

Trump stokes right-wing hysteria over alleged drone sightings

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In a press conference Monday at Mar-a-Lago, incoming President Donald Trump made remarks intended to fuel the right-wing hysteria over alleged drone sightings in New Jersey and other northeastern states. Trump said:

The government knows what's happening. Our military knows where they took off from. If it's a garage, they can go right into that garage. They know where it came from and where it went.

For some reason they don't want to comment. And I think they'd be better off saying what is. Our military knows and our president knows. And for some reason, they want to keep people in suspense. I can't imagine it's the enemy because if it was the enemy they'd blast it out even if they were late. Something strange is going on. For some reason, they don't want to tell the people.

To underscore the supposed danger from the drones, compounded by the government's alleged conspiracy of silence, Trump added that he was cancelling his plans to spend the weekend at his New Jersey estate, saying, "It's happening over Bedminster."

The *Times of India*, reporting Trump's remarks, noted that he had survived two assassination attempts during the election campaign, suggesting the danger of a third at the hands of a malicious drone.

Trump's remarks followed a posting last week on Truth Social, in which he wrote:

Mystery drone sightings all over the Country. Can this really be happening without our government's knowledge? I don't think so! Let the public know, and now. Otherwise, shoot them down!!!

For the past several weeks, panicky reports and conspiracy theories have proliferated of "mystery" drones along the eastern seaboard of the US. They have been spearheaded by far-right political forces and social media influencers and facilitated by wall-to-wall coverage by the corporate media, including the broadcast networks and the cable news channels. The aim is to create in advance of Trump's inauguration next month an atmosphere of fear and disorientation, to facilitate Trump's plans for a police state assault on immigrants and dictatorial measures, as well as an escalation of war against the adversaries of US imperialism.

While the leading role in this operation has been played by the Republican fascist right, Democratic politicians have joined in. This is despite overwhelming evidence that the vast majority of drone sightings are, in fact, commercial flights, private manned aircraft and helicopters, and the much smaller numbers of actual drones are commercial, law enforcement or hobbyist craft registered with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

At the same time, the presence of drones in the skies over densely populated regions is not surprising. Recreational and commercial drones have surged in popularity, with nearly a million registered by the FAA. There are 42 million drone launches in the US per year, and some 1,600 drones in the skies over New York City on any given day.

On Monday, the same day as Trump's press conference, John Kirby, the Biden administration's National Security Council spokesperson, said that of the more than 5,000 tips received about drone sightings in recent weeks, only 100 required further examination. Most of the sightings were fixed-wing, piloted aircraft that were taking off or landing at major airports.

Kirby added:

We assess that the sightings to date include a combination of lawful commercial drones, hobbyist drones and law enforcement drones, as well as manned fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters and even stars that were mistakenly reported as drones... We have not identified anything anomalous or any national security or public safety risk over the civilian airspace in New Jersey or other states in the Northeast.

On Tuesday, he made the rounds of the morning shows on NBC, ABC and CBS and reiterated the same talking points. This followed a joint statement Monday by the Department of Homeland Security, FBI, FAA and Defense Department making the same basic points.

Those who have been leading the promotion of drone conspiracy theories include Infowars founder Alex Jones, fascist militia groups such as the Oath Keepers and the Three Percenters, former Fox News host Tucker Carlson, and the far-right website *Gateway Pundit*. Podcaster Joe Rogan has been promoting a video claiming the drones are secretly detecting radioactive material.

Republican Congressman Chris Smith from New Jersey's 4th Congressional District held a press conference on December 14 at which he announced he was drafting legislation to give state police the authority to shoot down drones.

On December 11, New Jersey Rep. Jeff Van Drew (R-2nd CD) appeared on Fox News and declared he had unimpeachable information, provided by an unnamed Pentagon source, that Iran had stationed a "mothership" off of the US East Coast to launch low-flying drones over New Jersey. He demanded that the drones be shot down.

Responding the same day to Van Drew and Fox

News, Sabrina Singh, the Pentagon's deputy press secretary, told reporters at a briefing: "There is no Iranian ship off the coast of the United States and there's no so-called mothership launching drones towards the United States."

At a House Homeland Security Committee hearing held December 10 to discuss the drones, Republican Tim Burchett of Tennessee denounced the "lack of transparency" from the White House and the Pentagon, calling it "more than shameful" and adding, "They don't trust us, we don't trust them."

Prominent Democratic politicians have rushed to make the drone hysteria bipartisan. New York Governor Kathy Hochul said December 15 that federal officials were sending a "drone detection system" to her state, while arguing that Congress should give the state "the power to deal directly with the drones." She previously said drone activity forced Stewart Airfield north of New York City to close its runways for about an hour the night of December 13, adding: "This has gone too far."

Her Democratic counterpart in New Jersey, Governor Phil Murphy, has joined with New York Senator Chuck Schumer to urge Congress to pass the Safeguarding the Homeland from the Threats Posed by Unmanned Aircraft Systems Act, a bill introduced in the Senate last year that would give state and local law enforcement the power to track, disable and destroy drones under Department of Homeland Security supervision.

Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-Connecticut) said the drones should be taken "out of the skies" if needed. Meanwhile, President Joe Biden has said nothing to counter the hysteria over alleged drone sightings.

The potentially disastrous consequences of the far-right furor over "mystery drones" is underscored by reports of pilots being blinded by lasers aimed at their planes.



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