

US Military Intervenes, Downs Suspected Chinese Spy Balloon via Fighter Jet



A U.S. military fighter jet has taken down a suspected Chinese spy balloon off the coast of South Carolina, causing tensions between the two countries to escalate. The balloon was first detected in U.S. airspace a week before its destruction and sparked a public spying saga. President Joe Biden claimed that he issued an order to take down the balloon on Wednesday. Still, the Pentagon recommended waiting until it could be done over open water to avoid any potential harm to civilians from falling debris. The mission was carried out by an F-22 fighter jet from Langley Air Force Base in Virginia, using a single AIM-9X supersonic, heat-seeking air-to-air missile.

China has condemned the U.S. for the military strike, stating that the airship was only being used for meteorological and scientific purposes and had accidentally strayed into U.S. airspace. The U.S. has dismissed these claims, stating that the balloon clearly violated U.S. sovereignty. The balloon was shot down about six nautical miles off the coast of the Atlantic Ocean in shallow water, potentially aiding efforts to recover any surveillance equipment. The debris field was spread over seven miles, and multiple U.S. military vessels are now on the scene.

The downing of the balloon occurred shortly after the U.S. government ordered a halt to flights in and out of three South Carolina airports due to a "national security effort." Biden is likely to face criticism from Republican opponents in Congress who believe he failed to act quickly enough. However, he emphasized that he ordered the balloon to be shot down as soon as possible. The U.S. government has spoken directly with China regarding the action and briefed allies and partners worldwide.

Questions remain about the extent of information China may have gathered during the balloon's journey across the U.S. The balloon entered U.S. airspace in Alaska on January 28th before moving into Canadian airspace on January 30th and re-entering U.S. airspace over northern Idaho on January 31st. It is believed that the balloon was part of a fleet of Chinese spy balloons, with another balloon reportedly flying over Latin America. The Pentagon assesses that the balloon was not likely to provide significant information over and above other Chinese intel capabilities, such as satellites in low-Earth orbit.

The suspected spy balloon has also prompted Secretary of State Antony Blinken to postpone a visit to China, which was seen as an opportunity to stabilize the increasingly fractious relationship between the two countries. China is keen for a stable relationship with the U.S. to focus on its economy, which has been impacted by the now-abandoned zero-COVID policy and neglected by foreign investors alarmed by the perceived return of state intervention in the market. The relationship between the U.S. and China is likely to be a significant theme in the 2024 presidential race, with former President Donald Trump seeking to portray himself as stronger on China than Biden.

REFERENCES:

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