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THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE US-SOVIET MISSION TO THE MOON

Abstract

Most people are aware of the speech made by John F. Kennedy on September 20, 1963 calling for cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union in launching a manned mission to the Moon. While many people were caught by surprise by this announcement, the project had been on the table since shortly after the election of President Kennedy in 1960. The issue was even broached in the somewhat rocky summit with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in 1961, and would occur occasionally in their then-secret correspondence during the following years. In fact, there were ongoing discussions between NASA officials and members of the Russian Academy of Sciences during the entire period dealing with the possibilities of cooperation in space, including a joint manned exploration of the Moon. These continued even though the Soviet leadership was showing little interest in cooperating in a lunar program, or even little interest in a manned mission to the Moon at all. However, when Premier Khrushchev in 1963 indicated that the Soviets would be interested in collaborating in such a mission, President Kennedy was intent that this should occur, even though he was aware that it would meet with some opposition from those in NASA who wanted to make this solely a U.S. project. The President's primary concern was to find the means of working together with his Soviet counterparts, even though it would mean sharing the credit in a successful manned lunar mission. Kennedy's assassination, however, led to the proposal being tabled as no one else was as enthusiastic as he in bringing this to fruition.