

# CHINA'S REACTION TO BALAKOT AIRSTRIKES EXPOSES PAKISTAN'S INTERNATIONAL ISOLATION

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Even as international pressure has forced Pakistan into taking some action, only if symbolic, against terrorist organisations flourishing on its soil, the reaction that would have hurt it the most came from China. By taking a neutral position between India and Pakistan after the terrorist attack in Pulwama and the airstrikes in Balakot, China has revealed the true value it places on Pakistan. During his media briefing on Friday, China's foreign minister and state councillor, Wang Yi, reiterated the need for preventing escalation and solving the matter through dialogue. It is true that China, unlike other countries, has not asked Pakistan to take stern action against terrorists, but Islamabad would have hoped for greater rhetorical support from its old friend during this crisis.

It is not that China has not supported Pakistan at all. It did try its best to ensure that the United Nations Security Council statement on the Pulwama attack did not mention Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM). However, with the US and France standing firmly behind India, China had to accede. As this newspaper has said earlier, China's support for Pakistan is perfectly rational. If the cost of supporting Pakistan is greater than the transient gains, China does not hesitate in taking a stance that would hurt its "iron brother". At the moment, China realises that the gains made in the informal summit in Wuhan between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping are still in their infancy. Any overt support for Pakistan after Pulwama could hurt those precarious gains. Wang credited the Wuhan summit and said, it "created a new model of high level interactions between our two countries, deepened trust between our leaders but [also] set the direction for our future relations".

Pakistan also made an effort to get China involved as a mediator between itself and India. Pakistani foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi even announced that China would be sending a special envoy to both New Delhi and Islamabad for the purpose. Chinese vice foreign minister Kong Xuanyou did indeed visit Islamabad but not New Delhi. It is not known whether India refused this mediation offer or if the Chinese were too sensible to make the offer in the first place. The big story from the current crisis is not the number of terrorists dead in the Balakot airstrikes, but the international isolation of Pakistan. China's neutrality only strengthens that story.

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