

US menaces China over balloon, arms for Russia

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In a face-to-face meeting on Saturday on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken dramatically escalated threats against China in a tense confrontation with top Chinese diplomat Wang Yi.

Blinken bluntly told Yi that the Chinese balloon which strayed into US airspace late last month was an “unacceptable violation of US sovereignty and international law” and “must never occur again,” according to State Department spokesperson Ned Price.

The US is yet to provide a shred of evidence for its belligerent accusations that the Chinese balloon was spying on American military installations. This is despite the fact that the US Air Force shot the balloon down with a missile on February 4, and the debris has been recovered and reportedly examined by technical experts.

Blinken also expressed disappointment that Beijing had not engaged in military-to-military dialogue over the Chinese balloon. In fact, at the time, China declared that its non-manoeuvrable civilian research balloon had been blown off course by unusual winds and apologised for its entry into US airspace.

The US media and political establishment showed no interest whatsoever in dialogue with Beijing. Rather it seized on the “spy” balloon to manufacture a political climate of uncertainty and fear in which it can ramp up its economic and military confrontation with China. The Biden administration used the incident as the pretext for calling off a planned visit by Blinken to China on February 5–6.

Wang confirmed that the meeting with Blinken had taken place and called on the US to repair the “damage” to the countries’ relations. He told the media: “To have dispatched an advanced fighter jet to shoot down a balloon with a missile, such behaviour is

unbelievable, almost hysterical.”

Wang asked: “There are so many balloons all over the world, and various countries have them. So, is the United States going to shoot all of them down?” He branded the US response as “100 percent an abuse of the use of force.”

Following the downing of the Chinese balloon, the US Air Force has shot down three unidentified flying objects, which the Biden administration was compelled to acknowledge were not Chinese and posed no threat.

The *Washington Post* and CNN reported last Wednesday that US intelligence agencies were reassessing previous claims that the Chinese “spy balloon” had been deliberately manoeuvred over sensitive US military sites, and saying it may indeed have been blown off course, as China has explained.

In his meeting with Wang, Blinken further inflamed the already heated confrontation by accusing China of being on the brink of providing lethal military aid to Russia in its war in Ukraine with the US and NATO. According to State Department spokesman Price, Blinken warned Wang of “the implications and consequences if China provides material support to Russia or assistance with systemic sanctions evasion.”

Again, neither Blinken nor anyone else in the Biden administration has provided a shred of evidence to support the allegations. Instead, unnamed US officials have made vague insinuations to the media, which uncritically recycles the claims.

The CNN report, for instance, declared it had been told that “the US has recently begun seeing ‘disturbing’ trendlines in China’s support for Russia’s military and there are signs that Beijing wants to ‘creep up to the line’ of providing lethal military aid to Russia without getting caught.”

Beijing is yet to respond to these US allegations.

Wang is due to visit Moscow after the Munich Security Conference, having already visited Italy and France. While Beijing has not condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine, neither has it publicly supported it. Wang met with the Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba on Saturday and declared that China wanted to see a negotiated end to the conflict.

Blinken's threats come as China is about to unveil a proposal for a peace plan in a speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping on February 24, which marks one year since the war started. Wang announced China's intention to launch the plan in his speech to the Munich security conference. He has reportedly discussed the proposal with France, Germany and Italy.

In his speech to the conference, Wang made a particular pitch to the European powers, saying: "We need to think calmly, especially our friends in Europe, about what efforts should be made to stop the warfare; what framework should there be to bring lasting peace to Europe; what role should Europe play to manifest its strategic autonomy."

Peace proposals are the last thing that the US and its close allies want, as any negotiations would cut across their plans to further escalate the war. Having provided the Ukrainian military with heavy tanks, they are now engaged in discussions on the provision of fighter aircraft.

As far as US imperialism is concerned, the war has nothing to do with defending Ukrainian independence or its non-existent democracy. Rather Washington is determined to exploit the conflict to weaken and destabilise Russia and ultimately fracture and subordinate the country and its vast natural resources.

The US is concerned that the Chinese plan will undermine support in the UN general assembly for a resolution supporting Ukraine—a move that is already under discussion to coincide with the February 24 anniversary. Blackening China's name internationally and undercutting support for its peace proposal is one immediate aim behind Blinken's unsubstantiated slurs against Beijing.

More fundamentally, however, the latest anti-Chinese allegations are one more step in the escalating US propaganda war against Beijing as Washington intensifies its economic bans and sanctions, and increases its military build-up throughout the Indo-Pacific in preparation for military conflict with China.

The US regards China as the chief threat to its global economic hegemony and the war against Russia in Ukraine as the prelude to war with Beijing. Blinken hypocritically told Wang that Washington was not changing its policy on Taiwan even as it has been systematically undermining the One China policy on which US-China relations have been based since 1979.

Just as it deliberately goaded Russia into invading Ukraine, the Biden administration is seeking to provoke China into attacking Taiwan and thereby trap it in a conflict that will destabilise the Chinese regime.

The extraordinary way in which a vagrant Chinese research balloon has been absurdly inflated into a major threat to US security is a measure of just how reckless and far advanced US war preparations are.



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