



## New US, Japan defense budgets 'target China'

After the US and Japan announced record defense budgets for 2024, experts warned the move aims to maintain hegemony amid grave security situation **3**

## Respiratory diseases show declining trend

China's respiratory disease cases have been showing a declining trend with COVID-19 cases reaching the lowest level of 2023, China CDC said on Sun **4**

## China's modernization process gains appeal globally: GT survey

According to a latest survey conducted by the Global Times Institute in 20 countries, about 60 percent of respondents from foreign countries believe that China's global influence is rising **8-9**

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### ► Christmas eve alert



**German police officers at the entrance to Cologne Cathedral control the start of early mass on December 24, 2023. Due to indications of a planned attack, the local police have stepped up security measures. Neither police agency specified the threat, but the German news agency dpa said authorities were responding to signs of a possible attack by "Islamic extremists," without citing a specific source. Photo: VCG**

## Red Sea risks expand with 'little effort from US' for cease-fire in Gaza

By Yang Sheng

US President Joe Biden has not asked Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for a cease-fire in Gaza, even though the crisis has spilled over to more and more regions as attacks targeting ships related to Israel have occurred not only in the Red Sea but also in the Indian Ocean.

Chinese analysts said that the navigation problem brings pressure to everyone along trade routes, but the conflict and humanitarian crisis in Gaza are the cause of these attacks. Arab and Islamic countries in the region are divided about how to deal with the problem, so before the end of the conflict, it is unlikely that attacks against Israel-linked ships will come to a halt.

According to the statement released by the White House on Saturday, leaders of the US and Israel discussed "Israel's military campaign in Gaza" to include its objectives and phasing. Biden emphasized "the critical need to protect the civilian population including those supporting the humanitarian aid operation," and "the importance of allowing civilians to move safely away from areas of ongoing fighting."

Biden told the media on Saturday that he "did not ask Netanyahu to negotiate a cease-fire," despite rising pressure to do so. Pro-Palestine protesters launched a "No Christmas as usual" campaign, and took to the streets on "Super Saturday" en masse in multiple major Western cities including New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, London and Toronto.

The "Shut it Down for Palestine" movement, made up of pro-Palestine groups, **2** Spillover

### ► More exchanges help stabilize bilateral ties, expand cooperation: expert

# China-US interactions increase amid a rocky year of relations

By GT staff reporters

China-US relations have undergone a rocky year in 2023, from the US hyping "balloon incident," to Washington's continuous attempt to crackdown on China on almost every front, while the summit meeting between the two heads of state in San Francisco in November brought temporary detente.

**GT YEAR 2023 ENDER**

Although the US still largely holds competition as the dominant theme of bilateral ties, interactions on people-to-people exchanges, climate issue, drug control and some other areas between the two countries have increased.

Experts said those interactions can help consolidate guardrails of China-US relations, and help form a driving force that may lead to more cooperation between the two countries, thus will be conducive to stabilizing an unpredictable bilateral relationship. Whether the world's most important bilateral ties can be less tumultuous in 2024 than this

year, it depends on Washington's ability to avoid spillover effects of US domestic politics, such as the presidential election, and both countries' willingness, as well as ability to solve specific issues troubling bilateral relations and expand areas of cooperation, said experts.

The Chinese Embassy in the US **2** Non-govt



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## Victorious celebration



**Ahunim Addisu Workeneh, a marathon runner from Ethiopia, raises his hands in celebration as he crosses the line in first place in the men's event of the 2023 China-ASEAN Marathon on December 24, 2023. The race, held in Fangchenggang, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, saw nearly 20,000 participants from China and ASEAN member countries, as well as other countries and regions.** Photo: cnsphoto

# Non-govt communication key to reducing misperception: expert

►China-US, from Page 1

held an event recently to commemorate the 52nd anniversary of Ping-Pong Diplomacy. The Peking University table tennis team was invited to attend the commemorating events in Washington and San Francisco. The team has also participated in the 2023 USATT Table Tennis Open Championships at the Ontario Convention Center in California, the Xinhua News Agency reported on December 18.

"What impressed me the most is the huge interest and enthusiasm the American youth showed during our visit to the US this time," Zhang Yuwen, a student from the Peking University table tennis team, told the Global Times. "Every time the Americans saw the name 'China' marked on our jerseys, they would come to ask where in China we come from; which games we play, and even wish us good luck in our games."

Chinese President Xi Jinping said at a welcome dinner by friendly organizations after the San Francisco summit in the US last month that China is ready to invite 50,000 young Americans to China on exchange and study programs in the next five years to increase exchanges between the two peoples, especially between the youth.

The importance of non-governmental exchange can never be underestimated as it serves as important channel for both sides to form objective and true understanding about each other, and it will help prevent misunderstanding and misjudgment between the two countries, Li Haidong, a professor at the China Foreign Affairs University, told the Global

Times on Sunday.

In August this year, Xi replied to a letter from the US-China Youth and Student Exchange Association and friendly personages from all walks of life in the US state of Washington.

"It is essential to encourage comprehensive exchanges and cooperation between the youth and students of both countries. It is particularly important to enable young people from both countries to understand each other's culture and values, especially after the pandemic," said David Chong, founder and president of the US-China Youth and Student Exchange Association, noting that his association is preparing for more exchange programs with US schools and youth organizations.

## Necessary interactions

The interactions between China and the US this year have reached a new level, the highest in at least the past five years, Wu Xinbo, director of the Center for American Studies at Fudan University, told the Global Times on Sunday, referring to not only frequent high-level officials' visits, but also consultation on issues including trade, drug control and climate change.

Before the COP28 meeting in Dubai, China and the US jointly released Sunnyland climate agreement in mid-November. The Chinese and American teams have worked together to support the success of COP28, which was also one of the goals of the previous joint climate statement between the two countries, Xie Zhenhua, China's special envoy for climate change affairs, said at a press conference along with US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry.

Interactions on those areas suggest that both countries are sincere about achieving concrete results in specific collaborations, experts said, therefore, joint cooperations on those areas aim to further strengthen general cooperation between the two sides and, where possible, facilitate cooperation in other areas that are difficult to cooperate on, said Li,

Looking forward, Wu said that the successful holding of the San Francisco summit, where a series of important consensus were reached, has become a highlight of China-US relations in recent years, or could be seen as a new starting point for China-US relations.

"While the summit meeting in San Francisco has helped stabilize China-US relations, the question now is whether we can move forward. Can we resolve specific issues disrupting bilateral relations and expand areas of cooperation? I believe this is possible, so next year's China-US relations are likely to show a distinct dual nature," said Wu. Particularly noteworthy is next year's US election.

Next year's China-US relations are expected to stabilize, said Li, explaining that the effect to stabilize the relations brought about by the intensive interactions between China and the US in the second half of this year will continue into next year.

Moreover, although the US may adopt an unfriendly rhetoric towards China during next year's presidential election, it will be difficult for Washington to roll out new policies in an election year, said Li, noting that the negative spillover effects of domestic politics in the US on China-US relations will be especially important to watch.

## Spillover effect to affect more countries if root cause not addressed: observer

►Red, from Page 1

had plans to "organize actions to boycott, disrupt, and rally at commercial centers on December 23," according to the website of the ANSWER Coalition activist group, the Hill reported. Protesters in New York City appeared to be chanting, "While you're shopping, bombs are dropping."

In the US, people who sympathize with Palestinians are mainly voters who intended to support Biden rather than Donald Trump, so in order to respond to these people, Biden must do something. However, he has yet made real efforts for a cease-fire, as Jewish groups are also important for Biden as key funders of Democratic candidates, analysts noted, saying that the Biden administration is facing an embarrassing situation. What Biden is trying to do at the moment is just political gesturing, and it has nothing to do with the situation in Gaza.

## Spillover effect

On Saturday, the attacks that target Israel-linked ships occur in Indian Ocean, which is the latest sign of risks expanding to commercial shipping beyond the Red Sea. Reuters reported that a "Liberia-flagged, Japanese-owned, and Netherlands-operated chemical tanker" struck Saturday off the coast of India was targeted by a drone "fired from Iran," the Pentagon said.

The attacks launched by some non-state actors in the region to some extent fit the demand among the Islamic world to support Palestinians in Gaza while the governments of those Arab and Islamic countries are unable to take any direct action to pressure Israel effectively.

This is why most Arab and Islamic countries refused to join the US-led joint patrols in Red Sea and also refused to directly condemn the Houthis militia in Yemen. Some might even tolerate these attacks, Song Zhongping, a Chinese military expert and TV commentator, told the Global Times on Sunday.

"Washington might want to use this incident to hype another civil war in Yemen so that it can force Saudi Arabia to return to the battle fields in Yemen, and then undermine the recovering ties between Riyadh and Tehran. But this attempt is unlikely to succeed," Song told the Global Times.

Liu Zhongmin, a professor at the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University, echoed that "joining the US-led and Israel-supported multinational patrol at this moment to target the Houthis would go against the shared justice and morality among the Muslim world. The biggest political correctness shared by the Muslim world at this moment is about opposing Israel and supporting Palestine."

However, the attacks will also affect the interests of many countries in the region and even the major economies around the globe. Reuters reported on December 18 that the attacks launched by Yemen's Houthi group on commercial ships at the southern end of the Red Sea have prompted several shipping companies to divert vessels, avoiding a route that would take them through Egypt's Suez Canal in the north and its link to the Mediterranean Sea.

"Therefore, not only will Israel pay the price, but the attacks will also damage the interests of major regional countries like Egypt. The approach they will likely choose to solve the problem will be pressuring the US and Israel to end the conflict and open corridors for humanitarian aid to enter Gaza, rather than joining the US-led coalition to fight the Houthis," Liu said.