

The US May Have Shot Down a Small Hobby Balloon with a Sidewinder Missile

President Biden acknowledged Thursday that the three objects he ordered shot down were likely harmless research balloons

By [Dave DeCamp](#)

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President Biden on Thursday acknowledged that the three unidentified objects he ordered the US military to shoot down [were likely harmless weather balloons](#).

"The intelligence community's current assessment is that these three objects were most likely balloons tied to private companies, recreation, or research institutions studying weather or conducting other scientific research," Biden said.

Following the panic caused by the Chinese balloon that floated over the United States, US fighter jets shot down unidentified objects on February 10, 11, and 12 using heat-seeking AIM-9X Sidewinder missiles, which are worth over \$400,000 apiece.

Biden said the military was still working to collect the debris. "Our military and the Canadian military are seeking to recover the debris so we can learn more about these three objects," he said.

According to [a report from Aviation Week](#), at least one of the objects may have been a hobby balloon reported missing by a club in Illinois that launches small balloons with tracking devices that are capable of traveling the globe at high altitudes.

The club, the Northern Illinois Bottlecap Balloon Brigade (NIBBB), said its balloon was last reported off the coast of Alaska on February 10, and tracking data projected that it would be floating over Canada's Yukon Territory on February 11, the same day a US F-22 shot down an object in the area.

The balloon they launched is known as a "pico balloon," a small silver-coated party-style balloon that carries a transmitter. A Pentagon memo [described the object that was shot](#)

[down over Canada](#) as a “small, metallic balloon with a tethered payload below it.”

This is a pico balloon, and it may be what your government shot down with heat-seeking AIM-9X Sidewinder missiles, which are worth over \$400,000 each pic.twitter.com/c0Lb5EE2zE

— Dave DeCamp (@DecampDave) [February 16, 2023](#)

Canadian authorities said the object that was shot down was traveling at “approximately 40,000 feet.” When the NIBBB’s balloon was last reported, it was floating at 38,910 feet.

The NIBBB isn’t blaming the US government for shooting down its balloon yet and sometimes [the transmitters turn off for a few days](#), but they think it’s a real possibility. Ron Meadows, the founder of Scientific Balloon Solutions (SBS), a company that makes pico balloons, told *Aviation Week* that he tried to contact the government to tell them they were likely shooting these balloons down.

“I tried contacting our military and the FBI—and just got the runaround—to try to enlighten them on what a lot of these things probably are. And they’re going to look not too intelligent to be shooting them down,” Meadows said. According to *Aviation Week*, the pico balloons can usually be purchased for between \$12-180 each, depending on the type.

Rocky Mountain Ham Radio, another group that launches hobby balloons, [describes the pico balloons as](#) “a 3-foot mylar foil party balloon, filled partially with ultra-pure helium, and carrying a 13-gram solar-powered APRS transmitter. The balloon is intended to travel for long distances (not to achieve heights) and is not intended to be recovered. These balloons have literally circumnavigated the globe — even multiple times — before finally descending.”

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