

VIEWS

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US must help end Middle East conflict

Israel unleashed another round of air strikes on Gaza City on Monday which was heavier and on a wider area than the series of attacks a day ago in which 42 Palestinians were killed and the house of a Hamas leader was razed. The Israel-Palestine conflict has simmered since April, escalating sharply on May 10 after Hamas set an ultimatum for Israel to withdraw its forces from the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, where hundreds of Palestinians were injured in clashes with Israeli police earlier that day.

That some Palestinian families in East Jerusalem neighborhoods such as Sheikh Jarrah face eviction to make way for Jewish settlements is main reason behind the latest escalation. Sheikh Jarrah is a predominant, though not exclusively, Palestinian neighborhood, whose residents claim Israel is illegally evicting Palestinian families from their homes.

However, a private Israeli NGO claims it has the legal title to the property in question and the tenants have to be evicted and thus breached the law. To a large extent, Sheikh Jarrah reflects the political development of Palestine over the years.

The escalation of the conflict can also be attributed to the coming elections in Palestine, and the uncertainty over government formation in Israel. The Palestinian presidential election to be held in July, too, faces uncertainties, as Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas announced in April that the parliamentary elections scheduled for May 22

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have been postponed until further notice. "We have decided to postpone the elections until the participation of our people in East Jerusalem is guaranteed," Abbas said.

In reality, however, disunity within, and a lack of confidence on the part of the Palestinian National Liberation Movement, also known as Fatah, have led to the deferment of the parliamentary elections — Fatah fears that Hamas, which governs the Gaza Strip, will probably win the elections again, as it did in 2016, if they are held on time.

Unhappy with the postponement of the elections and to win the support of more Palestinians, Hamas launched a rocket attack on Jerusalem on May 10, inviting a disproportionately heavy response from Israel.

As for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, he missed the May 4 deadline to form a new government even six weeks after the country's fourth election in less than two years, prompting Israeli President Reuven Rivlin to

invite opposition leader Yair Lapid to form a government. But the intensification of the conflict has upset the fragile balance between Arab and Jewish citizens in Israel and made it harder for Lapid to cooperate with the Arab parties to form a government. Which benefits Netanyahu.

The Iranian presidential election scheduled for June 18 could also have an impact on the Gaza conflict, not least because the Iranian government is closely linked with Hamas in Palestine, and the Hezbollah group in Lebanon, while Iran and Syria are strategic allies. Therefore, if the conflict escalates further, Israel will have to guard against potential attacks from militants in Lebanon and Syria.

But the current conflict is not likely to develop into a large-scale war, because despite strengthening its military, Palestine still lacks the firepower to confront Israel. On the other hand, Israel has its own concerns. If it pounds Gaza Strip too heavily, the international community will be forced to intervene. And given the barrage of rockets fired by the Palestinians despite being pounded by Israeli missiles, Israel realizes that if the conflict intensifies, it will face even fiercer attacks. So neither the Gaza leaders nor the Israeli politicians want the conflict to be prolonged.

Nevertheless, there is an urgent need for the United Nations, Arab countries that recognize Israel such as Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, as well as Turkey and some major countries to mediate between Israel and Palestine

to end the conflict. In this context, the United States has a key role to play.

Israel-Palestine ties worsened and the interests of Palestinians were grossly compromised during the administration of previous US president Donald Trump, who controversially recognized the disputed holy city of Jerusalem as Israel's capital in 2017, and promoted the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020 to normalize relations between Israel and some Middle East countries.

On its part, China, which assumed the rotating UN Security Council presidency this month, urged the council to hold two rounds of emergency consultations on the Palestine-Israel issue, in order to help end the conflict. But both meetings ended without issuing any statement on ending the conflict because the US opposed it. By taking the opposite position vis-à-vis the international community, the US allowed the Israel-Palestine conflict to intensify.

Since US President Joe Biden claims to be different from Trump, the international community hopes his administration will fulfill its international responsibilities by not opposing international justice and persuading Israel and Palestine to end the current hostilities and eventually reach an agreement to permanently settle the Israeli-Palestinian disputes.

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Liu Hu

Vaccine IPR waiver may end up being just US posturing

Since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus pandemic, international organizations, such as the United Nations, and developing countries have been calling on Big Pharma to waive intellectual property protection for COVID-19 vaccines, so as to increase vaccine production and ensure equitable vaccine distribution across the world.

Under increasing international pressure, the Joe Biden administration announced on May 5 that it supports temporarily lifting IP protections, with US Trade Representative Katherine Tai saying the US would participate in negotiations at the World Trade Organization to achieve the goal of IPR waiver.

With the virus still raging in India and some other parts of the world, the US' stance will boost cooperation in the global fight against the pandemic. Yet, in spite of earning praise from the WHO and the European Union, the US administration has invited severe criticism from American pharmaceutical companies and Germany for its stance. And as a fallout of the US decision, the stock prices of US vaccine makers Pfizer and Moderna have plunged.

The Joe Biden administration faces three challenges in turning its statement into an effective tool to boost the global fight against COVID-19. First, it is difficult to skirt international and domestic laws on IP protection. The IP protection waiver means the patent owner loses, even if temporarily, the right to prohibit others from using its patent, which could have serious legal consequences in the future.

Even if the proposal becomes a reality, the US has to help amend relevant international agreements under the WTO framework and then apply the new ones to its domestic laws. The current agreements on IP protection are mainly the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property, the Patent Cooperation Treaty, and the WTO's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights.

And even if all patent holders waive their IP rights, it would take a long time for countries to pass relevant legislation after the WTO approves the proposal.

Adherence to TRIPS is mandatory for WTO member states, which are required to protect other countries' IP rights in the same way as they would protect theirs, although this has led to the formation of monopolies. Way back in 2001, WTO members passed the Doha Declaration allowing governments to issue compulsory patent licenses during a public health crisis based on TRIPS. In October, India and South Africa jointly proposed to the TRIPS Council that IP protection for the vaccines be temporarily lifted, which most developed countries including the US opposed.

The TRIPS Council will discuss the proposal again on June 8 and 9, and the Biden administration has to persuade other WTO members to follow its example, which will not be easy. The US also has to persuade American pharmaceutical companies to temporarily waive their IP rights, lower the threshold to access the patents and/or reduce vaccine prices. If the companies reject the idea, Washington must invoke the Bayh-Dole act which empowers the federal government to exercise march-in right to issue patent licenses during emergency situations and pay compensation to the patent holders.

But it will be very difficult for the Biden administration to overcome the legal barriers at home and abroad, as three days after the US announcement on May 5, German Chancellor Angela Merkel reiterated her opposition to the proposal. On the same day, the CEO of Pfizer published an open letter telling employees that the company had rejected the proposal.

Second, the dispute over the patents began in February last year, with opponents questioning whether the waiver will address the vaccine shortage globally. Take the mRNA vaccines which Pfizer and Moderna have developed. At least 113 patents are involved in their R&D and production process, 70 percent of which come from the industry. Which means not all IP rights are owned by the vaccine manufacturers.

And even if all patent holders waive their IP rights, it would take a long time for countries to pass relevant legislation after the WTO approves the proposal. As Anthony Fauci, President Biden's chief medical adviser, said: "Going back and forth, consuming time and lawyers in a legal argument about waivers — that is not the end game. People are dying around the world."

Third, it will not be easy for many US officials to abandon their "America First" and Cold War mentality, although they know combining the developed world's high-tech and the developing world's manufacturing is the most effective way to boost the global fight against the virus and address the vaccine shortage problem.

History tells us that for the common interest of humankind, the Soviet Union and the US put their ideological differences aside to work together to develop polio vaccines. And China and the US cooperated to produce the hepatitis B vaccine in the 1990s. But these are different times, because soon after Biden supported the move to waive IP protection, Republican Congressman Byron Donalds moved a bill, "Preventing Foreign Attempts to Erode Healthcare Innovation Act" aimed at preventing "the Biden administration from senselessly giving away America's intellectual property to countries like China".

Since populism is still growing in the US, preventing the politicization of vaccines will be a big challenge for the Biden administration. And if the administration cannot overcome such challenges, its support for waiving IP protection for the vaccines would just be diplomatic posturing.

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Fu Xiaoqiang

China, Pakistan promote regional peace, stability

Pakistan was one of the first countries to recognize the People's Republic of China, and the two countries established formal diplomatic relations on May 21, 1951. Since then, China and Pakistan have maintained a rock-solid friendship irrespective of global developments, and Sino-Pakistani ties have become a model of diplomatic relations.

President Xi Jinping paid a historic visit to Pakistan in April 2015, elevating bilateral relations to an all-weather strategic cooperative partnership. During the visit, he said that the two countries share a special friendship, and have always supported each other on core interests and major national concerns.

During the visit of Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan to China in November 2018, the two sides agreed to build a Sino-Pakistani community of shared future in the new era.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China and the 70th anniversary of the establishment of Sino-Pakistani relations. Also, China is set to achieve its first centenary goal of building a moderately prosperous society, and its goal to realize the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation resonates with the Khan administration's vision of "Naya Pakistan".

Sino-Pakistani friendship entered a new era when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, with the two sides supporting each other in the fight against the novel coronavirus.

Pakistan was the first country to receive COVID-19 vaccines from both the Chinese government and military. In April, the third batch of vaccines dispatched by the Chinese government arrived in Pakistan to help the country control the third wave of the pandemic, reflecting the ironclad friendship between the two countries.

Sino-Pakistani relations are the pillar of regional peace and stability, and the two countries share similar development and security interests. Even during the Cold War, the two sides worked together to break the geopolitical containment of the West, and helped stabilize the South Asian region.

Over the course of this century, China and Pakistan have been supporting each other in the implementation of anti-terrorism strategies. They also

support the Afghan peace and reconciliation process, and are promoting regional counter-terrorism cooperation.

The two sides reject the politicization of the COVID-19 pandemic, and have established a cooperation mechanism to contain the spread of the virus and organized meetings with other South Asian countries, in order to strengthen the global fight against the pandemic.

They have also set a benchmark for international cooperation, with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Gwadar Port being an important part of the Belt and Road Initiative. In fact, under the CPEC, 46 early-harvest projects have been launched or completed, and the CPEC is proceeding uninterrupted despite the pandemic. Besides, the electricity the CPEC energy projects generate accounts for about one-third of Pakistan's power supply.

The second phase of the CPEC is focused on industrial and agricultural development and better road connec-

tivity, and the two sides are reaping the benefits of cooperation in the Gwadar Port.

The world is undergoing unprecedented changes partly due to China's rise, while Pakistan plays an important role in the Muslim world. As such, Sino-Pakistani friendship is set to deepen further.

First, China and Pakistan both face complex security and have arduous development goals. China has made national development and security an integral part of the 14th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035. Pakistan, on its part, has introduced an economic security plan, emphasizing the integration of development and security. With cooperation in the fields such as technology, national security and poverty alleviation, the two sides will break the security and cooperation dilemma and set an example for sustainable development.

Second, the Belt and Road Initiative

is not a geopolitical tool and the Pakistani government has decided to shift its diplomatic focus from geopolitics to geo-economics, and lays emphasis on regional trade and investment.

The CPEC now links different economies and the further development of Sino-Pakistani ties will promote regional development and safeguard regional security, spurring the economic growth of neighboring Afghanistan and Central Asian countries.

Third, the future points toward a multipolar world, and the days when some countries set the international agenda are gone. And from now on, countries in the region will handle regional affairs through consultation. And since China and Pakistan already believe in this principle, they will contribute greatly to regional peace and stability.

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