


September 2012

Publisher's Corner

Roger G. Harrison
Roger.g.harrison@edu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/spaceanddefense>

 Part of the [Asian Studies Commons](#), [Aviation and Space Education Commons](#), [Defense and Security Studies Commons](#), [Eastern European Studies Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), [Leadership Studies Commons](#), [Near and Middle Eastern Studies Commons](#), [Nuclear Engineering Commons](#), [Science and Technology Studies Commons](#), and the [Space Vehicles Commons](#)

Please take our feedback survey at: https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE

Recommended Citation

Harrison, Roger G. (2012) "Publisher's Corner," *Space and Defense*: Vol. 6: No. 0, Article 9.

DOI: 10.32873/uno.dc.sd.06.01.1142

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/spaceanddefense/vol6/iss0/9>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Space and Defense by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.

Publisher's Corner

Roger G. Harrison
Eisenhower Center Director

Kalic, Sean, N. *U.S. Presidents and the Militarization of Space, 1946-1967*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2012, 182pp., \$40.00.

Natalie Bormann and Michael Sheehan. *Securing Outer Space: International Relations Theory and the Politics of Space*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, c2009, 2012 (pbk), 272 pp., \$44.95 (pbk).

Sean N. Kalic has provided a useful history of U.S. militarization of space under Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson and the combination of ideals, bureaucratic jostling, and Cold War tensions that formed the foundations of U.S. space policy. His theme is the continuity through the administrations of these three presidents of a space policy built around the “non-aggressive military uses of space,” a policy which effectively ruled out weapons in orbit. There were, of course, many in the military and scientific community with a more hawkish view on weaponization, and space policy has vacillated between an altruistic *Ying* and atavistic *Yang* ever since. The fact that the bulk of resources were devoted in these early years to peaceful striving rather than weaponization (to Apollo rather than a Fractional Orbital Bombardment System) was due, Kalic convincingly argues, to decisions made by the three Presidents whose administrations he describes. Thanks to them, prudence, the desire for the world’s admiration, and scientific curiosity carried the day.

Fans of bureaucratic politics will find much to admire in Kalic’s description of how the Air Force maneuvered, usually without success, to outflank NASA, the Army, and the Navy to become the principle agent for space. Part of this effort involved a narrative of space as a simple continuation of the atmosphere, part of an “indivisible field of operation” and therefore an extension of the responsibilities a newly independent Air Force should naturally assume. Space emerges in this campaign for the first time as the “high ground” which must be seized (by the Air Force) to prevail in the military confrontation with the Soviet Union. The Army, Navy, and

NASA all had a different idea, and the Air Force push was frustrated (as it has been frustrated many times since) not just by technical failures and cost overruns in key programs but by its own tendency to focus resources on airplanes (strategic bombers then, air superiority fighters now) rather than things that fly invisibly through the cosmos.

Kalic recites a long list of unsuccessful space weapons projects, like SAINT (an early orbiting ASAT concept), BAMBI and SPAD (both orbiting boost phase ICBM interceptors), and FOBS, or fractional orbital bombardment system, a version of which was actually tested by the Soviet Union. The nuclear warheads in the FOBS concept would circle the Earth in low Earth orbit and then be deorbited over the intended target. That would have allowed orbiting Soviet warheads to approach the United States from the south, bypassing defenses oriented northward toward Soviet land-based missile fields. Soviet moves toward an operational FOBS system were the impetus, the author argues, for President Kennedy’s authorizing the development of a U.S. ASAT interceptor; but Kennedy’s aversion to weapons in space ensured that the ASAT system would be ground- rather than space-based. Both the Soviet and the United States eventually (and unilaterally) abandoned ground-based ASAT systems, although the Chinese broke that norm with an ASAT test in 2007, a test that, fortunately, has not been repeated.

Kalic’s book also traces the rise of partisan political divisions on space policy, initially caused, he argues, by concerns among Republican lawmakers about resources being devoted to peaceful rather than military uses of outer space. The success of Apollo silenced the partisan

criticism, which is now largely forgotten. But Kalic's book reminds us that among the achievements of the Apollo program, and the Cold War competition to be first on the moon, was to help prevent a military arms race in space by starving it of resources.

This is a short book, made shorter still by a host of redundancies. The initial chapters are summarized again at the end, perhaps to flesh out what would have been a longish journal article to book length. The author is not a master of style. Still, it is very useful to be reminded that successive presidents favored the "non-aggressive military use of space" and shared what seems to have been an instinctual aversion to orbiting space weapons. Weapons programs seldom die. Usually they return every generation or so in a new form. German imaginings, in the 1920's, of an orbiting "sun gun" morphed into orbiting laser platforms, nuclear missile platforms, and finally "rods from gods." But these have remained on the level of *Popular Mechanics* cover art rather than becoming weapons in orbit.

The common sense of Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson, particularly regarding weapons in space, turned out not to be as common as one might have hoped. This is one lesson to be drawn from *Securing Outer Space*, the reissue in paperback of a 2009 compendium of essays by social scientists about space. One question always raised by compendia like this is why certain essays were included and others not. The title does not help; only some of these essays concern themselves directly with space security. The introduction does not help much either. The editors tell us their goal was to "articulate an understanding of, and critically engage with, the effects of particular manifestations of space policies." This is hardly a sentence to whet the intellectual appetite, but it does prepare the reader for a tendency toward the obscurantist in many of the articles that follow. It may well be, as one of these authors claims, that the U.S. space policy discourse is based on, "...important performances of gendered identity construction specific, tacitly gendered, rationalizations of exploration and colonization in particular ways..." On the other hand, it may not be. It is hard to tell. Still, what the collection lacks in coherence, and some of the authors in elegance or clarity of language, is made up for in

part by variety, and a degree of heterodoxy – both good things when much contemporary writing about space tends toward the stale, the clichéd, and the self-interested.

Names which appear often in these pages are Everett Dolman, Steven Lambakis, Alfred Thayer Mahan and – oddly enough – the French philosopher Michael Foucault (who is mentioned as often as Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson together). The former two are the chief proponents of the concept of space as an inevitable theater of war and the consequent need for the United States to weaponize and dominate the space domain. Mahan is present in these articles mostly to solidify the analogy of space control to control of sea lines of communication (in spite of obvious differences between the two realms), and also because any anthology with even a hint of geo-politics is bound to include him. But what is Foucault doing here?

It turns out that "discourse analysis" (the exploration of how power relationships are reflected in language) is a very useful tool in unpacking space discourse, the often feckless, self-interested, posturing combination of sweeping generalizations, misplaced metaphors, empty slogans, bureaucratic point-scoring and magical thinking that has characterized official and semi-official proclamations about space since Werner Van Braun announced that human destiny lay in the cosmos. None of our great spiritual or philosophical traditions (if one excludes Scientology) had noticed this, but suddenly it seemed persuasive. In the event, while human beings have been rare and transient visitors to space, ideologues have virtually colonized the cosmos, creating what David Grodin ("The Power Politics of Space") describes in these pages as a "strategic discourse that hinders the possibilities of cooperation and increases the likelihood of conflicts in space." Space, as Van Braun knew, is all about narrative (about the sizzle rather than the steak), and that narrative has been, and to a degree still is, dominated by the devotees of "inevitable war" and space control. Common sense hasn't much appeal for ideologues, especially when their blood is up – as it always seems to be. After all, if ideology did not contradict common sense, what would be the point?

There are also articles here on space from the perspective of small powers, particularly Canada (by Wade Huntley), and the impact of science fiction on space policy by Mark Hamilton. The latter contains the mother of all power point slides which I am still puzzling through. But it is fun to consider how science fiction allows us to examine our follies by bestowing them on aliens who turn out to be anything but alien.

In sum, those looking for novel and creative thinking about space, and willing to plough through some head-scratching prose to find it, need look no further. What they will also find, unfortunately, is a certain datedness of material. This is the editors' rather than the authors' fault. A lot has happened in the decade or so since many of these articles were written, and a more fastidious editor would have asked for rewrites or epilogues. This is not a problem for more theoretical and/or historical chapters, like C. Peoples' exploration of what might be called the original sin of space – that later pioneers stood, willingly or not, on shoulders of Nazi scientists who were, at the very least, morally obtuse, and often much worse than that. But it is a serious issue in more prosaic articles like David Webb's on space weaponry. This seems to have been written in the middle of the last decade (no copyright date is given), before some of the weapon programs Dr. Webb describes were abandoned and also before the Chinese ASAT test of 2007. In this same vein, the specter of orbiting weapons platforms haunts the imagination of some of these authors. Such platforms receded in the interim even further into the realm of improbability. Talk of "space control" was once robustly cutting edge, but the technological and budgetary obstacles proved formidable, and the accompanying rhetoric, with its fatal tendency to strut off the page, alienated allies whose cooperation would have been a necessary ingredient. That trust once lost has been hard to regain. Likewise, the debate about the implications for space of a "unipolar world" (the subject of I.R. Ballantyne Bolton's chapter) now seems as quaint as debates about world government. The unipolar interlude in space, if it ever existed, was brief and has yielded to hand-wringing about America's decline, to talk of an eroding space infrastructure, and to worries about

an aging space workforce. The new catch phrase is the "three C's" – competitive, congested, and contested space. It is not yet clear what "contested" space is but it is certainly not space control. Meanwhile, commercial satellite operators are forcing the pace toward a more regulated and transparent space environment; China is on the rise; and private space launch is now a reality. The space policy of the Obama Administration differs sharply in both tone and substance from its Bush-era predecessor, with more emphasis on cooperation and only a residual mention of space control. And cyber might now be a more likely vector of attack on space capabilities than a crushingly expensive armada of space or even ground-based engines of space war. None of this is reflected in these pages.

Although *Securing Outer Space* is, therefore, less up to date than might be wished, there are some very good things in it. My personal favorite is the aforesaid piece by David Grodin. The writing is awkward in places, but the core idea – that space policy is informed by narrative, which actively produces imaginary future problems that self-interested bureaucracies then compete for resources to solve – is a valuable insight. The Air Force professes that space will inevitably become not only a battlefield but the *central* battlefield of future war. This vision, not incidentally, makes the Air Force itself the most important line of defense. Unfortunately, it turns the actual situation on its head. Space has no strategic value apart from the services it supplies to warfighters within the atmosphere, where power is denominated and battles are lost or won. The Air Force does acknowledge this – in fact if not in theory – by regularly shorting space of resources in favor of air-breathing systems like the F-22, the F-35, and more recently (when they became unavoidable) remotely piloted vehicles. If you want to know what bureaucracies really think, don't read their vision statements; read their budget submissions.

Space, to be sure, is important – even vital – in the same way that communications and logistics are. But when we speak of winning the war of logistics, or of communications, or of space, we are speaking metaphorically. Mistaking metaphor for reality has been characteristic of space strategy from the beginning, exemplified by phrases like

“high ground” and “high frontier.” Taken together, the articles in *Securing Outer Space* remind us of how hollow this rhetoric can be.