



Research Article

China's Role in Indo-Pak Conflict in 2025: A Study of China's Multidimensional Involvement and Regional Geopolitics

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Abstract

Operation Sindoor of 2025 marked a significant shift in South Asia's security architecture due to the conspicuous and multi-dimensional role of China. Unlike previous crises, China's role extended beyond diplomatic support, functioning as an active shaper of the conflict to advance its strategic interests against a rising India. This paper examines how China utilised the conflict to execute a coordinated strategy encompassing military, proxy, informational, and geo-economic domains. The central argument is that China leveraged Pakistan to achieve four key goals: (i) to disrupt India's internal stability through the facilitation of cross-border terrorism and communal polarization; (ii) to test and promote its advanced military technologies; (iii) to undermine India's appeal as a global manufacturing and foreign investment destination; and (iv) to amplify anti-India narratives via state media and social platforms.

The analysis confirms the conflict was a hybrid warfare paradigm where Beijing sought to gain a strategic advantage without confrontation. However, India responded with a comprehensive strategy of military precision, targeted information countermeasures, and economic resilience, which successfully neutralised China's efforts to destabilise the market and impede industrial growth. The study concludes that the 2025 conflict defines a new, complex phase in the China-Pakistan-India strategic triangle, necessitating India's continuous adaptation to these hybrid threats.

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INTRODUCTION

The Indo-Pak conflict of 2025 represented not merely another episode in the protracted rivalry between New Delhi and Islamabad but also a significant turning point in South Asia's strategic environment. Unlike earlier crises, this conflict witnessed the conspicuous involvement of China, whose role extended beyond diplomatic posturing to include active support for Pakistan through military assistance, psychological operations, economic manoeuvring, and information warfare [6]. China's actions during the conflict reveal its growing determination to shape the regional balance of power, constrain India's strategic autonomy, and safeguard its own global economic and political interests. The conflict unfolded in a broader geopolitical context marked by intensifying United States-China rivalry, the expansion of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and India's emergence as an increasingly attractive destination for global investment and manufacturing relocation. China, perceiving India's economic rise and its strengthening ties with Washington as direct challenges [11], found in the Indo-Pak confrontation an opportunity to weaken India internally and internationally. From enabling Pakistan's military operations through advanced weapons systems to amplifying anti-India narratives in global and domestic media, Beijing's engagement reflected a multidimensional strategy that combined elements of conventional, hybrid, and proxy warfare.

This paper examines the role of China in the Indo-Pak conflict of 2025 with the central research question: How did China influence and exploit the conflict to advance its strategic objectives in South Asia? In addressing this question, the paper argues that China utilised the conflict to achieve four interrelated goals:

- i) To disrupt India's internal stability through the facilitation of cross-border terrorism and communal polarisation.
- ii) To test and promote its military technologies via Pakistan.
- iii) To undermine India's appeal as a global manufacturing hub and foreign investment destination and
- iv) To position itself diplomatically as both a mediator and a silent backer of Pakistan.

The study situates these developments within the frameworks of proxy warfare, hybrid conflict, and geo-economics to highlight how the 2025 conflict illustrates a new phase in the China-Pakistan-India strategic triangle. By analysing China's role in this conflict, the paper not only contributes to the understanding of Beijing's evolving foreign policy behaviour but also sheds light on the shifting security architecture of South Asia. It underscores the need for India to recalibrate its national security strategies in order to effectively counter China's multi-pronged approach, which increasingly blurs the boundaries between military, economic, and informational domains.

Historical Context

The Indo-Pak conflict of 2025 cannot be understood in isolation; it is embedded in a long history of China's evolving strategic engagement with Pakistan and its indirect role in

India-Pakistan crises. Since the 1960s, Beijing has cultivated what is often described as an "all-weather friendship" with Islamabad, grounded in converging strategic interests against India [3]. The Sino-Pakistan relationship deepened after the Sino-Indian war of 1962, when Beijing began to view Pakistan as a natural partner to balance India's regional influence. The 1963 Sino-Pakistan boundary agreement, which ceded the Shaksgam Valley of Kashmir to China [3], laid the foundation for a durable alignment against New Delhi. During subsequent Indo-Pak wars, China's posture combined rhetorical support for Pakistan with strategic restraint [13]. In the 1965 conflict, Beijing issued strong statements against India and provided military supplies to Pakistan but refrained from direct intervention, though there were some reports of intrusions in Ladakh and Sikkim [1]. In 1971, despite being an ally of Pakistan and a new member of the United Nations Security Council, China exercised caution, constrained by U.S. and Soviet positions during the Bangladesh Liberation War [4]. This pattern highlighted China's preference for indirect involvement, seeking to sustain Pakistan's military capabilities without being drawn into confrontation with India.

The 1980s and 1990s marked a new phase of Chinese assistance to Pakistan, particularly in the nuclear and missile domains [4]. Numerous scholarly and intelligence assessments have documented Beijing's role in aiding Pakistan's nuclear weapons program, which altered the strategic balance in South Asia. By the time of the Kargil conflict in 1999, China had assumed a more measured diplomatic stance, urging restraint on both sides while continuing long-term military cooperation with Pakistan [13]. A similar approach was visible during the 2001–02 crisis and the 2008 Mumbai attacks, when Beijing avoided overtly siding with Islamabad but shielded Pakistan diplomatically in international forums. The Balakot crisis of 2019 marked a subtle shift. While China publicly urged de-escalation, it simultaneously increased defence transfers to Pakistan and supported Islamabad's narratives in international media [15]. This dual-track strategy underscored Beijing's use of Pakistan as both a strategic proxy and a testing ground for its own geopolitical ambitions. By the 2020s, the consolidation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the increasing share of Chinese arms in Pakistan's defence imports, estimated at over 81% by mid-decade, strengthened Islamabad's military dependence on Beijing [8]. Thus, the historical trajectory illustrates a consistent pattern: China has avoided direct involvement in Indo-Pak hostilities but has enabled Pakistan's capacity to challenge India through sustained military, nuclear, and diplomatic support. What distinguishes the 2025 conflict from earlier episodes is the scale and visibility of China's multidimensional engagement-extending beyond traditional arms supplies and diplomatic cover to encompass information warfare, economic disruption, and proxy-based destabilisation. The historical context, therefore, highlights the transition from China as a cautious supporter of Pakistan to China as an active shaper of Indo-Pak crises.

China's Role in the Indo-Pak Conflict 2025

The 2025 Indo-Pak conflict revealed the multidimensional nature of China's involvement in South Asia. Rather than engaging directly, Beijing operated through Pakistan, combining military assistance, proxy warfare, information manipulation, and economic tactics to influence the conflict's trajectory. This approach reflected China's broader strategy of hybrid warfare using a mix of military, psychological, and economic tools to achieve strategic gains without open confrontation [18-19]. By strengthening Pakistan's military capacity, fueling internal unrest, shaping global narratives, and targeting India's economic stability, China sought to contain India's rise and reinforce its own regional dominance.

Military and Strategic Dimension

China provided Pakistan with a significant upgrade in its military capabilities during the 2025 conflict. Islamabad deployed fighter jets such as the JF-17 Block III and J-10C, alongside advanced missile systems like the PL-15E air-to-air missiles and the PL-10 short-range missiles, which were integrated into its air defence networks [18-19]. Beyond material support, the conflict functioned as a testing ground for Chinese military technology [6]. Instances like Pakistan's claims of shooting down Indian Rafale jets, although largely unverified, served as demonstrations of Chinese aerial combat technology, boosting Beijing's export credibility. Additionally, China's broader strategic posture was evident through its presence in the Indian Ocean region, part of its "String of Pearls" strategy [6]. By maintaining naval and logistical capabilities near India's maritime approaches, Beijing could influence regional operations indirectly, signalling deterrence while avoiding direct engagement [6]. These measures indicate that China's military involvement was dual-purpose: strengthening Pakistan as a proxy and advancing its own global defence objectives.

Terrorism and Proxy Warfare

China's involvement extended to proxy operations through Pakistan, aimed at destabilising India internally. Cross-border infiltrations into Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) during the conflict included militants equipped with Chinese sniper rifles, encrypted communication devices, and body cameras, reflecting covert support from Beijing [17]. The Pahalgam attack, where terrorists targeted civilians based on religious identity [18-19], exemplifies China's strategy of using Pakistan to create communal unrest and disrupt India's internal security. Reports suggested that attackers interrogated victims on religious grounds and executed them if they did not meet the assailants' criteria [18-19], drawing widespread national and international attention. The conflict also highlighted the use of diaspora-based networks like Sikh for Justice (Pannu), whose propaganda campaigns sought to destabilise Punjab [16]. While Pannu operates from abroad, the alignment of his messaging with Pakistan's ISPR statements indicates coordinated efforts to exploit communal tensions [16]. By facilitating these actions, China used Pakistan not just as a military partner but as a strategic proxy to achieve regional destabilisation.

Information and Psychological Warfare

Beijing actively engaged in information and psychological operations during the conflict. Chinese state media outlets, including Xinhua News Agency and Global Times, amplified Pakistani narratives [18-19], such as claims of an Indian missile strike on Amritsar and exaggerated accounts of air combat successes. These messages aimed to provoke communal tension in India, undermine confidence in Indian military performance, and challenge the international perception of India's internal stability [16]. Social media was another key arena. Chinese-aligned digital channels spread selective information to inflame public sentiment and create confusion about the course of the conflict. By coordinating messaging with Pakistan's ISPR, Beijing conducted a hybrid information operation, blending conventional media, social platforms, and proxy communication networks. The objective was clear: to weaken India's political cohesion and amplify the perception of vulnerability, particularly during sensitive periods such as the Amarnath Yatra and the spring tourist season in J&K.

Economic and Geo-economics Dimension

The 2025 conflict unfolded amid the U.S.-China trade war, which incentivised multinational corporations to diversify production away from China. Companies like Apple accelerated the relocation of iPhone manufacturing to India, with India producing 14% of global iPhones by April 2024, projected to reach 25% within a year [9]. This shift threatened China's position in global supply chains. By exacerbating instability in Jammu & Kashmir and encouraging Pakistan's proxy operations, Beijing sought to discourage foreign investment in India, portraying it as a conflict-prone environment. Moreover, Chinese actions in the market demonstrated an effort to influence perceptions. After India's Operation Sindoor, Indian defence stocks surged while Chinese defence firm stocks temporarily fell (TOI, 2025), highlighting the interconnectedness of military action, propaganda, and economic signalling. By using Pakistan to challenge India's security and economic image simultaneously, China applied a geo-economic strategy, combining destabilisation with market influence to protect its global economic interests.

India's Countermeasures in Response to China's Role

India's response to the multifaceted Chinese engagement in the Indo-Pak conflict of 2025 reflected a combination of military, diplomatic, digital, and economic strategies, aimed at neutralising both direct and indirect threats. Recognising the complexity of China's proxy, hybrid, and geo-economic tactics, India adopted a calibrated approach to safeguard national security while maintaining strategic signalling in the regional and global arenas.

Counter-Proxy and Internal Security Measures

To mitigate the threat posed by Pakistan-backed terrorism, India intensified intelligence operations and tightened border security in J&K and other border states. Security agencies intercepted infiltrators equipped with foreign-supplied weapons

and communication devices, thereby restricting the operational reach of proxy actors ^[17]. Law enforcement and state authorities also implemented community engagement programs to prevent escalation of communal tensions, particularly after high-profile attacks like Pahalgam. Coordination between central and state agencies ensured swift containment of potential unrest, signalling India's resilience against proxy-driven internal destabilisation. India's armed forces executed precision operations to counter Pakistan-backed insurgent actions in J&K and to deter further cross-border infiltration. Operation Sindoor exemplified India's ability to conduct coordinated strikes while minimising civilian harm, demonstrating operational maturity ^[7]. The Indian Air Force and Army reinforced border defences with rapid mobilisation, counter-artillery deployment, and enhanced surveillance systems ^[7]. Additionally, India strengthened air defence networks to intercept potential missile threats and conducted reconnaissance to monitor Chinese and Pakistani military movements near the conflict zones. These steps limited the operational leverage of both Pakistan and its external backers.

Information and Cyber Countermeasures

India recognised the growing importance of countering Chinese and Pakistani propaganda campaigns during the 2025 conflict. Government agencies took decisive steps to ban Chinese state-run media accounts, including Xinhua News Agency and Global Times, from domestic social media platforms to restrict the flow of disinformation and psychological influence operations ^[10]. This move was aimed at curtailing the deliberate spread of false narratives designed to create panic, confusion, and mistrust among the Indian public. At the same time, strategic communication campaigns were launched by the Indian government to highlight operational successes and to counter misleading claims regarding the performance of the Indian Armed Forces ^[7]. Regular press briefings, digital outreach by official handles, and fact-based updates ensured that the national and international audience received accurate information. These communications reinforced narratives of normalcy in conflict-affected regions, particularly J&K, which had been a major target of misinformation. Digital intelligence units within Indian security agencies also played a critical role ^[2]. They actively monitored online platforms to detect coordinated propaganda activities, troll networks, and fake accounts operated from outside India ^[2]. By identifying and neutralising such networks in real time, India managed to limit the spread and impact of hostile narratives. Additionally, cyber experts worked closely with major technology platforms to report and remove malicious content that sought to incite communal hatred or undermine public morale.

Economic and Policy Responses

India's economic measures during the 2025 Indo-Pak conflict were carefully designed to insulate the national economy from external attempts to undermine investor confidence and destabilise financial markets. Recognising the strategic use of economic pressure and disinformation by China and Pakistan,

the Indian government adopted a multifaceted approach to maintain economic stability and ensure continued growth momentum (TOI, 2025). A key component of this strategy was reinforcing India's image as a reliable, stable, and investment-friendly destination for global capital. Through coordinated communication between the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of External Affairs, and NITI Aayog, India projected an image of confidence and self-reliance in the face of regional uncertainty (TOI, 2025). Multinational corporations such as Apple, Microsoft, and Samsung, which had already begun shifting production from China to India amid the ongoing U.S.-China trade war, publicly reaffirmed their commitment to expanding operations within the country ^[6]. The Indian government capitalised on this momentum by streamlining production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes, expediting clearances for manufacturing units, and emphasising the continuity of supply chains ^[8]. This not only boosted domestic employment but also countered China's attempts to frame India as an unstable or risky market.

Strategic and Long-Term Measures

Beyond immediate tactical responses, India adopted a series of long-term strategic measures aimed at strengthening deterrence and ensuring sustained national security readiness. Recognising the multidimensional nature of Chinese involvement in the Indo-Pak conflict, the Indian government prioritised the modernisation of its armed forces and the development of resilient military infrastructure along sensitive border regions, particularly in Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh, and the Western front (EFSAS, 2024). Major investments were directed toward improving all-weather connectivity, forward air bases, and advanced surveillance systems to enable rapid mobilisation and real-time situational awareness (EFSAS, 2024). Parallel to these efforts, India deepened its engagement with Indo-Pacific strategic partners such as the United States, Japan, Australia, and France through defence dialogues, joint military exercises, and technology-sharing initiatives (EFSAS, 2024). These partnerships reinforced India's strategic position within the broader Indo-Pacific security architecture and served as a counterweight to China's growing regional assertiveness. Additionally, India emphasised indigenous defence production under the "Atmanirbhar Bharat" initiative to reduce dependence on foreign suppliers and build long-term self-reliance in critical defence technologies ^[14]. Measures like the renaming of Chinese-occupied or contested territories and the enhancement of administrative control reinforced India's sovereign claims and strategic messaging. Collectively, these initiatives embodied India's comprehensive approach to countering both conventional and hybrid threats from China.

Analysis: China's Objectives and India's Strategic Response

The Indo-Pak conflict of 2025 illustrates a multidimensional approach by China, blending conventional, proxy, informational, and economic strategies to advance its interests in South Asia. A critical analysis of China's engagement

reveals four primary objectives, each corresponding to the roles discussed earlier, and highlights how India's countermeasures effectively neutralised or mitigated these strategies.

Disrupting India's Internal Stability

Through sustained support for cross-border terrorism, information warfare, and the deliberate amplification of communal tensions, China sought to undermine India's internal stability during the 2025 Indo-Pak conflict. Beijing's strategy operated indirectly by leveraging Pakistan as a proxy, using its intelligence networks and terror outfits to conduct low-intensity operations aimed at diverting India's military focus and straining its internal security apparatus. Incidents such as the Pahalgam terrorist attack, along with attempts to incite unrest in border states and sensitive urban areas, reflected a coordinated pattern of hybrid warfare designed to erode domestic cohesion and weaken India's strategic resolve. China's influence was also evident in the digital domain, where diaspora-based information networks and pro-Beijing online communities disseminated propaganda narratives portraying India as politically divided and economically unstable. These disinformation efforts were amplified through social media campaigns, targeting religious and ethnic sensitivities to provoke polarisation and distrust within Indian society. In response, India's national security agencies, particularly the Intelligence Bureau, Research and Analysis Wing, and National Investigation Agency, undertook a coordinated strategy emphasising preventive intelligence, border fortification, and community-level engagement. Enhanced surveillance along infiltration routes, real-time intelligence sharing, and joint operations with local law enforcement helped neutralise multiple infiltration attempts and terror modules before they could escalate.

Testing and Showcasing Military Technology

China used the 2025 Indo-Pak conflict as an opportunity to test, evaluate, and showcase its expanding range of advanced military technologies. Through Pakistan, Beijing was able to observe the real-time performance of its fighter aircraft, missile systems, drones, and electronic warfare capabilities under conditions of active conflict without engaging directly. Pakistan's use of Chinese-origin weaponry such as the JF-17 Thunder fighters, Wing Loong II drones, and guided missile systems offered China valuable operational data on the efficiency, accuracy, and resilience of its defence exports when confronted by a capable and technologically adept adversary like India^[18-19]. This indirect participation served multiple purposes for Beijing. It provided a low-risk mechanism to demonstrate the credibility of its defence industry, assess battlefield adaptability of its systems, and promote Chinese arms in the global market^[6], particularly among developing countries seeking affordable alternatives to Western weaponry. Moreover, it allowed China to observe India's response mechanisms, thus collecting intelligence on India's radar, communication, and anti-missile capabilities. The conflict environment became, in essence, a testing ground for China's

evolving doctrine of informationized and intelligitized warfare.

Undermining India's Economic Rise

China's attempts to undermine India's economic trajectory during the 2025 Indo-Pak conflict were not isolated incidents but part of a broader geo-economic strategy aimed at preserving its dominance as the primary manufacturing and investment hub in Asia. By leveraging Pakistan's territory and intelligence apparatus to foment instability, particularly in J&K, Beijing sought to create a perception of insecurity that could deter multinational corporations from expanding their operations in India. These efforts coincided with China's growing anxieties over the post-COVID-19 global supply chain realignment and the ongoing U.S.-China trade war, which encouraged global firms to relocate manufacturing bases to safer and more politically stable destinations, notably India and Vietnam. Through orchestrated propaganda campaigns, China amplified narratives portraying India as volatile and conflict-prone, using social media networks, diaspora-based outlets, and state-run media channels to propagate concerns over India's investment climate. Beijing's strategy was twofold: first, to discourage potential investors from viewing India as a viable alternative to China; and second, to signal that regional instability could disrupt global production chains if firms relocated to India. This economic coercion, disguised as regional security volatility, represented a subtle but potent form of hybrid warfare aimed at weakening India's long-term developmental prospects.

Diplomatic Positioning and Strategic Signalling

China's statements during the conflict, which oscillated between calls for restraint and subtle alignment with Pakistan, were aimed at enhancing Beijing's image as a regional power capable of influencing outcomes without overt engagement. India's diplomatic engagement, public communication of operational successes, and strategic signalling in regional and global forums effectively countered these narratives. India's ability to combine military, informational, and diplomatic measures reflects a sophisticated multi-domain response, neutralising China's hybrid strategy. The 2025 conflict exemplifies a hybrid warfare paradigm, where China integrates military, proxy, information, and economic tools to pursue strategic objectives. From an International Relations perspective, this aligns with theories of proxy warfare, where a dominant state leverages a smaller partner to achieve strategic goals while minimising confrontation. Additionally, China's geo-economic tactics reflect the increasing interdependence of economic and security domains, emphasising the relevance of geo-economics in contemporary conflict analysis.

India's multidimensional response demonstrates the efficacy of a comprehensive national security approach, integrating conventional defence, internal security, strategic communications, and economic resilience. The conflict underscores the need for continuous adaptation to hybrid threats and proactive measures to counter emerging strategies that blur

the boundaries between military, economic, and informational domains.

CONCLUSION

The Indo-Pak conflict of 2025 stands as a defining episode in South Asian geopolitics, revealing how traditional bilateral hostilities have now transformed into a multi-dimensional contest influenced by external great powers—most notably China. While Pakistan remained the visible actor on the battlefield, China's role as a hidden architect was undeniable, using Pakistan as a conduit to pursue its strategic objectives against India. Beijing's engagement in this conflict was marked not by direct intervention but through a calibrated strategy of hybrid warfare, a blend of psychological operations, information manipulation, technological experimentation, and economic coercion. The underlying purpose was twofold: to destabilise India internally and to impede its emergence as a viable alternative to China in the global economic and strategic order. By encouraging Pakistan's terrorist proxies, particularly in J&K, and by amplifying narratives of communal division through social and digital media, Beijing sought to weaken India's internal cohesion. Attacks such as the Pahalgam massacre, where civilians were targeted on religious grounds, were not mere acts of terrorism but part of a broader plan to ignite domestic unrest and undermine India's image as a pluralistic democracy. Simultaneously, China's state-controlled media and cyber networks amplified Pakistan's propaganda, portraying India as unstable and conflict-prone, thereby discouraging foreign investors. These tactics aligned with the Three Warfare Doctrine, psychological, media, and legal warfare, that Beijing has increasingly employed to shape strategic narratives without overt confrontation. Furthermore, the economic dimension of China's involvement revealed an intent to obstruct India's growing attractiveness to global investors seeking to relocate operations amid the U.S.-China trade war. By fostering regional instability, Beijing hoped to erode confidence in India's business environment and halt the ongoing industrial transition from China to India. Yet, India responded with remarkable resilience. Through policy assurance, diplomatic outreach, and effective information management, New Delhi succeeded in maintaining investor confidence, as evidenced by Apple, Microsoft, and other multinational corporations expanding their operations in India. The episode thus reflected India's growing maturity in integrating national security strategy with economic stability and international diplomacy.

At the military and technological level, the conflict revealed how China used Pakistan as a testing ground for its defence technologies and operational doctrines. The deployment of Chinese-origin drones, JF-17 fighters, and missile and air defence systems provided Beijing with an opportunity to evaluate the battlefield performance of its defence exports and gather intelligence on Indian countermeasures. This indirect participation allowed China to promote its defence capabilities in global markets while also assessing India's radar systems, electronic warfare responses, and missile interception capacity.

However, India's decisive counter-strikes under Operation Sindoor, coupled with its robust air defence network and indigenous technological assets, neutralised these attempts and exposed the limitations of Chinese defence equipment when confronted by a technologically adept adversary. Equally critical was India's success in the information and cyber domain, where government agencies effectively dismantled Chinese and Pakistani propaganda machinery. The banning of Chinese state-run accounts such as Xinhua News Agency and Global Times from Indian social media platforms curtailed Beijing's ability to manipulate public perception. Strategic communication campaigns emphasising operational success, national unity, and regional stability further reinforced domestic confidence and international trust in India's credibility. Beyond the immediate tactical responses, India undertook long-term strategic measures to consolidate deterrence by upgrading military infrastructure along sensitive borders, deepening Indo-Pacific partnerships, expanding indigenous defence production, and asserting sovereignty through symbolic acts such as renaming Chinese-occupied regions. These initiatives reflected a comprehensive approach to national security that transcends conventional warfare, combining deterrence, diplomacy, and domestic resilience. Ultimately, the 2025 conflict underscored how China's hybrid strategies, ranging from proxy terrorism to economic sabotage and disinformation campaigns, failed to achieve their objectives against a strategically coherent India. Instead of weakening India, Beijing's involvement reinforced New Delhi's determination to emerge as a resilient, self-reliant, and globally credible power. The conflict thus stands as a pivotal moment in Asia's strategic evolution: a demonstration that coercive statecraft and hybrid manipulation cannot deter a nation fortified by unity, preparedness, and long-term vision. India not only preserved its territorial integrity and internal stability but also redefined the contours of deterrence in the 21st century, proving that strategic resilience, not aggression, is the true measure of power in the modern geopolitical order.

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