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## US Government Says UFOs are “Real” An Analysis of the *60 Minutes* Investigation

by Mick West

Senator Harry Reid got his committee to award a contract to his friend around 2008. That friend hired his friend Luis Elizondo to study the reports. Now Elizondo claims the observations prove something fantastic. Careful analysis explains something more mundane.

The *60 Minutes* segment of Sunday May 16, 2021 ([available on YouTube \(https://bit.ly/3wa48Bo\)](https://bit.ly/3wa48Bo)), was no doubt for many people a startling revelation that the US Government has admitted that UFOs are “real” and the military is investigating them. But for me it was a walk down memory lane, a recap of the curious events of the last four years. A disappointing recap at that, as I’d hoped at least for some new nuggets of information that I could use to help solve the rather complicated puzzle of just exactly what is going on.

The segment opens with an interview with a familiar character, Luis Elizondo, reputedly the former head of a \$22 million program instigated by Senator Harry Reid called AATIP: the Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program. Ostensibly this was created to study possible future developments in aerospace. Elizondo claims the program was actually created to study UFOs (or, as they prefer to call them now, UAPs, or Unidentified Aerial Phenomena.) Put out to tender in 2008, the budget was awarded to Harry Reid’s friend, Robert Bigelow, a UFO and paranormal enthusiast.

Elizondo opens with the startling claim that “the Government has already stated for the record that [UFOs] are real.” Startling, that is, until you remember that “UFO” does not necessarily mean alien visitors, but rather something unidentified in the sky, something about which the observer lacks sufficient information to identify. Obviously, the government would admit such things are “real.” A mylar balloon floating into the range of a Navy jet’s camera is “real”, but the U in UFO and UAP does not mean extraterrestrial, or even necessarily an aerial technology beyond any known physics and aerodynamics.

Earth rotates at about 17000mph. At that speed materials burn up in the atmosphere (“re-entry of shuttles”)

Elizondo then goes on to describe craft exhibiting startling technologies—the ability to accelerate at a physics-defying 600g, reaching speeds of 17,000 mph in the atmosphere, or even through water. These are things that the government very much has *not* admitted are real.

We then are shown a series of familiar videos as evidence of this amazing technology—all of which have been in the public domain for some time (over a decade in one case) and all of which have been analyzed (by several people, myself included) and found to almost certainly not represent objects exhibiting incredible abilities, and instead more likely signify very ordinary human technology.

First, we see “Go Fast”, a video presented as showing an incredibly fast craft skimming low over the ocean. But if you do the very simple trigonometry invited by the numbers on screen, it turns out to be something *far* above the surface and moving at a speed that matches the wind at that altitude, making it almost certainly just a balloon. Yet the *60 Minutes* host, the highly respected journalist Bill Whitaker, repeats Elizondo’s baseless claim that it’s “fast moving.”



Next we see a more recent video, the green flashing triangle. Initially very impressive, it shows a triangular shaped object moving across the sky, filmed with a night vision device from a Navy ship. But then you notice the flashing light that, as I demonstrated in a video posted at Metabunk, perfectly matches the pattern of blinking lights on a commercial plane like a Boeing 737. A little research reveals that some night-vision devices have a triangular aperture (see [my analysis at Metabunk \(https://bit.ly/3ePgM2t\)](https://bit.ly/3ePgM2t)). When the device is slightly out of focus then a plane flying overhead looks exactly like this flying triangle. The case was effectively closed when other triangles in the scene were identified as stars. Yet we are told “the Pentagon admits it doesn’t know what in the world it is.” It’s pretty obvious what it is once you match the UAP blinking triangle to that of commercial airliners.

In fact, the only thing the Pentagon has admitted is that the videos are “real,” in that they were taken by US Navy personnel (and not, therefore, fake CGI-generated videos or whatever), and that they were included in studies by the UAP task force, meaning they were at least unidentified at one point.

We are then shown two other videos. “FLIR1” is claimed to show physics-defying acceleration, but careful study has shown that the supposed sudden moves are actually the result of the camera moving or changing mode. “GIMBAL” shows an impressive looking flying saucer, but again the reality seems more mundane—an infrared glare of a distant plane and a rotating gimbal mechanism explain both the rotating saucer shape, and why it was named “gimbal” in the first place.

Later we hear about the 2004 *USS Nimitz* aircraft carrier incident, which gave us the FLIR1 video. Two pilots, David Fravor and Alex Dietrich, repeat a story they (mostly Fravor) have been telling for over a decade. Lauded as the greatest UFO encounter of all time, it has remarkably little in terms of actual evidence. The one blurry video has been consistently misinterpreted (including by Fravor) as showing rapid motion. There are accounts of unusual radar returns showing rapid motion, but unfortunately there’s no solid evidence for these, and the account has changed somewhat since it first appeared in a bizarre short science-fiction story written by the chief radar operator in 2008.

Dietrich and Fravor describe an encounter and short dog-fight with a “Tic-Tac” shaped craft. This is perhaps the most compelling story, and one that’s difficult to explain. But their accounts don’t exactly line up, and I suspect that they saw the same thing, but both had different illusions of motion based on parallax. Unfortunately, the passage of time might mean we will never know what they saw.

We then meet Elizondo’s partner in this enterprise, Christopher Mellon, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Intelligence. Mellon seemingly shares Elizondo’s suspicion that we are being visited by some kind of non-human entity, and in 2017 worked with him to secure the release of the videos, which they then gave to the *New York Times* for a piece of well-timed publicity for their then employer, the To The Stars Academy, founded by rock star Tom DeLonge.

The *60 Minutes* segment is capped by Senator Marco Rubio, who has somehow become embroiled in the UAP saga, presenting himself as the voice of reason, just trying to get the military to look into “this.”

But the military is not ignoring things that fly into their airspace just because they can’t identify them. Procedures exist for reporting and investigating such things—not the least of which being that incursion into sensitive airspace would be aggressively intercepted. And the supposed rationale for AATIP (exploiting UFO technology) has already been covered by a variety of Foreign Material Exploitation Program—likely with vastly higher budgets.



What is going on? I really don't know. The simplest explanation is that there are UFO fans in government, and they get to do these pet projects because the lumbering bureaucracy has better things to do than question every little \$22 million in the trillion-dollar budget. More complicated alternatives involved some kind of military smokescreen, allowing UFO stories to run rampant to distract from real secret programs. But these are speculations. I suspect the people being quoted about the videos have not considered the more mundane explanations I have offered, or considered and rejected them because the “off world” or “extraordinary technology” explanations are more appealing.

Ultimately this story has gone on for far too long because the wall of military secrecy allows rampant speculation and claims based on supposed classified knowledge. The unwillingness of the military to clear this up is perhaps understandable, as they have more important things to do. But it's becoming a big story now, with large segments of the public thinking that there's something to these accounts and these videos, and it's a short path from “unidentified” to “extraterrestrial” or “foreign assets”. I do not have great expectations for the story going away, but I wish that someone high up will eventually say enough is enough, and explain exactly what is going on, what these videos show, and what the military *really* thinks about UFOs.

### About the Author

Mick West is the author of *Escaping the Rabbit Hole: How to Debunk Conspiracy Theories Using Facts, Logic, and Respect* and the host of the podcast: *Tales From The Rabbit Hole*. Both focus on developing tools for understanding and helping people who have been sucked into conspiracy theories. He's a retired videogame programmer who helped make the Tony Hawk's Pro Skater Franchise. Mick also runs the website [Metabunk.org \(https://www.metabunk.org/\)](https://www.metabunk.org/), where he investigates conspiracy theories, debunks pseudoscience, and analyzes UFO videos.

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