

51st IAA HISTORY OF ASTRONAUTICS SYMPOSIUM (E4)  
Scientific & Technical Histories (2)

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HOW SPUTNIK PUT A MAN ON THE MOON

**Abstract**

On the 4th October 1957 the world witnessed an event that would change our perception of everything around us: the launch of Sputnik. In 2017, the world celebrates the 50th anniversary of the event that set the pace for one of Humankind' biggest achievements: a man on the moon.

Sputnik's political impact, the advancement of science and the endless possibilities provoked surprise, fear and illusion. It marked the beginning of an era and, even indirectly, contributed to the development of technology and society's support that would allow, just 4 years later, President John F. Kennedy to announce the dramatic and ambitious goal of sending an American safely to the moon before the end of the decade

After Sputnik, a number of political factors affected Kennedy's decision and the timing of it. In general, the United States was under pressure to "catch up and overtake" the Soviet Union in the "space race." The cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin had become the first human in space on 12th April 1961, greatly embarrassing the U.S. Although Alan Shepard became the first American in space on May 1961, he only flew on a short suborbital flight instead of orbiting the Earth, as Gagarin had done. In addition, some international events like the Bay of Pigs fiasco in mid-April contributed to increasing pressure on the US President. Kennedy wanted to announce a program that the U.S. had a strong chance at achieving before the Soviet Union. After consulting with its Vice President, NASA Administrator, and other officials, he concluded that landing an American on the moon would be a very challenging technological feat, but an area of space exploration in which the U.S. actually had a potential lead.

The paper tries to provide an analysis of key events, both political and space related, that began with the Sputnik launch and occurred until the US announcement to put a man on the Moon in May 1961. It will cover also Sputnik's preparation and launch, the reaction to it and how it impacted the decision to go to the moon, taking into account the political context of the Cold War at the time.