

CBS Mornings

02/06/23

7:01:06 a.m. [TEASE]

10 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Chinese Spy Balloon]

DAVID BEGNAUD: The U.S. shoots down an alleged Chinese spy balloon. Why some people are criticizing the President.

SENATOR TED CRUZ (R-TX) [on CBS's *Face the Nation*, 02/05/23]: He allowed a full week for the Chinese to conduct spying operations.

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7:05:42 a.m.

6 minutes and 59 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Chinese Balloon Fallout; China Responds to Biden's Decision to Finally Shoot Down Balloon]

BEGNAUD: Now to the suspected Chinese spy balloon that raised tensions between the U.S. and China. An Air Force fighter jet shot down the balloon off the South Carolina coast on Saturday, and a recovery operation is underway. This morning China said the U.S. hyped up the incident on purpose. The U.S. says the balloon flight was a clear violation of international law. Nancy Cordes is at the White House this morning where officials are defending their response. Nancy, good morning.

NANCY CORDES: Good morning, David, yeah, the White House has been strenuously arguing all weekend that waiting to shoot this balloon down was the safest thing for people on the ground, and enabled them to gather valuable intelligence. Overnight, though, the Chinese accused the U.S. of an indiscriminate use of force even as some of the President's critics argue he wasn't forceful enough. The Chinese balloon may be down now, but the political fight over it rages on.

CRUZ [on CBS's *Face the Nation*, 02/05/23]: I think this entire episode telegraphed weakness to Xi and the Chinese government.

CORDES: In Washington Sunday, Republicans argued that the balloon, the size of three school buses, should have been taken out over the Pacific before it even entered U.S. air space in Alaska.

SENATOR TOM COTTON (R-AR) [on *Fox News Sunday with Shannon Bream*, 02/05/23]: The President was paralyzed for an entire week by a balloon.

CORDES: The balloon's seven-day cross country journey took it over Idaho, Montana, Missouri, and eventually to the South Carolina coast —

MAN: They shot it.

CORDES: — where an F-22 fired a single air to air missile and sent the equipment hurtling into the Atlantic Ocean.

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN: I told them to shoot it down.

REPORTER: On Wednesday?

BIDEN: On Wednesday.

REPORTER: But the recommendation from —

BIDEN: They said to me let's wait until the safest place to do it.

CORDES: Senior administration officials argued that closely observing the balloon in flight before shooting it down allowed them to better understand the Chinese program, and further confirmed its mission was surveillance.

SENATE MAJORITY LEADER CHUCK SCHUMER (D-NY): We sent a clear message to China that this is not acceptable. We protected civilians. We gained more intelligence while protecting our own sensitive information.

CORDES: White House officials say similar Chinese spy balloons entered U.S. air space at least three times during the Trump years though this information, they say, was discovered after the prior administration left. On Friday, yet another Chinese balloon was spotted over Latin America. All this comes just as the U.S. was trying to dial down tensions with China. The Chinese are now claiming the U.S. overreacted, even as Secretary of State Antony Blinken called off a diplomatic trip to China at the last minute.

SENATOR MARCO RUBIO (R-FL) [on CNN's *State of the Union*, 02/05/23]: It's not a coincidence that this happens leading up to the state of the Union address, leading up to Blinken's visit to China.

CORDES: President Biden's State of the Union address is taking place tomorrow night, and the administration is considering taking further action against China over all of this. The full Senate is expected to get a classified briefing this week about China's spying capabilities, because clearly, Gayle, there's a lot more to be learned.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Chinese Balloon Fallout; H.R. McMaster on Biden Administration's Handling of Situation]

GAYLE KING: Yeah, a lot of questions here, Nancy, thank you so much. Joining us now is retired General H.R. McMaster, CBS News foreign policy and national security contributor. He is a former White House national security adviser. General, thank you for joining us from California. I know it's bright and early for you, but we know this is important. Can you help us understand exactly what happened? Intelligence officials say that this poses a threat to national security in this country. Do you feel the same? What could they be looking for up there?

H.R. MCMASTER: It is, Gayle, but this is — this is part of a sustained campaign of espionage against the United States, so I'm hoping this is kind of a wake-up call for all of us. It's really time for us to recognize that the Chinese Communist Party is engaged in this sustained campaign against the United States, and — and maybe we should take other actions that are similar to shooting down a balloon, which is maybe not underwriting our own demise with investments in — in — in China, and companies that are associated with their — yeah, with their military complex. And — and then also, you know, I think it's really important for us to call out the wide range of behaviors of the Chinese Communist Party, including — including what they're doing to their own citizens with the sustained, you know, campaign of — of — of — of really genocide against the people in Xinjiang as well as their aggression overseas.

KING: Already, as you hear, it's turned into a partisan issue. Many Republicans are — say that the Biden administration overreacted here. Do you feel the same?

MCMASTER: No. I mean, I think, I mean, come on, let's blame the Chinese Communist Party and stop pointing fingers at each other, right? We're on the same side. I'm hoping, you know, I'm hoping that we can all come together and this is really one of the few areas, Gayle, right, I mean, everything is so partisan these days.

KING: Yes.

MCMASTER: Everything is so political. I mean, this is one of the areas where there's really a high consensus, right? I mean, I think that when you look at the behavior of the party, the Chinese Communist Party, that there's a great deal of consensus, and that we ought to — we ought to maybe point fingers at the Chinese communist party instead of at each other.

KING: You know, *SNL* made a joke over the weekend, saying way to go, USA, you shot down a balloon. Can you just give the American people a couple sentences why this matters and why we should be concerned?

MCMASTER: Well, it really matters because this is part of a broad campaign to extract as much data and information as the Chinese Communist Party can, to gain an advantage over us, and this is an advantage militarily, you know, as this balloon loitered over sensitive sites, critical to our strategic deterrent capabilities but also, you know, it's to get data that gives the Chinese Communist Party a differential advantage economically over us as well.

KING: Hmmm.

MCMASTER: And so I'll tell you, Gayle, what we've been doing for so long is we've been actually enabling our own demise with investments in Chinese companies that are connected to their — their defense establishment. We have — we have allowed them to — to extract data from us that is sensitive, whether it's commercially, you know, from communications infrastructure or from, you know, TikTok and where they're —

KING: Yeah.

MCMASTER: — where they're Information from your teenage children. I just think that this is — this is -- hopefully a metaphor like remember Sputnik, you know, late 1950s.

KING: Yes. Yes. I do.

MCMASTER: That woke us up to the competition with the soviet union. I think this -- this might be like a less spectacular — it's a balloon, Gayle —

KING: Alright.

MCMASTER: — but hopefully that's a moment — it will be a moment where we can really recognize we're in a very consequential competition.

KING: Thank you, general, this is so much more than a balloon. We thank you for your time this morning, thanks.

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8:01:30 a.m.

18 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Spy Balloon Shot Down]

BEGNAUD: The Biden administration defends the President's decision to wait to shoot down an alleged Chinese spy balloon.

CORDES: The White House has been strenuously arguing all weekend that waiting to shoot this balloon down was the safest thing for people on the ground, and enabled them to gather valuable intelligence.