

SECURITY POLICY ANALYSIS REPORT

Unguarded Skies: Key Assertions & Critical Questions

*A Detailed Analysis of the Daryl Johnson Interview
on UAPs, Drones, and America's Commercial Nuclear Fleet*

Subject: Aerial security vulnerabilities at U.S. commercial nuclear power plants

Primary Source: Interview with Daryl Johnson, Reality Check / NewsNation

Interviewee: Former NRC Senior Security Specialist & Author, *Unguarded Skies*

Monitoring Period Covered: 2014–2025

ANALYTICAL SUMMARY — NOT CLASSIFIED

Executive Summary

This report summarizes the key assertions and critical questions raised in an interview between host Ross of Reality Check (NewsNation) and Daryl Johnson, a former Senior Security Specialist at the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Office of Nuclear Security and Incident Response (ONSER). Johnson, who spent fifteen years (2010–2025) monitoring drone and UAP flyovers at commercial nuclear power plants and fuel cycle facilities nationwide, has documented a pattern of aerial intrusions that he considers one of the most underacknowledged security vulnerabilities in the United States today.

The interview reveals a deeply troubling picture: between 200 and 300 drone and UAP incidents over nuclear sites in the eleven years between 2014 and 2025; reporting that was voluntary — and therefore grossly incomplete — for most of that period; facilities with zero mandated aerial detection capability; security guards legally unable to counter intruding aircraft; and a regulatory culture that, according to Johnson, actively resisted his attempts to raise alarm. Several recorded incidents exhibit flight characteristics that fall outside the performance envelope of any known commercial or military drone technology.

The report is organized into four sections: Section 1 provides background on Daryl Johnson and the context of the interview; Section 2 presents all twenty-eight key assertions from the transcript, organized thematically; Section 3 distills twenty critical questions raised explicitly or implicitly by the discussion; and Section 4 offers a concluding assessment of the significance of these findings. The source material is the interview transcript itself, used verbatim as the evidentiary basis throughout.

Section 1: Background & Context

1.1 About Daryl Johnson

Daryl Johnson — Former NRC Senior Security Specialist

- **Early career:** Counterterrorism analyst with the U.S. Army, ATF, and DHS (2004–2010). Authored the 2009 DHS report on right-wing extremism — a document that was widely criticized at the time of release but whose warnings were vindicated by the January 6, 2021 Capitol attack.
- **NRC career (2010–2025):** Senior Security Specialist and Federal Security Coordinator Headquarters Program Manager, Office of Nuclear Security and Incident Response (ONSER), Division of Security Operations.
- **Primary responsibility:** Monitoring, assessing, and trending all drone and UAP flyovers at commercial nuclear reactors and fuel cycle facilities nationwide; writing annual reports to Congress; coordinating with DoD's All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO) on UAP reporting.
- **Current role:** Founder of DT Analytics; author of *Unguarded Skies: Safeguarding America's Commercial Nuclear Fleet Against UAPs and Drones of Unknown Origin*.

1.2 Context of the Interview

The interview, conducted by Ross for NewsNation's Reality Check program, took place in the context of Johnson's book publication and his retirement from the NRC in 2025. Johnson speaks as an insider: someone who personally tracked every flyover incident, drafted internal briefings, and attempted — with limited success — to push for stronger detection and reporting requirements. His perspective is therefore that of a practitioner who encountered systemic institutional resistance, not simply a policy critic from the outside.

The timing of the interview is significant. Johnson retired shortly after the NRC dissolved the very office — ONSER — that housed its nuclear security expertise. This dissolution, combined with the elimination of live force-on-force training exercises and reductions in security inspections, means that the institutional capacity he spent fifteen years building no longer exists in the form he left it. The interview is, in part, a public warning issued precisely because internal channels have been exhausted.

The book's title — *Unguarded Skies* — encapsulates Johnson's central thesis: that American commercial nuclear infrastructure, while heavily protected on the ground, is effectively open to the sky above it. What flies over these sites, who controls it, and what it intends remain, in the vast majority of documented cases, completely unknown.

Section 2: Key Assertions

The following twenty-eight assertions are drawn directly from the interview transcript. They are organized thematically to highlight structural patterns and relationships among findings. Assertion numbers correspond to their original sequence in the source material.

200–300

FLYOVERS 2014–2025

<1%

OPERATORS EVER
IDENTIFIED

~75

OPERATING NUCLEAR
PLANTS

0

MANDATED AERIAL
DETECTION SYSTEMS

THEME A — SCALE & HISTORY OF THE THREAT

1 Drones began appearing over nuclear sites in 2014. The NRC received its first formal reports of drone activity over commercial nuclear power plants and fuel cycle facilities in 2014. That year, a new drone category was added to the "protective web server" — the NRC's suspicious activity reporting system — reflecting the emergence of commercially available unmanned aerial systems as a new threat vector. The 2014 baseline is significant because it establishes the start of what became an eleven-year monitoring record under Johnson's stewardship.

2 Approximately 75 operating nuclear plants and two CAT-1 fuel cycle facilities are at risk. The U.S. commercial nuclear fleet consists of approximately 75 operating power plants, some of which have multiple reactors on a single site. Additionally, two Category 1 (CAT-1) fuel cycle facilities that produce highly enriched uranium (HEU) are considered especially sensitive targets: BWXT in Lynchburg, Virginia, and NFS in Erwin, Tennessee. CAT-1 status reflects the highest level of material security concern within the NRC's regulatory framework, making these sites of particular consequence if compromised.

5 Between 200 and 300 documented drone flyovers occurred from 2014 to 2025. Johnson estimates that approximately 200–250, and possibly close to 300, drone and UAP flyovers over commercial nuclear sites were recorded during the period he monitored. Crucially, he notes that the number was increasing every year — with 2025 representing the highest annual count ever recorded. Because reporting was voluntary for most of this period (see Assertion 3), these figures almost certainly represent a significant undercount of actual incidents.

4 The operator was identified in fewer than 1% of all incidents. Over the entire eleven-year monitoring period, fewer than one in a hundred drone flyover incidents resulted in the identification of the operator and establishment of their intent. This extraordinary gap is not merely an investigative failure; it reflects the fundamental absence of the detection infrastructure — radar, radio-frequency monitoring, acoustic arrays — that would be required to trace, track, and intercept aerial intrusions. The result is that the nature and purpose of almost every single incident recorded over the past decade remains legally and forensically unresolved.

THEME B — ANOMALOUS CHARACTERISTICS OF OBSERVED OBJECTS

6 Many observed objects exhibited characteristics beyond the performance envelope of commercial drones. Johnson catalogued multiple anomalous characteristics across the documented flyover record: objects flying at night without navigational lights (a legal requirement for manned and unmanned aircraft); objects operating above the FAA-regulated 400-foot ceiling that applies to hobbyist and commercial drones; objects loitering for hours at a time, far beyond the 15–20 minute battery life of any commercially available hobbyist drone; coordinated drone swarms, involving multiple simultaneous objects; and objects described as substantially larger than a vehicle. Each of these characteristics, individually, is difficult to explain through conventional means. Taken together, they constitute a profile that does not match any category of known civilian drone technology.

7 UAP shapes in NRC data are mostly reported as "lights," with triangles being the most distinctive geometric form. The vast majority of NRC incident reports describe the observed objects only as lights in the sky — a reflection of the nighttime nature of most observations, the absence of proper lighting on the objects, and the untrained observational capacity of security personnel without dedicated optical instrumentation. Within this dataset, triangular-shaped objects represent the only UAP-specific geometry that appears consistently in the NRC records, making them a meaningful analytical signal within an otherwise poorly characterized dataset.

8 Two pre-2014 triangular incidents were found in archived NRC data. When Johnson searched the NRC's protective web server back to the early 2000s, he discovered two historical incidents involving triangular-shaped objects over commercial nuclear power plants — incidents that predate the modern drone phenomenon entirely. These archived incidents suggest that the aerial observation of nuclear sites by anomalous triangular objects may not be a recent development, but rather part of a longer pattern that predates the consumer drone industry.

THEME C — SPECIFIC INCIDENTS

7 Susquehanna (Berwick, PA) — October 22, 2022. A triangular-shaped object hovered over the Susquehanna nuclear power plant outside Philadelphia for more than two hours. The object had a spotlight that shone directly down onto the plant facility — a characteristic that implies deliberate observation or targeting of the site. Johnson describes the incident as one of the most striking in his monitoring record. No countermeasures of any kind could be taken. The identity, origin, and purpose of the object remain entirely unresolved.

8 Surrey, Virginia — December 2024. During what Johnson describes as the broader "holiday drone frenzy" of late 2024, a large object accompanied by two to three smaller objects was observed near the Surrey nuclear power plant in Virginia. The incident is remarkable for several reasons. The lights from the objects disappeared and then reappeared miles away within seconds — implying instantaneous acceleration of a kind not physically possible with any known aircraft. The large object subsequently ascended vertically into the sky and disappeared, consistent with what researchers describe as transmedium travel. The two smaller lights performed synchronized zigzag ascent patterns until they were no longer visible. No noise was heard, and no visible propulsion system was observed at any point. Johnson considered this incident potentially anomalous in ways that warranted immediate reporting to AARO — but was told to stand down (see Assertion 17).

Note on the Surrey Incident: The behavioral characteristics described — instantaneous positional change, silent ascent, synchronized geometric movement of multiple objects, and possible transmedium travel — are consistent with UAP reports reviewed and documented by AARO, the UAP Task Force, and congressional testimony. These behaviors are not attributable to any publicly known drone or aircraft technology as of the date of the interview.

THEME D — INSTITUTIONAL & REGULATORY FAILURES

9 Reporting was voluntary and grossly under-reported for eleven years. Until January 2025, the reporting of suspicious drone and UAP activity over nuclear sites was entirely voluntary for NRC licensees. There was no requirement to report at all, and when reports were filed, critical details — photographs, altitude estimates, duration, object shape, movement characteristics — were routinely absent. Mandatory reporting was finally implemented in January 2025, a full eleven years after the drone threat was first catalogued. The consequence of this delay is that the historical record — upon which threat assessments, intelligence analyses, and policy decisions are based — is severely incomplete.

10 Nuclear plants have zero mandated aerial detection systems. There is currently no regulatory requirement for radar, radio-frequency monitoring, acoustic detection, or optical surveillance at any U.S. commercial nuclear power plant. Ground-based intrusion detection systems — fencing, sensors, armed security forces — are mandated, but the airspace above the plants is entirely unmonitored from a detection and tracking standpoint. Johnson describes this as a fundamental gap in the security architecture: without detection systems, there is no basis for identification, no basis for tracking, and no basis for countermeasures.

1 Only two of approximately 75 nuclear plants have FAA no-fly zone designations. Since 2019, only two nuclear plants have received FAA no-fly zone designation — meaning that at the other 73 or so plants, it is entirely legal to fly a drone overhead with no legal consequence. A small number of additional plants are in the application process, but obtaining a no-fly zone designation takes months to years. The practical implication is that a bad actor wishing to conduct aerial reconnaissance of a commercial nuclear plant currently faces no legal prohibition in the vast majority of locations.

4 The nuclear energy lobby actively resisted tighter security requirements. Johnson believes the Nuclear Energy Institute (NEI) — the nuclear industry's principal Washington lobbying organization — exerted influence on the NRC to avoid imposing additional detection or reporting requirements on licensees. The industry's concern, in Johnson's assessment, was fear of Congressional backlash and the cost of compliance. The NRC, as an independent regulator, is nonetheless susceptible to this kind of industry pressure, particularly when security requirements impose direct costs on operators who are ultimately the agency's principal stakeholders.

5 The 2019 NRC threat assessment is dangerously outdated. The NRC's intelligence unit briefed on the drone threat in 2019. At that time, weaponized drones had not been used in domestic U.S. attacks. The 2019 assessment concluded that there were "no risk-significant vulnerabilities to drones for radiological sabotage." Johnson now considers this assessment dangerously out of date. The Ukrainian conflict has demonstrated in graphic operational detail the lethal and precise effectiveness of commercial off-the-shelf drones as weapons against hardened infrastructure. That capability was not present in 2019, and the assessment has not been substantively updated to account for it.

6 AARO's data from the NRC is grossly incomplete. The 2023–2024 AARO annual report cites approximately 18 incidents reported by the NRC. Johnson — who personally provided NRC data to AARO — states that this figure is wildly under-representative of the actual incident count. The discrepancy flows directly from the voluntary reporting regime: most incidents were not submitted with sufficient description to be properly characterized, and many were never reported to AARO at all. If the NRC's own data is incomplete, AARO's cumulative picture of UAP activity near nuclear infrastructure is correspondingly flawed.

7 Johnson was told to "stand down" when attempting to report the Surrey incident to AARO in real time. When Johnson identified the December 2024 Surrey incident as potentially anomalous and sought to report it to AARO immediately, NRC management refused. Only annual data dumps are required by law. The Surrey incident was consequently not reported to AARO until May 2025 — nearly five months after the event. This delay is significant not merely as a procedural failure but as evidence that the mandatory reporting mechanisms, even when they exist, are structured to be episodic rather than operationally responsive.

8 Johnson's internal white paper and security advisory were blocked. Johnson drafted an internal white paper addressing the distinction between UAPs and conventional UAS/drones, and separately attempted to issue a security advisory to NRC licensees describing UAP behavioral characteristics so that security personnel could better recognize them. Both efforts were met with institutional resistance; the deputy director is reported to have laughed at the UAP subject matter. No updated guidance was ever issued. The result is that nuclear plant security forces across the country have received no formal training or guidance on how to identify, document, or respond to objects that exhibit anomalous flight characteristics.

9 No NRC guidance distinguishes UAPs from conventional UAS. The NRC's updated regulatory language uses the term "uncrewed aerial systems" (UAS), which management considers sufficient to encompass both conventional drones and UAPs. Johnson disagrees with this conflation. A drone and a UAP are operationally distinct categories — they require different detection approaches, different reporting frameworks, and different response protocols. Lumping them together under a single regulatory category obscures the nature of incidents that fall outside the commercial drone profile and produces records that cannot be properly analyzed for threat patterning.

THEME E — LEGAL & COUNTERMEASURE GAPS

2 Nuclear security forces are legally unable to take any countermeasure against intruding drones. Because drones are legally classified as aircraft under U.S. federal law, nuclear plant security guards who jam, hack, shoot down, or otherwise physically interfere with an intruding drone — even one hovering for hours over a sensitive facility with a spotlight — risk federal criminal liability. Johnson describes the operational consequence with striking simplicity: "All we could do is observe and report." This legal constraint applies regardless of the apparent intent of the operator, the duration of the intrusion, or the sensitivity of the facility being overflown.

4 Executive Order 14305 (June 2025) lacks enforcement teeth. The Trump administration issued Executive Order 14305 in June 2025, directing the NRC to provide guidance on drone detection at nuclear sites. However, the order contains no penalty provisions for non-compliance, meaning that nuclear sites can effectively decline to implement any guidance without legal consequence. Johnson is not aware, as of the date of the interview, whether the NRC had even issued that guidance. An executive order without enforcement mechanisms is, in his assessment, largely symbolic.

5 The Safer Skies Act and the Cotton Bill offer partial paths forward but have not yet been enacted. The Safer Skies Act (early 2026) grants limited counter-UAS authority to qualified state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies — but explicitly does not extend that authority to the NRC or to private commercial nuclear plant operators. Senator Tom Cotton's Critical Infrastructure Airspace Defense Act is more comprehensive: it would extend counter-UAS authority to private operators of high-risk facilities including nuclear plants, provide \$250 billion in funding over five years, and include liability protection for operators who take countermeasures. As of the interview, this legislation has not been acted upon by Congress.

THEME F — SECURITY ROLLBACKS & INDUSTRY CAPTURE

3 Nuclear security has been actively rolled back under the current administration. Since Johnson's retirement, the NRC has cut the number of security inspections at nuclear sites, eliminated live force-on-force training exercises (replacing them with desktop tabletop exercises that Johnson considers far less rigorous), and dissolved the Office of Nuclear Security and Incident Response (ONSER) — the specialized office that housed the NRC's nuclear security expertise. ONSER was the office in which Johnson spent his entire NRC career. Its dissolution means that the institutional capacity to monitor, trend, and assess aerial security threats at nuclear facilities no longer exists in the form he developed and maintained.

3 The nuclear industry systematically prioritizes profit over security investment. Johnson is unsparing in his characterization of the private nuclear sector: utilities are, in his words, "all about profit," and "security is kind of a secondary concern." He notes that drone detection systems capable of protecting a nuclear plant would cost in the tens of thousands of dollars — a fraction of the cost of operating a nuclear plant, and a negligible fraction of the cost of a radiological incident. The fact that no plant has voluntarily self-imposed such systems suggests, in Johnson's view, a calculated decision to externalize security risk rather than incur even modest detection costs.

THEME G — INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

6 Japan and France moved quickly and effectively after aerial incidents at nuclear sites. Johnson cites two international precedents as illustrative of the regulatory decisiveness the U.S. has failed to replicate. In Japan, after an anti-nuclear activist flew a drone carrying radioactive material onto a government building, the country immediately passed legislation requiring drone detection technology at all nuclear power plants — a requirement that Johnson reports has resulted in essentially zero drone flyovers at Japanese nuclear sites since. In France, after Greenpeace flew a drone in a Superman costume into a nuclear cooling tower, similar legislative action followed. Both governments treated the incidents as a regulatory trigger; the U.S. government, having experienced far more incidents, has not.

11 The United States lags every comparable Western nation in nuclear aerial security. Johnson's overall assessment is that the United States — the country with the largest commercial nuclear fleet in the world — has implemented the weakest aerial security requirements of any comparable Western nuclear power. This is not a result of technical limitation or cost infeasibility; it is a product of regulatory inertia, industry lobbying, and institutional resistance to a threat category that has been poorly characterized and systematically underreported.

THEME H — UAP VS. DRONE DISTINCTION & THE BROADER QUESTION

2 A terrorist or adversarial attack exploiting aerial vulnerabilities is viewed as increasingly inevitable. Johnson expresses the view that the likelihood of a foreign adversary or terrorist group exploiting the aerial vulnerabilities he has documented is growing with each passing month. He uses the word "eerily" to describe the probability — suggesting that the attack scenario is not merely conceivable but operationally imminent. He notes that the FBI has already thwarted multiple plots involving explosive-laden drones targeting electrical infrastructure, providing a clear proof-of-concept for the attack vector he fears most applied to nuclear sites.

6 Johnson's core public statement: "Something is observing us. We don't know what it is or who controls it." This single sentence from Johnson's book serves as the intellectual center of his public warning. It is a statement of acknowledged ignorance — a former senior government security official saying plainly that the United States has been surveilled at its most sensitive infrastructure for more than a decade, has been unable to identify the surveilling party in more than 99% of cases, and does not know whether the surveilling party is a domestic hobbyist, a foreign intelligence service, or something that does not fit any of those categories.

8 Johnson speculates the TR-3B or a U.S. government red-cell operation may explain some triangular sightings — while remaining open to other hypotheses. When pressed on the nature of the triangular objects appearing in NRC records, Johnson offers two candidate explanations: the TR-3B — a reported advanced U.S. military aircraft that has appeared in speculative defense literature — or a covert U.S. government "red cell" operation designed to test nuclear site security and generate political pressure for upgraded defenses. He does not endorse either explanation as confirmed. He also explicitly declines to rule out the extraterrestrial, interdimensional, or non-human intelligence hypotheses, characterizing his epistemological position as open rather than committed. What he is certain of is that the current regulatory framework provides no mechanism for systematically investigating any of these possibilities.

Section 3: Critical Questions Raised

The following twenty questions are raised explicitly or implicitly by the interview. They are organized into thematic clusters corresponding to the five major areas of concern the discussion surfaces. These questions do not have resolved answers in the transcript — they represent the policy and analytical agenda that Johnson's testimony leaves on the table.

CLUSTER 1 — NATURE & IDENTITY OF THE OBJECTS

1 Are the objects over nuclear plants actual commercial or military drones — or something else entirely?

Johnson is explicit that he cannot say with authority what the observed objects are. The behavioral characteristics of the most anomalous incidents — instantaneous positional change, silent sustained loitering, synchronized multi-object movement, apparent transmedium travel — fall outside the known performance envelope of any commercial or military drone technology. This question is the foundational one: before policy responses can be designed, the nature of the phenomenon must be established.

- 2 What was the triangular object over Susquehanna that hovered for two hours with a spotlight on October 22, 2022?** No identification has been made. The triangular shape, multi-hour loitering, and apparent directed spotlight constitute a behavioral profile that has not been explained by any authority, and the absence of countermeasure authority meant that no investigation was possible in real time.
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- 3 What was the large object with accompanying smaller objects seen at Surrey in December 2024 that demonstrated instantaneous acceleration and apparent transmedium travel?** The behavioral characteristics of the Surrey incident — as described in the transcript — are consistent with the most anomalous UAP cases documented by AARO and congressional witnesses. The question of what this object was, who or what controlled it, and what it was doing above a nuclear plant is not answered anywhere in the record.
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- 4 What are the two pre-2014 triangular incidents in the NRC database, and have they ever been investigated?** The discovery of archived triangular incidents predating the commercial drone era raises the question of whether these objects have a history at nuclear sites that extends back decades, and whether any prior investigation was conducted.
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- 5 What actually are UAPs? Are they foreign adversarial technology, a secret U.S. program, non-human intelligence, or something else?** This is the overarching question that Johnson declines to answer definitively — and whose answer determines the entire character of the threat. Each possible answer implies a radically different response framework.

CLUSTER 2 — REGULATORY & REPORTING FAILURES

- 6 Why was the NRC's suspicious activity reporting system voluntary for eleven years before mandatory reporting was enacted in January 2025?** Given that the drone threat was recognized as early as 2014 and that the NRC was receiving reports of anomalous aerial activity with increasing frequency, the decision to keep reporting voluntary for over a decade represents a failure of regulatory will that requires explanation.
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- 7 Why is it currently legal to fly a drone over the vast majority of U.S. nuclear power plants with no legal consequence?** The FAA no-fly zone application process is slow, opaque, and covers only two of roughly 75 operating nuclear sites. The legal regime governing airspace over nuclear infrastructure appears to treat nuclear plants no differently from other comparable structures, despite their unique hazard profile.
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- 8 Why don't nuclear power plants have mandated aerial surveillance, radar, or RF detection systems?** The cost of commercially available drone detection systems is in the tens of thousands of dollars — a trivial expense relative to plant operating costs and a negligible fraction of the cost of any radiological event. The absence of a mandate for even basic aerial awareness capability requires explanation.
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- 9 Why does the U.S. lag behind Japan, France, and the United Kingdom in aerial security requirements for nuclear sites?** Countries that experienced single high-profile aerial incidents responded with rapid legislative action. The U.S. has experienced hundreds of incidents, many of considerably greater anomalousness, and has not enacted comparable requirements.

- 10 **Is the 2019 NRC vulnerability assessment — which concluded there were "no risk-significant vulnerabilities" to drone-based radiological sabotage — still operationally valid?** The drone capability landscape has changed dramatically since 2019, particularly in light of commercial drone weaponization demonstrated in the Ukrainian conflict. A threat assessment based on 2019-era drone capabilities may be not merely outdated but actively misleading.

CLUSTER 3 — LEGAL & COUNTERMEASURE GAPS

- 11 **Why are nuclear security forces legally prohibited from taking any countermeasure against intruding drones, even when those drones linger for hours with apparent adversarial intent?** The legal classification of drones as aircraft — and the federal criminal liability that attaches to interfering with an aircraft — creates a situation in which no security response is legally available. This gap predates the drone era and has not been addressed legislatively for nuclear sites specifically.
- 12 **Why have private nuclear utilities not self-imposed drone detection systems, given their negligible cost relative to the catastrophic consequences of an attack?** Johnson's characterization of the industry as profit-driven and secondarily security-conscious raises the question of whether the absence of self-imposed detection reflects a rational cost-benefit calculation, a failure of security culture, or something more deliberate.
- 13 **Has the NRC even issued guidance pursuant to Executive Order 14305 (June 2025), and if not, why not?** An executive directive with no enforcement mechanism and no confirmed implementation is effectively a press release. The question of whether the regulatory apparatus has taken any substantive action in response to the presidential directive is unresolved in the interview.

CLUSTER 4 — INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

- 14 **Why did NRC management laugh at and dismiss the UAP topic when Johnson raised it internally?** Institutional dismissal of a documented phenomenon — one that Johnson had been monitoring and reporting for years — raises questions about the epistemic culture of the NRC's security apparatus and its capacity to assess novel threats.
- 15 **Why was Johnson told to "stand down" rather than immediately report the Surrey incident to AARO?** The decision to delay reporting a potentially anomalous incident at a nuclear facility to the national authority charged with assessing such incidents — on the grounds that only annual data dumps are legally required — represents a policy choice that may itself require congressional scrutiny.
- 16 **If AARO is receiving incomplete, under-reported, and poorly described data from the NRC, what is the actual quality of AARO's overall threat picture for UAPs near nuclear infrastructure?** AARO's credibility as the national authority on UAP assessment depends on the quality of data it receives. If the NRC — one of its principal reporting agencies — has been providing data representing only a fraction of actual incidents, the reliability of AARO's analyses is structurally compromised.

- 17 **Now that ONSER has been dissolved and Johnson has retired, who at the NRC has the knowledge, the mandate, and the institutional memory to track, classify, and assess UAPs near nuclear sites?** This question goes to the question of institutional continuity. The expertise Johnson built over fifteen years was organizational, not structural — it existed in a person and an office, both of which are now gone. Whether that expertise has been transferred, documented, or simply lost is a critical gap.
- 18 **Has the nuclear energy lobby's influence over the NRC's security rulemaking ever been formally examined or audited?** Johnson's assertion that NEI lobbied against detection and reporting requirements is a serious claim about regulatory capture that, if substantiated, would have significant implications for the integrity of the NRC's independent regulatory function.

CLUSTER 5 — THE BIGGER PICTURE

- 19 **What is the TR-3B, and if it is a U.S. government asset, what is it doing above commercial nuclear plants?** Johnson's hypothesis that triangular sightings may represent a covert U.S. government red-cell program raises the question of what the purpose of such a program would be — and, if true, why it would be conducted without the knowledge of the NRC or the plants being overflown.
- 20 **What is the true scale of drone and UAP flyovers at nuclear plants, given that AARO's data represents only a small fraction of recorded incidents, and recorded incidents represent only a fraction of actual incidents?** The 200–300 figure Johnson cites is itself an estimate subject to the incompleteness of voluntary reporting. The actual number of times an unidentified aerial object has overflown a U.S. commercial nuclear facility since 2014 may be substantially higher — and the subset of those incidents with anomalous characteristics remains entirely uncatalogued.

Section 4: Conclusion & Significance

4.1 The Core Finding

The testimony of Daryl Johnson, examined in its totality, presents a picture of a known, documented, and worsening security vulnerability at the most sensitive category of civilian infrastructure in the United States — one that has been systematically underreported, institutionally dismissed, and deliberately unaddressed by the regulatory apparatus responsible for its oversight. The convergence of factors he describes is not accidental: voluntary reporting, no detection mandates, no countermeasure authority, no regulatory distinction between conventional drones and anomalous UAPs, an outdated threat assessment, and an industry lobby that has successfully resisted the imposition of even basic aerial awareness requirements.

4.2 The Anomaly Problem

Perhaps the most significant dimension of Johnson's account is the subset of incidents that cannot be explained by conventional drone technology. The Surrey and Susquehanna incidents, taken on their face, describe objects behaving in ways that are physically inconsistent with any commercially available or publicly known military unmanned aerial system. Johnson is careful not to claim a definitive explanation. What he does assert is that the

regulatory framework contains no mechanism for distinguishing these objects from conventional drones, no protocol for accelerated reporting when anomalous characteristics are observed, and no authorized response capacity regardless of what the object is or who controls it.

This creates a particularly consequential gap. If the anomalous objects are foreign adversarial technology, the absence of detection and response capability represents a strategic intelligence failure. If they are a classified U.S. program, the absence of coordination with the NRC represents a critical interagency communication breakdown. If they are something that does not fit either category, the absence of a formal investigative mechanism represents a failure of the national security enterprise at the most fundamental level of threat characterization.

4.3 The Institutional Dimension

Critical Note: The dissolution of ONSER — the NRC's dedicated nuclear security office — concurrent with the reduction of security inspections and the elimination of live force-on-force exercises, means that the institutional infrastructure for assessing and responding to aerial threats at nuclear sites has been materially degraded at precisely the moment when Johnson's data shows the threat is at its historical peak. The combination of a record-high incident count in 2025 and the simultaneous dismantling of the office responsible for tracking those incidents is, in his assessment, not a coincidence to be dismissed.

4.4 The International Standard

The comparison with Japan and France is instructive not because those countries are more technologically sophisticated, but because they treated a single aerial incident as a sufficient regulatory trigger. The United States has experienced hundreds of incidents — many of them more anomalous than the events that prompted legislative action abroad — without enacting a comparable regulatory response. This disparity cannot be fully explained by differences in legal frameworks or regulatory philosophy. It reflects, in Johnson's view, the influence of an industry that has successfully externalised the cost of aerial security onto the public interest.

4.5 What Needs to Happen

Johnson's testimony implies a clear agenda, even where he does not state it prescriptively: mandatory aerial detection systems at all commercial nuclear sites and CAT-1 fuel cycle facilities; expedited no-fly zone designations; real-time AARO reporting for any incident with anomalous characteristics; legislative authority and liability protection for counter-UAS response at nuclear facilities; a new and updated threat assessment incorporating post-2019 drone capability developments; regulatory guidance distinguishing UAPs from conventional UAS; and the restoration of a specialized office within the NRC with the mandate and expertise to conduct this work.

"Something is observing us. We don't know what it is or who controls it."

— Daryl Johnson, *Unguarded Skies*

4.6 Final Assessment

The significance of Johnson's interview lies not in any single incident or statistic, but in the composite picture it assembles: a decade-plus of documented aerial intrusions at the nation's most sensitive civilian infrastructure; a regulatory regime that has been structurally designed — whether by intention or inertia — to minimize rather than

illuminate the scale of the problem; a legal framework that renders the security forces at those facilities helpless observers; and an institutional culture that responded to internal alarm-raising with dismissal and obstruction. Whatever the ultimate nature of the objects involved, this combination of factors represents a serious and growing vulnerability. Johnson's account is a matter of public record and warrants the most serious attention from policymakers, oversight bodies, and the public alike.

Area	Current Status	Required Action
Aerial Detection	Zero mandated systems at any nuclear plant	Mandatory detection (radar, RF, optical) at all nuclear sites
No-Fly Zones	2 of ~75 plants designated	Expedited FAA designation across the fleet
Counter-UAS Authority	None — guards may only observe and report	Legislation with liability protection for nuclear operators
AARO Reporting	Annual data dump; real-time prohibited	Mandatory real-time reporting for anomalous incidents
Threat Assessment	Dated to 2019; not updated for modern drone capabilities	Immediate updated assessment incorporating post-2022 landscape
UAP/UAS Guidance	No guidance distinguishing UAPs from conventional drones	Formal licensee guidance on UAP behavioral recognition
Security Infrastructure	ONSER dissolved; live exercises eliminated	Restore specialized nuclear security office and training requirements