

# Extra-Terrestrials (ET), Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (UAP) and the Pentagon

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*Those of you drawing sustenance and stimulation from the traditional acronym UFO best brace yourselves. The less exciting and dull term accepted by the defence clerks - unidentified aerial phenomena (UAP) - is renewing its march into the extra-terrestrial hinterland.*

On June 25, the Pentagon’s UAP Task Force will release a declassified report to Congress that will do little to shift ground or alter debate on the nature of such phenomena. For those exercised about green creatures, ancient aliens and that roguish charlatan Erich von Däniken, nothing would have changed. For sceptics, it will be a case of tired yawn before returning to work. There will be many “I told you so” moments and no one will be any wiser.

Since 2017, various eyewitness accounts and videos have been circulating in such measure as to worry members of Congress. This came a decade after Senate majority leader Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.) first began tooting the horn on the subject, a measure that led to the creation of the \$22 million Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program. That program, along with the even lesser known Advanced Aerospace Weapons Systems Application Program, saw the [involvement](#) of such proponents of extra-terrestrial life as billionaire Robert Bigelow.

Such programs were hardly the first. From 1966 to 1968, the University of Colorado’s UFO Project, which led to the publication of the tome heavy *Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects*, was funded by the US Air Force Office of Scientific Research. Led by physicist Edward U. Condon, the report, totalling almost a thousand pages, covered 56 “cases” (UFO sightings), of which 33 were suitably [explained](#) as “normal phenomena”.

The unexplained cases were not sufficient for Condon and his co-authors to encourage further government study or scientific investigation of UFO sightings. The words of the report are unequivocally damning: “nothing has come from the study of UFOs in the past 21 years that has added to scientific knowledge. Careful consideration of the record ... leads us to conclude that further extensive study of UFOs probably cannot be justified in the expectation that science will be advanced thereby.”

Decades after, with interest rekindled, the Pentagon was duly pressed by US lawmakers into

compiling a report examining UAP sightings. Legislation passed in December [stipulated](#) that the resulting work should contain “detailed analysis of unidentified aerial phenomena data and intelligence” gathered by the FBI, the Office of Naval Intelligence and the Unidentified Aerial Phenomena Task Force. The latter was created in August 2020 on the direction of Deputy Secretary of Defense David L. Norquist. It was done so [with a view](#) to improving “understanding of” and to “gain insight into the nature and origins of UAPs. The mission of the task force is to detect, analyze and catalogue UAPs that could potentially pose a threat to US national security.”

The focus of the report is bound to be workmanlike, given the DOD’s concern about “the safety of our personnel and the security of our operations”. Emphasis is placed on the potential risks posed by “any incursions by unauthorized aircraft into our training ranges or designated airspace”. “This includes examinations of incursions that are initially reported as UAP when the observer cannot immediately identify what he or she is observing.”

So far, news outlets have veered between panting anticipation and bemused interest. The BBC [suggested](#) that, “The review of 120 incidents is expected to conclude that US technology was not involved in most cases.” The *Hill*, not quite grasping the meaning of secrecy, [concluded](#) that this fact “effectively rules out any secret government operations conducted by the American government”.

Both the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* went for common ground. The *Times* [reported](#) that senior administration officials briefed about the report found no evidence that the sighted objects seen over the past decade by Navy pilots were not of this planet. But these same officials “still cannot explain the unusual movements that have mystified scientists and the military.” US technology, it was confirmed, was not involved in the sightings. The report, [according](#) to the *Post*, “finds no proof of extraterrestrial activity, but cannot provide a definitive explanation for scores of incidents in which strange objects have been spotted in the sky”.

The *Post* goes on to make some broad claims, detecting a shift from “fringe conspiracy theory” to the “mainstream”. To justify the assertion, they cite such figures as Luis Elizondo, a former military intelligence official who [told](#) reporters on an April roundtable call that many objects recorded in the videos under review had “baffled pilots, military and intelligence officials for their apparent defiance of known laws of flight and gravity”.

Fox News, for its part, can call upon the [observations](#) of former director of national intelligence John Ratcliffe. Those interested in the report would read of “objects that have been seen by Navy or Air Force pilots or have been picked up by satellite imagery that frankly engage in actions that are difficult to explain.”

The minds of former presidents are also being tickled with interest. “[W]hat is true, and I’m actually being serious here,” Barack Obama [claimed](#) in May on the *Late Late Show With James Corden*, “is that there are, there’s footage and records of objects in the skies, that we don’t know exactly what they are. We can’t explain how they moved, their trajectory.”

A good number in the scientific and sceptical fraternity have been much cooler to this excitement. “Recently,” a reproachful Andrew Franknoi, astronomer at the Fromm Institute for Lifelong Learning at the University of San Francisco [observes](#), “there has been a flurry of misleading publicity about UFOs [based on military reports]. A sober examination of these

claims reveals there is a lot *less* to them than first meets the eye.”

Science writer Mick West, who has viewed much UAP footage released by the US military, affords a good perspective for debunkers. Most sightings can be put down to distortions in the image or problems in the instruments themselves. For all that, [he admitted](#) that unidentified objects appearing “in restricted airspace” presents “a real problem that needs solving.”

UFO sceptic Robert Sheaffer [sees no reason](#) for a Damascene conversion. “There are no aliens here on Earth, and so the government cannot ‘disclose’ what it does not have.” With a measure of unflagging confidence, he suggested that government sources knew “less on the subject than our best civilian UFO investigators, not more.”

Another good reason for dampening any excitement around the UAP Report is the motivation of the Pentagon. Instances of costly bungles are many, from the vast expenditure in such failed conflicts as Afghanistan to the \$1.6 trillion debacle over the F-35. Perhaps, [writes](#) Matt Stieb, the DOD “simply wants a flashy reason to demand more money.”

Reid, for his part, expects little but [urges](#) continued interest in funding ventures in UAP investigations. “I don’t think the report is going to tell us too much. I think they need to study it more and not just have one shot at it.” Condon and his research team might have set him straight.

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*Featured image: In an undated handout image taken from a video released by the Defense Department’s Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program, a 2004 encounter near San Diego between two Navy F/A-18F fighter jets and an unknown object. UFOs have been repeatedly investigated over the decades in the United States, including by the American military. (U.S. Department of Defense via The New York Times)*

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