Sino-Pakistan Collaboration on the Indus

What is the issue?

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- Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) is finalised between China and Pakistan to construct an array of hydropower projects, to be referred to as the North Indus Cascade.
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- This has raised concerns with India.
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How is it a concern for India?

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- The string of projects include: Bunji dam, Diamer Bhasha dam (4500 MW), Dasu dam, Patan dam and Thakot dam.
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- Diamer Bhasha Dam (DBD), a part of the Cascade will cut across Gilgit Baltistan, a part of Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) in India.
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- Now, China is stepping up its effort to include DBD as part of the CPEC(China Pakistan Economic Corridor) which also passes through PoK.
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- Both projects have geopolitical underpinnings, given the India angle.
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- Similar to the Kashmir problem where China is increasingly seen as the third party because of its stakes in PoK, the North Indus Cascade is likely to make China the third actor in the Indus framework as well.
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What should India do?

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- India is yet to fully harness its permissible share for storing water under IWT in the western rivers (Jhelum, Chenab and Indus) allotted for its use.
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- Whereas India's limited number of projects have been blocked by Pakistan’s repeated challenges, India has so far not sought either the opinion of neutral experts or international arbitration on DBD or Bunji projects.
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- High profile projects such as CPEC and North Indus Cascade will enable China to exploit resources under Pakistan’s control and take up projects overseas in times of lowering domestic demand.
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- China’s approach towards transnational rivers has no regard for ecological concerns. Ex: DBD and Bunji dams projects are located in ecologically fragile seismic belt.
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- India must look at options that can diminish the challenges arising from what appears to be an emerging Sino-Pakistan axis on the Indus waters.
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- India must firmly assert its sovereignty claims in PoK.
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Source: IDSA

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