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UFOs AND THE CONDON REPORT:
A DISSENTING VIEW

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"Further extensive study of UFOs probably cannot be justified in the expectation that science will be advanced." -- Dr. E. U. Condon, in *Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects*, Bantam Books, 1969.

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RÉSUMÉ

As a result of more than two years of rather intensive study of the UFO problem, interviewing about five hundred witnesses in selected cases here and abroad, talking to most of the persons who have been concerned with recent aspects of Air Force handling of the UFO problem, exchanges with many of the major independent UFO investigating groups, and repeated discussions of the UFO question with scientific colleagues, including members of the Condon Project, I might summarize my main findings and conclusions as follows:

1) The number of substantial reports of entirely unconventional, structured objects exhibiting performance characteristics far beyond the state of any known terrestrial technology seems too great by one or two orders of magnitude to justify further scientific neglect of this body of evidence.

2) All evidence points to the global scale of the phenomena; reports from essentially all parts of the world exhibit a sufficient degree of similarity to rule out hypotheses that these are secret test vehicles of any nation. Many other considerations support that conclusion so strongly that it may safely be rejected.

3) Despite many superficial efforts to explain away this body of reports on meteorological, astronomical, optical, or psychological grounds, and despite obvious operation of such factors in many reports of low evidential quality, these factors seem quite incapable of resolving the puzzling nature of hundreds to thousands of reports from reliable observers made during the 1947-69 period.

4) There is certainly no evidence that any nation has mounted any major scientific program to explore the UFO problem in depth. Nor is there evidence indicating clandestine investigations anywhere in the world.

5) With the exception of persons affiliated with the several independent UFO investigatory groups such as NICAP, APRO, etc., who have been checking UFO cases for years,

most members of the public appear to have accepted the periodically reiterated claim that the best scientific talent available to the U. S. Air Force was being used to study UFO reports -- and that the findings indicated nothing unexplainable in terms of existing science and technology.

6) Although the UFO studies within Air Force Project Bluebook have repeatedly been officially described as scientific in nature, that is very far from the case. Superficial and often quite incompetent UFO evaluations have issued from Project Bluebook over the past 15 years. Major Air Force laboratories (e.g., AFCLRL) were never brought actively into an extended study of UFO phenomena, yet it is just such laboratories where the requisite Air Force talent lay.

7) When one examines the 20-year history of Air Force efforts to secure outside scientific advice on the UFO problem, one encounters repeated instances of negative advice, recommendations to downgrade or even to abandon the Air Force UFO studies. In my view, the scientific advice that the Air Force has received, over the years, from the scientific community has been exceedingly poor advice, in almost all instances, and is a major factor in its quite inadequate response to the UFO problem. I have come to regard this, and not some high-level coverup, as the reason USAF has repeatedly failed to react to striking UFO reports coming from their own flight personnel.

8) In the Condon Report, I believe the Air Force and the federal government have now received the largest single piece of bad scientific advice on UFOs that has ever come out of a segment of the scientific community. Despite a great deal of publicity to the contrary, I believe that this Report is not the definitive, exhaustive study it is being made out to be. Rather, I think it is a very weak study, as measured by usual standards of scientific investigation, and that it is characterized by numerous defects of serious nature.

9) The mischief has, in my opinion, been sorely compounded by a quick and almost certainly superficial assessment and strong endorsement of the Condon Report by an *ad hoc* review panel within the National Academy of Sciences. I believe that none of the 11 NAS panelists had any extensive prior investigatory experience in the UFO problem.

10) All of the above appears to indicate that no further significant scientific progress towards elucidation of the 20-year mystery of the UFOs, their nature and origin, will be possible until the serious inadequacies of the Condon Report are exposed to general discussion in scientific and technical channels.

11) The AIAA, through its UFO Subcommittee has (12/68 issue *Aero. & Astro.*) been urged to give serious scientific attention to the UFO problem. I wish to heartily second that excellent suggestion. The AIAA is perhaps the single most appropriate professional

group to examine the UFO problem in some new and independent manner.

The Condon Report (available in unbridged form in a recently-published Bantam Books paperback) and its disturbing array of shortcomings will form the main subject of my talk to the PMR Section, AIAA. I can here only summarize some of the major deficiencies, but will illustrate them with specific examples in the course of the talk. (For brevity I hereafter use *CR* for Condon Report.)

It is well to stress that the Conclusions and Recommendations section of the *CR* is signed only by Condon, and, though it is cast in the first person plural, my inquiries among some of the investigating staff who contributed other sections indicate that this all-important summary section was not prepared with unanimous concurrence of the small investigatory staff of the Project. This is a more important point than would be assumed by persons unfamiliar with the unusual history of the Condon Project and with the slight involvement of its director over most of the duration of the Project. (For some insights, read *UFOs? Yes!* by Saunders and Harkins, Signet paperback, 1969.)

Condon recommends that "*further extensive study of UFOs probably cannot be justified in the expectation that science will be advanced thereby*". He writes that not only should no new group or agency be set up to pursue the UFO problem but that such secondary implications as might bear on defense functions can be handled "*without the continuance of a special unit such as Project Bluebook*". Recognizing the possibility that UFO reports might still be submitted in the future to some branches of the government by members of the public, he recommends (to make his earlier point still clearer) "*that nothing should be done with (such reports) in the expectation that they are going to contribute to the advance of science*". He concludes his major recommendations with an admonishment to school teachers that they try to discourage school children from "*absorbing unsound and erroneous material*" from UFO books. UFOs are, by this implication, grouped with astrology, phrenology, and other pseudosciences, one gathers.

But what, in fact, lies within the thick bulk of the Condon Report that supports such conclusions, such recommendations?

As I shall show in my remarks, there is, in fact, relatively little in that Report to warrant such conclusions. Indeed, Condon's recommendations are so similar to public statements of negative tone which he was already making a mere three months after the establishment of the Project (see, *e.g.*, the Saunders-Harkins book), that it seems fair to ask whether Condon has really studied carefully and thoughtfully the actual contents of this Report to alter his earlier views.

One wonders how he can shrug off such Unexplained cases, to be found within the Report, as the 1957 B-47 UFO case in the Louisiana-Texas area. Having quite recently

interviewed all six crew members of that ECM-equipped RB-47, I find it an intensely interesting and baffling case, as I shall explain to you. Condon evidently can somehow ignore it. And how can so involved and well-reported a UFO case as the multiple-radar, multiple-visual, airborne radar-visual incident at Lakenheath RAF Station in 1956 be disregarded by Condon, or such other Condon Report Unexplained cases as Beverly, Mass. (4/66) or Utica, N.Y. (6/55) or Colorado Springs (5/67) or Jackson, Ala. (11/56) or Joplin, Mo. (1/67), plus a number more that are still left in the Unexplained category after the Project's analyses were completed?

Since Condon appears to be author of a review of UFO history in the 1947-68 period constituting one chapter of the Report, he must surely be cognizant of the kind of "classic" cases that led to the very problem he contracted to try to solve for the Air Force. If so, one must ask how he feels satisfied with the inclusion in the Report of so many obviously trivial cases of less than marginal interest at this stage of UFO study? Why, I must ask, are there so many non-significant cases discussed when so few outstanding past UFO cases are confronted?

And, since any physicist capable of the good work for which Condon has been known over the years would have little difficulty mastering all requisite principles of radar-propagation physics and atmospheric physics to assess the inadequacies that run through the Report's discussion of the relatively small sampling of the old "classic" cases it does confront, one must wonder how those deficiencies and errors escaped Condon (let alone the NAS panelists). Illustrative examples will be cited. A detailed discussion on these must be set before scientific readers; I have such a discussion in preparation, and it is growing lengthy.

I urge all of you to secure copies of the Condon Report and to study it carefully. The greater the number of scientists who assess its level of scientific argument, the sooner it may become generally known that we do not yet have "the definitive scientific answer to one of the world's most fascinating riddles", to quote from the book's cover.

The Condon Report has deepened, not solved, the UFO problem. AIAA can and should help to resolve this major scientific mystery. The dimmest possibility that we might be dealing here with some form of extra-terrestrial surveillance should provide significant incentive for close AIAA scrutiny of the evidence for and against that hypothesis. I continue to find it difficult to accept any competing hypothesis.

"Any sufficiently advanced technology will appear indistinguishable from magic."

-- Arthur C. Clarke