interviews has been undertaken. The interviews were transcribed and cross-checked again to ensure accuracy. The medium of communication was mostly English. However, three of the interviews were bilingual, i.e., in Urdu and English. Transcription of these interviews was undertaken cautiously and counter-checked to ensure the veracity of the statements. After finalizing the transcriptions, all the data was entered into N-Vivo for coding. Codes were generated and then clubbed to formulate themes. Some codes did not relate directly to the questions. However, they still offered an insight on the issue and were included in the analysis. The codebook has been attached in the annexes.

### **Observations During Sampling and Interviews:**

Most of the participants sought anonymity for the research. Especially, the Afghan participants cited security reasons and asked not to disclose their names or other details while mentioning their responses. Some of them wanted to ensure that the interview was being conducted and listened to by only the researcher. Such concerns were expressed by seven out of nine participants.

Interestingly, despite the security concerns of Afghan participants, they were more forthcoming and easier to approach. Most of the researchers contacted responded timely and agreed to give the interview. However, researchers and the government officials in Pakistan were reluctant to speak on the issue. Some did not respond on contact while some officials said that giving a statement on the subject would equate giving an official statement by their office. One of the officials told (on the condition of anonymity of both the individual and the organization) that Pakistan does not have any immediate plans to work on a treaty with Afghanistan.

- For the third and final objective, i.e., introducing political will into water diplomacy, strategies for creation of/strengthening political will have been reviewed based on the interviews and literature and then a framework has been developed to link political will and water diplomacy.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Details of the respondents have been kept classified as requested. Consent was taken before recording the interviews. All the quotes from the interviews have been included after consent of the respondents.

## CHAPTER 4

### 3.1 Analyzing Political Will

Scholarly literature recognizes political will as both a critical factor for an effective public policy intervention or success and an obscure concept that is hard to assess. Apart from the scholarly literature, media analyses, public speeches, and policy debates also mention political will. However, most of the mentions of political will are ex post facto and include its absence as a factor for the failure of a policy or reform or its need for a policy's success. The attempts to delineate political will as a concept have been rare even in academic literature. As Evans (2000) states that the major elucidations on political will are more about resenting its absence than deconstructing what it means (Woocher, 2001).

Since it has been acknowledged widely that political will is crucial for any development intervention or policy reform, it should be developed into a concrete idea that can be assessed objectively and thus become a tool for policy effectiveness. Recognizing the need, many authors have attempted to define the term and render it tangible enough to be assessed objectively. Some donor agencies have also attempted to deconstruct the concept while reaching at methods or ways to generate it for development interventions. Hammergren (1998) is one of the authors contributing to initial literature attempting to define political will. The author considers political will as a factor which contributes to the likelihood of reform. She states that the discussion and criticism of the prevailing situation on the subject denotes some level of political will. Moreover, she focuses on allocation of funds as a sign of presence of political will and builds on this premise to state that donors' funds and interventions can help generate the will for to reform.

Another article, which many authors have built on develops an analytical framework to assess political will in the context of anticorruption efforts. Brinkerhoff (2000) defines political will as the commitment of actors to execute actions for the achievement of certain objectives. The author

identifies the characteristics of political will while maintaining a high-low continuum for assessment and outlines environmental factors that influence political will.

The origin or ‘locus’ of the policy initiative influences whether political will is high or low. If the initiative is proposed by the indigenous or local actors, it has a higher level of political will compared to the initiative recommended by external actors like donors. However, the author clarifies that this factor alone cannot indicate the existence or lack of political will. Second comes the degree to which policy actors, which include but are not limited to policymakers, bureaucrats, and entities directly related to formation of a policy, conduct extensive analysis of the causes of corruption to develop an anti-corruption framework or action plan. The willingness as well as capacity of the actors to mobilize stakeholders for support of proposed reforms also indicates the extent of political will. The political will may be high if the policy actors are inclined to enforce the reform strategy through identified incentives and sanctions. The last characteristic, which is the trickiest yet crucial one, is the continuity of effort in undertaking reforms. Treating a reform as one-time effort or as a symbolic gesture denotes low political will. According to Brinkerhoff (2000), the environmental factors that influence the degree and presence of political will include:

- Type of regime
- Social, political, economic stability
- Influence of vested interests
- Extent and nature of corruption
- Influence of civil society and the private sector, and
- Donor-government relations.

Brinkerhoff (2000) also acknowledges that an event-shock or crisis-time proves to be a great impetus for a reform. The author has a nuanced approach to the concept of political will, as it considers the underlying or back-end mechanisms such as vested interests and capacity. Although

it is specific to the context of corruption reforms, its major points can be extracted and applied to other scenarios as well.

Malena (2009) discusses political will in the context of participatory governance. Like the other attempts at conceptualizing political will, the author acknowledges the idea that political will can be generated and sustained. While exploring the avenues for generation of the will, the article attempts to operationalize the concept as well. The author identifies three elements of political will that reinforce each other: 'political want', 'political can', and 'political must'. The political actors should 'want' to conduct the policy option and thus commit to act on it, know that they have the ability and capacity to do it, and feel the need to undertake the required policy option. Moreover, the author concedes that sometimes state actors openly accept or reject an initiative. However, open acceptance of an initiative does not necessarily manifest presence of political will. It must be accompanied by adequate resources, implementation, enforcement, and prioritization of the concerned initiative. Elucidating further, the author maintains that political will as a reality is unpredictable and complex. Hence, ideally, the implementation of a policy results from the interplay of policymakers' sincere wish, power/capacity, and pressure or recognition of the need. She describes the three mutually reinforcing pointers as elements of political will: political want, political can, and political must. While discussing the ideal situation, the author does acknowledge that the actions of many political actors do not originate from their personal values (which are deemed in the article as one of the drivers of 'political want') but derive from the political or personal interest. As for 'political can', the perceived lack of skills or capability (be it economic or structural) can lead to low political will. 'Political must' completes the level of political will and renders the probability of political action higher if it accompanies capacity and want. This component of political will refers to a crisis where business as usual is not an option for the policy makers anymore. It also implies pressure from top (leadership, external) as well as from below (public pressure; demonstrations, strikes, petition, media campaigns, lobbying, and advocacy). This research demarcates the difference between indicators of political will and the influencing factors.

Post et al. (2010) define political will as the "the extent of committed support among key decision makers for a particular policy solution to a particular problem." They further explain that to achieve political will, following factors must be present:

- Sufficient set of decision makers
- Common understanding of the issue that is listed on the formal agenda
- Committed support
- Common perception about the potential effectiveness of the policy solution.

The authors attempt to operationalize the concept of political will along with characterizing it. They operationalize the component of sufficient set of decision makers as actors who can approve, implement, and enforce policies. The assessment target of this component is the existence of institutions and factions. The second component has two parts, common understanding and presence on the formal agenda. The operationalization of these parts is use of similar terminology and frame and listing of the problem on the formal agenda. The assessment target is volume of discussion on the issue and convergence in the policy actors' statements. The third component - committed support, is operationalized as strength and distribution of the actors' preferences against the target of incentives/disincentives, analytical resource allocation, bargaining mechanisms, credibility of statements, key constituency positions, and cultural constraints. The fourth component also has two parts - common perception, and effectiveness of the policy option. Its operationalization is in the form of common frame, avoidance of ineffective options, and capacity for effectiveness. The assessment targets are binding statements by decision makers, commitment of funding, effective enforcement mechanisms, and implementers' support.

This article [Post et al., (2010)] is the most comprehensive one on the subject, as it compares and builds on the existing attempts of defining and assessing political will. Moreover, this article acknowledges the importance of capacity, as the last two components directly deal with the issues of capacity. It needs to be noted here that capacity does not only imply institutional or economic capacity, but it also refers to social and political stability.

While these articles remain extensive, these are focused on domestic policy issues. When it comes to foreign policy, the internal political economy and organizational context matters along with the international context. In case of foreign policy decisions, the environmental factor (i.e., Geopolitical environment) takes utmost importance. Hence, the foreign policy decision making models

needed to be considered while discussing political will for such an issue. Woocher (2001) connects the aforementioned models with the concept of political will in the context of preventive action against deadly conflicts. The author maintains that political will remains a pivotal factor in any government decision making model. He acknowledges the importance of perception of a situation by policy actors while discussing the three decision-making models posited by Allison (1969). Here are the decision-making models explained in the context of political will.

### **Rational Actor Model:**

As the rational actor model states, a policy outcome is a result of the (rational) actor's goals, perceptions of the objective scenario, and cost and benefit analysis of multiple options. All these factors influence political will. If the actor's goal does not coincide with a certain policy outcome, the political will for that policy would be low. Similarly, if the actor does not construe a situation as viable to act or feels that it offers more costs than benefits, the will to take a course of action would be low. Notably, this model is the closest to fitting political will as a concept. However, here comes the issue of bounded rationality, as the actor would only have limited capacity to objectively assess information which also has limited availability. This model also discusses the capacity of the rational actors as a factor driving the outcomes.

### **Organizational Behavior Model:**

This model addresses the issue of 'bounded rationality' noted in the rational actor model - organizations are supposed to be more systematic and objective than individuals (Woocher, 2011). This model considers policy actions as an outcome of various organizational factors, such as objectives, capabilities, culture, and SOPs. It also mentions organizational capacity and capabilities as an influencing factor in the decision-making process.

The organizational model indicates presence or absence of political will as lack of institutionalization and rationalization of a policy solution. Moreover, lengthy procedures and half-hearted attempts at implementation might also demonstrate low political will for a policy solution.

### **Governmental Politics Model:**



This model focuses on actors as players. It takes into consideration who is playing, behavior of the individual players, and rules of the games as well as action channels. It takes a relatively individualistic approach to decision making. The model propounds that the players in the game act as per their individual characteristics and political skills. Their interests, experiences, and preferences play an important role and thus changing the players can drastically change the results of a policy. For instance, a decision to prevent refugee influx or containing illegal refugees would incur a different result if only defense personnel were taken onboard as compared to a combination of military forces and human rights personnel. As to how it is linked to political will, Woocher (2011) suggests that lack of political will is demonstrated if the decision-making rules and action channels tend to go against the policy decision on the agenda

While the author attempts to explain the decision-making options separately, it needs to be noted that in real-life scenarios, these models operate simultaneously. There cannot be a hard and fast claim to ascertain which actor plays the major role, the individual actors, organizations, or the system. Each one influences the process in their domain. Their role may grow or reduce based on the context and the capabilities of these actors.

### **3.2 Discussion:**

The aforementioned literature acknowledges that political will is a multi-faceted concept. The degree of its presence or complete absence relies heavily on the context and situation in a country. Its elements are mutually reinforcing, and the factors interplay to generate political will. In some cases, or policy choices, economic factors may be sufficient on their own to drive a policy. Whereas, in others, factors like political economy, internal politics, and vested interest may play a bigger role. Regardless of what these facets or layers come to be, political will can be seen through certain developments and actions. Nevertheless, the literature iterates that political will is a major factor that can influence the policy making process. Not only that it can determine the selection of a policy option, it can also be generated and nurtured in certain ways.

These articles discuss stages of a public policy cycle, directly or indirectly. They recognize that the policymakers or political actors tend to select certain options from a plethora of problems based on the outcome and their interest. Another aspect that most of these articles acknowledge is regime

types. Post et al. (2010), Brinkerhoff (2000), and Hammergren (1998) consider authoritarian regimes as well while discussing the concept of political will. In an autocratic regime, many of the public policy cycles stages are informal or have minimal existence. Moreover, the regime type tends to influence the degree of political will and the process of generating political will for a policy solution.

Furthermore, some of the literature discusses agenda setting strategies as ways to generate political will. They maintain that there are multiple actors at play while deliberating on policy issues and choices. Some of them have higher influence and power so they also influence the degree of political will. Another thing common in this strand of literature is that it acknowledges capacity, authority, and legitimacy of political actors having the potential to be major factors in determining the presence or absence of political will. If there are insufficient resources for a policy option or the polity lags in capacity, be it institutional or in capabilities, the will to opt for that option would be low. This factor plays a major role in foreign policy decision making, as states tend to gain advantage (in realism, this benefit is relative power - while institutionalists claim it is absolute advantage, the constructivists view it a perceived benefit) in the international arena. So, if the state does not have the capacity to benefit from a policy decision (the political actors would not have political or economic gains from it), it would not opt for that decision (unless there is irresistible pressure). It needs to be noted here that capacity does not only imply institutional or economic capacity, but it also refers to social and political stability.

The third factor shared by the said literature is continuity or commitment to pursuance of the policy issue. Half-hearted or insincere attempts at an intervention show a lackluster will. However, one thing that remains missing or less discussed is the perception about the capacity or the urgency/gravity of a policy problem.

However, this literature on political will remains specific to certain issues and reforms. Foreign policy issues, although closely linked to the domestic politics and agendas, as Woocher (2011) acknowledges, have to take into consideration several externalities originating from the international institutions and climate. Moreover, most of this strand of literature focuses on the factors that can help generate political will. It is a solution-oriented approach, but if one were to assess the current level of political will for a policy solution, there is a lot of derivation to do from

these articles. While influencing factors should be accounted for in the assessment of political will, they are based on the context and not every time would indicate the presence or absence of political will in isolation, as the literature admits. Another thing that needs to be noted is that it is more about the awareness about the presence of these factors. For instance, even if a policy intervention has economic benefits but the policymakers do not realize the potential, the presence of these benefits alone cannot influence political will for that policy option.

This thesis aims to render the concept of political will more tangible by identifying the areas or actions where political will becomes visible and separate the factors or elements from the areas where political will manifests itself. This makes it easier to assess the presence of political will and even calculate its strength while separately analyzing the factors influencing political will and then targeting them to generate will for an issue. It needs to be reiterated here that this attempt is not at all conducted in isolation, rather it builds on the previously conducted operationalization and assessment criteria of political will. One thing that did not get enough attention in the said literature is whether the perception of certain factors lead to political will or the real situation. For instance, avoiding policy failure might be of important (but not as much as a threatening existence), but it will not become notable in the eyes of the policymakers only if they become aware of it and start perceiving it as a noteworthy policy issue. This consideration of perception is highly relevant in foreign policy issues.

Hence, this research seeks to propose a political will framework that considers foreign policy decision making as well. It also attempts to identify the factors that influence political will and working on which can help generate political will for a specific issue. It builds on the existing conceptualization of the concept and tends to draw out areas that clearly show the presence or lack of political will. Even these academic viewpoints take from each other and propound more or less the same ideas with difference in operationalization. To develop a framework that is more tangible and takes into account the foreign policy context as well, there has to be a demarcation between systemic IR theories (such as realism, liberalism, and constructivism) and foreign policy decision making is merited. This research takes inspiration from the Synder-Bruck-Sapin's foreign policy analysis, generally known as SBS-framework in this regard. It considers state behavior in both international and domestic arenas and provides a generic baseline for other frameworks by

providing for both physical and sociocultural factors. It also acknowledges that policy decisions are more about perception of a certain situation rather than the real situation itself. (Snyder et al., 1961).

Another aspect that needs to be considered while materializing the concept of political will is whether it applies to the will of an individual leader or of leaders and political agencies collectively. The answer is again in the theoretical context of public policy and remains a little bit of both premises.

The question can be divided into two premises in the context of political will. According to some researchers, political will is the discretion of leader(s). According to these researchers, a leader is an executive. They can issue orders and prevent actions. They can incentivize and disincentivize certain policy choices for other political actors. This argument is plausible. An individual does play an important role in policymaking, but there is only a limit to as far as they can go in this regard. An executive or a political leader is also operating in a constrained environment. There is the issue of bounded rationality. Humans experience certain constraint when it comes to rationality. Moreover, there is an entire paraphernalia of policymaking surrounding the executive. For instance, a structural reform would involve not just the executive (political leader) but bureaucratic organizations, interest groups, and above all other politicians/political actors. Even if they are somehow influenced to operationalize certain actions, they might take their fair share of time working on it if they do not have the 'will' to do it for some reason. As for incentivizing or disincentivizing is concerned, an entire entity would be a bit harder to appease with some uniform actions. This impediment is more evident in the foreign policy decisions where multiple institutions negotiate to develop an outcome acceptable to the relevant stakeholders. Exhibit A shows how President Woodrow Wilson strived for the development of League of Nations, being a pacifist. However, he couldn't join the organization because of certain political concerns back home (Cooper, 2001). He failed to convince the other political actors to form this policy. Here, a view put forth is that in an authoritarian regime, gaining support of other political actors is not an issue. However, more often than not, even authoritarian leaders have to consider certain factors before making a decision, including public support (Mintz & Sofrin, 2017).

Mintz & Sofrin (2017) maintain leaders (even authoritarian) must heed their advisors in a crisis situation. They will take the final decision as per their discretion, but a lot of factors play into this

decision making. They must take into account what is expected of them as a leader viz-a-viz a policy decision, their advisors' vantage, public support, and external influence elements like international community and in some cases donor support. So, even for the executives, there are some costs and benefits involved. They would decide based on their gains, which arise from certain listening to other actors as well. Having said that, regardless of whether the context is foreign policy or a domestic one, the idea of political will relates to the public policy frameworks. While political will operates subtly and remains invisible mostly, it does show in the decision-making processes and can be identified as low or high. The relevant literature discussed earlier take these considerations into account.

The common factors identified in the literature on political will include:

| Authors                   | Definition                                       | Focus                   | Indicators of Political Will   | Influencing Factors   |
|---------------------------|--|-------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Hammergren (1998)</b>  | Likelihood of reform/commitment of policy actors | Law programs            | Allocation of funds<br>Commitment to reforms<br>Discussion and criticism of existing situation | Donor intervention<br>Resource availability<br>Capacity to formulate and implement policy<br>Disposition of the political elite <sup>2</sup><br>Common vision and understanding among actors<br>Public will/support |
| <b>Brinkerhoff (2000)</b> | Actors' commitment to execute actions to achieve | Anti-corruption reforms | Locus of initiative:<br>Degree of analytical rigor   | Environmental factors:<br>Regime type   |

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<sup>2</sup> Hammergren maintains that sometimes elite apathy can be a facilitator for reform. The author implies that political elite's apathy, which is perceived as lack of political will, might be a good thing for reform, as in some cases, elite plays a negative role in reform implementation.

|                       |   |  |  |  |
|-----------------------|---|--|--|--|
|                       | certain objectives                              |  | Stakeholders' mobilization for support<br><br>Application of credible sanctions<br><br>Continuity  | Economic, social, political stability<br><br>Nature and extent of corruption <sup>3</sup><br><br>Vested Interests<br><br>Private sector and Civil society<br><br>Donor-government relations  |
| <b>Woocher (2001)</b> |   | Preventive action against deadly conflicts | Political will through government decision-making models:<br><br>1. Rational Actor Model<br><br>2. Organizational Behavior Model<br><br>3. Governmental Politics Model | 1. Actors' goals<br><br>Perception of objective situation<br><br>Cost and benefit analysis<br><br>Bounded rationality issues<br><br>Collective action problems<br><br>2. Organizational objectives<br><br>Organizational culture<br><br>Routines and SOPs<br><br>3. Who plays?<br><br>Players' behavior<br><br>Action channels and rules of game |
| <b>Malena (2009)</b>  | Commitment of political leaders and bureaucrats | Participatory governance                   | Initiation of practices<br><br>Active support  | <b>Elements of political will:</b><br><br><b>Political want:</b>   |

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<sup>3</sup> The article focuses on corruption reforms, but these factors have generic application as well.

|                                      |   |   |   |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
|                                      | to undertake action   |   | <p>Expressed disposition<sup>4</sup></p> <p>Resource allocation</p> <p>Stakeholders' mobilization</p> <p>Implementation</p> <p>Enforcement via sanctions</p> <p>Prioritization or timely implementation</p> | <p>Natural want—personal beliefs, values</p> <p>Converted: realization of benefits, political gains</p> <p><b>Political can</b></p> <p>Confidence in capacity (of both state actors and other stakeholders); abilities, skills, and mechanisms</p> <p><b>Political must</b></p> <p>Political, economic, or social crisis.</p> <p>Pressure from top (leadership) or below (public).</p> <p>Having made certain actions compulsory by legal or constitutional framework</p> |
| <b>Post, Raile, and Raile (2010)</b> | “The extent of committed support among key decision makers for a particular policy solution to a particular problem.” | Political will (mostly details domestic issues as case study, such as healthcare reforms) | <p>1. Sufficient set of key decision makers:</p> <p>Assessment targets (potential indicators):</p> <p>Institutions and factions</p> <p>2. Common understanding of the problem on a formal agenda</p>        |   |

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<sup>4</sup> Positive refers to acceptance of a certain action as a policy option by the political actors

Convergence in decision makers' statements

Volume of discussion on the concerned problem

3. Commitment to support

Incentives/ disincentives for political actors

Allocation of analytics resources

Statements' credibility

Constituencies' position and accountability relationships

Bargaining mechanisms

Cultural characteristics and constraints

4. Commonly perceived, effective policy solution

Decisionmakers converge on statements on a policy solution

No short-term solutions or diversionary tactics

Funding commitment

Enforcement mechanism and sanctions

Implementation resources and support

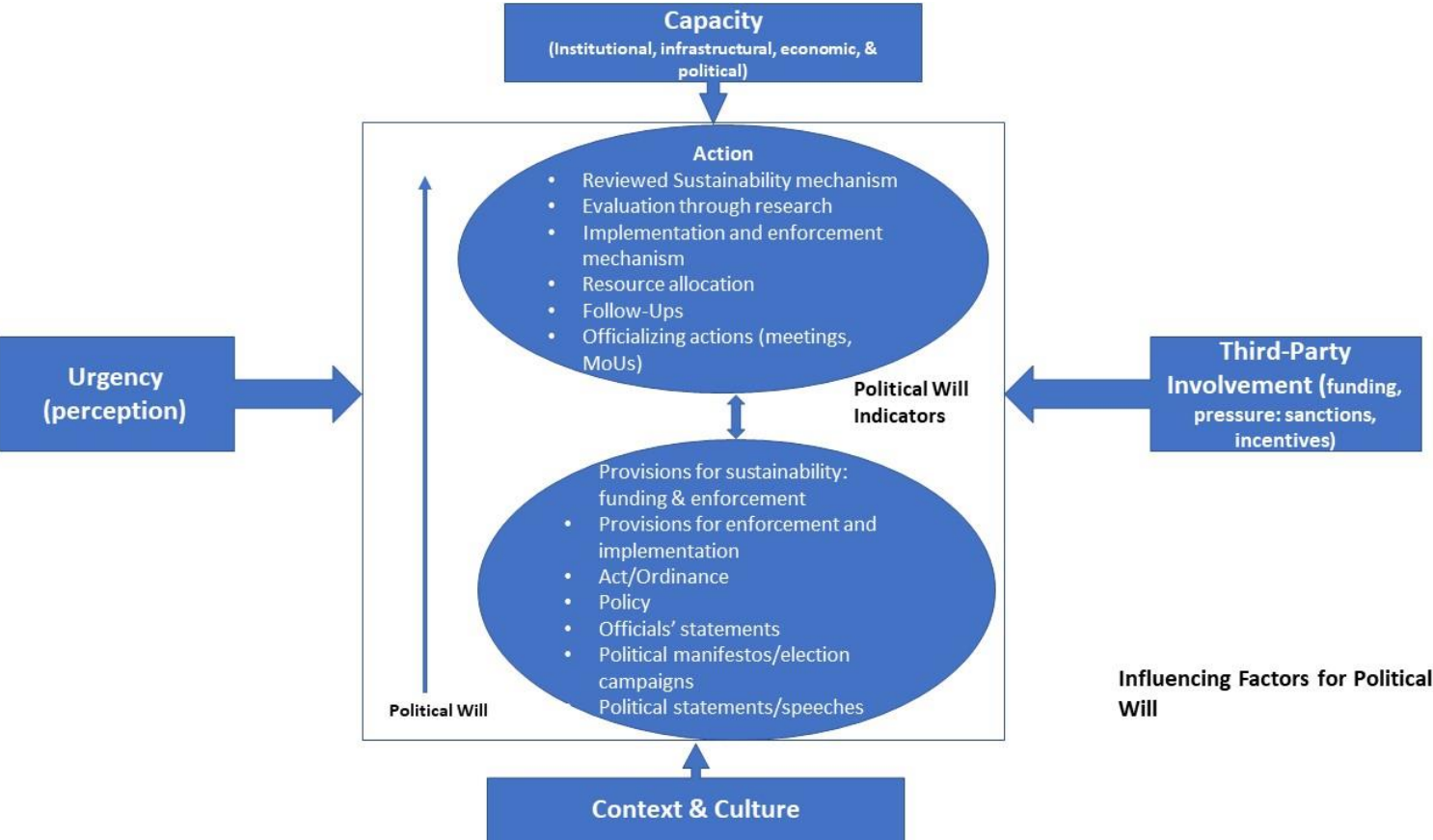


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**Table 1: Literature on Political Will**

### 3.4 Developing Political Will Framework

Deriving from the literature, here are the indicators where political will becomes visible along with the factors that influence political will.



**Figure 2: Political Will Framework**

## **Visibility Indicators:**

The literature discusses the intent or disposition of decision makers and convergence of ideas (Brinkerhoff, 2000; Hammergren, 1998b; Post et al., 2010). The authors discuss enforcement mechanisms, resource allocation, and continuity efforts. All these elements are evident through some tangible aspects. For instance, discussion and convergence of understanding can be assessed through political or official statements, political speeches, election campaigns, meetings, bills, resolutions, and parliamentary debate.

The prospect of the commitment or sustained will shows itself in the envisaged actions in policies. The will can be deemed higher if the concerned issue is a part of the country's acts and laws. The will becomes even higher resources are allocated for the purpose, especially finances and a sustainability mechanism to ensure continuity of the effort in the policy. However, in many cases, specifically in developing countries, the process of policy formulation is weak and replete with delays and procedural errors. Hence, in these countries, just the specific actions by the policy actors can be enough of a sign for the presence of political will. For instance, the first-ever water policy of Pakistan was formulated in 2018. However, the water infrastructure, irrigation approach, water allocation, and transboundary water policy remained non-existent, only in writing - if the policy does exist on a subject, but the concerned issue remains absent from it, this would denote low political will (could be lack of understanding which reflects lack of political will). For instance, Pakistan's water policy mentions pursuing transboundary issues but only with reference to shared water courses with India. It might denote the absence of a recognized need of having water cooperation with Afghanistan. Nevertheless, if the policy is absent altogether on the issue, the assessment criteria can be the real actions of policy actors. When Pakistan raised the issue of water sharing with India and claimed its low-riparian rights before the international community, that was enough reflection of political will for potential water cooperation with India. Similarly, when Pakistan changed its policy on the Taliban regime in 2001, there was no debate or discussion. There was a speech by the then chief executive Pervez Musharraf informing the public of a change in policy. Hence, some policy decisions might not follow the due course, but political will for them can still be assessed. This case applies more on autocratic regimes where the executive can take independent decisions. Hence, actions like initiation of a project or development of institutions to

look after a program can be an indicator of political will. Listed below are the indicators of political will derived from the aforementioned literature:

### **Policy Paraphernalia**

- Research studies identifying the problem and suggesting possible solutions
- Policy papers/memos for discussion
- Political statements/speeches
- Political manifestos/election campaigns
- Officials' statements
- The Policy
- The law: Act/Ordinance
- Provisions for enforcement and implementation
- Provisions for sustainability: funding & enforcement

### **Actions**

- Officializing actions (official meetings with other actors, MoUs, drills)
- Follow-Ups (leading to concrete, binding actions like agreements)
- Resource allocation (funds, infrastructure, personnel)
- Implementation and enforcement mechanism (incentives, sanctions for other actors)
- Evaluation of the implemented actions through rigorous research
- Reviewed (based on the evaluation) sustainability mechanism: finances & enforcement

It is not necessary for all these conditions to be fulfilled for the presence of political will. Moreover, depending on the nature of the policy decision, the issue might appear on one of these indicators but remain absent on the other. For instance, an issue might appear on the policy documents but remain absent from political speeches and election campaigns. However, if an issue remains present on the political speeches and election campaigns but remains absent from the formal agenda (here it refers to policy drafts, resolutions, bills), it might reflect low political will or divergence in the understanding/perception of an issue among different political actors.

## **Influencing Factors**

Before delving into the factors influencing the degree of political will, it needs to be reiterated that the perception of the political actors about these factors regarding an issue plays a more important role than the reality. A limitation is that the exhaustive knowledge of a subject helps develop perception and actors may lack this knowledge and may not have enough time to acquire the knowledge required to frame perceptions.

### **Perception**

As mentioned earlier, policy making is more about the perceived objectives, gains, and urgency. Snyder, Burck, and Sapin (1961) support this premise that actors' decisions depend on their perception of a situation instead of reality. This perception depends on the information available to them and their own acumen to assess the situation. For instance, Prime Minister Blair and President Bush had to order the invasion of Iraq in 2003 without knowing whether Saddam Hussain would retaliate with biological or chemical weapons. Similarly, the realities at that time, even the probability of Saddam having or using the biological or chemical weapons, could not have been analyzed with accuracy or precision. The policymakers had to decide based on the reports they were receiving at that time. The universe of information available, when it comes to international arena, is far too wide to be absorbed by any human (Rourke, 2008).

### **Urgency**

As explained by Malena (2009), the crisis situation can render it necessary for the policy actors to shun business as usual and take alternate options. It is also manifested by Brinkerhoff's environmental factors. The urgency factor refers to a situation that might be an existential threat for a country or put survival at risk in the extreme cases or risk the country's political or economic stability. The premise of perception has strong application here. Sometimes, the leaders deem a situation urgent and take actions while sometimes the real risk to survival exists. This factor supersedes all the other factors mentioned below, as survival is the foremost concern of a state.

For instance, General Musharraf's decision to change the policy on Taliban regime instantly after 9/11 can be exemplified as a perceived urgency. It was perceived as an existential threat by the

executive and a policy change was implemented without much consultation. The urgency factor can arise in the event of a certain shock. For instance, Pakistan decided to start its nuclear program after the fall of Dhaka in 1971. The premise of this factor superseding all others is supplemented by this example. Despite the threat of economic sanctions and global isolation the then regime(s) decided to carry on with the project because the existential threat was even greater

Another example of urgency leading to political will is the signing of the Indus Water Treaty. It was a real crisis situation as the absence of a treaty could create a survival risk for Pakistan, given that it fulfilled around 80 percent of its needs from River Indus and was heavily reliant on agriculture for economic subsistence. These examples denote relatively extreme situations where the political actors do not have to be told about the gravity of the situation. Sometimes, the situation is grave and requires urgent action, but the leaders must be briefed or made aware of the situation. At this stage, advocacy plays a crucial role in educating the political leaders and the public as well as creating pressure to act. For instance, the impacts of climate change, specifically the adaptation measures, despite being urgent for Pakistan, must be conveyed to the political actors through narrative, evidence, and incentives (by the international institutions). This brings up the problem identification stage of the public policy cycle. In some other circumstances, the leaders are aware of the situation but not enough to agree on a course of action. This leads to policy debates between actors, debriefs by the concerned departments and experts, and then an acceptable policy option is selected from several. Case in point: initiation of Operation Zarb-e-Azab and promulgation of National Action.

In other cases, the issue can be urgent and there would be efforts to make them aware about it, but the policymakers (political elite) might still not be interested to take it up on agenda due to certain reasons. These reasons can be low political gains, resistance of interest groups – de jure or de facto influential actors, and the wish to remain in the comfort zone.

### **Capacity**

Capacity refers to economic and political capabilities of the country. It also refers to infrastructure and institutional capacity as well as political, economic, and social stability as explained in the literature on political will (Brinkerhoff, 2000; Hammergren, 1998a; Post et al., 2010). These authors

stress that political will cannot be separated from capacity, be it technical or financial. Lack of knowledge or skills regarding an issue can keep the political actors from instituting the required initiative. Moreover, according to analysts, stability leads to increased confidence among the policymakers about their abilities and generates strong political will.

For instance, there was a need for an all-out lockdown during the pandemic. However, Pakistan could not afford this policy, as its economy was already fledgling with many challenges. The lack of economic capacity rendered political will for a pandemic low and made the policymakers go for alternative options. The will for a policy choice where capacity is an issue can be improved by certain incentives and provision of funds to increase capacity. For example, the promise of funding or incentives can generate will for gradual energy transition. Similarly, absence of political or economic stability renders the political actors more interested in policy solutions that would help them turn the situation around rather than policy reforms. For instance, government in Afghanistan (pre-Taliban) would prefer issues of law and order and the security on the agenda over water treaties and SDGs. The current Taliban regime's utmost concern is stability and security because of an uncertain, relatively unstable circumstances (amid Islamic State Khorasan Province's—ISKP—activities).

### **Third-Party Involvement**

As discussed in literature mentioned earlier, funding by donors can be an impetus for a strong will. Other incentives, such as trade, lifting or imposition of sanctions, or development aid can also drive political will for an issue. Moreover, international pressure (which may lead to a threat to a country's reputation, economic capability, and standing in global community if not heeded) can lead the political actors to take up a certain issue. However, this coercive situation might still render low political will with lackluster policymaking and ineffective implementation. This is why Brinkerhoff (2001) mentions locus of initiative as a crucial element of political will. It depends mainly on the nature of initiative. If it brings costs for political actors, the political will be low. Nevertheless, third-party involvement, be it funds, incentives, or arbitrary services in some cases, tends to influence political will generally. For instance, many countries would be inclined towards introducing climate change mitigation initiatives if these efforts are attached with funds or reimbursements.

## **Culture and context**

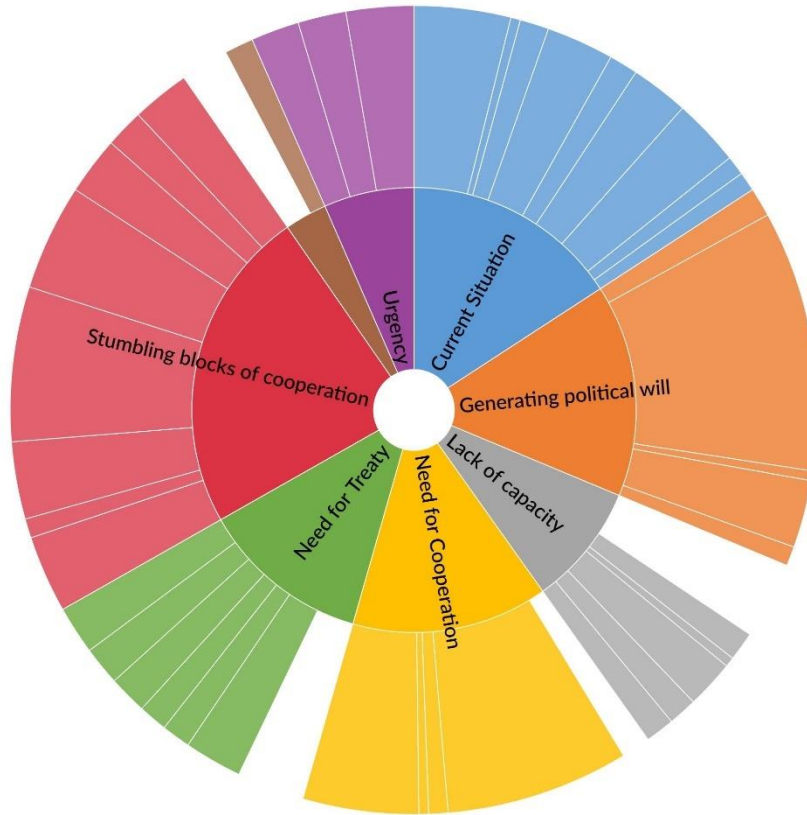
The culture of country as well as its and the issue's context play a crucial role in generating or eliminating political will. In fact, this factor might supersede others because of the risk of public opposition and political losses of the actors. The context may include history of a country, political baggage, religious considerations, and so on. The example of this factor would be death penalty. The EU has attached the extension of GSP+ status of Pakistan with moratorium or abolition of death penalty. However, the political cost of this decision seems to outweigh the economic benefits, as the government has refused to act on it. The reluctance to introduce the no-death penalty policy originates from religious context, as earlier, the religious factions objected to it citing its contradiction with the religious legal code (shariya code). Thus, the policymakers are reluctant to take this decision because there is of the risk of public outrage and losing support among the electorate.

Pakistan's decision to start a nuclear program can also be seen through this lens. Being a security state and deeming India as its archrival, Pakistan was perceived to have no choice when India initiated its nuclear program.

## **CHAPTER 5**

This chapter includes the thematic analysis of the interviews conducted as part of this research. The codebook is attached in the annexure and visual representation of the themes generated from the codes is depicted below. The findings from the analysis are used to assess the political will for Pakistan and Afghanistan water cooperation. The political will has been assessed using the framework for assessing political will developed in chapter. The interviewees names have not been mentioned as per their request.





## 5.1 Assessing Political Will for Pak-Afghan Transboundary Water Cooperation

### Current Situation

#### No Water Sharing Mechanism

Water cooperation on Kabul River between the two riparian states, i.e., Pakistan and Afghanistan, is non-existent. However, lack of cooperation does not necessarily mean the existence of conflict. Pakistan is using 90 percent of the water flowing from Kabul River, despite being the downstream riparian. That is because Afghanistan does not have any infrastructure or mechanism for storing and utilizing the water. Afghanistan's water usage is majorly for drinking purpose while Pakistan's

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province is heavily reliant on Kabul River for agriculture (strategic). As for the demographic features, Afghan communities adjacent to the basin have high political influence on previous governments as well as the current Taliban regime, according to an ex-Afghan ministry official.

Kabul River Basin is one of the region's most populated basins and deemed the lifeline of 10 million people in the surrounding cities and provinces (Akhtar et al., 2018). Notably, the water usage by Pakistan is deemed as strategic while that by Afghanistan is considered non-strategic. While water usage by Pakistan owes partly to the unhindered downstream supply amid lack of upstream structures, the current situation seems to benefit Pakistan. That leads to the notion that Pakistan does not want a water treaty on Kabul River.

*“If you look from the user perspective, the water users in Afghanistan see Pakistan using the bulk of the share. There is need for a treaty, but would that benefit Afghanistan or Pakistan? In the current scenario, it would benefit Pakistan. It has more capacity, more resources, more technology, and more land to use the water. On the Kabul side, they need it in the winter for winter energy. Also, they don't have the capacity to build dams or storage or use it for utility. So, in a way, the actors see it as dominant position of Pakistan in terms of water usage on Kabul River.”*

Both Pakistan and Afghanistan have not signed the UN Watercourses Convention (Shams & Muhammad, 2022). However, other UN Conventions and legal frameworks concerning water do apply to both countries, such as Convention on Biodiversity and UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. While there has been no apparent cooperation on water, the risk of tensions between the two states has been rising for the past few years amid Afghanistan's plans to build infrastructure for storage and irrigation on Kabul River. Although the responses differed on whether water can be a source of conflict itself, all of them posited that tensions on water might escalate friction over other issues as well.

## **The issue of Dams**

Notably, resistance to dams have come from both sides. Pakistan's plans to construct Dasu Dam had met with objection from Afghanistan, stating that since the dam was to be built on a transboundary river, the due process needed to be followed. While the then regime of Hamid Karzai, in 2014, strongly opposed the dam, the researchers are also of the view that development of that dam has implications for Afghanistan. Siltation from that dam would impact water quality and aquatic life, inter alia, of that specific ecosystem. According to an Afghan water expert who participated in the study,

*“We are not against the construction of Dasu Dam. It's the impacts of the dam about which we are concerned. The dam might be in Pakistan, but we are also benefitting from the ecosystem. Thus, certain initial steps need to be taken to prevent the harmful effects of siltation and protect the ecosystem.”*

However, Pakistan's stance has remained throughout that the area where Dasu Dam is being built does not concern Afghanistan. According to the then Pakistan's envoy,

*“Afghanistan's objection against Dasu Dam was completely irrelevant. The area where Dasu Dam is being constructed, Kabul River doesn't even go there. Now, we were very surprised when they objected to it. The Afghan foreign office had actually issued a statement on this.”*

The envoy added that later, it turned out that it was nothing but statements to pressurize Pakistan.

The embassy got it published in a newspaper that the site where Dasu Dam is being constructed is 100-200 km away from where Kabul River meets River Indus

*“Objecting to Dasu Dam is just like objecting to some dam being built on Nile River saying Afghanistan has reservations against it.”*

According to the envoy, after the embassy's letter got published in a main newspaper in Afghanistan, there has been no follow up on the issue.

However, Afghanistan's dams would impact the downstream flow, ecosystem, and the water quality on Pakistan's side of the basin. Given Afghanistan's limited usage and need for economic rehabilitation, the country would build irrigation and storage structure on the rivers whenever the circumstances allow. When the previous regimes started to plan the construction of dams and initiated work on some of them, Pakistan objected. India was funding a few of those dams and promising to facilitate more, which aggravated the situation and led Pakistan to believe that it was an act of destabilization against Pakistan. Afghanistan sought the World Bank's funding for some of the infrastructure projects, but the World Bank required the country to notify the downstream riparian before carrying out any such plans. The Afghan dignitary replied, "Whatever development Pakistan has undertaken downstream, did it ever give us any notification?" So, the resentment over development of infrastructure on the river basin prevails on both sides. A few participants said that Afghanistan did claim to construct dams, but most of those plans were limited to statements. Due to lack of funds and other capacity issues, Afghanistan did not move forward on its plans to build dams. Apart from the Salma Dam and a few other small ones, there has not been any significant progress on announced dams. According to a water expert from Pakistan,

*"We have been hearing for long that Afghanistan is building dams, but there is no evidence. Please look for evidence, like is there a project? The name of the dam, has it been conceived and so on. We hear the news stories, but we don't know the names of the dams and what funding has been secured. And in this situation, can you imagine someone funding the dams?"*

Nevertheless, Afghanistan has the right to construct irrigation and storage facilities. On the dams proposed, an Afghan water expert official said,

*"If Afghanistan had a plan to build a dam on the upstream near Kabul, that water is seasonal, it's not the standard flow coming to Pakistan. The purpose of the dams is just to recharge groundwater. That's all. As I said, there is a very limited irrigable area (in Afghanistan near that water basin). It's super expensive to uplift that water to those irrigable areas because they are on high elevation."*

Kabul River's upper extreme is (around) 6,500 above sea level. At Peshawar and Jalalabad, it's 400-450 meter. Due to the extreme variation in the elevations, the flow is sharper from the upper

side, which can be disastrous in case of increased water levels (or floods). Hence, there must be a few storage facilities on the upper side to reduce the velocity and avoid destruction.

*“If it is to be taken positively, Afghanistan does not have any mean to stop and use this water. It’s just for hydel power and even that can come to Pakistan with overflow.”*

### **Data Sharing**

Data sharing is an important aspect of transboundary water cooperation. Even if the riparian states are not under a legal treaty, exchange of data or information indicates some level of cooperation between them. On Kabul River, no such practice is observed by either Pakistan or Afghanistan. There have been talks about data sharing, but practically no such step has been taken hitherto. According to the Afghan respondents, Pakistan also needs to notify Afghanistan regarding its downstream activities.

Pakistan has the same concern that Afghanistan does not share information about the situation upstream, such as water flow and rise in surface level, which can aggravate the flood situation, as the country would not be prepared to respond or reduce the risk of disaster. In fact, the need for data sharing is also being used as a blame game and leverage between the two countries. Several individual level meetings, such as between experts and researchers from both countries have stressed the need for data sharing and presented it as an initiation of water cooperation.

### **Intermittent Cooperation Attempts and Prolonged Inertia**

There have been multiple attempts to initiate a mechanism for water cooperation. Both countries tend to differ on who started these initiatives and who was the reason they could not come to fruition. There have been multiple statements showing consent to cooperation. The embassies and ministry level talks have also occurred. One of the Afghan respondents, an ex-government official and water expert said,

*“Politics is very complicated. There are thousands of statements from the government of Pakistan towards Ghani government and towards Karzai government, and it’s the same way around here. But those are just political*

*statements. The fact is that these countries don't have trust on each other at all."*

As for the formal attempts regarding water sharing, the finance ministers of the two countries signed an agreement on an energy sharing hydropower project in 2013. The act was welcomed inside Afghanistan as well, but there has been no further progress or concrete outcome of that agreement. Afghanistan has been going through the energy crisis much larger than experienced in Pakistan. It has been seeking to enhance its power generation capacity. Hence, it was an attractive proposition. According to ex-officials of both ministry of energy and water and foreign office of Afghanistan, the proposal was welcomed in Afghanistan. The proposal originated in Pakistan but was not pursued further. According to Pakistan's ambassador to Afghanistan, China was supposed to facilitate this process and the two riparian countries were to share the benefit from the project.

*"If that proposal had moved forward, both countries would have reaped benefits. The only thing that needed to be decided was the investment and the allocation of benefits for each country."*

When the commotion of Indian investment on dams in Afghanistan began in 2016, Pakistan embassy in Afghanistan approached the Afghan ministry for energy, asking to share a factual position of the hydropower projects in the country and whether there is a possibility of a project on the Kabul River. An email response from the Afghan Deputy Minister for Energy divulged that the only project that is in some shape is a run-of-the-river project in Sarobi, which is being implemented with the help of local, private sector.

Moreover, after the inauguration of Salma Dam, Indians approached the ministry with a proposal to undertake further hydropower projects. However, in an in-house discussion at the top level, it was agreed with consensus that Afghanistan should not do any more hydropower projects with India that could impact its cooperation with Pakistan over TAPI and CASA-1000. Hence, the Indian proposal did not get through.

Other project that could impact the water flow to Pakistan included a dual-purpose project for irrigation and power generation included Kama at Kunar River. The Pakistan ambassador also stated that the then officials from the Afghan Ministry of Water and Energy hinted that joint

collaboration and investments in the field of water and energy in Afghanistan by Pakistan might encourage Afghan government to consider dropping the irrigation component of the Kama project to address Pakistan's concerns. Notably, the attempts to cooperate on water or have a treaty have been initiated by Pakistan. This is because data sharing as well as the uninterrupted water flow is its major concern. Afghanistan has remained reluctant to share river flow data ever since the fall of first Taliban regime. In 2003, Pakistan's Federal Flood Commission made an attempt to draft a water treaty with Afghanistan, but the latter's reluctance to share data rendered this attempt futile. Nevertheless, the Afghan side blames Pakistan as well for not coming through on the cooperation attempts. An Afghan respondent revealed that Pakistan approached Afghanistan in 2009-10 as well through its ministers. The two sides tried to at least create a platform to discuss the issue. This attempt also failed.

*“At that time, I don't know what the reason was, but our Pakistani friends said due to some political reasons, Pakistan government would not like to talk on the issue of water.”*

There seems to be a lag between the communication and announcements of initiatives. The causes of this lag are multi-faceted and identified in the latter part of this section.

Aside from the state-level attempts, the academia and practitioners of both countries have also tried to begin the water cooperation process. These attempts have mostly been facilitated by the international agencies or NGOs. One such attempt was Regional Green Dialogues by Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (HBS) in 2016 that engaged experts from Pakistan and Afghanistan. A few meetings were held, which focused on information sharing and research on the transboundary issues, electricity, and other avenues that can benefit both countries and open doors for cooperation. The thought behind this process was that collaboration information, knowledge, and skill sharing can lead to cooperation on water sharing as well. However, according to the Afghan respondent, certain situation in Afghanistan and lackluster interest from Pakistan on transboundary water cooperation led the dialogues come to a halt.

A relatively recent attempt was made by International Water Management Institute (IWMI) that envisaged a plan to engage the universities from Pakistan and Afghanistan to collaborate and create an exchange program. According to the Afghan interviewee, their country does not have any

specialized degree on water resource management while many universities in Pakistan are offering degrees in this discipline.

*“You can only have a discussion or debate with a doctor when you are a doctor yourself. You can talk with an engineer effectively only when there is an engineer in front of you.”*

Hence, if Pakistan wants to talk on water with Afghanistan, the other party should have at least a basic understanding of the issue and its technical aspects. Afghanistan’s reluctance to have a treaty on water is mainly because it does not have the experts or people who understand the needs, terminology, demand and supply, and basic requirements.

The plan was that both sides would conduct scientific workshops, conferences, and students exchanges for capacity building and knowledge sharing. However, due to certain objections from a government agency, this initiative also could not come to pass.

As for the state level, the transboundary water issue came to limelight in 2016 when the prospect of constructions of dams (especially by India) was imminent. After that, the issue started facing inertia. According to the former Pakistani ambassador to Afghanistan, there was no mention of the transboundary water issue during his tenure i.e., 2017-2020.

*“There were some discussion-events a few years back, I think 10 years back, interest was shown by the World Bank in facilitating the process. There was some interest shown with regard to water sharing and water management of the Kabul River. But thereafter, there was **no interest shown from either side.**”* According to him, the reason for this inaction is that Afghanistan’s focus was to have a broad-based, inclusive Afghan-led peace treaty, as the withdrawal of foreign forces was approaching. Notably, the World Bank offered to facilitate the process but refused to be the guarantor.

## **Need for Treaty**

Pakistan has attempted to begin the process for a water treaty with Afghanistan in the past decades. However, these attempts remain intermittent and are perceived as half-hearted, as in a few instances, it did not follow up the propositions itself. These lackluster attempts led to a narrative whether a



treaty is even needed on Kabul River. Some of the interviewees maintained that the treaty is needed on the river, but it is not practical to sign a treaty before Afghanistan's capacity and stability reaches a satisfactory level. As to why a treaty is needed, the reasons have been detailed below.

### **Flood Management**

The stark variation between the upper basin elevation and the lower basin elevation can make a flood catastrophic. To reduce the velocity of flow, constructing a storage structure upstream is inevitable. However, it should be built with a shared agreement of the details of such project. While the common perception in Afghanistan is that a water treaty is Pakistan's concern, a formal mechanism would benefit Afghanistan as well. Until it builds a storage facility that is acceptable for both riparian states, it can ask for an incentive in return for the water flowing towards Pakistan. However, to be able to accomplish that, the two countries need to agree on the water allocation for which there must be a needs assessment as well as projections of water flow and future needs of the two countries in place.

### **Data Sharing**

As of now, both countries are not following any data sharing practice, which is a prerequisite of any formal water sharing mechanism. Data sharing is a concern of Afghanistan as well, contrary to the popular perception that data is required by downstream states only. According to many water experts, downstream activities affect the upstream states as well. Hence, the knowledge of downstream activities is the concern of Afghanistan. A treaty can necessitate data sharing for both states. The far-reaching impact of climate change in the strategic economic sectors is a big concern. It is reducing the water flow in the river basin. In fact, it has drastically reduced river water in Jalalabad and Kabul as well as in the downstream cities. Hence, a treaty is incumbent for peaceful management and allocation of resources, as water scarcity can escalate the tensions between the two states.

### **Economic Benefits**

The respondents also discussed the economic implications of a potential treaty. For Afghanistan, a treaty implies development of water storage (which is a common component of a water treaty

containing water allocations) will help with its water and energy crisis as well as its agriculture and ultimately economic growth. It will help Pakistan prevent and prepare for floods and droughts along with effective management of its crops. Aside from that, the countries can adopt benefit-sharing approach and jointly manage irrigation and hydropower facilities.

*“The energy and power that not only benefits the households but a lot of businesses, medium and small sized businesses. And of course, big corporations. So, economically, it will be a huge win for Afghanistan and Pakistan, for everyone.”*

### **Water Quality**

Another benefit of this treaty would be improved water management. In both Pakistan and Afghanistan, water is God-gifted and hence can be utilized as considered appropriate. This attitude towards water use is leading to wastage of water. Besides, water quality issues also mar Kabul River Basin. The unregulated use is polluting Kabul River and rendering it unfit for drinking and agricultural use. A treaty can help regulate and manage water, which will reduce the environmental implications as well as economic cost (health and agriculture) for both the countries

According to a Pakistani water expert,

*“There are a lot of water treatment plants installed in the Kabul River in Kabul as well as Peshawar, but none of the system is still functioning. If we make those systems functional and we just move away our attention a little away from adaptation towards mitigation, then we will incentivize these water quality aspects where around 3 million tons of greenhouse gases are emitted from poor quality water. So, 3 million tons mean that if we invest \$20 million on reclaiming water, we can get benefit up to 3 billion for the next 10 years. And apart from the financial incentive, it will also reduce the pressure from the available water resources in the basin.”*

### **Urgency:**

Experts and officials who believe that water can be a source of conflict between the states opine that a water treaty between the two states is incumbent. Citing that water will replace oil as the most coveted resource and be a potential source of conflict, especially in certain regions including South

Asia, this school of thought propounds that an agreed water cooperation mechanism is need of the time.

*“We cannot wait for the war to start,”*

say two of the Pakistani and Afghan respondents.

The consultative process should go alongside the other issues and politics should not shadow over the potential benefits from a water treaty. If the process stumbles over certain hurdles, incentives, lobbying, and cooperation among the civil society of both states should keep the ball rolling. For Pakistan, it is hay time to sign a treaty. For the first time in decades, there is a government in Afghanistan that is not pro-India, so the specter of the eastern neighbor would not shadow over the treaty negotiations with Afghanistan. Moreover, Pakistan is in a better position to sign a treaty with more power and resources. It will be able to sign the treaty on a strong footing.

*“We need to formalize the mechanism because when the mechanism is formalized, you have institutions on both sides. If there is an abnormal kind of situation, there is a water crisis, climate change, and other issues that can affect water resources so that the quantities can get reduced. In that sense, when there is a conflict, you have a cooperation mechanism that can come and play their role to diffuse the tension. But without a treaty, when you have no treaty, the might is right.”<sup>5</sup>*

Afghanistan needs dams, and there would not be any law preventing them from building one, as they will be utilizing their share now. A treaty will ensure that Pakistan’s interests are considered when Afghanistan constructs dams.

*“Be it lack of capacity or lack of interest, we are not considering a water treaty with Afghanistan now, and it will bite us in the long run. The power of negotiation that we have now might not remain as such when this issue becomes urgent. We might even go on backfoot during negotiation while now we are on a strong foot. Just like India has signed treaties with Nepal and Bangladesh on*

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<sup>5</sup> Pakistani-based water expert

*strong footing, we can do that now. Being a bigger and more powerful country, we should use our position<sup>6</sup>.”*

However, some of the respondents opined that because of Afghanistan’s lack of capacity and capabilities in terms of both finances-institutions and knowledge-skills, the treaty might not be the right or fair option. Technical discussions, need assessments on both sides, and certain icebreaking, trust-building measures should predate any talk or negotiation for a treaty.

A Pakistani respondent says,

*“India can stop our water instantly. Afghans do not have this kind of a way out for now to stop this water. For this, they have to build a proper dam first. We need to keep our eyes on any potential or such risk that such plan is coming out there. But the current absence of such plan shows that this is not a very urgent issue. However, this issue is not to be ignored as well and postponed/delayed for long.”<sup>7</sup>*

Some respondents from Afghanistan also shared this view.

*“You know this very complex issue to say whether we need a legal framework or we don’t. Around the world, there are many examples of cooperation without having a legal treaty. And there are also examples of being a legal framework in place but lack of cooperation. So, cooperation is important. In fact, it can help with the cooperation overall.”<sup>8</sup>*

## **Need for Cooperation**

Due to instability and uncertainty in Afghanistan, the business-as-usual scenario on the Kabul River Basin prevails. Therefore, a narrative prevails among a few groups that a water sharing mechanism or a treaty is not needed currently. It can wait until other issues get resolved or the situation

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<sup>6</sup> Pakistani government official

<sup>7</sup> Pakistan’s former ambassador to Afghanistan

<sup>8</sup> Afghan ex-foreign ministry official

improves in Afghanistan. However, the need for water cooperation persists. Treaty can wait, but cooperation or discussion on the issue at least at initial bureaucratic level should begin. As for why a treaty should be signed, the major reason given by the interviewees is Afghanistan's lack of capacity and knowledge as well as instability and uncertainty prevailing inside the country.

*“If it comes to Afghanistan side and Pakistan side, both of them are in a very separate condition, be it development, economic stability, socio-economic factors, alternate technologies. Pakistan is using DRIP irrigation to enhance their irrigation efficiency. Afghanistan is still using old technologies. We are in very different conditions, so the urgency is not there. But to work for the transboundary water cooperation is urgent.”<sup>9</sup>*

Another Afghan respondent maintained that as for now, treaty shouldn't be done in any case. The reason for this is we need technical experts from both sides. But on the Afghan side, even the available ones are not part of the system now. Those who are in the system would not understand logic and the technical discussion.

*“This would be a one-way decision if it happens, as there would be nobody to sign it. One needs to create an environment first where people from the other side (Afghanistan) trust the policies of this side (Pakistan).”*

Water cooperation on Kabul River is also needed because to avoid the adverse impact of climate change, data sharing regarding river flows is essential. The seasonal variations have increased droughts and floods. Some respondents believed that certain trust-building measures along with capacity building initiatives by Pakistan should precede the talks on water sharing. Here the cooperation venues identified by the respondents:

### **Beyond Formal**

Many major issues like immigrants, transit, and terrorism etc. can lead to the use of water as leverage over one another. Moreover, the border issue can also cast a shadow on the treaty talks.

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<sup>9</sup> Ex-government official and water expert from Afghanistan

Hence, it better to start low and move beyond formal state to state cooperation. Instead, engagement of the non-political actors would help break the ice and pave way for formal cooperation as well. The proper way of collaboration through the non-political actors is Track III Diplomacy, which will ensure continuous coordination, meetings, and collaborations between the academia, media, and the civil society of both countries. It will help generate a common understanding of the issue and create awareness among the political actors. Every respondent from the academia agreed that till the time this issue is linked with politics and security, its resolution will remain a far-fetched proposition. The academia and civil society have to play their role. Moving beyond the security lens will enable both countries to see that climate change and other environmental issues are to stay. These issues will create a more disastrous and long-term impact than a political crisis can.

*“We should engage the experts of both countries and start initiatives like capacity building, knowledge and experience sharing. We should include people from all walks of life, youth, media, and local communities living along the Durand Line. It should be a comprehensive approach in building this common knowledge and understanding. It will in long term help with the confidence building as well.”*

The interviewee from Pakistan said,

*“Media is the de facto pillar of the state, whether you call it or don’t. It creates awareness. It creates ripple effect so why not use the power of media that can be used connectively? We also have to engage civil society, researchers, academia, and intelligentsia.<sup>10</sup>”*

Many participants suggested engaging local communities surrounding the Kabul River Basin. They have customary practices in place and share ethnicity, religion, and customary codes. They would be more inclined to cooperate and manage water jointly than the political actors sitting at the top. The objection of Pakistan staying oblivious to Afghanistan’s needs and context will also evade over time with local engagement.

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<sup>10</sup> Water expert from Pakistan

Technical discussions on need assessment, water flow, quality of water can also be the enabler for cooperation between the two states. Scientific cooperation, i.e., exchange of research and findings on the said basin can help build trust among the two states. There have been recommendations of forming a commission to undertake different activities.

*“Why do we have to see everything through Pakistani or Afghani passport? We have to see this issue through technical lens.”*

One of the Afghan respondents suggested formulating a commission to conduct studies on the resource availability and quantify the different aspects of the concerned river basin. Similarly, Pakistan’s officials also suggested forming a commission to consider and deliberate the issues preventing water cooperation between the two states and take into account the water flow and feasibility of dams. Based on this data, both countries can have talks and negotiate to reach an agreement. A commission can come in handy to decide the investment and allocation of benefits and jointly explore the venues for cooperation. Once the details are sorted out, the World Bank or any neutral third-party organization can get involved and facilitate the further process.

## **Stumbling Blocks of Water Cooperation**

The failure of cooperation efforts and the prevalent inertia afterwards at the state level originates from certain irritants.

### **Durand Line**

There are a lot of foreign policy obstacles when it comes to water cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The major one is the issue of Durand Line. For Pakistan, this issue has been sorted out, as it is a recognized international border. However, for Afghanistan, it remains a major issue. In fact, during the Karzai administration, an order was issued to all the public offices in Afghanistan to call and write the concerned border Durand Line and not a border.<sup>11</sup> This issue has been politicized and used as a tool magnanimously by every Afghan government. Hence, their people

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<sup>11</sup> Respondent from Afghanistan.

are sensitive about it. The issue of water is linked to Durand Line, and just as people do not approve of giving land, they oppose giving water as well in there.

According to an Afghan interviewee,

*“No matter what government comes, people think that if you sign any kind of treaty on the Kabul River, it means legitimizing Durand Line. And whoever does it, he will be called a Shah Shuja. Shah Shuja is the Afghan ruler who signed the Durand Line and he is still cursed in Afghanistan for being a person who sold his motherland. So, every government will avoid being a Shah Shuja.”*

Apart from this perception, Durand Line towers over any cooperation attempt between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It has remained an irritant since Pakistan’s inception and has always impacted the relations between the two countries. Therefore, it can loom over the water cooperation attempts as well.

*“Whether you refer to the Durand Line issue or Taliban or previously Mujahideen government, there was always this mistrust between the two countries at a political level. And that of course affected the population as well. Because then population has a negative perception of the other country.”*

### **Ineffective Leadership**

Water cooperation or any kind of peaceful attempt comes from the leadership that has a vision and sincerity. Unfortunately, the previous regimes in Afghanistan lacked proper leadership and Pakistan too. The leadership in both countries has remained focused on political gains and point scoring rather than making genuine attempts of maintaining regional peace. The ineffective leadership has rendered Afghanistan to use water as a leverage and a tool for coercive diplomacy rather than a source of cooperation and economic benefits. Moreover, the leaders in both countries do not have a vision to do long-term planning. They look for short-term gains, and water cooperation is not one of them. In this kind of a context, leaders go for the narrative that garners popular support and political benefits. They would not strive for a policy that bears fruits in 10-15 years.



## **Mistrust/Distrust**

There has been historical mistrust between the two states. Ever since Pakistan's inception, the two states have not enjoyed amicable relations. Afghanistan was the only country to oppose Pakistan's admission to the UN. The border dispute has prevented the two neighbors from having good trade and transit relationships and rendered looking at each other through security lens. The tensions aggravated further by a pro-Indian narrative in Afghanistan in the wee years of Pakistan's inception. Resentment grew further against Pakistan when it decided to support Mujahideen and later Taliban.

After Taliban were designated as a terrorist entity, Pakistan was blamed for still supporting them and sponsoring terrorism in Afghanistan. "Before the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, Pakistan's support for Taliban, that's something that we can't hide. It was a main impediment in cooperation, and not just on water, water issue would be the last one on this list. There were many other issues that we couldn't reach to an agreement while there was Pakistan government's support for Taliban.<sup>12</sup>"

The country is still viewed from this perspective in Afghanistan. The terrorist attacks at infrastructural development during previous Afghan regimes on the transboundary river (Kabul River) are associated with Pakistan. The issue of immigrants, transit, border fencing, terrorism, and extremism have remained at the heart of the relationship of the two neighbors. It has led to distrust and perception of each other's acts through security lens. According to an Afghan respondent,

*"Treaty can never happen until you have trust. There is zero trust among both countries."*

## **Perception about Water Sharing**

In Afghanistan, water sharing is considered as a zero-sum game. According to an Afghan respondent, this perception prevails in the upstream countries and not just specific to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Water is a sensitive issue among people as well and has been highly politicized in the

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<sup>12</sup> Ex-foreign ministry official from Afghanistan

past few years. There have been statements from the Afghan leaders that Afghanistan will sell water at the price of oil.<sup>13</sup> People there also think that the water in their area is their right. Overall, the country follows the absolute territorial sovereignty doctrine whereas Pakistan propounds the absolute territorial integrity. In both countries (and many others for that matter) water remains a challenge, as there have been contentions among the provinces of the same country. The issue would of course be exacerbated when it comes to sharing water between the states.

### **Pakistan as hydro hegemon**

There is a perception that Pakistan is manifesting hydrohegemonic behavior on the Kabul River. It has been shared by both Pakistani and Afghani respondents. The Afghan respondents maintain that this is one of the reasons of distrust regarding Pakistan in Afghanistan. Afghanistan believes that Pakistan portrays to be taking steps for water cooperation, but it does not show in its actions.

*“They feel that somehow they are working under the shadow of Pakistan,”* says one of the Afghan participants.

While the prevailing narrative is that Pakistan is the hydrohegemon on the river, one respondent believed that both countries are striving to expand their water use to be in a strong position during negotiations.

Another ex-foreign ministry official says that Pakistan has experience of good cooperation in the form of Indus Water Treaty, but Afghanistan has a bad experience of the only treaty it has with Iran. Even with treaty, they suffer, as whenever they intend to build a structure on Helmand River, there is resistance from the Iranian side.

*“Pakistan has been trying to expand its water uses as much as they can under the financial, institutional and developmental circumstances. Because some key decision makers in Pakistan would think that more water uses can create more leverage over the counter party in negotiation.*

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<sup>13</sup> One of the Afghan respondents quoted it. In 2019, President Ghani said in a government meeting that no more free of cost water for Afghanistan’s neighbors.

*Afghan decision-makers may also think of expanding its water uses, which would eventually contribute to the geographical strength of Afghanistan as an upstream state.”*

While Pakistan and Afghanistan enjoy the position of both upstream and downstream riparians, Pakistan cannot enjoy the strength of being an upper riparian because of the harsh terrain in the Chitral/Kunar River. Nevertheless, some of the Pakistani respondents maintained that Pakistan is the hydrohegemon on Kabul River Basin. Whereas, a few believed that the country is just using water that is flowing to it. If they do not use it, it will go to the sea.

*“It is not like we are pumping the upstream water and using it downstream.”*

The other school of thought maintains that Pakistan is benefitting from the current scenario. Despite blaming Afghanistan for not sharing data, it is Pakistan that uses delaying tactics to stall signing a treaty with its riparian partner. As for Pakistan being a hegemon, the usual attributions are higher capacity, power, and ability to use water.

*“I think what is happening now is more of a river having hegemon power, which in this case is Pakistan. It has more resources, more institutions, more power, and it has more land to use the water. So, Pakistan is using much more water than Afghanistan. And similar case is everywhere around the world. Whoever has more resources, more organized institutions, they use more water.”*

There is a perception that Pakistan is using more water than it should be using. Moreover, another feature of hydrohegemon is using proxies to maintain status quo and prevent any infrastructure development on the basin. Egypt has been alleged to have instigated an insurgency in Sudan when the latter tried to change the water treaty between them. Pakistan is also accused of sponsoring militant attacks on the engineers/project consultants who were involved in constructing dam on Kabul River.

### **No Political Will**

Many respondents maintained that there is no political will on both sides to have a treaty or any other formal water sharing mechanism on Kabul River. Government on both sides are trying to use this issue for political gains and as leverage. Afghanistan has shown reluctance to share river flow data ever since the issue has been brought up, which is Pakistan’s major concern and Afghanistan

knows it is one of the few leverages it can use against Pakistan. Another reason for Afghanistan to not engage into talks is its limited capacity. It cannot have water allocation negotiations before knowing how much water it actually needs and without having the capacity to store water for later use. This is another reason for no will for a water treaty in Afghanistan.

*“Unfortunately, water is a political issue here. And I would say it would have been solved, many issues are political but then there are solutions. But in our part of the world, there is **no political will** to solve this issue.”<sup>14</sup>*

### **Other issues obliterating water**

Other issues like trade, transit, and immigration tend to ingest the water cooperation attempts. According to one Afghan respondent, when there were attempts to have water talks and there seemed to be some progress, the issue of border closure arose. Pakistan had closed its Karachi port for Afghan traders, and this has been cited as the reason for the failure of the cooperation attempts multiple times.

*“You see the level of understanding in Afghanistan and Pakistan overall, not the political regime or government that comes and goes, but from the beginning, there were like very basic issues that prevent us from cooperation. Pakistan’s access to Central Asian countries and Afghanistan’s access to sea will always be a big issue, much less complex issue than water, but it will always be a challenge between the two countries. Because it was mostly packed with the political issues. So, if we want to have a meaningful cooperation over water, these issues need to be addressed first.”<sup>15</sup>*

The incidence of political issues weakening water cooperation is not specific to Pakistan and Afghanistan. Even after the signing of Indus Water Treaty, tussle over other issues is brought to the water table. A response cited the water officials from both sides that they receive orders from (apparently) anonymous source that things are going well between the two countries, create a water

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<sup>14</sup> Development practitioner from Afghanistan

<sup>15</sup> Ex-foreign ministry official from Afghanistan

issue. The issue is things are politicized, be it water, forests, or environment in South Asia (or developing countries).

The thing is we have politicized everything, environment, water, forest. Everything has been politicized, securitized. We have to look at things with different angles, different lenses. We shouldn't look into water with a security lens.

### **Securitization of issue**

Water is a securitized issue in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Even within the country, researchers are denied access to data regarding water saying it is classified. That is the major obstacle cited by the researchers on both sides. They cannot collaborate on assessing canal and river mapping, snowfall and precipitation. The reluctance to share data with academics is preventing research on other domains as well, such as impact of climate change on the river basin. This issue has been cited by Afghan researchers mostly. They mentioned security concerns as well.

Several low-tier initiatives, i.e., collaboration between universities have also failed due to this obstacle. However, due to the securitization of this issue, the initiative got lost in the procedural requirements. the distrust between the two states and security concerns render the students and academic collaboration difficult to materialize<sup>16</sup>.

*“Our foreign policy dictates water cooperation. This is one flaw because our foreign policy is security related. If it is based on some other kind of aspects like development, SDGs, environment, climate change, it is easier to collaborate.”*

### **Generating political will**

This theme explains the solutions and a way out for water cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

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<sup>16</sup> Although, Pakistan has already introduced scholarships for Afghan students. Many Afghan-

## **Trust building measures**

The Afghan respondents maintain that Afghanistan needs the confidence that any cooperation on water would be in good spirit. Once this confidence is established, cooperation would materialize. It is a matter of a few years to establish this confidence, but this mistrust, lack of confidence really prevents politicians from meaningful engagement. These trust-building measure can include site visits and offering of incentives.

## **Awareness**

Both countries somehow lack awareness of this issue, its significance, and technicalities. The riparian states have an interdependency on shared waters. Whether the country is upstream or downstream, it gets affected by the activities of the others. Hence, it is better to collaborate and jointly manage water. instead of distributive bargaining, both countries are suggested to engage in integrative bargaining. To be able to undertake this, the countries need to enhance their understanding and reach common ground. For now, it is usually a blame game or a struggle to achieve an agreed mechanism to operate in silos.

*“The thing is most of our bilateral decisions are mostly taken by the economists. They love numbers. For that purpose, it is necessary to some kind of new evidence that what kind of benefits exist.”*

## **Exchanges:**

This theme explains the possible cooperation venues for benefits and knowledge exchange as well as capacity building.

## **Benefit sharing**

The countries can share electricity by jointly building and managing a dam on the shared rivers. In fact, one such proposal has been turned into an agreement. According to the former Pakistani ambassador, that proposal still stands and will be moved forward once the situation across the border stabilizes. Most of the respondents agreed that water cooperation should not be taken as signing of treaty. It has to go beyond it, as treaty is not an indication of cooperation.

*“If the cooperation is a one-shot deal as in allocations. It will not help with the long-term objective. But if the objective is to gain benefits for both countries, through energy sharing or different forms, then this is something that both countries can work on.”*

### **Capacity building and data sharing**

For any cooperation mechanism to work between the two countries, building trust is crucial. It can be achieved through information sharing and capacity building. It can be seen through a give-and-take approach. Pakistan has a good capacity, at least better than Afghanistan in terms of education and knowledge. It can offer annual scholarships to Afghan students and start exchange programs on water cooperation. Academia from each side can collaborate and conduct joint research. Water experts from Pakistan can go to Afghan universities and acclimate the students about technical considerations for water cooperation.

Aside from knowledge and skills, both countries can collaborate on data collection and analysis on quantifying the water dynamics (availability, flow, mapping, seasonal variations, etc.) on both Upper and Lower Kabul Basin.

### **Incentives**

Just as other issues have been responsible for sabotaging water cooperation efforts, they can be used to initiate water cooperation. Pakistan can offer trade and transit incentive to Afghanistan and tie it to a water cooperation mechanism. Many Afghan respondents suggested creating a package of incentives and water sharing mechanism to materialize cooperation.

*“For Afghanistan, water is not a priority. But other things are important for Afghanistan. There might be a way to move forward and that would be to link issues together, kind of a basket of problems, and sit together to discuss on each of those things. Then reach an agreement based on all those things like immigration, trade, access to the sea, water resources as a package, there*

*might be a solution to move forward but if it's just about water resources and the rest remain, I don't think it has any future.”<sup>17</sup>*

Notably, Afghanistan has shown willingness to drop certain element of its water projects that can impact the downstream flow if Pakistan agrees to help with the project funds. Funds can be an issue for Pakistan as well though. However, it can help Afghanistan with developing better irrigation systems (not just in funds but providing technical experts) and support in agriculture as well.

### **Third Party Involvement**

A push from donor agencies and other international organizations can help with the cooperation process. While the World bank and the US have offered to facilitate the consultative process for a water treaty, many respondents believed the support was not sufficient. If the World Bank offers enough funding, both countries would come to the table today. A few respondents also maintained that the role of the third party needs to be decided first. The major thing that needs to be done now is reaching a common understanding of the issue. Both countries have different perspectives on this water issue that originate from mistrust. It will be difficult for a third party to find place that is common between Pakistan and Afghanistan. However, a majority of respondents from Pakistan and Afghanistan have maintained that a strong third-party support can motivate both countries to cooperate. It happened in the case of Indus Water Treaty, which is still working despite the fact that its signatories are archrivals and have gone to war many times.

### **Lack of Capacity**

Afghanistan's lack of capacity in terms of funds as well as institutions and instability remain major obstacles for water cooperation. The country does not know how much water it needs now and how much it will need in future.

*“Right now, if you think who is going to benefit from this treaty if there comes one, simple forward answer is Afghanistan can't utilize water. So, it is Pakistan that will benefit from it.”*

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<sup>17</sup> Ex-government official and water expert from Afghanistan



Moreover, it is difficult to have a treaty with an unstable polity. Even if they reach an agreement, there is no guarantee it will stand so when the next regime comes to power. Moreover, it is difficult to collect data and focus on water issues when their security concerns are high and issues of law and order prevail in the country.

*“There would be different security challenges, regardless of political and economic challenges. There would be other actors that would not want this project to be successful. And they can have their own agendas.”*

Even in Pakistan, there has been a regime change now and the country is going through a severe economic crisis. For now, the policymakers are focused on salvaging their countries out of these crises.

### **Taliban Regime**

Many respondents believed that the Taliban regime might not be able to help with water cooperation as well. It also does not recognize the Pak-Afghan border, the so-called Durand Line in Afghanistan. Besides, the narrative on water and border remains the same in Afghanistan and they would not want to take such a major step that goes against public will right after coming to power. Furthermore, they are grappling with survival challenges now and would want to focus on them.

*“I don’t see in near future any kind of negotiations, although there might be push from Pakistani side because probably Taliban will accept but that is not guarantee to the future legitimate government of Afghanistan will accept that kind of negotiation, talk, or any kind of treaty when it’s done in this kind of emergency situation.”<sup>18</sup>*

### **International Experts**

Dr. Asim Zia, an expert on water and environmental diplomacy, revealed that Pakistan and Afghanistan are reluctant to discuss water quantity, but they are willing to discuss and collaborate over the quality of water. Moreover, discussing water quality is crucial because it can impact the

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<sup>18</sup> Ex-government official and water expert from Afghanistan

water availability immensely in the future. He added that the quantitative allocations between Pakistan and Afghanistan are becoming more and more complicated with climate change.

In the short run, a cooperative commission could be set up for the Kabul River between Afghanistan and Pakistan. That would be a more practical and feasible option in the short term.

He also suggested the formulation of a broader Indus Water Basin Treaty.

*Although there is Indus Basin Treaty between Pakistan and India, it does not include China and Afghanistan which are the riparian partners of the Indus Basin. There should be a provision for reforming the Indus Basin Treaty, but that's way more complicated. That will mean we will need to bring in India and China into that and, of course, Afghanistan.*

As for the urgency regarding a Pak-Afghan water treaty, he said that it is urgent because of climate change. The Western side of the Kabul River, (upstream) is going to hit badly from droughts. The water flow will reduce gradually in the next 20-30 years.

*Scientific research shows very clearly that if Pakistan and Afghanistan do not cooperate with each other, both of them would lose. It will be lose-lose proposition for the future generation of both countries.*

He called it unfortunate that despite the big momentum in 2012 and then in 2016, 2017, no concrete step could be taken regarding a water sharing mechanism. At that point of time, the then governments had good bilateral ties with Indians, and they were trying to be more independent of the Pakistani influence. There was some kind of hostility regarding Pakistani interference in Afghanistan. Therefore, they were hesitant to rush a treaty. They wanted to have more details, but they were still interested in having a treaty. They wanted to conduct technical feasibility studies to determine what needs to be negotiated. They wanted more time for that. Now that that government is gone and Taliban government has come, which is deemed friendly with Pakistan. It can be a window of opportunity for Pakistan.

On the issue of dams, he said that it is the conventional engineering solution approach toward water scarcity. That is a short-sighted approach as opposed to saying we need to think about the nature-

based solutions, ecological designs, water conservation, and access to clean water. Of course, China, India, Afghanistan, and Pakistan have resorted to this dam-building approach to cope with the water scarcity crisis, which is not sustainable in the long run. So, what Afghans and the Pakistanis, in terms of political perception, think is that dam building is the only way to secure water.

Water security is associated with dam building and that is a very short sighted and narrow approach. You cannot secure water with dams because the problem is climate change is going to change the monsoon shifts and the larger patterns in terms of La Nina regional scale dynamics. These shifts might make the investments in dams redundant. When there is no water in the river, you can have a dam, but it might be empty.

*You are investing millions and billions into building dams, and you don't even know how much water there is going to be.*

Even if there is water, there might also be flooding. The floods might bring sediments to the dam, which might shorten the life of these dams. The perception of dams as protectors against water scarcity is the core of contention between all the riparian partners in this basin.

Christina Leb, a transboundary water expert from the World Bank, said that there were concrete projects in Afghanistan to increase storage capacity and hydropower potential a few years ago. And all these projects would have had an impact in one way or another on the water flow. Maybe, currently, there might not be a particular need for a treaty, but as we know over time, things change. On political issues superseding the water benefits, she said that globally, historical relations play a role in water frameworks. Sometimes, there exist cooperative frameworks because there was war and then a peace treaty was signed. That peace treaty would include a water framework as well. However, sometimes, there is no cooperative framework because there is very little level of trust. There are multiple reasons on why there would not be a cooperative framework in many basins. So, it is possible that in the case of Afghanistan and Pakistan, it might also go back to reasons other than water.

She further said that though Pakistan is an upstream state on Kunar, it is mostly downstream on the Kabul River as a whole. On the Kabul River, except from the Kunar tributary, the water comes

from Afghanistan. Afghanistan might have less of an urgency to engage, and Afghanistan focuses on the other issues before because they might be more important for them. In water negotiations, it is difficult to engage the upstream states, as they do not have much to lose. In this case, what some countries do is they bundle negotiations. It is helpful to bundle negotiations on water with trade, access just because that allows to deal with multiple issues. That way, there would be interest would be from both sides to cooperate on water. That's how we see these negotiations play out globally.

David Michel, a transboundary water expert, also maintained that a water treaty between Pakistan and Afghanistan is needed. It would be beneficial because the Kabul River System is likely to be very vulnerable to climate change. And at the same time, water needs are growing in Pakistan and Afghanistan. We also know that as Afghanistan emerges from these decades of conflicts, it will attend to its water needs. As in the previous government, it has long been the intention of Afghanistan to improve its water infrastructure for hydropower, irrigation, and drinking water. There will be increasing claims on the resources of the Kabul System. He said that it would have been better to have a treaty back then. Now, there is no certainty regarding the availability of funding for a cooperative mechanism. He said that in case of negotiations on a Kabul River Treaty, Pakistan would be in a stronger position compared to Afghanistan.

All the aforementioned experts agreed that cooperation between non-state actors, civil and scientific diplomacy, can help pave way for state-level cooperation on water.

Another international expert, who desired to remain anonymous, said that

*Water in South Asia has fallen in the hands of civil engineers. That is why it is all about the piles of concrete and all the solutions point to constructing new structures here and there.*

She added that both experts and policymakers focus on surface water. Ground water can be a source of collaboration and would entail less friction. On the question of whether a treaty is urgent, the

expert maintained that it is beneficial for Pakistan to have a treaty now then in future. Future holds uncertainty.

## **Discussion**

A water treaty on Kabul River might take time to materialize, but it is essential to start discussion on the subject and begin cooperation on water sharing. Pakistan's attempt to start discussions on the treaty shows that it realizes the need. However, these attempts remain feeble due to many reasons. As for Afghanistan, a water treaty is beneficial for it as well. It will pave the way for availability of funds and other required support as well as yield other benefits as well. Water allocation between the two states can be a bone of contention between the two riparian partners, but this friction can be circumvented by focusing on water quality. However, to achieve that, the policymakers on both sides need to make genuine efforts and see beyond the political gains to be able to understand the benefits that water cooperation offers. These benefits like electricity, improved irrigation, and reduced emissions from water wastage, inter alia, can have a spillover effect on the overall cooperation between the two states. Currently, Pakistan is in a better position to sign a treaty and negotiate on a strong footing. Therefore, it is high time for Pakistan to enter a treaty or any formal water-sharing and information-sharing mechanism with Afghanistan. The urgency is there, it is just not being perceived as such by the policymakers. If Durand Line or any other issue is expected to become a hurdle, Pakistan may be in a position to offer incentives to Afghanistan on issues that matter to its Western neighbor the most like transit trade and trade with Pakistan. Afghanistan can also benefit from the treaty in the form of incentives and water structures.

Moreover, to circumvent the border issue, the countries can opt for integrative water management or any joint water sharing mechanism that does not emphasize borders. If not a treaty, the need to cooperate on water is urgent for Afghanistan as well. The policymakers are not perceiving this need as urgent. That is why the situation viz-a-viz negotiations on water sharing remains in inertia. Then there are ripples from either side or an effort by a third party, mainly international organizations. After the fall of Taliban regime in 2001, the Afghan administration has been trying to enhance its water storage and energy generation capacity whenever it could pay attention to it. In 2003, Pakistan seemed to have realized this, and its Indus River System Authority (IRSA) Chairman said that if Afghanistan builds dams on Kabul River, we will have no water to store any further. The treaty

seemed to be the solution to contain this threat. In 2006, the World bank offered its role as a mediator to facilitate the consultation process between the countries. However, Afghanistan refused, citing its limited capacity and lack of need assessment. Since then, there have been multiple attempts at having cooperation only to be jeopardized by political issues and point scoring. Policymakers in Afghanistan have also been nurturing the narrative of absolute territorial sovereignty and propounding that Afghanistan will not enter into any long-term treaty since the one they have is causing harm to them. However, the country has a policy draft on transboundary water management that provides for signing treaties with the riparian states, with focus on safeguarding Afghan interests. The Water Policy of Pakistan (2018) does not contain any specific provision for cooperation or water sharing mechanism while discussing the settlement of transboundary water issues. It has focused solely on the shared rivers with India.<sup>19</sup> The initiatives proposed, or attempts made by Pakistan in this regard have also come about in isolation. For instance, the foreign offices of about countries were not consulted nor notified before the signing of the 2013 agreement of a hydropower project. This indicates that the initiative might not be a result of the consultative process of policymaking. The political statements regarding the need for a water treaty with Pakistan remain scanty, but they have come at certain times. In Afghanistan, these statements mostly toe the narrative of its rights over the transboundary river and that its interests must be safeguarded. Afghanistan has a policy draft on transboundary rivers where it iterates that it will enter agreements with the other riparian states to safeguard its share and interest over transboundary rivers. However, the statements and the official meeting reports show that the country has changed its approach towards this policy. nevertheless, the policy draft remains a draft till date.

## **Gauging Political Will in Pakistan and Afghanistan for Transboundary Water Cooperation**

A framework for gauging political will has been developed in chapter 3. Now using the framework developed, I attempt to assess the state of political will in Pakistan and Afghanistan for

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<sup>19</sup> It mentions Kabul River as water source in the introductory section as well.

transboundary water cooperation. First, the visibility indicators for the political will in Pakistan and Afghanistan regarding transboundary water governance are explored based on responses of the persons interviewed for this research. Recourse is also made to the news reports, and to the policy documents available. Next, the identified drivers of political will are assessed to understand the state of political will on transborder water governance.

**Visibility Indicators:**

| <b>Indicators</b>                               | <b>Pakistan</b> | <b>Afghanistan</b> |
|---|-----------------|--------------------|
| <b>Reviewed Sustainability mechanism:</b>       | —               | —                  |
| <b>Implementation and enforcement mechanism</b> | ×               | —                  |
| <b>Resource allocation</b>                      | ×               | ×                  |

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
|   |   |   |
| <b>Follow-Ups</b>   | x | x |
| <b>Officializing actions (meetings, MoUs)</b>                   | ✓ | ✓ |
| <b>Provisions for sustainability: funding &amp; enforcement</b> | — | — |
| <b>Provisions for enforcement and implementation</b>            | — | x |
| <b>Act/Ordinance</b>  | x | x |
| <b>Policy</b>   |   |   |
| <b>Officials' statements</b>                                    | ✓ | ✓ |
| <b>Political statements/speeches</b>                            | ✓ | ✓ |

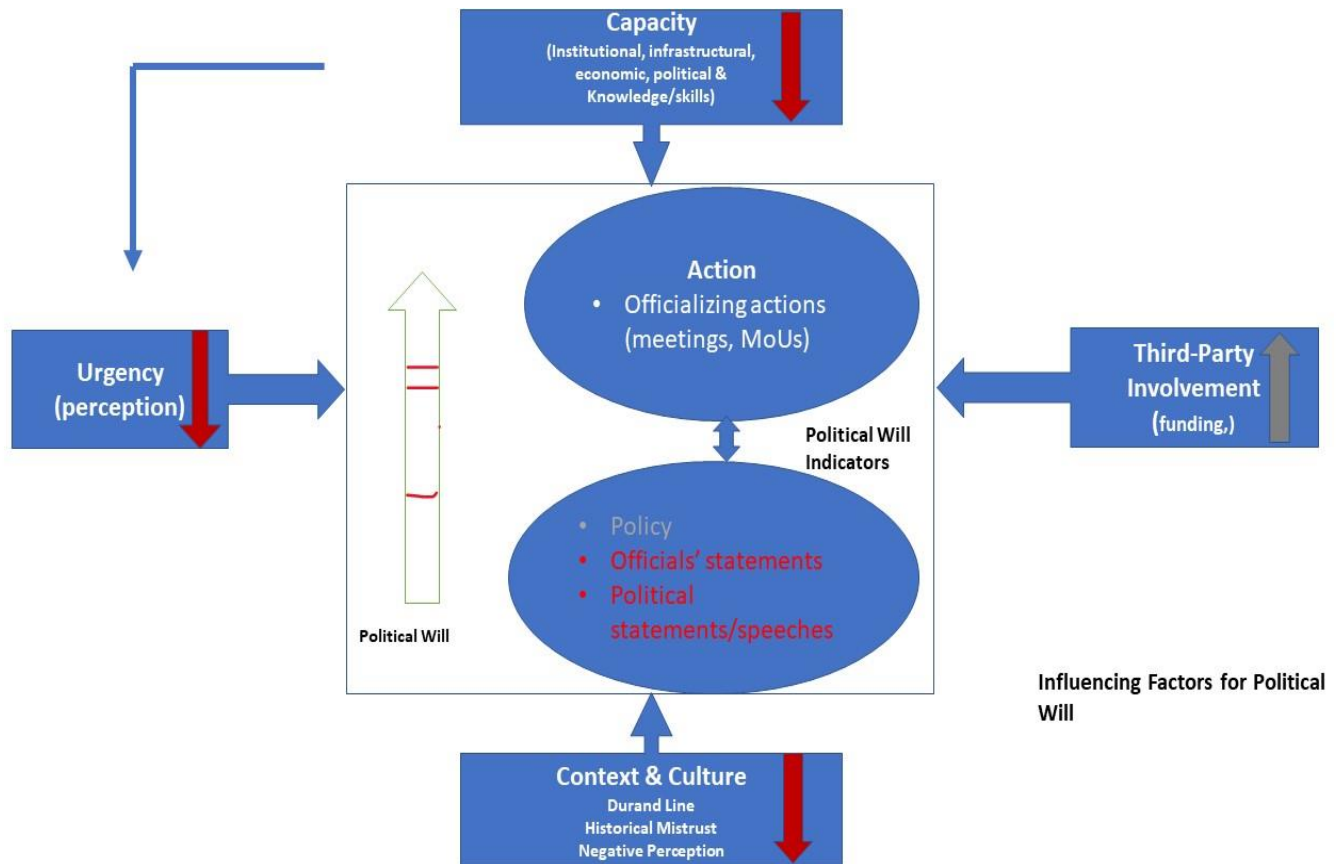
**Table 2: Visibility Indicators for Political Will for Pakistan-Afghanistan Transboundary Water Cooperation**



Table 2 shows the prevalent state of political will in Afghanistan and Pakistan for Kabul River Treaty. The ✖ notation indicates that the indicator is missing from the policy realm of the country concerned while ✓ show the presence of the indicator. Conclusions drawn from the table include that while there have been multiple statements about transboundary waters, the countries have not translated them in their policy documents. Similarly, the actions taken by both countries remain confined to signing the 2013 agreement after which no follow up was undertaken, as revealed in the interviews. Hence, it can be deduced that the level of political will for an agreed water cooperation mechanism remains low, as it is not visible enough in the countries' policy and actions.

## **5.2 Political Will Framework for Water Cooperation for Afghanistan:**

This section incorporates the data collected through interviews into the framework I developed in Section 3.4 to gauge the state of influencing factors of political will for water cooperation in Afghanistan.



**Figure 3: Transboundary Water Cooperation Political Will Framework for Afghanistan**

### Capacity

As evident from the interviews, Afghanistan lag in financial, institutional, infrastructural, and knowledge capacity as well as political and economic stability. The country has been going through war and insurgency for the last four decades. This situation has taken a toll on the country’s economy and governance. Even after a relatively better institutional set up with proper government, the overall resources remain meager, the law and order situation is still not fully satisfactory amid increased militancy, and governance is weak. Moreover, there exists a huge knowledge gap. The country has not even conducted a need assessment on water in the Kabul River Basin. Hence, the capacity indicator has been marked as a downward arrow.

### **Third Party Involvement**

The political will framework developed in chapter 3 includes third party agency as an influencing factor for political will. In developing countries, funding by donors play a crucial role. However, in this specific case, the donor agencies as well as a few countries (US and China) have expressed interest in providing funds. Either the proposed funds are insufficient to be a motivation or rest of the issues have a higher density than the prospect of funds. The upward pointing arrow with a grey color shows a perceived lukewarm third-party involvement in figure 3.

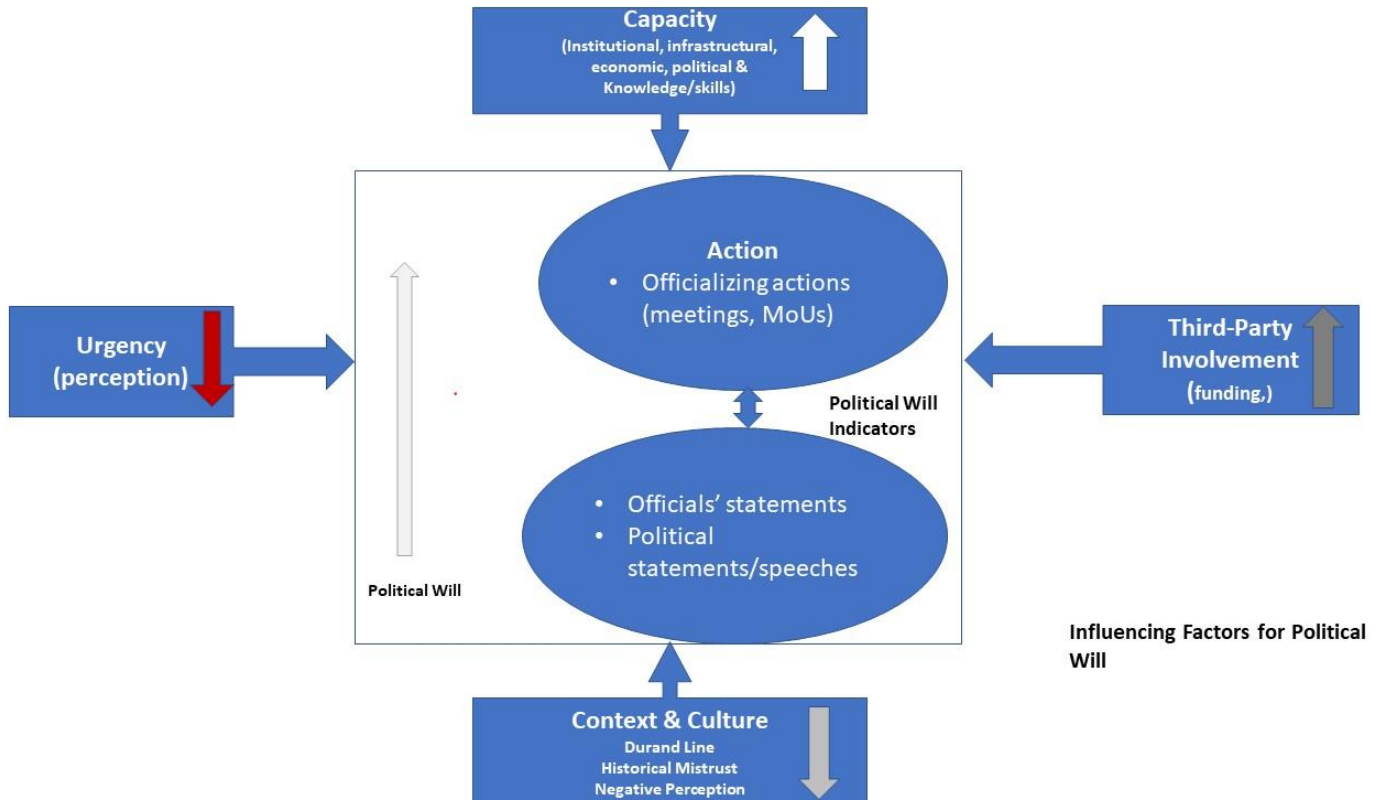
### **Context and Culture**

Context and culture play an important role in driving political will for a policy issue. In case of Afghanistan, there has been deeply entrenched and prolonged mistrust regarding Pakistan, as the interviews from both Pakistani and Afghan respondents reveal. The issue of Durand Line and then perceived support for Taliban remain major irritants for cooperation with Pakistan. As for the current Taliban regime, the government has not formally recognized regime as yet.

### **Urgency**

Due to lack of stability and capacity, Afghanistan considers itself unready to enter a water-treaty with Pakistan. Hence, the country's or the (previous) political leaders' perception of urgency for a treaty is significantly low. In fact, the country is still deliberating whether they should even go for a treaty or not, as evident from the statements of Afghan officials and discussions. Along with the capacity challenges, mistrust and negative perception about sharing water renders the political will for a water sharing mechanism evidently lower. Low political will is also indicated by the absence of many visibility indicators, some of which marked in the red text in figure 3 are essentially negative. For instance, speeches of political leaders and discussion in official meetings portray a discouraging narrative regarding water sharing as well as treaties. Even in the current regime, the security concerns as well as the learning curve viz-a-viz governance issues remain the foremost concerns. There is also a risk that Taliban might also use water as a leverage in case the two countries are in a state of conflict on any major issue.

## Political Will Framework for Water Cooperation for Pakistan:



**Figure 4: Transboundary Water Cooperation Political Will Framework for Pakistan**

### Capacity

Pakistan’s relative capacity in terms of economy, institutions, stability, and governance is adequate. Although the country is going through an economic crisis and has faced political instability in the past, having signed many international agreements involving protracted negotiations its situation is much better relative to Afghanistan. The country lags in availability of data on Kabul River, but it fares relatively better than Afghanistan against this indicator as well.

### **Third-Party Support**

The third-party support is available to both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Both funding and the offer to facilitate the consultative process are available. However, they do not seem to be attractive enough to convince both countries to come to table and have an effective discussion on the issue.

### **Context and Culture**

Although Pakistan has considered Afghanistan through security lens due to Indo-Afghan cooperation and certain historic events, the perception about water sharing in Pakistan has never been negative, as far as the political discussions and general narrative are concerned. The narrative regarding water sharing and overall relations with Afghanistan is also not resentful. Hence, the indicator has been marked as an upward pointing arrow but with greyish tinge to show that the context does not indicate resentful perception, but the high securitization of water sharing, i.e., its perception through security lens as discussed in the interviews, remains an issue for cooperation.

### **Urgency**

Pakistan is concerned about the current and potential of upstream development projects. This is why it has proposed a water treaty. Nevertheless, the issue remains absent from its policy document. If practical measures like state-level meetings are considered, a few meetings have been held, and several attempts have been initiated by Pakistan in this regard. However, there have not been significant follow ups after those attempts. Even the number of attempts made are not enough. This is because, as far as water issue is concerned Pakistan is more focused on Indus River tributaries shared with India, as most of its water needs are fulfilled by those rivers. Also, given that the business-as-usual situation favors Pakistan, the issue of treaty does not come to limelight unless there are reports of upstream development activities. Hence, the perceived level of urgency is lower in Pakistan.

The state of affairs on other drivers of political is quite adequate in Pakistan.

## CHAPTER 6

This chapter explores the relation between political will and water diplomacy through multi-track diplomacy approach.

### **6 Generating Political Will Through Water Diplomacy**

Water Diplomacy is an alternative approach to water sharing against the prevailing competitive, contentious approach as well as the technocentric, value-oriented approaches. It takes into account the sensitive nature of water issues as well as the uncertainty associated with them (Islam & Repella, 2015). Moving a step ahead and incorporating the multitrack diplomacy approach renders the conflict to cooperation transformation more practical and attainable. Scenarios in which the countries are still deliberating whether there is a need for water cooperation (as the matter is not of immediate existential threat) and the political issues remain deeply entrenched in the state-to-state interactions, multitrack diplomacy tends to be more effective. Studies show that track 2 and 3 diplomacy have proven to break the ice and move the countries towards cooperation (Panikkar et al., 2019; Wasike et al., 2016; Wehrenfennig, n.d.). The non-state actors concerned with these two tracks can be engaged to generate and strengthen political will as well. These non-state actors are discussed below.

#### **Academia**

Academia of both countries can be engaged to share knowledge and data about the river basin. Researchers from both countries can conduct joint studies and publish data and policy papers while creating evidence that is of urgency nature. It will help the policymakers to introduce evidence-based policies and be a trust-building exercise at the same time. Universities can collaborate to start exchange programs with specialization in transboundary water domain.

## **Media**

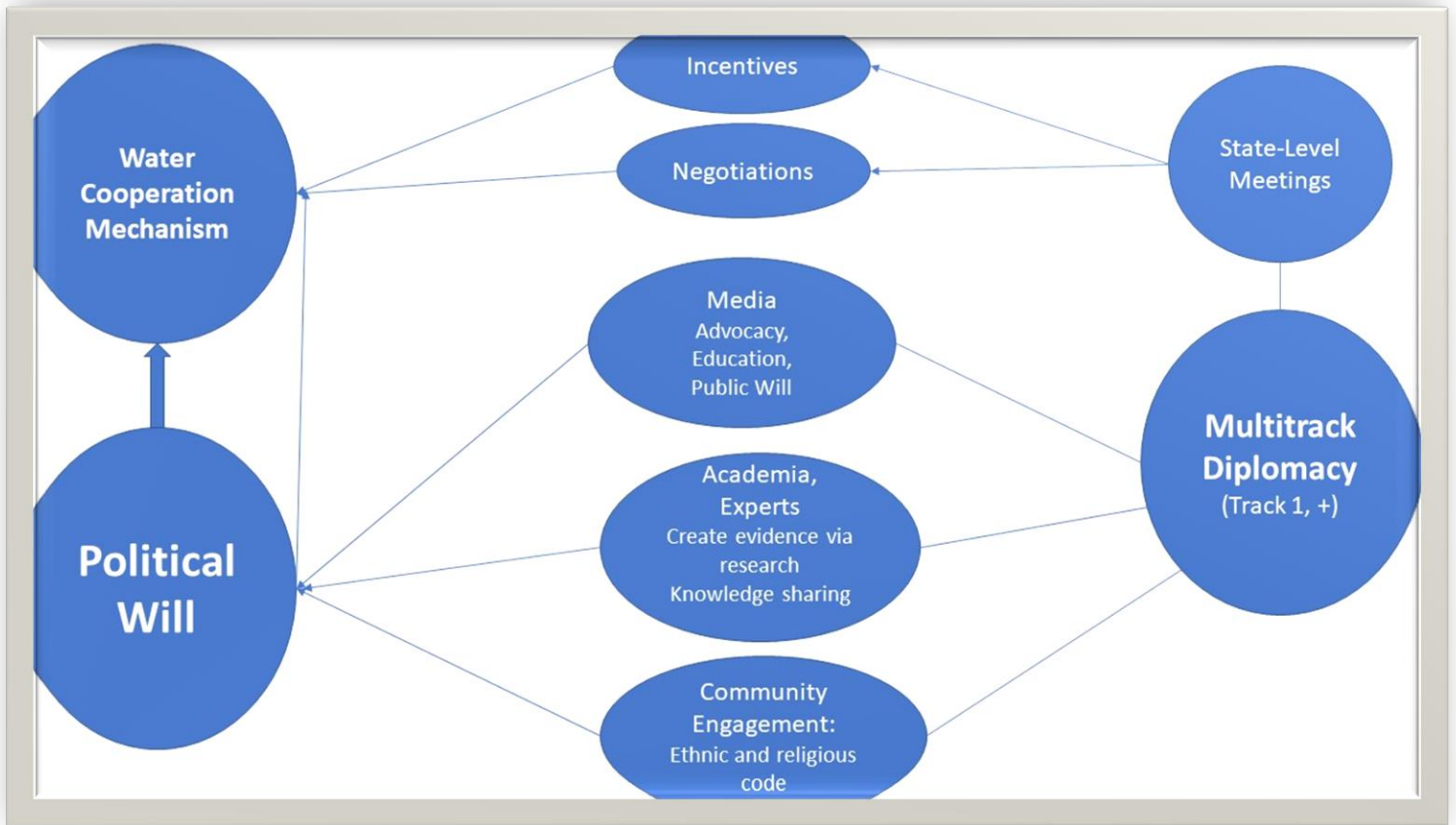
Media can be engaged to disseminate the evidence generated by researchers and educate people rather than sensationalizing and misleading the public as well as political actors (this role has been identified by many interviewees).

## **Community Engagement**

Kabul River Basin shares ethnicity and religion on both sides of the border. Their religious and ethnic code (Pashtoonwali) are similar and thus can play a crucial role in joint amicable water management.

The engagement of these non-state actors would pave way for Track 1 diplomacy, i.e., state-level meetings that will include negotiations based on win-win approach and discuss incentives for both countries which will ultimately lead to an agreed water sharing mechanism.

The framework of water-diplomacy that emerges from the foregoing discussion is depicted below in figure 4.



**Figure 5: Linking Political Will and Water Diplomacy**

## Conclusion

Analyzing the Pak-Afghan transboundary water governance against the public policy stage shows that the issue has not gone past the problem identification stage. It has been flip-flopping within the list of issues that need the attention of political actors. That is because the perceived level of urgency in both countries is low due to various reasons. However, research shows that signing water treaties has more helped than harming a state. Afghanistan’s concerns about its bad experience with Iran regarding a water treaty can be addressed by undertaking an extensive need assessment of present and future (via projections). Even in Afghanistan-Iran case, an understanding needs to be developed that the benefits of cooperation surmount the unilateral resource capture strategies. Reverting to the Kabul River Basin, several solutions have been recommended by different experts.



Hydrodiplomacy is concerned as the most effective one in mitigating the tensions between the two countries and paving way for a formal cooperation mechanism. However, even to engage in diplomacy, political will is required. Without political will, there might be a few meetings every now and then without further follow ups, as is the case with the issue in hand. It needs to be clarified here that political will does not imply whims of political actors but the willingness and the capacity of a polity to make a policy decision. Engaging the non-state actors in generating political will can help states cooperate on the concerned issue.

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*“We have everything we need except political will, but political will is a renewable resource” --Al Gore speaking on climate change, 2009*

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## **Limitations**

The research touches on the theoretical aspects of transboundary water governance. Hence, it does not distinguish between the kinds of water like surface water or ground water neither specifies aquifers, streams, lakes, and so on. The research method had to be confined to integrative review, as interviews or discussions with Afghan nations (politicians etc.) could not be conducted due to shortage of time and lack of accessibility because of both limited resources and political climate at the time of this research. Moreover, the documents or records of the meetings could not be accessed because of the regime change in Afghanistan.

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# ANNEXURES

## Codebook

### Pak-Afghan Transboundary Water Governance on Kabul River

Codes (Inductive)

| Name                 | Occurrence | Frequency |
|----------------------|------------|-----------|
| Cooperation attempts | 8          | 15        |
| Current Situation    |            |           |
| Dams                 | 5          | 12        |
| Afghan Dams          | 4          | 6         |
| Need for Dams        | 3          | 3         |
| Pakistan's Dams      | 3          | 3         |
| No data sharing      | 3          | 4         |



| Name  | Occurrence | Frequency |
|---|------------|-----------|
| 1. No formal cooperation                    | 7          | 7         |
| 2. Conflict                                 | 3          | 3         |
| 3. Status quo benefits<br>Pakistan          | 6          | 9         |
| 4. Water usage                              | 4          | 8         |
| a. Afghan usage                             | 3          | 4         |
| b. Pakistan's usage                         | 2          | 2         |
| c. Water<br>mismanagement                   | 2          | 2         |
| 5. Generating political will                | 12         | 47        |
| 6. Awareness                                | 3          | 4         |
| 7. Exchanges                                | 11         | 32        |
| a. Benefit Sharing                          | 5          | 5         |
| b. Capacity<br>building and<br>data sharing | 4          | 5         |

| Name                                 | Occurrence | Frequency |
|--------------------------------------|------------|-----------|
| c. Incentives                        | 4          | 7         |
| d. Integrative management            | 2          | 2         |
| e. Local participation               | 3          | 3         |
| f. Third Party Involvement           | 7          | 9         |
| 8. Leadership                        | 2          | 2         |
| 9. Parallels from Indus Water Treaty | 7          | 7         |
| 10. Lack of capacity                 | 12         | 30        |
| 11. Economic resources               | 3          | 3         |
| 12. Knowledge and skills             | 5          | 7         |
| 13. Security                         | 3          | 3         |
| 14. Storage                          | 3          | 3         |
| 15. Need for Cooperation             | 10         | 35        |

| Name                       | Occurrence | Frequency |
|----------------------------|------------|-----------|
| 16. Beyond formal          | 9          | 24        |
| a. Engaging academia       | 5          | 6         |
| b. Engaging media          | 3          | 5         |
| c. Track 3<br>Diplomacy    | 6          | 8         |
| 17. Commission             | 2          | 3         |
| 18. Technical discussions  | 1          | 5         |
| 19. Need for Treaty        | 12         | 38        |
| 20. Climate Change         | 6          | 7         |
| 21. Data Sharing           | 3          | 3         |
| 22. Economic benefits      | 5          | 6         |
| 23. Floods                 | 3          | 4         |
| 24. Potential for conflict | 4          | 4         |

| Name  | Occurrence | Frequency |
|---|------------|-----------|
| 25. Water management                        | 4          | 4         |
| 26. Stumbling blocks of cooperation         | 13         | 83        |
| 27. Durand Line                             | 7          | 10        |
| a. Not an issue                             | 1          | 1         |
| 28. Inefficient leadership                  | 2          | 2         |
| 29. Mistrust or distrust                    | 8          | 14        |
| 30. Negative perception about water sharing | 8          | 20        |
| a. Pakistan as hydrohegemon                 | 4          | 4         |
| 31. No Political Will                       | 11         | 18        |
| 32. Other issues subsuming cooperation      | 6          | 8         |
| 33. Securitization of issue                 | 4          | 5         |
| 34. Water on back burner                    | 6          | 6         |

| Name                          | Occurrence | Frequency |
|-------------------------------|------------|-----------|
| 35. Taliban regime            | 6          | 11        |
| 36. Might not help with water | 3          | 3         |
| 37. Urgency                   | 12         | 20        |
| 38. No urgency                | 5          | 6         |
| 39. Urgency for treaty        | 5          | 6         |
| 40. Urgency to cooperate      | 7          | 8         |

## Semi-Structured Interview Guide

- 1. Current state of water sharing on Kabul River between Pakistan and Afghanistan.**
- 2. Is there any need for a treaty/agreement for water sharing on Kabul River Treaty?**
- 3. Are there any economic implications of Kabul Treaty for both countries?**
- 4. Why couldn't the treaty get signed?**
- 5. We have established through literature and multiple case studies in the international realm that institutions can help with cooperation on water sharing. Why do you think it could not be done in the Pak-Afghan context?**
- 6. Perception about a potential transboundary water governance mechanism in both countries?**
- 7. Can we draw parallels from Indus Water Treaty?**