

US media report calls into question balloon “spy mission” claims against China

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A report by the *Washington Post* published Wednesday drastically undermines the media campaign—instigated by the Biden administration—demonizing China for allegedly sending a “spy balloon” over sensitive military sites in the continental United States.

The *Post* report, published on its front page under the headline, “Winds may have sent spy balloon off its path,” revealed that by the time the Chinese balloon had reached US airspace in the Aleutian Islands, “U.S. military and intelligence agencies had been tracking it for nearly a week, watching as it lifted off from its home base on Hainan Island near China’s south coast.”

By this account, the balloon was fitted out with surveillance equipment for military purposes, but its intended path was the huge US military base on Guam, in the western Pacific, the closest US base to China, or Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, the headquarters of the US Pacific Fleet.

These bases are routinely watched by China, just as US agencies are continually watching Chinese military centers, such as Hainan Island, the biggest base of China’s navy.

According to the *Post*, “U.S. monitors watched as the balloon settled into a flight path that would appear to have taken it over the U.S. territory of Guam. But somewhere along that easterly route, the craft took an unexpected northern turn, according to several U.S. officials, who said that analysts are now examining the possibility that China didn’t intend to penetrate the American heartland with its airborne surveillance device.”

The cause of this swing to the north was unusual weather conditions, which pushed the balloon into the Aleutian Islands, the southwesternmost part of Alaska, where it then was picked up by the normal wind

currents that sweep southeast through Canada and into the US Great Plains. The balloon entered the continental US in Montana, continued to drift to the east and south, and ultimately reached the Atlantic Coast where it was shot down.

The balloon was launched from Hainan on January 20, crossed into US airspace in Alaska on January 28, passed through Canada and reached Montana on January 31, and finally reached the Atlantic Ocean on February 4. US military-intelligence agencies were monitoring its movements throughout this two-week period.

Given its sources, “US officials ... speaking on the condition of anonymity to describe sensitive intelligence,” the *Post* report amounts to a public admission by the US military-intelligence apparatus that China was not conducting anything but a routine operation in the Western and Central Pacific, before the balloon went off course unexpectedly.

The grudging conclusion of this devastating concession: “This new account suggests that the ensuing international crisis that has ratcheted up tensions between Washington and Beijing may have been at least partly the result of a mistake.”

The *Post*, which has been among the leaders in trumpeting for a confrontational anti-China policy by Washington, tried to put a good face on the debunking of the latest *casus belli*, suggesting that after the balloon went off course inadvertently, “Beijing apparently decided to seize the opportunity to try to gather intelligence.”

The article went on to claim, in complete contradiction to its initial revelation, that “The incident was just the latest indication of how purposefully China is going about expanding its surveillance capabilities ...”

Even by the degraded standards of the US corporate

media, this makes no sense. How can an inadvertent flight of a wind-blown balloon reveal “how purposefully” China is proceeding? One might ask, what would China have to do to satisfy the editors of the *Post*? Cede Hong Kong to the United States? Cede Shanghai, as under the “concessions” regime imposed by the imperialist powers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries? Cede the capital, Beijing?

The White House has also backed off from some of the more inflammatory claims voiced by administration officials and Democrats and Republicans in Congress in the week since the initial reports of the balloon’s presence in Montana. White House National Security spokesman John Kirby said Monday, “These balloons have provided limited additive capabilities” to China, rejecting suggestions that there was a major escalation of Beijing’s intelligence operations.

The Biden administration has yet to present any actual evidence that the Chinese balloon was, in fact, equipped with surveillance equipment for military purposes. Navy divers have reportedly retrieved much of the payload of the balloon, which China claims was a weather balloon conducting meteorological observations, but no public accounting has been given.

As far as that goes, moreover, Chinese military officials would be mad not to be watching the movements of US forces in the Pacific. It is barely a week since the remarks of a US admiral, telling his subordinates that he expected a war with China by 2025, were made public.

One can only imagine what an explosion of militaristic hysteria would ensue if a top Chinese officer had made a similar statement about an imminent war with the United States. There would be screaming media headlines and hysterical congressional demands for retaliation.

There was also a White House pullback in relation to the US shootdowns of unidentified objects over Alaska, Canada and Lake Huron. On Tuesday, Kirby told the media that the US government had no evidence of any connection between these objects and China or the intelligence operations of any government.

US investigators had not yet found the remnants of any of the objects, which were downed in remote areas difficult to conduct retrieval operations—two in the frozen north, in Alaska and the Yukon, and one in Lake Huron in water 150 feet deep.

US officials “will not dismiss as a possibility that these could be balloons that were simply tied to commercial or research entities and therefore benign,” Kirby said. “That very well could be, or could emerge, as a leading explanation here.”

Why the three were shot down, out of thousands of similar objects in the skies over North America, he did not explain.



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