



Illustration: Liu Rui/Global Times

Who is unhappy about Syria's return to the Arab League?

The Arab League on Sunday agreed to reinstate Syria's membership, which is another exhilarating news to the Middle East recently. This is the latest progress after the emergence of a reconciliation wave caused by the resumption of diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran. It marks the beginning of a correct path toward a political solution to the Syrian crisis – “continue direct dialogue with the Syrian government in order to reach a comprehensive solution.” In this sense, Syria's return to the Arab League after a 12-year suspension symbolizes a new height of solidarity and self-development among Arab countries, and brings more confidence in peace to the Middle East which was viewed as a “powder keg” of the world. We sincerely feel happy for Syria and the Arab League.

Many analyses hold that there are two major reasons for Syria's return to the Arab League: First, the big earthquake that struck the Turkey-Syria border region in early February has accelerated Arab countries' steps to restore diplomatic relations with Syria; second, Saudi Arabia and Iran who were opposed each other in the Syrian crisis have achieved historic reconciliation under China's mediation, providing direct impetus for the Arab League's decision. Last month, Special Envoy of the Chinese Government on the Middle East Issue visited Syria and had an in-depth exchange of views with Syria on seeking a political settlement of the Syrian issue and facilitating Syria's return to the Arab League. The Chinese Foreign Ministry expressed congratulations on Syria's return to the Arab League on Monday, noting that as a sincere friend of Syria and other Arab states, China welcomes and supports Arab solidarity and will continue to work relentlessly to that end.

Over the past 12 years, Syria has experienced heartbreaking hardships. In 2011, the Syrian crisis erupted amid the “Arab Spring.” At that time, the Arab League suspended Syria's membership under the pressure from the West. Subsequent military and political intervention by external forces has further worsened the situation in Syria, resulting in catastrophic consequences that continue to this day. During this period, countries in the Middle East have suffered from war, social division, and frequent conflicts, making their desire for unity, peace, and development stronger than ever before. The Syrian Foreign Ministry emphasized “dialogue, mutual respect, and the common interests of Arab countries” in its latest statement, which reflects the common desire of regional countries.

From any point of view, Syria's return to the Arab League is a happy matter, but there are exceptions. The US and Britain openly expressed “criticism” and claimed that Syria “should not

be readmitted.” Bloomberg reported that Arab League readmitted Syria after more than a decade of isolation “in defiance of US;” The Wall Street Journal claimed that US influence is waning in the Middle East. It appears that Washington seems to have an overwhelming reluctance and non-acceptance of the independence and autonomy shown in the Middle East. Of course, it will feel uncomfortable. The tragic stories that have occurred in Syria and the Middle East in recent years are largely due to Washington's Middle East policy of “playing one side against the other.” In its eyes, the desperate plight of ordinary families and their lack of sufficient food are just dust on the boots of the US military and not worth mentioning.

But the fact once again proves that when the shadow cast by Washington becomes smaller, the dawn of peace becomes bigger. Arab countries have not lost anything due to their independent foreign policies, but have achieved dialogue, reconciliation, and won respect. Egyptian Foreign Minister Samer Shoukry said on Sunday that “The different stages of the Syrian crisis proved that it has no military solution, and that there is no victor nor defeated in this conflict.” This can be seen as a subtle response to Washington's past practices of stirring up regional conflicts and abusing military forces. This view is becoming increasingly common in today's international community. Some American media sourly said that the Arab League's decision to readmit Syria represents a rejection of US interests in the Middle East as Arab countries forge policies independent of Western concerns. But they really got it wrong this time. It is not that Middle Eastern countries are “independent of the West,” but rather the fact that the West is isolating itself from the entire international community.

Not long ago, on the 12th anniversary of the Syria war, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for “renewed energy” to be channeled into peace efforts. Syria's return to the Arab League is a good start for a political solution to the crisis, but there are still many obstacles ahead. For instance, the US' illegal unilateral sanctions on Syria have created many hindrances for further cooperation in the region. We firmly support united and strong Arab countries, and also hope to work with the international community to bring the sunshine of peace and the hope of development to every corner of the world, especially in places shrouded by the shadow of hegemony.

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US' railway plan a mere copycat, hard to win favor from Middle East

According to media reports, national security advisors from the US, India, Saudi Arabia and the UAE met in Saudi Arabia on Sunday to discuss a US proposal to link the Middle Eastern nations through a network of railway lines and connect the region to South Asia via sea lanes.

US media outlet Axios, which ran an exclusive report before the talks, said, “The project is one of the key initiatives the White House wants to push in the Middle East as China's influence in the region grows. The Middle East is a key part of China's Belt and Road vision.”

Xu Liang, an associate professor at the School of International Relations, Beijing International Studies University, told the Global Times that the US is trying to coordinate its Middle East policy with its South Asia policy, thereby creating a US-style railway plan in the Middle East that is different from China's initiative. “This is the revival of the Cold War mentality in the Middle East. The plan is a deliberate containment of China's Belt and Road Initiative,” said Xu.

China has been engaging with the Middle East through the Belt and Road Initiative for years. Its peacemaker role in the recent Saudi-Iran detente has been lauded by the international community, countries in the region in particular, and injected momentum of stability to the region. All these trajectories have deeply worried the US.

Ding Long, a professor with the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University, believes that the US is saving its declining influence in the region with something it is not good at, which will make the US' rail plan hard to achieve its desired goal.

According to a report released by the American Society of Civil Engineers in 2021, the US spent just over half of what was required to support infrastructure, the backbone of the economy.

Even former US president Donald Trump once compared the US' crumbling infrastructure to that of a third-world country.

It is worth mentioning that the victims of the calamitous train derailment accident in East Palestine, Ohio, are still suffering. There were at least 1,164 train derailments across the US last year, according to data from the Federal Railroad Administration. Here is another startling data: The Bureau of Transportation Statistics found that 54,539 train derailments occurred in the US from 1990 to 2021, an average of 1,704 per year. If there is



something that the US could export to the Middle East besides its “democracy” and “freedom,” it must be the freedom to derail.

The US, the most powerful country in the world, performs so poorly in terms of railway construction and infrastructure. As it's now trying to woo Middle Eastern nations to establishment a network of railway lines, it is a mere copycat. While connectivity and win-win cooperation are in China's mind when it is promoting infrastructure, what is in the mind of the US is countering its perceived rivals and sustaining its global hegemony.

“In terms of the technology and costs of building railways, no other country in the world than China has the prominent advantage. What the Middle Eastern countries want from the US is not a railway, but security. However, the US did not and could not bring security to the region, but messed up the security situation there. This is the dilemma the US is facing in the Middle East,” said Ding.

Now the Middle East is witnessing a strong wave of rapprochement. “The regional countries care more about their interests, and aren't following US lecturing. As their independence and autonomy is increasing, the Middle Eastern countries will not buy into US tactic of forming small cliques,” said Ding.

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“All acts of violence carried out against migrants on US territory and at its border are the responsibility of that authority [Biden administration].”



Twitter user @camilapress commented on Monday.