

INTRODUCTION

In 1976, a committee of the Institut des Hautes Etudes de Défense Nationale (IHEDN) chaired by General Blanchard, of the Gendarmerie Nationale, opened the unidentified flying objects file. The objective: to make proposals for organizing research and the collection of data on these phenomena. The goal was achieved, because the recommendations of this committee were followed by the creation of the Groupe d'Etude des Phénomènes Aérospatiaux Non Identifiés (GEPAN) [Unidentified Aerospace Phenomena Study Group], the precursor to the current Service d'Expertise des Phénomènes de Rentrée Atmosphérique (SEPRA) [Atmospheric Reentry Phenomena Consulting Department], a division of the Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales (CNES), which is in charge of this file. Twenty years later, it seemed useful to us to take stock once again of the knowledge regarding these sightings, which are becoming of greater and greater interest to a large public that is often convinced of the extraterrestrial origin of UFOs. Just look at the number of films or television broadcasts on this subject.

For the sake of convenience with respect to language, we will use the term UFO (Unidentified Flying Object) generally, instead of the more scientific term UAP (Unidentified Aerospace Phenomenon).

Without a doubt, the phenomenon remains and the number of sightings, which are completely unexplained despite the abundance and quality of data, is growing throughout the world. On the ground, some sightings, like the Trans-en-Provence sighting in 1981, have been the subject of in-depth studies proving that something did in fact land on the ground and parked there. Civilian and military pilots have provided gripping visual testimonies, often corroborated by radar recordings, as was the case recently in France. In view of the lack of irrefutable proof regarding the origin of these phenomena, the need for understanding persists.

We will devote the first part of this report to several particularly remarkable French and foreign cases.

In the second part, after having recalled the current organization of the research on these phenomena in France and abroad, we will evaluate the work being done by scientists worldwide who are interested in UFOs and are proposing, as we will see, partial explanations that are based on known laws of physics.

Some of these (propulsion systems, non lethal weapons, etc.) could become realities in the short, medium and long term.

We will review the principal global explanations proposed, focusing on those that are in keeping with the current scientific data, which range from secret weapons to extraterrestrial manifestations.

The UFO phenomenon involves defense in the broad sense and calls for a certain number of measures, which we will examine in the last part:

- [providing] civilian and military pilots with sufficient information to teach them an adapted conduct when faced with these phenomena and, more generally, [providing] the public and decision-makers with information,
- developing the actions of SEPRA and promoting supplemental scientific monitoring, or even research, actions,
- considering the strategic, political, and religious consequences of a possible confirmation of the extraterrestrial hypothesis, the bizarre connotation of which it is