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THE APOLLO-SOYUZ TEST PROJECT - ITS LEGACY 46 YEARS ON

Abstract

It has been 46 years since the Apollo Soyuz Test Project (ASTP) or Apollo-Soyuz, as the first joint manned space mission by the Soviet Union and the United States undertaken with the docking of a Soviet Soyuz capsule and a NASA Apollo command and service module. Whilst the origins of the ASTP can be traced to the 1962 Dryden-Blagonravov Agreement, it was really not until 1969 under the Nixon and Brezhnev administrations that serious progress was made in discussions for space collaboration between the two countries. These led to full-fledged cooperation agreements and eventually culminated in the successful joint manned space mission of July 1975. True to its actual name, the ASTP was indeed a multi-year test project with technical, political, cultural and indeed ideological difference and challenges that were largely successfully overcome. Since that historic mission, collaboration in space has now become the new normal exemplified by the success of the International Space Station, which has been through a multi-lateral rather than bi-lateral cooperation of countries. This paper traces the origins and development of the ASTP and highlights the key motives, differences and challenges of the project. The experiences and lessons learned from ASTP are analyzed to show how they have contributed to the modern-day policy model of international collaboration and how they have benefitted emerging space agencies such as United Arab Emirates Space Agency and others.