

► Region should be wary of US attempts to create division, turmoil

# Blinken kicks off Saudi Arabia visit amid strategic dilemma

By Wang Qi

Amid the rapprochement momentum in the Middle East and the US' strategic dilemma in the region, Washington is trying to avoid the total collapse of its influence in the region, experts said on Monday, as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is set to start his three-day Saudi Arabia trip for security and economy talks.

Blinken's trip, from June 6 to 8, comes after a visit by White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan in May. Experts emphasized that Middle Eastern countries need to be wary of the US creating more turmoil and division in the region.

According to the US State Department, Blinken will meet with Saudi officials to "discuss US-Saudi strategic cooperation on regional and global issues and a range of bilateral issues including economic and security cooperation."

The top US diplomat will also attend the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

talks during his visit, and is set to co-host a meeting for the global coalition against ISIS.

Before Blinken's visit, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister Faisal bin Farhan met with his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in South Africa during the foreign ministerial BRICS summit on June 2, Iranian media reported.

In April, Saudi Arabia and Iran formally restored diplomatic ties after a seven-year rift. In May, foreign ministers from Arab League member states agreed to reinstate Syria's membership after its suspension for more than one decade.

With the rapprochement process in the Middle East accelerating, observers are not optimistic about Blinken's visit.

Liu Zhongmin, a professor with the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University, told the Global Times that Blinken's visit reflects the current predicament Washington is facing in its Middle East policy.

On the one hand, the US is shifting

its strategic focus to the Asia-Pacific region to compete with China. On the other hand, the US is reluctant to see its control in the Middle East weakened, Liu explained.

The US cannot stop the trend of increasing autonomy in the Middle East, so it is trying to avoid a total collapse of its influence in the region, Liu said.

Li Haidong, a professor at the China Foreign Affairs University, told the Global Times on Monday that Blinken's visit to Saudi Arabia would be a first-hand investigation and assessment.

In the process of adapting to the new situation in the Middle East, the US would try to promote the transformation of the region's internal environment along the direction of reflecting American interests and influence, Li said.

While the US is less likely to play a constructive role in the Middle East, its disruptive role cannot be underestimated, analysts said, especially given its military and diplomatic presence in the region that no other power can match.

## Strategic autonomy 'common aspiration of regional countries'

After leaders of some Southeast Asian countries firmly maintained that they would not take sides between China and the US, as many of them are dependent on China for trade and have deep security ties with the US – during the Shangri-La Dialogue on Sunday – China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded on Monday by saying it is the common aspiration of the regional countries to maintain strategic independence and keep the region stable and prosperous.

Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Wang Wenbin said at a routine press conference on Monday that these Southeast Asian countries' remarks – that they do not want to see a new cold war or to take sides between China and the US – are a clear indication that many countries in this region are alerted by and opposed to certain country's attempt to set off a "new cold war" in Asia and force regional countries to take sides.

What countries want in this region is to maintain strategic independence and keep the region stable and prosperous, he noted.

"What is particularly concerning is that certain countries, while claiming to champion freedom and openness and aim to preserve peace and prosperity in the region, have been in fact patching up various military blocs and extending NATO's influence into the Asia-Pacific," Wang said.

The attitude of the majority of countries in the region is very clear. They oppose the emergence of military blocs in the region. They don't welcome NATO's outreach in Asia. They don't want a replica of bloc confrontation in Asia. And they certainly will not allow any cold war or hot war to happen again in Asia, Wang stressed.

Wang also said that Asia is the most economically dynamic and promising region in the world. It can offer a vast stage for win-win cooperation, and should not be divided into isolated, exclusive blocs. Asian countries welcome common efforts to succeed together. They do not welcome schemes that could bring trouble to this region.

He reiterated that China firmly supports ASEAN centrality and an inclusive regional cooperation architecture.

Global Times

## ► Palestinian food aid



**Palestinians carry their share of food aid provided to poor families at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) distribution center, in the Al-Shati refugee camp in Gaza city on June 5, 2023. At present, some 5.9 million Palestine refugees are eligible for UNRWA services, according to the agency. Photo: VCG**

## Construction accidents reflect management loopholes, corruption in India's infrastructure

By Xu Keyue

While India was still reeling from the deadly train crashes that killed nearly 300 people on Friday, a bridge that is under construction over the Ganga river collapsed on Sunday. Although no casualties has been reported, the incident once again triggered a strong reaction in Indian society and the outside world, with heated debate over the country's management on infrastructure

construction and corruption problem.

The accidents have exposed a series of problems in India's infrastructure projects, and they may also deter foreign investment from coming to India while the US and some of its allies have been hyping the so-called de-risking and decoupling from China and transferring some industries to India, experts warned. They called on India to put aside geopolitics and cooperate with China for

better mutual development, as China is known as an "infrastructure maniac" around the world due to its mega projects.

The construction of the ill-fated Aguwani-Sultanganj bridge in Bihar's Bhagalpur district began eight years ago and was set to be completed this year. Slabs of its three pillars collapsed in April last year, which delayed construction, the Xinhua News Agency reported.

The collapse of the costly bridge on Sunday and the train

crashes on Friday are a microcosm of India's infrastructure problems. If India wants to improve the level and quality of its infrastructure, it must address many fundamental issues, otherwise it will only get itself into deeper trouble, said Long Xingchun, a professor of international relations at Sichuan International Studies University.

Some infrastructure projects in India lack scientific and rational planning and design, as well as effective supervision

and review mechanisms, making it difficult to ensure their feasibility and safety, Long told the Global Times on Monday.

Considering that the bridge construction is not technically difficult, shoddily built projects resulting from corruption of officials could have contributed to the bridge collapse, Long believes.

