

Media drops story of apparent missile launch

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Only days after the a Los Angeles television station reported an unexplained missile launch off of the coast of California, the American media has completely dropped coverage of the event.

The story gained national prominence after Robert Ellsworth, a former deputy secretary of defense and US ambassador to NATO, told the news station Tuesday morning that he suspected that the unidentified event Monday was a missile fired by the US military to coincide with US President Barack Obama's trip to Asia.

"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 previously.

The incident raises many serious questions: If it was a missile launch, who fired it? Was it a deliberate act of provocation organized by the US government, amidst rising global tensions, particularly with China? Was it carried out by sections of the military without the knowledge of the government? Is the United States government fully in control of the military and its missiles and nuclear arsenal?

None of these issues have been seriously broached—indeed, none have been broached at all—in the media. After first ignoring the report, television news outlets later treated it more as a curiosity. The print media—including, most notably the *New York Times*—downplayed or entirely ignored the event. The *Times* failed to write even a single article on the story, which was clearly national news worthy of coverage.

The silence of the *Times* is one of the most significant factors calling into question the official interpretation. The "newspaper of record" has worked closely with the US government in its coverage or non-coverage of events. The *Times*' decision to completely ignore a story that was being reported on all the national

television networks can only be assumed to have been a conscious act.

In the days following the incident, commentators on internet blogs (including contrailscience.com) advanced the theory that the apparent missile launch was actually the contrail (condensation trail) of a plane, which they later identified as American Airlines flight 808. Airplane contrails can appear to be vertical when the plane is flying directly toward the viewer. Based on flight tracking information, a webcam shot showed that the same flight left a vertical contrail on a subsequent day.

Various experts on missiles and aerospace technology opposed this interpretation, however, noting, for example, the appearance of a flame at the source of the contrail, which would not be present on a jet. The contrail in the video, moreover, appears to be very different from what is produced by a plane. The cameraman indicated that the location of the incident was 35 miles off the coast of California, near a naval base from which high-powered missiles are regularly fired.

On Wednesday, the US Pentagon announced that it was "satisfied" with the view that the apparent missile launch was nothing more than an airplane contrail. This was the signal for the entire media to drop the event altogether. The word of the US military, as far as the American media is concerned, is the last and final pronouncement on such matters.

But the military's conclusions, issued two days after the fact, raise more questions than answers. The Pentagon's official statement was particularly vague, concluding, "The Department of Defense, after gathering information over the last 36 hours from within, and other US government agencies, is satisfied that the contrail was likely caused by an aircraft."

If the contrail was really an airplane, however, why did it take the US government—which has detailed radar

of all US flights—two days to make this determination? Why, moreover, did initial reports indicate that there was no flying object detected in the region at that time?

The military did not disclose what flight caused the contrail, nor did it provide any radar data on the object. “The FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] said they didn’t have any data on it, and neither did NORAD [the North American Aerospace Defense Command],” said Sam LaGrone, a staff writer for *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, in a telephone interview with the WSWS Friday.

Theodore Postol, an MIT professor and well-known critic of US missile policy, said in a telephone interview Friday that the US Department of Defense failed to make any proper explanation of the incident. “Given all the concerns people have over the last few years about US missile policy, you would hope that the DOD would be in a better position to make a clear statement on this event,” he said.

Postol was among those who raised many criticisms of the plane contrail interpretation of the incident, though he has since modified his position.

The apparent missile launch comes after a string of high-profile incidents involving the United States strategic missile armament. Four years ago, the US inexplicably sent long-range missile components to Taiwan. Then in 2007, a bomber carrying six thermonuclear warheads flew from North Dakota to Louisiana without clearance.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is not in a position to make an absolute determination as to what happened on Monday evening. There are, however, many reasons to question the official explanation—not the least of which is the speed with which the media has accepted it.



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