

A new angle is needed to observe today's US

By Jin Canrong

Given the situation in US domestic and foreign policy, rounds and rounds of discussions among academic and public opinion circles on whether the US' self-correction ability has failed and whether the US has declined, have been going on for some time. The fundamental issue behind the questions is how should observers understand today's US?

The US is a superpower. Normally, for a major power, as long as there is no domestic chaos, its challenges from the outside are relatively controllable. But the current challenge for the US is that it faces a number of intensifying internal controversies.

To begin with, the US is faced with conflicts among different social classes. This contradiction has always existed, but has been aggravating in recent years. In 2011, Occupy Wall Street, a protest movement against economic inequality and the influence of money in politics broke out. Its slogan was, "We are the 99 percent," referring to income and wealth inequality in the US between the wealthiest 1 percent and the rest of the population. The movement came to an end in November 2011, but the contradiction has continued, leading to rising populism.

The second is political polarization, or growing contradictions between the left and the right. In the past, both Democratic and Republican parties had strong moderate forces. But the moderate forces have been waning over the years. The left-wing forces in the Democratic Party are keen to engage



in identity politics and pin labels on others. In the Republican Party, populist right-wing forces have obtained the upper hand. This has made it increasingly harder for both sides to reach any compromise. The US is thus trapped in a vicious circle of "veto politics," and has run out of governance capability.

The third is racial contradictions and tensions between blacks and whites. After the civil rights movement in 1950s and 1960s, the problem has been alleviated over time, but it is rising again today with more complexities, such as growing discrimination against Asians.

Whilst the above-mentioned problems are old issues for the US, there are also new headaches.

The fourth is the contradiction between the real economy and the virtual economy. As internet economy has been growing several times faster than US real economy, divisions and

contradictions have emerged among US capitalist groups. This has never happened in the US before. It means cracks are growing amongst US elites and the ruling class.

The fifth is the contradiction between globalism and nativism. People in US coastal areas and capitalist groups support globalization, as they have strong bonds with the outside world and have gained benefits from it. But those living in inland tend to support nativism.

Both old and new problems have made the US more complicated than ever before in modern times. Worse, the US lacks real politicians. There was a time when the US had Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, and other leaders with visions. But there is no one like them nowadays. There are numerous politicians, but they are mostly the puppets of different interests groups.

The US once had a system that could correct its errors, but now, people are not sure whether they could still say so.

Whether the US can once again demonstrate its resilience among all the puzzles depends on whether it can confront its problems, pool its resources and utilize strength to promote economic and technological development, slowing down its political infighting and bringing social contradictions under control.

But it seems the US can hardly face up to its problems. The Biden administration has kept blaming the Russia-Ukraine conflict for surging inflation, and blaming China for its domestic employment and broader economic problems. The fundamental logic of Washington is finding a scapegoat for its own failures, forcing others to take the medicine when itself is sick.

Moreover, the US is not as strong as it used to be. Years after the attack on Pearl Harbor during the World War II, the US built a considerable number of aircraft carriers, destroyers and fighter jets. But now, as its virtual economy squeezes its real economy, the strength of the US no longer exists. The US is like an old man, who had his glorious days, but has lost its ability to correct his own errors. Against the backdrop, a simple tumble could be fatal. Granted, the US is still the superpower. But with all its contradictions, observers need to view the country with a new angle.

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Foreign Policy sees China-Middle East ties through bloc confrontation, last thing region needs

"China Won't Replace the US in the Middle East," said Foreign Policy magazine on Wednesday, among a chorus of other US media outlets following President Joe Biden's trip in the region. As the talks about whether US is pivoting away from the Middle East are growing louder, Uncle Sam seemingly wishes to prove its leadership there again.

Foreign Policy made its point quite clear: Opportunistic China "remains uninterested in choosing sides in the region's ongoing power games." It argued that "Arab and Israeli concerns boil down to one overarching priority: containing Iran," and while "Beijing is uninterested in playing balance-of-power politics, let alone providing a security umbrella to the likes of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates," the US would continue to play a role in the game to oust Iran's leaders from power.

This is the typical logic of US-centrism. It shows when the US views China-Middle East relations, it sees the rela-

tionship only through its narrow-minded mentality. After the end of the Cold War, the US established its dominance in the Middle East, which is filled with hegemonism, power politics, infiltration and ideological values. More importantly, it consolidated its regional influence through bloc confrontation. The US believes this is the best model of foreign policy. As a result, when Foreign Policy analyzes China's role in the region, it adopted exactly the same logic and model of the US. This is poles apart from the reality.

If one can learn anything from the recent history of Middle East, there is one inescapable fact – the challenges confronted by Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya and other regional countries, are a mess left behind by US policies. How could any US media outlet possibly show off such an approach anymore? The result of the Biden's tour has only mirrored the fact that US credibility in the region is declining.

Compared with the US,

China has a completely different path in dealing with Middle East countries. China focuses on friendship and cooperation. There has been no cultural penetration, no missionary work, but only friendly cooperation and joint works against colonialism and hegemonism.

China is not a "newcomer" in the Middle East. The link between the two has been around since the ancient Silk Road. As a country that had once suffered from colonialism, China cherishes national sovereignty and does not interfere in other countries' domestic affairs. This is the cornerstone of China-Middle East diplomacy.

In recent years, as China's strength has been growing, it has also increased its participation in Middle East affairs. But China's manner in such participation is completely different from that of the US. Engaging in bloc confrontation is not China's way. Rather, it attaches significance in promoting security through development. The China-raised Belt and Road Initiative is the manifestation of this.

China believes that Middle East turmoil is a result of a lack of development and governance. Only by solving development problems can people achieve long-term peace and stability in the Middle East.

However, the logic of the US, just like what Foreign Policy suggests, is to solve the security puzzle in the Middle East by granting a security umbrella to one side and forming a military alliance to confront other regional countries. For instance, during Biden's tour this time, the US urged Arab countries to team up with Israel to counter Iranian missiles. This is typical confrontational and zero-sum thinking.

When Foreign Policy portrays China as an opportunist power, it exactly reveals that it is the US that is the true opportunist. The US cozies up to the Middle East only when it needs the region. Otherwise, Uncle Sam would simply ignore it.

At the moment, the US faces a dilemma. On the one hand, it wants to strategically pull itself out from the Middle East and

focus on major power competition elsewhere. On the other hand, it needs the Middle East badly given the severe energy crisis. This is the background of Biden's trip. In other words, the US is becoming more and more utilitarian in its Middle East policy.

What Middle East countries need most now is to achieve domestic political reconciliation and explore a development path that suits them together. Many of the challenges the Middle East is now facing are largely the problems left by the West. Concerning future development, the last thing they need is the zero-sum thinking of the US and bloc confrontation.

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