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U.S. Shoots Down High-Altitude Object Over Alaska

Object was flying at 40,000 feet and posed threat to civilians, officials say



National Security Council spokesman John Kirby, speaking at the White House on Friday, said the U.S. shot down a high-altitude object over U.S. territorial waters.

PHOTO: ANDREW HARRER/BLOOMBERG NEWS

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WASHINGTON—The U.S. military downed a “high-altitude object” spotted in Alaska’s airspace, the White House said Friday, marking at least the second time in less than a week the Biden administration took action to protect the skies over the U.S.

The U.S. couldn’t say who owned the object, but a White House official said it didn’t appear to have a sophisticated capacity to maneuver and appeared to be unmanned. The U.S. planned to recover the debris, which landed on frozen water in northeastern Alaska. That location could “make it easier for us to try to recover some of the debris,” John Kirby, a White House National Security Council spokesman, told reporters.

The U.S. first learned about the object Thursday night, Mr. Kirby said. The U.S. hadn’t attempted to reach out to China, Mr. Kirby said, as they did last week

when a suspected Chinese spy balloon was spotted traveling across the U.S.

Photos: Navy Starts to Retrieve Balloon Debris

PHOTO: US NAVY/SHUTTERSTOCK

The object was flying at an altitude of 40,000 feet and posed a “reasonable threat to the safety of civilians,” Mr. Kirby said. The balloon had been flying at roughly 60,000 feet.

The military downed the object in U.S. territorial waters at the recommendation of President Biden, Mr. Kirby said. Mr. Biden was briefed on the matter Thursday night and gave the order to shoot down the object on Friday morning.

A fighter aircraft conducted two flights—one on Thursday and another earlier Friday—to assess the object. The object was downed early Friday afternoon, U.S. officials said.

Mr. Kirby said the object was about the size of a car, smaller than the suspected Chinese spy balloon that the U.S. downed on Feb. 4. The balloon was about 200 feet long and carried a payload roughly the size of a jetliner, Pentagon officials said.

As with Saturday's downing of the alleged Chinese balloon, an F-22 brought the object down today, a defense official said.

The Biden administration is planning as soon as Friday to blacklist about a half-dozen Chinese companies involved in production of surveillance balloons, a person familiar with the matter said.

The discovery late last month of the Chinese balloon, which traveled across the continental U.S. for several days, set off renewed tensions between Washington and Beijing, and prompted criticism of Mr. Biden from Republican lawmakers.

China has said the balloon was used for "research, mainly meteorological, purposes" and had blown off course, and that the U.S. has overreacted to the incident.

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