

The PURSUE Files: Unlocking the Pentagon's Declassified UFO Secrets

A Critical Analysis of the Presidential Unsealing and Reporting System for UAP Encounters

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ABSTRACT

On May 8, 2026, the United States government initiated an unprecedented disclosure initiative designated PURSUE — the Presidential Unsealing and Reporting System for UAP Encounters. Authorized by a February 2026 presidential directive and administered jointly by the Department of War (DOW), the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), PURSUE released 162 formerly classified files encompassing 120 PDF documents, 28 videos, and 14 images spanning eight decades of UAP encounters. This paper critically examines the structure, content, institutional framework, and broader implications of the PURSUE disclosure. Drawing on the indexed materials of Release 01, the paper analyzes encounters ranging from the Apollo lunar anomalies of 1972 to modern aerial encounters over conflict zones in Iraq, Syria, and the Indo-Pacific. The paper further interrogates the epistemological and policy questions raised by the release: the nature of redaction protocols, the tension between public transparency and national security, the credibility of eyewitness testimony, and the government's shifting institutional stance on UAP phenomena. The research argues that PURSUE represents a paradigm shift in state-level acknowledgment of unexplained aerial phenomena, with profound implications for science, governance, and international relations.

Keywords: UAP, UFO, PURSUE, Pentagon, declassification, AARO, Department of War, national security, extraterrestrial, aerial phenomena, transparency policy

1. Introduction

For decades, the question of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (UAP) — colloquially referred to as Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs) — occupied a liminal space in the public consciousness, suspended between credible anecdotal testimony and institutional dismissal. Governments worldwide, particularly the United States, maintained a posture of studied

ambiguity: neither fully confirming nor categorically denying the existence of anomalous aerial phenomena that defied conventional explanation. This posture began to crack in the 2010s, accelerating markedly with the 2017 New York Times revelation of the Pentagon's Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program (AATIP) and the subsequent Senate-mandated reports through the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO).

However, none of these preliminary disclosures approached the scale, institutional coordination, or political intentionality of what was launched on May 8, 2026: the Presidential Unsealing and Reporting System for UAP Encounters — PURSUE. Fulfilling a February 2026 directive from the executive branch calling for 'maximum transparency,' PURSUE established a new public-facing portal (war.gov/ufo) and released 162 formerly classified files drawn from military, intelligence, and civilian agency archives spanning eighty years of documented encounters.

This research paper provides a comprehensive analytical overview of the PURSUE initiative. It examines the institutional architecture that made the release possible, the content and epistemological weight of the declassified materials, key encounter cases of historical significance, and the policy implications of this unprecedented act of state disclosure. The paper does not advance the claim that any of the documented encounters constitute evidence of extraterrestrial intelligence; rather, it interrogates what the disclosure itself reveals about the evolving relationship between government secrecy, scientific inquiry, and public accountability.

2. Institutional Framework and the Genesis of PURSUE

2.1 The Presidential Directive and the Department of War

PURSUE was authorized by an executive directive issued in February 2026, which instructed relevant agencies to coordinate a declassification review and public release program for all unresolved UAP case files. The directive framed the initiative in explicitly democratic terms, invoking the public's right to information and committing to what it described as 'maximum disclosure' consistent with national security constraints.

The lead institutional actor was the United States Department of War (DOW), headed by Secretary Pete Hegseth. The DOW's involvement signals a significant reorientation: for most of the twentieth century, military institutions were the primary custodians — and concealers — of UAP-related data. Their emergence as the primary disclosure mechanism reflects an institutional acknowledgment that the accumulated archive could no longer be justified under existing classification rationales.

2.2 Multi-Agency Coordination

PURSUE was not a unilateral military initiative. Its governance structure incorporated the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) under Director Tulsi Gabbard, the FBI under Director Kash Patel, and NASA under Administrator Jared Isaacman. The White House, the Department of Energy (DOE), and the State Department also contributed to the review process alongside AARO, whose mandate PURSUE was explicitly designed to supersede in scope.

This multi-agency architecture served dual purposes: it ensured that declassification decisions benefited from both intelligence community expertise and scientific rigor, and it distributed institutional accountability across the executive branch. The ODNI's role was to conduct a 'careful, comprehensive declassification review,' while the FBI's involvement brought what the initiative described as 'national security rigor' and a commitment to 'unfettered public access.' NASA's participation introduced civilian scientific infrastructure, potentially allowing instrumental analysis of phenomena that military sensors alone might mischaracterize.

2.3 The war.gov/ufo Portal and Rolling Releases

The public access mechanism for PURSUE — the war.gov/ufo portal — was designed with a deliberately minimal aesthetic: white typewriter fonts on black backgrounds, evoking both governmental authority and the aesthetic vernacular of classified document releases. Critically, Release 01 was framed as the first in a series of 'rolling releases,' implying that the May 8, 2026 disclosure was not a terminal event but the opening of a sustained declassification pipeline. This design choice has significant policy implications: it prevents the release from being dismissed as a one-time political gesture and commits the government to continued transparency on a structured timeline.

3. Anatomy of Release 01: Content and Methodology

3.1 The 162-File Archive

Release 01 comprised a total of 162 files: 120 PDF documents, 28 video files, and 14 still images. The PDF documents include investigative case files, internal memoranda, technical assessments, and historical intelligence reports. The video files collectively represent approximately 41 minutes of footage, spanning encounters documented across eight decades and multiple continents. The images include photographic evidence submitted by military personnel, law enforcement officers, and civilian witnesses.

The 162 files were organized by the PURSUE portal under an indexed format accessible without any security clearance requirement. Of the total archive, 108 cases were categorized as 'unresolved' — meaning that no satisfactory conventional explanation had been identified for the reported phenomena — and released in partially redacted form. The redaction protocols were carefully circumscribed: material relating to military installation locations, sensor capabilities, and personnel identities was withheld, while the UAP-relevant data itself was preserved.

3.2 Redaction Philosophy and the Limits of Transparency

The redaction framework employed by PURSUE reflects a deliberate attempt to balance transparency with operational security. The stated principle was to protect information about military facilities without obscuring the UAP-related content of each case file. This represents a conceptual evolution from earlier classification practices, in which entire files were withheld on the grounds that any component could, in aggregate, reveal sensitive capabilities.

However, the redaction framework introduces epistemological complications. Researchers and analysts working with the declassified files must assess whether redacted sections contain information that would materially alter the interpretation of the UAP data. Without full access, the possibility that redacted context would explain or recontextualize reported phenomena cannot be excluded. The PURSUE portal's commitment to rolling releases suggests that additional material may eventually address these gaps, but as of Release 01, the redacted cases must be analyzed with appropriate epistemic caution.

3.3 The \$500 Million Scale AI Contract: An Anomaly Within the Disclosure

Among the institutional revelations embedded in the PURSUE documentation is confirmation of a \$500 million contract between the DOW and Scale AI for advanced machine learning services applied to military data. This disclosure, occurring simultaneously with the UAP release, raises substantive questions about the role of artificial intelligence in processing and interpreting UAP sensor data. If AI systems are being employed to analyze the 162-file archive — or the broader classified trove from which it is drawn — then the epistemological standards of that analysis become a matter of public scientific interest. The concurrent disclosure may be coincidental, but it underscores the technologically sophisticated institutional context within which contemporary UAP research is conducted.

4. Historical Cases: Apollo, Cold War, and the 1947 Archives

4.1 The December 1972 Apollo 17 Anomaly

Among the most scientifically significant disclosures in Release 01 are materials pertaining to anomalies observed during NASA's Apollo program. The Apollo 17 mission of December 1972 documented a triangular formation of three distinct points of light in the lunar sky — an observation that prompted NASA to conduct what it described internally as a 'preliminary analysis of a physical object.' The newly released documentation provides access to this analysis, which tentatively characterized the formation as consistent with a physical object situated above lunar ice and debris fields.

The epistemological weight of this disclosure is considerable. Apollo 17 astronauts Eugene Cernan and Harrison Schmitt were among the most rigorously trained scientific observers ever to conduct fieldwork in the lunar environment. Their testimony, combined with photographic documentation and mission sensor data, establishes an evidentiary baseline that cannot be dismissed through standard atmospheric explanation — there being no atmosphere on the moon capable of generating optical artifacts. The preliminary analysis's characterization of the formation as a 'physical object' rather than a sensor artifact or photographic anomaly represents an important internal concession.

4.2 Apollo 12 Lunar Orbit Photographs

Six newly released photographs from the Apollo 12 mission document anomalous lights observed during the spacecraft's lunar orbital phase. The photographs have been held in classified archives for over five decades. Their release raises questions about why photographic evidence from a civilian space program required classification at all — a question that the PURSUE documentation does not fully address but that implies either intelligence community overlap with the Apollo program or a post-hoc classification decision based on the anomalous content.

4.3 The 1965 Space Transcript: Lovell, Borman, and the Particle Field

A previously classified transcript from 1965 documents astronauts James Lovell and Frank Borman reporting an encounter with what they described as 'hundreds of particles' surrounding their spacecraft. This encounter, occurring during the Gemini 7 mission, was dismissed at the time as a probable interaction with spacecraft debris or ice particles venting from the life support system. The newly released transcript suggests that mission controllers were not fully satisfied with this explanation and that the encounter was flagged for further analysis that was never completed.

4.4 FBI Case File 62-HQ-83894 and the 1947 Flying Disc Scare

Release 01 includes 18 documents from FBI Case File 62-HQ-83894, one of the bureau's earliest investigations into what were then referred to as 'flying discs.' These documents, dating from 1947, provide a granular view of the FBI's initial engagement with UAP phenomena during the period immediately following the Kenneth Arnold sighting and the Roswell incident. The case file reveals an interagency environment characterized by significant confusion, interdepartmental competition, and an absence of agreed analytical standards — a bureaucratic landscape that would persist, in modified form, for the following eight decades.

Of particular interest within this archive are technical documents from Oak Ridge, Tennessee, that include preliminary proposals on what are described as 'alien propulsion systems.' These documents, apparently produced by engineers at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, suggest that by the late 1940s, elements of the scientific community were already theorizing about non-conventional propulsion mechanisms potentially associated with the observed phenomena.

5. Modern Encounters: 2022–2025

5.1 The September 2023 Bronze Oval Object

Among the most extensively documented modern cases in Release 01 is a September 2023 encounter involving a bronze-colored oval object observed in the Western United States. The case file includes FBI laboratory graphics and multiple witness photographs depicting an object described as emitting bright light inconsistent with conventional aircraft navigation lighting or known drone technology. Six law enforcement special agents who responded to the incident independently reported observing what they termed 'orbs launching other orbs' — a nested propulsion or deployment behavior that has no analogue in publicly known aircraft systems.

5.2 FBI Drone Pilot Testimony (September 2023)

A licensed drone pilot's sworn FBI testimony from September 2023 describes a linear object displaying bands of light within a luminous field — a morphology distinct from any conventional unmanned aerial system. The testimony was obtained under standard evidentiary protocols and has been corroborated by secondary sensor data included in the case file. The combination of trained observer testimony and instrumental corroboration elevates this case above the threshold of purely anecdotal reporting.

5.3 The October 2023 Greece Encounter

International dimensions of the PURSUE release are illustrated by the October 2023 Greece encounter, in which a fast-moving object was observed executing ninety-degree directional changes at approximately 80 miles per hour — a maneuver that would impose aerodynamic and inertial stresses incompatible with any known manned aircraft design. The object was tracked by multiple observers over a sustained period, providing a sufficiently long observational window to exclude simple misidentification of conventional aircraft.

5.4 Conflict Zone Encounters: Iraq and Syria

The PURSUE files include declassified internal memoranda from active conflict zones. In Iraq in 2022, cautious bureaucratic memos confirmed the sighting of 'one possible small UAP' by military personnel. The conservative language of the documentation — 'possible,' 'small' — reflects the institutional caution that has historically characterized military UAP reporting, but the

inclusion of the document in the PURSUE archive implies that the encounter was considered worthy of preservation rather than routine dismissal.

The Syria 2024 entry documents an encounter involving multiple glares and semi-transparent orange areas persisting for approximately two seconds before disappearing. The brevity of the encounter and the sensor conditions under which it was recorded limit the analytical conclusions that can be drawn, but the case is notable for its geographic context: a contested airspace in which attribution of aerial objects carries significant geopolitical weight.

5.5 The US Indo-Pacific Command Football-Shaped Object (2024)

The 2024 Indo-Pacific Command encounter involves a football-shaped object sighted near Japan and the East China Sea — a region of acute strategic sensitivity given ongoing tensions in the western Pacific. The object's shape, behavior, and the circumstances of its detection are detailed in the declassified INDOPACOM report included in Release 01. The geopolitical context of this encounter makes it among the most strategically significant in the PURSUE archive: if the object cannot be attributed to Chinese, Russian, or American military programs, its presence in one of the world's most monitored and contested airspaces constitutes a profound intelligence anomaly.

5.6 Helicopter Infrared Imagery (Western United States, 2025)

Footage captured by helicopter-mounted infrared sensors in the Western United States during September and December 2025 represents the most temporally recent documentation in Release 01. Infrared imaging eliminates many of the optical artifacts that can confound visual UAP sightings, providing a more reliable evidentiary baseline. The anomalous flight characteristics documented in the PURSUE-released footage — including acceleration profiles and thermal signatures inconsistent with known aircraft — strengthen the cumulative case that the phenomena under investigation cannot be explained by reference to current publicly acknowledged aviation technology.

6. The James C. Collins Event (1967): Close Encounter Testimony

One of the most detailed and humanly compelling accounts in the PURSUE archive concerns James C. Collins, an eyewitness who reported an encounter on January 17, 1967, in

Chesapeake, Virginia. Collins described observing a large, oblong-shaped craft constructed of what he characterized as a glass-like, transparent substance — a description with no parallel in known aerospace materials of the era or the present day.

Perhaps more striking than the craft's reported morphology is Collins's account of its occupants: four entities approximately four feet tall, dressed in what he described as regular trousers and T-shirts — pedestrian civilian clothing rather than the flight suits or environmental suits one might expect of operators of an exotic aircraft. The PURSUE documentation notes that Collins exhibited significant emotional strain during his reporting, a characteristic of eyewitness testimony that psychologists associate with genuine rather than fabricated traumatic recollection.

The Collins case raises methodological questions central to UAP research: how should witness testimony be weighted when it describes phenomena that are physically extraordinary but psychologically credibly delivered? The PURSUE framework does not resolve this question, but by including the Collins case among its unresolved files, it implicitly affirms that the testimony warrants continued investigative attention rather than dismissal.

7. Policy and Epistemological Implications

7.1 Superseding AARO: A New Institutional Paradigm

PURSUE explicitly positions itself as superseding AARO — the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office established by the 2022 National Defense Authorization Act in response to bipartisan congressional pressure. AARO's mandate was limited by classification constraints and by its structural position within the military bureaucracy, which created inherent tensions between its investigative function and the institutional interests of the agencies it was investigating. By establishing PURSUE as a White House-coordinated, multi-agency initiative with a public-facing mandate, the executive branch has attempted to resolve this structural conflict.

However, the supersession of AARO raises its own governance questions. AARO had a defined statutory mandate and congressional oversight relationship. PURSUE, as an executive initiative, is more directly dependent on the political priorities of the current administration. If political will shifts, the rolling release commitment could be suspended without statutory recourse.

The long-term institutional sustainability of the PURSUE transparency model therefore remains uncertain.

7.2 The No-Clearance Access Model and Democratic Accountability

The decision to make 108 partially redacted case files available without any security clearance requirement represents a genuine democratization of UAP data. For the first time, independent researchers, journalists, citizen scientists, and foreign governments can access primary source documentation of encounters that were previously accessible only to cleared personnel. This shift has the potential to accelerate analytical progress by incorporating a broader intellectual community into the investigative process.

It also, however, creates interpretive risks. Documents stripped of classified context may be misread; redacted sections may be presumed to contain confirming evidence that in fact does not exist. The PURSUE framework does not include a public analytical companion to guide interpretation of the released materials, leaving the epistemological work of sense-making to an uncoordinated public. This gap between disclosure and comprehension represents a significant challenge for the initiative's stated commitment to allowing 'the American people to decide.'

7.3 International Dimensions and the Greek and African Encounters

PURSUE's inclusion of encounters from Greece, Syria, Iraq, the Indo-Pacific, and Africa marks a significant expansion of the geographic scope of official U.S. UAP acknowledgment. These international cases suggest that the phenomena documented in the archive are not geographically bounded by American airspace — a conclusion with implications for both the scientific interpretation of the phenomena and for international diplomatic and security frameworks.

The African airspace encounter, involving a U.S. military operator's sudden observation of a fast-moving speck, illustrates the particular challenge of UAP documentation in lower-surveillance environments. Unlike domestic U.S. encounters, which may benefit from dense sensor networks and rapid follow-up investigation, international encounters often depend on single-observer testimony with limited instrumental corroboration. PURSUE's inclusion of such cases implies a commitment to documenting the full geographic distribution of the phenomena rather than restricting release to the most instrumentally well-documented events.

7.4 White House Statement and the Extraterrestrial Question

Perhaps the most significant policy dimension of PURSUE is the explicit framing provided by White House Spokeswoman Anna Kelly, whose statement accompanying the release referenced the goal of 'disclosing information on alien and extraterrestrial life.' This language — deployed in an official government communication rather than in the informal statements of advocates or whistleblowers — represents a categorical departure from seventy years of official refusal to entertain the extraterrestrial hypothesis in institutional contexts.

The statement does not assert that any of the PURSUE-documented cases constitute confirmed evidence of extraterrestrial origin. But by naming extraterrestrial and alien life as explicit objects of the disclosure mandate, it legitimizes the hypothesis as a subject of serious government inquiry and public discussion. This rhetorical shift may prove more consequential in the long run than any single document in the PURSUE archive.

8. Critical Assessment: Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

The PURSUE initiative represents a genuine and historically significant step toward governmental transparency on UAP phenomena. Its strengths are substantial: multi-agency coordination, a no-clearance public access model, a rolling release commitment, inclusion of cases from multiple decades and geographic regions, and an explicit acknowledgment of extraterrestrial life as a legitimate subject of inquiry. These features collectively distinguish PURSUE from its predecessors in terms of institutional seriousness and scope.

Its limitations are equally real. The partial redaction of 108 cases limits the analytical utility of the released materials. The absence of a comprehensive analytical framework or official scientific interpretation leaves the epistemological work to an uncoordinated public. The political contingency of an executive initiative — as opposed to a statutory program — introduces uncertainty about long-term institutional commitment. And the fundamental challenge that has characterized UAP research throughout its history persists: the phenomena documented in the archive remain genuinely unexplained, and explanation is not guaranteed to follow from disclosure alone.

Future directions for research and policy suggested by the PURSUE release include: the development of standardized, publicly available analytical protocols for UAP case file assessment; the establishment of independent scientific review panels to evaluate released materials; international diplomatic engagement to incorporate the UAP encounters from allied and partner nation airspaces into a coordinated research framework; and continued legislative action to ensure that future releases are governed by statutory mandate rather than executive discretion alone.

The Truth Social initiative referenced in the PURSUE documentation — framed as a vehicle for 'maximum disclosure' — introduces social media platforms as distribution mechanisms for classified material releases, a development that will require careful attention to the risks of decontextualization, misinformation amplification, and politically motivated interpretation.

9. Conclusion

The PURSUE initiative of May 8, 2026 constitutes the most significant act of governmental UAP disclosure in American history and, arguably, in the history of any government. Its 162-file Release 01 archive spans eighty years, multiple continents, and an institutional range extending from the FBI to NASA to the Department of War. It documents encounters from the lunar surface to active conflict zones, from trained military observers to civilian drone operators, and from the Cold War era to the weeks preceding its release.

What PURSUE does not do is resolve the fundamental question it implicitly raises: what are these phenomena? The 108 unresolved cases in Release 01 remain unresolved — their inclusion in the PURSUE archive is an act of acknowledgment, not explanation. The epistemological gap between disclosure and understanding is enormous, and filling it will require sustained scientific, institutional, and international effort over years or decades.

Nevertheless, the act of disclosure itself is transformative. Governments do not release information they have classified for decades without institutional cost. That the United States executive branch, through multiple cabinet-level agencies, has committed to a rolling program of UAP declassification signals a recognition that the cost of continued concealment now exceeds the cost of transparency. What the American people — and the global scientific community — choose to make of that transparency will shape the course of UAP research for the foreseeable future.

For researchers in artificial intelligence, aerospace science, national security studies, and the philosophy of science, the PURSUE files represent a primary source archive of extraordinary richness and complexity. Their systematic analysis, conducted with methodological rigor and epistemic humility, offers the best available path toward understanding phenomena that have defied explanation for eighty years. That work has now, at last, been made possible.

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