

On December 6, the first test of the US *Vanguard* space vehicle, carrying a three-and-one-half pound satellite, seemed to the world an ignominious flop. This spectacular failure, coming as it did after the successful *Sputnik II*, increased the hysteria and embarrassment in the United States and the ridicule abroad. In England, the press revelled in caricaturing *Vanguard*, calling it, among other things, *Puffnik*, *Flopnik*, *Kaputnik*, or *Stayputnik*.²⁷

Later that month, however, Killian prepared a memorandum for the President containing the judgment of a Science Advisory Committee panel chaired by George Kistiakowsky. Taking on the implications of competitive space (and therefore missile) capabilities in light of the Russian *Sputnik*, the panel expressed the judgment that “technically our missile development is proceeding in a satisfactory manner,” and although the United States was behind the Soviets in the space race, having started much later, the nation’s technological progress in the missile field was, in fact, “impressive.”²⁸

Another panel of the Committee recommended outlines of an American space program and the organization to manage it. As a result, NASA was established in July 1958 to conduct civilian aeronautical and space research. The first administrator of NASA, Keith Glennan, recalled the subdued tone of the president as he asked Glennan to take on the task of furthering America’s advances in space science and technology:

The meeting with President Eisenhower was brief and very much to the point. He stated clearly his concern over the development of a program which would be sensibly paced and prosecuted vigorously. As I recalled it, he made no mention of any great concern over the accomplishments of the Soviet Union although it was clear that he was concerned about the nature and quality of scientific and technological progress in this country.²⁹

To calm the public concerns and deflect Department of Defense strategies to mobilize U.S. space efforts primarily on a military basis, the president and his advisors set a course for civilian leadership in space. The president sought to further calm matters in the international nuclear contest by announcing, in August 1958, a moratorium on nuclear weapons testing to begin October 31 of that year.