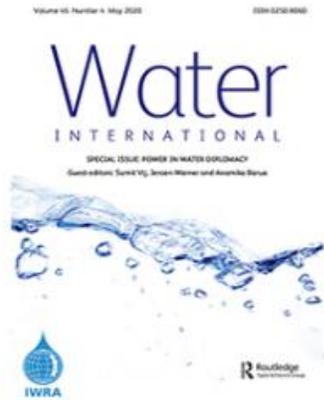


# Power & Water Diplomacy

Sumit Vij

# Special Issue with Water International



Water International



ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rwin20>

## Power in water diplomacy

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To cite this article: Sumit Vij , Jeroen Warner & Anamika Barua (2020) Power in water diplomacy, Water International, 45:4, 249-253, DOI: [10.1080/02508060.2020.1778833](https://doi.org/10.1080/02508060.2020.1778833)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508060.2020.1778833>

# Why this special issue?

- Water is understood as an economic good (in the marketplace), as a political good (in bureaucracy) and as a cultural good (in kinship)  
Donahue (1997)
- Actors involved in transboundary water diplomacy have varying interests and priorities – create conflicts or challenges collective action
  - Actors (state) use their power or resources to meet their interests and priorities
- Most hydro-diplomacy literature is power-blind or at least power-shy – especially towards nuanced power processes and outcomes

# Power nuances and related questions

- Multiple hegemonies – China and India in Brahmaputra River Basin
  - How the two hegemonies interact with each other?
- Domestic conflicts or emotions influence the foreign policy and water diplomacy – Teesta; Ganges and Indus in South Asia
  - How domestic interplay influences the transboundary interactions?
- Rise of nationalism and realism in the world political cycle is influencing the transboundary waters
  - Changing the process of 'hollowed-out' state
  - Alpha males leadership style and transactional relationship

# Content

- Current scholarship has limited focus on how power shapes the interplay between the actors while (re)framing conflicts, achieving positive cooperation
- SI aims to capture different nuances of power and diplomacy through questions such as:
  - What is the role of power and its interplay between actors in the transboundary water arena?
  - Where do we locate the power element in water diplomacy, where the ‘shadow of hard power’ – coercion and power asymmetry between the conflictive parties – is rarely addressed?
  - How do ‘non-decisions’ and ‘ideational and material power’ lead to the status quo in water diplomacy?
  - What role can non-diplomats play in altering the power relations in water discussions?
  - How do ‘two-level games’ operate, where ‘games’ at one scale influence negotiations at another?

# Carte du jour

- Introduction and Non-decision making in Brahmaputra Basin
- Power and water diplomacy – Jeroen Warner
- Non-decision making in Central America – Carmen Maganda
- Informal Water Diplomacy – Anamika Barua
- Water Conflict transformation – Mark Zeitoun

10-12 minutes presentation each

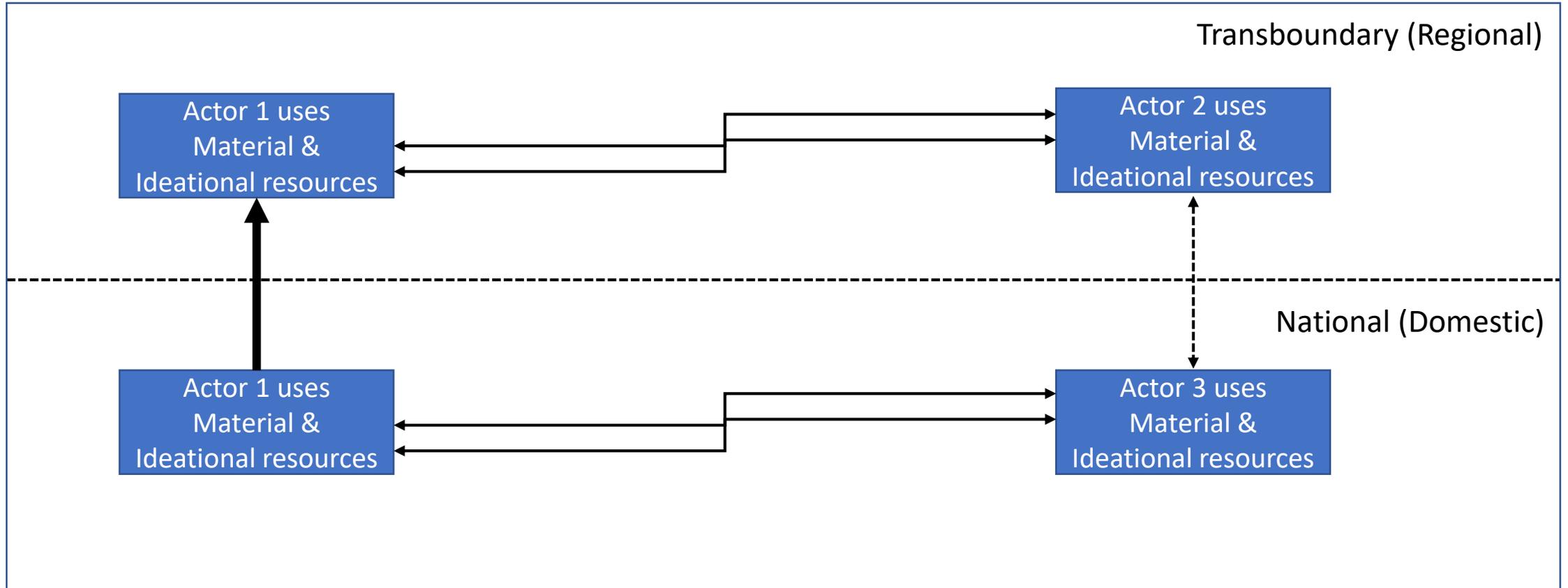
# Non-decision making

Brahmaputra River Basin in South Asia

# Non-decision making

- Power interplay in hydro-diplomacy suggests two kinds of outcomes: zero-sum and non-zero-sum (Susskind & Islam, 2012)
  - With the use of material and ideational resources, a partial or complete status quo can be maintained by riparian countries
- Bachrach and Baratz (1963) explained the second face of power, relating to non-decision making and keeping conflicts from being discussed in political fora
  - Manipulating the ideas and rules of interaction, power relations and instruments of force during the power interplay (Robertson & Beresford, 1996)
  - Non-decision making as hiding information and tabooing a topic (McCalla-Chen, 2000)

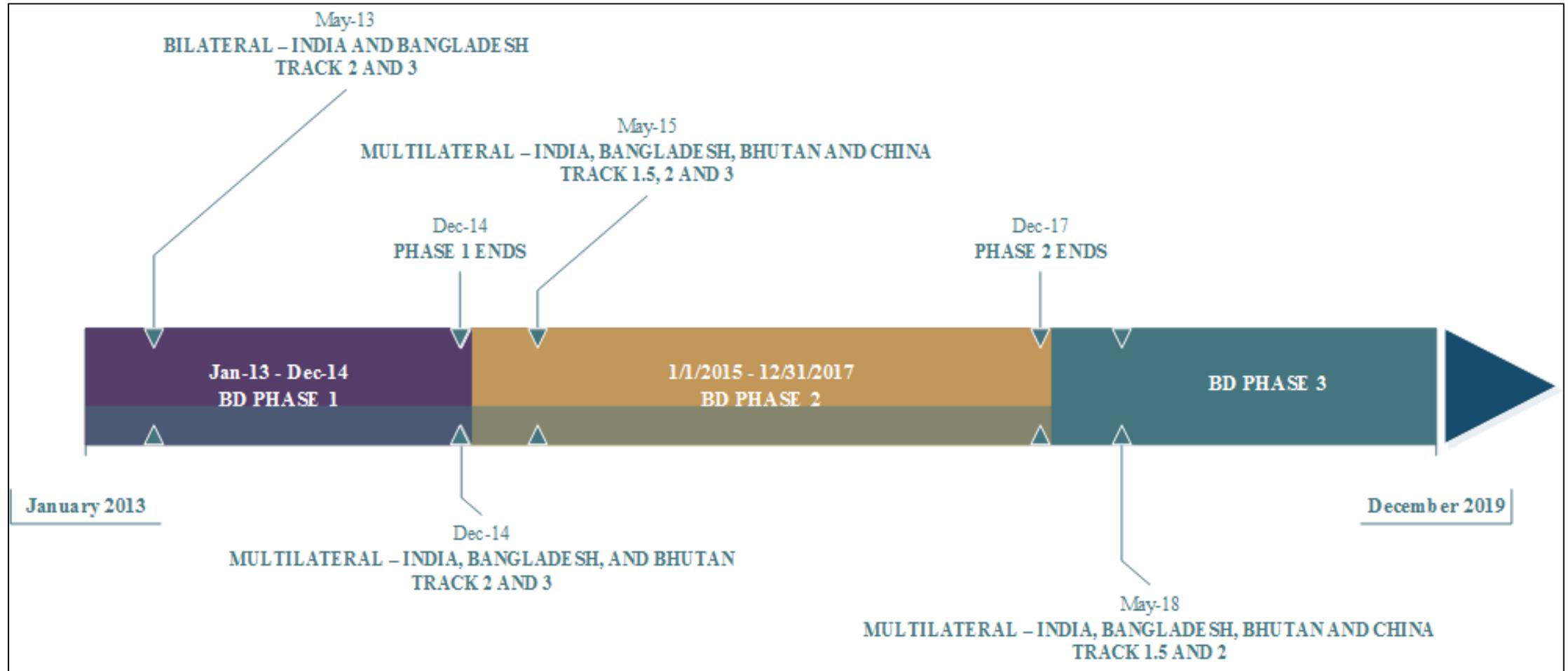
# Power interplay framework



# Brahmaputra Basin

- Persistent conflicts between riparian nations for controlling floods and tapping the potential of the River.
  - Different interests and priorities of riparians
  - Historical border rivalries
  - Multiple hegemonic states
  - Domestic conflicts
  - Cycle of conflicts-cooperation-conflicts in foreign relations
  - Strategic autonomy and bilateralism challenges

# Brahmaputra Dialogue 2013-2018



# Actors uses resources

- India uses
  - Geographic position, economic growth and military strength to make unilateral decisions (MR)
  - Rules of interaction to decide participation in regional BD meetings (IR)
  - Hegemonic vulnerabilities (IR)
- Bangladesh uses
  - Past transboundary experience of Ganges and Teesta (MR)
  - India's bilateralism (IR)
  - Lack of research, data and information (MR)

# What can Non-decision making offer?

- India & Bangladesh purposively maintain status-quo for diplomacy in Brahmaputra
- Advances the power analysis in hydro-diplomacy
  - Analysis can help understand conflicts and cooperation in other river basins
- Operationalize non-decision making through material and ideational resources is much simpler