

## Sir Creek Dispute

The Sir Creek dispute between India and her neighbour Pakistan is a long-standing border dispute with origins in pre-independence India. Despite the issue not taking centre stage amidst the larger canvas of India-Pakistan relations, it is an important one for various factors. In this article, you can read all about the origins and course of the dispute, along with the way forward. This is an important topic in the [UPSC exam](#) International Relations segment.

### Sir Creek Dispute

Sir Creek is a 96 km strip of water in the marshes of the Rann of Kutch in Gujarat. It is a disputed region between India and Pakistan. The creek roughly separates the Kutch region in India and Pakistan's Sindh province. Sir Creek opens up into the Arabian Sea. It was originally named Ban Ganga and was named Sir Creek during colonial times after a British official.

What is the dispute?

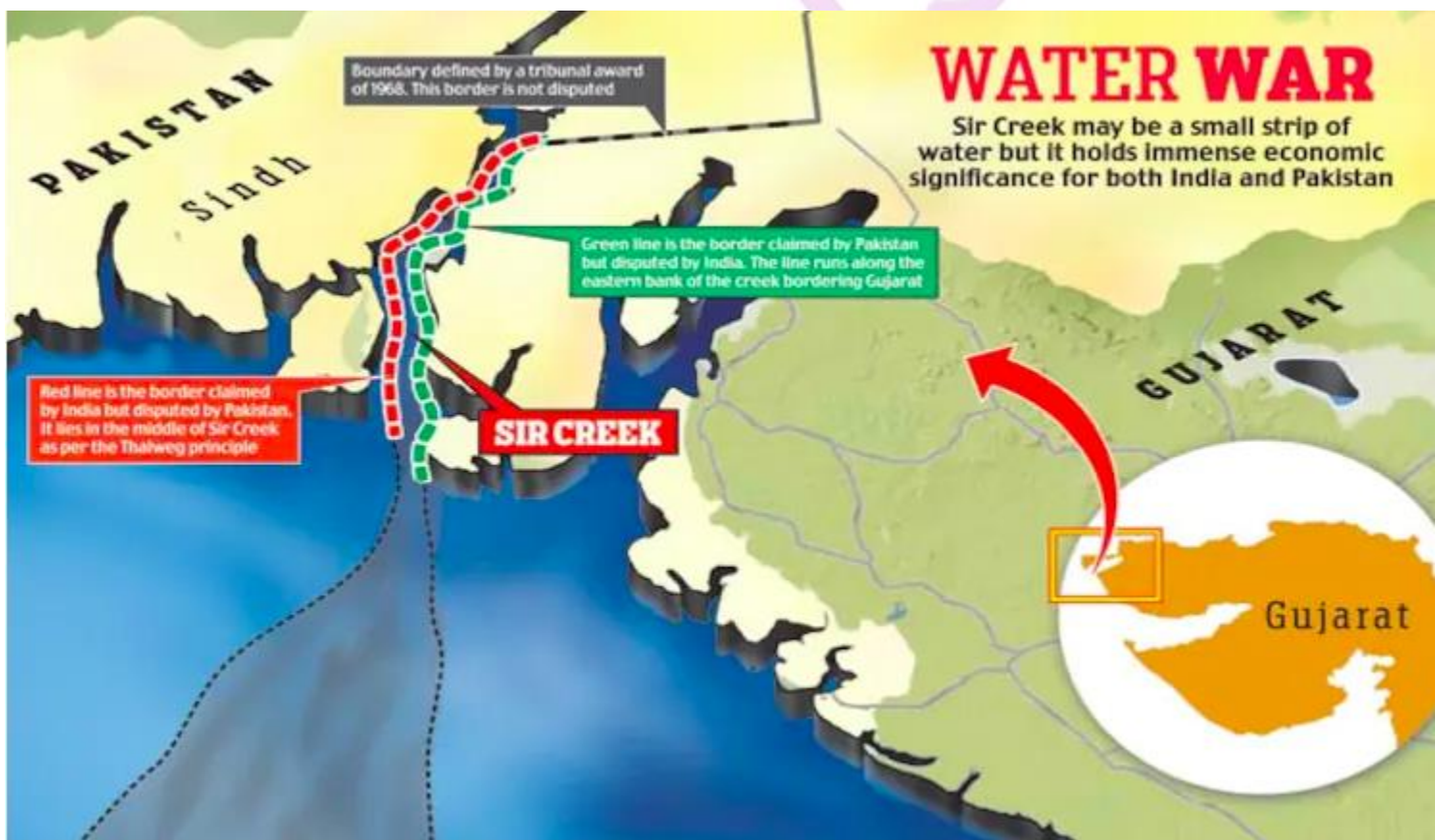


Image source: <https://www.indiatoday.in/>

- At the heart of the dispute is the differing interpretations of the maritime boundary line between the two neighbouring countries.
- Before independence, the provincial region was part of the Bombay Presidency.

- While Kutch remained with India, Sindh went to Pakistan after partition in 1947.
- Pakistan claims the whole of the creek as part of its territory according to the Bombay Government Resolution of 1914 which was signed between the Rao of Kutch and the Sindh provincial government. As per this, the eastern flank of the creek was the boundary line. (This is indicated in the image by the green line).
- According to India, this Green Line is an indicative line only.
- Another map drawn in 1925 is the basis for India's claim according to which the boundary line lies mid-channel. Also, mid-channel pillars were constructed in 1924. (The red line on the given map shows India's claimed position of the boundary line).
- India draws on the **Thalweg Principle** in international law according to which if the boundary between two political entities is a waterway, the boundary follows the thalweg of that watercourse.
  - This means the boundary would follow the centre of the principal navigable channel of the waterway.
- Pakistan rejects this saying that the principle is applicable only to navigable channels which Sir Creek is not according to it.
- However, India says that Sir Creek is navigable during high tides and that fishing trawlers use the channel to go out into the sea.

## Origins of the Sir Creek Issue

The dispute originated in 1908 when the ruler of Kutch and the government of Sindh sparred over the collection of firewood from the creek area.

- To resolve the dispute, the government of Bombay drew up the Bombay Government Resolution of 1914.
  - A map on this resolution placed the boundary of Sindh as the eastern flank of the creek.
  - However, paragraph 10 of the resolution places the boundary mid-channel in accordance with the Thalweg Principle.
- According to paragraph 9, the Kutch-Sindh boundary is to the east of the creek which meant that the whole of Sir Creek would go to Pakistan.
- However, para 10 also states that Sir Creek is navigable most of the year, making the Thalweg Rule applicable.

## Why is Sir Creek Important?

Sir Creek is a strategically important region and Indian and Pakistani troops had clashed in the Rann of Kutch in the [1965 war](#). It is an important fishing ground and is one of the largest fishing sources in Asia. Another reason for its significance is the possible presence of oil and gas reserves under the sea in that area. It is currently unexplored because of the ongoing border dispute. The area is also of great ecological importance with it being home to flamingoes and other species of migratory birds in the winters.

## *Sir Creek Issue Resolution Attempts*

After the 1965 war, the then British PM Harold Wilson intervened and both India and Pakistan set up a tribunal to resolve the dispute.

- The verdict was given in 1968 and according to this, Pakistan was awarded 10% of its claim.

- In 1997, both countries resumed composite dialogue and one of the issues on the table was the Sir Creek dispute.
- In 1999, there was a tense situation when an Indian fighter plane shot down a surveillance aircraft of the Pakistan Navy which was flying over the Sir Creek area. India says that Pakistan violated its airspace whereas Pakistan denies this.
- Between 2005 and 2007, joint surveys of the area were carried out.

It is important to find a resolution to the long-standing issue that is acceptable to all parties. Many innocent fishermen are caught and arrested by the other country when they accidentally stray across the perceived border. It would be to the benefit of both countries if this issue, considered a low-hanging fruit in the basket of disputes between the two countries, is amicably resolved.

