



By: *The Editorial Board*

The inflation of China's peace initiatives



There is little prospect of success for China's latest peace initiative, this time (again) between Israel and Palestine. But that will not be a reason for Beijing to stop hyper-producing plans to solve major global crises.

Last Wednesday's meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Mahmoud Abbas in Beijing was the Palestinian leader's fifth visit to the Chinese capital in the past 20 years.

The long-lasting partnership, dating back to Yasser Arafat and the PLO, has been further enhanced by signing the Strategic Relations Agreement.

But is there any tangible proof behind the usual warm words and declarations that followed the last meeting between Xi and Abbas?

The Chinese leader used this opportunity to launch a new, three-part initiative for a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, even though there were no statements regarding details.

It was not necessary. The initiative includes the founding of a fully sovereign Palestinian state, within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Also, there was an invitation to all countries to increase their support for Palestine and organise a broad international conference to determine a solution for peace.

Nothing new about Palestine in 10 years

There are almost no differences between this and President Xi's initiative from ten years ago

when Abbas visited Beijing in May 2013.

At that time, Xi's initiative was considered China's ambition to become more actively involved in resolving the Middle East crises and achieve a more significant influence as a mediator in the region.

China's four-point plan for a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis attracted some attention but did not have any follow-up or effect.

After ten years, offering an almost identical plan does not make much sense. The previous initiative, and several similar attempts in the meantime (2017, 2021), did not produce any results.

However, Beijing has not given up trying to get a different result with almost the same moves.

Fulfilling the bureaucratic form

One explanation for this diplomatic behaviour could be China's highly bureaucratized political structure.

The "new" Chinese initiative for peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians will feature highly in one of the annual or five-year reports before the Congress and commissions of the Chinese Communist Party.

The 2013 Peace Plan had a similar destiny. Promoted by Xi at the very beginning of his leadership, clearly hinting that China, under him, would conduct a more active foreign policy, seeking a leadership position in global relations.

However, apart from celebrating it at the CCP

forum sessions, China's first peace plan for Israel and Palestine did not make any progress, or China's more serious involvement in the Middle East.

This time, Xi's plan represents one of a series of diplomatic attempts to resolve major global crises in recent months, like the diplomatic thaw between Iran and Saudi Arabia, or encouraging reconciliation between Arab countries and Syria.

China's peace plan to end the Russian aggression against Ukraine has had no effect due to its biased position towards the regime in the Kremlin.

China abandoned multilateralism

Considering its widespread diplomatic actions in the Middle East, conducted almost exclusively on a bilateral level or through agreements within small regional alliances, China has deviated from its principle of broad multilateralism as a universal way to solve problems in the world.

Under Xi, and particularly in the period after the lifting of the three-year lockdown, Chinese diplomacy has taken on an extremely pragmatic form based on offering mediation services wherever there is an opportunity, and wherever it sees an economic or political profit.

It appears as a mediator, relying on its growing economic power and the long-term influence vacuum the US has left behind, particularly in the Middle East.

Unlike mediation between Tehran and Riyadh, and with increasingly frequent initiatives in

the Arab world, China does not have economic but exclusively political motives regarding Palestine.

China is aware that the Israeli-Palestinian talks stopped in 2014, when the dialogue was under the US mediation, and that there is no possibility of renewal in a different format.

Dialogue with the Israelis is also uncertain because of the intra-Palestinian conflicts between Abbas's Fatah and Hamas, which is unlikely to stop as long as Abbas is in a leadership position.

In addition, it is inconceivable that Israel would enter into any negotiated arrangement with the Palestinians mediated by Beijing and not Washington.

The Middle East as a trump card for dialogue with the US

That is why the goal of the new Chinese effort in the Middle East has little to do with Palestine or ambitions to resolve its conflict with Israel.

It is another of Beijing's steps towards self-promotion as a new global player in the Middle East, presenting itself as capable of solving existing crises.

Frequent diplomatic operations in the Middle East will serve Beijing as negotiating capital at the "big table" with the US, perhaps even during the forthcoming visit of Secretary of State Antony Blinken to Beijing at the end of this week.

Beijing has been trying to lower US pressure regarding the repression of the Uyghurs whilst

acting as a friend of the Islamic world and offering a series of various initiatives to calm the conflict in the Middle East.

It is less significant for Beijing that most of these initiatives, including the latest one with Palestine and Israel, will not bring a result. It is crucial that there are as many as possible, and that the perception of China as a factor capable of stabilising the Middle East can be as widespread as possible.