

The UFO that remains very, very 'U'

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On the morning of Friday, June 4, about 300 nautical miles south of Cocos Island, a small task force of Soviet military and civilian ships collected an object which had come from space.

The re-entry of the object and its recovery by the Russians was closely observed by a Lockheed P3C Orion patrol aircraft of the Royal Australian Air Force.

During several sweeps low over the area, the cameras and other sensors aboard the Orion captured a series of pictures, apparently in minute detail, of exactly what it was the Soviets deployed their ships to gather.

A specially equipped United States Air Force Boeing 707 electronic intelligence aircraft was also in the vicinity and may have taken its own photographs of the recovery operation.

Two days later, the RAAF issued pictures of the Soviet ships but no information about what they recovered.

Beyond the release of the pictures, no further information has been made available. Not only have the authorities since refused to release pictures of the space vehicle and its recovery but re-

space vehicle and its recovery but refused even to comment on its nature and why it might have been programmed (if

it was) to splash down to close to a relatively well-trafficked area.

Not only the Australian authorities ("at the highest level") are refusing information on the Soviet vehicle but also the US.

At the weekend the US Secretary of State, Mr Haig, disclosed that, in the period leading up to and during the "splashdown", the Soviets were testing an anti-satellite weapon or "killer" satellite.

Defence officials have refused to speculate on whether this could have been the vehicle recovered in the Indian Ocean.

A Soviet space authority denied last

week that the vehicle was connected with the Salyut program or that it was part of the Soviet space shuttle.

There never has been any reticence on the part of Western or Soviet authorities to discuss civil satellites. A good example was the much-publicised re-entry of Skylab.

If a military vehicle is involved, the authorities tend to become shy but, if that was the case, why was the recovery publicised at all and pictures issued of the recovery fleet?

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ing US Congressional committee might stumble across the June 4 details and

blurt them out, but even that seems unlikely in the face of the tight security blanket around the affair.

The Soviets do know how much the West has learned about the vehicle and the recovery operation. It is hard to ignore an Orion roaring across the sky only a few hundred feet overhead.

Australian and US military intelligence officials who "need to know" are fully aware of what it was they observed. But nobody else is intended to be let into the secret.

The secrecy is unusual because the objects of most of this sort of cloak-and-dagger intelligence are the Russians and they of course know everything about this secret they need to know.