

COMMENT

Editorials

Washington won't reach summit it aspires to by always trying to force its way to top

Mike Johnson, speaker of the United States House of Representatives, made his first major foreign policy speech on Monday at the conservative think tank Hudson Institute.

It was no surprise the speech by the leading Republican in the House sounded at some points like a pro-Donald Trump Republican Party campaign manifesto. Nor that he openly disparaged Democratic Party leaders Barack Obama and Joe Biden and sang the praise of Trump. Nor the fact that much of his speech dwelled on the alleged "threat" from China. Or as he said, in his attempt to give his words more gravitas, "a China-led axis".

As former House speaker Nancy Pelosi convincingly demonstrated, the song remains essentially the same no matter which party is boss of the House. China-bashing is the new political correctness in the US Congress, where people can talk whatever rot is in their head without worrying about being held accountable so long as they present it as countering the "China threat".

Beijing has largely grown accustomed to taking such cheap shots as "a puff of wind passing the ear". Still, Johnson's speech on Monday was particularly bargain-basement bullets, and served only to expose how rotten things are in the state of the country.

In a rhetorical style that has become typical of Congress ravings, Johnson spoke of an "interconnected web of threats", from "enemies" such as China, Russia and Iran, "a group of nations openly aligned against the United States".

In his words, "Russia, Iran, North Korea, Venezuela, and even Cuba ... all wake up every morning thinking how they can take down America".

According to his account, weak Democratic leadership under Obama and Biden has exposed US vulnerabilities at "a fateful moment". His prescription is a return to the Ronald Reagan approach to the former Soviet Union and, not surprisingly, a second term for Trump.

With Trump, he argued, the US would embrace "a new policy of peace through strength". Praising his own leadership in the assault on TikTok — conveniently ignoring the fact that Trump has been prominently using the social media platform as part of his campaigning — he promised to focus Congress on "countering China with every tool at our disposal".

He also vowed to pass a "significant package of China-related legislation" by this year's end, from sanctioning Chinese companies to restricting outbound investment in China.

Parroting Trump, he highlighted the need for a "US-led, America-first coalition" to "reinstate fear" in America's enemies and "retake the summit of respect".

Unintentionally, that gets to the nub of the US' problem: Fear does not beget respect. It is the US' predilection for the use of force to bully and coerce and the divorced-from-reality hamming in the House that drag it inexorably down and ever further from the summit it aspires to. Even its clinging-to-privileges allies don't have any respect for the showboating of Washington although they debate themselves by going along with it.

Spouting paranoid gibberish may pass for hard-hitting certainty of purpose for a prime-time audience desperate for hope that things are going to change. But to earn respect and "Make America Great Again", Washington needs to display some humility. Constructive engagement will prove far more productive than Johnson's baby-milk formula of bloc confrontation. By pitting itself against a self-forged "coalition", the US will only sink further into the quagmire of delusions of empire.

No matter how Washington politicians such as Johnson exaggerate the dire plight their country is in — ignoring its true nature — none of the "enemies" seem ready to take on that mantle. Beijing, for one, emphasizes the importance of healthy China-US relations. Even Moscow has clarified it has no intention to seek confrontation.

Time moves on and the world is moving with it. But the US is in danger of being left behind in a time loop of its own as those in Washington rant and rage about the lost good old days.

NATO's musketeering makes all less secure

The ongoing NATO Summit in Washington was initially aimed at finding ways to reassure Ukraine of the organization's enduring support and offer some hope to its battle-weary citizens that their country might prevail in its conflict with Russia. But it is US President Joe Biden's health and cognitive abilities that grabbed the attention of all sides before the start of the gathering on Tuesday.

The NATO Summit undoubtedly comes at a trying moment in the US president's bid for reelection, and the three-day meeting is also likely to become a trying test for Biden to prove he is "fine", as he claims. The gathering on the 75th anniversary of the alliance's founding involves not only the 32 leaders of the NATO member states but also others from some Asia-Pacific countries and international organizations invited to attend. That means dozens of multilateral and bilateral meetings and a lot of talking for Biden.

After his stumbling in the first televised debate with Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump two weeks ago, which has raised questions about his ability to defeat his challenger in the November election, Biden is intent on using the NATO Summit to show he is capable of not only winning that contest but also holding office for another four years.

However, all parties are holding a wait-and-see attitude toward that, even as the White House has tried its best to reassure the public of the president's health and mental capacities.

Yet several anonymous senior US officials, who say there isn't — at least not yet — a crisis of confidence over Biden's general mental state, told the media that the president displays a strong grasp of the broader issues — Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the threat posed by China — but on specific and incremental actions that countries or groups may take when it comes to these conflicts, Biden has appeared confused at times.

Even if Biden can prove he is no less vigorous and healthy, over the three days, than the 75-year-old organization that was said to be "brain-dead" just three years back, the other leaders have enough reasons to care about a U-turn change in the US' NATO policy if Biden does lose the election.

European anxiety was heightened in February when Trump warned NATO allies in a campaign speech that he "would encourage" the Russians "to do whatever the hell they want" to countries that don't meet defense spending goals if he returns to the White House.

If that happens, the most pressing challenge the European NATO member states will be facing in just a few months will not be about how to support Ukraine to defeat Russia, but how to come up with the money to pay their NATO dues at a time when many European economies are flagging and there is public questioning of whether spending it that way is putting the money to best use.

The US and several other allies have said they will deliver on the \$1 billion air defense systems they have pledged to provide Ukraine at the opening of the NATO Summit on Tuesday. But how the others will follow up remains a question. The US used its you-are-on-the-table-or-the-menu argument to coerce its allies to follow its lead not long ago when they appeared to be reluctant to be dragged into its geopolitical games. It remains to be seen how Washington will try and persuade its allies to open up their wallets this time to stake its geopolitical games of aggression.

Over the past more than three years, an increasing number of people, including in the NATO member states, have seen clearly that the Three Musketeers-like vow of all for one, one for all "collective security model for like-minded countries" that Biden has tried to resurrect from the Cold War era has brought disastrous consequences to Europe and beyond.

A more consensus-seeking secretary-general is set to replace the US yes-man head of the organization. Over the past decade, the latter has done a good job in turning the NATO countries into an extended buffer zone for the US, transforming Russia from a potential dialogue partner into an enemy, and even antagonizing faraway China. So it is to be hoped the rest of the NATO member states will get a reality check and realize that their true concerns are not external threats but internal challenges.

NATO is howling that once security is hijacked by a few, it becomes a threat to all.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Closer encounters with space for understanding and asteroid defense

China's Tianwen 2 probe is scheduled for launch on a Long March 3B rocket in May 2025. This is an ambitious mission which involves collecting samples from a near-Earth asteroid, delivering it to Earth, and then taking a gravitational slingshot back into deep space to study a comet.

The first destination is the near-Earth asteroid 469219, a quasi-satellite of Earth. After rendezvousing with Kamo'oalewa, as it is called in the Hawaiian language, the spacecraft will carry out remote sensing to assess potential landing sites. It will then attempt to collect samples using two different techniques — touch-and-go and anchor-and-attach — and then return to Earth to deliver the samples for analysis.

Kamo'oalewa is about 14.5 million kilometers away and the mission will take around two and a half years. This is the first time an asteroid sampling

mission is using the anchor-and-attach method, with the autonomously operating lander employing four robotic arms with drills to secure itself onto the surface.

If the mission is successful it will determine if Kamo'oalewa is a primitive planetary body or a piece of the moon that blasted into space on the impact of an asteroid, as a French analysis concluded in April.

By returning with samples from Kamo'oalewa, Tianwen 2 will test the technologies involved in conducting round trips from asteroids, increasing hopes of mining from the Asteroid Belt in the not-so-near future.

Many of the asteroids have high metal content, of which a good example is Psyche, 30 to 60 percent of its volume being metals that might be worth \$100,000 quadrillion.

After sending the capsule to Earth,

the Tianwen 2 spacecraft will use its close encounter with the planet to propel itself into a transfer orbit that will take it to the main-belt comet 311P/PANSTARRS. After reaching there about seven years later, it will orbit the comet and conduct a remote sensing study.

China also has Tianwen 3 scheduled for launch in 2028, which is a round-trip mission to collect samples from Mars, and the ambitious Tianwen 4 mission, which is scheduled to launch around 2030 and involves both a Jupiter orbiter and a Uranus flyby spacecraft.

Relatively low-cost, such missions can provide a better understanding of the early stages of the solar system and lead the way to the assessment of space resources and their utilization, as well as the development of asteroid-strike defense strategies.

— ZHANG ZHOUIXIANG, CHINA DAILY

Opening-up policies attract tourists to country

Traveling to China is in vogue in recent months, and "China Travel" a popular search term on multiple online platforms.

This is largely thanks to China's continuous efforts to expand the visa-free policy for foreigners, including the unilateral opening of 15-day visa-free travel for people from some countries and a 144-hour visa-free transit for people from more than 50 countries, including the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom.

China has also optimized the payment channels for inbound foreign

tourists to facilitate their travel. On March 7, the State Council, China's Cabinet, issued a guideline document requiring a multilevel and diversified payment service system to be put in place for foreign tourists. Ever since, four-star scenic spots and hotels in Beijing have completed the addition of foreign currency exchange points, ATMs and POS machines.

Data from the Chinese authorities show that in the first half of this year, 14.64 million foreign tourists visited China, up 152.7 percent year-on-year. Among them, 8.54 million visits were

made through visa-free entry, an increase of 190 percent year-on-year.

After arriving in China, many foreign tourists have found that what they see in China is very different from how some in the Western media portray it. China has made a big step forward in many aspects, including its airports, high-speed rail, and other modern urban infrastructure. At the same time, China is also one of the safest countries in the world, with tourists walking freely on the streets even late at night.

— BEIJING YOUTH DAILY

What They Say

Russia and Ukraine footing bill for US' bloody game

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has taken an increasingly ugly turn in recent weeks as both sides appear to be intent on including civilians and civilian infrastructure among their attack targets to try and inflict as heavy losses as possible on each other.

Both sides should realize that as immovable neighbors their conflict, for which they have already paid a heavy price, cannot last forever and it is imperative to seek a political resolution of the crisis so as to pave the way for the establishment of a lasting fair and workable peace mechanism in the Europe continent.

It is evident to most parties that the Ukraine crisis is an outburst of the long-accumulated tensions and hostility between Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which was triggered by the former's rising security concerns caused by the latter's continuous eastward expansion since the end of the Cold War. Apart

from the United States, a major supporter of its proxy Ukraine, no parties benefit from the crisis, including the US' European allies.

Both Moscow and Kyiv, as well as the European Union, should bear that big picture in mind and give a serious thought to the question of how long they will continue to foot the bill for Washington's geopolitical game in Europe.

That being said, both Russia and Ukraine should exercise restraint and be rational, effectively comply with international humanitarian law, and avoid attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. Preventing an expansion of the conflict into a protracted all-out war between the two nations serves their common interests, and is in line with the expectation of the world, except Washington.

There are no winners in conflict and confrontation, and military means will not bring lasting peace. An early cease-fire and a political settlement are in the interests of all parties, and

the priority is to cool down the situation by observing the three principles of no expansion of the battlefield, no escalation of fighting, and no fanning of the flames by any party.

On the one hand, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states should be respected, the purposes and principles of the UN Charter should be adhered to; on the other hand, the legitimate security concerns of all states should be taken seriously, and all efforts conducive to the peaceful settlement of the crisis should be supported.

The international community, based on an objective and impartial position, should pool its efforts to create conditions conducive to putting an early end to the fighting and play an active role in this regard. China will continue to actively promote peace talks in its own way and make unremitting efforts and play a constructive role in promoting a political settlement of the Ukraine issue.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

Contact us at:

China Daily
15 Huixian Dongjia Chaoyang District,
Beijing 100029
News: +86 (0) 10 6491-8366
editor@chinadaily.com.cn
Advertisement: +86 (0) 10 6491-8631
ads@chinadaily.com.cn
Subscription: +86-400-699-0203
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn
App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/mobile/daily.html

China Daily UK
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK
+44 (0) 207 398 8270
editor@chinadailyuk.com

China Daily Asia Pacific
China Daily Hong Kong
Unit 1818, Hing Wai Centre, 7 Tin Wan
Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong
+852 2518 5111
editor@chinadailyhk.com
editor@chinadailyasia.com

China Daily USA
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036
+1 212 537 8888
editor@chinadailyusa.com

China Daily Africa
P.O. Box 27281-00100, Nairobi, Kenya
+254 (0) 20 242 8589 (Nairobi)
editor@chinadailyafrica.com
enquiries@chinadailyafrica.com
subscription@chinadailyafrica.com