Tomorrow's Affairs
Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

By: The Editorial Board

Did China really interfere in the India-Pakistan conflict through intelligence cooperation?

New data on China's role in the recent wave of tensions on the India-Pakistan line of control raises serious questions about the limits of Chinese involvement in the region and the long-term implications for South Asia's security architecture.

According to India's Army officials on 4 July, China provided direct intelligence support to Pakistan in the form of satellite and electronic data on the movements of India's troops during the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir.

Indian Army Deputy Chief General Rajesh Kumar announced that Pakistan's armed forces had received real-time information on the deployments and manoeuvres of India's units in the disputed area. Chinese military satellites and signals intelligence systems stationed in the Xinjiang region reportedly provided these reconnaissance products. This enabled Pakistan to position its units more precisely and better monitor India's activities.

In the last three weeks of June and early July, clashes along the Line of Control (LoC) resulted in casualties on both sides.

Although such incidents are a regular occurrence, this time India's army points to a qualitatively new dimension due to the involvement of China, which has not limited itself to providing political or logistical support to Pakistan.

The LoC is a de facto military demarcation belt between India and Pakistan in the Jammu and Kashmir region, established after the 1971 war by the Simla Agreement of 1972.

A test for Quad partnership

China's Foreign Ministry has not explicitly denied these allegations. The official spokesperson reiterated in Beijing on 4 July that China "firmly supports Pakistan in safeguarding its sovereignty and territorial integrity" and that it "calls on all parties to exercise restraint and resolve disputes through dialogue."

Such wording leaves Beijing room to continue its current practice without the need to openly affirm operational cooperation, which would formally put it in conflict.

India's response is aimed in several directions. On the military front, its military is already deploying additional reconnaissance and counter-battery radars along the LoC to reduce the potential tactical advantage that China's intelligence infrastructure offers Pakistan.

> Analytical services in Washington and Tokyo are already assessing the consequences that could have on regional and global security flows

On the political front, New Delhi is using this case as an argument for deeper integration with Quad partners – the US, Japan, and Australia – in the area of intelligence cooperation and surveillance.

American and Japanese officials have not yet officially commented on this information, but the analytical services in Washington and Tokyo are already assessing the consequences that this practice by China could have on regional and global security flows.

Diplomatic analyses say that China, for the first time, is openly demonstrating the ability to use its satellites and electronic resources to provide direct military support to a third party during an active crisis in a region where the interests of the US and its allies are directly aligned.

Fragmentation of the Indo-Pacific security space

Pakistan sees such cooperation as a strategic counterweight to India's numerical and technological superiority. For Islamabad, China's support through satellite imagery and signals intelligence products has a concrete military significance and is part of the concept

of "smart balancing", with which it wants to stand up to India's significantly larger armed forces.

At the same time, this further strengthens Pakistan's dependence on China and reduces the scope for a future rapprochement with New Delhi.

For India, this form of Chinese involvement is a clear signal that the development of reconnaissance and satellite systems must be accelerated domestically, as well as the modernisation of electronic protection and anti-satellite capabilities.

India has been investing in expanding its military satellite network for years, but China's resources are still far ahead in terms of both the number and quality of sensors.

There is therefore a real danger that China will interfere in a similar way in future tensions, providing Pakistan with information that can directly influence the outcome on the ground.

> These examples of Chinese military assistance could accelerate Quad's transformation into a more direct security alliance

The further consequence of this development is the additional fragmentation of the Indo-Pacific security space.

The Quad was originally intended as a framework for a political and economic rapprochement that would contain China, but these specific examples of Chinese military assistance could accelerate its transformation into a more direct security alliance.

Therefore, the next Quad Summit could focus precisely on the modalities of joint satellite surveillance, intelligence data sharing, and the standardisation of anti-satellite technologies, which would be a signal to Beijing that the cooperation framework is rapidly militarising.

Exploring the boundaries of international tolerance

Simultaneously, China is using this practice to explore the boundaries of international tolerance. Beijing apparently assumes that India and its partners are not prepared to take serious countermeasures for this kind of aid to Pakistan.

China is leveraging the regional asymmetry to its advantage, showcasing its ability to swiftly alter the tactical landscape in areas it deems strategically significant.

A key uncertainty remains: will China conclude that it is profitable in the long term to continue this kind of direct intelligence support to Pakistan

However, this also opens up the possibility of counter-effects. There is now intense debate in New Delhi as to whether China, with its actions, is accelerating India's ties with the Quad partners and deepening military-technological cooperation with the US.

The same question is being asked in Beijing, where there are those who are in favour of a more cautious approach to prevent India from moving even closer to Washington.

If the pattern of China directly supplying intelligence products to Pakistan every time there is a new Kashmir crisis is confirmed, it could permanently redefine the security dynamics in India-Pakistan-China relations.

It could accelerate the development of domestic satellite and anti-satellite capabilities in India, intensify Quad Alliance

military exercises, and further redirect global investment flows to more secure destinations, which would also have indirect consequences for economic growth in the region.

Ultimately, a key uncertainty remains: will China conclude that it is profitable in the long term to continue this kind of direct intelligence support to Pakistan, thereby taking on additional reputational and political risks, or will it return to the previous model of indirect support through arms and loans?

This decision will determine the further extent of destabilisation in the Indo-Pacific region and the ability of Western powers to maintain the existing balance of power in the coming years.

This case demonstrates the blurring boundaries between political and direct military support and how rapidly regional disputes can escalate into global issues.