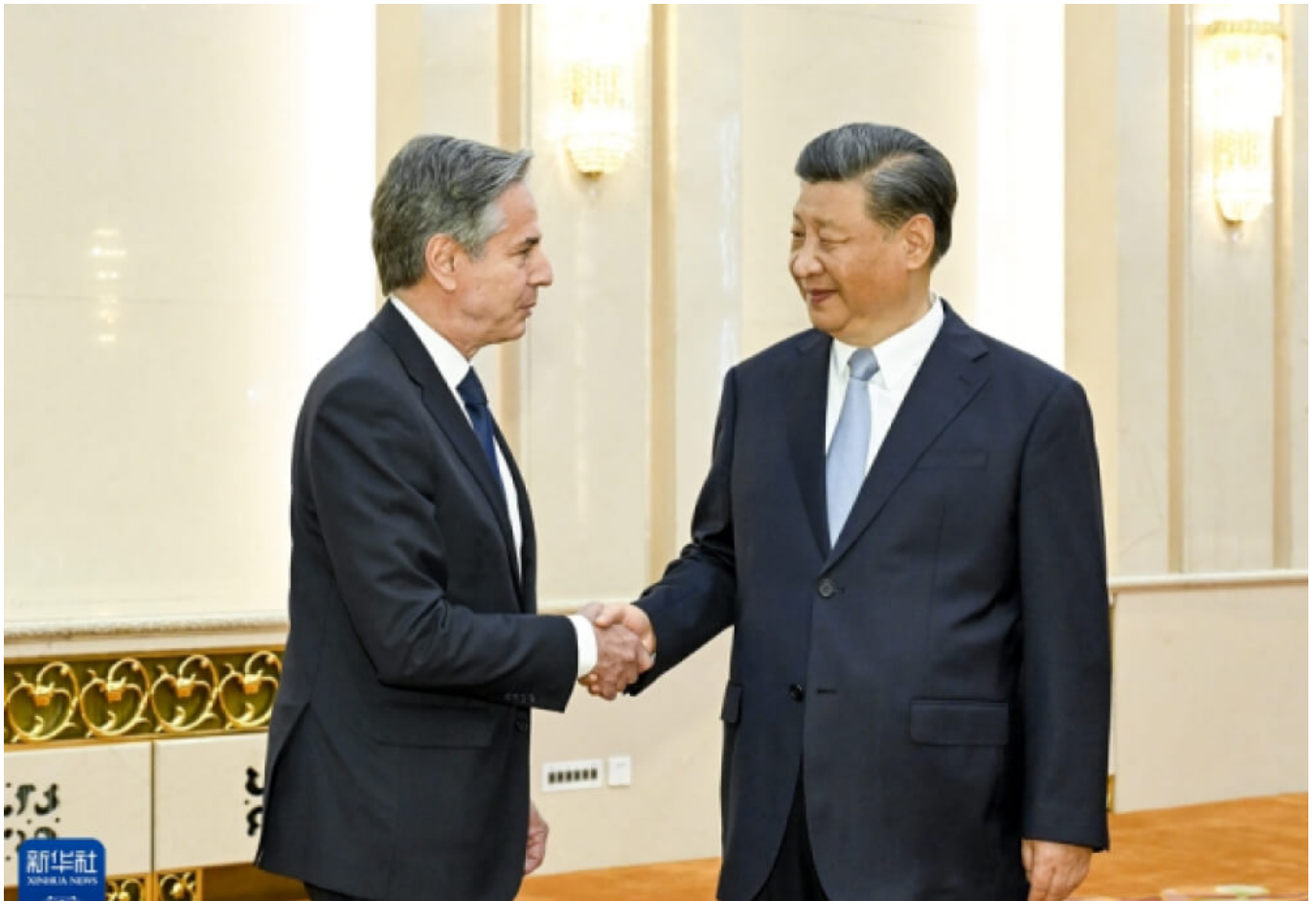




By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

Candid, substantive, and constructive talks - a hell of a job



A Chinese spy balloon over US territory has been destroyed for the second time. US Air Force shot it down last February, and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and the Chinese leadership repaired the consequences of its mission in Beijing. For now.

Blinken's visit to Beijing restored relations between the US and China to the level of last February when Blinken was supposed to travel to China. The spy balloon incident abruptly postponed his visit.

US-China relations have not been in a vacuum in the past four months. It appears that they have been on a downward path without serious communication or dialogue.

During that time, the US was primarily dealing with the Ukrainian crisis, strengthening ties with partners in the Indo-Pacific, and placing resisting Chinese influence in the region at the centre of that cooperation.

China has also worked hard in the competitive field. Under Chinese influence, Iran and Saudi Arabia restored diplomatic ties last March, a deal that opened the door to calming a series of regional crises.

Beijing encouraged the recent return of Syria to the Arab League after a decade of exile, and now it has repeated the initiative to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Relations regarding Ukraine have also cooled. Beijing announced a peace plan on the anniversary of the Russian aggression, wanting to prove its proclaimed neutrality towards this conflict. Due to its protective attitude towards Russia, it never came to life.

The cooling down process intensified the following month when Chinese leader Xi travelled to Moscow, where Vladimir Putin welcomed him as his greatest ally and saviour

of his isolated economy.

A complicated task

Antony Blinken had a complicated task in Beijing. It was not enough to return relations to the level of last February when they were practically frozen but also to relieve all the burdens that had arisen in the meantime.

Blinken used the cautious diplomatic phrase during the visit and said the talks were "candid, substantive and constructive". But his boss, US President Joe Biden, said Blinken did "a hell of a job" in China.

Perhaps Biden was satisfied because his top diplomat met the Chinese leader Xi Jinping. The conversation was not definite until the last moment, but according to the short transcript, it went well.

Xi referred to his last meeting with Joe Biden in Indonesia last November as a point in mutual understanding that the two countries needed to reach.

This suggests that the meeting between the two leaders is possible in the foreseeable future as a final confirmation that their countries have exited crisis mode and are improving their relations. The meeting in Bali on the side-lines of the G20 summit also suggested this.

Even though there is no confirmation, the new US-China summit could be held in New Delhi in September, at the G20 summit, or exactly one year after the meeting in Bali, in November this year when San Francisco will host the leaders of the Asia-Pacific region (APEC).

However, there probably won't be any military to-military talks among senior officials for some time.

Blinken's visit to Beijing with low expectations and great caution positioned talks at a level that China does not supply weapons to Russia, which was one of the more significant reasons for his visit. As far as Beijing is concerned, the deadlock after Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan last August is still in effect. Security in the Pacific, as one of the points of dispute between the US and China, will bring it up. He said Blinken pointed out that the US has no indication that Beijing has been supplying weapons to Moscow.

This could be considered the end of a contentious chapter the US administration has been talking about for months, which coincided with a period of worsening US China relations.

However, the suspicion remained that the sanctions against Russia have been violated by the Chinese private companies, which supply it with equipment and technology for military purposes.

He asked the Chinese state leadership to be "vigilant" in this regard towards companies that violate sanctions, which means that the Chinese state is a US partner in controlling sanctions against Moscow.

This may also be a hint of a sharper closing of the loopholes that the Russian economy and army use to supply itself with Western technology.

In light of a possible visit to Beijing by the US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo after Blinken, the issue of so-called secondary sanctions against Chinese companies that violate them could be at the top of the agenda.