

Biden refuses to explain why Air Force shot down harmless civilian balloons

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In a brief news conference Thursday, US President Joe Biden said three objects shot down by US fighter jets last weekend were most likely used for civilian research and recreation purposes.

“The intelligence community’s current assessment is that these three objects were most likely balloons tied to private companies, recreation or research institutions studying weather or conducting other scientific research,” Biden said.

On February 10, 11 and 12, the US Air force launched heat-seeking anti-aircraft missiles from advanced fighter aircraft to destroy small flying objects that it claims it could not visually identify.

These actions were the first time in American history that the US Air Force shot down any flying object over North America, the Pentagon said, marking a turning point in US aviation.

In response to this unprecedented series of attacks, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote,

The most plausible explanation for the events of the last three days is that the US military has begun shooting down weather and research balloons, with no serious explanation to the public or to the scientific, meteorological or aviation community about the change in policy.

We noted,

Meteorologists around the world launch hundreds of weather balloons every single day, and dozens of long-duration weather balloons

have been launched by NASA in recent decades. To these can be added the thousands of unmanned aircraft and drones launched at various altitudes by commercial and recreational pilots. The vast majority of these devices would not have FAA transponders, and would thus be qualified as “unidentified flying objects.”

Biden’s statements Thursday have completely confirmed this assessment. But Biden refused to explain why he took the reckless and unprecedented decision to shoot down some of these objects.

Biden explained the action by pointing to a change in the way the US military was collecting data:

I want to be clear: We don’t have any evidence that there has been a sudden increase in the number of objects in the sky. We’re now just seeing more of them, partially because the steps we’ve taken to increase our radars—to narrow our radars. And we have to keep adapting our approach to delaying—to dealing with these challenges.

This was a recapitulation of statements Sunday by Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Hemispheric Affairs Melissa Dalton:

In light of the People’s Republic of China balloon that we took down last Saturday, we have been more closely scrutinizing our

airspace at these altitudes, including enhancing our radar, which may at least partly explain the increase in objects that we've detected over the past week.

None of these statements, however, explain anything. Both NORAD and the FAA are aware of the thousands of small balloons that are launched around the world every single day, largely for research and meteorological purposes.

The Federal Aviation Administration has clear, decades-old rules dealing with “unmanned free balloons” to ensure that such balloons do not pose a danger to aircraft. Critically, the FAA regulations ensure that balloons have a density such that, in the unlikely event that they are struck by a powered aircraft, they do not damage it.

Jet aviation and ballooning have coexisted for decades. And over the course of these decades, the US has never dealt with unidentifiable balloons by shooting them down.

In other words, there was a deliberate, conscious decision on the part of the Biden administration to break with decades of precedent in shooting down objects it could not identify.

In reality, the decisions were clearly politically motivated, aimed at demonizing China and further militarizing not just air travel, but space itself.

Critically, Biden did not address the report that appeared just one day earlier in the *Washington Post* explaining that the US government allegedly suspects that the “Chinese spy balloon” shot down earlier, on February 4, unintentionally crossed into US airspace.

Under the headline, “Winds may have sent spy balloon off its path,” the *Post* wrote that “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.”

Instead, Biden continued to threaten China in his speech. But even his combative statements were condemned by Republican politicians and the *Wall*

Street Journal as insufficiently aggressive against China.

Despite its buffoonish elements, the events of the past two weeks are deadly serious. Civil aviation and research are being militarized, and the precedent has been set for downing aircraft that cannot identify themselves over the United States, creating the conditions for a catastrophe of massive proportions.

The greatest intended effect of the series of attacks on unmanned aircraft over the US has been, however, the deliberate effort to whip up fear, panic and hysteria with the aim of making the US population feel threatened by China, which is in reality being systematically encircled by US military assets deployed on the other side of the globe from American soil.



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