

ROSS DOUTHAT

Does the U.S. Government Want You to Believe in U.F.O.s?

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By Ross Douthat
Opinion Columnist

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In U.F.O. arcana, one of the figures claiming a whistle-blower's knowledge of a secret U.S. program to reverse-engineer recovered alien technology is a man named Bob Lazar.

Here's how Lazar has told the story: As a physicist educated at M.I.T. and Caltech, he was hired by the U.S. Navy in the 1980s to work as a technician at "S-4," a subsidiary of Area 51. By his account, the facility contains nine recovered flying saucers; in addition, Lazar has claimed glimpses of alien cadavers and briefings on human contact with the Zeta Reticuli star system.

Heady stuff, this — except that Lazar isn't actually a physicist, he was never hired by the Navy, he didn't graduate from M.I.T. or Caltech, and his only possible connection to military installations is a brief stint at a contractor firm associated with Los Alamos.

So to believe his story, you have to believe that once he turned whistle-blower, the Men in Black magically erased all evidence of his résumé. Alternatively, you can just assume that Lazar is an All-American bunkum artist — an impression that his later career as a chemical salesman frequently in trouble with the law does little to dispel.

The Lazar story is a useful backdrop to the latest round of claims about secret U.S. programs involving alien technology, which just appeared in the technology website The Debrief. Useful, first, because of the familiarity — once again we have a whistle-blower claiming knowledge of long-hidden work on otherworldly crafts.

But useful, also, because of the difference. The would-be whistle-blower in this case, David Grusch, isn't touting fraudulent credentials; he's a former national-security professional who was assigned to the then-newly-created Unidentified Aerial Phenomena Task Force (lately rebooted as the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office) from 2019-22. That assignment appears to be the basis for his claims; he's operating through normal national security channels in making this report; and he has other figures with some kind of governmental background speaking in his support.

That doesn't mean that you should believe him. My general view is that the U.F.O.-encounter phenomena seems in continuity with supernatural experiences reported across the long pre-modern past — abductions into faerie realms, especially. As such, the experiences are more likely to offer evidence of either some kind of strange Jungian unconscious or of actual supernatural realms than they are to involve interplanetary visitors from Zeta Reticuli.

The possibility of literal spacecraft stashed in U.S. government hangars, meanwhile, piles up two immense-seeming improbabilities. First, that inhuman species cross oceans of space or leap interdimensional barriers using unfathomable technology and yet somehow keep crashing and leaving souvenirs behind. Second, that human governments have been collecting evidence for generations without the truth ever being leaked or uncovered or just blurted out by Donald Trump.

But this whistle-blower's mere existence is evidence of a fascinating shift in public U.F.O. discourse. There may not be alien spacecraft, but there is clearly now a faction within the national security complex that *wants Americans to think* there might be alien spacecraft, to give these stories credence rather than dismissal.

The evidence for this shift includes the military's newfound willingness to disclose weird atmospheric encounters. It includes the establishment of the task force that Grusch was assigned to. It includes the government's bizarre behavior, secretive in an attention-grabbing way, around the military shootdowns of what were presumably balloons earlier this year.

It also includes other examples of credentialed figures, like the Stanford pathology professor Garry Nolan, who claim they're being handed evidence of extraterrestrial contact. And it includes the range of strange stories being fed to writers willing to operate in the weird-science zone.

I am not a personal recipient of hints and tidbits — though my DMs are open if you have them — and I have no definite theory of why this push is happening. Maybe it's because there really is something Out There and we're being prepared for the big reveal. Or maybe the dose of Pentagon funding that Harry Reid engineered for studying the paranormal back in 2007 allowed a cluster of U.F.O. enthusiasts to infiltrate the defense establishment. Or maybe there's always a Deep State network of occult-knowledge believers — think of the Cold War experiments in psychic research — and they've just become more media-savvy lately.

Or maybe it's a cynical effort to use unexplained phenomena as an excuse to goose military funding. Or maybe it's a psy-op to discredit critics of the national security state — to make, say, Tucker Carlson look bad by persuading him to believe in aliens and then doing a debunking.

Actual aliens would be more interesting than Deep State cranks or psy-ops. But all these scenarios make for pretty strange stories about how our government operates.

So you should be following the U.F.O. beat even if you don't think aliens are out there — because the truth might be weird enough.

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Ross Douthat has been an Opinion columnist for The Times since 2009. He is the author, most recently, of "The Deep Places: A Memoir of Illness and Discovery." [@DouthatNYT](#) • [Facebook](#)

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