

WORLD

Doubts cast on US aims in Pacific region

With summit, island nations likely seen as pawns, not partners, analysts say

By YIFAN XU in Washington
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With the US hosting a summit of Pacific island leaders this week, some experts are questioning whether Washington's objective is to treat the nations as part of a geopolitical strategy rather than as partners.

"The US tends to see all policy actions through the geostrategic and national security lens," Sourabh Gupta, a senior fellow at the Institute for China-America Studies in Washington, told China Daily.

"As such, the Pacific island countries, despite having a population of less than 10 million, are first and foremost seen as ramparts constituting the second-island chain line of defense. For China, on the other hand, these countries are development partners."

President Joe Biden was scheduled to host the summit in Washington on Wednesday and Thursday. Officials and analysts say that the United States is looking to strengthen ties with the islands by demonstrating its commitment.

"Left to their own choices, the Pacific island states would much prefer to see themselves not as strategic pawns but as partners tackling the development and climate change challenges facing the South Pacific," Gupta said.

Gupta detailed what he believes are the US' motivations during the summit: "First, it will convene more such summits with the Pacific countries to maintain institutionalized continuity. Next, it will have senior and midlevel diplomats show up more often in the region to commu-

nicate its interest and commitment. Third, it will try to crowd-in allies as co-partners in the capacity-building of these Pacific island nations. All fine and good. But the real test will be in the staying power — or lack of — the US' commitment."

Patricia Kim, a Brookings Institution fellow, wrote in a blog post that the US has been criticized for overlooking the Solomon Islands and coming "too late to the region."

Zongyuan Zoe Liu, a fellow at the New York-based Council on Foreign Relations, said in an article carried by the Honolulu Civil Beat website that this is the first Pacific island summit held by a US administration, which "just goes to show the region from a historical perspective has not been our top priority."

US Vice-President Kamala Harris acknowledged that the US may not have provided the diplomatic attention the region deserved in a virtual address to the Pacific Islands Forum in Suva, Fiji, in July.

Nuke tests destination

In an opinion article under the headline "The US should get real about history and colonialism before China does", Akhil Ramesh, a consultant to the EastWest Institute, said that the Western countries have historically siloed the Pacific island nations as tourist destinations, sources of mineral and natural resources, and even as a destination for nuclear tests.

"The US conducted 67 nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands from 1946 to 1958, leading to health and environmental consequences that continue to affect residents today.

Those tests include the 'Castle Bravo' bomb at Bikini Atoll in 1954 — which is the largest thermonuclear detonation ever conducted by the US," he wrote, saying that the Biden administration should "revisit its understanding of history".

According to United Nations Comtrade data, most Pacific island nations' two-way trade with China overtook the flows with Australia from 2013.

Data released by Australia's Lowy Institute showed that China provided close to \$1.5 billion in foreign aid to the Pacific islands region in grants and loans between 2006 and 2017.

Because of their location, Pacific island nations usually see the climate as a top priority.

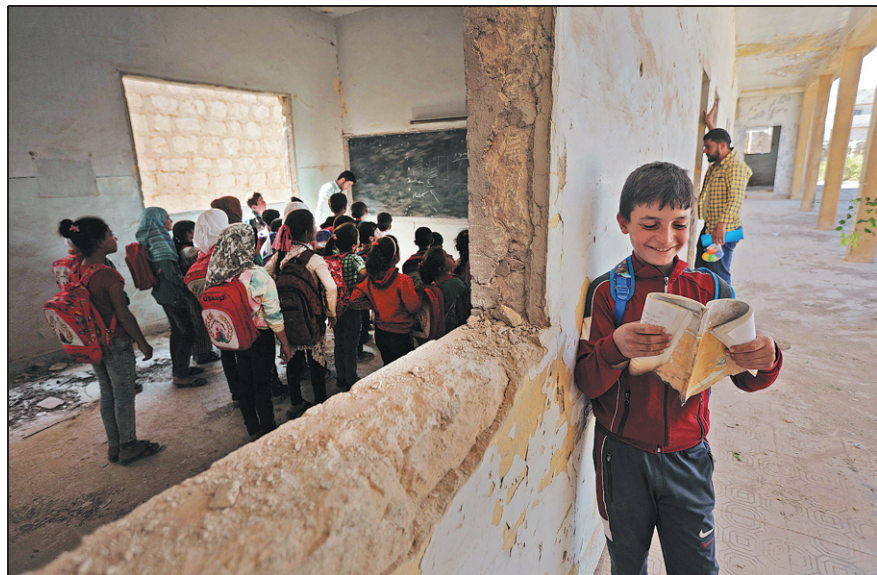
At the Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders held in Honolulu two weeks ago and attended by more than 10 leaders of Pacific island nations and territories, Gerald Zackios, the Marshall Islands' ambassador to the US, stressed "the existential threat that climate change poses".

"A fundamental problem in US-Pacific dialogue is that island leaders do not regard China as a threat to their security and do not find US references to 'rules-based order' or 'bad actors' particularly relevant," Terence Wesley-Smith and Gerard Finin wrote in an article published on the website of the Development Policy Center, an Australian think tank.

Wesley-Smith is a professor emeritus in the Center for Pacific Islands Studies at the University of Hawaii in Manoa, and Finin is a former director of the Pacific Islands Development Program at the East-West Center in Hawaii.

"Pacific leaders prefer to be engaged on their own terms rather than as part of a wider endeavor to counter China," they wrote.

Learning against the odds



Syrian schoolchildren keep up with classes on Monday in difficult circumstances in the rebel-held side of the divided town of Tadfir, about 30 kilometers from the northern city of Aleppo.

BAKR ALKASEM / AFP

Briefly

SAUDI ARABIA

Crown prince named prime minister

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud was appointed prime minister on Tuesday by royal decree. The royal decree appointing him as prime minister was carried by the Saudi Press Agency. It said King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud will continue to chair the Cabinet meetings that he attends. The 37-year-old crown prince has taken the lead on Vision 2030, the kingdom's wide-ranging plan to transform its economy and end its dependency on oil. US President Joe Biden visited the kingdom and met with the crown prince earlier this year, acknowledging the continued importance of relations with the world's largest oil exporter.

UNITED KINGDOM

New trade chief makes US her first trip

Britain's new Secretary of State for International Trade Kemi Badenoch will visit New York on Wednesday in her first overseas trip in the role. She is expected to stress the importance of the United States as a trading partner even as talks over a free trade deal between the countries are blocked. Liz Truss, who became prime minister this month, said Britain is not prioritizing a free trade deal with the US "in the short to medium term". Truss, herself a former trade minister, had previously highlighted such a deal with the US as a key opportunity of the UK leaving the European Union. Badenoch will highlight the importance of US investment in Britain even in absence of a free trade agreement.

PAKISTAN

Economic corridor seen reviving tourism

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, or CPEC, will help revive the tourism sector of Pakistan, which has faced a serious setback due to recent floods, Pakistan Tourism Department Corporation Managing Director Aftab-ur-Rehman Rana said. The CPEC includes a vast network of roads from the south, east and north of Pakistan, making resorts in north Pakistan accessible to tourists, and it will play a vital role in the revival of tourism when the situation becomes normal after the floods, Rana said. He said it will not only create economic activity in the local areas, but will also have a positive impact on the national economy.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Policy support enables the development of Nansha to gain momentum

By YUAN SHENGGGAO

Strong policy support from the central and local governments is expected to help Guangzhou's Nansha district in its endeavors to deepen opening-up and promote comprehensive cooperation among Guangdong province, Hong Kong and Macao.

The support includes 16 measures released on Sept 20 by the General Administration of Customs. The measures are expected to strengthen the convenient flow of production factors within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area; elevate Nansha's position as an international aviation logistics service center; bolster key project and platform construction; support Chinese enterprises to seize opportunities in the global market; and promote alignment of rules in the Bay Area.

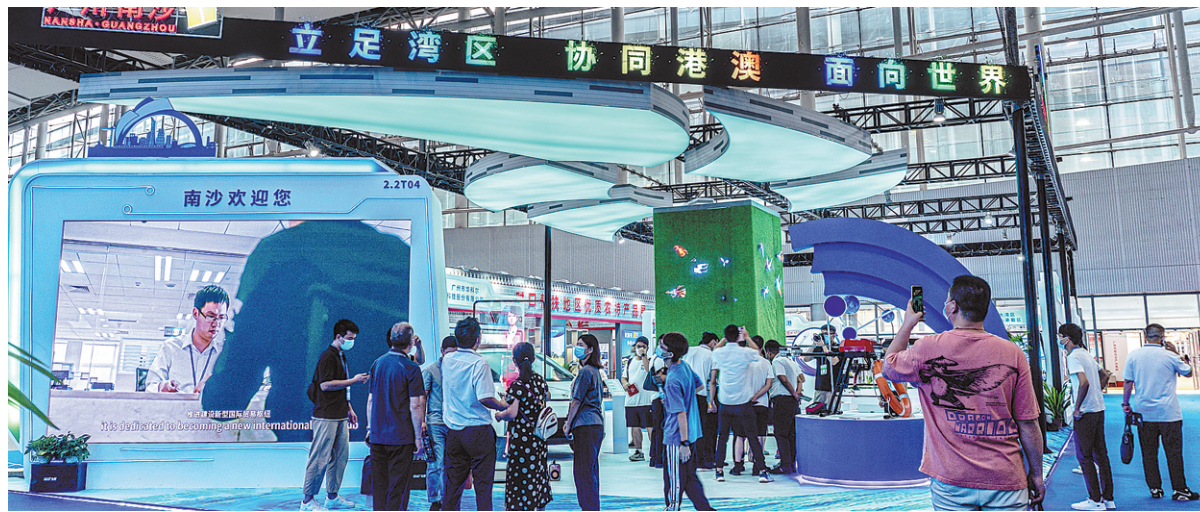
They are also expected to inject momentum into a wide range of scientific areas and support industries including bioscience and the vehicle trade.

According to the new customs measures, Nansha is allowed to adopt a positive-list approach in managing the import of research and development materials. R&D institutions from Hong Kong and Macao can apply for rapid customs clearance for products and samples for the purposes of R&D, testing and certification provided they have official certificates from the market supervision administration.

The district's cross-border e-commerce, bonded aircraft leasing, bonded bunkering for international ships also benefit from the new measures, so will new energy, the smart vehicle industry and imports of vehicles and core parts.

The measures also include support for Nansha to become a comprehensive service base for Chinese enterprises to seize opportunities in the global market. It will encourage big enterprises to set up regional headquarters or functional headquarters in Nansha and aid Nansha to set up a comprehensive service platform for offshore trade and to try offshore data services.

The customs' new measures came



Clockwise from top: Nansha demonstrates its vast potential at Guangzhou Fair in August. Nansha vows to provide premium services to residents and businesses. Customs officers work at Nansha Port Area in Guangzhou. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



about 100 days after the State Council released a master plan, known as the Overall Plan for Promoting Comprehensive Cooperation among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao by Further Deepening Opening-up in Nansha District of Guangzhou, on June 14.

According to it, Nansha is set to be a scientific and technological innovation industry cooperation hub; a youth entrepreneurship and employment cooperation platform; an important base and strong support for Hong Kong and Macao to better integrate into overall national develop-

ment; a rule convergence mechanism; and a high-quality urban development landmark.

Li Xi, Party secretary of the Guangdong Committee of the Communist Party of China, acknowledged the significant headway made by Guangzhou and Nansha district in carrying out the mid-June overall plan. He spoke when attending a meeting on Sept 19 to review the work over the last three months.

Li urged Nansha to redouble efforts in quality urban planning, modern traffic infrastructure, innovation and technology develop-

ment, continuous reform to support opening-up and business and living environment enhancements. He added that the provincial authorities of Guangdong will muster up resources and map out policies to help Nansha on its way to become a major world-oriented strategic platform rooted in the Bay Area, collaborating with the Hong Kong and Macao.

Over the last three months, Nansha has made solid progress in several fields including preparing new policies for attracting talent from Hong Kong and Macao and setting

up new scientific and innovation projects.

The district has hammered out concrete steps to carry out a favorable taxation policy released by the Ministry of Finance and the State Taxation Administration in August. It applies a personal income tax rate on Hong Kong and Macao residents working in Nansha that is the same as Hong Kong or Macao.

On July 20, Nansha launched its service center in Hong Kong. Together with the Consultative Committee on Guangdong-Hong Kong Co-operation (Guangzhou Nansha) Service

Center, which opened in mid-October 2021, it will promote exchanges between Nansha and Hong Kong in such fields as finance, sci-tech innovation, shipping and logistics, as well as professional services.

On Aug 30, the district secured 73 projects focusing on chips manufacturing, artificial intelligence, new energy, maritime technology, biomedicine, automobile manufacturing and high-end equipment during the 2022 Guangzhou Annual Investment Conference. The investment contracts were worth nearly 140 billion yuan (\$19.56 billion) in total, injecting new vitality into the scientific development of Nansha.

Nansha also made attempts to become a highland that promotes the alignment of international and domestic rules. In early July, a couple of lawyers from Macao who work in Nansha received licenses from the Guangdong Department of Justice to practice in the Bay Area. In late July, 16 engineers from Hong Kong and Macao were granted their mainland professional titles, to the effect that they can enjoy the same professional qualification and treatment as their counterparts on the mainland.

Set to be a landmark in quality urban life, the district witnessed the opening of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (Guangzhou) on Sept 1. The university is the first independent educational institution jointly established between mainland and Hong Kong universities since the development initiative for the Bay Area started in 2019.

On the same day, the Minxin Hong Kong School opened, ridding the Hong Kong residents who work in Nansha of concern for their children's education. The new school offers Hong Kong-style education.

Scan the QR codes below to learn more about Nansha.

