

**James E. David.** *Spies and Shuttles: NASA's Secret Relationships with the DOD and CIA.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015. 370 pp. \$49.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8130-4999-1.



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James E. David's *Spies and Shuttles* traces a crucial yet typically underacknowledged aspect of the history of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA): its connection and interactions with the Department of Defense (DOD) and the other national security and intelligence entities during the Cold War. The irony and significance of David's findings hinge on the fact that NASA was established a year after the Soviet satellites with the explicit purpose of conducting civilian space activity in the open and keeping it unclassified, in order to draw a contrast against the Soviet program, which intimately connected its security efforts with the rest of its projects.

Even before NASA's establishment, its aviation-oriented predecessor had been complicit in the making of a cover story that aimed to protect the U-2 spy plane as a weather research vehicle. NASA officials' attempts to use intelligence requirements as a means of leveraging greater funds in the 1960s floundered because budget-shaping figures in Congress and the White House

already had access to NASA's information as well as that of the intelligence agencies.

As David demonstrates, NASA's autonomy even during its heyday in the 1960s was overshadowed to a considerable extent by the strictures imposed by the intelligence community and by the need to fend off intermittent encroachments by DOD. As the country contemplated a lunar venture, Defense Secretary McNamara unsuccessfully proposed that NASA retain lunar efforts but cede crewed Earth-orbit missions to DOD. Where intelligence entities deemed that NASA's use of secret but existing cutting-edge cameras or sensors might disclose US intelligence-gathering capabilities, or reveal information about the United States, they convened to require the civilian space administration to use equipment of lesser capability. The relationship was not entirely one way, as later on NASA's Hubble telescope was in many ways possible because of shared technology, and intelligence organizations relented to allow spe-

cialized cameras to do crucial work supporting the selection of Apollo moon landing sites.

The quest to secure a substantial space program after Apollo was “lengthy and frustrating,” and David relates this (p. 188). NASA’s ambitious wish list winnowed to the development of a reusable shuttle expected to make frequent trips into space and provide a cheaper satellite-delivery capacity than existed with one-time use expendable launch vehicles. The shuttle would also offer the chance to repair or upgrade friendly satellites in orbit. The shuttle project survived the budget knives of the 1970s to a considerable degree because it promised economy of scale. NASA won allies in its fight for the shuttle by literally reshaping the vehicle to fit the anticipated needs of DOD and the intelligence community.

The shuttle era, David indicates, marks a betrayal of NASA’s “guiding principles” because of its agreement to undertake missions on behalf of DOD and “repeatedly carry classified payloads and conduct classified experiments, employ secure command and control procedures, and withhold extensive information from the public” (p. 217). A large proportion of slated missions were to be dedicated to putting classified DOD payloads into orbit. NACA and then NASA had begrudgingly acquiesced in the concealment of Central Intelligence Agency reconnaissance activities, but up until the 1980s NASA had not been conducting entire space missions at the behest of DOD and without informing the public of a mission’s purpose.

The shuttle’s fate was sealed for many reasons. It underperformed relative to the lift capabilities originally promised, the turnaround time between missions was far greater than estimated, and security entities that had encouraged the building of a fifth orbiter never committed money to its construction and instead began backing away from the shuttle as it underperformed. This disengagement accelerated following the accidental destruction of *Challenger* in February 1986

and the extended delay before the next shuttle mission in 1988.

David’s work provides a valuable window into the workings of NASA and the impact that defense and intelligence efforts have on civilian science. One natural upshot of David’s topic is that he encountered repeated instances of documents remaining classified. This was, as he acknowledges, a formidable obstacle from the 1970s through the end of the period he examines. Although David mentions some recent activities including the 2010 launch of the unmanned Air Force X-37 that had been a cooperative effort with NASA, the focus is definitely on the Cold War era. Defining the project in these terms makes natural sense, particularly given the increasing problem of classification as the study approaches the modern day. It is an excellent book: descriptive, informative, and engaging. The topic, unfamiliar to many readers, still means that a reader who already holds some awareness of NASA history will feel more at home than a reader unfamiliar with NASA’s general history. *Spies and Shuttles* is a must read for those interested in space history, Cold War security issues, and twentieth-century science and technology.

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