

China and the Strait of Hormuz Crisis: A Quiet Rise in a Turbulent International Order

(Translated)

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In the midst of the geopolitical turmoil that accompanied the navigation crisis in the Strait of Hormuz, China emerged as an actor moving outside the logic of direct confrontation, and within a calmer logic based on managing balances rather than breaking them. While the traditional powers were busy managing the military and security escalation, China appeared in a different position: that of a mediator who seeks to reduce tension without engaging in the conflict.

In this context, China has intensified its diplomatic moves in the Iran crisis, in an effort to consolidate its role as an international mediator. Its Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, led a series of intensive contacts with his counterparts, in parallel with presenting a joint initiative with Pakistan to ceasefire and reopen the Strait of Hormuz, which provided Iran with a diplomatic way out of the escalation.

According to Chinese officials, Wang Yi held about twenty-six telephone conversations with international officials as part of these efforts, while the Chinese-Pakistani plan on March 31 called for a ceasefire and the reopening of the strait as a vital international corridor. On the other hand, American officials considered that this initiative gave Iran a wider space for diplomatic maneuver, in light of its close relations with Beijing as a strategic partner and major energy importer. (Al-Arabiya, 10 April 2026)

These moves go beyond the Middle East, as Beijing is engaging in a multi-directional diplomatic path to highlight itself as a responsible force capable of managing international crises, in a context that precedes the upcoming meeting between US President Donald Trump and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping, which gives the Chinese movement a global negotiating dimension. European government statements, including a Spanish position, also confirmed that "the Chinese role is important in finding diplomatic paths to stop the war and restore stability in the Middle East." Spain appears to be one of the most prominent European supporters of expanding trade and dealing with China as a strategic ally, not an economic and geopolitical competitor as Trump sees, as Reuters reported on 14 April 2026.

This presence cannot be separated from a deeper structural fact: that China now possesses the material capabilities that qualify it to be a major power in the world. However, this transformation is not yet embodied in the form of a confrontational force, but instead in the form of economic and diplomatic influence, that is quietly expanding within the vacuums left by the traditional powers.

This dynamic is linked to Iran's stance in the Chinese strategy, as the relationship between Beijing and Tehran represents one of the pillars of the Belt and Road Initiative, as Iran constitutes a geographical node between Central Asia and the Middle East, and a vital corridor for energy and trade, which directly clashes with the theory of dominance over strategic bottlenecks, or chokepoints, that America adopts as part of its expansionist policy.

Here the fundamental paradox emerges: China did not enter the crisis as a confronting force, but instead as a managing force. It did not seek to change the balance of power militarily, but instead to adapt to it and employ it politically. This reflects a difference in the philosophy of power, more than it reflects a decisive superiority of one model over another.

America, which has built its influence for decades on military presence and securing vital corridors by force, still relies on solid deterrence tools, and extensive coalition networks.

However, it seems that the matter cannot be resolved with battleships and planes, nor by dragging NATO countries into conflicts and paying the price for a war they did not start. On the other hand, China appears to be testing a different model based on economic interconnection, mutual dependence, and crisis management through mediation rather than confrontation, noting that it has established a military base in Djibouti, a few miles away from an American base in the same country near the Bab al-Mandab Strait.

Hence, Beijing moves with the logic of functional stability, that is, maintaining a minimum balance that allows the continued flow of energy, without engaging in direct military commitments that might put it in direct confrontation with the United States. This approach contributed to strengthening China's image as a force acceptable to various parties. It initially secured the passage of its ships, then presented itself as a balancer and not as a party to the conflict, as it considered, through its Foreign Minister Wang Yi, that the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz to prevent the movement of Iranian ships does not serve the common interests of the international community. (Reuters, 13 April 2026)

However, the implications of the Strait of Hormuz crisis go beyond direct Chinese behavior. According to an analysis published by the New York Times on 6 April 2026, power in the international system is no longer measured only by the size of armies or economies, but instead by the ability to influence strategic chokepoints, most notably the sea lanes. In this context, Iran has emerged to the fore as an actor capable of influencing global energy security through its geographical location, making Iran part of an equation whose effects extend to China as one of the largest energy importers. The Independent newspaper pointed out that China emerged from the crisis in a calm and confident manner, benefiting from the West's preoccupation with managing escalation, without a move to the position of leadership of the international order.

Despite this progress, China appears to be in a transitional phase: it has not become a hegemonic power, but it is no longer a marginal power, but rather an international actor moving within the voids of a "crumbling" international order, as the Chinese president described it while receiving the Spanish Prime Minister. (Reuters, 14 April 2026).

As energy market volatility increases, the shift towards electric cars is emerging as one of the potential alternative paths, which may enhance the presence of Chinese companies in this sector as they are among the actors who benefit most from reshaping the global energy economy.

Although China sought to avoid a direct confrontation externally and to exploit the division within the Taiwanese arena, by opening up to some opposition forces at a sensitive political moment, in order to obstruct a US arms deal for Taiwan worth \$40 billion, the future of its international role remains dependent on its ability to balance four interconnected matters: the expanding economy, geopolitical exposure, cautious military power, and the symbolic image in the Muslim lands. While its expansion in the Middle East and Central Asia enhances its economic presence, it remains trapped in the global capitalist order from which it cannot escape, and the issue of the Uyghur Muslims remains a sensitive element, prone to political and moral exploitation in contexts of international rivalry and a "silent dark shadow" that accompanies Chinese global expansion.

Here, we have the right to ask, whose hands have been stained for decades with the blood of Uyghur Muslims in East Turkestan? Has China prepared itself for a stage in which power is no longer measured only by what is accomplished on the ground, but also by what generates global political awareness, that is being molded today by the blood of the sons and daughters of the Islamic Ummah, to write a new chapter in the history of humanity, entitled: the Khilafah Rashidah (Rightly Guided Caliphate) on the Method of the Prophethood?!