

Blinken on peace mission amid US arms flow to Israel

International Desk

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Egypt on Tuesday in an effort to end Israel's war on Gaza, which has been strongly supported by his country since October 7.

Blinken – on his fifth regional tour since the bloodiest ever Gaza war broke out – met Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, a day after he held talks with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Riyadh.

The US top envoy then left for Qatar and was later to head to Israel, hoping to shore up support for a truce deal that was hashed out in

Paris in January but has not yet been signed off on by either Hamas or Israel.

The United States, on one hand, tries to secure a truce in Gaza and, on the other hand, provides crucial military aid for Israel's deadly offensive on Gaza. Washington has also vetoed UN resolutions for a cease-fire. Israel has so far killed more than 27,500 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip since October 7, when Hamas's attack on the occupied territories triggered Israel's onslaught on Gaza.

According to the Gaza Health Ministry on Tuesday, heavy strikes and fighting killed at least 107 people in

just 24 hours, mostly women and children.

Fears grew for more than a million Palestinians crowded into the far southern Rafah area as the battlefield draws ever closer in Israel's campaign to destroy Hamas. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant warned on Monday that the military "will reach places where we have not yet fought... right up to the last Hamas bastion, which is Rafah," on the Egyptian border.

Israeli troops, with air and naval support, have been engaged in heavy urban combat centered on Gaza's main southern city of Khan Younis.



'No place is safe'

An AFP journalist said overnight strikes rocked Khan Younis and that two air strikes also struck Rafah.

"No place is safe, no place at all – where shall we go?" one Palestinian, Mohamad Kozaat, said after six members of his family, including his daughter, were wounded in an Israeli strike on the border town.

The truce Blinken is hoping to seal proposes a six-week pause to fighting as Hamas frees captives held in Gaza in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel, and more aid enters Gaza, according to a Hamas source.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has faced divisions within his cabinet and public fury over the fate of the

remaining captives, said Israel "will not accept" demands Hamas has made for an exchange involving thousands of prisoners.

The premier's right-wing Likud party quoted him as saying the terms "should be similar to the previous agreement" in late November, which saw a more limited ratio of Palestinian prisoners exchanged for captives.



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (L) meets with Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Cairo on February 6, 2024.

AFP

Kazakh-Qatari cooperation is an example of an economic interaction between two regions

The multi-vector foreign policy of Central Asian countries has led to increased attention from a new player to the region. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, including Qatar, are collectively and individually forging new diplomatic and economic ties with the states of Eurasian region.

Thus, one of the most important signs of the increasing role of the Arab monarchies of the Persian Gulf in Central Asia has been the sharp development of interaction and bilateral relations over the past three months. During this period, a significant number of meetings between high-ranking officials as well as economic events took place between the countries of the two regions.

In this context, on July 19, 2023, a summit of the heads of state of Central Asia + GCC was held in Jeddah city (Saudi Arabia), where the Gulf countries expressed interest in investing in the energy sector of the region. The event was attended by the heads of the states of the Persian Gulf (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and Qatar) and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan). Against the backdrop of growing interaction between regions, Qatar's cooperation with the leading Central Asian country – the Republic of Kazakhstan – stands out. Nowadays Astana is becoming a key partner for Doha in the CIS region, as evidenced by regular meetings between the heads of the two countries. The upcoming on February 11, 2024 trip of President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to Doha marks his fourth meeting with the Emir of Qatar Tamim bin Al Thani over the past 2 years.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Doha and Astana, there has been mutual support for the initiatives of the two countries in regional and international forums, including Qatar's membership in the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) in 2015, as well as the Islamic Organization for Food Security (IOFS).

At this stage of the development, Qatar and Kazakhstan signed an agreement on mutual protection of investments. The parties are already working on mutual promising projects in various sectors of the economy. To strengthen cooperation, Doha and Astana signed a corresponding agreement. Countries began to implement projects worth \$1.3 billion. For example, with the participation of Qatari investors in the Akmola region of the Republic of Kazakhstan it is planned to build a grain processing plant. The estimated cost of the project is \$200 million.

Due to the fact that Qatar has in recent years attached great importance to its own food security, the development

of cooperation with Kazakhstan in the field of agro-industrial complex (given the huge potential of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the field of agriculture) can help Doha diversify the supply of important agricultural goods in the face of an unstable situation in the global food market and disruption of supply chains.

Thus, the Qatari company «Hassad Food» – the largest food security enterprise in the emirate, became interested in the capabilities of the Kazakh agro-industrial complex. Chief Executive Officer of «Hassad Food» Mohammed al-Sada noted that his company intends to strengthen trade relations between the Central Asian countries to ensure food security.

Along with this, the Qatari partners «Power International Holding», represented by its subsidiary «Baladna», will act as a technological partner. The created fund will become one of the ten largest processors of dairy products in the world. According to international economic observers, this will attract long-term investments and give a new impetus to the development of not only the dairy industry, but also the entire agro-industrial complex of Kazakhstan.

In this context, it should be noted that Astana also intends to increase mutual trade with Doha, increasing the export of domestic products to Qatar for 60 commodity items worth more than \$243 million.

In addition, Qatar's current military cooperation agreements with Central Asian countries could help expand Qatari-Kazakh security cooperation, which includes joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, and concerted counter-terrorism efforts, thereby making a significant contribution to ensuring regional stability. The tourism industry of cooperation between the two countries is also constantly growing. In November 2021, «Qatar Airways» opened direct scheduled flights between Doha and Almaty, which will contribute to the expansion of mutual economic and trade relations in the future.

Finally, taking into account the growing interest of the world's leading countries in Central Asia, the prospects for cooperation between Kazakhstan and Qatar seem quite extensive and promising. Considering emerging global trends, Qatar, as one of the richest countries in the Persian Gulf, is interested in investing in the Kazakh oil and gas and agricultural industries, as well as in other areas, including tourism, finance and construction. In this regard, according to journalistic circles, the upcoming visit of the President of Kazakhstan K. Tokayev to Qatar confirms the commitment of the parties to build up bilateral relations and will give fresh impetus to new joint projects in various areas of economic cooperation.

New York Jews ...

October 7 marked a pivotal event for the United States. It was not

an unforeseen incident for the US. Now, Washington seeks to create a controlled tension through this event to secure its long-term interests. Since September 11, the US has pursued three specific agendas for West Asia: Creating insecurity, creating a balance in the countries' weaknesses, and ensuring relative security. The invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq was the stage of exporting insecurity to the region. Proxy wars utilizing oil money of certain regional countries helped the establishment of a balance of weakness in the US's favor. Israel serves as a military stronghold for the US in the region. Now, in the third stage, the US is seeking to create a state of relative security in order to manage its long-term policies against Iran and China.

Do you mean that the US is trying to establish a cease-fire in Gaza by creating a relative security? Do you believe that this cease-fire is a form of preparation for confronting Iran and China?

Yes. US strategic objectives include restraining Iran while controlling China. China takes priority for the US; however, Iran is the US's primary problem. That's because US interests in the 21st century greatly depend on its presence and influence in the new heartland, centered on the Iranian plateau. Currently, the US has put the West Asia region, Iran, and even the international system in a state of "suspended war". This war



spans from the Caucasus region to the Persian Gulf, West Asia, and continues to Taiwan. Within the framework of this suspended war, the US first aims to establish a relative security in the New Heartland.

The visits by American officials to the region, including Antony Blinken and Jake Sullivan, along with expert teams, are aimed at paving the ground for creating relative security.

Does the establishment of relative security and the realization of US goals hinge on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

Certainly. I am not pessimistic about the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. How have Arab nations, as supporters of Palestine, reacted to Israel's atrocities against Palestinians in recent months? Not much. Contrary to some predictions that assumed October 7 would mark the end of Arab-Israeli normalization, discussions now revolve around the resumption of Israel's normalization of ties with Saudi Arabia. Capitals of the Arab countries have been hosting representatives from the US and Israel to end the conflict in Gaza. While Is-

rael opposes the establishment of a Palestinian state, the United States and Britain insist on the creation of an independent Palestinian state. Recent news suggests that negotiations have made progress in ending the conflict. These developments indicate the US is trying to resolve the Arab-Israeli issue.

Americans have advocated for a two-state solution for many years, but Israel has yet to accept this idea. Do you believe the US can exert pressure on Israel to accept the independent state of Palestine this time?

Israel is no longer an important partner for the US. It remains an ally, but under US's 21st-century strategy, Israel no longer holds a strategic ally status. America's doctrine concerning the region and the Israel-Palestine issue is a strong and manageable Israel and the establishment of a weak Palestinian state. Even Britain, which played a significant role in Israel's formation, now insists on recognizing the independent state of Palestine. Therefore, Netanyahu does not have the final say here. While the Jewish lobby wields influence in the US, New York Jews will ultimately control Tel Aviv Jews.