

U.S. Missile Surveillance Program Halted After Blimp Floats Away



Washington, November 6 (RHC)-- The Pentagon has reportedly put on hold a costly missile surveillance program after one of its unmanned blimps broke away from its moorings.

The giant radar-carrying blimp was part of a \$2.7 billion program intended to help safeguard the skies over Washington. Dubbed the Joint Land Attack Cruise Missile Defense Elevated Netted Sensor, or JLENS, the expensive program is run by North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD).

The Los Angeles Times reported that the program is now on hold until investigation about the case is completed. "It's going to be a complete and thorough investigation, and it takes time," U.S. Army spokesman Dov Schwartz told the daily.

NORAD spokesperson Army Major Beth R. Smith said that "future actions regarding the JLENS exercise will be made following the conclusion of the investigation."

The mishap took place last week when one of the program's two helium-filled blimps went loose from the cable that connected it to the ground in a Maryland military base. The blimp then uncontrollably flew into

the skies of Pennsylvania dragging a 6,700-foot-long (2042 meters) mooring cable behind it.

The cable clipped power lines along the way, knocking out electricity for tens of thousands of people, before crashing in a rural area (pictured below), after a 4-hour journey.

JLENS was designed by Raytheon in 1998 and entered service in 2014. The program has endured bad publicity ever since its first phase was debuted in 2009.

In 2012, the Pentagon's Operational Test and Evaluation office faulted the system in four "critical performance areas" and described its reliability as "poor." In its most recent assessment, in 2013, the agency again pointed to serious deficiencies and said JLENS had "low system reliability."

The system is supposed to provide early detection of cruise missiles, drones and other low-flying threats, but it has struggled to track flying objects. The program has also failed to distinguish friendly from threatening aircraft and to communicate with the country's air defense networks, according to The Los Angeles Times.

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