

10  
Sep 19, 2025Department of Defense  
OFFICE OF PREPUBLICATION AND SECURITY REVIEW*An AARO Information Paper***AARO and the Declassification Process***September 2025*

The All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO) is the U.S. Department of War office established to investigate and resolve report of unidentified anomalous phenomena (UAP). AARO is responsible for receiving, processing, and adjudicating UAP reports, and routinely accesses classified information—including that collected by U.S. Government systems—to complete its review of UAP reports. The processes governing the classification of information are complex and can be misunderstood. Our national defense requires that certain information be classified to protect our citizens, our democratic institutions, our homeland security, and our interactions with foreign nations. Nevertheless, as established by law and in accordance with direction from the Secretary of War, AARO places a heavy emphasis on transparency in facilitating the declassification and release of information so the public can see the results of AARO's reviews for themselves.

**What are UAP?**

UAP are as-yet-unknown objects that exhibit potentially anomalous characteristics and are seen or recorded in space, the sky, or the ocean. The vast majority of UAP reports are eventually determined to be mundane objects—such as balloons, satellites, and birds—after further review. A small percentage of reported UAP exhibit potentially anomalous characteristics, and AARO expends most of its review efforts on these UAP reports.

For the public, UAP sightings raise a profound and enduring question: Are we alone in the universe? Another question often follows: What does the U.S. Government really know about UAP? Though AARO has found no evidence of extraterrestrial beings or technology to date, the office considers all available evidence in conducting its analyses.

(UNCLASSIFIED)



(UNCLASSIFIED)

**Figure 1:** A screenshot from 2:53 of the video titled “Al Taqaddum Object” (popularly known as “the jellyfish video”), available to view online at <https://www.dvidshub.net/video/960331/al-taqaddum-object>.

## Why is so much UAP-related information classified?

Classification is a mechanism the U.S. Government uses to safeguard sensitive information related to national security. For the Department of War, this sensitive information could include military objectives, locations, and capabilities, as well as vulnerabilities and intelligence sources and methods. For example, if an F-35 fighter jet pilot uses the aircraft’s camera to take an image of an ordinary object (a soda can, for example), that image could be classified for reasons other than the subject of the image (here, the soda can) and instead due to the use of the fighter jet’s camera. The image could contain information that meets the standards for classification due to its relationship to a sensitive capability that is itself classified. For instance, the raw image may include information about the resolution, metadata, or other sensitive information that could be used to deduce that camera’s capabilities and limitations. If an adversary were to combine this information with other information about the aircraft, that adversary might be able to draw conclusions about how to elude detection by those aircraft because that adversary would now better understand the capabilities of the F-35’s sensors.

Much like the soda can example above, UAP imagery is often classified to protect sensitive information associated with the platform, location, or methods used to capture it. This includes commonplace images of birds, balloons, commercial drones, and natural phenomena, which are frequently reported to AARO as UAP. Even when AARO resolves a case as unremarkable, the underlying data may remain classified if it originates or is derived from sensitive sources or methods.

In addition to considering the classified nature of sensitive sources or methods, AARO is also vigilant of U.S. and allied operational security. In characterizing and resolving UAP, AARO must balance its commitment to transparency with its national security mission to increase domain awareness to avoid strategic surprise.

### **How does AARO declassify UAP-related information?**

AARO cannot declassify information on its own because the classified information relevant to the UAP reports was created by other government entities outside of AARO – for example, the Military Departments. The office that originally created the information has the primary authority to declassify it. As such, AARO experts must work with the owners of classified information across the U.S. Government every day to facilitate the declassification and release of UAP records without compromising the security of its partners.

Declassification is a deliberate and time-intensive process in which the originating office uses a team of experts to examine the classified information to determine if it still requires protection. Information must remain classified when its disclosure could reasonably be expected to cause damage, serious damage, or exceptionally grave damage to national security. Even when declassification may seem appropriate or obvious based on the subject of the information, such as the soda can image example, the methods with which the information was obtained or other details within the data may result in a decision to postpone declassification. If declassification is postponed, the information will be required to undergo additional declassification reviews at prescribed intervals to determine whether continued classification is needed.

To declassify information as part of the UAP case resolution process, AARO first solicits a determination from the originating office that created the information as to whether the release

of the data could harm national security. The owners will conduct a declassification review and provide one of the following determinations: 1) All of the information has been declassified and can be released, in its entirety, to the public; 2) Only some of the information has been declassified and only those portions can be released to the public (NOTE: information that continues to be classified will be redacted or removed prior to public release); or 3) All of the information must remain classified and cannot be released to the public. Once AARO receives the determination that some or all of the information can be released, AARO coordinates with the Defense Office of Prepublication and Security Review (DOPSR) to ensure the classified portion (if any) is appropriately redacted. AARO can release the document or data to the public once DOPSR stamps the information as approved for public release.

### **How does AARO release declassified data and documents to the public?**

AARO is committed to facilitating the declassification and public release of as much UAP-related information as possible. AARO may incorporate declassified information into its public case resolution reports and unclassified congressional reports, or it may publish the declassified information directly to AARO's website. AARO is also working closely with the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) to transfer UAP-related records for permanent storage and public access, thus further promoting transparency in accordance with existing law. The public can view UAP-related records that have been transferred to the National Archives at <https://www.archives.gov/research/topics/uaps>.

AARO seeks to build trust through increased openness and analytic rigor as it executes its important national security mission. AARO will continue to demonstrate its commitment to transparency by publishing declassified information, engaging with partners across the U.S. Government, and transferring records to public archives.

Please visit AARO's website at <https://www.aaro.mil/> to view UAP imagery and records, case resolutions, congressional reports, FOIA releases, and more.