



Can Philippine foreign policy be rational?

We hope the Philippines will demonstrate sufficient strategic wisdom to develop a future-oriented China-Philippines relationship **6**

More support urged for high-quality listed firms

Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng called for efforts to address difficulties faced by listed companies, stressing that improving the performance of listed firms is a priority **10**

China's aerospace endeavors ignite African youth

As China makes forward strides in its aerospace endeavors, it extends a collaborative hand to Africa's youth, fostering an environment for their aerospace dreams to take flight **8-9**

French farmers' strike



French farmers drive tractors to take part in road block protests on the A6 highway near Ormoy, south of Paris, on January 29, 2024, amid nationwide protests called by several farmers unions on pay, tax and regulations. Local branches of major farmer unions FNSEA and Jeunes Agriculteurs announced on January 27, 2024, a "siege of the capital for an indefinite period" starting at 2 pm on January 29, 2024, as some farmers deem the government's announcements in favor of the sector are insufficient. Photo: AFP

Excessive reaction to 'entangle US in Mideast crisis it tried to avoid'

Deaths of US soldiers pose challenge for Biden admin

By Zhao Yusha

The US has pledged to retaliate against the recent drone attack in Jordan that resulted in the deaths of three American soldiers and left more than 30 injured. However, determining the form of response presents a challenge to Washington.

An excessive reaction risks entangling the US further in

the complex Middle East crisis, while a weak response may undermine its global standing and appear embarrassing, said Chinese experts, noting that a continued US presence in the region will only bring the country closer to a real war.

Three US soldiers were killed and more than 30 injured in the drone attack on a US base near Jordan's border with

Syria. Scores of US personnel have been wounded, including some with traumatic brain injuries, during the attack.

After the incident, US President Joe Biden claimed the attack was carried out by "radical Iran-backed militant groups." He vowed "We shall respond," AP reported.

However, in a statement on Monday, Iran's mission to the

United Nations said that Tehran was not involved in the attack that killed the US service members, media reported.

The mission said, "Iran had no connection and had nothing to do with the attack on the US base... There is a conflict between US forces and resistance groups in the region, which reciprocate retaliation."

Philippines' Marcos kicks off Vietnam visit for maritime cooperation



By Wang Qi

Philippine President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos left for Vietnam on Monday for a two-day state visit, which is anticipated to mainly focus on the agriculture sector and coast guard cooperation, against the backdrop of the tensions in the South China Sea provoked by Manila.

Chinese experts said on Monday China is always open to cooperation among ASEAN member countries that is conducive to regional development and stability, while strongly opposes "cooperation" that targets a third party and harms others' interests. If Vietnam and the Philippines cooperate in certain areas to the detriment of China's interests in the South China Sea, it will only irritate the situation in the South China Sea and make the risk of conflict higher. According to the Voice of Vietnam, Marcos' first-ever Vietnam trip since his inauguration in 2022 aims to reaffirm the strategic partnership between the two countries, strengthen political trust at the highest level, and create momentum to bolster bilateral cooperation.

Before Marcos' departure, he said in a speech on Monday that he will discuss with his counterpart, Vietnamese President Vo Van Thuong, cooperation in trade and investments, education, and tourism, as well as "regional and multilateral issues of mutual concern."

Calling the state visit to bring the relations between the Philippines and Vietnam to "greater

2 More See also Page 6



► Embassy reopens



Luo Zhaohui (second from right), head of the China International Development Cooperation Agency, who participates in the reopening ceremony of the Chinese Embassy in Nauru as a representative of the Chinese government, and Nauru's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Lionel Aingimea (second from left), unveil a plaque for the Chinese Embassy during the ceremony held in a hotel in Nauru on January 29, 2024. A flag-raising ceremony was held on Monday in a compound that also houses the team's temporary offices. This marked the first time in nearly 19 years that the Five-Star Red Flag, China's national flag, has been raised in the Pacific island country. Photo: Xinhua

US request for Red Sea crisis shows 'perplexing contradiction'

► Possible, from Page 1

tory attacks." It is the first time that a strike has killed US soldiers in the region since the Palestinian-Israeli conflict broke out in October 2023.

A US official was quoted by the Telegraph as saying that the drone strike on US troops was "the most deadly attack since October 17," when attacks on US personnel in the region began, and "clearly an escalation of significance." He added that the Pentagon had launched an immediate investigation into how US air defenses did not repel the strike.

Headache for the US

Chinese experts questioned whether the retaliatory action will be confined to the militant groups that the White House has blamed for the attack, or widened to Iran, the country the US has accused of supporting those militant groups.

The US must target different militia groups in the region if it decides to carry out retaliatory attacks against militant groups, as the identity of the culprits behind the assault on US troops remains uncertain, said Tian Wenlin, a professor at Renmin University of China's School of International Studies. Tian further noted that the US may find itself trapped in a similar quagmire in the Middle East as it did following the 9/11 attacks.

In fact, the US is now in a bind as to what form its response will take. Engaging in excessive attacks on the militants or resorting to retaliatory measures against Iran would only serve to entangle the US further in the web of the Middle East crisis, a nightmare that the country is keen to avoid repeating. Conversely, a feeble

response would risk tarnishing Washington's image, leaving it vulnerable to accusations of embarrassment and weakness on the global stage, said Liu Zhongmin, a professor at the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University.

Liu said that the US is facing growing pressure as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict drags on, thus the US dilemma of choosing how to respond to the recent attack reflects the contradiction in its Middle East strategy of engagement and withdrawal. According to experts, the US' involvement in the Middle East appears increasingly perilous, even if it were to overlook this particular attack. The potential sinking of a US warship by militant factions in the region would not only pose a severe challenge to Washington's image, credibility, and hegemony but also bring the country closer to the brink of war, cautioned Liu.

Yemen's Houthis launched a rocket at US warship Lewis B. Puller as it sailed through the Gulf of Aden on Sunday, the group's military spokesman said in a statement on Monday.

Reaching out

As the US finds that handling the Middle East crisis is getting thornier by the day, it is now seeking China's help to assuage the conflict in the Red Sea, as the Houthi armed group continues attacking ships in the region.

Wang Yi, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, held a new round of talks with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan from Friday and Saturday in Thailand.

According to a readout issued by the Chinese Foreign Ministry, the two talked about not only bilateral

relations, but also regional and international issues, including the Middle East, Ukraine, the Korean Peninsula and the South China Sea.

After the meeting, a number of US media outlets reported that the US failed to prod China into pressuring Iran to stop Houthi attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea.

The Biden administration has been making the case to Beijing that it should help "in terms of quieting some of those attacks, but whether it chooses to use that leverage in that way, I think that remains to be seen," said a US official on Saturday, US media outlet Politico reported.

Counting on China to pressure Iran to stop Houthi attacks is an overly simplistic notion, because China is not in a position to pressure Iran, and neither do the Houthis completely follow Iran's orders, said Liu.

China has been making active efforts to ease tensions in the Red Sea from the very beginning, having called for an end to the attacks on civilian ships and urging relevant parties to avoid adding fuel to the tensions in the Red Sea, Wang Yi said in an interview with the media after concluding his trip to Africa earlier this month.

The US has displayed a perplexing contradiction in its approach toward China's involvement with Middle Eastern countries. While it has often viewed China's collaboration with these countries with a sense of envy, it now finds itself seeking China's assistance in resolving the ongoing crisis, said Liu, who added that the US should take a lesson from the Red Sea crisis and recognize the imperative nature of cooperating with China on Middle East issues.

More conflicts to rise if coast guard deal harms China's interests: experts

► Philippines, from Page 1

heights," Marcos is also scheduled to meet Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh and Chairman of the National Assembly Vuong Dinh Hue. According to the GMA Network, Marcos will also meet with the business sector to explore how his country can further strengthen trade and investment between the Philippines and Vietnam.

Before Marcos' departure to Vietnam, the Philippine Coast Guard said the two countries will sign a memorandum of understanding on cooperation between their coast guard forces, "toward promoting, preserving, and protecting mutual interest," according to the CNN Philippines.

In particular, the discussions will center on marine environmental protection, search and rescue, as well as setting "hotline" of communication for easier coordination.

Gu Xiaosong, dean of the ASEAN Research Institute of Hainan Tropical Ocean University, said that Vietnam and the Philippines are both ASEAN member countries and it is normal for them to interact with each other and strengthen bilateral exchanges and cooperation.

Chen Xiangmiao, director of the World Navy Research Center at the National Institute for South China Sea Studies, said that China, Vietnam, and the Philippines have overlapping claims in some of the South China Sea regions. The Philippine and Vietnamese coast guard cooperation is based on the mutual recognition of the enforcement of the waters, which means that China's sovereignty claims are excluded and ignored, said Chen. "If Chinese fishing vessels run into waters claimed by China, which the Philippines and Vietnam also claimed, then it will put more pressure and cost on our maritime rights protection, because the Vietnam and Philippines coast guards could share information and cooperate in law enforcement based on their agreement."

China is open to closer economic, trade and food security cooperation between Vietnam and the Philippines, as it is conducive to the economic and industrial cooperation of the whole region, said Chen. However, if their cooperation harms the interests of third parties, including China, it will only deteriorate the situation in the South China Sea, making the risk of possible conflict greater, noted Chen.

Position of Vietnam

Before Marcos' recent visit, in December 2023, Chinese President Xi Jinping concluded a successful visit to Vietnam. Leaders of the two countries held in-depth and candid exchange of views on maritime issues during Xi's visit, with both sides stressing the need to better manage and actively resolve maritime disputes, so as to safeguard peace and stability in the region.

China and Vietnam have enjoyed closer ties in recent years. "China and Vietnam share a land border, and the two countries have close political, economic and cultural exchanges," Gu said.

Both countries are led by a Communist Party and enjoy good-neighborly friendship, which makes it unlikely for Vietnam to join other countries against Beijing on the South China Sea dispute at present. And in the long run, much remains to be seen as Vietnam-Philippines relations deepen, Gu said.

Despite the South China Sea disputes between Vietnam and China, Vietnam's South China Sea policy is also multi-faceted, and it also emphasizes cooperation with China, Chen remarked.