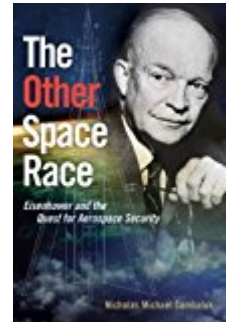


Nicholas Michael Sambaluk. *The Other Space Race: Eisenhower and the Quest for Aerospace Security*. Transforming War Series. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2015. 352 pp. \$44.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-61251-886-2.



Reviewed by Garrett Gatzemeyer

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The familiar tale of the Cold War space race usually begins in 1957 with the Soviet Union's Sputnik launches. In *The Other Space Race*, historian Nicholas Michael Sambaluk shifts the timeline left and turns the reader's attention to a second race. This one pitted the Eisenhower administration against aerospace advocates, primarily in the air force, to determine the future of US space policy. The book's narrative vehicle is the air force's space age nuclear bomber—the Dynamic Soarer, or the Dyna-Soar for short. *The Other Space Race* is about much more than the life and death of a quixotic Cold War program, though. The Dyna-Soar story also enables analysis of presidential leadership styles; the challenges of aligning policy, strategy, technology, and doctrine; and the origins and trajectory of US space policy. This space policy, Sambaluk argues, emerged from a contest between policymakers and military leaders to answer the nation's security needs and to “define the parameters—and, to an extent, even the very nature—of the Cold War” (p. 5).

This contest concerned the best approach to operating in the new frontier of space. Actions taken at the dawn of the space age would set precedents for the future of space exploration and the Cold War arms race. Sambaluk divides the debate into two camps that were on a collision course even prior to 1957. Each operated on a different set of assumptions in pursuit of institutional purposes. In one camp, the air force and their congressional and industry allies pushed for the militarization of US space policy. Air force leaders drew on the rich heritage of airpower theory, a vision of the future informed by technological determinism, and their experiences in World War II. They assumed the inevitability of military conflict in space, the necessity of piloted systems, and the idea that “technical supremacy was a sacrosanct prerequisite for national security” (p. 73). Air force leaders staked their claim in this new frontier by inventing the concept of “aerospace,” which represented the earth's atmosphere and beyond as a continuous environment. The Dyna-Soar, an aerospace platform, would allow the

United States to dominate the ultimate high ground of space, thereby ensuring peace through strength.

Civilian policymakers in the Eisenhower administration took a different approach. Dwight D. Eisenhower and his staff preferred reconnaissance platforms, such as surveillance satellites able to prevent a future war. They feared the militarization of space would spark an expansion of the arms race, threatening their long-haul strategy based on sufficiency. Satellites depended primarily on diplomatic means to preserve their safety, making crucial the establishment of the freedom of space principle. Weaponized space platforms foreclosed this possibility. Sambaluk attributes this “perceptual gap” between the air force and the Eisenhower administration to institutional responsibilities. Eisenhower and his staff were responsible for preventing war, or leading the nation through crisis if war occurred. In contrast, the air force “needed to be prepared for war and wage it if the time came” (p. 40).

Sputnik’s launch in 1957 “challenged and contorted” the shaping of US space policy (p. 4). Sambaluk emphasizes Eisenhower’s leadership style as a key factor in the subsequent contest. The president’s “hidden-hand” approach and likeable public persona “became as much of a trap as a tool” in his second term when security issues became political vulnerabilities (p. 113). Before Sputnik, Eisenhower enjoyed the public’s trust to quietly shape space policy outside public view. Sputnik, subsequent US rocket failures, and missile gap allegations made Eisenhower appear “out of touch and ill prepared” (p. 234). The “hidden-hand” was not well suited for public debate and Eisenhower struggled to retain control of policy-making. In contrast, the air force’s aerospace concept and Dyna-Soar program were “technologically exciting” and enjoyed airpower’s cultural power (p. 228). Eisenhower refused to reveal the underpinnings of his space policy for short-term political gain. This committed him to fight “a ‘retro-

grade’ action in space” during his last three years in office (p. 231). Though Eisenhower wanted to cancel the Dyna-Soar program, he declined to do so in the face of popular opinion. Instead, budget and turf battles between the air force and civilian agencies gradually splintered the Dyna-Soar program. President John F. Kennedy’s campaign rhetoric, which initially captured his space policy, gave aerospace advocates hope. Over time, however, Kennedy and his advisors came to reject Dyna-Soar’s weaponized missions too. Within two weeks of Kennedy’s assassination, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara announced Dyna-Soar’s cancellation.

The Other Space Race is a clearly written and thoroughly researched monograph that deserves a wide readership. Sambaluk’s use of archival resources and contemporary trade journals is excellent, as is his care in reminding readers that nothing in history is inevitable. Eisenhower’s non-weaponized space policy still leads today, but for a time the Dyna-Soar appeared to represent the future, poised as it was to become the single largest item on the national space budget. The author’s reading of Eisenhower’s presidential style puts him in the now-standard “hidden-hand” interpretive camp. Sambaluk spends much less time on Kennedy, though he directly challenges the president’s popular reputation as a space pioneer. *The Other Space Race* complements Roy Houchin’s air force-centric *U.S. Hypersonic Research and Development: The Rise and Fall of Dyna-Soar, 1944-1963* (2006) by integrating the air force and Eisenhower administration positions. However, Sambaluk delivers a more complete understanding of early US space policy and the formulation of Cold War strategy.

The book’s short, focused chapters will make for useful supplements to undergraduate courses on twentieth-century US history and the Cold War. Sambaluk’s light use of cultural analysis, reminiscent of Michael Sherry’s in *The Rise of American Airpower: The Creation of Armageddon*

(1987), will also prove useful at the undergraduate level or in graduate seminars. Finally, *The Other Space Race* bears current relevance. Today, the US government seeks alignment of policies, strategies, technologies, and doctrines concerning the latest frontier—cyberspace. As the Dyna-Soar story shows, this is a complex effort involving negotiations between many parties with the potential to become captive to popular anxieties in case of a cyber “Sputnik moment.” Sambaluk makes an outstanding contribution to the literature available to those laying the foundations of a thoughtful, deliberate, and coherent policy.

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