

Dummy US Hellfire missile disappears, turns up in Cuba: Reports

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Washington: A dummy U.S. Hellfire missile was mistakenly shipped from Europe to Cuba in 2014, The Wall Street Journal reported Thursday.

The inert missile did not contain any explosives, the Journal reported, but there are concerns that Cuba could share the technology with potential U.S. adversaries like North Korea or Russia.

The Journal report was attributed to anonymous "people familiar with the matter." A U.S. official with knowledge of the situation, who wasn't authorized to speak publicly on the matter and demanded anonymity, confirmed its veracity to The Associated Press.

According to the Defense Department, the Hellfire is a laser-guided, air-to-surface missile that weighs about 100 pounds. It can be deployed from an attack helicopter like the Apache or an unmanned drone like the Predator. It is manufactured by Lockheed Martin. The Hellfire training missile contains an incomplete guidance section and has no operational seeker head, warhead, fusing system or rocket motor.

The U.S. official told the AP that Lockheed was authorized to export the dummy missile for a NATO training exercise. The official attributed the shipping error to Lockheed's freight forwarders, and said the U.S. was working with Lockheed to get the device back.

The official said the U.S. doesn't want any defense technology to remain in a proscribed country, whether that country can use it or not. The official said there is greater concern that Cuba could give more technically advanced countries access to the dummy.

According to the Journal report, the missile was properly shipped to Spain, where it was used in the training exercise. It was then taken on a somewhat roundabout journey through Spain, Germany and France before winding up at Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris. From there, it was supposed to have been shipped back to Florida; instead, it was loaded onto an Air France flight to Havana.

U.S. officials have been urging the Cuban government to return the missile, the Journal's sources said. The U.S. and Cuba restored diplomatic relations in July 2015 after more than 50 years of hostility.

The Journal reported that the U.S. is also investigating whether the missile's disappearance was a deliberate act of espionage.

- AP