

How the CIA Views the UFO Phenomenon

by Victor Marchetti SECOND LOOK, Vol. 1, No. 7, May '79

There are many myths, few facts, and much speculation about what the CIA knows of the UFO phenomenon. These, combined with the public's distrust of the clandestine agency, have led to a strong popular belief that the CIA is at the center of a government-wide conspiracy to cover-up the truth about UFOs. It usually follows that the cover-up is designed to keep us ignorant, or at least confused and doubtful, about contacts or visitations by intelligent beings from outer space. Thus, if we only knew what the CIA knows, and is covering up, we would be better able to understand and deal with aliens. And that would be a good thing.

I do not know from my own firsthand experience if there are UFOs. I have never seen one. Nor have I seen conclusive, empirical, or physical evidence that they really exist. But, I do know that the CIA and U.S. Government have been concerned over the UFO phenomenon for many years and that their attempts, both past and recent, to discount the significance of the phenomenon and to explain away the apparent lack of official interest in it have all the earmarkings of a classic intelligence cover-up.

My theory is that we have, indeed, been contacted--perhaps even visited-- by extraterrestrial beings, and that the U.S. Government, in collusion with other national powers of the Earth, is determined to keep this information from the general public. The purpose of the international conspiracy is to maintain a workable stability among the nations of the world and for them, in turn, to retain institutional control over their respective populations. Thus, for these governments to admit there are beings from outer space attempting to contact us, beings with mentalities and technological capabilities obviously far superior to ours, could, once fully perceived by the average person, erode the foundations of the Earth's traditional power structure. Political and legal systems, religions, economic and social institutions could all soon become meaningless in the mind of the public. The national oligarchical establishments, even civilization as we know it, could collapse into anarchy. Such extreme conclusions are not necessarily valid, but they probably accurately reflect the fears of the "ruling class" of the major nations, whose leaders (particularly those in the intelligence business) have always advocated excessive governmental secrecy as being necessary to preserve "national security." The real reason for such secrecy is, of course, to keep the public uninformed, misinformed, and, therefore, malleable.

During my years in the CIA, UFOs were not a subject of common discussion. But neither were they treated in a disdainful or derisive manner, especially not by the agency's scientists. Instead, the topic was rarely discussed at internal meetings. It seemed to fall into the category of "very sensitive activities," e.g., drug and mind-control operations, domestic spying, and other illegal actions. People simply did not talk about the UFO phenomenon.

There were, however, rumors at high levels of the CIA.....rumors of unexplained sightings by qualified observers, of strange signals being received by the National Security Agency (the US Government's electronic intercept and communications intelligence collector), and even of little gray men whose ships had crashed, or had

been shot down, being kept "on ice" by the Air Force at FTD (Foreign Technology Division) at Wright- Patterson AF Base in Dayton, Ohio. And there was the odd case of the lady from Maine who, while in a hypnotic trance, had allegedly communicated with a starship.

Most of these rumors, I found to be unimpressive....except for the strange signals from outer space being received by NSA. Perhaps that was because I had once been an NSA officer. Or perhaps it was because I had frequent contact with that agency while serving with the CIA, and the little I learned of the signals was treated with extreme caution even by SIGINT standards.

But let us assume that there have been contacts by intelligent beings from beyond the Earth. How would the CIA and US Government respond to such a phenomenon?

The first order of business would be to determine whether UFOs were secret weapons of the Soviet Union or some other foreign nation. The task of coordinating this program would be given to the CIA because it is the President's personal intelligence organization and the nation's only non- departmental, or independent, intelligence component. As such, it is charged, among other things, with performing "services of common concern" which relate to "intelligence affecting the national security." However, the military intelligence services, NSA, and other agencies and departments would also participate in the collection and analytical efforts under the program.

If it were concluded that UFOs were not of terrestrial origin but, rather, vehicles from outer space, the next step would be to assess their weaponry capabilities and the intentions of the aliens controlling the ships. At this point, the CIA and US Government, aware that the phenomenon was of a worldwide nature, would seek cooperation in the investigation from the Earth's other technically advanced nations, such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and even the USSR. The CIA would function as the US Government's agent, just as the KGB would be the USSR's, MI-6 would be the UK's, and so on. These agencies, in addition to specializing in secrecy and deceit, are quite accustomed to cooperating with each other on matters of mutual interest. Cooperation in the intelligence business is not restricted to allies. There are times when the CIA and KGB have found it advantageous to work together.

One example is the production and publication of Khrushchev Remembers, the "memoirs" of the former Soviet leader--a ruse on the public which is actively being continued to this day. Furthermore, both the CIA and KGB sometimes "declare," i.e. identify, their officers to each other in order to facilitate the smooth functioning of clandestine intelligence activities. Even the famous U-2 program was conducted with mutual understanding --until the Soviets shot down Francis Gary Powers. According to the Chief of the CIA's Clandestine Services it was an example of two hostile government collaborating to keep operations secret from general public of both nations. "Unfortunately, there aren't enough of these situations," he said.

But before full cooperation on the UFO phenomena was achieved, there might be a period of suspicion and perhaps competition, each government hoping to gain some advantage over the others through the use of aliens and their superior scientific knowledge. It would soon, however, become apparent to all the nations involved that

this was not feasible and that the UFO phenomenon was a common problem. Thus, cooperation, secret cooperation, would become a fact.

Later, after further study, if it were judged that UFOs were harmless, perhaps even unarmed, vehicles from outer space controlled by aliens seeking merely to observe the Earth and its peculiar inhabitants....like so many galactic Jane Goodall's studying chimps in their native environment....and, therefore, presented no direct, hostile threat to the Earth's power structure, then another collective decision would have to be made. Should the public be told the full and true story of the phenomenon ?

It is unlikely, for the reasons mentioned earlier, that any government aware of the UFO facts would deem it necessary or wise to inform its people of the truth. Governments prefer an ignorant and gullible public because an unknowing public is much more easily manipulated. In fact, that is one of the major reasons for so much governmental secrecy and official disinformation.

Once the international cover-up had been decided, the CIA and US Government would act pretty much the way they have with regard to the UFO phenomenon. There would be a prestigious scientific group (the Robertson Panel) convened to declare that UFOs were no threat to the national security. The fact that the panel's conclusions were not immediately made public is of no great consequence. Here, the primary consideration would be to turn off the speculation brewing among the military, bureaucrats, and other secondary levels (including the US Congress) of the governmental apparatus. The information would eventually filter down to the news media and public.

But, because of the intensity of public curiosity, a formal investigation (Project Blue Book) would be launched, after a couple of false starts. And when public interest continued to build, another scientific panel (the Condon Group) was assembled to assure us that there were no such things as UFOs. With that accomplished the US Government--the Earth's spokesman on the issue--could call off all further official investigations, slamming the lid of secrecy on the problem.

But despite governmental proclamations, the sightings--often by astronauts, professional pilots, and even prospective presidents--have continued. Public pressure is again building for an honest, authoritative explanation of UFOs.

Of all the evidence that exist with regard to UFOs, the single, most impressive item (to my mind) is the Jimmy Carter experience. One night in Georgia in 1973, the man who was destined to become the President of the US and his son, Jeff, saw what they believed to be a UFO. Three years later when campaigning for the presidency , Carter promised to make "every piece of information the country has about UFOs available to the public." He never fulfilled that pledge. Nor has he ever again spoken out publicly on the subject. Meanwhile, his White House staff has parried all queries on the matter and both his Director of NASA, Robert Frosch, and Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, have officially dismissed the UFO phenomenon as nothing more than something that exists only in the public's imagination.

This sequence of events can mean only one of three things. What Jimmy Carter saw in 1973 was:

- a) a reflection of a physical event which has since been explained to him
- b) the testing of a secret weapon to which he is now privy, but for reasons of "national security" it is still a secret: or
- c) a UFO.

If what President Carter saw falls into category "a," there is no reason why he could not publicly say so. As presidents go, he has been relatively humble and honest on other matters of personal embarrassment. If it falls into category "b," there is again no reason why he should not admit to the fact. There is no way that such a weapon system could possibly still be a secret from the Soviets. But if what he saw was a UFO--and there is a secret international agreement among the great powers to withhold this information from the people--then Mr. Carter would act exactly the way he has. He is neither smart enough nor tough enough to override the pressures of the Establishment.

Thus, the CIA would be called upon once again. This time to release to the public all the information it has regarding the UFO phenomenon..... after, of course, the usual and long ritualistic procedures of litigation under the Freedom of Information Act. We can safely assume , however, that the CIA would not disclose everything it knows or that it would reveal any data it believes would not advance the UFO cover-up. The CIA, like other intelligence organization, has little respect for the public's right to know. It is an attitude they all consistently display.

Ironically, however, among the vast body of circumstantial evidence pointing to the existence of UFOs or contacts from outer space, the FOIA documents recently provided by the CIA have done more to make the public suspect there is an official conspiracy than any of the recent sightings or reports of encounters. In fact, the entire FOIA exercise has the same aroma of the agency's previous messy efforts to hide its involvement in drugs and mind-control operations, both prime examples of a successful intelligence cover-up.

The CIA, under the scrutiny of Congress, admitted only to experiments and a few operational indiscretions which occurred mostly in the 1950's and 60's. There was little or no disclosure of the full operational use of drugs and mind control techniques. The stratagem employed by the agency was, as it is known in the business, a "limited hangout," i.e., admitting to a few past errors then declaring the program has ended and, therefore, there is nothing else to tell. With that, all investigations come to a halt.

The FOIA/UFO exercise is stained with the same telltale spottiness. Furthermore, the conduct and conclusions of the Robertson Panel (1953) and the Colorado Group (1969) are suspiciously similar to those concerning another great mystery--the JFK assassination. The findings of the Warren Commission in 1964 and, for all practical purposes, those of the House Select Committee on Assassinations (1978/9) differ from the UFO studies only in that the former sought to promote a "lone nut killer" hypothesis while the latter offered a "multiple nut believer" explanation.

Regardless of its shortcomings, the recently released CIA information does, however, tell us something...perhaps more than the government thinks. From the very beginning in 1947, the CIA closely monitored UFO reports on a worldwide basis. Although most of the FOIA documents indicate only a routine interest in the problem which was handled largely by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service. Foreign

Documents Division, and the Domestic Contact Service--all innocuous, non-clandestine collection units--they also disclose by inference a standing requirement of the Directorate of Science and Technology for gathering UFO data. This, in turn, indicates other collection components, namely the Clandestine Services, the CIA's main directorate, was tasked with providing information from all over the world on the UFO phenomenon. However, few such reports were released--and that implies a cover-up!

By 1953, the US Government, acting through the CIA and using the vehicle of the Robertson Panel, had clearly decided to cap the persistent public rumors of UFO sightings and extraterrestrial contacts. The panel concluded that UFOs were not a direct or hostile threat to national security but that continued emphasis of the phenomenon could clog the communication channels of the establishment or cultivate a morbid national psychology which enemy propaganda might exploit. For good measure, the panel recommended that the public should be "educated" to recognize real hostile actions against the nation and the UFOs be stripped of their "mysterious aura." Very nifty.

The tone and timing of the Robertson Panel were almost perfect. In early 1953, the nation was preoccupied with the Korean War in particular and the Cold War in general. Stalin was not yet dead. There were almost daily confrontations with Communists somewhere in the world. A new terror weapon had just been introduced into the arms race--the hydrogen bomb. General Curtis LeMay of the Strategic Air Command was warning of the "bomber gap." And Senator Joe McCarthy was scaring the bejesus out of everybody in Washington, including the CIA. Furthermore, there was no self-respecting accredited scientist prepared to risk his reputation by challenging the government's position on UFOs. Thus, the Robertson Panel provided an excellent opportunity to sweep the phenomenon under the rug of official secrecy.

There is one other thing about the Robertson Panel that has always puzzled me. Nowhere in its report does the panel deny the existence of UFOs. The panel only addresses the question of UFOs as a "possible threat to national security" and concludes there is no direct evidence indicating such a threat. Could it be that the evidence showed that UFOs did exist, but the data revealed that the extraterrestrial contacts were of a benign nature, i.e., there were no "foreign artifacts capable of hostile acts" and, therefore no "direct physical threat to national security ? "

After the Robertson Panel, there was a curious development. The CIA, according to the FOIA documents, apparently faded into the background. The Air Force assumed responsibility for the UFO problem and initiated a series of reviews culminating in Project Blue Book and the Condon's Colorado Study. But the CIA continued "unofficially" to follow developments concerning the phenomenon...and to display an uneasy, overly cautious, even defensive attitude toward outside curiosity about its UFO work. In fact, during the preparation of the Condon Panel's report, the CIA reacted so skittishly in providing aid to the panel that one can only wonder if the agency was attempting to hide something from the Air Force.....not an unusual occurrence in the inter-tribal relations of the US intelligence community. The performance is reminiscent of how the CIA responded to the first public revelations that it was deeply involved in illegal drug and domestic spying operations.

In December 1969, the findings of the Condon Panel were made public by the Department of Defense. Again, it was concluded that UFOs were no threat to national security, and we were given the added assurance that those sightings (roughly one-half of one percent) categorized as "unidentified" evidenced no technical capabilities beyond our scientific knowledge. A rather odd commentary.

In addition, the panel stated there was no evidence that UFO sightings (not contacts or signals) represented extraterrestrial visitations. A flat statement that was supported by no empirical evidence.....only the panel's opinion. Were the panelists again begging the question?

With the release of the Condon Report, Project Blue Book was canceled, and the Air Force, like the CIA , seemed to drop out of the UFO business. The timing of the Condon Report, like that of the Robertson Panel, was, to say the least, interesting. We were fighting--and losing--a war in Vietnam. There was severe domestic turmoil caused by the civil rights and peace movements. Again, the nation was not, at the time, much concerned with UFOs. Perhaps that is why the government opted for a flat denial. It was another excellent chance to stop all the speculation about UFOs and to further sweep the phenomenon under the rug of official secrecy.

But ten years have gone by since the Air Force allegedly closed its UFO shop and more than fifteen years since the CIA claims to have lost interest in the subject. The sightings and contacts, however, continue --not only by questionable sources. Even the President of the United States thinks he saw a UFO. Thus, we are left with five possible conclusions.

(1) The US Government is trying to keep certain super weapon systems secret from the Soviets. In this age of advanced electronic, photographic, and other intelligence sensors , when the testing of a new system begins by any nation, the other participants in the geopolitical game soon learn of it.

(2) The US Government, in cooperation with its allies, is playing a game with such rivals as the USSR, trying to confuse them with false reports of UFOs. The state of the art in intelligence collection and analysis, as well as science, precludes the possibility of such a ruse.

(3) The US and its allies are attempting to keep UFOs a secret from the USSR. The Soviets, however, are as astute in space science as we are. If we know about UFOs, so do they...and so do all the technically advanced nations.

(4) There are no UFOs, nor have there ever been any contacts from outer space. However, the amount of circumstantial evidence to the contrary (including indications that our planet may have been visited in the distant past by extraterrestrials) argues against this conclusion--or at least for further study of the UFO phenomenon.

(5) There are UFOs or there have been contacts--if only signals --from outer space, but the evidence reveals the aliens are interested only in observing us. They have no hostile intentions and are no direct threat to any nation. But public knowledge of these facts could become a threat. If the existence of UFOs were to be officially confirmed, a chain reaction could be initiated that would result in the collapse of the Earth's present power structure. Thus, a secret international understanding--a

conspiracy -- has been agreed to by the world powers to keep the public ignorant of and confused about contacts or visitations from beyond Earth.

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