

## [Transcript] Plain English with Derek Thompson / UFOs and Aliens and Drones and Balloons: Understanding the U.S. Sky Wars

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Today  
Why the US keeps shooting stuff out of the sky and a reality check on UFOs  
Ever since a big white Chinese balloon floated across the ocean and into US airspace  
The United States has now shot down four objects over North American skies  
The first one that balloon has landed in the waters off the coast of South Carolina. We are currently  
Harvesting its exploded remains for information about Chinese surveillance technology  
As for the other three well, we don't know much  
The scattered remains are littered in the Arctic Ocean the Yukon territories the Great Lakes and  
The government has not been  
entirely forthcoming  
The head of NORAD said the military didn't fully understand the propulsion system allowing these  
objects to stay in the air  
That's a little weird  
and into that vacuum of weirdness and uncertainty  
Conspiracy theories are flooding  
What isn't the government telling us what kind of technology is floating around American skies? Is it  
American? Is it Chinese?  
Is it human?  
My personal take on UFOs is a little bit like my position on God. I  
know that sounds weird, but give me 30 seconds to unweird it. So I'm an agnostic reformed Jew. I  
Don't know that I fully believe in God. I'm questioning  
But I also don't think anyone can be reasonably positive that God doesn't exist  
For the simple reason that we haven't looked everywhere. We haven't explained everything  
Yes, you can go back through time and show that many things that we associated with God were  
eventually explained by science  
We thought God made this the sunrise and the moon and the stars  
we thought people could be possessed by angels and demons and then we discovered gravity and  
and telescopes and the solar system and  
psychosis  
So as we whittled away at God claims a certain person could go through history and say well  
We use science and theories of a deterministic universe to explain the supernatural. So that's  
evidence that there is no higher power  
But that's not rational just because  
previous supernatural phenomena have eventually been explained by science

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doesn't mean that every phenomenon is explainable if you find a thousand white swans  
You haven't proved that black swans don't exist and  
That's how I feel about UFOs  
We have many many many many historical reasons to be skeptical of UFO claims in our episode a few weeks ago on conspiracy theories  
We talked about all these government programs in the last 70 years where the government would experiment with aerial technology  
The public would either see or recover some of that aerial technology and the government wouldn't say much  
And it would allow the public to think this was a UFO when in fact the government was just serving a geopolitical end  
They were trying to keep secret projects out of the public eye  
And if you think that sounds like a conspiracy theory or tin-hatted  
look up  
projects blue book  
But you take this history of debunking possible UFOs and what does it actually add up to?  
Like just because previous UFOs have been explained by humans and science  
Doesn't mean that every unidentified flying object is of our world  
Again, if you find a thousand white swans, you haven't proved that black swans don't exist  
Maybe you just haven't found what's really out there  
So to tell the full story here from the balloon to the aerial shootout to the UFO freak out  
From the real story of Roswell's flying saucer to today's alien watch dogs. We've got two guests  
Coming up first is former Atlantic correspondent and sub-stack writer James Fallows on the Chinese spy balloon and its  
aftermath and then we've got science writer and noted  
extraterrestrial skeptic mcwest talking about UFOs UAPs  
aliens and  
evidence  
I'm Derek Thompson. This is plain English  
Jim Fallows welcome back to the show  
Derek, it's always a pleasure and honor to speak with you  
I want to start by taking us back a few weeks to the Chinese spy balloon that kicked off this whole trend of America  
shooting stuff out of the sky, you know as much about China and  
Chinese-American relations as anybody that I know  
Give me your summary of what you think happened here  
So the reaction on the US side to which I had immediate and total skepticism was the idea that this was some Chinese  
Provocation they were giving the middle finger to the US  
They were showing their greatness  
Etc. Etc. And it seemed to me the much more likely explanation given everything  
That seems to be true about China and true about this kind of aerial device is that this was a screw-up and the question was at

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What level was a screw-up? Was it something that happened with the winds just at the very tactical level?

Was it somebody within the People's Liberation Army who had some big idea that they were going to do something about the

You know to sort of taunt the United States

Was it something was it a miscalculation the various highest level of Chinese leadership saying okay?

We're gonna show a new thing we can do there are instances of all those things in past Chinese history

But mainly it seemed to me this was going to make China end up looking clownish as I think it did And so at what level did the clownishness as opposed to the menace start on the Chinese side?

it's certainly possible that the level at which the

Mistake began is just the direction of winds

I was fairly persuaded by one of your reports in your sub-stack that you look at wind currents and the

Weather patterns that were present in North America at the time including a little bit of a polar vortex

And that might be sufficient to explain how a Chinese spy balloon that might have been a legitimate Chinese spy balloon trying to take pictures of something in Guam or who knows what

Flew off course and ended up in Montana. Tell us a little bit about how the winds might have played a key role here

So there's a there's a general point about winds and the way they would affect this u.s.

And Chinese surveillance which is that the way the winds blow around the earth which is almost everywhere in the Northern Hemisphere

West to East means that it's very easy for

Countries on the Pacific like China or Russia to send balloons across the u.s.

Or Canada because that is where the wind would take them

And it's very difficult for the u.s.

To do that with China because you'd have to be launching them around Moscow or someplace

They have the wind blow them over China and get them over Tibet and all the rest

So it was not surprising that you had this drift

Westward from this, you know Montana area to South Carolina across the United States the particular anomaly

That wasn't clear on day one or two

But that lots of weather experts then wrote in was that the time when the balloon made its fateful Menacing crossing starting in Montana coincided with one of the coldest moments in recorded history on the u.s.

East Coast Coast when all this cold air from the

Canadian from the Arctic in Canada came down much further south than normal and there's been an excellent real recent series of pieces in the Washington Post where they've had both security reporters and

A meteorologist saying that it appears this balloon might have been launched someplace, you know on the

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Offshore in China and been intended for Guam and  
Something kicked it way up far north towards the Aleutian Islands  
And then something pushed it way far south down to the u.s.  
And that same thing that brought  
Temperatures of minus 100 degrees or something like that to mount Washington in  
In in doing one may have been the same mass of air that pushed this balloon down to the u.s.  
So to me that seems the most likely scenario now  
We shoot down the balloon off the coast of South Carolina and in a matter of days  
U.s. surveillance goes from seeing one balloon in the sky to seeing suddenly a  
Constellation of crazy weird flying objects that we start shooting down  
How would you explain what happened? How did our radar?  
Technologies surveillance technology go from seeing one thing to suddenly seeing all these things  
that needed to be taken down  
Well, there is of course the possibility that new things are coming from space  
And so we don't want to say that's that's impossible  
I once worked for Jimmy Carter who among his many accomplishments was sort of a UFO  
Interested  
Person it seems to me the much more likely hypothesis is that radar to work has to be tuned  
There is so much stuff that radar could be bouncing off that it's  
It's very much like if you're driving across country trying to find a radio station on your on your car  
radio  
back when there were car radios and you would have a seek or scan button it would skip around  
because there's so many very weak and  
scratchy and  
non  
Legible stations that it can't really focus on so it finds the ones that are worth looking at  
Radar works very much the same way something that I hadn't realized until I saw radar  
You know in airplane cockpits is that if you're looking at the ground many times  
It seems like there's all kinds of crap in front of you  
And it can be birds and it can be dust and it can be smoke from a forest fire can be all sorts of things  
so radar has always had to be tuned to be able to separate signal from noise and  
generally military  
Radar I said if something is moving at a velocity of zero knots  
Relative to the prevailing air and if it's so small we can hardly see it and it's made out of plastic  
So there's nothing bouncing back  
We're not going to pay attention to that because we're looking at something going 500 knots and  
made out of metal is coming from Russia  
Etc. So I think suddenly it's recalibrating and you see all these things as if you're bringing a  
microscope or a telescope or binoculars  
Into focus and seeing things that were always there just hadn't been looking for them  
It reminds me and this is not a radar analogy, but it reminds me of how  
After you watch a scary movie that involves a demon in your house  
Suddenly you become hypersensitive to all of these little creaky sounds in your house that are just a

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normal

Part of the event of living inside of a house. That's a bunch of wood put on top of more wood houses  
Creek

That is their nature, but when you are primed to be highly sensitive to those creeks

Suddenly it feels like there are just demons behind every single closet and from a sort of radar  
surveillance perspective

It seems like we were spooked. We got spooked by a balloon

We started to retune our radars to look for more demonic balloons and as a result

We ended up finding what and what might very well have been a lot more balloons

I think is is that the general picture of things? Yes

I think that's an excellent way to put it in a plain language as one might say in plain English

So yes, so there's things that have always been there

You know, there's all sorts of sorts of things in our ambient environment that we just our senses tune  
out because we know

They're always there that they're not worth paying attention to here's another sort of data point for  
people to bear in mind

One reason that weather forecasting has become as accurate as it is is that the US is putting up  
these weather balloons all over the place

There are hundreds or thousands of them per day

So if you're flying around in little planes as I've done you see these things and you just know they're  
part of the landscape

They go up they come down

Suddenly they are these ominous threats and we had a couple of days in the US of oh

The Chinese are coming with their balloons and the Chinese actually I'll just mention they went  
through an interesting sort of

Political spin cycle on their own

Initially when the US is saying oh the Chinese is are coming and they're threatening us the Chinese  
were saying sort of for lock tugging

We didn't mean this as a mistake. You can see that the wind currents

They have recently

Shifted in two ways one is to say oh the US is really beating up on us, you know

They're becoming so mean and aggressive and now they've gone back to sort of the Marco Rubio  
position, which is yes

The US is showing its weakness by overreacting to these balloons

So it's been there's been sort of dynamics on the politics of both sides

I want to keep a couple of ideas in the air one is that speaking of in the air

We just had a very strange meteorological event that blew a balloon into Montana

There was a national freak out Republicans got on Biden

He felt like he had to shoot a lot more balloons out of the sky

Americans in the absence of information about what exactly these things were started freaking out  
about aliens and we've just spooked ourselves

Into believing that we are surrounded by alien aircraft and that is one possibility

it is also the case though that we are entering a generation of

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warfare of

Military technology where these kind of aerial technologies unmanned aerial technologies things like drones

Are going to be a bigger part of the picture and it's conceivable that around the US off the coast of California may be

Potentially 60,000 feet 70,000 feet in the air. It's possible. There are

Drones and balloon type devices that are spying on us. I mean we know satellites are spying on us in in low orbit

But it might also be the case that that the drones in these kind of balloons just going to be a part of our of our

Existence for the next few years. Is that right? Oh?

I very much agree with that. I think it's it's worth distinguishing in the scenario you present

Which I think is entirely plausible, you know nations spy on each other all the time everything you're sort of putting into

Digital forms somebody is likely to intercept at some point for aerial surveillance. There are different altitudes of significance

There is very high altitude surveillance from satellites

Which are extremely precise and sophisticated for some things for for photography and all the rest and for heat signatures

There are things that are very close to the ground for example at zero feet of elevation where you have actual spies or people driving around

At a couple thousand feet couple hundred to a couple thousand feet where drones can fly. It's difficult for

Quote enemy unquote drones to operate in the u.s. Right now because they are pretty easy to To detect for the FAA and the rest so the question is what at this intermediate altitude from say 40,000 feet to

60,000 feet where these balloons go?

What else they might get and so at face value it doesn't seem that there is that much more

They might get from that altitude but conceivably, you know, there is and that's presumably what the u.s.

Is now looking for with whatever it is fishing out of the waters out of us off South Carolina, right?

Yeah, exactly

I don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater here and say that even though there are aspects of the story that are

Kind of ridiculous and the u.s.

Made-of-a-reacted and we might be having a freak out about

Balloons that are not in fact alien technology. It still is the case that there's

People who are worried might be directionally accurate about the idea

These aerial objects are going to play a larger part of our future, especially if relations between China and America continue to be

This chilly Jim Fallows. Thank you very very much

Derek it's a pleasure. Thanks. So thanks to you

That was former Atlanta correspondent and sub-stack writer James Fallows next up

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We've got the science writer and noted extraterrestrial skeptic Nick West Nick West welcome to the show. Thank you very good to be here Tell us a little bit about who you are and what you do Well, I'm an investigator of UFO videos is my main Interest at the moment my background is that I used to be a video game programmer about nearly 20 years ago now and After I retired from that industry. I just got interested in investigating all kinds of strange claims things like conspiracy theories the supernatural and UFOs and now here I am I Want to situate the story of the last week in the broader history of UFOs in America Which I guess we now have to call you AP's unidentified aerial phenomena. Let's go back to perhaps the first most famous incident in US history July 8th 1947 Roswell army airfield issues a press release saying they have recovered a flying disc which is sometimes reported as a flying saucer This Roswell incident lives on in pop culture. It has become synonymous with aliens and UFOs Remind us what we actually learned here. What actually happened in Roswell that might be Important for understanding of what's happened the last week Well, I think Roswell is a great example of what in ufology. I call the low information zone the Initial reports that came out of Roswell were very mixed You know first of all those reports of something crashing and then later there was a report of a flying saucer being recovered And then there was all kinds of conflicting information that was out there And the reason that the what all this conflicting information is that it was essentially a military event And the military is never very forthcoming about what they are actually doing. You have a very good reason and at the time Of course, it was kind of in the start of the Cold War and there were lots of concerns about Russian intelligence and finding things out and as it turns out What the Roswell event actually was was in fact a balloon. It was a crashed essentially a Like a weather balloon, but it was a scientific balloon that was used for a project called project mogul Which basically was listening for the sounds of nuclear Explosions in the atmosphere and so it's a very sensitive project. And so the military's Interest was in not revealing what was actually going on. So I think at the time they were fairly happy to let the speculation About aliens and UFOs actually run rampant. And so we just really had this Massive confusion around the event which is something that we see today with military UFO encounters And so for the last 70 or 80 years and especially during the Cold War

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This has become a theme the military isn't forthcoming and people Americans come to believe in alien UFOs not because these flying objects or Aerial phenomena use inexplicable technology But rather because they use secret technology that the government doesn't necessarily want people to know about is that right? Yeah, it's really that the government or rather the military By default will not tell you what they are doing and there are things that are probably very straightforward That can be very explained very easily that have become these famous UFO cases That we just simply don't know about because it contains something that's a little bit sensitive And it doesn't even mean it's something that's amazing. You know, a lot of the time we hear Rumors about supposed advanced technology that has been observed, but we never actually see that information and A lot of the times when it does come out what these things actually were it turns out it wasn't that advanced after all It was just something that they didn't want to talk about like they don't want to talk about the type of radar That they use for example, which is a really boring thing for most people compared to flying saucers But it's something the military wants to keep covered up. So we get this kind of This area in which rumors and speculation can grow just because the military doesn't want to talk about things that are actually fairly boring And before we get into the news of the week, I want to make a point that might be obvious to many people explicit You would agree that two things can be simultaneously true. On the one hand, the government can be consistently Unforthcoming if that's a word the government can consistently lie or withhold information from the public which increases the public's belief that there are UFOs that are not actually alien technology At all. They're either US technology or maybe some other country's technology that we don't necessarily want to share with the public That can be true. But also it can be true that aliens exist, that extraterrestrial intelligence exists, that at some point in the last year, 50 years, a thousand years We have been visited by alien aircraft that we either didn't pick up or perhaps did see and don't fully understand that we saw, right? These two things can both be true. Yes Absolutely. There's nothing about the absence of evidence that proves definitively that we haven't been visited by alien visitors It could well be that perhaps they've come once or twice, a very small number of times It does seem though that the absence of evidence, the lack of good photographs, good videos or highly corroborated eyewitness testimony does indicate that they're not very common if they are visiting



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If alien spaceships were in fact whizzing around every single day, then we would eventually expect to see them

But yes, it's entirely possible. It's entirely possible. You can't rule it out that the aliens may well have visited us

Aliens may well be visiting us right now and just be very, very stealthy about what they are doing

But the real point here is that there isn't any good evidence of that

And many of the things that we assume to be evidence upon investigation can turn out to be explained by, oh, that's a glare or oh, that's a balloon

And we will get to some examples of that, but let's dive right into the news of the week

The government once again in the last week after shooting down these three other objects has been less than forthcoming

What do we know for sure as of Thursday afternoon about what these objects we've shot down are?

Well, we know very much about the first object, which is this very large balloon

We know that it was a Chinese balloon. The Chinese admitted as such and we know that it had surveillance equipment on it

So we know it was essentially a spying balloon. We think that it was originally heading for Hawaii or Guam

And it got blown off course and it was not actually intentionally sent over the United States

And we know that, you know, a large balloon like that is not very stealthy. It's something you could basically see with the naked eye as a white dot

And certainly through binoculars and that it's something that would have shown up on radar. So it wasn't a stealthy spy balloon

We know then that after that we had three other incidents, all of which appear to be consistent with balloons

And have been described by various people, including Chuck Schumer as being balloons

We know that they move at airspeed. They just drift along. They're not transmitting anything

And we know that at least one of them looked like a Mylar balloon

It was kind of described as being a silvery balloon with a small payload underneath it

Which is probably something like a Pico balloon, which is a hobbyist radio balloon

Where they try to send the radio as far around the world as they can

So this may well have been something that's been around the world twice and just happened to be flying over Yukon at the time it was shot down

And I think we also know that it's perhaps a bit of an overreaction

We spent a lot of money shooting down these balloons

Now the first one you could make an argument that is justified, we want to recover this surveillance equipment

But the other three do not appear to have any real justification for shooting them down

There are lots of balloons in the air. There are lots of other objects in the air like large birds that we don't shoot down all the time

That provide about the same threats to aviation

But we still spent about a million dollars shooting down each of these three balloons

Which is perhaps an overreaction

In the days after we shot down these UAVs, maybe they were balloons

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Representative Jeff Jackson, North Carolina, published his own report of what he understood. He said that the three UAVs that have been shot down since that initial Chinese balloon were all fundamentally different from the spy balloon.

They were flying much lower, about 20,000 to 30,000 feet above the ground rather than the first balloon.

Which reached an altitude of about 60,000 feet, almost twice as high as a typical domestic airline would fly.

He also said that while one of them had a shape and size that was consistent with the balloon.

The other two were more like the size of an ATV or a four-wheeler, which means they're small and they're hard to see.

Have those initial reports been corrected or are you describing something that is consistent with Representative Jackson's reports?

Yeah, that size of an object, something about the size of a smaller car is what a pilot might describe the size as being.

Balloons are very hard to judge their size.

All you've got essentially is a sphere that you can see in midair.

And you don't know how far away it is and you're zipping along at 300 to 500 plus miles per hour in your fighter jet.

You can't actually get too close to it for fear of collision.

So you've got basically this small thing off in the distance, very, very difficult to judge exactly how big it is.

And a lot of these balloons, like hobbyist balloons, are of a size about three feet in diameter.

Whether balloons get quite a bit larger, but still not that much larger than say a small SUV, for example.

But yes, this is certainly consistent with just regular balloons of the wide variety of types that we expect to see in the air.

And very different obviously from the initial balloon, which was 200 feet wide.

We're talking about things that are much smaller, perhaps just a few feet wide.

We have very good theories about where these balloons came from.

You said that some of them are hobbyist balloons.

Can we rule out the possibility that this is just like some guy in Pennsylvania, some person in Iowa.

Who just has a fascination with balloons and radar technology that just launched something that's been floating around for a bit.

Or do we have reason to think, given this kind of equipment that they're more likely to have been launched by a foreign government?

Well, there's no other indication that there's any sophisticated equipment on these balloons.

One was described as being a metallic balloon, like a Mylar balloon with a small payload beneath it.

And that's actually suspected to be a specific balloon that someone in the United States launched.

And that went around the world and kind of came back around over the United States at that time.

And it stopped transmitting radio information at the same time that this other balloon, probably the same balloon, was shot down.

So there's a very good case to be made that it's likely this particular Pico balloon by just a radio hobbyist.

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And the other two, we don't really have any good information about what they are  
But we do know that there are literally thousands of balloons up in the sky at any one time of a large size  
And probably tens of thousands, if not more, of the smaller type  
Because party balloons get released constantly all the time  
We can't figure out exactly what they are, but there's no real reason to suspect them as being nefarious  
I think one of the politicians came out of the briefing suggesting there were things like car sales lot balloons  
Promotional balloons that might have just got loose, things like that  
That's perhaps a silly example, but it's the type of thing that does happen  
Balloons get let into the sky just for random reasons  
And there's also a lot of scientific balloons, like universities and research organizations and scientific organizations  
Release balloons to study things like upper level winds and pollution in the upper air and radio transmissions and things like that  
So there's lots and lots of benign explanations for what we might be seeing  
But of course it might also be something that was released by a foreign adversary, Russia or China  
To do things like test our defenses or test what might happen if a balloon gets blown over the United States  
And I guess they've got their answer now  
I don't have perfect information about what exactly we shot down  
You're not saying that you have perfect information about what we shot down  
But it certainly seems like if the federal government has a certain confidence or a certain degree of confidence  
That what we shot down are essentially a bunch of relatively unsophisticated balloons  
I'm not sure why that point hasn't been made more clear to the American public  
Because once again, I think the administration or the government's instinct to withhold information from the public about UAP or UFOs  
Is creating a space, creating a vacuum into which conspiracy theories are running  
But maybe just one announcement from President Biden that says, look, we shot down this Chinese balloon  
We had a conversation with the Chinese government and said, be careful about your balloons being swept into U.S. airspace  
Even if it's by wind  
We changed the way that we're using our radars  
We got more noise compared to signal  
We shot down some stuff that we don't think you should be worried about  
Please everyone get on with your lives, hug your family, have your dinner, go to the movies  
This is not one of the 1,000 most important things for you to care about  
Again, we don't have all the information  
So maybe there's a very good reason why the government hasn't done that  
But it seems to me the government should have done that

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I think they kind of largely have, it's just kind of a mixed message that is coming out  
I think there's a degree of, you know, they overreacted after the first balloon  
And they started shooting down every single thing that popped up on the new newly configured radar  
And if they continued doing that, they'd be shooting down like a couple of balloons every single day  
Billions of dollars a year shooting down a bunch of escaped used car lot balloons  
So I think they probably realized that those three balloons were a bit of an overreaction  
And they've probably detected a bunch of more balloons since then  
And decided just to let them go on their merry way  
Because they really are not a threat to aviation  
Because it's a very big sky and balloons and planes are very small  
And the challenges of collision are vastly smaller than probably hitting a flock of birds  
And I think they basically said, don't worry about it, it's not aliens  
There's nothing to be concerned about, there's no threat to the American public  
They just haven't really given the full accounting of exactly what happened  
And I think partly that's because they're reluctant to do so  
They can use the excuse that it was a threat to aviation  
But that's really not a particularly good one for spending a million dollars  
Every time you detect a balloon flying over the country  
In the last few years, you've published a lot of articles and YouTube videos  
Debunking various famous sightings  
Sightings that might be more likely to be inexplicable  
And more likely to be extraterrestrial certainly than a couple balloons that have fallen now  
In the Yukon and Great Lakes  
I want to ask you about the famous gimbal video, if that's okay  
If people haven't seen this, I'd encourage them to check out the video  
It's maybe just a couple seconds long  
Just describe it briefly for those of you that don't want to stop the podcast  
The gimbal video is taken by Navy pilots, it shows a dark object  
Roughly shaped like a top or a dreidel  
Skimming over the clouds, turning over its end in a way that seems to defy aerodynamics  
Like at some point it seems to pause in midair, despite winds  
Around it that are swirling at about the equivalent of 130 miles per hour  
What do you think this video is showing?  
Well, first of all, it's an infrared video, which means it's showing heat  
It's not showing what the pilots could actually see with their naked eyes  
I think what it's showing is a distant hot object  
Possibly something like a distant jet plane that's probably about 30 miles away  
And what we actually see on the video, the shape, what you described as a dreidel  
Or a flying saucer or a spinning top, is just the glare from the hot engines  
And we know from various previous cases that when a plane is very far away  
And you train an infrared camera on it, then all you can see basically is the heat coming out of the engines

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And it spreads out in the same way as when you look at the sun  
All you can see is a giant glare, even though the sun is actually relatively small in the sky  
So we're seeing a glare of a hot engine  
And the interesting thing about it, of course, is that it appears to do this amazing rotation  
It doesn't stand on its end  
But we did some investigation of that on Metabunk, my website  
And it turns out that the rotation of the object exactly matches the rotation of the camera that is required  
Which seems like an odd thing, I mean, why is the camera rotating?  
But the way the camera is mounted, it's on one of these targeting pods  
So it looks like a little torpedo that's underneath the wing of the plane  
And it's got a camera that looks kind of like one of those pan-tilt zoom cameras that you see, security cameras  
But the way it's mounted means it can't actually track something from left to right without rotating  
So this camera actually has to rotate, and it especially has to rotate when it crosses over the forward direction  
And because it rotates, the image rotates inside the camera  
And the pilot doesn't want this rotation, he wants the picture to look like what he sees out the window  
So there's another mechanism inside the camera that just rotates the image the right way back up  
But the end result of all this rotation is that any glare that you get in the image will end up rotated  
Because the camera's rotated, but the glare doesn't rotate  
And then the derotation rotates it back, which makes the glare rotate  
It's all very complicated and kind of difficult to get a grasp on  
I want to pause here because this last point, people can actually do a home project to see what you're talking about  
If you have an iPhone or you have some smartphone, any phone with a camera  
And you are filming a glare, say coming off of a table  
And you turn that phone 360 degrees around and then stop it and watch the video  
What you'll see is that everything in the video will rotate 360 degrees  
But the glare seems to roughly stay in place, which looks like it's hovering in midair and doing something that is quite alien  
But you're saying this is simply a function of the rotating nature of the infrared camera catching a glare in the distance  
Yeah, exactly, yeah, and you can definitely see this with just a simple phone  
The simplest way to kind of duplicate the shape of the glare is just to touch the lens of your camera very gently with your finger  
And this will just create enough of a streakiness on the lens to make the glare spread out in a particular direction  
Then point your camera at something like a flashlight or a bright light bulb and just rotate it  
And you will see this effect where the orientation of the glare rotates independently from the image  
And we think that's basically what's happening with this gimbal video  
That perhaps the front window of the camera is a bit streaked from flying through clouds or

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something like that

Or perhaps there's some other thing inside which contributes to the shape of the glare

But this is a very strong mathematical relationship between the rotation of the glare and the angle that's required by the camera

And there's a bunch of other things as well

You could actually see patterns of light in the background rotate at the same time as the object rotates

And you can see little bumps before it starts to rotate which is maybe the engines of the roll mechanism kicking in

And you can see that it's actually at the start of the video when the plane banks

The object's orientation doesn't bank, but the horizon does

So it's kind of decoupled from the horizon, it's not part of the environment

All of which points to it being just something in the camera

And I think pretty much 99% of the people who have looked at it in any depth will agree that this actually is a glare

And we've heard from the Pentagon that they agree that the orientation and the rotation of this object is in fact a camera artifact

This was cited in the New York Times and in ABC News both citing unfortunately anonymous Pentagon sources

But presumably with the New York Times they vet their sources

So it was a real person from the Pentagon who basically agreeing with me

I have friends who are fascinated by the phenomena of potential UAPs and UFOs

Who still look to the gimbal video as being potentially the best possible case that we have been visited by some kind of alien technology

And I know that while everything you said sounded just so so reminded and so intuitive and persuasive

I know that they're not persuaded and one of the reasons they're not persuaded, at least as they've explained it to me

Is that we seem to have multiple pilots saying that they've seen this phenomenon on their radar from several directions

Which makes it less likely to have been a phenomenon created by a single plane's infrared camera rotating in such a way as to create this dreidel-like phenomenon

What do you say to the fact that there are still pilots who seem similarly sober-minded who are saying

I'm not persuaded by this explanation, we have multiple Navy pilot sources saying we saw something like this on this day

Well the issue there is I think it's conflating a whole bunch of different cases

This one case, the gimbal case, was seen by two pilots, the two pilots flying the plane

And they didn't see anything with their naked eye

They saw something on the radar and they say they saw a fleet of things on the radar

And then they pointed their infrared camera in that direction and then they saw this one rotating thing

And it seems like what they're pointing at is a hot object and that the rotation is part of the camera

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That doesn't tell you anything really about what the object actually is  
It still might be something interesting, it might be something like a distant plane  
Or it might be something that's closer, that's flying in a bizarre way that defies the laws of gravity still  
You can't tell, but what the explanation of the rotation does is it means that there's now a plausible, benign, mundane explanation for it  
That's a potential explanation, but it doesn't disprove the possibility that we're still looking at something amazing  
Then of course we've got all these other reports that have been happening around the same time  
If you listen to some of the people who talk about what was going on in that area on the East Coast  
They were saying they were seeing things pretty much every day  
And if you're seeing something every day, just explaining one particular case doesn't really explain anything about all the other cases  
Is there an outstanding mystery, like an unexplained mystery, an unknown that's still out there  
That is, to your mind, the most interesting puzzle to solve in this space  
Something that you haven't been able to look at and map out as you've done so expertly with the gimbal video  
And you're still like, you know, I am not a deep believer in UFOs  
I don't have a I want to believe poster necessarily in my bedroom, but this is pretty weird  
Is there an example like that too?  
I think one of the best examples is the Nimitz encounters  
And this was actually a series of events back in 2004  
And it started out with lots of strange blips on the radar  
They were described as being groups of five objects moving from north to south at 100 miles per hour  
And then there was another event when they went out to investigate what these blips were  
Where the pilots, David Fraver and Alex Dietrich, saw what they described as a white tic-tac shaped object  
Making strange movements and mirroring their movements as one went down to investigate it  
And then later on, another pilot took a video of something kind of similar to the gimbal video in a way  
Of what looks like a distant hot object  
And this is an event that has a lot of mythology built up around it  
But the simple accounts of what the pilot saw is very much a bit of a mystery  
If what they said was accurate, it's something that was kind of defying the laws of physics  
But it could well be something where that operator, observer, misperception played a large role  
And then people conflate all the different events within that  
There's the video and then there's the radar returns and then visual sightings  
If you assume those are all the same thing, it becomes really amazing  
But if you separate them out into individual things, they're small parts of the same puzzle  
But I think, for me, the biggest thing is what did the pilot see that day?  
What was this white object that seemed to be jumping around?  
Was it something like just a significant illusion with something like a balloon?

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Or was it something like a high-tech drone that had perhaps been launched from a submarine?  
Like a missile type thing that was capable of advanced maneuvering  
So that's very much unknown and it's also something we'll probably never figure out  
Until maybe 50 years when the secrecy requirement is lifted  
Because it's one of those things hidden by the military  
In June 2021, the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence released a famous report on UAPs  
And it famously came to no conclusion about what many of these phenomena were  
If it's clear to you and to others that videos like Gimbal represent  
Highlights mistaking an infrared glare for a flying object  
And it is in the interest of the government to dispel unhelpful rumors about alien aircraft  
Why didn't the DNI report come to any firm conclusion?  
Well, I think that perhaps overstates the degree to which it's in the government's interest to dispel rumors  
That's not really a priority for them  
It's not something where they follow Twitter and see what the latest talk is and then want to try to debunk it  
Their primary interest is in preserving national security  
And so that's always going to take precedence over everything else  
And they don't comment on things basically  
They've said explicitly that if they investigate something like the Gimbal video  
And they make a determination of what it is, then they will not tell us what they discover  
Because the entire incident is covered by national security  
Because of the advanced technology that is being used both in the initial event  
And subsequent investigations as well  
So their default position is simply not to tell you what they found  
With things like the Gimbal, I don't know what the object is  
So from my perspective, it's still a UFO  
It's something that's unidentified  
It's just not as special as it was previously thought to be  
It is something that could very well be of mundane origin  
It's not necessarily an advanced physics object  
Which it would be if it was actually rotating  
The metaphor that comes to mind is it's like being a detective trying to solve an already complex crime  
Where you have a certain degree of certainty that the expert witness is going to lie to you  
Because the underlying facts of the case are often very confusing  
And require a lot of technology to pull apart  
Why is a dreidel spinning in space and seeming to defy the laws of gravity?  
Maybe it's because of the nature of the infrared camera and how it's positioned on the plane  
And then as you get deeper into the story and try to really figure out what do we know about this  
Perhaps the most important source of information has no clear interest in being withholding  
Or excuse me, being transparent is withholding



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That seems to make our job and your job very difficult

Yeah, I would kind of not say that they're necessarily going to lie to you

It's more like they just don't want to talk to you

It's if you have a witness who's brought up in a culture where snitching is not a thing that you do

You just don't want to talk to the police, it's kind of like that but in reverse

The military does not want to be very forthcoming about every single thing that it is doing to the general public

It's going to avoid lying wherever possible and the best way of doing that is simply by not saying anything at all

Yeah, they've outsourced the investigation to us, the public

And I appreciate you're out there on the front lines trying to help us understand these UAP and UFOs and strange phenomena

Nick West, thank you very, very much

Thank you

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Thank you