

## Saudi Foreign Minister Meets Syria's Assad in Damascus

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has met with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud in the most significant step yet towards ending Syria's decade-long regional isolation.

The visit is the first by a Saudi official to Syria's capital since the start of the country's civil war in 2011. The Saudi foreign ministry said in an online statement that the visit showed the kingdom's desire to find a political solution to Syria's conflict that would preserve the country's "Arab identity, and return it to its Arab surroundings". The trip comes less than a week after Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad visited Saudi Arabia, also on the first such visit since the conflict began. Syria's war has killed more than half a million people, while around half of the country's pre-war population has been forced from their homes. Al-Assad is hoping normalisation with the Gulf States could bring economic relief and money for reconstruction. With the uprising now halted and another regional ruler safe on his throne the surrounding rulers are normalising relations which will eventually lead to the wider world normalising relations with Syria.

## China Offers to Mediate 'Israeli'-Palestinian Peace Talks

China's foreign minister told his 'Israeli' and Palestinian counterparts that Beijing is ready to help facilitate peace talks, Chinese state media reported. In separate phone calls with both officials, Foreign Minister Qin Gang said on Monday that China is concerned about rising 'Israeli'-Palestinian tensions and supports a return to peace talks. China has offered to mediate between the Jewish entity and Palestine in the past. Its most recent pitch came during the May 2021 war between the Jewish entity and fighters in the besieged Gaza Strip, when it introduced a four-point peace proposal. An Egyptian-brokered bilateral cease-fire with US backing eventually ended the fighting. Qin told 'Israeli' Foreign Minister Eli Cohen that the Iran-Saudi deal offered "a fine example" of overcoming differences through dialogue, according to the Chinese foreign ministry statement. It remains to be seen if China can turn its words into actions as China has no influence in the Middle East and its relations are largely based around its need for oil.

## Afghanistan's Economy on Brink of Collapse

Nearly 34 million Afghans, 85% of the population are living in poverty and the country's economy is on the brink of collapse, a new UN report shows. According to the report, in 2020 the number of Afghans in poverty was 19 million compared to 34 million now, a 15 million increase. Much of the blame had to do with the Taliban taking over the following year, the report noted. In 2021, many aid programmes were cut back when countries refused to deal with the Taliban, resulting in an economic crisis. In order to survive, Afghans have been selling their homes, lands and assets to generate income. Some people have turned their children into labourers and their daughters into child brides, the report says. According to the report, the funding requirements today for Afghans to maintain their expenditures may have reached \$5.3 billion from the \$900 million needed two years ago. Whilst the report blames the Taliban for all the ills of the country the report failed to look at the 20-year occupation by the US and the corruption and mismanagement of the country.