

Congress is Finally Taking UFOs Seriously, 50 Years After Its Last Hearing on the Mysterious Subject

BY JEFFREY KLUGER

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The House Intelligence Committee’s Counterterrorism, Counterintelligence, and Counterproliferation subcommittee would like to make one thing very clear: They did not spend 90 minutes this morning conducting public hearings into the existence of UFOs. Yes, they were discussing unidentified objects, and yes those objects were seen to be flying, but the term for them today is “unidentified aerial phenomena” (UAP)—which means exactly the same thing but carries less whiff of tin foil hat conspiracies than the old UFO designation did.

Whatever the objects are called, Congress appeared determined to take them seriously. “UAP reports have been around for decades and yet we haven’t had an orderly way for them to be reported—without stigma—and to be investigated,” said Congressman Adam Schiff, (D, Calif.), chairman of the Intelligence Committee, in his remarks. “That needs to change.”

The hearings this morning were the first of their kind since 1970, after the Air Force terminated Project Blue Book, its own 22-year investigation into unidentified flying objects. Then, as now, the purpose of the open forum was to give public attention—and provide public answers—to a mystery that sparks fascination, confusion, and popular anxiety in equal measure.

Chaired by Congressman Andre Carson (D, Ind.), today’s session followed the June 2021 declassification of 144 different observations, including video evidence, by Naval and other military aviators of objects that were flying in all

any detectable exhaust. Some turned with a head-snapping suddenness that would have produced potentially deadly g-forces to any human who might be aboard. Others appeared to dive into the ocean.

“UAPs are unexplained, it’s true,” Carson said in his opening statement. “But they are real.”

The hearings took place in two parts—one morning session open to the public, and a classified afternoon session behind closed doors. Called as witnesses in the public portion were Ronald Moultrie, undersecretary of defense for intelligence and security, and Scott Bray, deputy director of naval intelligence.

The committee explored four possible explanations for the objects. They could be nothing at all—just errors in sensors or other instruments, though some of those sensors are human pilots themselves, who swear by what they’ve seen. They could be new weapons systems or other technology being tested by foreign adversaries such as Russia or China—both of which are known to be working on hypersonic systems capable of flying at five times the speed of sound or faster. It’s also possible the phenomena are so-called blue-on-blue sightings—American pilots spotting classified American technology. And, of course, they could, in theory, be of extraterrestrial origin.

Bray was quick to dismiss—or at least minimize—the blue-on-blue explanation. “We’ve established relationships with organizations and entities that are potentially flying or developing platforms ... and our goal is to continue,” he said. “We have a process to deconflict activities to ensure that we are not potentially reporting on something that may be a development platform.”

Certainly, it seems logical that if the military were both testing new technology and sending aviators up for routine surveillance and training flights, it would make sure to keep them out of each other’s way. But while there haven’t been any collisions between UAPs and pilots, there have been at least 11 near-misses, Bray said.

some cases.

“There could be some [sightings] that are a meteorological phenomenon or something like that, that may not be a physical object?” asked Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi (D, IL).

“I can say with certainty that a number of these are physical objects,” answered Bray.

That brought the hearing to the most tantalizing possibility—that the objects are of extraterrestrial origin. “No one knows whether there’s extraterrestrial life,” said Congressman Peter Welch (D, VT). “It’s a big universe and it would be pretty presumptuous to have a hard and fast conclusion. It’s not beyond the realm of possibility that there is some exploration coming here.”

In response, Moultrie was clear that that is an idea the Department of Defense is not ruling out and that it will be candid if it finds any evidence to support an extraterrestrial explanation. “There are elements in our government that are engaged and looking for life in other places,” he said. “Our goal is not to potentially cover up something if we find something; it’s to understand what may be out there [and] examine what it may mean for us from a defense perspective.” In such a case, he said, “transparency actually is very important for public consumption.”

That left the final possibility of hostile powers testing offensive technology, and on that score the committee was not nearly so transparent. The members did not even address the possibility in any detail. Only Welch mused about the chance that the UAPs could be foreign surveillance drones, and if so, “that has to be analyzed and stopped,” he said. But he did not ask Bray or Moultrie to comment on that scenario. Krishnamoorthi inquired whether any wreckage was recovered from any of the objects either on the ground or underwater. Bray deferred the question to the later closed testimony.

It was never likely that a 90-minute public hearing would solve decades of speculation about the origin of UAPs—and whatever is disclosed in the

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least an important first step. “It is one of the first times,” Carson said, “that we can agree in a bipartisan manner.”

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