

US media whips up anti-Chinese hysteria over balloon flight

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Over the past four days, the American population has been subjected to a barrage of war propaganda over the claim that China sent a huge balloon visible to the naked eye to spy on US nuclear bases.

The media machine is operating at full throttle. Since the balloon's existence was publicly announced last week, breathless coverage provided minute-by-minute updates on the progress of the floating white balloon as it slowly traversed across the continental United States. The story led every newspaper for days, was the first item on the evening news broadcasts, and dominated the 24-hour cable news networks.

On Friday, former President Donald Trump called for the balloon to be shot down—a demand that was repeated by Republican and Democratic politicians. On Saturday, under orders from Biden, the US Air Force shot down the balloon in the first US attack on a Chinese aircraft since the Korean War.

A day after the existence of the balloon was publicly announced, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken canceled his scheduled trip to China, which had been promoted as part of a supposed rapprochement between the two countries.

All of the media coverage has accepted the unsubstantiated claim that the airship was a secret Chinese “surveillance balloon” specifically targeting US military installations.

While the specific purpose of the balloon cannot be definitively stated, the notion that the Chinese government is seeking to secretly obtain vital information on US nuclear weapons by means of a gigantic and clearly visible object slowly passing through US airspace is, to put it mildly, ludicrous.

Far more likely is the account given by Beijing that the high-altitude balloon was conducting meteorological surveillance and was blown off course,

entering the United States on January 28. “It is a civilian airship used for research, mainly meteorological purposes,” China’s Foreign Ministry said. “Affected by the Westerlies and with limited self-steering capability, the airship deviated far from its planned course.”

NASA has launched dozens of balloon missions similar to the one destroyed by the US Air Force on Saturday. According to a NASA presentation by University of Hawaii Professor Peter Gortham, “Balloons offer flight opportunities for unique science investigations that require, or can be done in, near-space.”

According to the website of NASA’s Arctic balloon program, “Scientists use scientific data collected during balloon flights to help answer important questions about the universe, atmosphere, the Sun and the space environment.”

In publications that are written primarily for those within the state apparatus, a more sober assessment can be found. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a leading think tank connected to US intelligence agencies, commented on Friday that “the most likely explanation is that this is an errant weather balloon that went astray—lost weather balloons are the basis of many ‘UFO sightings.’”

The CSIS added that the incident is “embarrassing for China, and some Chinese meteorologist may be packing his or her bags for reassignment to Inner Mongolia.”

But in the media, such an appraisal is nowhere to be found. That the white orb is a “spy balloon” is taken as fact, and no section of the US media has even suggested the possibility of the most routine and reasonable explanation—that this was a peaceful research mission just like NASA has conducted dozens

of times.

Instead, the Biden administration, working together with the Republican Party and with the support of the US media, seized on the opportunity to whip up anti-Chinese hate and xenophobia.

The aim of this campaign is to condition the public to accept US plans for war with China that have been years in the making, and to construe China, which the United States is encircling with offensive missiles just miles from its coastline, as the aggressor in the Sino-American conflict.

The script of this week's "imminent threat" is well-worn. This type of wall-to-wall media hysteria was used to justify the 1991 Gulf War, the 1998 bombing of Yugoslavia, the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and the 2011 bombings of Syria and Libya. All of these claims—above all the Bush administration's assertions that the Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein possessed "weapons of mass destruction"—turned out to be nothing more than hot air.

But the media, acting as if the American people are all idiots, is reprising its role, hoping it will have the time-tested result of laying the groundwork for America's next "war of choice." This time, the target is not an impoverished former colony, but China, the world's second-largest economy with the world's second-largest military budget.

Even as the US and NATO powers recklessly escalate the war with Russia over Ukraine, the ruling class is preparing for a conflict with China, for which the war against Russia has been viewed as a necessary precondition.

In 2018, the United States adopted a National Security Strategy that urged the Pentagon to make its highest priority preparing for a war with China. While the military was operating with this conception, the US media kept these plans secret from the American population.

But this week's media hysteria over the balloon was used to introduce the concept of a potential war with China as a positive good, for which the United States needs to prepare.

The declaration by Air Force General Mike Minihan that the US faces a war with China by 2025 has been treated by the media as a sage and impartial warning.

He called for building "a fortified, ready, integrated, and agile Joint Force Maneuver Team ready to fight

and win inside the first island chain," referring to Taiwan, Japan, and other islands off the coast of China.

Implying that large numbers of his command will die in such a war, Minihan instructed them to "consider their personal affairs and whether a visit should be scheduled with their servicing base legal office to ensure they are legally ready and prepared."

Chuck Todd, moderator of "Meet the Press," asked Democratic Senator Cory Booker, "Are you going to be supporting whatever it takes to prepare for war with China over Taiwan? Do we need to do more to prepare for that potential?"

In just the past week, the United States announced a plan to put additional bases in the Philippines from which it could launch attacks on China. Biden also held discussions with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on the remilitarization of the country in preparation for a conflict with China.

The entire incident is a lesson in how the media works to advance US war plans, promoting trumped-up threats against the US and covering up Washington's aggressive actions against the targets of its wars.

The latest campaign to demonize China has parallels to the promotion by both the Trump and Biden administrations of the Wuhan lab lie, the conspiracy theory that COVID-19 was created by scientific research at the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

The desperate character of both of these lies reflects the basic reality that there does not exist significant support within the US population for the US government's plans for war. This passive opposition must, however, be transformed into a conscious mass anti-war movement based on an orientation to the working class and the perspective of socialism.



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