**Renewed Iran-China Ties**

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President of Iran Ibrahim Raisi made a three-day historic visit to China and met President Xi Jinping to deepen the bilateral cooperation and review the implementation of the 25-year Strategic Cooperation alliance between the two nations. President Raisi is the first Iranian president to visit China in over two decades. President Raisi was accompanied by a large delegation, including the chief of the central bank and ministers of oil and mining apart from the leading negotiator on matters related to dialogue on the nuclear program. During the visit, several cooperation agreements and documents were signed. Almost twenty documents were agreed upon related to the 25 years of agreement to accelerate bilateral cooperation in new areas. This historic visit has several political, economic, and strategic implications for not only Iran and China but also for the region and globe.

For the past several decades, China and Iran have steadily built a strengthened partnership focusing on energy trade and exploring new areas of cooperation. Apart from energy-related collaboration, there have been significant boosts in economic ties and defence cooperation, balancing the geopolitical landscape in the Middle East region. The official visit of the President of Iran is significant as amidst the strong western sanctions and pressure Iran is looking towards this crucial strategic partnership with China to boost its economy and ward off the western pressure, including sanctions. Currently, China is Iran’s largest trading partner; Tehran exports $12.6 billion of goods to Beijing and imports $12.7 billion.

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The growing alliance between China and Iran has grown further after Iran’s outreach to Shanghai Cooperation Organization from observer status to its full membership. Iran’s relationship with China, Russia, and Central Asia is testimony to the realignment in Iranian foreign policy. This further helps Iran to use its diplomatic relations with SCO as leverage against the US-led sanction regimes and negotiations on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

The significant trade-off of this strategic agreement is the Chinese imports of Iranian oil defying the American sanctions, which provide critical cash inflow to Tehran. In return, Iran provides market access to China for its products, including automobiles, houseware, and others. At the strategic level, China agrees to invest in railways, energy, sports, transportation, cyber security, research, and development in defence production. Through this vital cooperation, Iran will come out of the economic burden causing not only socio-economic stress at home and abroad.

This historic visit also reflects the non-partisan policy action of Iran towards China, especially after the change of government in Iran. During this important historic visit, the Presidents of Iran and China signed 20 more cooperation documents which are part of the 25-year comprehensive cooperation signed in 2021. Additionally, President Xi expressed his willingness to accelerate the implementation of the 2021 deal by deepening the “practical cooperation in trade, agriculture, industry, infrastructure, and other fields and importing more high-quality Iranian agricultural products in 2023.

The partnership between Iran and China has also created ripples on the geopolitical chessboard in the Middle East. China’s outreach to the Middle East is non-partisan and seeks to engage both Iran and Saudi Arabia. This independent foreign policy of China is a source of concern for the US because it not only reduces the US’s potential to punish Iran but also drifts Saudi Arabia away from the US. China has the inherent policy of no confrontation rather with sheer wisdom, the leadership and policy leaders of the Community Party are trying their best to promote the values of inclusive growth and helping countries through economic means. Iran is an example, and so do other countries like Pakistan. The growth of Iran and Pakistan means that although the political pandits might comment on strategic matters simultaneously if we review it through the lens of economic development, China’s support and investment is ever growing in both countries.

During this visit, Iran and China’s engagement also demonstrate China’s expanding and growing influence in the region and how the country is building its alliances with the regional countries. This is particularly significant given China’s role as a major player in global affairs and the increasing competition between the US and China for regional influence. It is also important to note that this visit will bring into the limelight that Iran is expanding its diplomatic engagement despite challenges.

The regional connectivity will reach one of the largest organizations in the region as an essential permanent member. The close partnership of Iran with China may also give a further boost to Pakistan and China relations, especially the trilateral cooperation on CPEC might further enhance cooperation although there are several challenges to that however, owing to the fact that China’s foreign engagement has the nature of building bridges and creating room for dialogue, there are various opportunities that will grow in future. Cooperation between Iran and China has several positive impacts on the region especially to make the region more connected and inclusive for growth. This also has the potential to open new doors of opportunity can enhance cooperation between Iran and China.

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