

China Is Not Neutral: Mediating to Contain Political Islam!

(Translated)

[Al-Rayah Newspaper - Issue 595 - 15/04/2026](#)

By: Ustadh Youssef Arslan*

On Friday, 3 April 2026, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning announced that, “Since the Pakistan-Afghanistan conflict escalated again, China has made mediation efforts in its own way, maintained close communication with both sides via multiple channels and at multiple levels, and created conditions and provided platforms for dialogue between the two sides. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan value and welcome China’s mediation and are willing to sit down and talk again. This is good. The consultation process is being implemented and advanced steadily. The three sides have had common understandings and agreements on specific matters regarding the process, including media reports.”

The latest tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan began in late February 2026, following Pakistani airstrikes inside Afghan territory and an exchange of accusations between the two sides. Islamabad accuses Kabul of harboring the TTP, the Pakistani Taliban, while Kabul denies these allegations. These clashes represent the worst border tensions since the Taliban’s return to power in Afghanistan in 2021, transforming the shared border between Pakistan and Afghanistan into a direct confrontation zone.

On the surface, China is trying to present itself as a neutral mediator. Mao Ning and other Chinese diplomats have repeatedly asserted that Beijing is merely “providing a platform for dialogue” without taking sides. This image is also carefully promoted within Afghanistan. Taliban-affiliated media and officials in Kabul speak of China’s “constructive and friendly role,” describing it as a sign of mutual respect. However, the geopolitical reality suggests that China is not neutral. Beijing’s relations with Islamabad are deeply rooted in history, economics, and security, and the Taliban, due to their need for Chinese investment, practically adhere to the red lines drawn by Beijing. Therefore, its mediation is not neutral diplomacy, but rather a tool for managing its vital interests.

China’s primary interests in the region are, first and foremost, security-related. It is deeply concerned about Islamic groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The repeated attacks by the Pakistani Taliban against Chinese workers and projects in Pakistan have sounded alarm bells. At the same time, the presence of Jihadist groups in Afghanistan, including the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), from the Uyghurs, poses a direct threat to China, which does not want Afghan territory to become a new base for Uyghur fighters. Therefore, the current mediation appears more like an attempt to coordinate a joint containment of these groups in cooperation with Pakistan, rather than a genuine effort to achieve peace.

Alongside these security concerns, China, by curbing the influence of political Islam, in line with Pakistan’s stance, seeks to maintain and expand its economic

influence. The current tension directly targets the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a \$60 billion project that is a cornerstone of the Belt and Road Initiative. The border clashes have not only disrupted trade and transit routes but have also delayed the expansion of the CPEC into Afghanistan, including access to gold, copper, and lithium, and the opening of new routes to Central Asia. Through mediation, China is essentially trying to establish a ceasefire, reopen border crossings, and protect its investments from these risks. This dual approach, initial containment and economic expansion, reflects a strategic priority for Beijing to transform South Asia into a vital sphere of influence.

China is also well aware of America's policy in the region. By fueling or exploiting these tensions, America seeks to divert Pakistan's attention from its primary rivalry with India, toward the Afghan arena. According to this scenario, India gains a greater opportunity to bolster its economic and military capabilities, enabling it to act as a counterweight to China. China does not want the region to slide toward these American objectives, as strengthening India's position would negatively impact China's strategic influence in the Indian Ocean and South Asia.

Consequently, the Chinese Communist Party's policy is also shaped by a deep-seated, principled hostility toward political Islam, and a profound fear of its rise in the region. The party views Islamic movements as an existential threat to its established control in East Turkestan, and even in its regional periphery, and fears groups like the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (Uyghur), which could launch operations from Afghan territory. Attacks by the Pakistani Taliban on Chinese projects in Pakistan have further reinforced these security concerns.

In addition, economic considerations are a pivotal factor; Border tensions threaten the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the expansion of the Belt and Road Initiative into Afghanistan, including access to lithium, copper, and gold. Geopolitically, China opposes the US strategy of exploiting these tensions to divert Pakistan's attention from its rivalry with India, thereby strengthening New Delhi's position as a counterweight to Beijing. Therefore, China's mediation is a tool for managing tensions, containing shared threats, and deepening its economic and security influence, rather than simply a neutral attempt to achieve peace.

*** Member of the Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir in Wilayah Afghanistan**