

Brazen, mysterious 'drone' incursions now a major crisis

BY MARIK VON RENNENKAMPFF, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR - 12/17/24 12:30 PM ET

Over the last five years, a series of brazen incursions involving objects that exhibit seemingly highly advanced technology, have left local, state and federal authorities baffled. In short, an unknown actor appears to be sending a stark message: "We can operate drone-like vehicles in American skies, over critical infrastructure and hover even above sensitive military facilities with complete impunity."

Most recently, military personnel, law enforcement officers and New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New York residents observed what they described as mysterious low-flying drones over their respective states. According to New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, the objects are "very sophisticated... the minute you get eyes on them, they go dark." Murphy is taking the situation "deadly seriously."

The Pentagon strenuously denied that the objects are U.S. military assets and claimed to have "no evidence" they are from a foreign adversary.

The recent rash of sightings began on Nov. 13 with reports from security and police officers at Picatinny Arsenal, a military research center in New Jersey. The facility reported an additional 10 "confirmed" incidents over the ensuing weeks. A key New Jersey naval base, Naval Weapons Station Earle, reported "multiple" incursions over its airspace, including "several" over a 24-hour period.

Alarming, groups of these unknown objects have been observed over critical infrastructure, including reservoirs, bridges and nuclear power facilities. The mayor of West Milford, N.J., for example, reported 60 of them hovering above local reservoirs in one day.

During a New Jersey State Police briefing that drew more than 200 mayors, officials learned that the objects are approximately six feet in length, often operate in a coordinated manner and can loiter for as long as seven hours. Notably, even though New Jersey has “some of the best detection equipment in the nation,” the craft evade detection.

Officers with the Ocean County, N.J., sheriff’s drone unit, for example, told the New York Times that “we had one the other night that, as we’re watching it, it just shuts the lights off and it’s gone in pure darkness.”

In one particularly striking incident, New Jersey State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan described to legislators how a police helicopter hovered over a large, six-foot object that suddenly shut off its lights, forcing the helicopter to depart due to flight safety concerns.

During a Dec. 10 House Homeland Security Committee hearing, Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.) recounted how an Ocean County, N.J., sheriff’s deputy observed 50 of the objects “come in off the ocean.”

Shortly thereafter, a Coast Guard vessel reported more than a dozen of these drones shadowing it. According to Ocean County Sheriff Michael Mastronardy, the approximately eight-foot-long objects then flew over the Coast Guard vessel at an altitude of 300 feet.

A Coast Guard spokesman confirmed “that multiple low-altitude aircraft were observed in [the] vicinity of one of our vessels near Island Beach State Park.”

Unsurprisingly, the month-long incursions have now escalated into a crisis, with key senators, local elected leaders, police officials and citizens demanding answers and action from a seemingly clueless federal government.

On Dec. 13, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said that “we have not seen anything unusual, we have not seen any unusual activity” following the deployment of federal officials and equipment to New Jersey. Mayorkas then suggested that “a case of mistaken identity” and small drones purchased at “convenience stores” explain the recent incidents.

To be sure, the vast majority of video footage recorded by private citizens is of misidentified commercial and private aircraft. But Mayorkas’ point-blank dismissal of “multiple” “confirmed” incursions over key military facilities, including over a dozen objects shadowing a Coast Guard vessel — which falls under Mayorkas’ direct authority — is astounding.

Similarly dismissive statements from the White House spurred fierce pushback from law enforcement officials and legislators, including one former Army helicopter pilot who observed the objects moving in “tight formations.”

Monmouth County, N.J., Sheriff Shaun Golden, for example, invited White House national security communications advisor John Kirby to speak with “members of

the state police, county and local law enforcement [and] trained personnel from... two military installations” who observed “highly sophisticated, very large objects that avoid detection [and] move at rapid speeds.”

Critically, these incidents follow an alarming pattern. For 17 days in late 2023, unknown objects flew over Langley Air Force Base in Virginia, a key military facility tasked with defending the airspace above the nation’s capital.

Beyond forcing the cancellation of nighttime training missions and the transfer of highly advanced fighter jets to another base, the incursions left the military so perplexed that it tasked a special NASA aircraft equipped with highly sophisticated camera systems to investigate. Intriguingly, the objects made no effort to hide their presence, displaying bright, flashing lights.

With parallels to the recent incidents, the Wall Street Journal noted that the unknown craft observed over Virginia in 2023 “were nearly impossible to track, vanishing each night despite a wealth of resources deployed to catch them.”

In mid-November, unknown, brightly-lit objects hovered and flew with complete impunity for several days over four U.S. military facilities in the United Kingdom. The incidents reportedly began at a U.S. base believed to host nuclear weapons.

Five years ago, hundreds of Colorado, Wyoming and Nebraska residents and law enforcement officers reported observing mysterious objects, including some that hovered over nuclear missile facilities. In at least two instances, police officers observed over a dozen objects circling around a stationary “mothership,” an intriguing dynamic also reported during the recent New Jersey incidents.

In another notable parallel to the New Jersey incidents, a Colorado witness described one of the unknown objects descending towards him before the lights suddenly shut off.

Critically, such perplexing incidents date back many decades. The New York Times, for example, reported on a series of extraordinary incursions by unknown objects at four key U.S. nuclear weapons facilities in 1975.

Declassified documents describe how, as fighter aircraft approached these objects, they “turned off their lights.” The lights then “turned back on upon [the

jets'] departure.”

The Washington Post noted that the 1975 incursions involved “unidentified, low-flying and elusive objects [which] led to extensive but unsuccessful Air Force attempts to track and detain the objects.” With yet more parallels to recent incidents, the Post stated that “brightly lighted, fast-moving vehicles... hovered over nuclear weapons storage areas and evaded all pursuit efforts.”

Government documents also describe how more than 140 personnel stationed at nuclear missile sites in Colorado, Wyoming and Nebraska observed nearly 150 objects over three nights in 1965.

Just like the New Jersey incidents, the unknown craft flew only at night, moved in various formations, displayed bright flashing lights and engaged in “hovering” and “up and down movement.” Notably, the objects also frequently disappeared “by fading out, usually quite suddenly.”

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