

No explanation for apparent missile firing near Los Angeles

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The lack of any official explanation for the apparent launch of a missile off the coast of Los Angeles Monday evening is both troubling and suspicious. The claim that no military or civilian authority was able to determine what the object was—more than 24 hours after it was videotaped ascending in a westerly direction some 35 miles from the second largest US city—strains credulity.

The non-explanation, combined with the virtual silence of the national media for most of Tuesday, suggests that the incident is far more serious than its treatment by both the government and the media would suggest.

On Monday at 5:30 p.m. local time, a Los Angeles news helicopter crew filmed what appeared to be a large missile rising into the sky, with a billowing vapor trail in its wake. (See video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyEvk-VTuEI)

More than 24 hours later, no explanation had been given by any government agency, civilian or military.

The media on Tuesday cited unnamed Pentagon sources as saying they had “no clue” about the “bizarre” and “unexplained” sighting. A Navy spokesman had earlier ruled out that his branch of the military had any role in the object videotaped, and a local Air Force base said it had not launched any missiles since November 5, when a rocket carried an Italian satellite into space.

The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) claimed they had detected no missile or any other large and fast-moving object in the area.

There was no comment from the White House. The unexplained event came with President Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates all out of the country.

Even as it denied having any information on the unidentified object, the military asserted that it posed no threat to the US population. NORAD issued a joint statement with the US Northern Command (NORTHCOM) confirming that the “contrail”—the object’s vapor trail—was not the result of a foreign military having launched a missile. “We can confirm that there is no threat to our nation, and from all indications this was not a launch by a foreign military,” the statement said.

No explanation was given as to how the military could assert something was not a threat while claiming it had no idea what it was.

Until Tuesday evening, the national media largely ignored the event. Notably, the *New York Times* produced nothing on the sighting until the late afternoon on Tuesday, when it reposted an article from the Associated Press on its web site.

The lack of any official explanation and the downplaying of the issue by the media suggest the possibility that the government or elements within the military/intelligence apparatus were, with the collaboration of major media outlets, buying time to come up with a credible story for public consumption.

Robert Ellsworth, former US Ambassador to NATO in the Nixon administration and deputy secretary of defense in the Ford administration, on Tuesday morning speculated that the object was indeed a missile fired by the US military to coincide with President Obama’s Asia trip.

“It could be a test firing of an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) from a submarine, underwater submarine, to demonstrate, mainly to Asia, that we can do that,” Ellsworth said, adding that similar firings had taken place over the Atlantic during the Cold War with the Soviet Union, but never previously over the Pacific.

A retired Russian rocket scientist who looked at the video told the *World Socialist Web Site* that the object could only have been a ballistic missile or a rocket destined for outer space.

Later in the day, reports circulated that the object was an optical illusion, created by the particular vantage point of the helicopter in relationship to an airplane flying directly toward it in the evening sky.

However, the intelligence web site Stratfor quickly challenged such explanations, noting that “the video footage available on open source appears to capture a flame emanating from the contrail’s source,” making such theories “unlikely.”

If the video indicated the normal route of a jet airplane, moreover, it should have been easy for the FAA to settle the matter. But both the FAA and NORAD had earlier claimed that there was no evidence of an airplane in the area.

Stratfor went on to question the credibility of official claims that neither the military nor civilian authorities had detected the object and that they had been unable to determine what it was. “The US operates constellations of satellites dedicated to detecting the slightest heat signature to be aware of any missile launch that may be happening that could affect the United States,” Stratfor noted. “It is thus odd that no one from the Navy or Defense Department has chosen to share more details to prevent a host of conspiracy theories and fear-mongering such an incident could spark.”

The web site continued: “Given US surveillance capabilities, it would seem that not only would the US military know that there was a launch, it would know what it was, where it came from and whether it posed a threat.”

Another possibility broached by Pentagon spokesman Col. Dave Lapani is unlikely. He speculated that if there was an object launched, it might have been done by a private entity.

“The launch of a rocket that size doesn’t belong to any commercial entity without them issuing a press release,” said Marco Caceres, an analyst with Teal Group Corp., a Fairfax, Virginia-based aerospace research firm. “It can’t belong to anyone but the military.”

Moreover, this would raise the question of how the largest military and intelligence apparatus in the world could have no knowledge of the assembly and firing of a large object off the coast of a major American city. Among the agencies that

would be expected to have knowledge of such an event are the Navy, the Air Force, the Coast Guard, NORAD, NORTHCOM, the FAA, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

There is another possibility that must certainly be drawing the scrutiny of intelligence agencies around the world: that elements in the military acted alone in firing a missile, doing so either without permission or by accident.

A further question is raised: Was the sighting on Monday part of a crisis event that is still in progress?

International intelligence and military officials are likely asking two further questions: Is the US military in control of its nuclear forces? Is the Obama administration in control of the military?

As Statfor concluded, “Working with the knowledge we currently have, including the fact that the US military conducts missile tests in this area on a regular basis, everything points to a missile launched by the United States. Still, why deny knowledge of something that appears to be a rather routine launch at a time when the president is out of the country?”

The apparent missile launch on Monday is the latest in a series of high-profile but unexplained events involving the US military. In 2006, US nuclear missile parts were sent to Taiwan, supposedly by accident. In September 2007, it was learned that a nuclear-armed B-52 bomber flew over the US without authorization. And in 2008, a US military report was leaked in the European media noting that over 1,000 nuclear missile parts had gone missing.

Last year there was the fighter jet-escorted flight of Air Force One, a Boeing 747 used exclusively for the travel of the US president, at a low altitude over Manhattan. President Obama claimed to have no knowledge of the flight, which was explained as a secret “photo op” to obtain pictures of the president’s plane flying near the Statue of Liberty.



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