

US-Japan-Philippines bloc 'to put regional security in jeopardy'

Blinken visits Manila; may eye an AUKUS-like mechanism: expert

By Zhao Yusha

A trilateral cooperation mechanism of the US, Japan and the Philippines is about to take shape with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to Manila on Tuesday, paving the way for a summit of the leaders of the three countries scheduled for next month.

Chinese experts believe it is a move by Washington to create an AUKUS-like clique in Asia aimed at China in the South China Sea. However, such actions not only risk stirring up military confrontation in the region, they also weaken ASEAN's role in region and put regional countries' security in jeopardy.

In Manila, Blinken criticized China's "provocative actions" in the South China Sea on Tuesday, as he reaffirmed the US' security commitment to the Philippines at the start of his two-day visit.

In response, Lin Jian, spokesperson from China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs admonished that "the US is not a party to the South China Sea issue and has no right to interfere in the maritime issues between China and the Philippines" at a

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press briefing on Tuesday.

Lin said that military cooperation between the US and the Philippines should not undermine China's sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea, nor should it be used to support the illegal claims of the Philippines. "China will continue to take necessary steps to firmly safeguard its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests and uphold peace and stability in the South China Sea."

Blinken's visit is seen by Chinese observers as partly to incite the Philippines to continue its provocations in the South China Sea and partly to pave the way for a summit of the US, Japan and the Philippines that is scheduled for April.

US President Joe Biden will host his Philippine counterpart Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on April 11 for the first three-way summit with the Asia-Pacific allies, the White House said on Monday.

The summit is expected to result in a trilateral cooperation mechanism, and will push the three countries to speed up cooperation in security, industrial chains and other areas, Li Haidong, a professor at the China Foreign Affairs University, told the Global Times. Li pointed out that US's marshalling of Japan and the Philippines is intend to create an Asian military clique, centered on US.

The mechanism will lead to countries in Asia-Pacific region becoming reliant on the US for security, and will ultimately form a security architecture where they are at the mercy of the US, Li said.

Chen Xiangmiao, director of the World Navy Research Center at the National Institute for South China Sea Studies said the trilateral mechanism will fragment the geopolitical landscape in Southeast Asia as small cliques will weaken the dominance of ASEAN.

He said on the South China Sea issue, the US is highly likely to encourage the Philippines and Japan to continue creating friction with China, and to push more countries in the region to take sides between China and the US.

New Zealand always regarded as a sincere friend, important partner: ambassador

GT EXCLUSIVE

By Lu Hanqi in Wellington

Although the international situation is undergoing complex and profound changes with increasing challenges, China has always regarded New Zealand as a sincere friend and important partner, and is full of expectations and confidence in the future development of the bilateral relationship, Chinese Ambassador to New Zealand Wang Xiaolong told the Global Times in an interview on the occasion of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to the country.

Speaking of the bilateral relations over the past 10 years, Wang Xiaolong said that China and New Zealand have been deepening and expanding mutually beneficial cooperation on the basis of mutual respect, mutual benefit, and seeking common ground while shelving differences, bringing tangible benefits to both countries, especially their peoples.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has indeed had an impact on cultural exchanges between the two countries, since last year, the two countries have restarted scientist exchange programs, he said. The Xuelong 2 research icebreaker has made multiple stops in New Zealand for supplies and exchanges. The Chinese women's field hockey team, men's soccer team, and film production teams have visited New Zealand. Chinese tourists and students have also accelerated their return to New Zealand, revitalizing cultural exchanges between the two countries.

Although the international situation is undergoing complex and profound changes with increasing challenges, the importance of China-New Zealand relations has not changed, Wang Xiaolong stressed.

"The complementarity of the two countries' economies has not changed, and China's positive attitude and policies towards the development of China-New Zealand relations have not changed," he told the Global Times. "China has always regarded New Zealand as a sincere friend and important partner, and is full of expectations and confidence in the future development prospects of the two countries' relations."

India on election footing



Indian police officers and paramilitary personnel check vehicles for cash or any prohibited items after general elections were announced last week, in Hyderabad, India on March 19, 2024. India announced its six-week-long general elections will start on April 19, with most surveys predicting a victory for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bharatiya Janata Party. Photo: VCG

Israel sends delegation for cease-fire, hostage release talks 'to respond to intl pressure'

By Deng Xiaoci

Israel reportedly sent a delegation to Qatar for talks on a Gaza cease-fire and prisoner exchange local time on Monday. Chinese observers view such diplomatic work by Israel as a way to respond to international pressure to some extent. However, fundamentally, they will not change Israel's brutal military actions in Gaza.

According to media reports,

Israeli officials said the broad proposal being discussed includes a 42-day pause in the fighting in exchange for the release of 40 of more than 100 hostages taken from Israel and held in Gaza by Hamas or its allies. But they emphasized that they expected reaching an agreement to take a long time.

"One of the obvious drivers behind Israel's move is mounting pressure from the international community, including

opposing voices from the conventionally pro-Israel Western world," said Cui Heng, a scholar from the Shanghai-based China National Institute for SCO International Exchange and Judicial Cooperation.

The situation on the Gaza battlefield has become more complicated than Israel expected, so it needs time to rearrange its military forces, Cui said.

US President Joe Biden spoke by phone US local time

Monday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Commenting on the Biden-Netanyahu phone call, Liu Zhongmin, a professor at the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University, said that "it simply continues America's hypocrisy in handling the crisis in Gaza."

"While the US set military ground forces entering Rafah as a red line, it fails to specify the consequences if it's violated

by Israel. The US emphasizes humanitarian aid but repeatedly vetoed cease-fire calls at the UN Security Council," Liu said.

"In essence, the US cannot exert effective pressure on Israel, change its current unilateral strategic approach, or prevent more brutal humanitarian crises in Gaza," Liu warned.

