



# The Decision to Go to the Moon: Project Apollo and the National Interest

*John M. Logsdon*

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The decision announced by John F. Kennedy on May 25, 1961, initiating the expedition to the moon, is now documented in full for future students of history. To John Logsdon, whose approach is that of a political scientist examining the influence of men and events on the decision-making process, the decision to land a man on the moon "before this decade is out" was wholly political rather than military, although overtones of implied defense were useful in obtaining congressional support. Moreover, he notes it was made without the support of the scientific community, although their previous research efforts were expected partially to offset this deterrent.

Although the success of the Russian manned orbit and the fiasco of the Bay of Pigs invasion certainly influenced the timing, in the author's interpretation the Kennedy decision manages to escape the narrow definition of a public relations exhibition. In Kennedy's view, he emphasizes, the security of the country itself was inseparably linked to a position of prestige in world opinion. Nor was he a particular enthusiast of space exploration for its own rewards. As he remarked to one of his advisors, "If you had a scientific spectacular on this earth that would be more useful—say desalting the ocean—or something just as dramatic and convincing as space, then we would do *that*."

The thoroughness of this book as a historical record is evident throughout. NASA historical records and government documents not previously released, including several Presidential papers, are used in the analysis, and the author weaves these records together with subtleties of opinion from interviews with NASA officials and such Kennedy advisors as Theodore Sorenson, McGeorge Bundy, David Bell, and Jerome Wiesner.

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