



**ASSISTANT TO THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR
PRIVACY, CIVIL LIBERTIES, AND TRANSPARENCY**

1155 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1155

Ref: 22-A-0381-A1
FOID: 22-F-0381

John Greenwald
The Black Vault
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Dear Mr. Greenwald:

This responds to your Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) appeal, dated May 24, 2023. You appealed the decision of the Freedom of Information Division (FOID) in response to your FOIA request, dated January 5, 2022.

After carefully considering your appeal, and as a result of discussions between FOID and this office, I am releasing additional information to you under the FOIA. After review of the portion of your request which was processed by FOID, I am releasing three pages in part to you from the seven pages originally processed. I am otherwise affirming FOID's actions on the seven pages. FOID properly withheld certain information because it is protected from disclosure under the FOIA pursuant to 5 U.S.C. §552(b)(6). This provision concerns material the release of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of the personal privacy of third parties.

My review included consideration of the "foreseeable harm standard" (i.e., information that might technically fall within an exemption should not be withheld from a FOIA requester unless the agency reasonably foresees that disclosure would harm an interest protected by an exemption or disclosure is prohibited by law).

For your information, the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) offers mediation services to resolve disputes between FOIA requesters and Federal agencies as a non-exclusive alternative to litigation. Using OGIS services does not affect your right to pursue litigation. The contact information for OGIS is as follows:

Office of Government Information Services
National Archives and Records Administration
8601 Adelphi Road
College Park, Maryland 20740-6001
ogis@nara.gov
Toll free: 1-877-684-6448

If you are dissatisfied with my action on your appeal, the FOIA permits you to file a lawsuit in federal district court in accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(B).

Sincerely,

Joo Y. Chung

cc:
FOID

Questions and Answers

Q. [If asked about the AOIMSG/AOIMEXEC prior to publishing of implementing guidance]

A. “As directed by Deputy Secretary Hicks in her memo, we’re currently transitioning the UAP Task Force and its ongoing efforts to the AOIMSG. We’re also working on additional implementing guidance on the AOIMSG, as well as the Airborne Object Identification and Management Executive Council (AOIMEXEC), for Deputy Secretary Hicks’ approval, per her memo. Once that guidance is approved and published, the transition from UAPTF to AOIMSG is complete, and the AOIMEXEC has had its first meeting, we’ll be happy to answer your questions about the AOIMEXEC and AOIMSG more fully.”

Q. Why is the Deputy Secretary replacing the UAPTF?

A. The DNI report to Congress highlighted the challenges associated with assessing airborne objects, including UAP, occurring on or near DOD training ranges and installations. It also confirmed that the scope of the UAP activity expands significantly beyond Navy’s purview. The report also identified the need to make improvements in processes, policies, technologies, and training to improve our ability to understand UAP.

Q. What are the national security threats that the Pentagon is concerned about?

A. The Department of Defense takes seriously any incursion into our airspace by any aircraft, identified or unidentified, very seriously.

Q. Is the U.S. not currently aware of items in its airspace?

A. Not all objects in U.S. airspace are tracked and identified, especially if they are small and don’t pose a threat. However, the increase in unmanned aerial systems and airspace debris has highlighted that there are a number of objects which do pose a concern. This effort lowers the threshold for items to be considered and evaluated to ensure that we are able to identify any items that may pose a threat to safety of flight or national security.

Q. Why is the data you have insufficient? What else do you need?

A. Encounters with UAP are often brief and fleeting, and frequently involve a single source, such as a verbal report or a single photograph. We need more data and a better reporting structure – standardized reporting, timely reporting, and further reducing the stigma about reporting on UAP so that we have more reports for pattern and trend analysis.

Q. Who is going to be the AOIMSG Director/what can you tell me about the AOIMSG budget/organization/size/members/personnel/operations/etc.?

A. As Deputy Secretary Hicks noted in her memo, implementing guidance is forthcoming.

Q. Can you explain the SUA term? Why are you using that now?

A. Special Use Airspace is designated in accordance with 14 CFR Part 73. It’s a more accurate term for airspace that the AOIMSG will be focusing on. SUA is airspace that is restricted for national security and other uses, and includes military operations areas, firing ranges, etc. For the AOIMSG, we are not interested in looking at *all* airspace in the world; the AOIMSG will be focused on the areas where there are security risks to our training, operations, and infrastructure. [This is no different than what the UAPTF was focused on – military training ranges and operations airspace.]

Q. Why is the memo using the term “airborne object” (rather than UAP)?

A. The term “UAP” still refers to items that are unidentified. The ODNI report in June 2021 noted that most objects were unidentified due to incomplete data. Therefore, this effort seeks to proactively detect, identify and attribute objects to help minimize the overall number of items that are classified as UAP. Additionally, as we’ve said, we need more data, including more reporting. One way to do that is to destigmatize UAP reporting by standardizing and normalizing reporting of airborne objects in SUA – whether the object is a UAP or another object.

Q. Why is Navy no longer in charge of UAP examinations?

A. The Department recognizes the great work that Navy did on examining UAPs, both before the UAPTF existed and as the head of the UAPTF. The June 2021 report to Congress confirmed that the scope of UAP activity expands beyond Navy and identified the need for improvement in many areas to better understand UAP; this involves organizations across DoD and the USG interagency, and is better directed at the OSD level rather than by a military department.

Q: Is the AOIMSG being established under the USD(I&S) because there are intelligence concerns or concerns about foreign actors?

A: The USD(I&S) has broad responsibilities for intelligence and security, which includes security of U.S. facilities. The USD(I&S) also oversees defense intelligence production and analysis which are critical capabilities to ensure identification of objects. As there are significant operational equities, the Joint staff is also involved.

Q. What is the mission of the AOIMSG?

A. The AOIMSG will oversee the Department’s efforts to detect, identify and attribute objects of interest in Special Use Airspace and to assess and mitigate any associated threats to safety of flight or national security.

Q. Will the AOIMSG be more transparent on UAP encounters than the UAPTF was?

A. The Department is committed to transparency with the Congress and the American people while balancing its obligation to protect classified information. In executing the AOIMSG mission, the Department will keep the Congress fully and currently informed in both unclassified and classified detail of its activities and findings to enable effective congressional oversight and accountability to the public. The Department is eager to work with Congress as it completes its Fiscal Year 2022 legislation to posture the AOIMSG for success.

Q. Has the Department found any evidence of extraterrestrial technology?

A. The examinations into incursions by UAPs are still ongoing; we lack sufficient information in our dataset to attribute incidents to specific explanations. It is not the purpose of the AOIMSG to look for evidence of extraterrestrials. Other parts of the government do that; for example, NASA looks for evidence of life on other planets.

Additional Background Information (Not for Release)

Public and news media interest in unidentified aerial phenomena (UAP) remains high. ODNI submitted a preliminary assessment report to Congress on June 25, 2021, as required by the SSCI report attached to the FY20 NDAA. That report noted the challenges associated with assessing UAP occurring on or near DOD training ranges and installations highlighted and also identified the need to make improvements in processes, policies, technologies, and training to improve our

Coordinated with: OUSD(I&S), ODNI

Prepared by: (b) (6)

ability to understand UAP. On the same day, DSD directed OUSD(I&S) to develop a plan to formalize the mission currently performed by the UAPTF.

Since the announcement of the establishment of AOIMSG, press interest has been high, especially in terms of how it relates to the proposed amendments to the NDAA. Press reporting on AOIMSG has mainly covered outsiders and former government employees deriding it as an insufficient effort or accusing that it will limit transparency. Press reporting also continues to tie it to “UFOs.”

Additional Talking Points

- Our approach has been – and will continue to be – driven by science and data.
- We currently lack the data to indicate whether UAP are part of a foreign collection program or indicative of a major technology advancement by a potential adversary.
- There is not one single explanation for UAP.
- We need to improve our capacity and capability to further analyze UAP. We need more data, more sensors, more reporting, and more consistency and standardization in reporting.
- The selection of USD(I&S) and the Director of Operations, Joint Staff on the AOIMEXEC reflect the Department’s characterization of this issue as both an operational and intelligence problem, and provides strengthened guidance to ensure appropriate efforts are undertaken in each area.

Additional Questions and Answers

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