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China brokers Afghan-Pak crisis management deal



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Afghanistan and Pakistan have agreed on the establishment of a bilateral crisis management mechanism and a trilateral foreign ministers' dialogue forum with China. China broker the deal aimed at keeping the communication channels between the two neighbours open during crises and enabling them to resolve their differences through dialogue. The trilateral foreign ministers' dialogue forum is apparently meant to sustain Beijing's mediation space in Pak-Afghan disputes. The agreement on the new bilateral mechanism, which would be supported by Beijing, and the trilateral dialogue forum was announced on Sunday in a joint statement issued by Pakistan, China and Afghanistan. The announcement came at the conclusion of a shuttle diplomacy mission by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi for defusing tensions between Islamabad and Kabul that have been trading accusations of sponsoring terrorism and were embroiled in bitter

border disputes. "Afghanistan and Pakistan agree to establish a crisis management mechanism. ... The Chinese side will support this mechanism," said the declaration in which Islamabad and Kabul also committed to "shared security", in addition to pledging to jointly confront security challenges. Pakistan and Afghanistan will bilaterally negotiate the terms of reference and other details for the mechanism. Noting challenges in relations between the two countries, the Chinese foreign minister at a press conference along with his host, Pakistan Foreign Affairs Adviser Sartaj Aziz, said: "The key for Pakistan and Afghanistan is to have detailed consultations on how this mechanism would function and reach an agreement on the operability of this mechanism." He, however, described the Pak-Afghan agreement on bilateral mechanism as "an important step". Aziz also hailed the accord as a "very important initiative on behalf of China", which would help to resolve differences and improve relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The bilateral mechanism will provide for sharing intelligence and information for preventing terrorist attacks and other steps that the two sides may agree to take. It will keep the communication lines between the two governments open during a crisis so as to resolve issues through dialogue while insulating the relationship from its negative impact. The arrangement on crisis management will be supplemented by the forum for dialogue between the foreign ministers of the three countries. It will discuss all aspects of Pak-Afghan ties but will focus more on promoting the economic aspect of the relationship. The three countries also supported the revival of the dysfunctional Quadrilateral Coordination Group and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Contact Group on Afghanistan for renewing the stalled Afghan reconciliation process. The Chinese minister said his country was ready to play its constructive role in this regard and asked others (an apparent reference to the United States) to play a positive role. He warned against delaying the reconciliation process and said that this could lead to complications. Aziz also said that sustainable peace in Afghanistan required a politically negotiated settlement. Wang's mediation trip took place at a time when the US is planning to take a tougher line towards Pakistan because of reservations about Pakistani counterterrorism operations. However, a meeting at the Pakistan army headquarters in Rawalpindi on Saturday dismissed those concerns and noted that Pakistan had done all it could. The meeting chaired by Army Chief Gen Bajwa observed that it was now time for others to do more. The visiting Chinese minister said that questioning Pakistan's counterterrorism commitment would be unfair. A statement from the Afghan Foreign Ministry said the three countries also called on the insurgents to join the Afghan peace process.