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Book Review: Spies and Shuttles: NASA's Secret Relationship with the DoD and CIA

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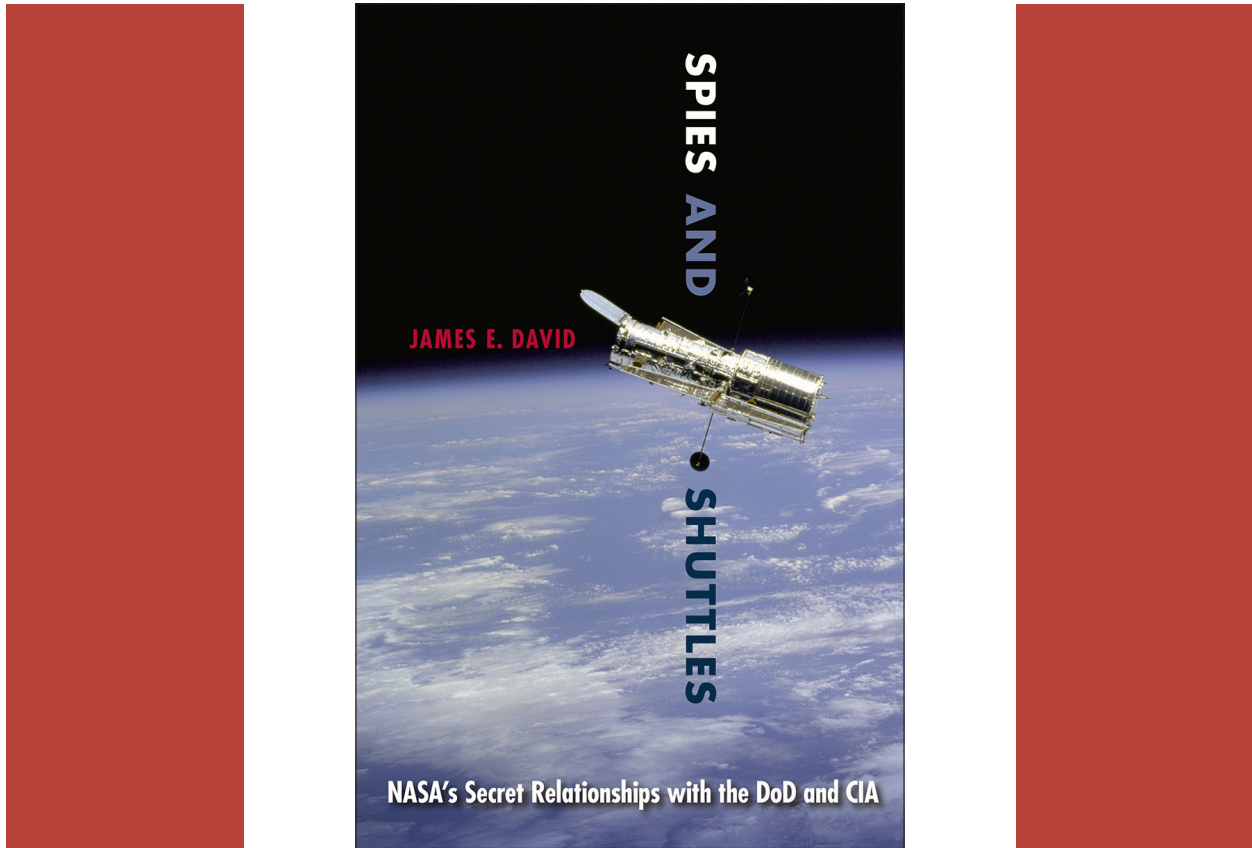
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Reviewed by Professor Carlos Barrera, Mexican Institute for Strategic Studies in National Security and Defence, and Manuel Carranza, defense and security affairs researcher

Critical for national security and providing vast economic opportunities for exploitation, outer space is now a contested domain. With rather technical prose, James E. David's autobiography of his outstanding career, *Spies and Shuttles: NASA's Secret Relationships with the DoD and CIA*, offers a peek at the difficulties of sustaining and financing aerospace programs during his outstanding career. As America enters a second period of strategic competition above and beyond the stratosphere, David offers a cautionary tale on grandiloquent endeavors and highlights the need to prioritize planning over narrative. As a later curator in the Division of Space History at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, he had access to newly declassified materials that allowed him to enrich an already fascinating historical testimony previously suppressed by those who were part of this titanic enterprise.

The beginning of the book provides context and refers back to 1957 with the Soviet Union's successful Sputnik 1 and 2 launches, which prompted controversy in the United States. President Dwight D. Eisenhower was pressured to take significant measures to increase funding for the nation's missile programs, which resulted in the creation of the President's Science Advisory Committee and, later, NASA.

According to David, it was crucial for Eisenhower that this new agency counteract the Soviet Union's bellicose endeavors. By 1958, the President's Science Advisory Committee produced a report that, among other things, called for a new civilian agency that was transparent to taxpayers and focused on research used for peaceful purposes. Still, it would provide the Department of Defense with "discoveries that have military value or significance," while allowing it to continue to lead national

defense-related matters in space (2). After Congress made arrangements, the bill was signed, and NASA became fully operational the same year.

The hope for a neutral and benign agency would be short-lived. From the beginning, NASA had deep ties with national security agencies. David describes the mutually beneficial arrangement the partners reinforced—a dynamic not always explicit but assumed by government officials and the public, though certainly not how the White House portrayed it to the American people.

The middle chapters describe NASA's post-Apollo project era. The agency continued to engage with the preceding activities with renewed importance but without budget increases. This situation led the agency to attempt to prove itself useful by performing operations such as providing a cover for defense space activities.

Although NASA was allowed to develop new programs and systems to protect classified information, its use of image-forming sensors was restricted, leading to frustration and setbacks. All activities were reviewed to ensure compliance, hindering the maturing of robotic land remote-sensing satellite activities. A vetting program developed to allow NASA personnel access to sensitive materials did not resolve the issue. Lunar photography, human spaceflight experiments, and astronomical programs were affected. In 1965, NASA and the National Reconnaissance Office signed an agreement, gradually leading to further compromises between NASA and the Department of Defense.

In the last section, David describes the unprecedented scrutiny of all civilian experiments and the conditions imposed on some programs. There was tremendous concern about the Space Shuttle becoming the target of anti-satellite weapons—and the lack of measures to address them. Technical and financial problems did not go away, but thanks to its contributions to national security, NASA was allowed to continue to operate.

From 1988 to 1992, NASA had eight national security missions. David evaluates the costs and benefits of participating in these programs to the national security community. He notes that, “the national security agencies received very few benefits from the partnership” and that the *Challenger* disaster, as well as the Titan 34D launch failures, damaged the Department of Defense's reputation (242). He highlights the STS-53 space shuttle as one of the last significant interactions between NASA and the national security agencies that bled out a budget that could have been used for better purposes.

Although NASA satisfied some tactical requirements, its satellite designs and operations failed to meet strategic needs and ended up being merged or privatized into civilian programs. David finishes by providing background information on the current status of some of these programs as far back as 2004 and 2010 and the limited impact of the data provided by NASA satellites to support tactical operations after 9/11.

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