

# China-India Brief

*A publication of the Centre on Asia and Globalisation*



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## *Student Essay Competition*

# China's Response to the 2025 Pahalgam Attack: Implications for Sino-Indian Relations

By Wei Shen Gay

The **2025 Pahalgam attack** that claimed twenty-six lives and wounded seventeen individuals in Indian-controlled Kashmir had rapidly escalated tensions between India and Pakistan, whose relations have been fraught for decades. In response, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration undertook **several actions**, including promptly expelling some Pakistani diplomats and suspending the 1960 Indus Water Treaty. Pakistan's retaliatory **countermeasures** included the suspension of

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The *China-India Brief* is a bi-monthly digest focusing on the relationship between Asia's two biggest powers. The Brief provides readers with a key summary of current news articles, reports, analyses, commentaries, and journal articles published in English on the China-India relationship. It features a Guest Column weighing in on key current issues in China-India relations.

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the 1972 Simla Agreement and bilateral trade with India, as also closing its flight space to air traffic from India. The Pahalgam attack drove a renewed armed conflict along the disputed border and has since seen the **United States (US)** and **China** calling on both India and Pakistan to defuse the situation and avoid further escalation to maintain regional peace.

Against the tense backdrop, **China, in response to media inquiries during a regular press conference**, called on both parties to exercise restraint and expressed support for a Sino-Russian-led investigation—an initiative backed by Pakistan to help defuse the situation. Despite supporting Pakistan’s call for a neutral probe into the Pahalgam attack, China’s spokesperson’s response did not explicitly side with either party but instead appealed for joint cooperation and harmony, one that is consistent with **China’s diplomacy**. However, this came just one day after China Foreign Minister Wang Yi **reaffirmed China’s support for Pakistan, characterising the relationship as an “all-weather strategic” partnership and referring to Pakistan as an “ironclad friend”** during a phone call initiated by his Pakistani counterpart Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar. Wang’s official response echoed the spokesperson’s narrative, albeit with a subtle yet clear affirmation of China’s support to Pakistan—an expression that carries profound implications for China-India relations.

China’s strong bilateral **All-Weather**

**Strategic Cooperative Partnership** with Pakistan is deeply rooted in **strategic** cooperation across areas such as economic, security, and infrastructure domains—most prominently through the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**. Between 2005 and 2024, through the CPEC, Pakistan received **\$68 billion** in investment from China, and separately, between 2019 and 2023, **82 percent of Pakistan’s military assets** were from China. China’s relationship with Pakistan is not just extended to its influence in South Asia but also to counterbalance India. **At a meeting on May 5 2025**, with Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari, the Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan, Jiang Zaidong, used the same rhetoric as Wang, signalling China’s clear and continued support for Pakistan.

These actions reflect the fact that Pakistan is not merely a strategic ally, but also an integral part of China’s broader diplomatic calculus. With stronger relations with Pakistan, China keeps India’s regional dominance in check, especially as India’s ties with the US continue to strengthen. India has been a key beneficiary of US efforts to reduce reliance on Chinese goods and manufacturing, as **major US corporations** aim to relocate their manufacturing and assembly operations to India. This trend only deepens the rivalry between China and India. The well-known Indian newspaper, **The Economic Times**, claims that China’s support for Pakistan is only rhetorical with no tangible matching actions. However, such a perspective

underestimates China's resolve and assumes that it will sit idly on the sidelines—an assumption that could be detrimental to India's strategic decision-making by promoting a misguided view.

China and India's relations are more rivalrous than amicable in nature, underpinned by thorny issues such as territorial disputes, military skirmishes, and economic competition. This was starkly illustrated in 2020, when the Sino-Indian border dispute escalated into armed clashes and a massive **military build-up** along the frontier, reflecting the precariousness of their bilateral ties. Although tensions have de-escalated since 2022 and relations appear friendlier, it would be prudent to recognise that such tranquillity is only temporary—vulnerable to future catalysts such as the India-US Trade Agreement, which may be seen as an attempt to **appease** the US for relief from Liberation Day Tariffs, or renewed tensions in the **Indo-Pakistani conflict**. These global developments, especially in light of the perilous economic outlook, could further deepen the already complex China-India relations, amplifying existing tensions. India's perception of China's support for Pakistan is especially important, given the deep-rooted strategic mistrust between both countries. This mistrust was evident during the negotiation process to de-escalate the 2020 Sino-Indian border conflict, as both sides simultaneously advanced the **modernisation of military infrastructure** in the disputed border regions.

Without a doubt, China is using Pakistan as a strategic proxy to destabilise and curb India's rise. However, it is clear that India is not only concerned about China's influence in Pakistan, given that **China could potentially seek to marginalise and alienate India diplomatically and strategically through the BRICS+ and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation**, where it continues to exert significant dominance. This is further compounded by Chinese President Xi Jinping's **renewed push** to enhance China's soft power, articulated through a **ten-year vision to transform China into a cultural powerhouse by 2035**. According to the **Global Soft Power Index 2025**, China ranks second, right behind the US in overall soft power, reflecting China's expanding influence.

Wang and Jiang's repeated emphasis on China-Pakistan relations as "ironclad brothers" reflects a deeper commitment. Even if China's valuation of Pakistan has declined, as suggested by **The Economic Times**, it would make little sense for China to renege on its commitments absent exigent circumstances. Reneging on such promises would profoundly damage China's credibility, undermining its influence achieved through deterrence and soft power. The effect would extend to all of China's trading partners, especially those involved in the BRI, who are likewise described as "ironclad brothers." This is a risk that Xi is unlikely to take, as it contradicts China's strategic objective of strengthening its global standing and reputation.

China's possible inaction will also send a signal that prompts India and potential adversaries to reassess the weight of China's influence. China's strategic leverage is contingent on its credibility; unfulfilled promises undermine its effectiveness and erode its international standing. It contradicts Xi's goal of elevating China's global standing and challenging US dominance. While uncertainty exists about whether China will intervene with direct military engagement if the Indo-Pakistani conflict escalates, it is unlikely to refrain from assisting through logistical supply and diplomatic actions, which would further strain China-India relations.

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## News Reports

### Bilateral relations

#### **India's alarm over Chinese spying rocks the surveillance industry**

**Reuters, May 28**

Global surveillance equipment manufacturers have recently clashed with Indian regulators over new CCTV security rules that, driven by concerns about Chinese spying, have led to increased scrutiny and delays.

#### **Mutual trust, respect and sensitivity key for ties with China: India**

**Hindustan Times, May 22**

"Just to underline, the Chinese side is well aware that mutual trust, mutual respect and mutual sensitivity remain the basis of India-China relations," Indian MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

#### **India rejects China's latest renaming of places in Arunachal border state**

**The Straits Times, May 14**

India has rejected China's move to rename places in the north-eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, where both countries share a border.

#### **China reasserts India border claims with fresh list of 'standard' place names**

**South China Morning Post, May 14**

China has renamed twenty-seven locations in Arunachal Pradesh, reinforcing its territorial claims despite recent diplomatic efforts with India. New Delhi dismissed the move as baseless, warning it could strain ongoing attempts to stabilise ties.

### China and India in the Region

#### **'It was Indian military action': Jaishankar denies US role in ceasefire with Pakistan, says 'draw your conclusions' on China link** **Times of India, May 28**

Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar asserted that India's military action had led to the recent ceasefire with Pakistan, and highlighted concerns over Pakistan's close defence ties with China.

#### **Pakistan, Afghanistan move towards 'restoring ties' in talks with China** **Al Jazeera, May 23**

A recent China-brokered trilateral meeting with Pakistan and Afghanistan worked towards resumption of relations, amidst the complications of Pakistan's recent clash with India and warming India-Afghanistan ties.

#### **China's Fighter Jets and Missiles Get a Boost From the India-Pakistan Clash**

**The New York Times, May 20**

During heightened India-Pakistan tensions in May 2025, Pakistan deployed Chinese-made J-10C jets and PL-15 missiles in a clash with India, highlighting the depth of China-Pakistan defence ties.

#### **China Blocked India's Request for UN Sanctions on 5 Pakistan-Based Terrorists: Report**

**NDTV, May 26**

China has reportedly blocked India's UNSC proposal to sanction five Pakistan-based terrorists, including those linked to the 2025 Pahalgam attack.

## Trade and Economy

### **India-US trade deal in works as Trump's tariff deadline inches closer**

**Times of India, May 27**

With a temporary pause on President Trump's reciprocal tariffs, India and the US are actively engaged in a mutually beneficial trade deal.

### **India poised to end China's dominance era in oil demand: Moody's**

**The Economic Times, May 22**

India is set to surpass China as the main driver of global oil and gas demand growth, driven by industrial expansion and rising mobility, as China's demand slows amid economic cooling and EV adoption.

### **Apple boosts India's factory hopes - but a US-China deal could derail plans**

**BBC, May 19**

India's ambitions to replace China as the global manufacturing hub face challenges due to the recent US—China trade “reset” agreement that lowers tariffs on Chinese goods, potentially reducing the incentive for companies to shift production to India.

### **China Signals India Levy Is a Warning on Cutting Deals with US**

**Bloomberg, May 7**

China's recent tariff on Indian goods serves as a warning against India's deepening trade ties with the US, signaling Beijing's intent to deter New Delhi from aligning too closely with Washington.

## Energy and Environment

### **The oil market has a bigger problem than a slowing China-India**

**The Economic Times, May 27**

India's service-driven economy cannot fully offset China's slowing oil demand, as its per capita consumption remains far lower, challenging optimistic forecasts that India will sustain global oil market growth.

### **India sees a future making solar panels for itself, and maybe the world**

**Deccan Herald, May 17**

China has “first mover's advantage,” said Amit Paithankar, CEO of Waaree Energies, the country's largest maker of solar panels. “It's about us being proactive, and being a part of the solution in diversifying the supply chain for India, for the US and for the world.”

### **China's Mega Dam Project Poses Big Risks for Asia's Grand Canyon**

**Yale School of Environment, May 14**

China's planned \$137 billion dam—the world's largest—on the Yarlung Tsangpo near the Indian border has sparked environmental and geopolitical concerns, with India fearing weaponization of disruptions to downstream water flows.

### **China, America, And India Compete Over Gulf Energy**

**Forbes, May 9**

China, the US, and India are intensifying their competition over Gulf energy resources, reflecting shifting global power dynamics and competing strategic interests in the Middle East.

## Analyses

### **Bangladesh may have ended its India-China tightrope game, but it must continue to tread carefully**

**Atlantic Council May 23**

*By Wahiduzzaman Noor, a Bangladeshi national security professional and former diplomat at the Embassy of Bangladesh in Washington, DC; and Samantha Wong, a Program assistant with the Atlantic Council's Global China Hub.*

India–China relations remain tense due to unresolved border disputes and deep strategic distrust. Despite ongoing diplomatic contacts, meaningful improvement appears unlikely without serious confidence-building efforts.

### **Prospects for India-China relations** **IISS, May 16**

*By Antoine Levesques, Senior Fellow for South and Central Asian Defence, Strategy and Diplomacy; and Viraj Solanki, Research Fellow for South and Central Asian Defence, Strategy and Diplomacy*

Sustained dialogue and new confidence-building measures are vital to stabilizing India–China ties amid their increasingly competitive relationship and regional security challenges.

### **“Made in India” relies on “Made in China”** **Hinrich Foundation, May 13**

*By Akhil Ramesh, Director of India Program and Economic Statecraft Initiative, Pacific Forum*

The growing overlap between trade and national security has driven India to deepen manufacturing ties with both the US and China, balancing strategic interests with economic pragmatism.

### **China faces a tough balancing act with India and Pakistan**

**South China Morning Post, May 13**

*By Zorawar Daulet Singh, historian and author of ‘Powershift: India-China Relations in a Multipolar World’*

Although the Chinese public supports Pakistan’s tactical successes over India, Beijing favors de-escalation over short-term advantage, understanding that extended conflict endangers both South Asia’s stability and its own strategic and economic interests.

### **China Question Facing India After Pahalgam**

**ORF, May 6**

*By Harsh V. Pant, Vice-President-Studies and Foreign Policy at ORF; and Kalpit A Mankikar, a Fellow with the Strategic Studies Programme and is based out of ORF’s Delhi Centre.*

China's response to the Pahalgam attack underscores its strategic balancing between India and Pakistan, highlighting the complexities in India's regional security dynamics.

### **JD Vance didn’t just visit India - he sent Beijing a message**

**Think China, May 5**

*By Rishi Gupta, Assistant Director, Asia Society Policy Institute, New Delhi*

US Vice-President JD Vance’s first official visit to India underscored efforts to diversify supply chains, reduce reliance on China, and deepen ties with democratic partners.

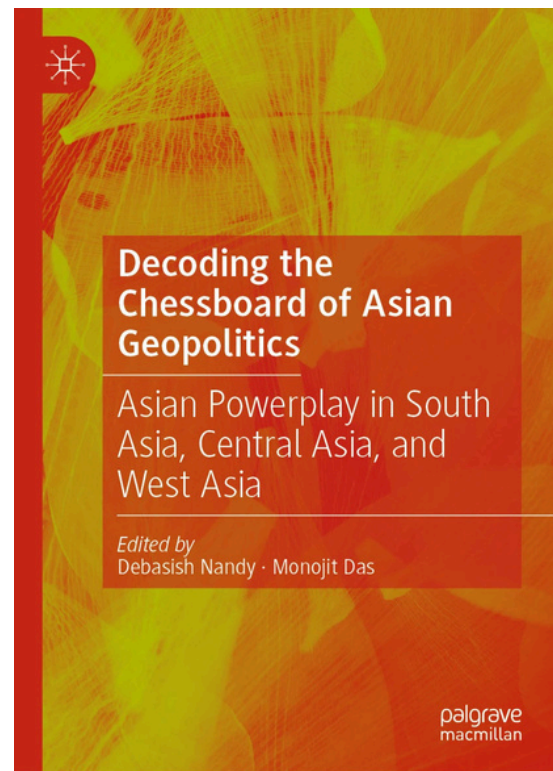
## Books and Journals

### **Decoding the Chessboard of Asian Geopolitics**

**Palgrave macmillan, May 2025**

*Edited by Debaish Nandy, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at Kazi Nazrul University in Asansol, West Bengal, India; and Monojit Das, Ph.D., focuses on geopolitics and national security. He serves as the Hon. Executive Editor of IADN Indian Aerospace and Defence News, which has been a leading defense magazine in India since 2012.*

The edited volume titled "Decoding the Chessboard of Asian Geopolitics: Asian Powerplay in South Asia, Central Asia, and West Asia" offers a distinctive examination of the power rivalries within the Asian region. It highlights the significant influence of extra-regional powers on South Asia's political, economic, foreign policy, and security landscapes. This volume also delves into the intricate power dynamics in Central Asia and West Asia. In light of recent global transformations, Asia emerges as a formidable entity that not only confronts the challenges of uncertainty but also plays a pivotal role in shaping contemporary geopolitics. Comprising 22 chapters, this volume provides a critical analysis of both internal and external factors influencing Asian Powerplay.



It emphasizes the significance of the Indo-Pacific region, the Non-Alignment Movement, and the concept of multipolarity. Furthermore, it addresses various issues from traditional security to human security across four distinct sectors. The scholars of International Relations, Defence Studies, Political Science, Strategic Studies, Journalism, Peace and conflict Studies, etc., will be benefited by this volume across the globe. This book is part of a two-volume set and the other volume in this set delves into the geopolitical dynamics and power relations in East and Southeast Asia and the Global North.



# Our team



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## OTHER CAG PUBLICATIONS

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- *Partnership or Polarization? Southeast Asian Security between India and China* edited by Evan Laksmana and Byron Chong (Contemporary Southeast Asia, 2023)
- *Asian Conceptions of International Order: What Asia Wants* edited by Kanti Bajpai and Evan Laksmana (International Affairs, 2023)
- *How Realist Is India's National Security Policy?* edited by Kanti Bajpai (Routledge, 2023)
- *Deterring Conflict and Preserving Peace in Asia* edited by Drew Thompson and Byron Chong (Centre on Asia and Globalisation, 2022)
- *What Can the United States Learn from China about Infrastructure?* by Selina Ho in *The China Questions 2* (Harvard University Press, 2022)
- *India Versus China: Why they are Not Friends* by Kanti Bajpai (Juggernaut Books, 2021)
- *Winning the Fight Taiwan Cannot Afford to Lose* by Drew Thompson (Strategic Forum, 2021)
- *Routledge Handbook of China-India Relations* edited by Kanti Bajpai, Selina Ho and Manjari Chatterjee Miller (Routledge, 2020)



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