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THE SPACE POLICY OF THE NIXON AND FORD ADMINISTRATIONS: ANOTHER DÉTENTE
DIPLOMACY THROUGH PROJECT APOLLO AND ASTP

Abstract

The Apollo-Soyuz Test Project, ASTP, was seen as a symbol of the U.S.-Soviet détente of the 1970s. It is true that the process by which ASTP was decided on and implemented seemed to overlap the evolution of U.S. détente diplomacy during the Nixon and Ford administrations. In fact, Project Apollo mainly through competition with the Soviet Union was terminated while ASTP as the first large U.S.-Soviet space cooperation was advanced. But, the reduction of Project Apollo had already begun during the Johnson administration. In addition, the Kennedy administration started to seek U.S.-Soviet space cooperation and the Johnson administration continued it. These persistent efforts yielded the fruit known as ASTP in the Nixon and Ford administrations. Even after ASTP was finished and the détente diplomacy began to decline, the Ford administration strived to continue and develop U.S.-Soviet space cooperation. Meanwhile, the Nixon and Ford administrations adopted and developed a new space transportation system, the “Space Shuttle,” to maintain the initiative in space during the post-Apollo period.

Therefore, it could not be easily said that the priority of U.S. space policy changed from competition to cooperation in accordance with its détente policy. From the beginning, the evolution of U.S. space policy was marked by the delicate balance between competition and cooperation. It was in the 1970s that the dual space policy produced the tangible diplomatic results. Concerning the relationship between space and diplomatic policies, the Eisenhower administration, which were influenced by the Sputnik shock, and the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, which advanced Project Apollo, have been relatively well examined. But, the Nixon and Ford administrations have not been sufficiently examined because the related diplomatic documents from those periods were classified. However, some of these documents have been recently declassified.

This paper will examine the policy decisions of the Nixon and Ford administrations that led to the cancellation of Project Apollo and the adoption and implementation of the Apollo-Soyuz Test Project, ASTP, from the perspective of U.S. détente diplomacy of those periods. It will make the most of newly declassified documents as well as build on earlier studies. Finally, by clarifying what role U.S. space policy played in its détente policy, this paper will reexamine the purposes and meanings of Project Apollo and ASTP during the Cold War of the 1970s.