ISSUE BRIEF

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CHINA'S DIPLOMATIC AND MILITARY SUPPORT FOR PAKISTAN DURING THE RECENT INDIA-PAKISTAN CRISIS

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)

South Asia once again witnessed one of the most intense regional crises in recent history. The region was on the verge of an all-out war between the two nuclear-armed states, India and Pakistan, which could have had long-lasting repercussions.

The crisis started on 22 April 2025 when a terrorist attack occurred in Pahalgam, Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu& Kashmir (IIOJK), which took the lives of 26 tourists. In the aftermath of the Pahalgam attack, India acted aggressively while escalating the conflict to an unprecedented level. New Delhi further downgraded diplomatic presence, severed all trade links, and illegally put the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance—steps that signaled a shift toward complete disengagement. These measures were accompanied by a high- status of military alertness and extensive media buildup to justify retaliatory action. Subsequently, India launched a series of airstrikes inside Pakistan targeting civilian infrastructure in Pakistan, using air power, drones, and missiles, resulting in 40 civilian casualties—among them 7 women and 15 children—while 121 others sustained injuries, including 10 women and 27 children.[1] The coordinated diplomatic and military offensive marked a significant escalation in India's posture, pushing the region toward a heightened state of conflict.

Pakistan was left with no choice but to act in self-defence. In a measured, responsible and resolute response, Pakistan retaliated by targeting Indian military installations—carefully avoiding civilian areas—to restore deterrence and prevent further escalation. The operation was conducted with

1 "Inter Services Public Relations Pakistan," accessed June 20, 2025, https://ispr.gov.pk/press-release-detail?id=7285.

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precision and restraint, demonstrating Pakistan's intent to defend its sovereignty while upholding its commitment to regional peace and stability.

In a series of high-level interactions during the crisis, the leadership in Beijing supported Pakistan's legitimate concerns and expressed solidarity and support for its security, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

As per the telephonic conversation between Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Senator Ishaq Dar and the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on 27 April 2025, Chinese Foreign Minister maintained that "As Pakistan's ironclad friend and all-weather strategic cooperative partner, China fully understands Pakistan's legitimate security concerns and supports Pakistan in safeguarding its sovereignty and security interests".[2] He also held that "China supports an impartial investigation as soon as possible, as the conflict does not serve the fundamental interests of either India or Pakistan, nor does it contribute to regional peace and stability".[3] By backing Pakistan's call for a neutral probe, China delicately urged India to respond with maturity and responsibility, rather than further escalation. The message from Beijing was unmistakable: strategic restraint, not militarized retaliation, is the path to lasting stability in South Asia.

On 1 May 2025, Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Jiang Zaidong called on Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif.[4] During the meeting the Prime Minister expressed "Pakistan's sincere thanks to China for its strong and steadfast support to Pakistan, in the prevailing situation in South Asia. He also thanked China for understanding Pakistan's principled position vis-à-vis India's actions since April 22, 2025".[5] On 7 May 2025, Ambassador Jiang Zaidong called on Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Ishaq Dar. During the meeting the DPM briefed the Chinese Ambassador on the "serious situation following India's unprovoked violation of Pakistan's sovereignty. The two sides exchanged views on regional security developments and agreed to maintain close coordination and communication across all relevant areas".[6] Likewise, On 11 May 2025, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi had a phone call with DPM Senator Ishaq Dar and maintained that "China supports Pakistan

2 "Wang Yi Has a Phone Call with Pakistani Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar_Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China," accessed June 20, 2025, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbzhd/202504/t20250428_11605921.html.

3 Ibid,.

4 "Prime Minister's Office, Islamabad, Pakistan," accessed June 20, 2025, https://www.pmo.gov.pk/press_release_detailes.php?pr_id=6080.

5 Ibid,.

6 Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Pakistan [@ForeignOfficePk], "Ambassador Jiang Zaidong of China Called on DPM/FM, Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar @MIshaqDar50 Early This Morning. DPM/FM Briefed the Chinese Ambassador on the Serious Situation Following India's Unprovoked Violation of Pakistan's Sovereignty and the Tragic Loss of Innocent Lives. Https://T.Co/4nfbCmxxVn," Tweet, *Twitter*, May 7, 2025, https://x.com/ForeignOfficePk/status/1920035394134954171.

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in safeguarding its national sovereignty and dignity. China believes that Pakistan will respond to the current situation with calm and make decisions in line with its fundamental and long-term interests. China hopes for and supports an early ceasefire between Pakistan and India".[7] After the ceasefire was reached between India and Pakistan, on 20 May 2025, during DPM and Foreign Minister Dar's visit to China, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi welcomed India-Pakistan ceasefire and reiterated that China supports Pakistan in defending its sovereignty and territorial integrity. He also held that Pakistan is an "ironclad" friend and pledged to further deepen the "all weather strategic cooperative partnership".[8]

China's firm diplomatic support during the latest round of India-Pakistan tensions carried significant weight, especially given Pakistan's long standing role as one of the countries most affected by terrorism. Despite facing repeated security challenges, Pakistan has consistently demonstrated its commitment to combating terrorism in all its forms. At the same time, it has shown restraint and opposed actions that could further inflame tensions in an already volatile region. China's support, therefore, was not just an expression of strategic partnership—it was a recognition of Pakistan's responsible approach in the face of provocation and its broader commitment to regional peace and stability.

In the military conflict, Chinese equipment played a critical role as Pakistan responded to Indian aggression. The equipment was used by Pakistan's armed forces while targeting military infrastructure inside India and also as an air defence shield against the Indian aerial attacks. These include the J-10C jets equipped with the PL-15 BVR air-to-air missiles.[9]Pakistan also employed a Chinese-made CM-400AKG air-to-surface missile, launched from a JF-17 Thunder fighter jet, to destroy an Indian S-400 air defense system.[10] Meanwhile, the Chinese supplied HQ-9 air defence system provided an additional air defence shield to Pakistan[11]. The difference between Indian aggression and Pakistan's retaliation was very clear. India targeted civilian infrastructure inside Pakistan, whereas Pakistan acted responsibly and only targeted military installations inside India. Pakistan is now reportedly in the process of acquiring the J-35 A fifth generation fighter jet from

7 "Wang Yi Has a Phone Call with Pakistani Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar_Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China," accessed June 20, 2025, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbzhd/202505/t20250511_11618796.html.

8 "Wang Yi Holds Talks with Pakistani Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar_Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China," accessed June 20, 2025, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjbzhd/202505/t20250521_11629903.html.

9 Nabil Tahir, "How Pakistan Became China's Air Power Showroom | The Express Tribune," May 11, 2025, https://tribune.com.pk/story/2545190/how-pakistan-became-chinas-air-power-showroom.

10 "How PAF Destroyed India's 2 S400 Air Defence Systems," accessed June 30, 2025, https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1310766-how-paf-destroyed-india-s-2-s400-air-defence-systems.

11 C. G, "Four Days in May: The India-Pakistan Crisis of 2025 • Stimson Center," *Stimson Center* (blog), May 28, 2025, https://www.stimson.org/2025/four-days-in-may-the-india-pakistan-crisis-of-2025/.

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China. The J-35 features stealth technology, advanced sensors and deep strikes capabilities with the provision of PL-15 and PL-17 BVR air-to-air missiles.[12] The jet would be a game-changer and significantly boost Pakistan's air power capabilities. It is also pertinent to mention that the Chinese military support during the latest crisis was unconditional as Pakistan has the flexibility to use the equipment.

China has a vital stake in the stability of the South Asian region. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and China's other investment projects are aimed at enhanced regional connectivity. China is also obliged to counter-balance the influence being generated by the United States and India combined within the 'Indo-Pacific' context. Historically, Beijing's approach has been based on the principle of 'non-intervention'. Staying within this ambit, during the latest India-Pakistan crisis, China adopted a nuanced and engaged diplomatic position. Beijing remained involved in engaging both Pakistan and India to help mitigate the conflict and stabilize the situation.

Conclusion

China's role during the May 2025 India-Pakistan crisis is quite significant. Beijing emerged as a responsible actor in the South Asian complex security environment by firmly supporting Pakistan and also emphasizing restraint, dialogue and peaceful settlement of disputes. For Pakistan, amid the Indian aggression during the crisis, China's firm diplomatic support and military equipment further reinforced its 'all weather strategic cooperative partnership' with Beijing. For India, China's diplomatic engagement highlights the complex geopolitical realities of the region, where no bilateral conflict could remain isolated from the regional power dynamics. During the conflict, India acted aggressively and irresponsibly, while Pakistan acted with restraint and responsibility. India initiated the escalation, while Pakistan retaliated with its 'quid pro quo plus' response. Pakistan had an edge vis-à-vis India in terms of Chinese firm diplomatic support and military hardware.

12 News Desk, "Chinese Defence Stocks Surge as Pakistan Buys J-35 Stealth Jets," The Express Tribune, June 9, 2025, https://tribune.com.pk/story/2549998/chinese-defence-stocks-surge-as-pakistan-buys-j-35-stealth-jets.

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