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# Chasing Shadows: UFOs, Politics and the Pentagon

*The Beliefs, Secrecy and Politics Behind America's UAP Programmes*

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## ***Summary and acknowledgement***

From private investigations at a privately owned site associated with reports of unusual and paranormal activity to Pentagon programmes and congressional hearings, this article traces how UAP claims moved from the margins into institutions. It examines the financial and political relationships behind that transition, the limits of testimony and sensor evidence, and the challenge of distinguishing genuine security concerns from speculation and belief.

This article is based on information and analysis presented in The Basement Office, an investigative video series by the New York Post. We would like to thank the programme's creators (especially Steven Greenstreet) and contributors for their extensive research into UFOs, UAPs, government secrecy and paranormal claims. The subjects discussed here represent only part of the material explored in those sources; much more information, documentation and analysis is available in the original videos and associated research.

## **1. Introduction: What the UAP Issue Is – and Is Not**

The term unidentified aerial phenomena (UAP) is used to describe observations that cannot be immediately explained on the basis of the available information. The word "unidentified" describes the status of an observation; it does not establish what caused it. An unresolved sighting may reflect incomplete sensor data, a lack of context, an unfamiliar object, foreign surveillance technology, classified aircraft, sensor artefacts or optical effects.

This distinction is central to the UAP debate. The fact that an observation remains unexplained does not, by itself, demonstrate the presence of extraterrestrial technology or any other extraordinary phenomenon. The source material used for this article therefore distinguishes between the existence of an unresolved observation and the explanation subsequently attributed to it. Claims involving extraterrestrial vehicles, interdimensional entities, werewolves or psychic abilities belong to the realm of interpretation unless they are supported by independently verifiable evidence.

The subject is further complicated by the interaction between government secrecy, private interests, political involvement and media attention. Sensitive aerospace programmes may be protected through classification, while the resulting lack of information can also create space for speculation and competing narratives. In this environment, accounts of unusual observations may be presented as evidence of hidden technology, non-human intelligence or a government cover-up, even when

the available evidence does not establish such conclusions.

The UAP issue is therefore both an evidentiary and an institutional problem. It concerns how unusual observations are recorded, assessed and explained, but also how government programmes, private organisations, political actors and the media shape the public understanding of those observations. A careful analysis must distinguish between documented events, personal testimony, allegations and interpretations. It must also separate a genuine data gap from the claim that the phenomenon has an extraordinary origin.

## **2. From Private Interests to Government Funding**

### ***Private research at Skinwalker Ranch***

The transition from private investigation to government-funded research began with Robert Bigelow's interest in Skinwalker Ranch. Bigelow purchased the property in 1996 and established the National Institute of Discovery Sciences (NIDS) to investigate reports of unusual activity there [21550].

The ranch was associated with claims involving unidentified objects and a range of alleged paranormal phenomena. NIDS investigators, however, did not produce publicly verifiable evidence establishing the extraordinary explanations attached to those reports. By 2004, Bigelow had ended the organisation's active investigations, stating that "nothing was happening" at the ranch and had not been happening for more than two years [21550].

The subject returned to public attention with the publication of *Hunt for the Skinwalker* in 2005. Written by Colm Kelleher and George Knapp, the book described accounts of werewolves, ghosts, portals and other unusual events allegedly connected with the ranch [21550]. These accounts helped connect Skinwalker Ranch to a wider discussion about UFOs, anomalous phenomena and possible government interest.

### ***James Lacatski and the move towards official involvement***

In 2007, James Lacatski, a scientist at the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), read *Hunt for the Skinwalker* and subsequently visited the ranch [21550]. According to the account presented in the sources, Lacatski reported witnessing an unexplained apparition during his visit [21550; 21557].

The material presents this experience as an important step in the development of a government-backed programme. It states that Lacatski worked with, or received support from, Senator Harry Reid in seeking official attention for the subject [21550; 21557]. The available account therefore links three elements: a privately owned site associated with extraordinary claims, the personal interest of a DIA scientist, and political support from a senior senator.

These connections do not, by themselves, establish that the claims associated with the ranch were true. They do, however, raise questions about how private interests, personal experiences and political access influenced the decision to examine the subject through government channels.

### ***The creation of AAWSAP***

In 2008, the Pentagon established the Advanced Aerospace Weapon Systems Application Program (AAWSAP), following Lacatski's involvement and with the support of Senator Reid [21550; 21557]. The programme was formally presented in terms of future aerospace weapon systems and potential foreign technological threats. This framing was intended to place the project within a national-security context and to support congressional and bureaucratic approval [21550; 21557].

The programme's stated purpose and its reported activities did not entirely coincide. According to

the sources, the work connected to AAWSAP also included investigations into alleged paranormal activity at Skinwalker Ranch. These subjects included cryptids, poltergeist phenomena, unusual physical sensations and purported interdimensional entities [21550; 21552; 21553; 21557].

The material further states that explicit references to UFOs, cryptids and paranormal activity were omitted from official proposals in order to facilitate funding and approval [21557]. This is a significant claim about the presentation of the programme. It should therefore be treated as an allegation or interpretation attributed to the relevant source, rather than as an independently established fact.

### ***The BAASS contract and potential conflicts of interest***

The prime contract for AAWSAP was awarded to Bigelow Aerospace Advanced Space Studies (BAASS), a company founded by Robert Bigelow [21550; 21551; 21555]. The programme received \$22 million in taxpayer funding [21557].

This arrangement created a potential conflict of interest because public money was directed to a company connected to the owner of the property that formed a central part of the programme's wider investigative narrative. The arrangement also brought together individuals with different kinds of involvement: Bigelow had private financial and research interests in Skinwalker Ranch; Lacatski was a DIA scientist who had developed an interest in the subject; and Reid provided political support for the programme [21550; 21557].

The existence of these connections does not, on its own, demonstrate improper conduct or prove that the programme's findings were predetermined. It does mean that the programme's independence and scope require careful examination. In particular, the following questions are relevant:

How was the programme's official purpose defined? What relationship did its formal aerospace and national-security objectives have to the investigations at Skinwalker Ranch? Why was the BAASS contract awarded to a company founded by the ranch's owner? To what extent did personal beliefs or prior experiences influence the programme's direction? Were the programme's publicly stated objectives sufficiently clear and complete?

The transition to government funding therefore did more than provide resources for the investigation of UAP reports. It also transferred a set of privately developed claims and interests into an official setting. That transfer made the subject more visible to government institutions, but it also created questions about institutional independence, the adequacy of oversight and the distinction between national-security research and investigations based on paranormal claims.

## **3. AAWSAP, AATIP and Institutional Ambiguity**

### ***Two programmes, overlapping narratives***

The relationship between the Advanced Aerospace Weapon Systems Application Program (AAWSAP) and the Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program (AATIP) is central to the later public discussion of UAPs. The two names are often presented as referring to the same programme, but the sources describe them as distinct, although related, designations.

AAWSAP was established in 2008 at the request of Defense Intelligence Agency scientist James Lacatski, with the support of Senator Harry Reid [21550]. It was formally presented as a programme concerned with future aerospace weapon systems and potential foreign technological threats. Its activities were reportedly broader, however, and included investigations into alleged paranormal activity at Skinwalker Ranch [21550; 21552; 21553; 21557].

The programme's prime contract was awarded to Bigelow Aerospace Advanced Space Studies (BAASS), a company founded by Robert Bigelow [21550; 21551; 21555]. It received \$22 million in taxpayer funding [21557].

### ***The AATIP designation***

The material states that the designation AATIP was used in 2009 in an attempt by Senator Reid to obtain highly restricted Special Access status for the initiative. The Pentagon denied that request [21550].

This distinction is important because AATIP subsequently became the name most closely associated with the public account of the Pentagon's UFO programme. The material describes the relationship between the two designations as a source of continuing confusion, particularly because the public presentation of AATIP focused on unidentified objects and national-security concerns, while AAWSAP had also been connected to the more speculative investigations at Skinwalker Ranch.

The material does not present a single uncontested explanation for this ambiguity. It records the view that the distinction reflected overlapping offices, changing responsibilities and inconsistent descriptions of the programmes. It also discusses the criticism that the distinction helped separate the public image of AATIP from the more controversial history associated with AAWSAP [21550; 21552; 21553].

### ***Luis Elizondo and disputed roles***

The public narrative that emerged after 2017 strongly associated Luis Elizondo with AATIP. The material notes, however, that Elizondo reportedly denied having been involved with AAWSAP [21550; 21557].

This creates an important distinction between a person's public association with AATIP and the question of which programme, office or activity that person actually worked for. The available accounts described in the sources do not resolve all of these administrative and personal overlaps. As a result, claims about individual roles should be attributed to the relevant person or source rather than presented as settled institutional facts.

### ***The 2017 media turning point***

On 16 December 2017, The New York Times published an article about a secret Pentagon UFO programme. The material describes this publication as a turning point that produced a wider media and political "domino effect" [21550].

The reporting shifted the public presentation of the subject. Instead of being treated primarily as an embarrassing or marginal topic, UFOs were increasingly discussed in terms of national security, military safety and government transparency [21550; 21551; 21553; 21555]. The use of military footage and the focus on encounters involving service personnel contributed to this more institutional framing. At the same time, the material notes that such footage did not, by itself, establish what the objects were.

The adoption of the term UAP also provided a more administrative and less culturally loaded way of discussing unresolved observations [6]. This terminology helped move the subject away from some of the extraterrestrial associations traditionally connected with the term "UFO".

### ***The allegation of deliberate reframing***

The material discusses a claim that approximately 97 per cent of the original story was omitted in order to make it politically viable [21557]. According to this interpretation, the omitted material included the investigations into ghosts, cryptids and other paranormal claims associated with Skinwalker Ranch.

The material treats this percentage as an allegation or source interpretation rather than as an independently established measurement. It also notes that no transparent basis is provided for calculating the figure [21557]. The claim should therefore not be stated as a verified fact.

Critics nevertheless argue that the change in emphasis amounted to a deliberate reframing. In their view, presenting the programme primarily as an investigation into military encounters and potential aerospace threats made it more acceptable to legislators and the wider public, while discussion of ghosts and cryptids would have been more difficult to sustain politically [21557].

The material qualifies this interpretation by noting that editorial selection is not automatically evidence of deception [7]. A change in emphasis may reflect political strategy, journalistic choices, institutional complexity or an attempt to distinguish different aspects of the programme. The available material does not, on its own, establish which of these explanations is correct.

### ***Institutional distance and unresolved questions***

The change from the broader AAWSAP narrative to the more publicly acceptable AATIP and UAP narrative created what the material describes as institutional distance. Public discussion became centred on military safety, sensor data and government transparency, while the earlier links to Skinwalker Ranch and paranormal investigations became less prominent [21557].

This distance complicates attempts to reconstruct the programmes' history. It raises questions about:

whether AAWSAP and AATIP should be treated as separate programmes or as overlapping parts of the same initiative; how their mandates changed over time; which activities were formally authorised and which were associated with related private investigations; how individual officials' roles should be understood; whether the differences in public descriptions reflected deliberate presentation, administrative confusion or both; and how much of the original programme's scope was communicated to political decision-makers and the public.

The central issue is therefore not simply whether AAWSAP and AATIP had different names. It is whether the changes in terminology, institutional framing and public emphasis affected how the programmes were understood, funded and scrutinised. The material provides evidence of substantial ambiguity, but some of the stronger conclusions about deliberate concealment remain interpretations or allegations rather than established facts.

## **4. Potential Conflicts of Interest**

The UAP programmes described in the sources brought together public funding, private contracting, political support and personal convictions. These connections do not, by themselves, establish that any decision was unlawful or improper. They do, however, raise questions about independence, oversight and the relationship between private interests and government research [21550; 21555; 21557].

### ***Public funding and private contracting***

A central issue is the allocation of \$22 million in taxpayer funding to the Advanced Aerospace Weapon Systems Application Program (AAWSAP) [21550; 21555; 21557]. The prime contract was awarded to Bigelow Aerospace Advanced Space Studies (BAASS), a private company founded by Robert Bigelow [21550; 21551; 21555].

Bigelow also owned Skinwalker Ranch, where investigations associated with the programme took place. This created an overlap between a government-funded project, a private contractor and a privately owned location that was central to the programme's wider narrative [21557].



The arrangement does not in itself demonstrate that the contract was improperly awarded. It does mean, however, that the programme's structure could reasonably attract scrutiny. Questions arise over the independence of the research, the extent to which the contractor's existing interests influenced the programme's direction, and the adequacy of the oversight applied to the use of public funds [21557].

### ***Political relationships and access***

The material also discusses the relationship between Senator Harry Reid and Robert Bigelow. Reid supported the creation of the government programme, while Bigelow was connected to Reid's political activities as a financial supporter [21550; 21551; 21555; 21557].

This relationship is relevant because it connected a private individual with a direct interest in anomalous phenomena to a senior political figure who helped promote official government attention to the subject. The available information does not establish that Reid's support was motivated improperly or that Bigelow's financial support determined the awarding of the contract [21555]. It does, nevertheless, create a potential or perceived conflict that requires clear disclosure and careful examination.

The issue is therefore not simply whether a political relationship existed. It is whether that relationship affected:

the decision to establish the programme; the way in which its objectives were defined; the selection of the contractor; the choice of Skinwalker Ranch as an investigative location; or the level of scrutiny applied to the programme.

The material presents these as questions arising from the documented connections, rather than as settled conclusions.

Personal conviction and institutional action James Lacatski's involvement illustrates another form of potential conflict. Lacatski was a Defense Intelligence Agency scientist who visited Skinwalker Ranch in 2007 after reading Hunt for the Skinwalker. According to the sources, he reported witnessing an unexplained apparition during that visit [21550; 21557].

The material links Lacatski's interest in the ranch to the subsequent establishment of AAWSAP, which was created with the support of Senator Reid [21550; 21557]. This sequence raises the question of how far a personal experience and an individual's prior interest influenced the decision to create a publicly funded programme.

The material does not establish that Lacatski acted improperly. Nor does a personal experience, by itself, demonstrate that a government investigation lacked a legitimate national-security rationale. The concern is institutional: a programme intended to examine aerospace or foreign technological threats also became associated with claims about cryptids, poltergeist phenomena, unusual physical sensations and purported interdimensional entities [21550; 21552; 21553; 21557].

### ***The scope of the programme***

The material describes a difference between the programme's formal presentation and the activities associated with it. AAWSAP was presented in terms of future aerospace weapon systems and potential foreign technological threats [21550; 21557]. Its reported activities were broader and included investigations into alleged paranormal events at Skinwalker Ranch [21550; 21552; 21553; 21557].

According to the material, explicit references to UFOs and paranormal activity were omitted from official proposals to facilitate congressional and bureaucratic approval [21557]. This is a significant allegation about how the programme was presented. It should not, however, be treated as an independently established fact without further evidence.

If accurate, the omission would raise questions about whether decision-makers received a complete account of the programme's intended scope. It would also illustrate the tension between a formal national-security justification and activities involving claims that were more speculative or paranormal in character.

### ***Secrecy and oversight***

The programme's secrecy added another layer of difficulty. In 2009, Senator Reid attempted to obtain highly restricted Special Access status for the initiative under the name AATIP [21550]. The Pentagon denied the request [21550].

The material presents the secrecy surrounding the programme as a factor that made its structure and activities difficult to reconstruct. Critics have interpreted the request for greater secrecy, and the distinction between AAWSAP and AATIP, as attempts to shield controversial activities from wider scrutiny [21550; 21557].

That interpretation remains contested. The available material does not establish that secrecy was intended to conceal improper conduct. Classified or restricted arrangements may also reflect the sensitivity attributed to defence-related work. The more clearly established issue is that secrecy and inconsistent public descriptions made it harder to determine how the programmes were organised, what they were authorised to investigate and how their funding was used.

### ***From potential conflict to established misconduct***

The material's evidence supports a distinction between documented relationships and claims about their meaning.

The documented elements include:

public funding for AAWSAP; the award of the prime contract to BAASS; Robert Bigelow's connection to BAASS and Skinwalker Ranch; Harry Reid's political support for the programme; Reid's relationship with Bigelow; James Lacatski's involvement after visiting the ranch; and the programme's association with both aerospace threats and alleged paranormal activity [21550; 21551; 21552; 21553; 21555; 21557].

The stronger conclusions – that funding was directed for improper reasons, that the contract was determined by political donations, or that the programme's scope was deliberately concealed – are presented in the material as allegations, interpretations or points of criticism rather than as conclusively established facts [21555; 21557].

A careful account should therefore avoid describing the arrangement simply as corruption or deliberate manipulation. A more precise conclusion is that the overlap between private ownership, political access, personal conviction and public funding created potential and perceived conflicts of interest. These conflicts placed particular importance on transparent mandates, independent oversight and a clear separation between verifiable national-security research and unsupported or speculative claims.

## **5. The 2017 Public Narrative**

### ***The New York Times Report***

On 16 December 2017, The New York Times published an article about a secret Pentagon programme concerned with UFOs. The publication marked a significant change in the public treatment of the subject. According to the article, UFOs moved from being regarded largely as a marginal or embarrassing topic to being discussed in terms of national security, military safety and government transparency [21550; 21551; 21553; 21555].

The reporting also contributed to what the sources describes as a wider media and political "domino effect". The subject became more acceptable as an issue for public officials to address, particularly when it was presented in relation to military encounters, aviation safety and possible gaps in national-security knowledge [21550; 21551; 21553; 21555].

### ***From UFOs to UAPs***

The public discussion increasingly adopted the term unidentified aerial phenomena, or UAP. The material presents this as a more administrative and less culturally loaded term than "UFO" [21550; 21551; 21552; 21555].

This change in terminology helped place the subject within an institutional framework. Instead of focusing primarily on extraterrestrial interpretations, the discussion could be presented as an issue involving unidentified observations, military reporting, sensor data and government oversight.

The change in language did not, however, resolve the underlying evidentiary problem. A recording of an unidentified object or event does not by itself establish what that object or event was. The material notes that military footage may be interpreted as showing extraordinary speed or advanced technological characteristics, while also discussing conventional explanations such as parallax, camera artefacts and distortions in thermal imaging [21551; 21553; 21554].

### ***The Role of Luis Elizondo***

Luis Elizondo became one of the principal public figures associated with the Pentagon's UAP activities following the 2017 reporting. His involvement helped give the story a recognisable official face and reinforced the impression that the subject had been taken seriously within government [21550; 21557].

At the same time, the sources describes continuing uncertainty about the relationship between Elizondo's public association with AATIP and the earlier AAWSAP programme. AAWSAP had been connected to Robert Bigelow, BAASS and the investigations at Skinwalker Ranch, including claims involving paranormal phenomena. The public narrative surrounding AATIP placed greater emphasis on unidentified objects, military encounters and national security [21550; 21557].

This distinction is important because it affects how the history of the programmes is understood. The question is not merely which name was used, but whether the public account accurately reflected the scope and background of the activities associated with the earlier programme.

### ***The National-Security Framework***

The 2017 narrative presented UAPs primarily as a question of national security, military safety and government transparency [21550; 21551; 21553; 21555]. This framing made the subject more suitable for political discussion than accounts centred on ghosts, cryptids or other paranormal claims.

The material notes that political figures such as Senators Kirsten Gillibrand and Marco Rubio could support further investigation when the issue was presented in terms of military safety and government oversight. A discussion focused on ghosts and cryptids would have been more difficult to sustain within that political framework [21557].

This does not establish that the national-security framing was illegitimate. Unidentified observations involving military personnel or equipment can be treated as an institutional or security matter even when no extraordinary explanation has been demonstrated. It does show, however, that the way the subject was described affected its political acceptability.

### ***The Omission of Paranormal Material***

The material discusses the claim that the 2017 public account left out much of the paranor-



mal material associated with AAWSAP and Skinwalker Ranch [21550; 21551; 21553; 21555; 21557].

One source alleges that approximately 97 per cent of the original story was omitted in order to make the subject "politically viable" [21557]. The material treats this figure as an allegation or interpretation rather than as an independently verified measurement. It does not provide a transparent basis for calculating the percentage [21557].

Critics interpret the omission as a deliberate reframing. According to this interpretation, the public narrative concentrated on military encounters and possible aerospace threats while reducing the prominence of claims about werewolves, ghosts, portals and other paranormal phenomena [21557].

The material also qualifies this interpretation. Editorial selection is not automatically evidence of deception, and the available material does not by itself establish whether the change in emphasis resulted from deliberate concealment, political strategy, journalistic judgement, institutional complexity or an attempt to distinguish separate programmes and activities [21557].

### ***Public Presentation and Institutional Distance***

The change in emphasis created distance between the earlier AAWSAP narrative and the public presentation of AATIP and UAPs. The former was associated with a broader set of activities, including investigations at Skinwalker Ranch, while the latter was presented mainly through the language of national security, military safety and government transparency [21550; 21557].

This shift gave the subject greater institutional credibility, but it also made the programme's history more difficult to reconstruct. Public attention focused on official statements, military videos and the question of whether the government had withheld information. The earlier links to private research and alleged paranormal activity became less visible [21550; 21557]. The result was a narrative in which official status could be mistaken for confirmation. Government involvement, political attention and military footage may demonstrate that the subject was considered worthy of investigation. They do not, by themselves, establish that the observations had an extraordinary origin or that the claims associated with them were true [21550; 21551; 21553; 21554; 21557].

### ***What the 2017 Reporting Established – and What It Did Not***

The 2017 reporting established that government programmes and military observations had become part of a wider public debate. It also changed the language through which the subject was discussed, moving it towards UAPs, national security and institutional oversight [21550; 21551; 21553; 21555].

It did not, on the basis of the evidence discussed in the material, establish that the objects were extraterrestrial, that they represented advanced non-human technology or that a government cover-up had occurred. The reporting brought unresolved observations into the public domain, but the explanations attached to those observations remained contested.

The significance of 2017 therefore lies not only in the information that was reported, but also in the way the information was framed. The episode illustrates how media selection, political language and institutional presentation can determine which parts of a complex programme become publicly visible – and which parts remain peripheral to the dominant narrative.

## **6. Evidence and Methodology**

### ***The Difference Between a Claim and Evidence***

The material distinguishes between reports of unusual events and evidence that can establish what caused them. An observation may remain unresolved because the available data are incomplete,

the observer lacks relevant context or the object is unfamiliar. That uncertainty does not, by itself, demonstrate an extraordinary origin [21552; 21554; 21557].

The material argues that conclusions in this field should be based on reproducible data, independent verification and, where appropriate, peer-reviewed analysis [21557]. These standards are particularly important when claims concern extraterrestrial technology, paranormal activity or physical effects on people.

### ***Testimony and Retrospective Accounts***

Many of the claims associated with Skinwalker Ranch were based on personal testimony and retrospective accounts [21557]. The material describes stories involving werewolves, ghosts, interdimensional portals and other unusual phenomena, but notes that no independently verifiable physical evidence was presented to establish these claims [21557].

The absence of independently verifiable evidence does not prove that every account was fabricated. It does mean that testimony alone cannot establish the nature or cause of the reported events. Accounts should therefore be presented as statements by witnesses or participants, rather than as confirmed descriptions of what occurred.

### ***Physical Samples and Scientific Testing***

The material also examines material said to have been collected during investigations connected with Skinwalker Ranch. These materials included spheres, rock samples, liquid and other items that were considered potentially significant by those involved [21557].

According to the sources, the materials did not provide evidence of alien or otherwise extraordinary origins. One analysis identified the spheres as ion-exchange beads, while other samples were associated with hydraulic fluid or muddy water [21557]. The material uses these examples to question the level of scientific rigour applied to some of the investigations.

The relevant methodological issue is not simply that the materials had ordinary explanations. It is also that the initial interpretation of an object as potentially alien appears to have preceded the establishment of evidence demonstrating that interpretation. A more rigorous process would require the material to be documented, tested and assessed independently before an extraordinary explanation was attached to it [21557].

### ***Claims of Health Effects***

The material discusses claims of physical or psychological effects associated with alleged phenomena at Skinwalker Ranch, including what it refers to as the "Hitchhiker effect" [21557].

It states that these claims were not supported by peer-reviewed medical studies or by collaboration with recognised public-health institutions [21557]. The absence of such research does not establish that no one experienced the reported effects. It does mean that the claims remain insufficiently validated and should not be treated as established medical findings.

### ***Military Footage and Sensor Data***

The material treats military videos and sensor recordings as potentially important sources of information, but not as proof of the extraordinary explanations sometimes attached to them. Such recordings may demonstrate that a sensor detected an unusual object or event. They do not necessarily establish what the object was, how it moved or whether it represented an advanced technology [21551; 21553; 21554].

The interpretation of sensor data can be affected by the characteristics and limitations of the equipment, the position and movement of the observer, atmospheric conditions and the absence of contextual information. These factors make it necessary to examine the original data and the circumstances in which it was recorded rather than relying only on the appearance of a video or

on a witness's interpretation.

### ***Parallax and Apparent Movement***

One technical problem discussed in the materials is parallax. The apparent movement of a distant object can be affected by the movement of the observing platform or camera and by changes in the background against which the object is viewed [21551; 21553]. This can create the impression that an object is travelling at an unusually high speed or performing an abrupt manoeuvre. A visual impression of extraordinary movement is therefore not sufficient, on its own, to establish that the object possessed extraordinary capabilities [21551; 21553].

### ***Camera Artefacts***

The material also describes the possibility that camera systems can alter the appearance of light sources. An out-of-focus light may acquire a geometric form as a result of the camera's aperture or iris [21553].

This is relevant to images interpreted as showing unusual craft, including objects described as having pyramid-like shapes. The appearance recorded by the camera may not correspond directly to the shape of a physical object. Determining that would require an assessment of the equipment, focus, exposure and other recording conditions [21553].

### ***Thermal Imaging and Other Distortions***

Thermal imaging can introduce further difficulties. The material refers to glare, engine exhaust and atmospheric turbulence as factors that may affect the infrared image and create misleading impressions of an object's shape or movement [21553].

These explanations do not demonstrate that every observation has a conventional cause. They do demonstrate why a recording must be analysed in context and why apparent motion or form cannot automatically be treated as evidence of advanced technology [21553].

### ***Missing Context and Classified Technology***

The material identifies a further problem in the lack of information surrounding classified aerospace programmes. Observers may encounter unfamiliar aircraft or other technology without having access to the information needed to identify it [21553; 21554].

The material refers to the "Klingon death ship" as an example of a highly geometric stealth design that could be mistaken for something non-human or extraordinary [21553; 21554]. When information about classified platforms is withheld, the resulting gap in knowledge can encourage speculation. The absence of an explanation may therefore reflect a lack of available context rather than the presence of unknown technology [21554].

### ***Secrecy and the Interpretation of Evidence***

Government secrecy has a dual effect in the material's account. It can protect sensitive aerospace programmes, but it can also contribute to the development of UFO narratives. The material states that government entities have at times used UFO folklore as a cover for classified aerospace testing [21554].

This possibility further complicates the interpretation of reports. A witness may describe an unfamiliar aircraft as an extraterrestrial object because relevant information is unavailable. Conversely, the existence of secrecy can encourage the belief that authorities are concealing evidence of alien technology. In both cases, the information gap makes it more difficult to distinguish between a genuine unidentified observation, a classified but conventional object and an unsupported interpretation [21554].

### ***Internal Confusion and Fabricated Evidence***

The sources also describe a more internal aspect of secrecy. Beneath the global fascination with

extraterrestrial visitors and anomalous craft lies a much more earthly reality: state-orchestrated deception designed to protect national-security secrets.

According to the source analyses, the US government has actively fabricated fake UFO imagery and propagated extraterrestrial rumours as a deliberate strategic tool. Rather than shielding evidence of non-human visitors from the public, these narratives were developed to mask cutting-edge, human-made military technology and classified aerospace projects from foreign adversaries and public scrutiny. [21554; 21555]

By encouraging or tolerating sensational stories about alien encounters, authorities could effectively neutralise genuine sightings of classified aircraft. Anyone who observed an advanced experimental test flight was steered towards talking about "flying saucers", instantly transforming a potential breach of high-level military secrets into fringe speculation that defence officials could easily dismiss. [21554; 21555]

This deliberate blurring of reality and mythology was particularly intense around installations such as Area 51, the remote Nevada facility long renowned for flight-testing classified aircraft. The source material details how fake alien spacecraft photographs were intentionally planted at tourist spots and commercial venues surrounding the facility. These fabrications were designed to serve as readymade cover stories whenever observers spotted unconventional, human-made aircraft conducting secret test flights in the surrounding airspace. [21554]

The deception, however, was not directed solely at the public. Inside military installations, fabricated "Special Access Programs" were reportedly utilised as hazing rituals and compartmentalised security traps. Military personnel and defence contractors were exposed to manufactured lore and mock documentation concerning extraterrestrial recoveries, leading many insiders to genuinely believe that alien craft were being reverse-engineered. [21554]

According to estimates cited from a Pentagon official in the source accounts, these sophisticated internal and external disinformation campaigns successfully convinced thousands of government and military personnel that extraterrestrial visitors were real. [21555] The state, in effect, manufactured a mythology that its own workforce eventually came to believe.

The material does not independently document the scale or frequency of such practices; the claim should therefore be treated as a source allegation rather than an established operational policy.

### ***The Institutional Effect of Unverified Claims***

The material argues that government funding, congressional attention and proximity to the Pentagon can give unverified claims an appearance of institutional authority [21550; 21555; 21557]. This is particularly significant where claims involving cryptids, psychic abilities or interdimensional phenomena become associated with official programmes.

Institutional involvement may establish that a claim was considered worthy of investigation. It does not independently verify the claim itself. The distinction is important because the authority of the institution can be transferred, unintentionally or otherwise, to the underlying evidence, even when that evidence remains anecdotal or incomplete [21550; 21555; 21557].

### ***Methodological Standards for UAP Investigation***

The methodological challenge described in the sources is therefore not simply to explain every observation immediately. It is to preserve the distinction between:

an observation that remains unidentified; a conventional explanation that has not yet been tested sufficiently; a claim based mainly on personal testimony; evidence that has been independently verified; and an extraordinary interpretation attached to incomplete data. This distinction is also

relevant to the later work of AARO, which the material presents as part of an effort to assess reports more systematically [21552; 21554; 21557]. The central methodological requirement remains the same: unresolved data should be investigated without treating the absence of an immediate explanation as evidence for extraterrestrial, paranormal or otherwise extraordinary causes [21552; 21554; 21557].

## 7. The Pentagon and AARO

### *From Ad Hoc Interest to Formal Investigation*

The creation of dedicated government offices marked a further stage in the institutionalisation of the UAP issue. In August 2020, the UAP Task Force was established to provide greater structure for collecting and assessing reports [21550; 21551; 21552; 21555].

The establishment of the Task Force reflected growing political and public interest following the 2017 reporting on Pentagon activities. The subject was increasingly presented in terms of military safety, national security and government oversight rather than as a primarily cultural or paranormal issue [21550; 21551; 21553; 21555].

In 2022, the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO) was established as a centralised framework for evaluating UAP reports [21552; 21553; 21554; 21555; 21557]. Its role was to assess reports across different operational environments and to distinguish unresolved observations from claims about their possible origin.

### *Sean Kirkpatrick's Approach*

Dr Sean Kirkpatrick served as AARO's first director [21552; 21553; 21554; 21555; 21557]. The material presents him as an advocate of a more rigorous, evidence-based approach to UAP investigations.

Kirkpatrick warned against what he described as a "UFO religion" or a "zealous paranormal religion" within defence and intelligence circles [21552; 21553; 21554; 21555; 21557]. In this context, the terms refer to a tendency to treat belief in non-human intelligence, interdimensional forces or extraordinary technology as a substitute for scientific assessment [21557].

The concern is methodological as well as institutional. If personal conviction begins to determine how ambiguous sightings or sensor data are interpreted, the investigation may become vulnerable to confirmation bias. A government office could then give greater weight to an extraordinary explanation before the available evidence had established that explanation.

### *Historical Claims and Earlier Programmes*

AARO's work included the reassessment of historical claims and evidence associated with earlier initiatives [21552; 21553; 21554; 21555]. This placed the office in a difficult position. It was expected to examine a long history of reports, programmes and testimony, while also addressing public expectations that the government possessed information about non-human technology or a longstanding cover-up.

The material maintains that the word "unidentified" should be understood as a description of the available evidence rather than as a conclusion about the nature of the object or event [21557]. A case may remain unresolved because the data are incomplete or because the relevant context is unavailable. That status does not, by itself, demonstrate that the case involves extraterrestrial technology or any other extraordinary cause.

The material also notes that some reports initially treated as unidentified were later associated with conventional explanations, including Chinese surveillance activity and spy balloons [21557]. This illustrates the importance of gathering sufficient information before drawing conclusions about



the origin or significance of an observation.

### ***Evidence and Institutional Responsibility***

The Pentagon and AARO faced an evidentiary problem that had already affected earlier UAP investigations. Public testimony, military videos and reports of unusual events could establish that observations had been made, but they did not necessarily establish what had been observed [21551; 21553; 21554].

The material therefore presents AARO's task as involving more than the collection of reports. It also involves assessing the quality of the underlying data, considering conventional explanations and maintaining a distinction between unresolved evidence and extraordinary claims [21552; 21554; 21557].

This distinction is particularly important when government involvement gives a claim additional authority. The fact that an observation is considered by the Pentagon or discussed in Congress demonstrates institutional interest. It does not independently verify the explanation attached to that observation [21550; 21555; 21557].

### ***Congressional Interest and Oversight***

Congressional involvement increased as UAPs were framed as matters of military safety, national security and government transparency [21550; 21552; 21555]. Senators Kirsten Gillibrand and Marco Rubio are identified in the material as political figures who supported further investigation within this framework [21557].

This political support helped sustain formal attention to UAP reports. It also reinforced the shift away from the earlier emphasis on ghosts, cryptids and other paranormal claims. The national-security framing made it possible to discuss the issue as a matter of oversight and defence policy rather than as an endorsement of paranormal belief [21557].

The resulting institutional structure created a tension between two expectations. On one hand, government offices were expected to investigate potential risks and provide greater transparency. On the other, some advocates expected those offices to confirm claims about non-human intelligence or hidden government knowledge.

### ***Criticism of AARO***

The material describes criticism from some advocates and congressional figures who questioned AARO's findings [21557]. These critics alleged that AARO did not have access to all relevant information or that its conclusions did not account for testimony held elsewhere within the defence establishment [21557].

These allegations form part of the wider dispute over transparency and institutional access. The material does not present them as independently established facts. They should therefore be distinguished from the documented creation and operation of AARO.

The disagreement also reflects a broader problem in the UAP debate. When information is classified or distributed across different offices, it can be difficult for outsiders to determine what evidence has been reviewed. The resulting uncertainty may be interpreted either as a normal consequence of national-security work or as evidence that information is being withheld.

### ***National Security and Paranormal Claims***

AARO's institutional role needs to be separated from the earlier investigations associated with Skinwalker Ranch and AAWSAP. The former were presented in terms of official assessment, national-security concerns and the systematic review of UAP reports. The latter had also been associated with alleged cryptids, poltergeist phenomena, unusual physical sensations and purported interdimensional entities [21550; 21552; 21553; 21557].

The material treats this distinction as important because paranormal claims can acquire additional credibility when they are connected to government funding, congressional interest or Pentagon personnel [21550; 21555; 21557]. Institutional proximity does not, however, provide independent evidence for the claims themselves.

The challenge for AARO was therefore not only to determine whether individual observations could be explained. It was also to maintain a clear boundary between the investigation of potential defence or aviation concerns and the validation of claims that remain anecdotal, speculative or unsupported by independently verifiable evidence.

### ***The Limits of Institutional Findings***

The creation of AARO did not remove the underlying uncertainty surrounding UAP reports. A formal government investigation can improve the organisation of evidence and provide a recognised process for reviewing claims. It cannot guarantee that every observation will be resolved, nor can institutional involvement transform an unresolved observation into proof of an extraordinary explanation.

The material's central methodological point remains that the absence of an immediate explanation should not be treated as evidence of extraterrestrial technology, paranormal activity or a government cover-up [21552; 21554; 21557].

AARO therefore occupies a difficult position. It must investigate reports that may have implications for national security while resisting the pressure to adopt explanations that the available evidence does not establish. Its credibility depends not only on the conclusions it reaches, but also on the transparency of its methods, the quality of the data it can examine and its ability to distinguish clearly between verified findings, unresolved cases, testimony and interpretation.

## **8. The Institutional Legacy of the UAP Debate**

### ***From Cultural Curiosity to National-Security Issue***

The development described in the material changed the position of UFO-related claims within public institutions. What had often been treated as a marginal or cultural subject increasingly became associated with national security, military safety and government transparency [21550; 21552; 21555].

The 2017 media coverage played an important role in this change. By presenting the issue through military encounters, government programmes and the possibility of unidentified technological threats, it created a framework in which congressional oversight and further official investigation became politically viable [21550; 21557].

This shift did not establish that the underlying claims were true. It changed the institutional setting in which those claims were discussed.

### ***Attempts to Formalise Investigation***

The creation of the UAP Task Force and, subsequently, AARO represented attempts to introduce a more systematic process for collecting and assessing reports [21552; 21557].

These organisations were intended to examine unresolved observations rather than to confirm a predetermined explanation. Their institutional purpose therefore differed from the earlier private and government-linked investigations associated with Skinwalker Ranch, where accounts of paranormal activity formed part of the programme's reported scope [21550; 21552; 21553; 21557].

A central principle in this approach is that "unidentified" describes the status of the available infor-

mation. It does not confirm that an object is extraterrestrial, non-human or otherwise extraordinary [21552; 21557].

### ***The Continuing Dispute over Reframing***

The material records the criticism that the transition from AAWSAP to the public presentation of AATIP and UAPs involved a deliberate reframing of the subject [21557]. According to this interpretation, the emphasis on military sensor data, aviation safety and national security reduced the visibility of the earlier programme's association with paranormal claims, including those connected with Skinwalker Ranch. Supporters of this view argue that the more conventional framing made the issue politically viable. The material also discusses the allegation that approximately 97 per cent of the original story was omitted [21557]. It treats this figure as an allegation or interpretation rather than as an independently verified measurement, noting that the source does not provide a transparent basis for calculating it [21557].

The available material does not establish that the change in emphasis was the result of a coordinated effort to deceive. Editorial selection is not automatically evidence of deception, and the distinction may also reflect institutional complexity, changing responsibilities or different purposes [21557].

### ***Conflict between Institutional Findings and Advocacy***

The formalisation of UAP research did not end disagreement about the evidence. The material describes tension between AARO and some congressional advocates or UAP proponents who questioned the office's conclusions [21557]. Critics alleged that investigators did not have access to all relevant information or that their assessments failed to account for testimony held elsewhere within the defence establishment [21557]. These claims are presented as allegations rather than as established findings.

The dispute illustrates a broader problem. If information is classified or distributed across several institutions, it may be difficult for the public to determine what evidence has been examined. A lack of visible evidence can then be interpreted in two opposing ways: as a consequence of national-security restrictions or as an indication that information is being withheld.

### ***Institutional Authority and Evidentiary Weight***

The material argues that institutional involvement can give unverified claims an appearance of credibility [21550; 21555; 21557]. Government funding, congressional attention, classified briefings and association with the Pentagon may lead audiences to assume that the underlying claims have been independently validated.

That assumption is not justified by institutional status alone. Official interest demonstrates that a matter was considered worthy of investigation or oversight. It does not establish the accuracy of a witness account, the identity of an observed object or the extraordinary explanation attached to it [21550; 21555; 21557].

This distinction is particularly important where claims involving paranormal phenomena, non-human intelligence or advanced technology are presented alongside genuine national-security concerns. The authority of the institution can otherwise become confused with the strength of the evidence.

### ***The Risk of Institutional Blind Spots***

The material also identifies a potential risk in allowing speculative explanations to dominate official attention. A focus on paranormal or extraordinary interpretations may divert attention from conventional but significant threats, including foreign surveillance platforms [21557].

Conversely, an excessive focus on conventional explanations could lead institutions to dismiss

reports that deserve further investigation. The methodological challenge is therefore to avoid both premature belief and premature dismissal.

A robust process must examine the available data, identify the limitations of the evidence and keep the explanation proportionate to what has actually been established. "Unresolved" should remain a provisional description, not a synonym for "extraordinary" [21552; 21554; 21557].

### ***Conclusion: Authority Must Not Run Ahead of Evidence***

The story that begins at Skinwalker Ranch and ends in congressional hearings and classified briefings is not simply a story about UFOs. It is also a story about how extraordinary claims acquire authority, how institutional power can make unverified ideas appear credible, and why the distinction between an unexplained observation and an extraordinary explanation remains essential to serious public inquiry [21550; 21555; 21557].

The central conclusion is not that every unusual sighting has been explained, nor that the government has never concealed unusual information. It is that belief, secrecy and institutional authority can combine to produce a narrative that runs ahead of the evidence.

The appropriate response is neither to dismiss every report nor to accept every interpretation. It is to apply consistent standards of evidence, distinguish documented events from testimony and allegation, and maintain a clear separation between genuine national-security concerns and claims that remain speculative or unsupported. The most important task is not to decide whether humans are alone in the universe, but to ensure that genuine threats are not mistaken for myths – or myths mistaken for genuine threats.

## **Timeline**

The following timeline outlines the evolution of the Pentagon's involvement with UFOs and paranormal research, moving from private investigations to taxpayer-funded programs and finally to official historical debunking.

### ***The Private Investigation Era (1996-2006)***

1996: Real estate mogul Robert Bigelow purchases Skinwalker Ranch from the Sherman family and establishes the National Institute of Discovery Sciences (NIDS) to scientifically study the reported anomalies.

1997-1998: NIDS investigators, including scientist Jacques Vallee, report a complete lack of physical UFO sightings at the ranch, noting that frequent sightings failed to materialize.

2004: Bigelow shuts down active investigations at the ranch, stating that "nothing was happening" for over two years.

2005: Scientists Colm Kelleher and journalist George Knapp publish *Hunt for the Skinwalker*, a book detailing sensational but unproven claims of werewolves, ghosts, and portals at the ranch.

### ***The AAWSAP/AATIP Era (2007-2012)***

2007: DIA scientist James Lacatski reads the *Skinwalker* book and visits the ranch, where he claims to witness a paranormal apparition.

2008: At the request of Lacatski and with the support of Senator Harry Reid, the Pentagon creates the Advanced Aerospace Weapon Systems Application Program (AAWSAP).

Late 2008: The AAWSAP contract is awarded to Robert Bigelow's company, BASS, as the sole bidder, providing \$22 million in taxpayer funding to investigate both UFOs and paranormal

phenomena like "monsters and ghosts".

2009: Senator Reid requests "Top Secret Special Access" status for the program using the nickname AATIP (Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program) to protect its activities from wider Pentagon scrutiny.

2009: Investigator Jay Stratton allegedly encounters a "werewolf" at his home after visiting Skinwalker Ranch, an incident later attributed by skeptics to a misidentified black bear.

2010: The Pentagon begins pulling AAWSAP funding after determining its reports were of "limited value".

2012: AAWSAP is officially terminated due to a lack of progress and concerns about the program's viability.

### ***The Mainstream Rebranding (2016-2018)***

April 1, 2016: Robert Bigelow sells Skinwalker Ranch to real estate mogul Brandon Fugal.

October 2017: Luis Elizondo resigns from the Pentagon, claiming a lack of support for UFO research, and joins the To The Stars Academy (TTSA).

December 16, 2017: The New York Times publishes a front-page article revealing the "Secret Pentagon UFO program" (AATIP). The article reportedly omits 97% of the original story—specifically the paranormal investigations into werewolves and ghosts—to make the subject "politically viable".

April 19, 2018: Brandon Fugal gives a briefing on Skinwalker Ranch to Senate staffers and officials, including future AARO director Dr. Sean Kirkpatrick, who attended as an objective third-party scientist.

### ***The AARO and Historical Findings (2020-2024)***

August 2020: The Pentagon establishes the official UAP Task Force, led by Brennan McKernan, to investigate unidentified aerial phenomena.

2022: Congress creates the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO) to investigate UAP claims; Dr. Sean Kirkpatrick is appointed as its first director.

December 2023: Dr. Kirkpatrick retires from AARO.

March 2024: AARO releases its Volume 1 historical report, concluding there is no evidence of aliens, alien technology, or secret government cover-ups. The report identifies that most modern UFO claims can be traced back to the same "core group" of activists.

## **Sources**

[21550 - The UFO Lie: Shocking truth of Pentagon AAWSAP program | The Basement Office](#)

[21551 - UFO "religion" influencing Congress to hunt aliens, says top Pentagon official](#)

[21552 - Pentagon UFO Hunter Reveals What He Knows About Aliens](#)

[21553 - Pentagon UFO Hunter Says Alien "Religion" Has Infiltrated US Government](#)

[21554 - BOMBSHELL: Pentagon created fake UFO evidence, promoted false alien stories](#)

[21555 - The Pentagon's Ghostbusters | Rogue military officials hunted UFOs, ghosts and monsters](#)



## 21557 - Spooky Hustlers: How wacky UFO activists and "crazy" ghost hunters duped Congress into hunting UFOs

### BOX - METHODOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATION: THE HUMAN-AI ARCHITECTURE

#### FROM EXECUTION TO ARCHITECTURE

The production of this report serves as another practical case study in the evolution of modern work. A first similar report was published about the impact of AI. The text of this report, largely compiled by AI from video sources, shows that the successful application of Artificial Intelligence is not a replacement for human agency, but a mandate for its evolution. The human researcher involved transitioned from a traditional "executor" of analysing and writing tasks to a "Director" or an "Architect of Outcomes". In an era where AI can process vast transcripts and draft complex analyses, the human value-add has shifted to Meta-Cognition - identifying which geopolitical and economic problems are worth exploring - and Strategic Synthesis - combining disparate AI-generated insights into this coherent and relevant report. This collaboration represents a "Human-in-the-Loop" methodology, where the algorithm provides the analytical muscle while the human provides the ethical and strategic compass.

#### DATA ACQUISITION AND AUTOMATED TRANSCRIPTION

The foundation of this research was a curated selection of high-level video content (YouTube).

To manage the scale of the data, a custom PHP-based automation was developed to interface with the TranscriptAPI.

- The Process: This script systematically retrieved raw transcripts, ensuring that metadata - such as video titles, author information, and precise timestamps - was preserved.
- The Goal: By automating the "execution" of data retrieval, the researcher was freed to focus on the "architecture" of the inquiry.

#### INTERROGATIVE ANALYSIS (THE Q&A FRAMEWORK)

Rather than allowing the AI to generate generic summaries, a rigorous interrogative method was employed using GPT-4o. The AI was asked to collect information about some ten different topics and contributed to this selection based on the video sources.

The AI was strictly constrained to the provided transcript. This ensured that the resulting data remained grounded in the primary source material, preventing "hallucinations" and preserving the unique nuances of the expert speakers.

The outputs were consolidated into a structured CSV format, creating a searchable and verifiable knowledge base for the final drafting phase.

The results of the AI analyses on the videos from a playlist are available via these link:

- [vidstance.com/vidstance-18](https://vidstance.com/vidstance-18)
- [vidstance.com/vidstance-19](https://vidstance.com/vidstance-19)

#### NARRATIVE SYNTHESIS AND EDITORIAL REFINEMENT

The final stage involved the synthesis of these structured insights into the report. This was performed using Gemini 3 Flash and GPT 5.1 and 5.2, acting as a sophisticated research assistants.

- Strategic Synthesis: The AI integrated the collected data with the broader available full transcripts. The human architect guided this process by defining the narrative arc and ensuring that the tone remained professional and aligned with British English (UK) standards.
- Citations and Verification: A systematic referencing system was maintained throughout, ensuring that every claim in the report can be traced back to the original video source via the consolidated reference

list. However, some hallucinations were noticed, so the referencing may contain errors.

#### THE SYNERGY OF INTELLIGENCE

This methodology demonstrates that the future of high-level research lies in the synergy between human and machine. The AI provided the speed and scale necessary to process thousands of minutes of video to an acceptable non-scientific report, while the human researcher provided the Empathy, Ethics, and Strategic Vision required to turn raw data into a meaningful contribution to the discourse on in this case UAPs and the Pentagon.

#### ABOUT VIDSTANCE.COM

This report, more information about this report, the video sources and other reports (work in progress) are available on [vidstance.com](https://vidstance.com). VidStance captures, structures this "oral living knowledge." It is also a tribute to the creators of high-quality content published on YouTube; their work provides intellectual raw material for the public debates of the 21st century.