

Rules of China-US interaction show key changes

By Tian Feilong

The recently concluded 2022 G20 Leaders' Summit was highly anticipated, and the most noteworthy one was undoubtedly the meeting between the heads of state of China and the US.

China has just completed the agenda of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC). The process of national rejuvenation and global governance has entered a new stage. "Chinese modernization" has been proposed at the 20th CPC National Congress, which is an integrated system of all basic elements of Chinese civilization and modernization development elements.

However, for the Western system, which is accustomed to Western-style modernization and its hegemonic dividends, "Chinese modernization" and its prospects cannot be easily accepted. Preventing or even blocking China's national rejuvenation process is regarded by war hawks as the most critical battle in the defense of Western hegemony. Accordingly, the political significance of the meeting between the two heads of state is particularly important, but if one thinks that a single meeting can solve the structural difficulties of the escalat-

ing struggle in bilateral ties, it will not age well from a historical perspective.

The US is used to drawing lines for China, but in Bali, China drew lines for the US. The differences are that the US drew the line of hegemonic interests, while China drew the line of sovereign interests. The ability to draw lines reflects both sovereign strength and global governance capabilities. This shows that the rules of interaction between China and the US have undergone key changes. "The Taiwan question is at the very core of China's core interests, the bedrock of the political foundation of China-US relations, and the first red line that must not be crossed in China-US relations," President Xi Jinping said during his meeting with Biden. This is an unprecedented shift in tone, as well as a new type of major power diplomacy.

In addition to drawing the bottom line, China also proposes specific rules and elements for interactions on Taiwan question: First, resolving the Taiwan question is a matter for the Chinese and China's internal affairs. China has the right to resolve it in its own independent way, and external forces, including the US, have no right to intervene. Second, anyone that seeks to split Taiwan from China will be violating the fundamental interests of the Chinese nation. Third,

the US should assume the responsibility of restraining "Taiwan independence" forces and to provide support for all legal actions taken by China to sanction "Taiwan independence" forces. Fourth, China hopes that the US side will match its words with action and abide by the one-China principle and the three joint communiqués.

In terms of rhetoric and diplomatic logic, President Joe Biden responded positively and affirmatively. Although Biden administration has repeatedly emphasized the need to establish guardrails with China to avoid open conflict, and avoided using blatantly aggressive words, its actual actions are almost the same as those of the war hawks.

The so-called guardrail may not be translated into a realistic mechanism and binding framework. The US' softer stance toward China is due to the fact that it is mired in the quagmire of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, global governance challenges, and multiple domestic conflicts, and its strength is dwindling. It has to change its strategy accordingly, and its demand for cooperation with China has expanded to a certain extent.

There are rational and pragmatic forces within the Biden administration, but it is also under strong pressure from the hawks. Whether the above positive

signals can really build resilient strategic guardrails for bilateral relations, however, remains a doubtful prospect.

Since the Biden administration took office, the two heads of state have met virtually and exchanged views, but the actual implementation has been much less effective. Whether this meeting is a turning point in the structural détente and rapprochement of China-US relations or another routine diplomatic interaction of a more symbolic than substantive nature, it will need to be carefully observed. For China, complete reunification across the Taiwan Straits cannot simply rely on Taiwan island but must rely on Chinese people on both sides of the Straits as a whole. That we clarify our bottom line is a signal that what we engage is a just fight. A clear bottom line is a rational choice to manage extreme risks and crises.

Now the pressure of choice has been passed to the US. It is unclear whether the US will act responsibly, pursue the Cold War route, or even take extreme risks to turn Taiwan into the second Ukraine. It is where the future structural risks of China-US relations lie.

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US can hardly find other kit other than coercion in its toolbox for Gulf countries

By Ai Jun

The same day the 2022 FIFA World Cup kicked off in Qatar, with Chinese elements abound both on and off the field of the games, a White House official told US Gulf allies that deepening certain ties with China would hamper their cooperation with the US.

Bloomberg reported that Brett McGurk, the White House's Middle East Coordinator, told a panel Sunday at the IISS security conference in Bahrain, "There are certain partnerships with China that would create a ceiling to what we can do... It's simply a fact and that's the truth here as anywhere else in the world, based upon relationships between countries that are military competitors of ours."

The US playbook is all too familiar: attempting to coerce Gulf countries to take sides, and interfering in their diplomatic and domestic affairs.

Some observers say increasing cooperation between China and Gulf countries may have become a stick in the US' throat. The reason is simple – the US still perceives the region as its own sphere of influence, even if Washington is withdrawing from the Middle East.

For some time, the White House has been holding on

to wrong perceptions, the US' loss must be China's gain, Ding Long, a professor with the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University, told the Global Times.

With such a mentality, it has been piling pressure on its allies and partners, telling them with whom they can and cannot cooperate with.

The Bloomberg report raised one example – A \$23 billion deal to purchase F-35 jets and other weaponry with the United Arab Emirates was suspended after failing to agree on conditions for the protection of US defense equipment. "The Biden administration has also pressured the UAE to remove Huawei Technologies Co. from its telecommunications network, and has pushed it to distance itself from China, the biggest buyer of Gulf oil," reported Bloomberg.

The Gulf countries are not buying US words. They are now sobering to the fact that the US has little else to offer other than geostrategic maneuvering. "When Washington keeps hyping the narratives like so-called China influence over and over again, it means the US is running out of tools,"



Illustration: Chen Xia/Global Times

force as an enemy or a threat. Against such a backdrop, other countries will naturally be under pressure to purchase arms from the US, He Wenping, a professor at the Institute of West Asian and African Studies under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, told Global Times.

Relations with the US based on military cooperation can no longer win the hearts and minds of the people in the Gulf region, nor the trust of the ruling elites, said He. The rulers need to take into consideration the interests of their countries. The US does not come for construction, but military deployment, which does not help in local development. So they naturally turn to more diverse diplomacy.

It is Washington's one-sided illusion that the Gulf region will surrender once the US imposes pressure. US President Joe Biden paid a visit to Saudi Arabia in July to talk about the oil prices and launched a new chapter of bilateral ties, but in the end Saudi Arabia decided to slash oil production along with its OPEC allies against US wishes. This indicates that the times when the Gulf countries echoed whatever the

US said have gone.

The first China-Arab Summit will be held in December in Saudi Arabia. It is believed the summit will represent a landmark in relations between Arab countries and China. The summit itself signals Gulf countries' strong will to cooperate with China. It also shows that it would be futile for the US to maintain its clout in the Gulf region by imposing pressure and interference, according to Ding.

Moreover, regional countries such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE have become dialogue partners of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Earlier, Saudi Arabia expressed its interest to join BRICS. The future of the Gulf will not revolve around the US, but will around its own interests, emphasizing its own independent and diverse diplomacy. If the US does not reflect on the sharp contradiction between its Middle East policy and the interests of the Gulf, there will be no other convenient kit in the toolbox of the US to exert influence.

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