All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO)

U.S. Department of War

Case: "The Al Taqaddum Object"

Case Resolution | 8 September 2025

AARO Assessment and Case Status

AARO assesses with high confidence that the Al Taqaddum object did not exhibit anomalous behavior or capabilities. AARO assesses with high confidence that the object was consistent with a cluster of fully and partially inflated balloons (Figure 1).

Case Overview

On October 23, 2017, an infrared (IR) sensor aboard an aerostat force protection dirigible (blimp) operating at 2,700 feet above Al Taqaddum Air Base, Iraq, recorded 17 minutes and 30 seconds of footage featuring an unidentified object that appears to be floating above the ground.

Key Findings

AARO assesses with high confidence that the object:

- Did not exhibit anomalous speed or other behavior exceeding known state-of-the-art performance characteristics
- Was consistent with a cluster of fully and partially inflated balloons

AARO based this assessment on analysis of full-motion video, video metadata, line-of-sight, scenario reconstructions, and weather data analysis. The object's appearance and lack of thermal signatures is consistent with previously identified balloon clusters, and bolsters AARO's assessment of the morphology and performance characteristics of the object.

Case Synopsis

Location: Al Taqaddum Air Base, Iraq

Date: 23 October 2017

Object Altitude (Reported): Not reported
Object Altitude (Assessed): 850-2,200 feet

Object Speed (Reported): Not reported
Object Speed (Assessed): 4-14 mph

Object Shape (Reported): Abnormally shaped
Object Shape (Assessed): Balloon shaped

Reporter: Unknown

Data Type: Infrared

Reported Behavior: Floating

Assessed Behavior: The object did not demonstrate anomalous performance characteristics.

Confidence: High confidence that the object did not demonstrate anomalous performance characteristics. High confidence that the object was consistent with a cluster of fully and partially inflated balloons.

Performance Characteristics

Object Altitude, Flight Path, and Speed: AARO assesses with moderate confidence that the object's altitude was between 850-2,200 feet and that the object was moving at 4-14 miles per hour (mph), due to the variability in both historical and real-time wind data. AARO assesses with high confidence that the object was traveling within range of wind speed in an east-to-west direction using locational data from the blimp.

Observable Characteristics and Attribution

Shape: The shapes of fully and partially inflated balloons—as well as dangling strings—are visible in several instances in the video. The dangling strings' shape and number change, which would be consistent with a cluster of balloons changing position relative to the sensor's point of view. The fluctuating IR return of the object is a result of the sensor constantly adjusting to assign grayscale values to every pixel, which maximizes the visual dynamic range in a diverse and changing background.

Attribution: AARO assesses with high confidence that the object is consistent with a cluster of fully and partially inflated balloons due to the object's altitude, flight path, speed, and observed shape.

Data Quality and Methodology: AARO assesses that the visual and sensor data associated with the object provides sufficiently detailed information to resolve this case with high confidence.

Sensor Effects and Limitations: The video is somewhat grainy, becoming increasingly grainy toward the end of the clip, which is likely due to the object's increasing distance from the sensor.

Alternative Hypothesis

One of AARO's partners theorized that the object could be a quadrotor Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) draped in camouflage netting, though this theory is unlikely for two reasons:

- **Movement:** A quadrotor UAS would be unlikely to drift with the wind, as this object does.
- **Heat signature:** The motors of a quadrotor UAS would generate heat visible to an IR sensor, and the video does not indicate the presence of such heat sources.

Therefore, AARO and its partners discarded this theory, concurring that the object was unlikely to have been a quadrotor UAS and was more likely a cluster of fully and partially inflated balloons.

(UNCLASSIFIED)

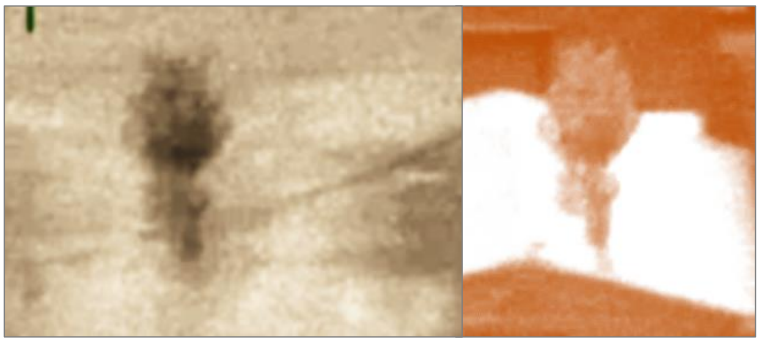

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Figure 1: *Stills of the UAP from the 17-minute video. Aerostat deployed at Al Taqaddum Air Base. The balloons appear as bulbous, rounded shapes; similarly, the strings and deflated balloons can be seen hanging below. These images were assigned different color temperatures to aid in visualization.*

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