

Beijing, Sep 8 (AP) - The White House's top national security adviser began talks in Beijing on Monday with top Chinese military and diplomatic officials on bilateral challenges such as a recent close-encounter between their air force planes over the South China Sea.

Susan Rice met with China's top diplomat, State Councilor Yang Jiechi, on a trip to pave the way for a visit by President Barack Obama to Beijing in November.

Rice said that among all the other issues facing the United States, Obama still considered China to be a priority and that her primary reason for coming to Beijing was to hammer out the agenda for the November meeting between Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

At the sprawling Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in western Beijing, Yang told her that the countries needed to "truly respect each other's core interests and major concerns and constructively manage our differences and sensitive issues." He said they would discuss military relations, counter terrorism, the Middle East, North Korea, South Sudan, Iran and other topics of mutual concern.

Rice is scheduled to meet Tuesday with China's defense and foreign ministers before departing Wednesday.

The countries' relationship has been tested by U.S. allegations of Chinese military cyberspying and Obama's stated pivot to Asia, which China sees as an effort to contain its rising power.

On Aug. 19, a Chinese jet made several close passes near a Navy P-8 Poseidon plane, coming within 30 feet (9 meters) of it at one point. The incident took place about 135 miles (220 kilometers) from Hainan, which is home to naval airfields and a highly sensitive submarine base.

China rejected American accusations that its pilot acted recklessly and unprofessionally and says it will continue responding to U.S. surveillance flights off its coast.

An editorial last week from the official Xinhua News Agency referred to the encounter as an example of Washington's resorting to "provocations out of fear for Beijing's growing economic prowess and regional clout."

"What is also worrying is that the U.S. leadership has apparently followed a bad tradition of taking China as scapegoat for its own messy domestic and foreign policies, while overlooking the big picture of China-U.S. relations," the editorial said.

Rice also drew Chinese ire with her harsh criticisms of Beijing's approach to the crisis in Syria while serving as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, although the Xinhua editorial said she has since matured in her approach to China.

"Thus, Rice's first China trip in her current position comes at a particularly critical time when it is of great urgency for the United States to reaffirm its commitment and sincerity to Beijing by treating it as a true partner," Xinhua said.