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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

1952

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

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MEMORANDUM TO: Director, Psychological Strategy Board

SUBJECT: Flying Saucers

1. I am today transmitting to the National Security Council a proposal (TAB A) in which it is concluded that the problems connected with unidentified flying objects appear to have implications for psychological warfare as well as for intelligence and operations.

2. The background for this view is presented in some detail in TAB B.

3. I suggest that we discuss at an early board meeting the possible offensive or defensive utilization of these phenomena for psychological warfare purposes.

Walter B. Smith
Director

Enclosure

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TAB A

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SECURITY INFORMATION

DRAFT

NSC

SUBJECT: Unidentified flying objects.

1. The National Security Council has recognized as a national security problem our present limited capabilities in making prompt positive visual or mechanical identification of flying objects. The problem is recognized also as one which bears directly upon both offensive and defensive capabilities of the armed forces; as one of concern to operations as well as to intelligence; and as one having possible implications for psychological warfare.

2. As the nature of the problem is such that a centrally administered inquiry rather than a divided effort offers the best promise of progress, the Director, Research and Development Board is charged with the responsibility of administering in this field a program of research which meets the specifications of Secretary of Defense and as regards operational requirements; of the Director of Central Intelligence, as regards the intelligence requirements and of Director, Psychological Strategy board, as regards psychological warfare implications.

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PROBLEM:

It is the purpose of this study to determine what concern to CIA, if any, is resident in the problem of "unidentified flying objects," and to recommend, if such interest is found, steps that should be taken to improve CIA's intelligence position on aspects related to national security.

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FACTS BEARING ON THE PROBLEM:

1. Since 1947, there have been about 1500 official reports of sightings plus an enormous volume of letters, phone calls and press reports. During this July alone, official reports totaled 250. Of the 1500, Air Force carries 20% as unexplained and of those received since the first of this year, 28% unexplained.

2. The administrative unit now handling the Air Force inquiry on these phenomena is a small section headed by an Air Force Reserve Captain, E. J. Ruppelt, assisted by two lieutenants and two secretaries at Air Technical Intelligence Center, Wright Field. It is from this small group that the controling collection directive to the entire Air Force originated and it is to this small group that the flood of reports on flying saucers comes for collation and analysis.

3. Research and analysis at this time is limited almost exclusively to the case history method. Reports, which are limited in their coverage to ten broad elements of information, are received from the field, mainly through the Air-intelligence reporting system, through also to a limited extent from the other services and from the Department of State.

4. Those in charge of the Air Force project at Air Technical Intelligence Center told the OSI team that it has not yet been decided what kind of an effort, or how extensive an inquiry should be undertaken in this field.

5. ATIC has roughly 20 percent of its cases in the "unexplained" category.

6. Of this 20 percent they feel that 10 percent would remain unexplained even with a full measure of available information. This residue of as-yet-unexplainable reports was aptly described as a group of "incredible reports from credible observers."

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DISCUSSION:

The three man OSI team entered into its inquiry fully aware that it was coming into a field already charged with partesanship, one in which objectivity had been overridden by numerous sensational writers, and one in which there are pressures for extravagent explanations as well as for oversimplification. They consulted with a representative of Air Force Special ~~Projects~~ Studies group; discussed the problem with those in charge of the Air Force Project at Wright field; reviewed a considerable volume of intelligence reports; checked the Soviet press and broadcast indices; and conferred with three of our consultants at MIT, all leaders in their scientific fields.

The present small scale inquiry at ATIC, which thus far has been able only to use the case history approach, examining each incident carefully to determine whether it can be explained or whether it must be put into the "unexplained" category, was considered a perfectly valid procedure but one that offered but little promise in opening up explanations regarding the nature of these phenomena, our consultants at MIT told us, it would probably be found on the margins or just beyond the frontiers of our present knowledge in the fields of atmospherics, ionization and extra-terrestial phenomena, taking into account the possibility that nuclear waste products might also be a factor to consider. A systematic attack on the as-yet unexplained cases would contemplate a centrally coordinated program involving projects on a number of fronts and involving a variety of techniques not now used.

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CONCLUSIONS:

1. The problem of "unidentified flying objects" is a national security problem of concern to operations as well as to intelligence.

2. Operational problems are of primary importance and should be attacked at once. They include:

a. Taking immediate steps to improve identification of "phantoms" so that in the event of an attack, instant and positive identification of enemy rockets or plans could be made.

b. Determination of what if any utilization should be made of these phenomena by US psychological warfare planners and what, if any, defenses should be planned in anticipation of Soviet attempts to utilize them.

3. Intelligence problems include.

a. Knowledge of the exact nature of these phenomenaaespecially as regards:

(1) Whether any are susceptible to control, and can be thus utilized for either military or psychological offense or defense.

(2) Whether any are predictable and can thus be taken advantage of in military or psychological operations.

b. The present level of Russian knowledgearegarding these phenomena.

c. Possible Soviet intentions and capabilities to utilize these phenomena to the detriment of US security interests.

d. The reasons for silence in the Soviet Press regardinga"flying saucers".

4. Intelligence responsibilities in this field as regards both collection and analysis can be discharged with maximum effectiveness only after much more

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is known regarding the exact nature of these phenomena.

5. The problem transcends the level of individual departmental responsibilities, and is of such importance as to merit cognizance and action by the National Security Council.

6. Additional work, differing in character and emphasis from that presently under way will be required to meet the specific needs in this field of both operations and intelligence.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

One of the two ~~possible~~ courses of action set ~~forth~~ below is proposed; one requires NSC action, and the other requires action by Secretary of Defense:

1. NSC action: under this course, it is recommended:

a. That the DCI present to the NSC a draft NSC directive (TAB A) which prescribes that a centrally administered research program under RDB be established, in accordance with Sec. 214 (a), National Security Act of 1947, this program having for its research objectives/requirements to be specified by the Secretary of Defense; the Director of Central Intelligence, and Director, Psychological Strategy Board.

b. That upon issuance of this NSC directive, CIA exercise its statutory function by providing coordinated intelligence/requirements and the requisite intelligence support to RDB.

2. Secretary of Defense actions: under this course, it is recommended:

a. That the DCI suggest to Secretary of Defense along lines of the draft letter that coordinated research program would be valuable to CIA, and that if such a study is undertaken by Defense, that coordinated intelligence requirements be provided by CIA before the study is started.

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There are a number of standard analytical processes that might be used if this problem should be ~~Air Force~~ considered ~~the inquiry~~ worth a full blown effort. It might define in detail the research objectives to be used in relation to the questionnaire.

After the areas of most profitable research had been determined, a logical next step would be to isolate the important elements in each problem area.

A third step would be to set up means by which to make a number useful cross-comparisons. Finally, ~~Fourth~~, trend studies as well as area studies could be made.

Finally, there might be an objective study on the attributes of available data.

In summary, the limited central administrative support given to the project by Air Force, coupled with the extremely limited scope of the analytical work done thus far, has placed a strict ceiling on the kind of interpretations that can be made from material now available.

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TAB B

DRAFT LETTER

FROM: DCI

TO : Secretary of Defense

SUBJECT: Intelligence interest in a study of unidentified flying objects.

1. Recently CIA's Office of Scientific Intelligence made an inquiry into the possible intelligence implications of this subject. We concluded that while the operational problem of improvement in identification of "phantoms" was of first priority because of the need to make instant and positive identification of enemy rockets or planes, the solution of intelligence problems are of sufficient importance to justify vigorous support by this Agency of an organized attack on the problem.

2. In our inquiry three of our men consulted with a representative of Air Force Special Projects group; discussed the problem with those in charge of the Air Force Project at Wright field; reviewed a considerable volume of intelligence reports; checked the Soviet press and broadcast indices; and conferred with three of our consultants at MIT, all leaders in their scientific fields.

3. The present small scale inquiry at ATIC, which thus far has been able only to use the case history approach, examining each incident carefully to determine whether it can be explained or whether it must be put into the "unexplained" category, was considered a perfectly valid procedure but one that offered but little promise in opening up explanations regarding the nature of these phenomena, our consultants at MIT told us, it would probably be found on the margins or just beyond the frontiers of our present knowledge in the fields

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of atmospherics, ionization and extra-terrestial phenomena, taking into account the possibility that nuclear waste products might also be a factor to consider. A systematic attack on the as-yet unexplained cases would contemplate a centrally coordinator program involving projects on a number of fronts and involving a variety of techniques not now used.

4. As the strictly US military operations problem of improved identification at home and abroad is closely tied to a number of intelligence questions, it would be advantegous to CIA, as well as to the interests of the intelligence components of Department of Defense, if intelligence research requirements could be included in any organized inquiry into the subject.

5. At this time we know so little of the exact nature of these phenomena that additional research would be necessary before it could be said whether any are susceptibel to control and can thus be utilized for either military or psychological offense or defense, or whether any are predictable, and can thus be taken advantage of in military or psychological operations.

6. It may be found that an appropriate center for such research would be in a group such as Project Lincoln which is now working for Department of Defense on problems of air defense.

7. At this time we are unable to find any basis in our information for estimating possible Soviet intentions or capabilities to utilize these phenomena to our detriment. The Soviet Press has been silent on the subject -- which is in itself provocative -- and we are not yet able to appraise the present level of knowledge of Soviet scientists regarding these phenomena.

8. It would be appreciated if this agency could participate in any plans for further inquiry into this subject.

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PRESENT STATUS OF THE INQUIRY

Mr. Strong has discussed with you some of the general features of this problem, and now I should like to describe briefly how the Air Force has organized its study of reports on unidentified flying objects and outline its methods.

The administrative unit now handling the Air Force inquiry on these phenomena is the Unidentified Flying Objects Section of the Aircraft Propulsion Branch of the Technical Analysis Division of Air Technical Intelligence Center, Wright Field.



This small section is headed by an Air Force Reserve Captain, E. J. Ruppelt, assisted by two lieutenants and two secretaries. It is from this small group that the controling collection directive to the entire Air Force originated and it is to this small group that the flood of reports on unidentified flying objects comes for collation and analysis.

The strength and position of this central administrative group clearly indicates a low level of support, and, presumably, serious reservations in the Air Force regarding the value of extensive inquiry into the subject. Paradoxically,

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this central effort at ATIC is maintained on a minimal basis while there is concurrently ordered a world-wide reporting system and an interception program which may expend hundreds of man hours and thousands of dollars.

The methods used by Air Force are now in the process of change but the conclusions and explanations given to the public are based on the process I am going to describe.

Research and analysis at this time is limited almost exclusively to the case history method. Reports, which are limited in their coverage to ten broad elements of information, are received from the field, mainly through the Air-intelligence reporting system, though also to a limited extent from the other services and from the Department of State.

These reports come to the Unidentified Objects Section where each one is examined separately to determine whether it is explainable as "misinterpretations of a known object", or whether it must be classed as "unexplained," and subject to further investigation.

In this sorting process, the reports are first examined in the light of established and readily available fact such as known balloon tracks or aircraft flights. The report may then be referred to an Air Force Base or to the Office

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of Special Investigation for direct interrogation of the reporter. Also, in some cases the reports are referred to technical or scientific specialists for interpretation. It should be borne in mind that this is all on an individual case basis.

There has been no systematic or extensive use of other standard methods of processing data. It is true that there have been a few attempts to examine some of the broader questions that have been raised by these reports. ATIC has, for example, laboriously gone through the accumulation of "unexplained" US reports, one by one, to plot them on a map. These plots show a high incidence of reported cases near atomic installations and Strategic Air Command bases but this might be expected because of the greater number of alert observers in such places. Actually, a number of accepted research techniques that should be used in any effort to gain a sound understanding of these phenomena, have not been employed.

There is, of course, some doubt regarding the extent and kind of effort required for the future. The Air Force has not yet found any great cause for concern. Captain Ruppelt remarked that, as the problem seems to be of more concern to operations than to intelligence, it might appropriately be moved out of intelligence to some operational command. (Within the last two weeks, he

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has tried, unsuccessfully, to hand the baby to Air Defense Command.)

Of the essential processes that might be used if Air Force considered the inquiry worth a full blown effort, we could list the following:

Research objectives should be defined in detail in relation to the questionnaire. The questions asked in the present collection directive are admitted to be inadequate even for the limited case-history approach. Further, the answers are not processed in such a way as to easily permit the determination of the lines of research and analysis that should be followed.

As there has been no preliminary determination of areas of most profitable research, there is no way at this time by which to isolate the important elements in each of the problem areas. No studies have been made, for example, to establish categories of the objects reported by shape, size, color, etc. or to show such things as shortest, longest and average duration of sightings of objects of various kinds.

These deficiencies have conspired against making cross-comparisons. There have been no studies, for example, that would compare certain weather conditions with the appearance of certain colors of lights.

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Trend studies as well as area studies could be made. There is now no picture of how the various phenomena may have formed patterns, either as regards aggregation or dispersal over specific periods of time.

Finally, there might be an objective study on the attributes of available data. Thus far, reports themselves (not factors present within these reports) are only classed "explainable" or "not explained". It is not known to what extent, or where, elements of consistency may extend through both the collection of "explainable" and "not explained" reports.

Also, there is no means by which to sort out valid elements from otherwise "unreliable" reports, nor is there a means by which to sort out invalid elements from otherwise accurate reports. An illustration of a consequence of this limitation would be the probable unhappy fate of a valid report on what was actually arionized cloud, when observed on a well established balloon track. It would, in all probability be classed "explainable" as a balloon. The relegation of this report to the "explained" category would take any valid elements present in the report out of the reach of later analysis.

In summary, the limited central administrative support given to the project by Air Force, coupled with the extremely limited scope of the analytical work

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does thus far, leads us to believe that any broad conclusions presently drawn can be accepted only with caution.

As to the future, a limited amount of improvement may be accomplished. A revised questionnaire, now being designed by Air Force and Battelle Institute experts will give more detail to each case-history. We have heard informally, though, that many objects are not reported in Korea because of the burden of required paper-work. A longer questionnaire would make pilots even more reluctant to report their sightings. Also, many cross comparisons will be possible if present plans to use punch cards are carried out. In addition, improvements may be expected if Air Force follows through on its present plan to establish an advisory board of top level scientists. Further, the current plan to place emphasis on using instrumentation such as refraction grid cameras and new type Schmidt telescopes, will yield more usable facts. The absence thus far, however, of a well planned and properly guided research program makes it appear that it may be some time in the future before we can expect complete explanations of many of these phenomena.

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For the next part of our presentation, Mr. Durant will discuss some of the factors that have been found, or may be involved, in these reports.