Challenge to Apollo: The Soviet Union and the Space Race, 1945-1974 by Asif A. Siddiqi
Review by: William P. Barry
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There are two periods of Soviet/Russian writing on their space history—the period of "One Big Lie" and the period of "Too Many Truths." From the 1950s to the late 1980s Soviet censors kept a tight rein on all publications about their space program. Virtually all histories and contemporary accounts were adulatory celebrations of the unerring accomplishments of Soviet space workers and the brilliant leadership of Communist Party officials. By definition, the Soviet space program was a clear series of carefully planned steps toward the exploration and colonization of space for purely peaceful and scientific purposes. Such patently unbelievable claims meant that Soviet sources were largely ignored in the West. A few Western analysts managed to disclose parts of the truth behind the "One Big Lie"—but there was little to go on except technical analysis of space operations and the occasional rumor or questionable revelation from defectors. In the very late 1980s the machinery that kept the "One Big Lie" in place began to fall apart. By the early 1990s there was a flood of new evidence available in Russian—much of it confusing, contradictory, and frequently full of bitter accusations. Various industries and individuals claimed credit for the successes and (more frequently) tried to assign blame for the newly revealed failures of the Soviet space program.

Asif Siddiqi has taken on the enormous task of making sense of this flood of new information. Having doggedly analyzed the data for a decade, he has been able to write the first truly comprehensive history of the Soviet space program. In this huge (1005 pages), richly illustrated book, Mr. Siddiqi demolishes the "One Big Lie" with mountains of evidence and organizes the "Too Many Truths" into as coherent a whole as we are likely to see for many years to come. Where possible, he sorts the truth from self-serving claims, and where not possible, he lays out the conflicting evidence.

As indicated by the title, Challenge to Apollo reveals that the Soviet space effort was largely driven by the need to upstage U.S. space programs and not by a long-range plan for peaceful exploration. For example, the decisions surrounding the launch of Sputnik were framed by the need to beat the U.S. (p. 155). Although the Soviet Union did not take President Kennedy's 1961 moon challenge seriously, it felt compelled to start two separate projects (circumlunar and lunar landing) in 1964 when it was clear that the U.S. was actually building the hardware needed to take the lead in the space race (p. 407). When both of these projects failed, they launched a crash program to build a robotic probe that could return a lunar soil sample (p. 675). The first attempted sample return mission (Luna 15) crashed on the moon while Armstrong and Aldrin were at Tranquility Base. As this volume shows, there
was no Soviet space "program" as such—just a series of high priority projects aimed largely at political ends.

In a book this large, on a subject this complex, there is inevitable repetition of some facts. This is useful to the casual reader looking for specific information. An extensive series of tables and appendixes (thirteen in all) and a twenty-six-page index further facilitate such trawling for information. Even for space history fanatics, intermittent reading is probably the best way to digest the phenomenal volume of information in what could well be described as an encyclopedia. Nonetheless, the writing is frequently compelling and remarkably balanced; though some readers may find the occasional odd word choice a bit disconcerting.

*Challenge to Apollo is the essential reference work* (in any language) for Soviet/Russian space history. It should be in the collection of every library and on the bookshelf of anybody with an interest in space history. There is much still to be written and clarified about Soviet/Russian space history (and I, for one, look forward to Mr. Siddiqi's further contributions to the field). However, this book will stand as the essential starting point for anyone hoping to make sense of the too many "truths" of Soviet space history.

William P. Barry

U.S. Army


Frank Donnini examines congressional hearings in his study of U.S.A.F. efforts to gain support for its manned penetrating strategic bombers. His study covers four bomber programs: the B-70, B-1A, B-1B, and the B-2. The author discusses each in turn, giving a summary, then relating congressional testimony, and finally drawing conclusions employing content analysis methodology.

* Battling for Bombers is little changed from the author's 1995 public policy Ph.D. dissertation (University of Alabama) and is an excellent example of a dissertation that should not have been published as a book. While it is clear why it was written, I do not understand why it was published, and certainly have difficulty understanding why anyone would knowingly buy or read it, considering its cost and content.

My strong negative reaction is based on the book's prose, sources, scope, and methodology. First, Donnini's prose is dominated by the passive voice, and is unclear and riddled with jargon. As a result it raises a substantial barrier between the reader and the content. Second, there is little new here aside from a few direct quotes from congressional hearings. The subject has been better covered by others, for example Nick Kotz (**Wild Blue Yonder**,}

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