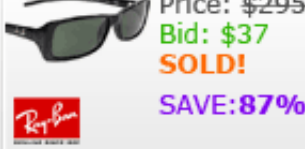
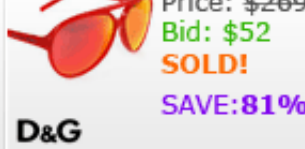

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





















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As to why the US might have wanted to bomb the embassy, the theories are legion.

They all center on the indisputable fact that China was sympathetic to Serbia and had dispatched a team of intelligence specialists under the direction of a senior military attache, Ren Bokai (identified in many news reports as "Ven Bo Koy"), to get a first-hand look at US technology, capabilities and doctrine.

**Continued 1 2**

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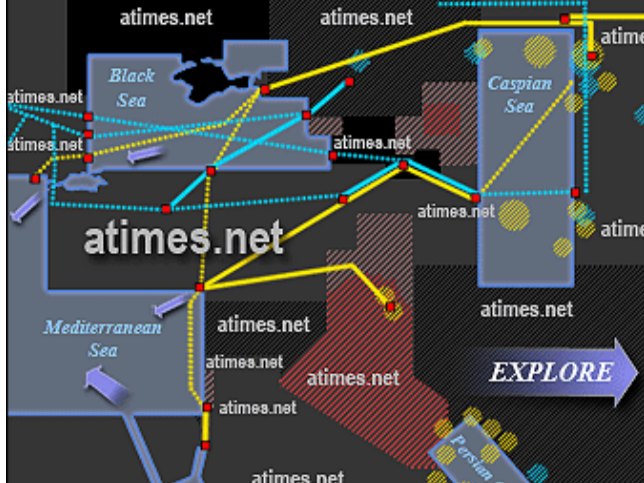
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**Page 2 of 2**  
**The tearful origins of China's stealth**  
By Peter Lee

One of the JDAMs, as The Observer reported, indeed went right into the window of the Chinese intelligence directorate, seriously injuring Ren (who was evacuated on a special plane to China for medical treatment).

- It is variously speculated that:
- The Chinese Embassy was intercepting NATO radio traffic.
  - China was monitoring the performance of US cruise missiles (which is what Ren reportedly said was the case).
  - China was abusing its embassy immunity privileges to operate a radio retransmission station that on behalf of a Serbian paramilitary bad guy.
  - China was testing a new kind of stealth-detecting radar in the embassy and passing information to the Serbian military.
  - The raid was an attempt to assassinate Slobidan Milosevic during a visit to the embassy.
  - The raid was an effort to punish and intimidate China for its support of Serbia.

The most interesting theory is that the US attacked the embassy



to destroy wreckage of the USF-117A that China was planning to ship back to China.

The F117A had been shot down a few weeks prior to the embassy bombing, on March 27, 1999, by a Serbian anti-aircraft battery.

Apparently, the F-117A was designed to be stealthy to modern, high frequency radar but was at least partially visible to the antiquated long-wave Czech radar operated by the Serbs.

The F-117A crashed in a field outside Belgrade and wreckage was all over the place. The loss of the plane caused extreme anxiety in the United States.

A RAND study indicated that the only thing that kept the US from bombing the wreckage to flinders was the presence of a crowd of government officials, diplomats, journalists and gawkers at the crash site:

- Heated arguments arose in Washington and elsewhere in the immediate aftermath of the shootdown over whether USEUCOM had erred in not aggressively having sought to destroy the wreckage of the downed F-117 in order to keep its valuable stealth technology out of unfriendly hands and eliminate its propaganda value ... Said a former commander of Tactical Air Command

"I'm surprised we didn't bomb it because the standard operating procedure has always been that when you lose something of real or perceived value - in this case, real technology, stealth - you destroy it." ... Reports indicated that military officials had at first considered destroying the wreckage but opted in the end not to follow through with the attempt because they could not have located it quickly enough to attack it before it was surrounded by civilians and the media. [8]

As noted above, the Chinese reportedly bought some pieces from farmers; some found its way to a military museum in Belgrade, where it can be viewed today (at one time it was reportedly possible to buy souvenir fragments at the museum gift shop); but much of the wreckage was apparently acquired by the Serbian government, which distributed - or possibly sold - chunks to its allies as reward/payment for their support.

In 2001, the Russians confirmed that they had received pieces of the F-117A and used it to improve the stealth detection capabilities of their anti-aircraft missiles.

It is not unreasonable to assume that the Chinese got some pieces as well - despite the efforts of a "Pentagon analyst" to make the case that China's technological backwardness would disqualify them from any interest in owning some stealth wreckage.

An article in the September 27, 1999, issue of Aviation Week and Space Technology reported, "A Russian official said that some parts had made their way to Moscow, but that the bulk of the airframe was shipped to China," a claim that "Pentagon analysts" dismissed "because "China ... doesn't have the industrial capability to benefit from either the design or the systems."

In this context, it is suggestive that the F-117A was rather abruptly retired in favor of the F-22A Raptor, perhaps because the Serbian shootdown demonstrated a rather embarrassing lack of stealthiness, and/or access to the wreckage enabled more effective anti-stealth measures by Russia and China (it was reported that plans to deploy the F-117A in South Korea were redrawn after the 1999 incident raised concerns about its vulnerability).

Chinese rumor-mongering on the Internet also tried to fill in the blanks, and link the F-117A wreckage to the attack on the embassy.

According to an Internet account of "a private encounter with a Chinese naval officer who was slightly tipsy" (now deleted), the Yugoslavian government had recovered the wreckage of the shot down F-117 and sold key pieces of it to China. The navigation system, fuselage fragments with the Stealth coating, and high temperature nozzle components of the engine were spirited into the basement of the Chinese Embassy. Unfortunately, according to this story, there was a locator beacon inside the INU powered by a battery and, before the Chinese could discover and disable it, the US military was alerted to the location of the F-117 fragments and executed the bombing.

It would not be out of the question that the Bill Clinton administration would bomb the Chinese Embassy to deflect criticism for its handling of the F-117A wreckage debacle, demonstrate its national security muscularity, and score some Team America points by pummeling some tangentially-related Third World asset.

Indeed, this is what happened the next year, in 2000, when an al-Qaeda attack seriously damaged the *USS Cole* in Yemen, killing 17 seamen; the US cruise-missiled a seemingly innocent pharmaceutical plant in Sudan - then an al-Qaeda stronghold - in apparent retaliation.

In a memoir published in 2006, China's ambassador to Serbia, Pan Zhanlin, rather coyly intimated something very important had been extracted from the embassy in the chaotic aftermath of the attack.

The two comrades in charge of the embassy's important assets were Little Wang and Little Zheng. One slept in the duty office on the fifth floor, one slept in the dormitory on the fourth floor. Little Wang pierced through the dust and smoke and by the light of the flames descended from the fifth floor to the fourth floor.

At this time, Little Zheng emerged from the bedroom. Little Wang grabbed hold of Little Zheng and ran back upstairs. Little Zheng had already been injured and his face was flecked with blood. People who ran into them urgently asked: "Why are you going back up?" Little Wang replied: "There is something that needs doing. This is our job."

They picked up four cases of national important assets and battled through smoke and pierced through flames to get downstairs. The stairwell was cut off, they stumbled down to the third floor. Ahead of time, the embassy had made various preparations for an emergency, so these four cases of important things had already been prepared. If any untoward event had occurred, they could be picked up and moved immediately. They knew, these things were more important than life. [9]

"Something more important than life". Stealth wreckage? Pan isn't saying.

Regardless of the motives or mistakes behind the US bombing of the Belgrade embassy, however, the consequences were significant. Viewed in retrospect, the bombing can be considered, albeit on a smaller scale, a 9/11 moment for China.

Pan Zhanlin's description of the attack awakens dark memories of our own.

He conveys the shock and fear as the embassy explodes into flames, "the loudest sound I ever heard". Survivors found the stairwells blocked by rubble and fire and desperately improvised escapes down the exterior of the building using knotted drapes. Pan saw his friends and colleagues stagger from the ruins of the embassy dazed and bloody, crying out for help.

Amid the chaos everybody ducked in fear of a follow-up attack as NATO bombers thundered overhead (May 7 was one of the busiest nights for aerial bombing). Then came the frantic ad hoc attempts to rally the survivors, account for the living, and search for the missing.

First responders were initially unable to enter the compound because the electric gate was disabled when the bombing cut the power; ambulances raced up to the shattered structure with sirens howling to rush away the injured willy-nilly; embassy staffers mounted a frantic search through local hospitals for the injured.

Finally, there was the extraction of the dead; consoling of the wounded; the grieving; and a defiant patriotic oration.

One JDAM failed to explode and buried itself in the ground near the embassy foundations; the building was abandoned and the expensive and dangerous job of removing the bomb was only accomplished five years later.

Again viewed through a post-9/11 lens, Pan's account also paints a picture of a privileged Chinese elite that has been stripped of the illusion that it is immune to attack, and realizing with anger, shame and disgust that at that moment it is helpless, vulnerable and unable to retaliate.

Reports of the bombing triggered an outpouring of populist and official Chinese anger that signaled a break from the pre-democracy/pro-US popular Chinese outlook prevalent during the democracy movement period, and a shift to the nationalist tone that dominates Chinese opinion today.

Chinese opinion was not mollified by the US apology, accompanied by Western insistence that the incident was a simple, regrettable mistake.

It should also be noted in passing that Pan's memoir debunks the canard, spread at the time by Western news reports seemingly anxious to minimize the destructiveness of the attack, that at night the embassy was empty (presumably excluding Chinese spooks huddled over their equipment in the intelligence directory).

In fact, at night the embassy was filled with staffers and their families, who believed that it was safer to stay at the embassy - whose coordinates were registered with NATO - than spend the night at their homes as NATO bombing operations against Belgrade were at their height.

One Chinese legend has a Chinese plane returning dozens of coffins - instead of the officially acknowledged three - to the motherland. The stealth wreckage, according to this story, returned to China on the same plane.

In the reported words of the tipsy naval officer ("who spoke with tears in his eyes"):

"Although some of our people sacrificed their lives, we gained no less than ten years in the development of our stealth materials. We purchased this progress with our blood and international mortification."

Premier Zhu Rongji - not given to sentimental public displays - reportedly wept when he met the plane carrying the victims. Another Internet poster wrote:

Now we know, and it causes us to appreciate even more profoundly that a nation, when it is poor and weak, is without recourse and pitiful (How helpless and evoking bitterness in people's hearts were the tears of Premier Zhu Rongji as he wept at the airfield when the remains of the martyrs were transported back to China).

Whether it was a matter of stealth technology - or the conviction that China must strive for military parity with the United States in order to secure its safety and render it impervious to insults and intimidation - it is safe to say that, to a certain extent, the J-20 was Made in America ... via Belgrade.

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*Peter Lee writes on East and South Asian affairs and their intersection with US foreign policy.*

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