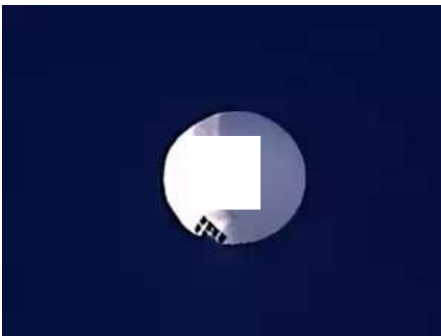


# US downs Chinese surveillance balloon, China threatens repercussions

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## Synopsis

Fighter aircraft from Langley Air Force Base in Virginia inspired a single missile into the balloon, causing it to crash into the ocean within the US territorial airspace, said the official, adding that as of now there are no indications that any people including US military personnel, civilian aircraft or maritime vessels were harmed in any way.



US military shoots down Chinese spy balloon, marks US-China tensions

The US military has downed the suspected Chinese spy balloon over the Atlantic Ocean and launched a mission to recover all the equipment from its debris, drawing a strong reaction from [China](#) which on Sunday warned of repercussions over America's use of force against its civilian unmanned airship.

At the direction of President Joe [Biden](#), the US military at 2.39 pm EST on Friday shot down the Chinese surveillance balloon in the Atlantic Ocean, some six miles (9.65 kms) away from the US shores in South Carolina, with no damage to the life and properties of Americans, a senior defence official told reporters in Washington.

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"I told them to shoot it down," Biden told reporters in Hagerstown, Maryland.

"On Wednesday, when I was briefed on the balloon, I ordered the [Pentagon](#) to shoot it down as soon as possible. They decided -- without doing damage to anyone on the ground -- the best time to do that was as it got over water, outside within the 12-mile limit," Biden said.

Responding to the downing of the balloon, [China expressed strong dissatisfaction and opposition towards the US use of force to attack China's civilian unmanned airship, state-run Xinhua news agency cited a statement from the Chinese Foreign Ministry as saying on Sunday.](#)

"The US insisting on the use of force is an obvious overreaction and a serious violation of international practice. China will resolutely uphold the relevant company's legitimate rights and interests, at the same time, reserving the right to take

further actions in response,” said the Foreign Ministry statement in Beijing.

The Chinese side has, after verification, repeatedly informed the US side of the civilian nature of the airship and conveyed that its entry into the United States due to force majeure was totally unexpected, the statement said, noting the Chinese side has clearly asked the US side to properly handle the matter in a calm, professional and restrained manner.

Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said that at the direction of President Biden, fighter aircraft assigned to US Northern Command successfully brought down the high-altitude surveillance balloon launched by and belonging to the People's Republic of China (PRC) over the water off the coast of South Carolina in US airspace.

“The balloon, which was being used by the PRC in an attempt to surveil strategic sites in the continental United States, was brought down above US territorial waters,” Austin said.

China has claimed that the balloon was merely a weather research “airship” that had been blown off course.

This action of downing the balloon of the size of three buses was taken in coordination, and with the full support, of the Canadian government. Defence officials told US media the debris landed in 14m of water - shallower than they had expected - near Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

The military is now trying to recover debris which is spread over seven miles (11 km).

The Pentagon official told reporters that they took immediate steps to protect against the balloon's collection of sensitive information mitigating its intelligence value to China.

By shooting down the balloon, it addressed the surveillance threat posed to military installations and further neutralise any intelligence value it could have produced, preventing it from returning to China.

“In addition, shooting the balloon down could enable the US to recover sensitive PRC equipment. While we took all necessary steps to protect against the PRC surveillance balloon collection of sensitive information of the surveillance balloons overflight of US territory, which was of intelligence value to us,” the official said without divulging much of the information.

“I can't go into more detail, but we were able to study and scrutinise the balloon and its equipment, which has been valuable. The Chinese officials have themselves acknowledged the high-altitude surveillance balloon which has been useful to the People's Republic of China,” said the official.

Now that the balloon has been shot down, the focus has shifted to the recovery mission, which is already underway.

Multiple vessels are on the spot along with the divers, to go down if needed. The US has also deployed unmanned vessels that can go down to get the structure and lift it back up on the recovery ship, said the official. FBI officials are also on board as well as other counterintelligence authorities to categorise and assess the platform itself.

According to the second senior defence official, the Pentagon has been tracking this high-altitude balloon for some time. It entered Alaska on January 28. It then entered into Canadian airspace on January 30 and re-entered US airspace over

Northern Idaho on January 31.

“With confidence, the high-altitude balloon was a PRC surveillance balloon. We assessed that it did not pose a threat at any time to civilian air traffic and because of the altitude of the balloons. We also assess it did not pose a military or kinetic threat to US people or property on the ground, although we were constantly updating both of those assessments and prepared to take it out if that threat profile changed,” said the official.

The Chinese authorities have denied it is a spying aircraft, and instead said it was a weather ship blown astray.

“We're also looking at the intel value of the balloon throughout. We are going to learn more as we pick up the debris that was not likely to provide significant added value over and above other PRC intel capabilities such as satellites in low Earth orbit, for example,” said the official.

But nevertheless, **this balloon was clearly crossing over sensitive sites, including sensitive military sites**. As such, the Pentagon took additional precautions to make sure that whatever added intelligence value was minimised.

Through constant monitoring and surveillance, the US has learned technical things about this balloon and its surveillance capabilities. “I suspect if we are successful in recovering aspects of the debris we will learn even more,” said the official.

President Biden had been under pressure to shoot the balloon down since defence officials first announced they were tracking it on Thursday. After the balloon was shot down, Biden said: “They successfully took it down, and I want to compliment our aviators who did it.”

Senator Jack Reed, Chairman of the [Senate Armed Services Committee](#), said that Biden made the right decision to shoot down this alleged Chinese spy balloon out of range of American civilians and infrastructure. US First Lady Jill Biden described it as a moment of pride.

“I mean, I felt such a sense of pride about the effort and that our military, you know, shot down the balloon, how coordinated it was, how thoughtful it was, that it was decided to wait until it was over water so that civilians weren't affected,” she said.

One senior military official told CNN the recovery of debris from the balloon should be “fairly easy” and could take a “relatively short time”. The official added that “capable Navy divers” could be deployed to assist in the operation.

China has a fleet of these types of surveillance balloons, according to another senior defence official, including the one that was spotted flying over Venezuela and Colombia this week.

“These balloons are all part of a (People's Republic of China) fleet of balloons developed to conduct surveillance operations, which have also violated the sovereignty of other countries. These kinds of activities are often undertaken at the direction of the People's Liberation Army or PLA,” ABC news quoted the official as saying.

“Over the past several years, Chinese balloons have previously been spotted over countries across five continents, including in East Asia, South Asia and Europe.”

The incident added new tension to the US-China relationship. The Pentagon called it an "unacceptable violation" of US sovereignty.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told Beijing it was "an irresponsible act", He also postponed his trip to China on February 5-6.

But China sought to play down the cancellation of his visit, saying in a statement on Saturday that neither side had formally announced a plan for a trip.

In Video: **US military shoots down Chinese spy balloon, marks US-China tensions**