
CHINA SIGNALS VETO IN STANDOFF OVER UN AFGHANISTAN MISSION

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Diplomats say China wants reference to its Belt and Road project in mission renewal as Tuesday deadline looms.

China and the United States are deadlocked over a United Nations Security Council resolution to extend the world body's political mission in Afghanistan, with Beijing signalling it will cast a veto because there is no reference to its global Belt and Road infrastructure project, diplomats said on Monday.

A planned vote by the 15-member Security Council to renew the mission, known as UNAMA, was delayed from Monday to Tuesday to allow for further negotiations. The mission's mandate expires on Tuesday. To pass, a resolution needs nine votes in favour and no vetoes by the US, France, China, Russia and Britain.

Ahead of the postponement, diplomats said China was expected to veto a resolution - drafted by Germany and Indonesia - that did not reference the Belt and Road project. China's UN mission did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

China was then planning to propose a vote on a short draft resolution, known as a technical rollover, to allow the mission to keep operating, diplomats said. But they added that it could fail to get the nine votes needed to pass because several council members were considering abstaining.

The UN mission, which was established in 2002, is helping Afghanistan prepare for September 28 elections and is pushing for peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

Talks between the US and the Taliban on a US military withdrawal fell apart earlier this month.

There are 14,000 US troops and thousands of others from NATO in the country, 18 years after a US-led coalition invaded following the September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda attacks on the US.

The UNAMA mandate is renewed annually by the Security Council. The resolutions in 2016, 2017 and 2018 all included a reference welcoming and urging efforts like China's Belt and Road initiative to facilitate trade and transit.

But when it came time to extend the mandate again in March, the US and other Western council members wanted the language removed, sparking a standoff with China. The council ended up adopting a six-month technical rollover to allow the mission to keep operating.

At the time, acting US Ambassador Jonathan Cohen slammed China for holding "the resolution hostage" by insisting "on making it about Chinese national political priorities rather than the people of Afghanistan."

He criticised Beijing's Belt and Road initiative - to link China by sea and land through an infrastructure network with southeast and central Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa - for "known problems with corruption, debt distress, environmental damage, and lack of transparency."

At a Security Council meeting on Afghanistan last week, Cohen referred to the continuing impasse with China.

"We strongly believe this mandate is too important at this moment to have one Security Council member deny consensus for reasons having nothing to do with UNAMA," Cohen said.

China's UN ambassador, Zhang Jun, did not specifically mention the negotiations on the UNAMA resolution, but said Beijing was working with Afghanistan to advance "the Belt and

Road construction to actively support the Afghan rebuilding and its reintegration into the regional economic development."

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