

PRIORITIZE WATER SECURITY TO STRENGTHEN ENGAGEMENT

ISSUE	South Asia's major rivers traverse borders defined by long-standing territorial disputes and political tensions. Declining freshwater resources, driven by population growth and climate change, heighten competition for water, making water security crucial for stability in a nuclear-armed region.
SIGNIFICANCE	Water-driven conflicts could destabilize South Asia, posing risks to U.S. security and economic partnerships, while also increasing the likelihood of regional countries' vulnerability and dependence on China, which controls many upstream water sources. By promoting transboundary water cooperation, the United States could reduce tensions and foster stability in a region vital to U.S. geostrategic interests. This approach builds naturally on the Trump administration's 2017 Global Water Strategy, a landmark initiative—mandated by the 2014 Water for the World Act—on what President Trump called “the most important issue we face for the next generation.”
EXPECTATIONS IN THE REGION	South Asian leaders seek to expand ties under a second Trump administration with openness to U.S. facilitation, investments, and technical support, which could extend to transboundary water security. Even though some nations might be wary of foreign involvement in their resource disputes, the United States could leverage established diplomatic ties to address concerns and ramp up political will for cooperation.
DOMESTIC CONSTRAINTS/ CONSIDERATIONS	Focusing on the issue of water security is a low-cost way of magnifying U.S. influence and weakening China's regional leverage without high costs or long-term commitments. Also, U.S. businesses could gain from increased regional demand for American water-management technologies and innovations.
RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION	Revitalize and expand the 2017 U.S. Global Water Strategy to include South Asia as a focus region. Establish a senior envoy-led task force to drive U.S. water security initiatives in South Asia through diplomatic and technical partnerships. This task force will coordinate with key regional stakeholders and also guide intra-regional dialogues to advance long-term planning for shared water resources, helping alleviate emerging tensions while fostering U.S.-backed regional cooperation.