

## **Pakistan – China Collusivity as Witnessed in Operation Sindoor**

### **Introduction**

China's official responses to the 22 Apr 2025 Pahalgam terrorist attack mirrored Pakistan's narrative—advocating a “Quick and fair investigation” of the Pahalgam attack and expressing “Full understanding” of Islamabad's ‘Legitimate security concerns’.<sup>1</sup>

While the Chinese Foreign Office spokesperson termed the 07 May response by India on terrorist targets in Pakistan as “Regrettable”, China also collaborated with Pakistan in diluting the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Press Statement, excising any direct reference to The Resistance Front, the group behind the Pahalgam attack.<sup>2</sup> More recently, it also prevented an inclusion of the terror attack in the draft SCO communique resulting in the Defence Minister Shri Rajnath Singh refusing to sign the document on 25 Jun as it would have weakened India's position on terrorism and regional security.<sup>3</sup>

The Chinese media also played an active role in shaping perceptions amplifying Pakistan's propaganda. The digital landscape also underscored China's active alignment with Pakistan's strategic messaging which included celebrating the alleged success of Chinese-origin military platforms deployed by Pakistan.<sup>4</sup>

A recurring theme was the concern that the crisis could escalate into a nuclear conflict, prompting calls for international diplomatic intervention to prevent further escalation.

However, the Chinese role is now no longer restricted to the dimensions of diplomacy, economy, supply of military hardware, and strategic communications. It has metamorphosed to a degree where a conflict with Pakistan, now openly involves China as Pakistan's military capability in terms of weapons and technology have been boosted by China. It is well known that Pakistan is the biggest buyer of Chinese military hardware but it is now the ‘Military Software’ as evidenced during Operation Sindoor which is concerning.

### **Deputy Chief's Remarks**

On 04 Jul 2025, the Deputy Chief of Army Staff (Capability Development and Sustenance), Lieutenant General Rahul R Singh, while speaking on Operation Sindoor, reinforced this important aspect of the China-Pakistan nexus when he stated that China was an ever-present factor bolstering Pakistan's military efforts through unprecedented battlefield collusion during Operation Sindoor.<sup>5</sup>

Drones, cyber operations, and net-centric warfare elements employed by Pakistan showed unmistakable imprints of the “Chinese military playbook.

The Deputy Chief also said that Chinese Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance systems provided real-time data, situational awareness, and surveillance capabilities to the Pakistani forces. Even civilian assets such as the Chinese fishing fleet were reportedly leveraged to monitor Indian naval deployments, while Pakistan's Navy remained coastal-bound.<sup>6</sup>

He stated that Pakistan had full visibility into Indian military deployments, which was made evident during the Director General of Military Operations (DGMO)-level talks by disclosing that; "When the DGMO-level talks were going on, Pakistan actually was mentioning that 'we know that your such and such important vector is primed and ready for action. I would request you to perhaps pull it back'. It is apparent that Pakistan was getting these inputs ... from China".<sup>7</sup>

Operation Sindoor was also a test bed for China's defence industry, validating its platforms and collecting performance data in real combat. As per him that 81 per cent of Pakistan's military hardware acquired in the last 5 years is from China. He said that China was using Pakistan as a 'live lab' to test its weapons against various other weapon systems.

To quote Siemon Wezeman of SIPRI, "Any state producing or buying weapons is keen to see how the product does in real conflict. Tests and exercises can tell most about the capabilities of weapons, but the ultimate test is often combat".<sup>8</sup>

This in turn allows the Chinese to improve and upgrade their product for the next conflict. These upgrades will probably be available to Pakistan, which will be better prepared in future.

Lieutenant General Singh revealed that during Operation Sindoor, India faced not just Pakistan, but effectively three adversaries on one border. "Pakistan was the front face. We had China providing all possible support ... Turkey also played a very important role in providing the type of support that was there".<sup>9</sup>

He also disclosed that Turkey provided substantial support to Pakistan, including Bayraktar drones and trained personnel. "Turkey also played a very important role in providing the type of support that was there. Bayraktar, of course, he's been giving from before. We saw numerous other drones also coming in during the war, along with trained sort of individuals who were there," he revealed.<sup>10</sup>

This brings out Turkey's active role in supporting Pakistan against India, indicating a broader geopolitical alignment that extends beyond traditional Pakistan-China cooperation.

### **China Downplays Remarks**

On 07 Jul China downplayed the Deputy Chief's remarks and its Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said at a media briefing that "I am not familiar with the specifics you mentioned. Let me say that China and Pakistan are close neighbours, enjoying

traditional friendship. Defence and security cooperation is part of the normal cooperation between the two countries and does not target any third party”.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, Mao said the India-China relationship is in a “critical moment of improvement and development” and Beijing would like to promote steady growth of bilateral ties with New Delhi.

When pointed out that China’s active support in providing live inputs to Pakistan during the conflict was contrary to her assertion that the close ties do not target any third party, Mao said, “I am not sure how that allegation came about. Different people may have different perspectives”.

In sync with these remarks the Pakistan Army Chief General Asim Munir in an address to graduating officers at the National Defence University in Islamabad, said that “Insinuations regarding external support in Pakistan’s successful Operation Bunyanum Marsoos are irresponsible and factually incorrect”.<sup>12</sup>

### **Pakistan China Collusivity**

The handing over of Shaksgam Valley in Gilgit – Baltistan by Pakistan to China in 1963 was a defining moment in Pakistan-China relations. In 1964, Pakistan became the first non-communist country to begin its flights to China. In Mar 1965, Pakistan denounced the ‘Two China Policy’ of the United States. China now began to regard Pakistan as a trustworthy partner in South Asia. The 1965 India-Pakistan war proved to be a real catalyst in cementing these ties, as China fully supported Pakistan. In 1971, the US used Pakistan to reach out to China and in recent years China has always stood by Pakistan at all international forums and provided them all possible support including the transfer of advanced missile and nuclear technologies.

During Operation Sindoor, Chinese-origin systems were visibly employed by Pakistan. The Pakistan Air Force’s deployment of Chinese J-10C fighters armed with PL-15 beyond-visual-range missiles, alongside HQ-9 Air Defence systems, demonstrated enhanced capability through operational integration honed over the years of joint exercises such as the Shaheen-series. This interoperability was not just symbolic. It was translated into tactical advantages in real-time combat.

China’s BeiDou satellite navigation system played a critical role, including in missile guidance for the PL-15, reaffirming the direct integration of Chinese systems into Pakistani battlefield operations. The Chinese satellite network Baidu continuously searched, identified, and tracked targets on the Indian side, and thereafter the data was fed to the fire control systems of the aircraft that were being tested by China through the air force of its autonomous region–Pakistan. Therefore, the air-to-air missiles could have found a target on the Indian side of the Line of Control (LoC).

On 12 May Air Marshal A K Bharti, Director General Air Operations, presented visual evidence of missile remnants and named China-supplied weapons in the Pakistani arsenal used against the Indian Armed Forces. “You can see the pieces of it on the

screen,” he said, showcasing debris of the PL-15 long range missile that fell inside Indian territory, including a relatively intact rear section recovered from Hoshiarpur in Punjab.<sup>13</sup>

Reports also indicate the fusion of the Swedish Saab 2000 Erieye airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) platform alongside Chinese systems to target Indian aircraft, reflecting a sophisticated convergence of multi-origin platforms, many of which are enabled or integrated by Chinese technologies.

Pakistan’s announcement on 06 Jun of China offering it its 5<sup>th</sup>-Generation J-35 stealth fighters, the KJ-500 AEW&C aircraft, and the HQ-19 ballistic missile defence system reinforces its position as the foremost recipient of Chinese frontline military hardware.<sup>14</sup>

China and Pakistan have a shared enmity with India and Pakistan with its geostrategic location is integral to China’s transformation to a global power as it provides it connectivity through both the China Pakistan Economic Corridor and Maritime Silk Route.

## **Conclusion**

The fact is that India is dealing with the legacy of the unsettled borders with both China and Pakistan on the LoC, Actual Ground Position Line and LAC. This has resulted in deployment of forces to safeguard India’s territorial sovereignty. Post the Jun 2020 Galwan crisis, while disengagement has taken place, the de-induction of troops has not. The ceasefire along the LoC has also effectively collapsed post Operation Sindoor.

The collusion is no longer in the realm of fantasy; it is a fact. The lessons from Operation Sindoor should guide India’s threat assessments, force modernisation, and operational thought process. This fundamentally changes India’s strategic calculus and defence planning, as it confirms the two-front collusive threat is not a theoretical construct for the Indian military but an operational reality. India therefore needs to secure itself and promote national interests by building on the economy and strengthening military capabilities.

While speaking at an event hosted by the Observer Research Foundation on 08 Jul 2025, the CDS General Anil Chauhan said; “There is a possible convergence of interest we can talk about between China, Pakistan, and Bangladesh that may have implications for India’s stability and security dynamics”.

Operation Sindoor has demonstrated that conflicts will not be fought as per the previous templates. The focus though shifting to multi-domain operations is on non-contact kinetic attacks using long range vectors and air to facilitate precision strikes apart from cyber, economic, legal, information and proxy wars. In such a scenario, China as a major player will prefer to remain invisible and it is in this grey zone that India will witness greater collusivity which will get compounded in times to come.

## Endnotes

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