

As part of UAI's Release the Afghan frozen funds campaign, we are pleased to re-publish this article by Italian journalist and long-time Afghan expert Emanuele Giordana. It is interesting because it highlights the role of China in debates on Afghanistan and its role in the negotiations for the renewal of the mandate of UNAMA at the UN Security Council earlier this month. It is noteworthy that the resolution adopted by the UNSC refers to the seizure of Afghanistan's sovereign external reserves.

China's Role in Afghanistan: the Eid al-Fitr Pause in Hostilities and the renewal of UNAMA's mandate.

By Emanuele Giordana

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While Ankara, Riyadh, and Doha mediated a week of non-hostility between Pakistan and Afghanistan, even though Kabul accuses Islamabad of having violated the agreement, behind the scenes, Beijing is also at work. It is responsible for defending and renewing the mandate of the UN mission UNAMA, which has significantly scaled down the death toll of Monday's Afghan massacre at Camp Phoenix.

Despite Pakistan and Afghanistan agreeing to a temporary "pause" in hostilities during this week's Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr, yesterday the police in Kunar reported that during the night between Thursday and Friday, the Pakistani army fired in several areas of the Nari district, in Kunar province, and that clashes involving heavy weapons were ongoing.

According to Kabul, this is not the only violation of the truce. Islamabad's Ministry of Information has categorically rejected the idea that Pakistan violated the agreement. Thus, **the suspension of hostilities** (scheduled until midnight on Tuesday) **is itself becoming one of the victims of the respective disinformation** campaigns that the two sides have been accusing each other of for weeks.

The truce was a surprising decision that—coinciding with the end of Ramadan—effectively poured water on the fire ignited by the latest Pakistani raid on Kabul. The toll of the massacre has been revised by UNAMA, the UN mission in Afghanistan, to 143 dead and 119 injured (albeit informally, since the official statement only mentions “dozens” of casualties). This figure does not change the substance of the massacre—over 400 dead according to Kabul—but it highlights how, in this war, lies are daily bread and both sides are always ready to exploit the dead for propaganda purposes. This is also evident in relation to the newly begun truce. It demonstrates how important the presence of an independent witness like UNAMA is—a witness whose future, until a few days ago, was itself uncertain.

That Kabul is the weak link in the dossier is quite clear. In recent days, the Emirate has been less aggressive than Pakistan, whose tone has consistently been more ultimatum-driven. But the latest raid and the massacre that followed have also pushed Islamabad toward a more moderate stance, thanks to mediation by Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. The latter, in particular, holds special leverage over Pakistan, which is perhaps its largest debtor. But there is also another influential player in these tense hours: China.

China is behind the resolution unanimously adopted by the UN Security Council just as—at 9 p.m. in Afghanistan—the massacre at Camp Phoenix and the Omid civilian rehabilitation centre was taking place. In reality, news from Kabul had probably not yet reached UN headquarters, but Beijing had long been working on the resolution it intended to present, and the vote coincided purely by chance with the Kabul massacre. It is therefore to Beijing that we owe **the renewal—albeit for only three months** (China wanted 12, but the Americans were opposed)—**of the UNAMA mission**, whose importance lies in independently assessing the massacre we have just seen.

Beijing went further. At a time when the United States would like to suspend or scale down the UN mission, China has called on the international community not to stop funding UNAMA. It has also, albeit indirectly, referred to the funds—frozen by the West—of the Afghan central bank (DAB). DAB is not central to the resolution nor explicitly mentioned, but the references are to economic stability, the financial system, and the humanitarian crisis, which indirectly include the functioning of the central bank. This marks a strong difference

from previous positions of the bloc of former occupying powers, which categorically excluded unfreezing DAB's assets abroad or tied their release to certain conditions. The Chinese subtly introduced the concept while avoiding confrontation. It may seem like a minor detail—diplomatic finesse—but in the end, even the current U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Mike Waltz—hardly a soft figure—accepted the compromise to extend UNAMA for three months only, a decision that nonetheless received a unanimous Security Council vote.

Whether Beijing played a role in the current truce is harder to determine. China has strong influence over Pakistan and also Afghanistan, but much less over Turkey—although it shares pragmatic investments with Ankara. With Qatar, the situation is different: Beijing maintains excellent, stable relations with Doha, centered on gas purchases, of which China is one of the main customers, but it is unclear how much pressure it can exert on the Al Thani monarchy. However, it plays more on home ground with Riyadh: one should not forget Beijing's role in 2023 in easing relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia (even if those relations are now a thing of the past). What is certain is that Beijing is actively working through its special envoy Yue Xiaoyong, who is shuttling between the two capitals. Gradually, in its own way, China is inserting itself more and more into the dynamics of West Asia—quietly, “acting without forcing,” carving out a role that could bear fruit, not necessarily immediately.