



Number: G&RS-10

June 12, 2023

## CHINA'S NEW PUSH FOR ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE TALKS: WILL IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

### Author(s):

*Dr Muhammad Shabbir*  
(Research Fellow)

### Edited by:

*Amb (R) Fauzia M. Sana*

China has been making efforts to revive the stalled peace talks between Israeli and Palestinian officials. In April 2023, Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang held telephonic conversations with top diplomats from both sides, renewing hopes for reconciliation in one of the world's most volatile regions.<sup>1</sup> This comes after several years of deadlock, with little progress made on the peace process since the collapse of US-brokered negotiations in 2014 while Israel's policy of illegal settlements in occupied territories continues. However, the development came soon after China facilitated the revival of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. While China has long advocated for a two-state solution, this latest push could prove to be a crucial turning point in the conflict. This article will examine China's initiative to resume peace talks, the likelihood of its success and Pakistan's role in it.

### China's Stance on the Israel-Palestine Conflict

In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping offered a four-point plan for peace to Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas.<sup>2</sup> This proposal was reworked and renewed in 2017.<sup>3</sup> The four-point plan that Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi proposed in 2021 to defuse the growing Palestine-Israel conflict mirrored past plans.<sup>4</sup> Consistent with China's position on the conflict since the early 1990s, these proposals have called for a two-state solution based on the 1967 boundaries, condemned human rights violations and aggressiveness on both sides and advocated for mediated negotiations.<sup>5</sup> This stance of China on the conflict is in line with the international consensus and the principles espoused by the so-called "moderate" Arab side. So far, though, these suggestions have not resonated with the relevant parties.

### China's Relationship with Israel

With annual bilateral trade of almost \$15 billion, Israel is China's largest trading partner in the Middle East.<sup>6</sup> When it comes to military technology, Israel is a major source for China that the United States is reluctant to share. US-China Economic and



Security Review Commission data shows that Israel supplied China with more weapons systems and advanced military technologies than any other country saves Russia.<sup>7</sup> Many business events have been held in both China and Israel, allowing for technology to be transferred from Israel to Chinese corporations. There are also extensive ties between businesses in the two countries in the area of research and development, which led to the signing of a general "R&D Cooperation Agreement" between the two countries in 2010 and a separate R&D Cooperation Agreement with the municipal government of Shanghai, which provides funding for research and development for any joint projects of Israeli and Chinese companies. The United States has been angered by this relationship on multiple occasions, and on those occasions, it has pushed Israel to back out of numerous arrangements with China. However, rather than hoarding technology, the trend has been to share it.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the relationship between Israel and China has been steadily trending upwards.

### China's Relations with Palestine

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and other Palestinian organisations have far weaker ties with China.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the relationship between China and Palestine is not as strong as it is with other Arab countries that support the Palestinian cause. This, coupled with China's close relationship with Israel, could hinder China's ability to broker a lasting peace agreement between Israel and Palestine. However,

### Disclaimer

The views expressed in this Insight are of the author(s) alone and do not necessarily reflect policy of the NDU.

the recent development of China playing a significant role in fostering diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran has raised hopes for potential positive impacts on other regional conflicts, including the long-standing Israel-Palestine dispute.

### Likelihood of Success

While the details of China's latest proposal have not been made public, it is likely to build on previous proposals and call for a two-state solution. This could bring the US back into the fold, as it has been a proponent of a two-state solution for decades. However, given the current political climate in the US, the US being the key facilitator of the Abraham Accords, its support for Israel in declaring Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the ongoing tensions between the US and China, it is unclear how willing the US would be to work with China on this issue.

*China's push for the Palestine-Israel peace process is a sign of its growing importance in the Middle East, and it is likely to continue to play a significant role in the years to come.*

The United States and China have been engaged in a broader geopolitical rivalry, and any significant Chinese involvement in the peace process could be seen as a challenge to US influence in the region. Thus, if China were to make progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, it would likely be viewed by the US leadership through the lens of competition and influence in the Middle East. The US may raise concerns about China's involvement and that it is using the peace process to advance its strategic interests in the region. It could also try to work with other countries in the region to counter China's influence. Therefore, it will be important to see how China engages with both sides and whether it is able to make any meaningful contributions. In the immediate terms, the US is likely to take a wait-and-see approach to China's role in the peace process.

From China's perspective, its interest in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process stems from a combination of strategic considerations and the desire to enhance its influence in the Middle East. China has been on a diplomatic offensive in the region, as demonstrated by its successful brokering of the restoration of ties between Iran and Saudi

Arabia. By engaging in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, China aims to position itself as a trusted mediator and bolster its image as a rising superpower capable of playing a constructive role in the region. Additionally, Israel, known as the "start-up nation," offers technological advancements and innovation that align with China's own goals for development. However, it is important to note that the Palestine-Israel peace process is a complex and sensitive issue. There are many factors that will need to be considered in order to reach a successful conclusion. These include the right of return for Palestinian refugees; the status of Jerusalem; the security of Israel; and the borders of a future Palestinian state. Notwithstanding the challenges, the establishment of peace and stability in the region could unlock substantial trade potential, benefiting both China and Israel economically.

For Israel, China holds significant economic and political clout. Israel has developed strong relations with China, particularly in the fields of trade, technology, and research and development. Israel may view China's involvement as an opportunity to diversify its diplomatic alliances, as China is the world's second-largest economy and a rising superpower. While the US has traditionally played a leading role in Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, the relationship has occasionally faced strains, and the US may prioritise its own interests in the region. Engaging with China could provide Israel with an alternative avenue to explore potential solutions. Thus, there is reason to be cautiously optimistic about China's latest push for peace talks.

### Conclusion

To sum up, China's efforts to mediate the peace process have been met with mixed reactions. Some observers have praised China for its willingness to take on a difficult role, while others have criticised China for not doing enough to pressure Israel to make concessions. The key challenge for China to address is the one that has derailed previous peace talks, including the issue of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Notwithstanding the challenges, China's role in the peace process is a sign of its growing importance in the Middle East, and it is likely to continue to play a significant role in the years to come. If China can successfully mediate the peace process, it would be a major achievement that would boost its status as a global power.

## References

---

<sup>1</sup> Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin's Regular Press Conference on April 18, 2023. [http://at.china-embassy.gov.cn/det/fyrth/202304/t20230418\\_11061179.htm](http://at.china-embassy.gov.cn/det/fyrth/202304/t20230418_11061179.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Mordechai Chaziza, "China's mediation efforts in the Middle East and North Africa: Constructive conflict management", *Strategic Analysis* 42, no. 1 (2018): 29-41.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> "China puts forward four-point proposal regarding Palestine-Israel conflict", Xinhua News, 17 05 2021. [https://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-05/17/c\\_139950043.htm](https://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-05/17/c_139950043.htm)

<sup>5</sup> Mordechai Chaziza, "China's mediation efforts in the Middle East and North Africa: Constructive conflict management".

<sup>6</sup> Degang Sun, "China's partnership diplomacy in the Middle East", In *Routledge Handbook ON China–Middle East Relations*, pp. 299-311, Routledge, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> "Israel-China Relations". <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/israel-china-relations>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Guy Burton, "Palestine and China", In *Between Diplomacy and Non-Diplomacy: Foreign relations of Kurdistan-Iraq and Palestine*, pp. 219-237. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023.