

CHINA, PAKISTAN SIGN MILITARY DEAL

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Pakistan

Reinforcing ties: PM Imran Khan called for closer cooperation to raise the Pakistan-China brotherhood to new heights. File

China and Pakistan have signed a new military memorandum of understanding to boost their already close defence relationship, as China's Defence Minister and People's Liberation Army (PLA) General Wei Fenghe met Pakistan's leadership in Islamabad and visited the headquarters of the Army at Rawalpindi.

Gen. Wei on Tuesday met Pakistan's President Arif Alvi and Prime Minister Imran Khan. He called on both countries to "push the military-to-military relationship to a higher level, so as to jointly cope with various risks and challenges, firmly safeguard the sovereignty and security interests of the two countries and safeguard the regional peace and stability", Chinese state media reported.

On Monday, the two militaries signed an MoU following Gen. Wei's meeting with Pakistan's Chief of the Army Staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, at the General Headquarters, according to reports in the Pakistani media. Both "exchanged in-depth views on the international and regional situations, the relations between the two countries and militaries, the equipment and technology cooperation and other issues", a report in China's official media said.

While details of the new MoU were not immediately available, it follows another agreement signed last year, when China's Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) General Xu Qiliang visited Rawalpindi for defence cooperation and "capacity building of the Pakistan Army".

Gen. Wei also discussed ongoing projects under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), in which the Pakistani military is playing an increasingly prominent role.

Prior to Gen. Wei's visit, recently appointed Chinese envoy to Pakistan Nong Rong conducted a "comprehensive review" of the CPEC projects along with Lt. Gen. Asim Saleem Bajwa (retd), who is heading the CPEC Authority.

The Chinese Defence Minister also had talks with Pakistan's Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee General Nadeem Raza, and both sides "reaffirmed their commitment to 'Iron Brotherhood' and 'All-Weather' friendship".

Firm support

President Arif Alvi on Tuesday conveyed Pakistan "firmly supports China's stand on issues related to the South China Sea, Taiwan, Xinjiang, Tibet and so on", Chinese State media reported. "We hope that the two countries will further strengthen cooperation in the construction of the CPEC as well as the defence and security fields," he said. Prime Minister Imran Khan called for "closer strategic cooperation to raise the iron-clad Pakistan-China brotherhood to a new height".

Gen. Wei's visit followed his day-long visit to Nepal, where he was the highest ranking Chinese official to visit since President Xi Jinping's visit in October last year. The Communist Party-run *Global Times* reported Gen. Wei as saying: "China firmly supports Nepal to safeguard its

national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity”, with the newspaper noting India’s recent territorial dispute with Nepal in Kalapani.

He said China would “continue assisting Nepal’s military development, contributing to regional peace and stability”. The newspaper reported that military-to-military relations were growing with the PLA Air Force earlier this year sending protective outfits, medical masks and thermometers to the Nepalese military. Nepal’s then Defence Minister Ishwar Pokhrel visited Beijing in October 2019 when both sides signed a 150-million yuan (\$22.8 million) deal on military assistance, the *Global Times* noted, adding that the two militaries have held joint special forces drills for three consecutive years.

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