



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on April 3, 2023

Downed Spy Balloon Transmitted Images and Signals Intelligence to Beijing

The Chinese spy balloon shot down over Myrtle Beach, S.C., on February 4 managed to call home to Beijing before being sent crashing to the sea by an F-22 Raptor. The data transmitted by the balloon included imagery and signals intelligence from U.S. military sites, according to sources who spoke to media.

Weeks after the Biden administration and Beijing downplayed the presence of a Chinese spy balloon in U.S. airspace — with Beijing claiming it was a “weather balloon” that had “inadvertently” gone astray — CNN, NBC, and other mainstream media are now reporting that the balloon was indeed gathering intelligence on military sites across the United States.

[NBC News](#) reports that “two current senior U.S. officials and one former senior administration official” say that “the Chinese spy balloon that flew across the U.S. was able to gather intelligence from several sensitive American military sites.” Further:

China was able to control the balloon so it could make multiple passes over some of the sites (at times flying figure-eight formations) and transmit the information it collected back to Beijing in real time, the three officials said. The intelligence China collected was mostly from electronic signals, which can be picked up from weapons systems or include communications from base personnel, rather than images, the officials said.

And [according to CNN](#), “The Chinese spy balloon that transited the US earlier this year was able to capture imagery and collect some signals intelligence from US military sites, a source familiar with the matter tells CNN.”

Analysis of the debris recovered from the downed balloon provides a glimpse into the technological capabilities employed. As NBC News reports:

The balloon had a self-destruct mechanism that could have been activated remotely by China, but the officials said it’s not clear if that didn’t happen because the mechanism malfunctioned or because China decided not to trigger it.



U.S. Navy/AP Images



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Further, the technological capabilities of the spy balloon were not the only — or even the *main* — problem. Inaction on the part of the Biden administration allowed the balloon to travel across Alaska and the entire continental U.S. — gathering and transmitting data all along the way — before finally being shot down. As NBC News reports:

The balloon entered U.S. airspace over Alaska on Jan. 28, according to the Biden administration, which said it was tracking it as it moved. Within the next four days, the balloon was flying over Montana — specifically Malmstrom Air Force Base, where the U.S. stores some of its nuclear assets.

On Feb. 2, NBC News was first to report that the Chinese spy balloon was flying over the U.S. and that President Joe Biden had considered shooting it down, prompting the administration to publicly confirm that and disclose it had been monitoring the balloon for days. Once the balloon's existence became public, China increased its speed, officials said, in [an] attempt to get it out of U.S. airspace as quickly as possible.

And while we *do* know some of the balloon's capabilities, a much larger part of the problem is what we *don't* know. As CNN reports:

The balloon was able to transmit information back to Beijing in real time, the source said, and the US government still does not know for sure whether the Chinese government could wipe the balloon's data as it received it. That raises questions about whether there is intelligence the balloon was able to gather that the US still doesn't know about.

And while China claims — as CNN reports — “that the balloon was actually just a weather balloon thrown off course” (and the Biden administration still seems willing to pretend that claim may be true), it is worth putting in the for-what-it's-worth column that China not only *had* the ability to maneuver the craft, but *used* that ability to accelerate the craft and head for the ocean once it was publicly reported that the U.S. was thinking of shooting it down. Furthermore, along its trans-American course, the spy balloon slowed and hovered for prolonged periods over sensitive military sites, including nuclear missile sites.

It seems obvious to even the casual observer that Beijing is lying and that the Biden administration failed to act to defend national security, only shooting the craft down once it had completed its week-long mission of intelligence gathering.

Given the connections between Biden and China, this failure on the part of his administration may be more than simple ineptitude — even a generously charitable view leaves Biden in the hot seat where blame is concerned. After all, Americans have the right to expect action from the president when it comes to defending and preserving our sovereignty as a nation.



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