

kinematics were inconsistent with current physical theory, the UFOs were not likely to be from a foreign power. Further, they argued, no other planets in our solar system were believed to support life -- certainly not intelligent life -- and since even the nearest star was over four light years away, the hypothesis of extraterrestrial origin was simply unacceptable from the scientific point of view.⁽⁹⁾

The Air Force investigative effort worked as follows:⁽¹⁰⁾ Whenever a sighting was made, a report was to be made out and turned in to the Air Force at base level. The report was forwarded to Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio for study. If the report was interesting enough, follow-up inquiry was made. By 1952 the number of reports coming in was so large that the CIA was concerned that an actual attack on the country might not be immediately recognized. A panel of scientists was then convened in January 1953 to study the available evidence and see what conclusion could be reached about UFOs. After seven days of hearing evidence and discussing the matter it was concluded that there was only circumstantial evidence of the extraterrestrial hypothesis. The panel recommended a broadened study effort with full disclosure of investigations. In order to unplug the military intelligence channels, however, the CIA recommended that, since the UFOs apparently posed no threat, the Air Force should debunk UFO reports and try generally to discourage public interest in them, in the hope that they would go away.⁽¹¹⁾

It was the CIA's recommendation, apparently, that was made policy, for the investigative procedures used since 1953 have been vestigial and the handling of the subject by the authorities tended to make witnesses look ridiculous. In spite of the unfavorable publicity accorded witnesses, reports persisted, and no doubt in response to official behavior several civilian study groups were formed to receive reports and investigate sightings. The most successful of these groups is the National Investigation Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP). NICAP's membership is well dispersed geographically and acts to learn as much as possible from sightings. The large number of scientific and technical personnel in the NICAP membership aids the quality of their evaluations. A summary of characteristics of the UFO phenomenology published by NICAP