

Headlines:

- **The Battle for Infrastructure**
- **China-Russia Military Exercises**
- **Saudi Clampdown**

Details:

The Battle for Infrastructure

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Monday 9th August that the US must invest more in infrastructure to compete globally with China and other countries as the Senate is gearing up to pass a \$1 trillion piece of infrastructure legislation. During a speech at the University of Maryland, Blinken said investments in public infrastructure in the US have been on the decline while other countries are increasing domestic spending. "For example, China is spending three times as much on infrastructure as we do every year," he said. Blinken said that "domestic renewal" is the "most important" thing Washington can do to advance its foreign policy agenda. He portrayed the relationship with both China and Russia as a global competition between democracy and authoritarian governments. "This is particularly important now, because it's no secret to any of us that the Chinese and Russian governments, among others, are making the argument in public and in private that the United States is in decline — so it's better to cast your lot with their authoritarian visions for the world than with our democratic one," he said. "Nothing would put to rest faster their specious argument about America's best days being behind us than if the United States made serious investments in our domestic renewal right now." President Biden has been pushing for a massive infrastructure bill since he came into office and has also framed it as vital to compete with China. In his first address to Congress, while pitching an infrastructure plan, Biden said the US was in a competition with China to "win the 21st century."

China-Russia Military Exercises

Russia and China have held large-scale joint military exercise in China's north-central Ningxia region, drills which come as the pair spar with Washington and its Western allies over a range of issues, including human rights and regional security concerns. The Sibur/Cooperation-2021 exercises launched on Monday and will run until Friday. They will involve more than 10,000 ground troops and air forces. The Russian military said that it had sent Su-30SM fighter aircraft, motorised rifle units and air defence systems to China as part of the exercise. The drills mark the first time Russian soldiers are using Chinese weapons, with the pair having conducted joint exercises since 2005, Russia's Kommersant newspaper reported. The exercises aim to "deepen ... joint anti-terrorism operations" and "demonstrate the firm determination and strength of the two countries to jointly safeguard international and regional security and stability", China's official Xinhua News Agency reported, citing Chinese and Russian officials. Richard McGregor, a China expert at the Australia-based Lowy Institute think-tank, said the burgeoning relationship between Beijing and Moscow was more than a "marriage of convenience". That [phrase] underestimates the depth of their shared interests, and of course the biggest one is opposing the US and undermining the US and the West," McGregor told Al Jazeera.

Saudi Clampdown

A court in Saudi Arabia has delivered verdicts against 69 Palestinians and Jordanians, handing jail terms of up to 22 years to some while also acquitting an unspecified number on Sunday. The group was detained in March 2018 during a wave of arrests by Saudi authorities on a group of long-term Palestinian and Jordanian residents in the kingdom on alleged links with an unnamed "terrorist" group, according to a 2020 report by Human Rights Watch (HRW). The Saudi court sentenced Hamas representative in Saudi Arabia Mohammed al-Khudairi to 15 years in prison. His son, Hani, was sentenced to three years. Al-Khudairi, 82, was a veteran Hamas leader responsible for managing the relationship with Saudi Arabia for two decades. It seems nothing is beyond approach in the new Saudi Arabia, **whether** its concerts, theme parks or cancelling Hajj whilst music concerts take place. Politically also those who were supports of the monarchy are quickly finding themselves now to be out of favour.