

NASA's philosophy was thus in accord with the President's reservations about the power of the nation's military-industrial complex. He "was not disposed to foster further growth by adding still another very large, very costly enterprise to the Pentagon's responsibilities."⁴

The content of the space program of the new civilian space agency was not specifically prescribed by Congress in the NASA Act passed in 1958. The charter provided only the framework for coordination and cooperation between NASA and other agencies. Under its first administrator, the new agency moved vigorously in the direction of a civilian space science program, setting "a strong but measured pace," according to Newell. The pace on serious commitments to a lunar science program was slow at first, and "Glennan for a while showed a reluctance to discuss planetary missions except as plans for later, for the more distant future."⁵

On the nuclear side of the nation's space efforts, two important aspects were forcefully addressed in that transition year of 1960: safety problems and organizational needs.

A few months earlier, the AEC had established an Aerospace Nuclear Safety Board "to analyze and project the possible effects of nuclear space devices upon the health of the peoples of the world...and recommend standards of safe practice for the employment of nuclear powered space devices proposed by the U.S."⁶ In May 1960, Glennan and AEC Chairman John McCone assessed the problems of safety along with the potential benefits in the use of nuclear components in space programs. In that early speculative period, Glennan wrote:

In respect to the use of nuclear sources for power generation in spacecraft, it is our belief that for certain missions the use of nuclear components may be the only way in which the mission requirements can be fulfilled.... Here again, however, there is considerable question as to the acceptability of the hazards involved. The hazards to personnel and equipment on the surface of the earth, the radiation problem incident to manned space flight, the interference with experimental measurements in spacecraft, and the radiological contamination of extra terrestrial bodies, are all moderating influences on the use of nuclear systems.⁷