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# CHINA-PAKISTAN RELATIONS AND INDIA'S EVOLVING SECURITY LANDSCAPE

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**CHINA AND OPERATION SINDOOR**  
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Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli's talk on China and Operation Sindoor offers a strikingly detailed picture of the evolving China Pakistan nexus and its consequences for India. He underlines that China is far from a neutral actor in South Asia, rather, it has positioned itself as an "interested party," actively backing Pakistan diplomatically, militarily, economically, and even in the realm of disinformation. Operation Sindoor, as he illustrates, made this alignment explicit, with Chinese-supplied fighter jets, air defence systems, and intelligence coordination forming the backbone of Pakistan's response. Reports of Chinese assistance in satellite repositioning and air defence recalibration further reveal the degree of operational depth. Publicly, Beijing framed itself as a responsible power urging restraint and dialogue, but in practice it continued to reassure Pakistan of its "ironclad" support. This duality reflects a consistent Chinese strategy: to appear balanced to the international community while ensuring its partner is shielded from isolation and equipped to challenge India.

The presentation also situates this pattern within a long historical arc. From supplying conventional weapons in the 1970s to nuclear cooperation in the 1990s and the extensive CPEC investments of recent years, Beijing's engagement has been comprehensive. By 2025, Pakistan's external debt reached \$130 billion, with China accounting for 22 percent of it, largely tied to CPEC loans. Far from grants, these loans reinforce dependence, even as Pakistan's GDP growth remains sluggish and instability deters Western investors. China's economic entrenchment, therefore, not only secures access to strategic corridors but also deepens Islamabad's reliance on Beijing for financial survival. Kondapalli notes that this dependence is unlikely to reduce, on the contrary, as crises mount, Pakistan will turn further towards China for bailouts, security guarantees, and diplomatic cover.

At the military level, the figures are staggering: nearly 81 percent of Pakistan's arms come from China, amounting to over \$21 billion in sales. From JF-17s to J-10Cs, from HQ-9 air defence systems to Wing Loong drones, Pakistan's arsenal is essentially an extension of Chinese production lines. Beyond hardware and software support in the

form of training, operational sharing, and joint exercises further institutionalises this relationship. The Shaheen air exercises, Sea Guardians naval drills, and coordinated grey-zone warfare exercises in Xinjiang and Tibet point to a partnership that has moved beyond simple transfers related to the equipment and is focussed on integrated operational planning. The cognitive domain is not left untouched either. Chinese bloggers and official outlets amplified Pakistan's narratives during Operation Sindoor, spreading unverified claims and turning India as the aggressor. For the first time since the Vietnam conflict of 1979, Chinese weapons were being tested in a live battle scenario, and Beijing celebrated this as a showcase of its military-industrial prowess.

Prof. Kondapalli's observations highlighted India's strategic dilemmas. He points out that since 2009, the prospect of a two-front war under the nuclear overhang has become a real and persistent possibility, and Operation Sindoor only heightened this reality. China's support to Pakistan in diplomacy, defence, and disinformation means that India is no longer dealing with one adversary in isolation. Any Indian victory in such a conflict would not only alter the balance with Pakistan but also directly threaten Chinese stakes in CPEC, Aksai Chin, and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. At the same time, Beijing itself faces dilemmas in Tibet and Xinjiang should instability spill over, but for now, it is willing to absorb such risks to keep India strategically boxed.

The recommendations that flow from these observations are both urgent and multidimensional. India must adapt its defence posture to the two-front scenario, strengthening tri-service integration and investing in capabilities that can counter grey-zone tactics, from cyber to space. The importance of cognitive warfare has become clear, and India must be prepared to not only defend its narratives but also project them globally to expose China's duplicity, condemning terrorism in principle while arming its perpetrators in practice. Diplomatic outreach to like-minded nations, particularly within the QUAD, is essential to build coalitions that can constrain Beijing's ability to pose as a neutral balancer. Economically, India must insulate itself from vulnerabilities to Chinese leverage and simultaneously present viable alternatives to CPEC for regional partners. Finally, maritime domain awareness and space situational awareness must be prioritised, leveraging partnerships with the US and Japan to counter the use of Chinese satellites and cyber capabilities in support of Pakistan.

Taken together, Prof. Kondapalli's assessment makes one thing clear: India faces not a temporary alignment but a structural reality where China and Pakistan's partnership is designed to contain and challenge it on multiple fronts. The response must therefore be equally structural, integrating military readiness, diplomatic activism and informational strength. Only through such an integrated approach can India manage the complex pressures of the Indo-Pacific and safeguard its strategic autonomy in the face of an entrenched Sino-Pak nexus.