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Issue Brief

The India-Pakistan Armed Conflict: Chinese Reactions

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Summary

India should be mindful not only about a two-front kinetic war but strategise to counter a two-front misinformation war emanating from Pakistan and China during combat situations. China could actively work to shape perception around military crises both in the neighbourhood and at the international level.

China’s responses to the Pahalgam terror attacks highlighted its close relations with Pakistan while projecting itself as a responsible power to the international community. The initial statements from the Chinese Ambassador to India Xu Feihong, *Xinhua* as well as the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson after the 22 April events carefully steered clear of any mention of terrorist attack on the tourists while expressing China’s firm opposition to “all forms of terrorism”.¹

Subsequently, as tensions between India and Pakistan escalated, China as member of the United Nations Security Council on 26 April condemned the terrorist attack in Pahalgam, voiced its support for “fair and just investigation” and also urged India and Pakistan to exercise restraint.² Member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, Director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi, in a telephone call with Pakistan’s Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on 27 April expressed understanding for Pakistan’s “legitimate security concerns” and pledged support for Pakistan in “safeguarding its sovereignty and security interests”.³ In show of support for Islamabad, Beijing also reportedly delivered PL-15 missiles to Pakistan.

Following India’s launch of Operation Sindoor that targeted terrorist infrastructures in Pakistan, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson termed India’s action regrettable. *Xinhua* reported India’s military operations without mentioning the preceding terror attacks in Pahalgam.⁴ Conversely, China remained silent about Pakistan’s shelling on Indian border villages and drone attacks on Indian military infrastructures. Moreover, the official media termed Pakistan’s military operation ‘Bunyan Marsoos’ as a response to India’s provocations.⁵ However, keeping with its image of responsible power, China offered to work with the international community “to continue playing a constructive role in easing the current tensions”.⁶

¹ Xu Feihong, “Shocked by the attack in Pahalgam and condemn. Deep condolences for the victims and sincere sympathies to the injured and the bereaved families. Oppose terrorism of all forms.”, X (formerly Twitter), 23 April 2025; [“25 Tourists Killed in Indian-controlled Kashmir”](#), *Xinhua*, 22 April 2025; [“Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Guo Jiakun’s Regular Press Conference on April 23, 2025”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The People’s Republic of China, 23 April 2025.

² [“UN Security Council Condemns Terror Attack in Indian-controlled Kashmir”](#), *Xinhua*, 26 April 2025; “China supports carrying out fair, just investigations into terrorist attack in Kashmir: spokesperson”, *Xinhua*, 28 April 2025; [“Wang Yi Has a Phone Call with Pakistani Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The People’s Republic of China, 27 April 2025.

³ Sumit Ahlawat, [“Indo-Pak Tensions: China Makes ‘Express’ Delivery of PL-15 Missiles to Pakistan to Counter Rafale Threat: Speculative Report”](#), *Eurasian Times*, 27 April 2025.

⁴ [“Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lin Jian’s Regular Press Conference on May 7, 2025”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The People’s Republic of China, 7 May 2025; [“India Launches Attacks on Pakistan’s Air Defense Systems at Multiple Locations: Media”](#), *Xinhua*, 8 May 2025.

⁵ [“Pakistan Launches Operation Bunyanun Marsoos in Response to Indian Provocations: Xinhua”](#), *Global Times*, 10 May 2025.

⁶ [“Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lin Jian’s Regular Press Conference on May 8, 2025”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The People’s Republic of China, 8 May 2025.

Indian observers assessing Chinese views both in the official media as well as strategic circles noted China’s rhetorical support to Pakistan while de-legitimising India’s concerns and policy approach, China’s attempt to position itself as a mediator in India–Pakistan conflict and China’s desire to maintain strategic pressure on India through Pakistan, while avoiding destabilisation of the region.⁷

Beyond these considerations, three salient factors emerged predominantly from Chinese discussions in news blogs: Misinformation campaign; Role of Chinese weapons; and the Taiwan factor.

Misinformation Campaign

Quoting Pakistani sources, social media posts, Chinese analysts and commentators engaged in a huge misinformation campaign against India.⁸ A substantial number of news reports and analyses claimed India’s air defence to be weak, its military equipment inferior, Indian personnel lacking tactical knowledge and the Indian Air Force (IAF) attack against Pakistan as ineffectual. Commentators in popular Chinese news media outlets like *Toutiao*, *China.com* and *China News wire*, asserted that “India had planned to retaliate against Pakistan with air strikes, but paid a heavy price in the face of Pakistan’s powerful air defence system”.⁹

Further, “Air Defence of Pakistani Air Force is extremely powerful’ and that Pakistan was able to shoot down ‘six fighter jets including French Rafale and Russian made Su-30 MKI fighters”.¹⁰ Lauding Pakistan air force personnel, analysts noted that while Indian Rafale was lost due to lack of proper training of the Indian personnel, Pakistani air force achieved victory in air combat due to high-quality training and strategic wisdom.¹¹ India’s diverse procurement was also opined to be a major

⁷ Jabin T. Jacob, [“Reading China’s Positions on the Pahalgam Attack”](#), Centre of Excellence for Himalayan Studies, Shiv Nadar University, 5 May 2025; Anushka Saxena, [“Mediation and Interference: Assessing Chinese Views & Analyses on the Latest India-Pak Tensions”](#), Takshashila Institution, 9 May 2025.

⁸ Chinese commentators, accepting Pakistan’s version, claimed that Islamabad paralysed 70 per cent of India’s power grid system and also destroyed India’s S-400 Air Defence system.

⁹ [“Commentator: The Indian Air Force has Suffered Heavy Losses, and Its Equipment Superiority Cannot Hide its Tactical Shortcomings”](#), *China.com*, 8 May 2025.

¹⁰ Ibid.; [“In a Big Fight, Pakistan Launched an all-out Counterattack Against India, and the Flames of War Burned to 1.7 Billion People”](#), *Toutiao.com*, 10 May 2025; Jiang Pingzhou, [“Pakistan Counterattacked, India was Completely Defeated, the Pilot was Captured, the Aircraft Carrier was Urgently Transferred, and the Situation Got Out of Control”](#), *Toutiao.com*, 10 May 2025.

¹¹ [“What Makes the Pakistan Air Force So Strong: The Perfect Combination of Well-equipped, High-quality Pilots and Strategic Intelligence”](#), *CNWNNews*, 9 May 2025. Claiming to be sourced from Audit Office of India, one Chinese news blog claimed that India is facing shortage of pilots and inadequate training. [“Striking the Indian Army’s Rafale Why is the Pakistani Air Force So Tough. The superiority of the system determines the outcome of the victory”](#), *China.com*, 9 May 2025.

vulnerability of the IAF. Prominent military expert Shao Yongling, who also had been part of China’s People’s Liberation Army’s Rocket Force, argued that

Indian Air Force equipment are complex, showing the characteristics of ‘made in many countries’. Although there are advanced French Rafale fighters, there are obvious problems with the integration of the equipment system.¹²

Another commentator writing in *China.com* claimed that India despite having 36 Rafale jets, “has a long-standing problem with a disorganized equipment system”. Although the Rafale has excellent performance, the use of “Mika” missiles with a limited range is “at a disadvantage in over-the-horizon operations”. Further the integration of indigenously produced Tejas fighter jets along with Russian made Su-30 MKI, MiG-29UPG greatly reduced the efficiency of coordinated operations.¹³

Likewise, one commentator from Tianjin, ‘analysing’ Western perception of India’s air combat capability, claimed that Western media and think tanks believe that India lost at least 2 to 3 warplanes, in the conflict with Pakistan reflecting the tactical inadequacy of the IAF in the face of Pakistan’s modernised air defence systems. The losses were seen as a blow to the reputation of the IAF.¹⁴ Another comment blog under the pseudonym Qin An, wrote that: “6:0 is a cruel and crushing result. And it could have been 15:0. But Pakistan maintained great restraint”.¹⁵

Similarly, few other commentator blogs, opined that Pakistan’s counterattack “is a blow to India’s ‘small hegemony’ and will also have an impact on future India-Pakistan relations”. Further, that the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) has “rich combat experience” and Indian pilots despite participating in multinational exercises, were constrained by inefficient tactical execution resulting from combination of Western training model combined with Russian equipment. It was also opined that the “excellent quality of Pakistani pilots”, “effective logistical support” and “tactical thinking” enabled the PAF to “defeat the Indian Army”.¹⁶

¹² [“The Performance Far Exceeds that of the Indian Air Force, Why is the Pakistan Air Force so Strong?”](#), *Yangcheng Evening News*, 9 May 2025.

¹³ [“Striking the Indian Army’s Rafale Why is the Pakistani Air Force So Tough The superiority of the System Determines the Outcome of the Victory”](#), *China.com*, 9 May 2025.

¹⁴ [“What Does the West Think of the Losses of the Indian Air Force? What is the New Understanding of the Chinese Air Combat System?”](#), *Zhihu*, 11 May 2025.

¹⁵ Qin An, [“The End of Taiwan Should be Accelerated, and the J-10 Shot Down Not Only a Fighter, But Also the New Clothes of the Hegemonic Emperor”](#), *Hanfeng*, 12 May 2025.

¹⁶ Jin Canrong, [“The Indian Fighter was Beaten to Slag by the J-10, which is a Blow to Indian hegemonism!”](#), *Guancha*, 8 May 2025; Ruoxu, [“The Truth of the Air Battle between India and Pakistan”](#), *Sina.com*, 7 May 2025; Hang Ziya, [“India-Pakistan Conflict, Chinese Fighter Jets Became Gods in World War I, Why Did the Indian Army Lose So Badly?”](#), *Hong Kong News*, 9 May 2025.

Role of Chinese Weapons

Besides exaggerating PAF capability, Chinese analysts consistently emphasised ‘Pakistan’s victory’ was largely due to use of Chinese combat system. This in turn was expected to demonstrate the superiority of Chinese military technology over that of the West and consolidate China’s position as a major arms supplier in the international market. Chinese observers argued that the combination of the ZDK-03 early warning aircraft with fighters such as J-10C and the Thunder 03 dealt a heavy blow to the IAF. Further, the PL-15 Air to Air missiles were able to shoot down six IAF planes.¹⁷

By integrating China’s advanced air defence missile system, it was contended that Pakistan formed a three-dimension defence network from short-range to long-range and therefore, compared to India, Pakistan seemed unscathed.¹⁸ Reportedly, Hu Xijin, former editor-in-chief of *Global Times* commented,

If the news that China's J-10C fighter and PL-15 missile shot down the French Rafale fighter is fully and officially confirmed.... This news will be a nuclear explosion-level attack on the international arms procurement market....The trend of arms buyers there turning to China will be unstoppable. Because Western weapons are expensive and the countries that buy them are politically constrained.¹⁹

Similarly, Hu Shisheng, deputy secretary-general of the Academic Committee of the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, opined that

Chinese-made J-10C fighters...combined with the PL-15 long-range air-to-air missiles and early warning command system provided by China, showed remarkable combat effectiveness in this confrontation.²⁰

Similarly, another analysis concluded that the military exchange between India and Pakistan was essentially an air battle dominated by technology. It argued that the entire system and individual combat system of the IAF was backward and the large fleet was outdated and clumsy in front of the assassins of the PAF composed of J-10CP and PL-15E.²¹ In a more detailed account, another commentary argued that Pakistan using Chinese J-20 stealth fighters, Silent Hunters, HQ-9 and HQ-16 missiles rendered the IAF “powerless”. Furthermore, China’s Xiaolong fighter jets destroyed India’s S-400 air defence system.²²

¹⁷ [“Commentator: The Indian Air Force has Suffered Heavy Losses, and Its Equipment Superiority Cannot Hide Its Tactical Shortcomings”](#), no. 9.

¹⁸ [“Comparison of Indian and Pakistani Air Defense Weapons Vividly Illustrates ‘Choice is Greater than Effort’”](#), *Sohu.com*, 8 May 2025.

¹⁹ [“India-Pakistan Air War. Dismantling the Situation”](#), *Sing Tao*, 9 May 2025.

²⁰ Ruan Jiaqi, [“The Global Military Will Study the Air Battle between India and Pakistan, and China will Face off Directly with the Most Powerful Weapons of the West”](#), *Guancha*, 9 May 2025.

²¹ [“Full review! How was the Air War between India and Pakistan Fought? How was the Rafale Shot Down? What are the Advantages of the Pakistani Air Force?”](#), *Guancha*, 8 May 2025.

²² [“China's Weapons are Crazy, Breaking the Indian Army's Three Major Killing Moves, Modi has No Cards to Play, and a Ceasefire has become a Forced Choice”](#), *NetEase*, 11 May 2025.

Along with these observations, Chinese analysts hailed China as the ‘winner’ in the India–Pakistan confrontation. It was argued that the ‘air battle’ was in a way confrontation between Western and Chinese made combat systems and Pakistan’s ‘victory’ reflected the rise of China’s military technology.²³ Commentators argued that Pakistan’s success in shooting down advanced Rafale jets using Chinese-made J-10C fighter jets highlighted the strength of Chinese military industry. Also, as Pakistan destroyed Indian aircrafts deploying ultra-long range of Chinese equipment, the “combat effectiveness” of Chinese weapons in actual combat has been tested.²⁴

Chinese analysts emphasised that the military confrontation between India and Pakistan

has achieved solid results, allowing international capital to see the strength of China's military industry and its bright prospects in the global defense equipment market.

Therefore, it is expected orders will pour into China especially from Saudi Arabia and other middle-eastern countries which till now sources weapon from the West.²⁵ China’s military industry will usher in an explosive period. Accordingly, China’s military industry now will not only be able to “hold its head high”, but also increase exports to regions like the Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Latin America and Africa, thereby extending China’s geopolitical influence.²⁶

The Taiwan Factor

Notably, Chinese commentators argued that the performance of Chinese combat systems held important lessons for future conflict in the Taiwan straits.²⁷ One commentator urging the government to accelerate the process of reunification of Taiwan, argued that if China’s J-10C could defeat Rafale, then they would certainly be able to counter Taiwan’s old Mirage-2000s.²⁸ It was suggested that even India's state-of-the-art Rafale has proven susceptible to mainland Chinese technology, then

²³ [“Commentator: The Indian Air Force has Suffered Heavy Losses, and Its Equipment Superiority Cannot Hide Its Tactical Shortcomings”](#), *China.com*, 8 May 2025.

²⁴ [“Indo-Pakistan Air War: The West is Slapped in the Face, and Chinese Assets are Seriously Undervalued Will Change!”](#), *Sina*, 12 May 2025.

²⁵ Ibid. [“The Outbreak of a Military Conflict between India and Pakistan Did Not Expect China to become the Biggest Winner, and the Military Industry will Become the Next Export Focus”](#), *NetEase*, 12 May 2025.

²⁶ [“India and Pakistan Start War| Air Battle 6-0 Shocked the World! Ten Aspects to Analyze its Significant Impact”](#), *Anue*, 8 May 2025.

²⁷ [“China's Fighter Jets in the India-Pakistan Conflict are Eyeing the Delicate Situation in South Asia Under the Tariff War”](#), *Ming Pao*, 10 May 2025.

²⁸ Qin An, [“The End of Taiwan Should be Accelerated, and the J-10 Shot Down Not Only a Fighter, But Also the New Clothes of the Hegemonic Emperor”](#), no. 15.

Taiwan's Mirage-2000 fleet, which entered service three decades ago, would face an insurmountable disadvantage against the PLA's active weapon systems.²⁹

Another commentary published in *Sohu* argued that as Chinese military industry proved its strength in actual combat, it will be able to shatter any external help to Taiwan's resistance to 'reunification by force'. Comparing J-10CE's superior detection range (200 kms) with Taiwan's F-16V (160 kms), the commentary noted that the generation gap between Chinese and Taiwanese military systems should serve as a profound warning for Taiwan.³⁰ Dismissing Taiwan's HIMARS rocket test on 13 May, another Chinese analyst noted that India–Pakistan conflict proved the futility of the HIMARS as Rafale's radar, avionics and missile upgrades failed to counter China's J-10s.³¹

Arguing on similar lines, a Hong Kong newspaper *Ta Kung Pao*, published an interview with a military expert Wang Yunfei. He claimed that the overwhelming superiority of the J-10 CE and PL-15 missiles in India–Pakistan conflict refuted Taiwan military's previous claim that PLA combat system lacked actual combat experience. Further, similar to the complexities faced by the IAF, Taiwan even if it upgrades the F-16V Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) fire control radar will be constrained by US data military link and will not be able to fully cooperate with French and Taiwan made Mirage-2000s and Taiwan-made Indigenous Defense Fighter jets respectively. Therefore, in an air battle, PLA will have absolute air supremacy.³²

Conclusion

China's official responses and discussions in various news media spaces and blogs confirmed with the trend of China's overwhelming support to Pakistan. It also saw continuation of China's policy to hyphenate India and Pakistan while placing itself as a superior power. Further, China's insistence of “fair investigations” and reiteration of Pakistan's claims showed China's inclination to accept Pakistan's version of events.³³

The Chinese misinformation campaign that was directed against India highlighted several aspects. First, by continuously downplaying Indian military's response and

²⁹ [“The Air War between India and Pakistan Shocked the Whole World, and the ‘Taiwan Independence’ Forces on the Island Were Silent”](#), *StockStar.com*, 12 May 2025.

³⁰ [“China's Weapons Helped Pakistan Crush India, and the Air Battle Made the ‘Taiwan Independence’ Forces Understand that Surrender is the Goal”](#), *Sohu*, 13 May 2025.

³¹ [“The Conflict between India and Pakistan Proves that Taiwan's Launch of the Seahorse is a Useless Struggle”](#), *EMedia*, 13 May 2025.

³² [“Expert: Taiwan's Army's Air Superiority is Far Inferior to the Mainland's ‘Resisting Reunification by Force’ is a fantasy”](#), *Huaxia*, 13 May 2025.

³³ Also see, Jabin T. Jacob, [“Reading China's Positions on the Pahalgam Attack”](#), Centre of Excellence for Himalayan Studies, Shiv Nadar University, 5 May 2025.

strategic capabilities, China sought to undermine New Delhi’s position as a major power in the region which can shape the security architecture. Second, Chinese analysts also aimed to cultivate a narrative of India as a regional hegemon by asserting that India acted against Pakistan without evidence. As Chinese news and social media have significant presence in India’s neighbourhood, these analyses could shape popular perception of India in South Asian neighbours. Finally, by advocating the IAF’s failure to manage Pakistan’s challenge despite possessing top-notch technology, Chinese analyses aimed to persuade the larger audience in the West of the futility of supporting India’s rise as a counterweight to China in the Indo-Pacific.

Second, China’s amplified portrayal of the role of Chinese combat systems *vis-à-vis* Western combat systems was driven largely by strategic purposes. By asserting superiority of Chinese combat systems *vis-à-vis* advanced Western military technology, Beijing evidently intends to posit itself as a major arms supplier alternative to the West. However, it also eyes the geopolitical influence that follows the role. China believes the US and the West’s role as primary global arms suppliers gives them the geopolitical leverage to act against Chinese interests in various regions. Consequently, China aims to become a major arms supplier itself to gain similar influence and shape international geopolitical outcomes. As one Chinese commentator argued,

arms exports are often not just a commercial behavior, but carry strong political logic, political labels and political stances, because military exports are all tied to politics, which in turn has a positive effect on expanding China’s geopolitical influence.³⁴

Chinese analysts also viewed the conflict between the IAF and the PAF as reshaping terms of military engagement, especially under the threat of nuclear escalation. Tactics like use of fighter jets to carry out long-range precision strikes into adversary’s territory and UAVs to attack as well as neutralise threats were seen as ushering a new form of air combat enabling both controlled escalation as well as deterrence. The extent to which Chinese military strategists will incorporate such tactics in their operational planning *vis-à-vis* India along the contested border or in a Taiwan scenario remains an open question.

Going forward, India should be mindful not only about a two-front war but also strategise to counter a two-front misinformation war emanating from Pakistan and China during combat situations. China might not be directly involved in the war but could actively work to shape perception around military crises both in the neighbourhood and at the international level.

³⁴ Li Guangman, “[6-0 Shocked the World! The Significant Impact of the India-Pakistan Conflict and China’s Response Strategy](#)”, *Kunlunce.com*, 8 May 2025.

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