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Pakistan and China Vow to Deepen Ties Amid Regional Tensions

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Pakistan and China have once again signaled their intent to strengthen bilateral cooperation, particularly in the face of shifting geopolitical currents in South and Central Asia. In a meeting held on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Council of Foreign Ministers in Tianjin, Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, who also serves as Pakistan's Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, met with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi. The two reaffirmed what they called an "All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership," with a renewed focus on promoting regional peace and development.

The meeting came at the conclusion of Dar's three-day diplomatic visit to China, which centered around the SCO meeting, a regional bloc that includes China, Russia, and several

Central and South Asian nations. The discussions, as reported by Pakistan's Foreign Office, emphasized strengthening economic ties, particularly the advancement of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship component of China's broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), while hailed by Islamabad as a vehicle for economic transformation, has drawn increasing scrutiny in recent years due to debt sustainability concerns and a lack of transparency. Nevertheless, the current government, led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, continues to champion the project as a cornerstone of its economic strategy, with China remaining its most crucial strategic ally.

Both foreign ministers also addressed multilateral cooperation, indicating a shared interest in maintaining influence within forums such as the SCO. Notably, Dar thanked Wang for China's hospitality during the summit and praised its leadership, reinforcing the image of a cordial, albeit asymmetrical, partnership.

With growing tensions in the region, including security challenges in Afghanistan and the broader Indo-Pacific rivalry between China and the United States, this meeting signals Beijing's intent to retain Pakistan as a close ally. For Pakistan's part, leaning heavily into this relationship continues to serve as a counterweight to its waning ties with the West and its unresolved tensions with neighboring India.

Additionally, discussions touched on the upcoming state visit of Prime Minister Sharif to China, scheduled for late August during the SCO heads of government meeting. According to government sources, the prime minister will be joined by Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, indicating the strategic depth of the visit. A meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping is also expected, underscoring the importance both sides place on military and diplomatic alignment.

While the official statements from both nations emphasized peace and development, critics argue that the symbolism of the visit may outweigh any tangible gains for Pakistan, especially given the country's ongoing economic struggles and domestic political instability. The Chinese side, however, appears committed to maintaining its influence in the region by propping up reliable, if dependent, partners.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), established in 2001, is an intergovernmental organization aimed at fostering political, economic, and security-related

cooperation. Although it promotes a message of mutual development, it increasingly serves as a platform for China and Russia to assert influence in Eurasia, often in contrast to Western institutions.

As Pakistan continues to pivot eastward, this latest diplomatic engagement with Beijing illustrates its priorities under the current leadership, despite widespread concerns about governance, accountability, and economic dependency.