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Eisenhower's Sputnik Moment: The Race for Space and World Prestige

by Yanek Mieczkowski (review)

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for espionage, bourgeois nationalism, and treason. This is an extremely valuable work. But it does not aim to do what Lapidus has done.

In Baider's Yiddish phrase, the Jewish poets of the Soviet Union were buried in silence, "buried without a name, without a number, without a 'here lies.'" Young poets in all languages want their poems to sing to readers forever. Lapidus's mission is to rescue their individual voices from the mass grave of Soviet Jewry.



Yanek Mieczkowski, *Eisenhower's Sputnik Moment: The Race for Space and World Prestige*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013. 358 pp.

Reviewed by Zuoyue Wang, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

Recalling how the United States took the challenge after the Soviet launch of the world's first satellite in 1957 and "beat them to the moon," President Barack Obama announced in his 2011 State of the Union address that "this is our generation's Sputnik moment." He called on the country to invest in science, technology, and education now, as then, as a way to deal with both a serious economic recession and heightened international competitions for jobs, especially from China and India. Whether Obama's Sputnik analogy has served its intended purpose of rallying public support for his various programs is subject to debate, but it demonstrates the continuing public fascination with this dramatic episode that took place before a majority of today's Americans were born. For those looking to learn more about this pivotal event of the Cold War and the original presidential response, *Eisenhower's Sputnik Moment: The Race for Space and World Prestige* by the historian Yanek Mieczkowski provides both rich information and nuanced analyses.

Using archival materials from the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library and elsewhere, newspaper and magazine articles, and oral history interviews with surviving members of President Eisenhower's White House staff, Mieczkowski, author of a fine book on Gerald Ford's presidency, gives us a lively and contextualized history of Eisenhower's space policy and program both before and especially after the *Sputnik 1* launch. Along the way, he debunks, rather convincingly, several conventional claims related to this history. For example, was there a panic in the United States right after the Soviet launch of *Sputnik 1*? Examining the records carefully, Mieczkowski reaches the conclusion that, yes, there was a panic but it was more "a press and political panic" (p. 20), generated by the self-interests of these elite groups, rather than a general panic among the population.

Another question is related to the actual achievements of Eisenhower's post-Sputnik space program. A common perception is that Eisenhower's fiscal conservatism and well-known opposition to manned space projects held back the U.S. space program, and that John Kennedy was the one who rescued and revitalized it with his launch, in 1961, of the Apollo project to land an American on the moon. Mieczkowski

argues spiritedly in this book that “the scope of scientific achievement [in space] during Eisenhower’s presidency was astonishing” (p. 4), especially in the areas of satellite technologies and national security, paving the way for what came in the 1960s. By the time Eisenhower left office, the United States had launched 31 satellites compared to just nine by the Soviet Union. Even in the area of manned space travel, Eisenhower deserves credit for starting the Saturn super-boosters that became the launch vehicles for Apollo.

What, then, explains the widespread perception during much of Eisenhower’s post-Sputnik presidency that the Soviet Union led the United States in the space race and the race for world prestige? Here Mieczkowski, like Robert Divine (in his 1993 study *The Sputnik Challenge*) and other scholars before him, blames Eisenhower’s low-key political leadership style, especially his seeming obliviousness to the political importance of international prestige during the Cold War. Taking “balance” as one of his key political tenets, Eisenhower gave priority to national security, economic strength, and scientific achievements over what he called space “stunts” that were designed mainly to enhance national prestige. Yet, a large part of the Cold War, according to Mieczkowski, was “a prestige race” (p. 6). He believes that Eisenhower could have avoided much of his post-Sputnik political trouble, or at least “inoculated him against pernicious political pressures” (p. 292), had he recognized the prestige factor and approved, in 1955, the U.S. Army’s proposal to launch, before the Soviet Union, a satellite using a military rocket.

That may be true. Yet, as Mieczkowski himself acknowledges elsewhere in the book, Eisenhower chose to go with the new non-classified Vanguard rocket, built by the Navy on contract for the National Science Foundation, for good reasons. The Vanguard was designed mainly to project a peaceful image of the U.S. space program, to establish freedom in space, and to lessen Soviet objections to eventual overflights of U.S. reconnaissance satellites over Soviet territory. The book notes the lack of criticism when the United States used the Army’s military rocket to launch its first satellite, *Explorer I*, in January 1958, but that does not mean the situation would have been the same had the United States launched before *Sputnik I*.

A larger question provoked by Mieczkowski’s extensive and valuable discussion of political leadership, especially by comparing Eisenhower’s style with that of Richard Nixon, John Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson, is how leaders of a democracy should balance between sensitivity to images and prestige and a focus on substance. If we agree with Mieczkowski that Eisenhower erred by not paying enough attention to prestige in space, then we should perhaps balance this assessment with an examination of whether the same obsession with images and prestige (and ego) helped lead Kennedy and later Johnson to the Vietnam War (as Fredrik Logevall has concluded in the affirmative with Johnson in his 1999 book *Choosing War*). In a way, Mieczkowski himself comes to Eisenhower’s side in these comparisons. He sees Eisenhower being vindicated by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s post-Apollo setbacks when it chose to rely on the prestige-boosting Space Shuttle program, in the collapse of the Soviet Union that had ignored consumer needs, and in the

renewed emphasis on economy and balanced budgets in the United States in the 21st century.

In *Eisenhower's Sputnik Moment*, Mieczkowski goes beyond a narrow story of Eisenhower's immediate response to the Soviet satellite to give us a sophisticated political history of the president's second term and space policy within the context of domestic politics and the Cold War. One may not agree with all his interpretations, and I, for one, also wished for a fuller historiographical discussion in the book. But, these minor points aside, this is a thoroughly documented, fresh, and thought-provoking study of a key figure and a singular event in the Cold War whose legacies continue to shape our political discourse today.



Shu Guang Zhang, *Beijing's Economic Statecraft during the Cold War: 1949–1991*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014. 496 pp. \$65.00.

Reviewed by James Reilly, University of Sydney

Even though China's economic statecraft is now often in the global spotlight, few scholars have addressed important historical questions about this statecraft. What are the origins of China's foreign aid program? What lessons has China learned from facing economic sanctions? How have Chinese leaders dangled the lure of market access for diplomatic leverage? Has China's economic statecraft actually succeeded—and if so, when and how? In this tour de force survey of China's economic statecraft throughout the Cold War, Shu Guang Zhang provides compelling answers to these crucial questions.

One of Zhang's most important contributions is to remind us of the impact of the U.S.-led embargo on China's early Cold War strategy. Following the onset of the Korean War (1950–1953), the People's Republic of China (PRC) faced a withering array of U.S. economic sanctions designed to isolate and cripple the PRC economy. As Zhang rightly asserts, China's pragmatic approach to economic statecraft emerged in response to this challenge. Many of China's techniques of offering aid in exchange for economic benefits—including access to valuable raw materials—also mirrored Soviet aid to China in the 1950s. Yet even as Beijing turned to Moscow for economic support, it sought to avoid becoming overly dependent, which proved to be a smart move.

Having been both a sanctions target and a vulnerable recipient of foreign aid made Chinese leaders sympathetic to their own aid recipients. As the Sino-Soviet split deepened in the late 1950s, Beijing began to expand its aid program to “nonaligned” countries. China countered Moscow's greater quantity of aid with higher quality—pledging assistance without preconditions. Zhang suggests, however, that Beijing was often unsuccessful. North Korea, Mongolia, and even Albania played on the PRC's fears of Moscow to extract considerable benefits while offering scant political loyalty in