

What happened in the skies over New York City?

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On the morning of April 27, one of two Boeing 747 jetliners used by the US president flew at low altitude over downtown New York, escorted by fighter jets. The official explanations and media commentaries concerning this extraordinary event raise more questions than they answer.

For half an hour the planes banked over the city, passing the Statue of Liberty, Lower Manhattan and the former site of the World Trade Center, where two jetliners crashed into the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001. CNN and YouTube videos show the planes passing only a few hundred feet above the New York skyline.

President Barack Obama was not on board the 747.

Residents and passers-by ran for cover, fearing that another terrorist attack might be in progress.

According to unnamed military and administration sources cited in the *Wall Street Journal*, the flight was a “secret” photo-op, of which only select officials at the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the White House, the New York Police Department and New York City Hall had advance knowledge.

One Obama administration official told the *Journal*: “The mission was to send [the aircraft] up to get a picture of it flying around the Statue of Liberty. They said they needed to get a picture of it flying up around the Statue of Liberty. They said they needed to update their photo files.”

An FAA email, sent to New York City Hall and reviewed by the *Journal*, specified a “photo-op altitude of 1,000 to 1,500 feet.” It added that this information “shall not be released to the public.”

It added, “Due to the possibility of public concern regarding aircraft flying at low levels, coordination with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies

... has been accomplished.” The FAA official who wrote the email refused to speak to the *Journal*.

President Obama and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg both claimed they had not been told of the operation in advance. In a press release, White House officials said Obama was “furious” but called the operation a “mistake.”

At a press conference, Bloomberg said: “I’m annoyed—furious is a better word—that I wasn’t told. Why the Defense Department wanted to do a photo-op right around the site of the World Trade Center defies the imagination.”

New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine and US Defense Secretary Robert Gates also told the press that they had not been made aware of the flight.

This official version of events is not credible.

How could one of two specially-designed presidential jets be requisitioned for a flight over New York City, where nearly 3,000 were killed in the 9/11 attacks, without the knowledge of the president, the mayor or high-ranking US military officials such as the defense secretary and the joint chiefs of staff? If the official story is indeed true, it raises the question of who is in control of the US military.

Certain details of the incident raise further questions. No explanation has been given for the obsessive secrecy of the operation. By its very nature, such an undertaking—flying a presidential jet in broad daylight and at low altitude over the US’ largest city, miles from normal air traffic routes—could not remain hidden.

The claim that the flight was needed to obtain photos of Air Force One strains credulity. In minutes, a designer using software like Photoshop could produce a convincing image, superimposing a shot of Air Force One over a picture of the Statue of Liberty. This would have saved a great deal of effort and money. Flying Air

Force One cost \$56,518 per hour in 2006, according to ABC News.

The security preparations outlined in the FAA email are provocative and sinister. FAA officials anticipated that the unannounced appearance of a low-flying passenger jet over New York City would create panic. The logical conclusion is that they set out to provoke public fear in some kind of test run of the response by the state, involving numerous police agencies.

This incident is only the latest in a series of odd and disquieting events involving the US military. In 2006, US nuclear missile parts were sent to Taiwan, reportedly by accident. In September 2007, a nuclear-armed B-52 bomber was discovered to have flown over the US without authorization. Last year, the European press leaked a US military report claiming that over 1,000 nuclear missile parts had somehow gone missing.

Louis Caldera, the chief of the White House Military Office—the official in charge of Obama’s personal security—is being held responsible for this bizarre incident. There have been calls in the media for his removal.

Yesterday evening, the Obama administration announced it was planning an investigation into the overflight. While many details about the incident have yet to emerge, the official story already reeks of a cover-up.



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