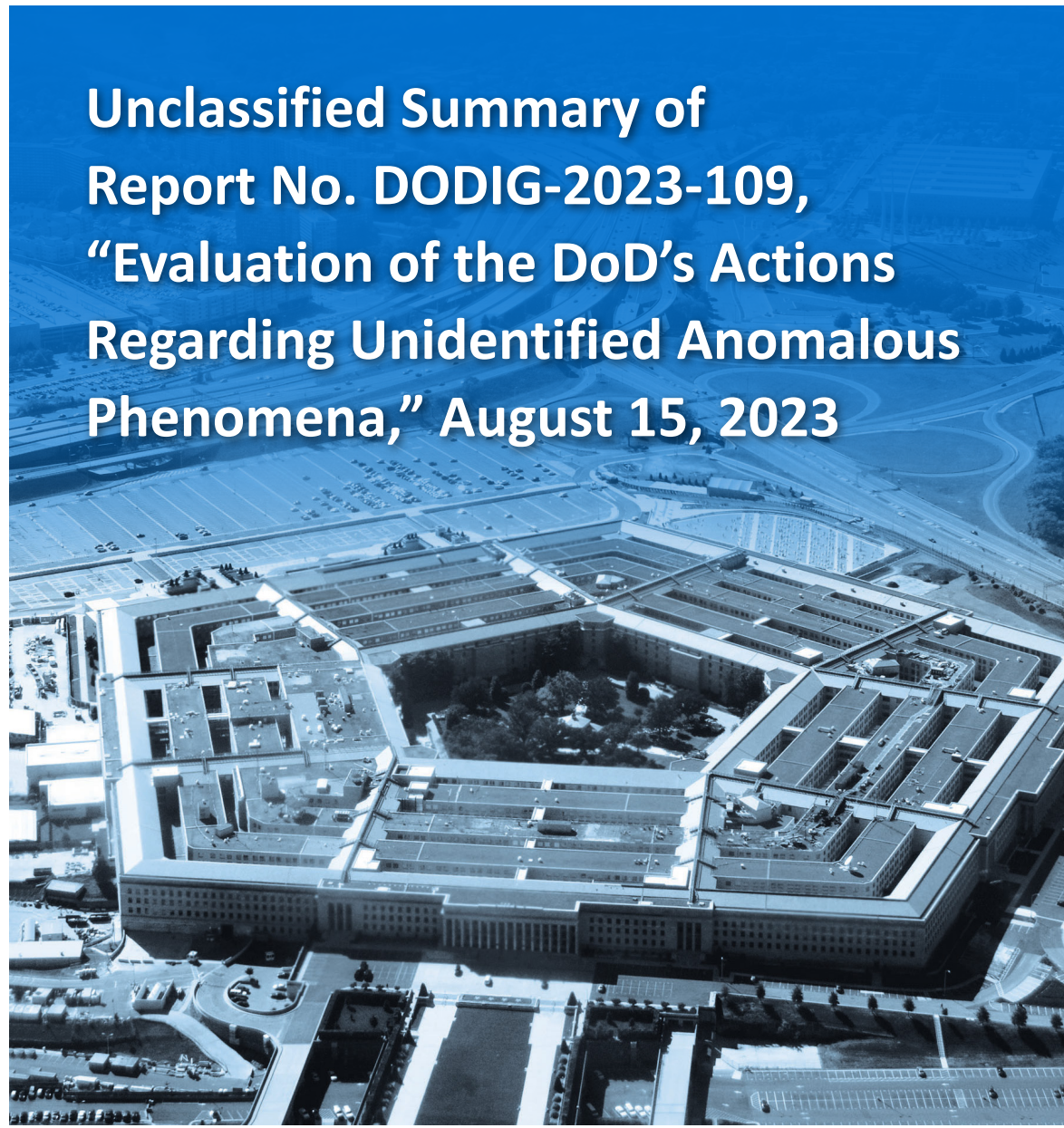




INSPECTOR GENERAL

U.S. Department of Defense

JANUARY 24, 2024



Unclassified Summary of Report No. DODIG-2023-109, “Evaluation of the DoD’s Actions Regarding Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena,” August 15, 2023

INTEGRITY ★ INDEPENDENCE ★ EXCELLENCE

NOTE: A classified version of the Evaluation of the DoD's Actions Regarding Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena formed the basis of the unclassified summary.

Historical Background

Over the past decades, the DoD has initiated infrequent and inconclusive efforts to identify and understand the origin, capabilities, and intent of unidentified aerial phenomena (UAP). Military pilots have historically reported many of the reported UAP sightings. Also, the Air Force and Navy have been at the forefront of developing policies, procedures, and mechanisms for reporting UAP. In fact, the DoD has relied heavily on the Services and Components to detect, report, collect, analyze, and identify UAP since the 1940s.

The DoD's first official UAP-focused activities occurred in December 1947, when the U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff established PROJECT SIGN to investigate the first recorded observations of unidentified flying objects. From 1947 to 1949, Air Force personnel investigated 243 reported UAP sightings. In 1952, the U.S. Air Force Director of Intelligence initiated PROJECT BLUE BOOK to investigate unidentified flying objects. Between 1952 and 1969, Air Force personnel investigated over 12,000 reported sightings. The DoD did not officially look at UAP again until mid-2000, when select members of Congress initiated and funded a program to study UAP, called the Advanced Aerospace Weapon Systems Applications program, under the direction of the Defense Intelligence Agency. Since then, the DoD has attempted to establish several programs for coordinating DoD-wide UAP reporting; however, none of the programs were ever fully implemented. In 2020, as a result of increased concerns of flight crew safety, national security, and adversary technology advances, Congress directed the DoD, through the FY 2022 National Defense Authorization Act, to develop, fund, and staff a formal interagency entity to study, collect data, and report on UAP. On July 20, 2022, the DoD established the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO) to be that entity.

Chapter 6, title 10, United States Code, establishes the authorities of combatant commanders, who are responsible for detecting, deterring, and preventing threats and attacks against the United States and its territories, possessions, and bases. After a review of the laws, policies, and guidance issued by Congress, the DoD, and other Federal agencies, we determined that, while the Services and Components have an important role to play, the combatant commands would be the logical organizations to detect, report, collect, and identify UAP incidents to AARO.

Introduction

Objective

The objective of this evaluation was to determine the extent to which the DoD, Military Services, Defense agencies, and Military Department Counterintelligence Organizations (MDCOs) took intelligence, counterintelligence, and force protection actions to detect, report, collect, analyze, and identify unidentified anomalous phenomena (UAP).

Background

The FY 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) defined UAP as “unidentified anomalous phenomena,” which include: (a) airborne objects that are not immediately identifiable, (b) transmedium objects or devices, and (c) submerged objects or devices that are not immediately identifiable.¹ According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence’s Preliminary Assessment on UAP, UAP are objects that are not immediately identifiable, lack a single explanation, and fall into one of five potential explanatory categories: airborne clutter, natural atmospheric phenomena, U.S. Government or industry developmental programs, foreign adversary systems, and a catchall “other” category.

Senate Armed Services Committee Fiscal Year Reports

DoD efforts to identify and understand UAP have been irregular because of competing priorities, lack of substantive progress, and inconclusive findings. However, military pilots have continued to report UAP incidents despite the sporadic efforts of the DoD to identify, report, and analyze the events. As a result, Congressional committees included language about their UAP concerns in the FYs 2019 through 2023 NDAs and a Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Report on the FY 2021 Intelligence Authorization Act.

In FY 2019 and FY 2020, Congress noted its concern regarding unidentified and unexplained airborne activity in sensitive areas and required the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security (OUSD[I&S]) and the intelligence community (IC) to establish an interagency task force and develop a plan to investigate and address the activity.² In the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Report on the FY 2021 Intelligence Authorization Act, the Senate Select Committee identified concerns that the U.S. Government did not have a unified, comprehensive process in place for collecting and analyzing intelligence on UAP.³

¹ Public Law 117-263, “James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023,” December 23, 2022. The FY 2022 NDAA defined “transmedium” as objects or devices that are observed to transition between space and the atmosphere, or between the atmosphere and bodies of water, that are not immediately identifiable.

² Classified Annex to the Senate Armed Services Committee Report on the FY 2020 NDAA, (Public Law 116-92), Enclosure 2, “Advanced Operational Capabilities Collection, Exploitation, and Research,” July 31, 2019.

³ Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Report on the FY 2021 Intelligence Authorization Act, “Advanced Aerial Threats,” June 8, 2020.

In response to Congress' concerns, in August 2020 the DoD established a UAP Task Force (UAPTF) to develop standardized reporting requirements for UAP encounters. In June 2021, the UAPTF and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence issued the congressionally mandated Preliminary Assessment on UAP, which stated that UAP reporting data are largely inconclusive, as well as a consolidation of reports across the U.S. Government is inconsistent. Moreover, the Preliminary Assessment on UAP stated that standardized reporting, increased collection and analysis, and a streamlined process for screening reports' relevant data would result in a sophisticated analysis of UAP.

In a November 2021 memorandum, the Deputy Secretary of Defense directed the OUSD(I&S) to establish the Airborne Object Identification and Management Synchronization Group (AOIMSG) as the successor to the UAPTF to synchronize efforts across the DoD and with other Federal departments and agencies to detect, identify, and characterize objects of interest in special use airspace. The AOIMSG did not reach operational capability and the Deputy Secretary disestablished it on July 15, 2022.

The FY 2022 NDAA required the DoD to establish a central office for all UAP matters with sufficient scope, authorities, responsibilities, and capabilities to continue UAP efforts.⁴ In July 2022, the DoD established the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO) to implement the duties previously assigned to the AOIMSG. The mission of AARO is to "synchronize efforts across the Department and with other Federal departments and agencies to detect, identify, and characterize objects of interest in, on, or near military installations, operating areas, training areas, special use airspace, and other areas of interest, and, as necessary, to mitigate any associated threats to safety of operations and national security."

The FY 2022 NDAA also expanded the meaning of UAP to include the water and space domains and required AARO to:

- synchronize and standardize efforts across the DoD to collect, report, and analyze UAP incidents;
- develop processes and procedures to ensure UAP incidents are reported and included in a centralized database; and
- coordinate with other departments and agencies, as well as allies and partners of the United States, as appropriate, to better assess the nature and extent of UAP.

The FY 2023 NDAA contained additional requirements for AARO to establish a secure way for persons to report a UAP incident without being subject to a nondisclosure agreement or reprisal.⁵

⁴ Classified Annex to the Senate Armed Services Committee Report on the FY 2022 NDAA (Public Law 117-81), Enclosure 13, "Unidentified Aerial Phenomena," October 19, 2021.

⁵ FY 2023 NDAA (Public Law 117-263), Section 1673, "Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena Reporting Procedures," December 23, 2022.

Presidential and DoD Intelligence, Counterintelligence, and Force Protection Policies

The following Presidential and DoD policies establish requirements for intelligence gathering, counterintelligence, force protection, and civil liberty protection.⁶

Executive Orders

Executive Order 12333 states that the DoD may conduct counterintelligence activities in support of DoD Components within the United States.⁷ In addition, Executive Order 12333 identifies that the DoD may use intelligence component offices for the collection of specialized intelligence through reconnaissance programs.

DoD Intelligence, Counterintelligence, and Force Protection Policies

DoD Directive (DoDD) 5240.02 states that counterintelligence activities support intelligence gathering and force protection and are undertaken as part of DoD and national efforts to detect, identify, exploit, penetrate, and counter activities conducted by foreign powers and directed against U.S. national security interests or the DoD and its activities.

DoD Instruction (DoDI) 5240.22 authorizes the OUSD(I&S) to establish policy for, and oversee, DoD counterintelligence support to counterterrorism and force protection.⁸

Counterintelligence Support from the Military Department Counterintelligence Organizations

DoDI O-5240.10 establishes policy, assigns responsibility, and prescribes procedures for conducting authorized counterintelligence activities in the DoD Components. The Military Department Counterintelligence Organizations (MDCOs)—Army Counterintelligence, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations (OSI)—provide overall counterintelligence support to their respective Military Services, assigned DoD Components, and assigned combatant commands.

Geographic Combatant Command Responsibilities

Geographic combatant commanders provide a single point of contact on military matters in the geographic area of responsibility (AOR) and exercise command authority over all subordinate, assigned, and attached forces assigned to their AOR. Under this authority, the commander coordinates with other appropriate forces to prevent and protect against national security threats.

⁶ DoDI 5400.11, “DoD Privacy and Civil Liberties,” January 29, 2019 (Incorporating Change 1, December 8, 2020), defines civil liberties as fundamental rights and freedoms protected by the United States Constitution.

⁷ Executive Order 12333, “United States Intelligence Activities,” December 4, 1981.

⁸ DoDI 5240.22, “Counterintelligence Support to Counterterrorism and Force Protection,” October 12, 2022.

The DoD Does Not Have a Comprehensive, Coordinated Approach to Address UAP

We reviewed the DoD's policies, procedures, and actions for detecting, reporting, collecting, analyzing, and identifying UAP and determined that, among other things:

- the DoD has not used a coordinated approach to detect, report, collect, analyze, and identify UAP;
- DoD Components have largely excluded geographic combatant commands, which are responsible for detecting, deterring, and preventing threats and attacks against the United States and its territories, possessions, and bases in their respective areas of responsibility, in developing UAP policies and procedures; and
- DoD Components developed varying processes to collect, analyze, and identify UAP incidents.

As a result, the DoD may not have developed a comprehensive and coordinated strategy for understanding, identifying, and protecting against unidentified phenomena that may present a safety threat to military personnel and territory.⁹

The DoD Has Not Issued a Comprehensive UAP Response Plan

The DoD has not issued a comprehensive UAP response plan that identifies roles, responsibilities, requirements, and coordination procedures for detecting, reporting, collecting, analyzing, and identifying UAP incidents. As a result, the DoD response to UAP incidents is uncoordinated and concentrated within each Military Department. Officials from the Military Services and MDCOs stated that they have been waiting for the DoD to issue comprehensive UAP guidance before developing their own guidance.

DoD Components Have Largely Excluded Geographic Combatant Commands in UAP Processes

We interviewed senior officials at the OUSD(I&S), the Military Services, the MDCOs, and the Defense agencies to learn how their organizations detect, report, collect, analyze, and identify UAP incidents. We concluded that these organizations generally adapted existing systems and that the DoD Components' existing UAP processes largely exclude the role of the geographic combatant commands.

We also reviewed the geographic combatant commands' processes for responding to UAP incidents and determined that the commands' processes also generally adapted existing systems to report UAP incidents. Chapter 6, title 10, United States Code, establishes the authorities of combatant commanders, who are responsible for detecting, deterring, and preventing threats and attacks against the United States and its territories, possessions, and bases. Therefore, the combatant commands would be the logical organizations to detect, report, collect, and identify UAP incidents to AARO.

⁹ We made other, classified observations and findings that are not included in this unclassified summary.

DoD Components Developed Varying Processes to Detect and Report UAP Incidents

The FY 2022 NDAA assigns AARO, under the OUSD(I&S), responsibility for synchronizing and standardizing the collection, analysis, and identification of UAP incidents. However, the DoD has not yet issued comprehensive UAP guidance. In the absence of DoD-level guidance, the DoD Components have developed varying informal processes to detect and report UAP incidents. For example, an Air Force Remotely Piloted Aircraft and Airborne Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Technical Advisor stated that the Air Force designated UAP as a “Special Interest Item,” which requires aircrews to document and report UAP observations within 24 hours of engine shutdown and mission completion using the Marauder system.¹⁰ An Army Senior Advisor for Science and Technology and Innovation stated that Army personnel also use the Air Force’s Marauder system to document and report UAP observations because the Army has not developed its own UAP-specific processes. The Military Services and MDCOs have sent some UAP incident reports to AARO, but the DoD does not currently formally require them to do so.

The DoD’s Lack of a Comprehensive, Coordinated Approach to Address UAP May Pose a Threat to Military Forces and U.S. National Security

We determined that the DoD has no overarching UAP policy and, as a result, it lacks assurance that national security and flight safety threats to the United States from UAP have been identified and mitigated.

¹⁰ U.S. Air Force, “Special Interest Item (SII) - Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (UAP) Reporting,” April 8, 2022. Air Force Life Cycle Management Center, “Marauder Mission Reporting User Guide,” September 2021. The Marauder system provides the global mission reporting capability on the SECRET Internet Protocol Router Network, including report drafting; quality control, rejection, and approval pipeline to ensure fidelity of reporting; publication of reports for global access; and export of published reports for analysis.

Recommendations, Management Comments, and Our Response

Recommendation 1

We recommend that the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security, in coordination with the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office Director, issue a Department of Defense policy to integrate unidentified anomalous phenomena roles, responsibilities, requirements, and coordination procedures into existing intelligence, counterintelligence, and force protection policies and procedures. The policy should include methods to address unidentified anomalous phenomena incidents and should align with policies and procedures for the protection of United States persons' civil liberties.

Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security and All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office Comments

The Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security, responding for the OUSD(I&S) and the AARO Director, agreed with the recommendation. The Under Secretary noted that the findings that inform the recommendation appear to be based on observations that largely predate the establishment of AARO [organizationally aligned under the OUSD(I&S)] on July 20, 2022. The Under Secretary also commented that the report describes AARO as having been “operational” at the time of its establishment when in fact the office was not at initial operational capability. The Under Secretary stated that AARO will achieve full operational capability using the resources provided in the Future Year Defense Plan beginning in FY 2024.

The Under Secretary also stated that AARO's progress in detecting, identifying, and resolving UAP includes the development of an analytic framework, science plan, operational framework, a strategic communications plan, and implementing guidance on the UAP-related roles and responsibilities of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, AARO, combatant commands, Military Services, and Combat Support Agencies. The Under Secretary stated that AARO is developing policy guidance, including recently released General Administration guidance through the Joint Staff to the combatant commands, to delineate UAP roles, responsibilities, requirements, and coordination procedures. This guidance will modify existing intelligence, counterintelligence, and force protection policies and procedures, as well as adhere to all policies and procedures for the protection of U.S. persons' civil liberties.

Our Response

Comments from the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security fully addressed the recommendation. Therefore, the recommendation is resolved but open. We will close the recommendation when the OUSD(I&S), in coordination with AARO, provides us with the issued DoD policy to integrate UAP roles, responsibilities, requirements, and coordination procedures into existing intelligence, counterintelligence, and force protection policies and procedures.

Recommendation 2

We recommend that the Secretary of the Army issue interim guidance for unidentified anomalous phenomena while waiting for the Department of Defense to issue policy. At a minimum, this guidance for unidentified anomalous phenomena should:

- a. Integrate existing intelligence, counterintelligence, and force protection policies and procedures.**
- b. Integrate procedures for coordinating with geographic combatant commands.**
- c. Incorporate roles, responsibilities, and requirements for the Military Services and their respective Military Department Counterintelligence Organizations.**

Secretary of the Army Comments

The Senior Advisor for Counterintelligence, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army G-2, responding for the Secretary of the Army, agreed in principle with the recommendation. The Senior Adviser stated that Army Counterintelligence plans to integrate existing intelligence, counterintelligence, and force protection policies and procedures into interim guidance for unidentified anomalous phenomena.

Our Response

Comments from the Senior Advisor for Counterintelligence, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army G-2 fully addressed the recommendation. Therefore, the recommendation is resolved but open. We will close the recommendation when the Secretary of the Army provides us with the issued interim UAP guidance.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that the Secretary of the Navy issue interim guidance for unidentified anomalous phenomena while waiting for the Department of Defense to issue policy. At a minimum, this guidance for unidentified anomalous phenomena should:

- a. Integrate existing intelligence, counterintelligence, and force protection policies and procedures.**
- b. Integrate procedures for coordinating with geographic combatant commands.**
- c. Incorporate roles, responsibilities, and requirements for the Military Services and their respective Military Department Counterintelligence Organizations.**

Secretary of the Navy Comments

The Secretary of the Navy did not provide official comments for inclusion in our final report, as requested. However, the Director of Intelligence (Deputy Under Secretary of the Navy, Intelligence and Security), responding for the Secretary of the Navy, after our final report issuance, agreed with the recommendation and stated in the response that the Navy began developing interim guidance for unidentified anomalous phenomena.

Our Response

Comments from the Director of Intelligence, Deputy Under Secretary of the Navy, Intelligence and Security, Department of the Navy fully addressed the recommendation. Therefore, the recommendation is resolved but open. We will close the recommendation when the Secretary of the Navy provides us with the issued interim UAP guidance.

Recommendation 4

We recommend that the Secretary of the Air Force issue interim guidance for unidentified anomalous phenomena while waiting for the Department of Defense to issue policy. At a minimum, this guidance for unidentified anomalous phenomena should:

- a. Integrate existing intelligence, counterintelligence, and force protection policies and procedures.**
- b. Integrate procedures for coordinating with geographic combatant commands.**
- c. Incorporate roles, responsibilities, and requirements for the Military Services and their respective Military Department Counterintelligence Organizations.**

Secretary of the Air Force Comments

The Secretary of the Air Force did not provide official comments for inclusion in this report, as we requested in our draft report. However, the Strategic Programs & Policy Associate Director, Secretary of the Air Force Inspector General, responding for the Secretary of the Air Force, provided us informal comments stating, “in coordination with OSI and our SAF/IGX [Secretary of the Air Force/Inspector General Special Investigations Directorate] deputy director, we concur without comment and look forward to the final published report.”

Our Response

The Strategic Programs & Policy Associate Director’s informal response stated that the Air Force agreed with the recommendation. However, this response did not provide the specific actions that the Air Force would take and the dates for those actions; therefore, this recommendation is resolved but open. We will close the recommendation when the Secretary of the Air Force provides us with the issued interim UAP guidance.

Recommendation 5

We recommend that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff issue guidance to the geographic combatant commanders regarding unidentified anomalous phenomena detection, reporting, collection, analysis, and identification within their area of responsibility. At a minimum, the guidance should include tools to help commands determine the threats posed by unidentified anomalous phenomena.

Joint Staff Comments

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not provide official comments for inclusion in our final report, as we requested. However, an official from the Joint Staff J3 responded and agreed with the recommendation. Further, the Joint Staff issued guidance to the geographic combatant commanders on unidentified anomalous phenomena detection, reporting, collection, analysis, and identification within their area of responsibility.

Our Response

The informal response from the Joint Staff fully addressed the recommendation. Therefore, the recommendation is resolved and closed.

Scope and Methodology

We conducted the work on this evaluation from May 2021 through June 2023 in accordance with the “Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation,” published in January 2012 by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency. Those standards require that we adequately plan the evaluation to ensure that we meet the objectives and perform the evaluation to obtain sufficient, competent, and relevant evidence to support the findings, conclusions, and recommendations. We believe that the evidence obtained was sufficient, competent, and relevant to lead a reasonable person to sustain the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

We identified and reviewed Presidential and DoD policies, directives, and guidance that establish requirements for intelligence gathering, counterintelligence, force protection, and civil liberty protections for U.S. persons. We interviewed senior officials and requested UAP-related data and organizational policies, procedures, and guidance from the following DoD organizations:

- OUSD(I&S)
- AARO
- Military Services (Departments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force)
- Military Service Intelligence Components (Army G2, Navy N2, Air Force A2)
- MDCOs (Army Counterintelligence, Naval Criminal Investigative Service, Office of Special Investigations)
- Defense intelligence agencies (Defense Intelligence Agency, National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, National Reconnaissance Office, and National Security Agency)

We also interviewed non-U.S. Government personnel considered subject matter experts on UAP and national security threats. In addition, we contacted the geographic combatant commands to understand how their command responds to and coordinates UAP threats. We requested UAP-related policies and procedures, incident reports, briefings, and notification procedures and considered those documents in our evaluation.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AARO	All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office
AOIMSG	Airborne Object Identification and Management Synchronization Group
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DoDD	Department of Defense Directive
DoDI	Department of Defense Instruction
IC	Intelligence Community
MDCO	Military Department Counterintelligence Organizations
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
OUSD(I&S)	Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security
UAP	Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena
UAPTF	Unidentified Aerial Phenomena Task Force

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