

Chinese balloon was designed for intelligence surveillance, not weather, US says

The Chinese balloon that was destroyed off the coast of South Carolina was built for spying and had sophisticated communications equipment, U.S. officials said, based on information about the balloon gathered by a U-2 spy plane.

“High-resolution imagery from U-2 flybys revealed that the high-altitude balloon was capable of conducting signals intelligence collection operations,” a senior State Department official told reporters. “The high-altitude balloon’s equipment was clearly for intelligence surveillance and inconsistent with the equipment on board weather balloons.”

That equipment included “an array likely capable of collecting and geolocating communications.” Those photos could contribute to an embarrassment in store for Chinese officials, who insist the balloon was a “civilian airship” deployed for scientific research and blown off course.

“Everybody knows that it’s a lie. Everybody knows that they’re just trying to cover themselves,” Sen. Ben Cardin (D-MD) told the *Washington Examiner* this week. “It’s not just the United States. The international community knows that they use balloons for spying purposes.”

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