

Inconclusive Is Not a Belief: UAP Videos, Pilot Testimony, and the Discipline of Evidence

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Part I — The False Choice Between “Aliens” and “Balloons”

The public debate around UAP usually collapses into a false choice. One side is accused of seeing alien technology everywhere. The other side often rushes to attach familiar labels — balloon, bird, flare, drone, parallax, aircraft, sensor artifact — as if naming an ordinary object were the same thing as demonstrating that it fits the case.

Both approaches fail for the same reason: they move faster than the data.

The recent war.gov/PURSUE UAP release makes this problem very clear. The official archive describes the materials as unresolved cases, meaning that the government is unable to make a definitive determination about the nature of the observed phenomena. The same official language recognizes that this can happen because of insufficient data and invites private-sector analysis, information, and expertise.

That should be the starting point.

These videos do not prove alien technology. They do not prove something extraordinary. They do not prove non-human intelligence. But that does not automatically turn them into evidence for a specific ordinary explanation either.

Absence of evidence for “alien tech” is not positive evidence for “balloon.” Absence of proof for something extraordinary is not proof of a flare, a bird, a drone, or parallax. It only means that the extraordinary claim has not been demonstrated. The next step is not to fill the gap with the most comfortable ordinary label. The next step is to ask what the data can actually support.

That is where much of the public debunking culture loses discipline. It often treats “possible” as if it were “probable,” and “probable” as if it were “demonstrated.” But a possible explanation is only a candidate. A probable explanation requires constraints. A demonstrated explanation requires reconstruction.

When a public video lacks range, altitude, platform track, platform speed, heading, calibrated field of view, wind at the relevant altitude, sensor mode, tracking metadata, line-of-sight geometry, and telemetry, the honest answer is not “alien.” But it is also not “therefore balloon.”

The honest answer is: inconclusive.

Part II — Proof of Concept Is Not Reconstruction

A proof of concept has a legitimate role. It can show that a mundane scenario is visually possible. It can refute a claim such as: “this could not possibly have an ordinary explanation.” That is useful.

But a proof of concept cannot, by itself, identify the actual object or reconstruct the actual event.

A simulation requires data. If the purpose is only to say “a mundane setup could produce something visually similar,” then a rough simulation may be enough. But if the claim is “this specific video is probably a balloon,” or “this specific case is parallax,” then the standard changes completely.

Now the simulation needs real inputs: range, altitude, platform track, platform speed and heading, calibrated field of view, wind at altitude, sensor mode, line-of-sight geometry, tracking metadata, and telemetry.

Without those, the simulation is not a reconstruction. It is a possible story.

That distinction matters. A person can simulate a bright dot drifting across an infrared frame and make it look like a balloon. Another person can simulate a flare. Another can simulate parallax. Another can simulate a reflection. The visual match may be interesting, but it is not decisive unless the scenario matches the actual constraints of the event.

This is especially important in infrared or FLIR-type footage. Brightness is not ordinary brightness. Shape can be distorted by sensor processing, bloom, focus, range, polarity, and contrast settings. Apparent motion can be caused by the target, the observing platform, the sensor, the gimbal, stabilization, zoom, lock loss, reacquisition, or a combination of these. A “trail” may be thermal, optical, processing-related, atmospheric, or simply a function of background contrast.

So the question is not: “Can I imagine a mundane setup that resembles this video?”

The question is: “Can I show that this mundane setup fits this specific event?”

Those are not the same.

The Naval Postgraduate School text cited in this debate reinforces this point. It says that UAP are a real domain-awareness challenge; that some cases can be resolved conventionally; that others remain unresolved because information is incomplete, ambiguous, or insufficiently instrumented; and that reducing uncertainty requires calibrated sensors, standardized data architectures, rigorous analytic processes, and proper scientific methodology. It also emphasizes that conventional explanations cannot simply be assumed adequate without rigorous analysis.

That is exactly the point: ordinary explanations may be correct. But they must still be demonstrated.

Part III — Why Aviation Is the Right Analogy

Aviation is useful here because aviation does not run on impressions. It runs on disciplined interpretation of data.

In aviation, what a pilot sees matters. But what a pilot sees is always checked against instruments, geometry, altitude, speed, heading, wind, distance, radar, traffic information, and operational context. Apparent motion can deceive. Scale can deceive. Visual perception can deceive. That is why aviation culture does not treat visual impressions as final conclusions.

Aircraft accident investigation follows the same discipline. The goal is not to choose the explanation that feels most common. The goal is to determine the cause, or contributing factors, from evidence. And the reason is practical: prevention.

When an aviation investigation reaches a conclusion, the findings matter to pilots, manufacturers, operators, regulators, and flight-safety authorities because the objective is to prevent the same accident from happening again. If the data are insufficient, investigators do not simply fill the gap with the most ordinary-sounding explanation. They say the evidence is insufficient.

That is not weakness. That is method.

The disappearance of Varig Flight 967 is a useful historical example. The Boeing 707 cargo aircraft disappeared over the Pacific in 1979 after departing Tokyo/Narita toward Los Angeles. Aviation accident records describe the case as a disappearance en route east-northeast of Tokyo. More broadly, the case remains a reminder that when wreckage, recorders, bodies, and a complete evidentiary chain are missing, the cause cannot be technically reconstructed with finality.

That does not mean “anything is possible.” It means the available data are insufficient for a final conclusion.

The same discipline should apply to UAP analysis.

A proof of concept may be useful. A prior may be useful. A common explanation may rank high on a hypothesis list. But without the actual constraints of the event, it is not a reconstruction, and it is not a case-specific identification.

The issue is not taboo.

The issue is method.

Part IV — Pilot Testimony Is Not Proof, But It Is Not Disposable

There is another problem in this debate: the casual dismissal of pilots.

Pilots are not infallible. Nobody serious should claim that. Pilots can misperceive, misjudge distance, misread motion, overestimate speed, underestimate range, or interpret an unusual sight through incomplete information. Human perception is fallible, and aviation knows that better than almost any profession.

But the opposite error is just as bad: treating pilot testimony as worthless because pilots can be wrong.

That is not scientific skepticism. That is overcorrection.

The problem is not proposing a bird, balloon, flare, drone, aircraft, or parallax hypothesis. Those are legitimate hypotheses when the facts support them.

The problem is treating trained pilots as if their observations can be casually dismissed by naming a mundane possibility without showing that it fits the case.

As someone from aviation, this honestly bothers me. I know what pilot training means: constant evaluations, simulator checks, operational discipline, instrument discipline, crew resource management, and the responsibility that comes with sitting in the captain’s seat with

lives on board. Pilots are not infallible, but their observations are not casual entertainment either.

A pilot's report is not conclusive proof.

But it is evidence.

And treating it as something banal, without method, without reconstruction, and without confronting the actual data, is not skepticism. It is poor analysis.

If a bird hypothesis is being proposed, then show the work: range, scale, altitude, line-of-sight geometry, platform motion, wind, apparent angular speed, sensor behavior, radar context, timing, and consistency with the witness testimony.

Without that, it is not analysis.

It is just reducing professional observations to a convenient label.

This is also why Ryan Graves's congressional testimony matters. He made the same point directly: military aircrews and commercial pilots are trained observers whose lives depend on accurate identification and who are reporting these phenomena.

That does not make every pilot report correct. It makes every serious pilot report worthy of disciplined attention.

Pilots such as Terauchi, Coyne, Fravor, and Graves should not be treated as children who cannot distinguish stars, planets, meteors, or ordinary aircraft from something they cannot explain. That does not mean their interpretations are automatically right. It means their observations deserve more than ridicule.

Captain Kenju Terauchi's JAL 1628 case is contested, and skeptics have proposed conventional explanations. But the FAA-related record reflects that Terauchi reported visual contact, aircraft altitude, Mach number, radar indications, relative distance, maneuvers, and communications. Whether one ultimately accepts or rejects his interpretation, the case is not responsibly handled by simply saying, "pilots can be wrong." The correct approach is to audit the data, the radar, the geometry, the communications, and the possible conventional explanations.

The Coyne helicopter incident is another historical example where the pilot and crew were not random observers. The CUFOS report describes a U.S. Army Reserve helicopter crew near Mansfield, Ohio, reporting an encounter with an unidentified lighted object, with an estimated observation time of roughly 300 seconds and alleged radio, instrument, and flight anomalies. The report also emphasizes the technical competence and credibility of the four airmen witnesses, while still attempting to analyze possible explanations.

David Fravor's 2004 "Tic Tac" account is also not a casual story from an untrained observer. In his House Oversight statement, Fravor described a white object, the loss and reacquisition of visual contact, radar information from the USS Princeton, and his view that the object's performance was far beyond what he knew from his operational experience. Again, that does not prove non-human technology. But it does mean the testimony deserves careful treatment.

The right standard is simple:

Pilot testimony is not conclusive proof.

But trained pilot testimony is evidence.

It must be tested, not mocked.

Part V — The Standard Should Be the Same for Every Hypothesis

The debate should not be “believers versus debunkers.” That framing is intellectually weak. The real divide is between people who apply a consistent evidentiary standard and people who do not.

If someone claims alien technology, ask for the data.

If someone claims balloon, ask for the data.

If someone claims flare, ask for the data.

If someone claims bird, drone, aircraft, parallax, reflection, exhaust trail, or sensor artifact, ask for the data.

The standard does not change because the explanation sounds ordinary.

Common things are common. That is true. Balloons exist. Birds exist. Flares exist. Drones exist. Aircraft exist. Sensor artifacts exist. Parallax exists. These explanations should absolutely be high on any hypothesis list.

But a prior is not a conclusion.

A prior tells us where to start. Evidence tells us where we can finish.

The mistake is to say: “Because balloons are common, this is probably a balloon.” That may be a reasonable suspicion. It may be a useful starting point. But unless the hypothesis is tested against the actual constraints of the case — range, altitude, wind, platform motion, field of view, sensor mode, line-of-sight geometry, tracking data, and telemetry — it remains an extrapolation.

Extrapolation is not identification.

The same applies to extraordinary claims. If someone says a redacted infrared video proves non-human technology, the response should be direct: where is the evidence? Where is the data? Where is the chain of reasoning? Where is the reproducible analysis?

But once that extraordinary claim is rejected, one does not get to replace it with an ordinary claim that is equally unsupported by case-specific data.

That is not skepticism.

That is filling the evidentiary gap with a preferred conventional label.

A disciplined approach would say:

This video does not prove alien technology.

This video also does not publicly demonstrate balloon, flare, bird, drone, parallax, or sensor artifact.

The case remains unresolved because the public data are insufficient.

That is not a marketing strategy. It is not mystery-mongering. It is not “holding out for the 1%.” It is simply the discipline of evidence.

In aviation, engineering, intelligence analysis, and science, possible scenarios matter. Proofs of concept matter. Priors matter. But they do not replace case-specific data.

A possible scenario may refute impossibility.

It does not establish actuality.

A common explanation may deserve priority.

It does not become demonstrated merely because it is common.

And a pilot report may be fallible.

It does not become disposable merely because it is inconvenient.

The honest answer, when the necessary data are missing, is not “alien.” It is not “balloon.” It is not “case closed.”

The honest answer is:

Inconclusive — pending the data required to test the hypotheses.

Conclusion — Method Before Labels

Possible is not probable; probable is not demonstrated; demonstrated is not resolved unless the explanation fits the evidence.

The point of this article is not to defend extraordinary conclusions. It is to defend evidentiary discipline.

The UAP debate does not need more belief. It does not need more ridicule. It does not need people rushing to either “alien technology” or “balloon” before the necessary data are available. What it needs is method.

Across the five parts of this discussion, the central standard remains the same: no hypothesis should be promoted beyond what the evidence can support. If the data refute an extraordinary claim, that claim should be rejected. If the data refute a prosaic hypothesis, that hypothesis should also be rejected. And if the necessary data are missing, the answer should not be forced into certainty. It should remain inconclusive.

This is where many self-described “analysts” fail. They often present prosaic explanations with great confidence, but without showing the data, without explaining the method, and without demonstrating how the hypothesis fits the actual constraints of the case. A balloon, a bird, a flare, a drone, parallax, an aircraft, or a sensor artifact may all be legitimate hypotheses. But they do not become technical conclusions simply because they sound ordinary.

The word “probable” is often used too casually in this debate. In science, probability is not a rhetorical shortcut. It requires evidence, constraints, likelihoods, uncertainty, and a testable model. Without range, altitude, platform track, wind, calibrated field of view, sensor mode, tracking metadata, line-of-sight geometry, and telemetry, “probably” often means nothing more than: “this reminds me of something ordinary.”

That is not analysis. That is a visual impression dressed up in technical language.

A proof of concept can be useful. A prior can be useful. Prior experience can help build a hypothesis list. But none of these replaces case-specific data. A simulation can show that a mundane setup is possible. It cannot, by itself, prove that the simulated setup is what actually happened.

This is the distinction that must be preserved: possible is not probable; probable is not demonstrated; demonstrated is not resolved unless the explanation fits the evidence.

Pilot testimony, sensor footage, official reports, simulations, and conventional hypotheses all deserve serious treatment. But serious treatment means testing them, not mocking them, not exaggerating them, and not replacing missing data with confidence.

The honest conclusion is simple:

These videos do not prove alien technology.

But they also do not justify unsupported prosaic certainty.

When the data are missing, redacted, incomplete, or insufficiently instrumented, the proper answer is not belief, ridicule, or premature closure.

The proper answer is:

Inconclusive — pending the data required to test the hypotheses.

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