

Commentary on COMETA

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A Fake “Official Report”

A number of ufologists have attempted to present the Cometa report as a “quasi-official French document”, “a document giving a quasi-official status to the UFO Phenomenon”, published “under the auspices of an institution close to the Defense Ministry”, or “by Cometa, an association of support to the IHEDN”, and various other statements of the same kind. Even better, we learn in various UFO publications that the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister have “accepted to make the report public” or that “this strictly confidential report has been sent to the media, not without the authorization of the highest government levels.” Because, “it is evident that the decision to publish it comes from a much higher level than Cometa, an important detail that journalists have missed.”

In short, “the lid is officially lifted from a taboo subject.”

Truth is less exciting, however. The announcement presenting this as “The confidential report submitted to the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister” appears as a simple publicity gimmick on the cover of the special issue of VSD magazine publishing the document. Thus G.Bourdais, who is not always so careful, begins one of his texts with “one must underline the fact that this is an independent report, written by a private association: the Cometa.” (Gildas Bourdais, ‘Rapport Français sur les Ovnis et la Défense,’ *Contact-Ovni*, 3rd quarter 1999, p.13). A brief statement, but it already suggests certain things...

As for P.Petrakis, he provides the following information in a text entitled “Reactions” in his review of the Cometa Report (Perry Petrakis, ‘La Guerre des Mondes, version Cometa’, *Phenomena* 1999, no.42, p.17):

“To start at the top, the IHEDN (Institut des Hautes Etudes de la Défense Nationale) wants nothing to do with the Cometa report: Anything done or written by General Norlain after he left the IHEDN has been done under his sole responsibility and cannot involve the IHEDN. The Communication service of the Institute has stated that it was ‘surprised’ by the report in question. Questioned by us, the Elysée has stated it was not in a position to answer us because of the holidays. At Matignon (for non-Frenchmen, let us make it clear that the Elysée is the seat of the Presidency and Matignon that of the Prime Minister) M. Henri Petitgand, a ‘Chargé de Mission’, confirmed he had received something through the Post Office: “It is not a report in any way. Reports are requested documents, but in this case, we have not asked for anything. The document was sent to us by post, at the sole initiative of its authors.” Thus the word ‘Report’ on the cover is somewhat of an usurpation.

On January 31, 2000, in order to get my own clear view of the situation, I asked the interested parties about the status of the ‘Cometa Report’ at the Presidency, the Prime Minister’s office, the General

commanding the IHEDN and the president of Cometa. To date (3 May 2000) I have received three answers, as follows:

- By letter dated 23 February General Bastien, of the Special Staff of the President of the Republic, wrote: “To answer your question, this ‘report’ compiled by members of an association organized under the law of 1901 (ruling most non-commercial private associations in France) did not respond to any official request and does not have any special status. You will have noted (page 7) that its authors, among other pretensions, intended to inform decision-makers on this topic. It is in that spirit that a copy got sent, for information, to the President of the Republic.”
- According to Lieutenant-Colonel Pierre Bayle, head of the Communication Service of IHEDN, “The Institute for Advanced Studies in National Defense wishes to make it clear that statements made by these individuals only engage them, and them alone, and are in no way a reflection of the thoughts of IHEDN, which has no special element of information on this topic.”

Naturally one could argue that such statements are misleading, because political and military authorities know well that real UFOs exist. Yet the position statements quoted above are the only objective reality about the true status afforded to the Cometa report.

Finally, in a letter dated 18 April, Michel Algrin, spokesman for Cometa, writes that “The Cometa association is not responsible for mistakes made here or there in presenting its report. The status it attaches to the document is described within the text itself. The report was not published by a magazine, but by the press company GS Presse (which publishes VSD magazine) that was able to insure it wide distribution. Publication of the report was decided for several reasons: in particular, to avoid that misquoted versions of the text start circulating.” He concludes with: “Cometa does not wish to follow you on the polemical grounds where you place yourself. It stands on the terms of its report.”

The Text Is Not Always Relevant

If the authors of the ‘Cometa Report’ intended to show that the UFO phenomenon is worthy of attention, for natural sciences and social sciences as well as for Defense, one could agree that they have reasonably fulfilled their mission, even if this or that case description could be questioned. But if, on the other hand, they really intended to “update the knowledge about the observations” and to “take an inventory of the work performed by scientists the whole world over” as stated in the introduction (page 7) then they have missed their objective.

Many aspects of the phenomenon are not taken into account, both regarding the specific cases presented and regarding more general considerations. For instance, not a single abduction case is presented to the reader while such events represent a major component of contemporary ufology, whatever their real nature. Similarly, physical effects are mentioned too quickly, while many “hard” scientists will only become convinced that UFOs are interesting when they see concrete data, not to say material ones. Unless I am mistaken, the Pocantico colloquium only rates four lines in the Cometa report. We will find almost nothing about statistical approaches to the phenomenon (one short paragraph, not completely up-to-date), or about various kinds of ufonauts reported by witnesses, or more fundamentally about the problems posed by reports of spontaneous anomalous phenomena. And many other gaps could be noted.

When it comes to speculations about our visitors' motivations and the UFO phenomenon's implications for Defense, they mix up some interesting views with mundane statements, sometimes in a confusing way. At the same time they forget to mention many previous works. One could also be surprised at the not-so-subtle way in which the official American policy regarding UFOs is put into question, if the hope is to gain eventual collaboration from U.S. authorities.

Ufologists have been justified in denouncing a biased presentation leading to the belief that all progress in ufology, whatever its real value, only comes from the work of the U.S. military, a few official organizations such as Gepan and Sepra, and rare American private groups. As for Gepa, LDLN or Sobeps, and all the others? They are ignored.

Political Implications of the Cometa Report

More fundamentally, this report contains a major contradiction. Its authors do believe that genuine UFOs exist (in the sense of objects or phenomena radically incompatible with our present science) and that the first-degree extraterrestrial hypothesis is by far the best one to account for the phenomenon, a position I do not share but find respectable. They have developed some military, political and sociological consequences from this hypothesis. But they proceed as if they had discovered a state of affairs of which the authorities were unaware.

This does not seem credible.

If UFOs are extraterrestrial craft roaming over the Earth, then French authorities and those of any significant country, must know what is happening. They have necessarily taken certain measures (perhaps secretly) either for altruistic reasons for the good of mankind or, more egotistically, for the benefit of the country or even their own private interests. But then, how can we explain that the authors of the Cometa report have written their text precisely as if this necessary official implication did not exist? This raises a problem. Is there no official implication? That would be hard to believe, except if there are no real UFOs. Perhaps they haven't been made aware of such official implication? That would be easier to understand, but it would mean that eminent members of Cometa are not the true UFO experts they were supposed to be. Alternately, perhaps they have decided to short-circuit some existing organization of which they are aware? That would be even easier to understand but it would be akin to treason. And in that situation, why send to the President and the Prime Minister, who obviously must be well-informed, a report that pretends that they are not? On the other hand, how could they have authorized publication of a report that could be seen as high treason towards the government's official, possibly secret policy?

Anyone is entitled to his or her own answer to these questions. As for myself, I see no reason to choose any interpretation but the simplest one: There is no secret official study of UFOs in France because the government doesn't feel concerned in any way by the UFO problem. Indeed, one could answer that the very existence of Sepra (ex-Gepan) shows that authorities are interested in UFOs. Knowing that Sepra is only a tiny sub-service with a very restricted budget and extremely narrow missions under the National Center for Space Studies (CNES), however, we can observe that State authorities don't seem concerned by the UFO problem. Then, can we conclude *a contrario* that the Cometa report is further indication that true UFOs don't exist?

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