

# 2022 UAP ANNUAL REPORT: TWO STEPS BACKWARD

On Thursday, January 12, 2023, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) released the 2022 Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena (UAP) Annual Report. By statute, the Report was due on October 31, 2022. No reason was given in the Report for the delay. The Annual Report contained fewer details about the results of the recent UAP study than the original Preliminary Assessment: Unidentified Aerial Phenomena, issued by ODNI in June 2021. In a substantial departure from the previous public report, the 2022 Report claims to have solved a majority of the case reports. Considering that the previous Report was only able to find an explanation for less than one percent of cases, the 2022 Annual Report claims to have solved an astounding 195 cases out of 366, apparently using the same methodology. No explanation for the discrepancy was given in the Report.

This drastic shift in the number of resolved cases, however, leaves us no closer to understanding reports where UAP exhibit unusual flight characteristics with no apparent means of propulsion. Because of this emphasis on identifying mundane objects, no progress has been made about UAP that most concern Congress. The 2022 Annual Report reflects the continuing Pentagon trend of limiting public knowledge about the core of this mystery, reflecting that little has changed in the last eighty years.

This emphasis on cases that are easier to explain and pose less of a potential threat has frustrated a bipartisan group of legislators who serve on national security oversight committees. The lack of cooperation from the Department of Defense (DoD) and the intelligence community (IC) led to the first UAP legislation in U.S. history. After the release of the original Preliminary Assessment in 2021, the 2022 annual defense appropriations bill contained language setting up a UAP program in the DoD. The bill set up a five year UAP study program. However, this program has been slow to get off the ground and the program has already begun to restrict information about the phenomenon to the public and, presumably, to Congress.

With this slow pace, Congress added new provisions to the 2023 defense appropriations bill, intended to remove bureaucratic roadblocks to UAP study. Under the second round of legislation, the UAP program is now required to gather up non-disclosure agreements intended to silence UAP witnesses. Whistleblower protections were also added to protect witnesses from adverse consequences as a result of their testimony. In order to learn from past efforts, the General

Accountancy Office (GAO) will now be required to undertake a review of IC efforts to study UAP from 1945 forward. Under this effort, the GAO must also review IC efforts to denigrate the study of UAP and to misinform the American People. Each of these new provisions will put more pressure on the DoD and ODNI to change its priorities to conform with the UAP legislation.

As the latest example of why the four congressional national security committees are displeased with management of the UAP issue, the disappointing 2022 Annual Report was filed more than two months late. Yet, the extra time taken did not result in more analysis of the data. In fact, many of the details found in the 2021 Preliminary Assessment were not present in the first Annual Report required by statute. While the total number of reports were listed, there was no real breakdown of characteristics of the reports, except a marked increase in the number of reports that had mundane explanations. While there was a significant increase in reports, most or all of the increased number of reports could be attributed to natural or man-made objects. There were 247 new reports with another 119 reports from the previous reporting period discussed in the 2021 Preliminary Assessment, for a total of 366 newly disclosed reports. This compares to 144 reports contained in the 2021 Preliminary Assessment, for a reporting period that was primarily Naval aviator reports from 2019 through March 2021.

The raw 2022 Report numbers, however, gave very few clues of the types of encounters being reported that were unable to be identified. We do not know how many near misses occurred; how many incidents were sightings showing unusual flight characteristics; how many incidents demonstrated propulsion without an apparent traditional power source; how many unidentified sightings were captured both visually and by sensors; and whether any sightings were tracked by sensors before or after any visual sighting to help determine where the craft came from or returned. Instead, the Annual Report's analysis concentrated on incidents that do not present any of these disturbing qualities.

In the 2022 Annual Report, 195 reports had unremarkable explanations with 26 drones, 163 balloons and 6 reports of debris characterized as "clutter". Out of 366 reports in the 2022 Annual Report, 53% were identified as mundane objects. Considering that 119 cases mentioned in the 2022 Annual Report were from the same reporting period of the 2021 Report, the DoD and ODNI were able to increase their identified rate from 0.7% to 53%, apparently using the same methodology. Quite a change that was never explained in the most recent report or by any DoD or IC official.

Since the most recent report included 119 reports from the same reporting period as the 2021 Preliminary Report, the sudden increase in resolved cases from 2021 to 2022 defies explanation if the same criteria were applied to each Report. If one assumes that the new reports from the 2021 Preliminary Assessment period had the same identified rate of 0.7% as other reports from the same time period, it means that the “identified” reports for cases in the 2022 reporting cycle had an “identified” rate of 78%. This rate of identification change is too great, using the same methodology, to be considered credible.

For instance, in the 2021 Report, there were 80 out of 144 reports that had sensor confirmation of visual pilot reports. No data was provided about how many of the 171 reports that were still listed as “unknown”, now considered “uncharacterized and unattributed UAP reports.” An undefined number of these reports “demonstrated unusual flight characteristics or performance capabilities, and require further analysis.” The 2021 Report mentioned 21 incidents displayed these unusual flight characteristics. In the 2022 Annual Report, all we are told is that “some” cases had extraordinary capabilities. However, the latest Report discusses that military aviators apparently failed to identify 162 more balloons than found in the first Report. Either military pilots were having more trouble identifying balloons in the 366 newly disclosed reports, or the ODNI failed to disclose a drastic shift in how the Pentagon analyzes UAP reports.

The newest Report probably reflects a change in how the military analyzes UAP, without saying so. This change takes the DoD and IC further away from the intent of Congress, as expressed in two rounds of legislation. Little emphasis was given to incidents with “near misses” between aviators and UAP. The 2021 Report discussed the safety hazard found in 11 reported near misses. The recently released Annual Report only mentions that there were no collisions between military aircraft and UAP. We are left to speculate as to how many aircraft had dangerously close encounters with UAP. With 2022 media reports from commercial pilots of similar activity, the Annual Report is hardly reassuring to a Congress also concerned about the frequency of near misses.

Keeping data on these disturbing encounters from the public does not serve the public interest. The release of this data will not compromise any classified sources or methods necessary to protect intelligence gathering. The pilot reports presented do not have to identify the pilot, classified equipment or clandestine sources. The cases are taken from incident reports and follow up investigation of pilots and any sensor data. There were 11 near misses discussed in the 2021 Report taken from data, mostly obtained from incidents occurring from 2019 to March 2021.

The same reluctance to provide information that was provided in the past is true for UAP that exhibited “unusual UAP movement patterns or flight characteristics.” There were 21 reports of 18 incidents where objects performed maneuvers impossible for our best high performance aircraft. The 2022 Annual Report contained no breakdown of reports with unusual UAP movement patterns or flight characteristics. Yet, these are the type of reports that most concern the House and Senate Armed Services and Committees on Intelligence. This concern was highlighted at the May 18, 2022 House Committee on Intelligence subcommittee hearing about UAP. Subcommittee Chair André Carson began the hearing by urging the Pentagon to concentrate on the most concerning cases, based on apparent unusual performance capabilities, rather than emphasize the “low hanging fruit” that have mundane explanations.

The emphasis of the 2022 Annual Report is on the simple cases like misidentified balloons, rather than near misses and exotic flight characteristics that cannot be duplicated by our most advanced aircraft. As expressed in the first hearing about UAP in 54 years, the Pentagon is also rolling back transparency policies to stop the release of videos of UAP. Videos like those declassified in 2017 (FLIR, Gimbal, and GOFAST) will no longer be available to the public.

Looking at the 2022 Annual Report, it is difficult to figure out the reason for a two plus month delay. The eleven page Report was short on analysis and mostly filled with background information. The Table of Contents and Appendix made up five of the 11 pages. The Appendix contained generic program information including a glossary and three pages of statutory language applicable to the UAP program. The actual analysis was limited to 555 words.

Of the cases studied, the assessment period ended on August 30, 2022, two months before the publication deadline. There appears that there were no glitches causing the delay. In response to a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request about the delay, there were no reported documents that informed Congress that the Report would be late. The main substance of the response to the FOIA request reads as follows:

“After a thorough search of our records and databases, no records responsive to your request were located. As the annual report is written with data and support from the Department of Defense, coordination required additional time. The report is currently undergoing the normal and appropriate approvals process

before it is delivered to Congress.” (ODNI FOIA case no. DF-2023-00028 (December 5, 2022).)

The crux of this letter is that no correspondence was sent to Congress informing them of the delay. Yet, it took more than two months for ODNI to minimally comply with the statutory requirement. The excuse was that ODNI needed to coordinate with the Pentagon, something that was a known factor ahead of time. In a program that was mandated by Congress with multiple deadlines and a five year statutory life, the unclassified version of the first annual report left out key factors found in the unclassified version of the 2021 Preliminary Assessment. The data left out would demonstrate UAP impact on aircraft safety. Supplying data of the sort previously disclosed would not impact any classified sources or methods. Sharing this general statistical data is the bare minimum to educate the public on an issue that was important enough to Congress that it was the subject of two rounds of legislation in the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress. We are left with the impression, especially considering past performance dealing with the same subject matter, that the dual purpose for the delay was to run out the clock on the five year program and downplay the potential significance of UAP.

Another way to look for the intent of the DoD is to see what activities it undertook during the delay. Put simply, what did the Pentagon do during the delay? First of all, the UAP program said nothing to explain the reasons for the delay. The UAP program that is now referred to as the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO) made no public statements about the reason for the delay, even at its Media Day (press conference) on December 16, 2022. Neither did the primary author of the Annual Report, ODNI. However, news reports around the time that the Report was due mentioned that the Report was “expected this week”. (*i.e.* ABC News, *Another UFO report expected this week, some incidents still unexplained*, October 31, 2022 (<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/ufo-report-week-incidents-unexplained/story?id=92303931>)). Similar stories talked about it being out by the end of November. Each story, mostly from traditional defense reporters, talked about the Report being issued “soon”.

During this delay, the Pentagon held a December 16, 2022 press conference with spokesperson Susan Gough, Undersecretary Ronald Moultrie and AARO Director Dr. Sean Kirkpatrick in attendance. When asked about the number of reports in the 2022 Annual Report, it took several follow up questions to get the officials to admit that there were “several hundred” reports. Dr. Kirkpatrick stated:

“I don't want to get ahead of the next report when it comes out. So, when that comes out, you'll get a better idea of what our batting average is.” (DoD, Media Roundtable on the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office, December 16, 2022.)

The answer left it to the release of the 2022 Annual Report issuance. However, no press conference was held after the public release of the Annual Report. This prevented any questions from the press about its contents. With very little data analysis in the Report, no questions could be asked about the lack of data or about whether the methodology had changed, resulting in a radical change in the amount of identified cases.

Prior to the press conference, the DoD had been the source of several articles that downplayed the contents of the yet-to-be-issued Report. Each of these articles came from media outlets that cover traditional defense issues. One common element in many of these news reports was the use of the term “enthusiast” to describe people with an interest in this public policy issue. (*i.e.* Reuters, *Latest U.S. defense-intelligence report on UFOs to be made public soon*, November 3, 2022.) The use of the term “enthusiast” harkens back to the early years of the UFO phenomenon when the official CIA UFO history began by calling people who had an interest in the subject and its public policy implications, “UFO buffs”. (Gerald K. Haines, *CIA's Role in the Study of UFOs, 1947-90 (A Die-Hard Issue)*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/97unclass/ufo.html>.)

The use of the term “enthusiast” to describe people with an interest in UAP was sprinkled through several articles, suggesting it came from a common source. It likely was a term used by Pentagon officials unless reporters from several news outlets independently decided to use it. This is not the first time that DoD officials have used derogatory terms to describe those interested in the phenomenon. Despite claims that the Pentagon is trying to destigmatize discussion of UAP, it appears that derogatory descriptions are once again part of the UFO phenomenon. It appears to have been used in discussions with reporters that are seen as allies to the DoD/ODNI narrative, much like the late 1960s study by the University of Colorado “Condon” Committee, which had support from friendly journalists. Most significant was the support of the *New York Times* science editor, Walter Sullivan, who wrote the Forward to the publication of the committee’s study, playing the role of advocate, not journalist.

During the delay in the issuance of the 2022 Annual Report, several articles came out, many using the same general language, about how UFO “enthusiasts” will be disappointed that the “soon to be issued” report will not disclose that aliens are visiting the planet. Twenty-seven days before the Annual Report came out, the December 16<sup>th</sup> press conference was held. At the December 16<sup>th</sup> “Media Roundtable”, the DoD participants revealed nothing about the Annual Report, beyond the vague references to the case total. Yet, AARO did not have a follow-up press conference to discuss what was actually in the short report. Issues like the increase of the number of balloons misidentified jumped from single “deflating balloon” to 163 misidentified balloons has gone without explanation. Was it a change in analysis? Was it due to an expansion of the types of personnel who could file reports? Were they all aviators? If aviators, what would explain their newfound confusion? Since neither the DoD nor ODNI have explained these abrupt changes in the number of balloon cases, the press and public can only speculate.

Overall, the latest conduct by the DoD and IC harkens us back to the Project Blue Book days with its fervor to hype “solved” cases and downplay the perplexing ones. For all of the claims of transparency, the DoD has been dialing back information provided to the public. All the while, they are delaying steps it takes that are required by law. These delays will have a twofold impact. First, the emphasis on cases with simple explanations takes center stage. At the same time, cases that show the most potentially threatening capabilities are hardly discussed. Second, the continued delays in implementing a five year program are running out the clock on this study. Ignoring statutory deadlines and taking the maximum times to take the procedural steps to begin an effective study are attempts to ensure that the mystery will continue. A mystery that the DoD and IC have artificially maintained did not start until the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. These strategies combine in the issuance of the 2022 Annual Report, taking us two steps backwards.