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# Video Catches Mystery ‘Missile’ Launch Near L.A. [Updated Once More]

By [Noah Shachtman](#)  November 9, 2010 | 11:34 am | Categories: [Weapons and Ammo](#)

Someone seemingly launched a mysterious missile 35 miles off of the California coast last night — just west of Los Angeles and north of Catalina Island. But anyone in the military knows who did it, or what the hell the thing was, they haven’t told me yet.

“We’ve checked and confirmed — this is not associated with any Navy operations,” says sea service spokesman Lt. Myers Vasquez. Who knows, the thing might only *look* like a missile – but turn out to be something else.

“Several different offices are looking into it,” says Anthony Roake, a spokesman for Air Force Space Command. “I’m reaching blanks with the folks I’ve talked to.” U.S. Strategic Command, Air Force Global Strike Command, the and Missile Defense Agency sources are similarly stumped.

In an odd statement, U.S. Northern Command says it’s “unable to provide specific details... [but] can confirm that there is no threat to our nation, and from all indications this was not a launch by a foreign military.”

Roake notes the Air Force’s last launch in the area was on Friday, when an unmanned Delta 2 rocket [took off from Vandenberg Air Force Base](#) with an Italian satellite aboard.

A local CBS TV news crew [caught the suspected missile](#), which threw up a long, thick plume against the Pacific sunset. If I learn anything about where the thing was headed, you’ll be the first to know.

**Update:** Some folks are [seizing](#) on a [Navy notice](#) — advising pilots to avoid the area — as evidence that the sea service isn’t lying about the launch. But that notice was issued today, hours after the mystery missile sighting.

Meanwhile, naval analyst Raymond Pritchett makes a smart point: [that the mystery itself is becoming a security problem](#).

“When someone makes an unannounced launch what looks to be a ballistic missile 35 miles from the nation’s second largest city (at sea in international waters), and 18 hours later NORAD still doesn’t have any answers at all – *that complete lack of information represents a credible threat to national security*,” he writes. “If NORAD can’t answer the first and last question, then I believe it is time to question every single penny of ballistic missile defense funding in the defense budget. NORTHCOM needs to start talking about what they do know, rather than leaving the focus on what they don’t know.”

To confuse matters even further: that contrail, seen from that CBS news helicopter, might not have been a missile at all. It’s “probably an aircraft contrail seen from a weird angle,” reader WB emails,

attaching the photo below from [contrailscience.com](http://contrailscience.com). It shows a plane plume, photographed on New Year's Eve above San Clemente, California. It, too, was mistaken for a missile. So was this aircraft, [photographed in December, 2008](#). To WB's eyes, the ascent from yesterday's launch was "far too slow to be a missile and the glittering exhaust 'flame' is, I believe, sun reflecting off the aircraft's airframe at altitude."



Spotter: [@Rickyars](#)

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**Comments (34)**

Posted by: Vinit | 11/9/10 | 12:18 pm |

NOTAM for LA.

KZLA LOS ANGELES A2832/10 – THE FOLLOWING RESTRICTIONS ARE REQUIRED DUE TO NAVAL AIR WARFARE CENTER WEAPONS DIVISION ACTIVATION OF W537. IN THE INTEREST OF SAFETY, ALL NON-PARTICIPATING PILOTS ARE ADVISED TO AVOID W537. IFR TRAFFIC UNDER ATC JURISDICTION SHOULD ANTICIPATE CLEARANCE AROUND W537 AND CAE 1176. CAE 1155 WILL NOT BE AVAILABLE FOR OCEANIC TRANSITION. CAE 1316 & CAE 1318 WILL NOT BE AVAILABLE FOR OCEANIC TRANSITION. CAE 1177 WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR OCEANIC TRANSITION. W537 ACTIVE, CAE 1176 CLOSED. SURFACE – FL390, 09 NOV 20:00 2010 UNTIL 10 NOV 01:00 2010. CREATED: 08 NOV 20:52 2010

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Posted by: bensanex | 11/9/10 | 12:18 pm |

My question is: if a NEWS team saw it, why didn't they get more than just a lousy picture of the trail. Why were they 35 miles out in the ocean also?

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Posted by: dooohhead | 11/9/10 | 12:33 pm |

Watch out world, Canada now has submarines that can do this. Who knows, it could be the new "Harper-SCUD" missile. It puts out all the indications that it might be able to do something big but in the end is nothing but a big wind-bag full of smoke and mirrors! In other words, its harmless eh.

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Posted by: Ninja\_peach | 11/9/10 | 12:38 pm |

And it landed where?

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Posted by: xephro | 11/9/10 | 1:04 pm |

I'm not sure you can jump off the ground without it registering on someone's radar (NORAD, perhaps?). And with all the protocols in place, could this really be an accident? And 35 miles off one

of the most densely populated cities in North America? Too many coincidences here, but I doubt we will ever hear the whole story. But I'll bet it's a really fascinating story indeed...

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Posted by: Sasparilla | 11/9/10 | 1:12 pm |

Just as an FYI for everyone, the first post is a NOTAM which stands for Notices to Airman and is created and distributed by the FAA. These things are checked by pilots before flight (or should be) and this one appears to indicate the Navy was doing something up in the air in this area after all – and alerted the FAA ahead of time (like they are supposed to about it).

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Posted by: GMUHistorian | 11/9/10 | 1:14 pm |

I'm going with the "oops!" theory based on the "unable to provide specific details" comment. Somebody was paying a little too much attention to Call of Duty:Black Ops last night rather than their job, lol.

Like Ninja\_peach I want to know where the thing landed or if the military believes the missile burned up in the atmosphere.

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Posted by: Sasparilla | 11/9/10 | 1:16 pm |

Sorry for the double post, the NOTAM is for the 9th of Nov until the 10 of Nov and is the Navy essentially closing this area off to aircraft flight – i.e. this wasn't created ahead of this issue yesterday. Sorry for the mistatement on my part.

Should be an interesting story. Maybe its a demonstration from a Chinese submarine? 😊

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Posted by: synergist | 11/9/10 | 1:16 pm |

Listen carefully to the second anchor—when he says when it happened it makes no sense. He says “at rush hour traffic last night, just before dawn...” What? Okay maybe he meant to say “just before dusk,” but it is a little weird to me that a news guy of this caliber gets something so basic so wrong and creates confusion.

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Posted by: jwalker7124 | 11/9/10 | 1:17 pm |

My initial thoughts are that this was a test by a foreign enemy to see if they could hack into our system and launch our own missiles.

It would be hard to believe this isn't being attempted.

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Posted by: Andy68 | 11/9/10 | 1:25 pm |

The Notam wasn't in effect when the launch took place and it's not the kind of Notam associated with missile launches and it appears the Notam is north of the reported missile launch location.

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Posted by: GMUHistorian | 11/9/10 | 1:36 pm |

I fully believe foreign enemies are trying to hack our missile systems, but I've read articles where expert hackers say there's just so many layers of security around American missile systems that it's just impossible to accomplish. Unless the military did something incredibly stupid and left a "back door" open I don't think we have to worry about China or anybody else launching an American missile.

My bet's still on the "oops!" theory that the Navy was testing something and the missile wasn't supposed to launch.

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Posted by: petek | 11/9/10 | 1:41 pm |

The Russians are known to let loose missiles by accident. Didn't they shoot down one of their airliners during war games?

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Posted by: bazzit | 11/9/10 | 1:48 pm |

I am thinking that this is OVER-THE-TOP marketing for 'Skyline'..... I bet the studio hired the Canadians to build a missile and launched it — cause, ya know, you can never over-market the opening of a science fiction film. And we all know that Canadians build super-duper missiles.

Bring on the Battle of LA — we are ready for you, Alien Scum! Phear our Missile Power!

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Posted by: docwatson223 | 11/9/10 | 1:49 pm |

How about a demonstration of Chinese ability to strike our coast?

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Posted by: deauxbot | 11/9/10 | 1:50 pm |

The NOTAM could be a cover. Never trust the officials, they are not interested in your right to know. They are only interested in their agendas.

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Posted by: sma7c | 11/9/10 | 1:56 pm |

ACTIVE, CAE 1176 CLOSED. SURFACE – FL390, 09 NOV 20:00 2010 UNTIL 10 NOV 01:00 2010. CREATED: 08 NOV 20:52 2010

This was issued more than three hours after the missile launch occurred, which was on 08 NOV 1700 or so.

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Posted by: tdave | 11/9/10 | 2:04 pm |

When you have the density of military operations that we have here (I'm in San Diego), this sort of stuff 'just happens'. There was a huge explosion heard all over the county last year that seismographs

(!) triangulated to a point off the coast. Everyone just thought 'US Navy' and moved on. Same with this one.

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Posted by: qpon | 11/9/10 | 2:07 pm |

Now that the elections are over, Nancy Pelosi could finally return home.

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Posted by: GMUHistorian | 11/9/10 | 2:10 pm |

Hey if we're going for a marketing stunt, Call of Duty: Black Ops was released at midnight last night.  


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Posted by: Andy68 | 11/9/10 | 2:27 pm |

sma7c,

No, Notams use GMT. It was issued about 4 hours before the launch. It's still very unlikely it has anything to do with the launch.

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Posted by: steve\_real | 11/9/10 | 2:46 pm |

Whoever built that rocket put on a show.  
If I was to take Northern Command at their word  
up to this point in time

.  
"no threat to our nation...  
not a launch by a foreign military..."

.  
then you have to kid,  
who built a rocket,  
launched it a party or something  
maybe I don't know,  
bit I did think the rocket was really cool looking,  
if you're into rocketry.  
Sounds to me like there's a bonehead afoot  
southern California is filled with boneheads.

Send in the "National Enquirer".

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Posted by: CMCarroll | 11/9/10 | 2:48 pm |

Has anyone actually picked up the telephone and called Range Control on San Nicholas Island?

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Posted by: MinusOne | 11/9/10 | 3:07 pm |

Wow. Is there any journalism left in the world? This is only slightly better than the "chemtrail" lunatics as you can at least blame perspective and illusion.

And that Raymond Pritchett (who?!) sounds like a loon. He can't tell visually it's a plane contrail? He's running with the "it's definitely a missile!" angle and judging everything based on that.

It was an airplane and a contrail. Reader WB doesn't confuse things further- he/she nails it perfectly. So, no, it is not a national security issue if NORAD does not comment on a random plane flight. From their point of view, out of nowhere a bunch of random questions start coming in about a non-existent missile. What do you want them to say right off the top of their heads?

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Posted by: Roborg | 11/9/10 | 3:09 pm |

I said "lunch," not "launch!"

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Posted by: unknlogar | 11/9/10 | 3:14 pm |

Who says it's a rocket or plane? Why close off the area after the fact? Anyone heard of a salvage operation yet? Just putting it out there.

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Posted by: GMUHistorian | 11/9/10 | 3:15 pm |

I agree with Mr. Pritchett's comments. My question is, has NORAD or any other U.S. governmental entity confirmed that this in fact was a missile? Or are they stuck on basically, "No comment, but we know it's not a threat to the security of the United States"?

I would hope that NORAD or somebody else with the government could confirm at least that it was a missile and not an airplane.

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Posted by: IAnthropologist | 11/9/10 | 3:18 pm |

Nice FIND, genius work.

Gerald

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Posted by: GMUHistorian | 11/9/10 | 3:25 pm |

"So, no, it is not a national security issue if NORAD does not comment on a random plane flight. From their point of view, out of nowhere a bunch of random questions start coming in about a non-existent missile. What do you want them to say right off the top of their heads?"

Actually it is a national security issue. If it is so obviously an aircraft contrail why is it that the local air traffic controllers and/or NORAD haven't come out with a statement saying that? If they were doing their jobs this issue could have been debunked, if it is indeed a contrail, hours ago. I also find it a little odd that an area near where this contrail was seen has been closed off by the Navy.

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Posted by: admile3 | 11/9/10 | 3:59 pm |

I'm surprised that no one has yet mentioned the fairly large amateur rocketry scene that exists. There are VERY large rockets that are built by amateurs every year. Granted, they are normally only fired

during competitions or shows, and have FAA clearance to do so, but that doesn't mean that it couldn't have been from one of these amateur rocketry groups. And no, I'm not talking about the little rockets you launched in your backyard as a kid. I'm talking rockets that are over 30 feet tall, weigh upwards of a ton, and fly close to 90 miles into the atmosphere. Just google and you'll find plenty on the "sport". Not saying this is what caused the trail in question, but I don't think it can be discounted.

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Posted by: jamesbg | 11/9/10 | 4:11 pm |

What's the big surprise? It's a chemtrail. The same kind of trail that gets sprayed over LA several days per week. No, it's not a contrail. A contrail doesn't linger in the air all afternoon – it dissipates after about 30 seconds. I see these things every day in SoCal and no-one can say definitively what they are. Whatever they are up to, they are certainly not going to tell us all about it.

What's surprising for the mainstream media guys is that they are just noticing it for the first time! That's a good thing. Maybe more coverage will wake people up.

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Posted by: joshcomm | 11/9/10 | 4:16 pm |

It may also be a test run of the Club-K system that the Russians have sold and Iran has been practicing for some time utilizing a merchant vessel. If you found a ship in the area that has containers, you may have the system launch from offshore.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9xupOOSvnas>  
<http://frontpagemag.com/2010/05/06/a-game-changing-weapon/>

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Posted by: JimO | 11/9/10 | 4:37 pm |

Re the NOTAM, note the keep-out zone: SURFACE – FL390

This tells you it was not a missile, but aircraft operations.

Just another coincidence in the missile shooting gallery.

Last night's 'mystery contrail'?

I doubt there was a rocket there at all.

When everybody's on the bandwagon, it's prudent to suspect it's headed for the cliff.

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Posted by: Evil13rt | 11/9/10 | 5:24 pm |

That contrail seems to have a spiral in it, which means whatever made it was rolling over on its axis. I doubt that's a jet... although if it was, it would be easy to look up by just checking who was in that airspace at the time.

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