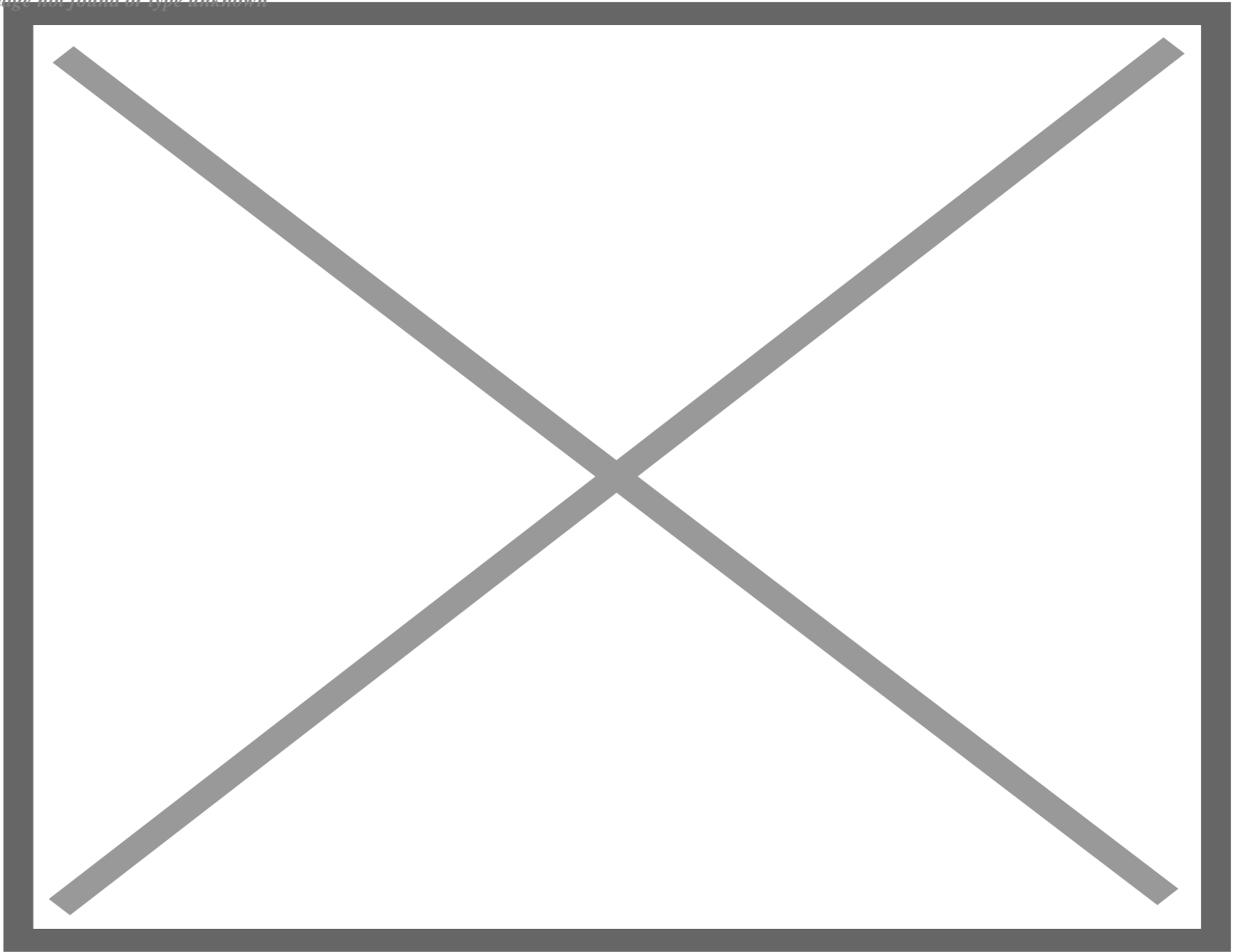


Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in China for official visit

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President Xi Jinping and President Mahmoud Abbas walking in Beijing
Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has visited Beijing a number of times [File: Jason Lee/Reuters]

Beijing, June 13 (RHC)-- Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas has arrived in Beijing with China expressing readiness to help facilitate Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. Media giant CGTN said Abbas landed in the Chinese capital on Tuesday morning for a four-day state visit. It is Abbas's fifth official visit to the world's second-largest economy.

Official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported that Abbas is expected to meet China's President Xi Jinping during the trip. The two are set to "exchange opinions... on the latest developments on the Palestinian arena as well as on regional and international issues of mutual concern", Wafa reported. Abbas will also meet Premier Li Qiang, the news agency added.

The longtime Palestinian leader is an "old and good friend of the Chinese people", foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said last week. "China has always firmly supported the just cause of the Palestinian people to restore their legitimate national rights," he added.

Beijing has sought to boost its ties to the Middle East, helping broker a rapprochement in March between rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran, and challenging long-standing United States influence. Xi travelled to Saudi Arabia last December for the first China-Arab States Summit on a trip during which he also met Abbas and promised to "work for an early, just and durable solution to the Palestinian issue".

In an interview with Chinese state news agency Xinhua published this week, Palestinian official Abbas Zaki said China and the Palestinians were "friends closer than brothers." "I am very pleased to see that China has been more involved in Middle East affairs after the China-Arab States Summit last year," he added.

The US has sought to address heightened Israeli-Palestinian tension, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken urging Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu not to undermine prospects for a Palestinian state.

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