



Diplomacy by Proxy—and China as the Quiet Winner in Iran

by Paolo Pontoniere

A growing strand of European coverage is beginning to frame the Iran crisis in terms that barely register in U.S. discourse. Not “war by proxy,” but something more subtle: diplomacy by proxy.

The structure is clear. Pakistan is the visible broker—hosting talks, carrying proposals, and moving between Washington and Tehran. But in *Le Monde*, *Corriere della Sera*, *La Repubblica*, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, *El País*, and *L’Orient-Le Jour*, that role increasingly appears to be part of a broader Chinese design. Anglo outlets are more cautious but still place Islamabad within a broader balance that includes Beijing.

What sharpens the picture now is China’s more open tone. At the U.N., Ambassador Fu Cong has denounced the U.S. naval blockade as “dangerous and irresponsible” and called for a ceasefire and “intensive mediation” to restart talks. Beijing is simultaneously pressing Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz while insisting on its sovereignty—a calibrated position that aligns de-escalation with China’s core economic interests.

The result is hard to miss: China is quietly coming out ahead. Its energy lifelines remain the central concern, its diplomatic profile rises without direct exposure, and it positions itself as indispensable to any settlement. The U.S. applies pressure, while China shapes the conditions.

Not the lead negotiator, but the power behind the scenes. Less visible, increasingly decisive. 🌿