Carlton Wiggins, Editorial Writing, Word Count: 766

Everything Changed When We Learned About Spy Balloons

Imagine you just woke up, you’re ready for the day and you’re off to a great start. You grab your phone and check your social media. The first thing you see on Twitter is “World War III” trending for the third January in a row. Clearly unphased, you look into what the uproar is about. “A Chinese spy balloon was discovered over the state of Idaho.” The balloon was first spotted by [NORAD](https://www.norad.mil/) on Saturday, January 28th, which was tracked since it reached Alaska’s airspace. A few days later, it drifted over Canadian airspace, and came back into the U.S. from Idaho. Once the public discovered the balloon, many took photos were taken. News coverage was everywhere. Even some people, including politicians, encouraged others to shoot it down. Hell, even I walked outside to see if you can find it.

President Biden is alerted by his team, and they go over military options on how to handle the situation. [Politico](https://www.politico.com/news/2023/02/05/timeline-a-chinese-spy-balloons-7-day-trip-across-the-united-states-00081222) quoted a Pentagon senior administrative official saying, “because we could track the exact path of the balloon and ensure no activities or sensitive unencrypted comms would be conducted in its vicinity.” Since the Pentagon has their eyes on this balloon, the plan is to let it drift out into ocean without revealing sensitive information. With more and more reports coming out and the Pentagon issuing a statement, two more balloons are spotted over Central and South America. Now, according to [WGBH](https://www.wgbh.org/news/news/2023/02/03/china-says-the-balloon-is-theirs-but-not-used-for-spying-heres-what-we-know), China confirmed that they owned the balloon, but it is mainly used for meteorological purposes. However, a reporter from [The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/03/spy-balloons-what-are-they-and-why-are-they-still-being-used) states that the spy balloons are “a piece of spying equipment, for example a camera, suspended beneath a balloon that floats above a given area, carried by wind currents.”

After traveling from Idaho to Montana, and finally reaching the Carolina coast. Biden is briefed on the plan to shoot down the balloon and what will happen afterwards. The FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) temporarily grounds all flights in the Wilmington/Charleston area for military jets to get into position. According to the [United States Department of Defense](https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3288543/f-22-safely-shoots-down-chinese-spy-balloon-off-south-carolina-coast/), the balloon was shot down over the coast of Surfside Beach, South Carolina on February 4th, and it fell from up to 65,000 feet. Soon after the United States military later recovered the wreckage. Videos of this incident were captured on a smartphone and went viral in a matter of minutes.

The way the Chinese government has handled the situation has not only been laughably shocking, but has made the relationship between China and the United States worse tense. China accused the United States of indiscriminatory use of force because military action was taken towards their property. They’ve even gone to the extent of demanding the United States return the device. According to [NPR](https://www.npr.org/2023/02/06/1154729711/china-accuses-the-u-s-of-indiscriminate-use-of-force-in-shooting-down-of-balloon), Vice Foreign Minister, Xie Feng, sent a formal complaint with the U.S. Embassy. Xie said, “What the U.S. has done has seriously impacted and damaged both sides' efforts and progress in stabilizing Sino-U.S. relations since the Bali meeting,” referring to Xi Jingping and Biden’s meeting in Bali. This whole incident occurs just before Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, was supposed to go to China in hopes to reestablish the relationship between the two nations. Now the event is postponed until further notice.

Again, this isn’t the first time China has sent spy balloons to another country. China has been spying on the U.S. for years, but who’s to say the U.S. hasn’t spied on China? I personally believe this isn’t a matter of spying, but foreign property flying in another territory’s airspace. So, I believe they have the right to shoot it down, but that’s beside the point. Other nations have even expressed gratitude, and “appreciating” what the U.S. has done to expose China. Antony Blinken, said in an [interview with ABC News](https://twitter.com/ThisWeekABC/status/1627313369052065792) that more than 40 different countries have had these balloons go over their land. Most of these countries are aware of what’s been happening, but to be the first country to call out this matter.

I’m not sure why China is doing this, nor do I believe anyone may ever truly know. They could be looking for information, landscapes, etc., but who really knows? Yet, it’s still a reoccurring issue, and if China continues with these deceptive antics, then it could lead the world to a dark path. The United States and China already have a grudge against each other. If two people get into an altercation, who’s to say a friend wouldn’t join in support if they were there? Who’s to say this won’t truly lead to a World War III?

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