

'Crazy' UFO-believing Pentagon bosses missed spy craft for years

By Todd Farley and Steven Greenstreet

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The Post was right. The "UFO" story is fake news.

After a gigantic Chinese spy balloon flew over America, the mainstream media and some Congressional leaders are still looking for "aliens."

And it's now reported that the Pentagon missed several incursions of foreign spy craft for years because they were instead looking for UFOs.

How did this happen?

It seems a small group of UFO activists spent years misleading a credulous media and an oblivious Congress.

On December 16, 2017, the New York Times released a bombshell story about a Pentagon "UFO program" called the Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program (AATIP).

The Times reported that Nevada Senator Harry Reid spearheaded the creation of AATIP, which was funded with \$22 million to study strange unidentified objects flying over America's skies.

This story, unsurprisingly, went viral and UFOs became a red-hot topic overnight.

Two days after it was published, Lue Elizondo, the former Pentagon official who the Times claimed was the director of AATIP, went on CNN to talk about the otherworldly UFOs that AATIP had allegedly studied.



After publicly saying he was in charge of the US government's Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program, Lue Elizondo became a media celebrity.

To The Stars Academy

He stated these “anomalous” crafts were “defying the laws of aerodynamics” and ended his interview by announcing: “We may not be alone.”

News headlines the following day repeated Elizondo's maybe-it's-aliens announcement and sent shockwaves around the world.

Over the next five years, this now-legendary story was repeated thousands of times in the media.

Elizondo, who declined to comment for this story, would become a minor celebrity, appearing on primetime cable news, starring in a History Channel series and landing a book deal. And the UFO hysteria, which began with that one New York Times story, has now culminated with Congress taking official action to hunt UFOs.

But most of that story was false.

Elizondo has touted himself as the director of a Pentagon UFO program, AATIP, including on shows like “Unidentified,” but the Pentagon said he had “no responsibilities” with AATIP.

As exclusively reported by the Post, the Pentagon didn’t actually have an official UFO program called AATIP and Elizondo was not its director.

In 2019, the Pentagon released a statement saying Elizondo had “no responsibilities” with AATIP, a program which they also said wasn’t created to investigate UFOs.

This official statement contradicted the claims of The New York Times and Elizondo, but hardly any outlets bothered to report it.

In 2021, Elizondo filed a complaint with the DOD’s Inspector General’s office (DOD/OIG) claiming that the Pentagon denying his role with AATIP was part of a “disinformation” campaign to discredit him.

But recently released documents from the DOD/OIG state that no evidence was found to support Elizondo’s claims of any such campaign against him. Danny Sheehan, Elizondo’s lawyer, confirmed with the Post that the DOD/OIG dismissed his complaint.



Real-estate mogul Robert Bigelow owned Skinwalker Ranch, a supposed paranormal hotspot in Utah that helped lead to the creation of the Advanced Aerospace Weapons System Application Program.

AP

Elizondo did not return requests for comment.

The story starts in 2007, when a scientist at the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), James Lacatski, says he read a book about Skinwalker Ranch — a supposed paranormal hotspot in Utah that some claim is home to UFOs, ghosts, werewolves and all kinds of monsters.

After reading the book (an evidence-free compilation of spooky stories), Lacatski wrote to Robert Bigelow — the ranch's owner, a real-estate mogul and long-time believer in all things paranormal — and asked if he could visit.

Within minutes of his arrival at the ranch on a sunny afternoon, Lacatski claimed in his self-published book and on a 2021 radio interview, he saw a small, yellow apparition appear in mid-air inside a kitchen before disappearing a few seconds later.

According to his book, it was enough to convince him that something spooky was going on at Skinwalker Ranch.



Bigelow associates have described various encounters with poltergeists, flying saucers, monster owls and werewolves at Skinwalker Ranch.

The Basement Office

Lacatski then went to the home of Nevada Senator Harry Reid, a longtime friend of Bigelow's and a believer in UFOs.

Lacatski told Reid about his Skinwalker "experience" and shared his theory that UFOs, ghosts and monsters were possibly all part of the same "phenomena."

According to Reid's interview with New York Magazine, Lacatski said, "Something should be done about this. Somebody should study it." Reid agreed.

And that's how the Advanced Aerospace Weapons System Application Program (AAWSAP) was born.

But how could they convince Congress to spend taxpayer money on a Pentagon program to study ghosts and goblins? Simple. They just wouldn't mention ghosts and goblins.



Late Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid has said that mentions of UFOs and spooky occurrences at Skinwalker Ranch were omitted from the official language for AAWSAP's objective.

Bloomberg via Getty Images

When creating the official language for the program's objective, Reid told New York magazine, Lacatski intentionally left out any mention of UFOs or spooky things at Skinwalker Ranch.

AAWSAP's objective, as drafted by Lacatski, was to use current technology trends to predict what types of aerospace technology foreign adversaries might have in the year 2050.

In August 2008, the Pentagon awarded the program's \$22 million contract to the sole bidder: Bigelow, owner of Skinwalker Ranch and a financial supporter of Reid's political career.

From 2009-2010, led by James Lacatski at DIA, the Bigelow AAWSAP contractors chased UFOs around the world and hunted monsters at Skinwalker Ranch.

In his book about the program, Lacatski and two other Bigelow associates describe various encounters with poltergeists, flying saucers, monster owls and werewolves.

In one instance, while walking around the ranch in the middle of the night, the three claim they encountered a half-dinosaur, half-beaver creature. The investigators say they had cameras — but forgot to snap a picture of the beast as it slowly walked by them.

According to Lacatski, he kept all this a secret from officials at the Pentagon because he feared the program would be shut down.

“They had no idea I was running Skinwalker Ranch. They had no idea whatsoever,” Lacatski bragged during a rare public interview in 2021.

But once the AAWSAP contractors began submitting paranormal reports to the Department of Defense, the cat was out of the bag.

Publicly, the Pentagon stated it had “concerns” and deemed the reports “of limited value.” But behind the scenes, there was shock and outrage.



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AP

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Fearing AAWSAP was on the chopping block, Sen. Reid submitted a Hail Mary request that the program be made top secret, thus protecting it from naysayers.

But in his request letter, Reid didn’t say “AAWSAP” — apparently because Pentagon officials were now upset about “AAWSAP.”

Instead, Reid referred to the embattled program with a “made up” nickname: AATIP.

Reid’s request was denied and AAWSAP (nicknamed AATIP) was shut down in 2012.

But in 2017, long-time UFO activist Leslie Kean pitched a story to the New York Times about a Pentagon UFO program called “AATIP” and Lue Elizondo, the guy who ran the program.



Leslie Kean (left, with Elizondo), who co-authored the Times article, admitted to a Showtime documentary crew that her objective with the article was “getting people to accept [UFOs]” and to “try to get credibility for the topic.”

Leslie Kean/ Facebook

The Times ran the story — but with no mention of AAWSAP, or James Lacatski, or ghosts and werewolves at Skinwalker Ranch.

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But, according to former AAWSAP contractor Colm Kelleher, Kean left out 97% of the true story. (Kean declined to comment.)

In February 2023, the Pentagon confirmed to the Post that AATIP was just a nickname for AAWSAP, a non-UFO program which shut down in 2012.

Quoting then-Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence James Clapper, the DOD states, “The AATIP that Senator Reid refers to is officially the Advanced Aerospace Weapon System Application Program (AAWSAP).”



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Getty Images

As for any official UFO program,” the Pentagon has stated it didn’t even have one prior from 2007 to 2018.

So AATIP, a Pentagon UFO program that never officially existed, and Elizondo, the man who officially wasn’t its director, stole the limelight for five years.

Meanwhile, the jilted and uncredited members of AAWSAP refused to give up their quest for aliens and monsters and were working quietly behind the scenes to move the paranormal needle.

In 2018, some of the first Pentagon officials to brief Congress on these so-called UFOs were former members of AAWSAP.

Among them was Eric Davis, a former AAWSAP contractor who had cited psychic spoon bending in a paper written for the Air Force. A celebrity in UFO circles, Davis told Congressional leaders that some UFOs were “off-world vehicles not made on this Earth.”

This obviously sent some elected officials into a tizzy. And the media — informed by former members of AAWSAP — ate it up.



Jay Stratton — who believes the ghosts and creatures of Skinwalker Ranch are real — officially headed up the Pentagon investigations for years.

Getty Images for A+E Networks

Documents released via the Freedom of Information Act reveal that AAWSAP/Skinwalker Ranch alum Jay Stratton provided UFO information to a Pentagon press office responsible for crafting official statements to the media.

And who was in charge, during the Trump administration, when the Pentagon created a UFO Task Force to investigate incursions of unknown objects over America?

Stratton — who believes the ghosts and creatures of Skinwalker Ranch are real — officially headed up these Pentagon investigations for years.

The “chief scientist” of this Pentagon task force was Travis Taylor, who is and was a co-star of “Ancient Aliens” on the History Channel. He currently stars on “The Secret of Skinwalker Ranch” on the same network.

Among his many paranormal claims, Taylor believes a Skinwalker poltergeist chopped off one of his chickens’ heads. (Taylor declined to comment.)

Stratton and Taylor’s Pentagon Task Force was charged with identifying things like Chinese spycraft flying over American airspace. But reportedly, and perhaps unsurprisingly, they only saw “UFOs.”

In a new Washington Examiner piece, national security reporter Tom Rogan writes that Stratton’s Pentagon UFO task force “was diverting government resources to researching truly unconventional UFOs at the expense of addressing Chinese balloons” and that Jay Stratton “was reluctant” to confront the balloon problem.

A former DOD official, who worked with the task force and spoke to The Post on the condition of anonymity, said Stratton was “a complete nutjob” and that most of what the task force did was a “complete and utter waste of money.”

The official claimed Stratton would talk about “the wolf man stalking his house” and other spooky stories stemming from Skinwalker Ranch.

Shocked and fed up, the source and others protested about their “crazy” boss to Pentagon brass.