

Sputnik I

Richard J. Davis



OVERVIEW

On October 4, 1957, Americans learned that the Soviet Union had launched a satellite—*Sputnik I*—into orbit around the earth. Fearing Soviet superiority in science, people demanded better training and more funds for scientific programs in the United States. Richard J. Davis, *Newsweek's* military affairs correspondent, reported on the situation, as follows.

GUIDED READING As you read, consider the following questions:

- Does Davis seem to believe that the United States's space program is really inferior to the Soviet Union's?
 - How did the *Sputnik* launching affect the United States's space program?
-

The Pentagon feels there is still time to break the U.S. logjam and catch up. While the U. S. ICBM [intercontinental ballistic missile] has yet to fly, there are no doubts in the military that both the Atlas and the Titan will be successful, or that Thor, Jupiter, and Polaris, the intermediate range ballistic missiles (1,500 miles), will similarly succeed. Moreover, in the face of the Red triumph, there is complete outward confidence that in battlefield rockets, air-defense missiles, air-to-air missiles, and air-to-ground missiles, we are up to par.

In fact, our whole approach to satellites has been somewhat different from Russia's. No U.S. scientists would say so openly—first because it would sound like quibbling; second, because they are full of open admiration for the Soviet scientists. But they keep stressing the fact we are planning highly instrumented satellites, quite in contrast to the relatively simple, radio-signal-transmitting ball now rotating around the earth.

Nonetheless, whatever the confidence in Washington, it is inescapable that the Soviet satellite has been a stunning shock to the nation and is likely to bring heavy pressure on our military planners. The knowledge that a Soviet-made sphere is whirling over America many times a day will evoke a torrent of questions and there will have to be some solid answers.

Officials will parry as best they can, but behind the scenes they are surely going to work with greater dedication and speed to get the Atlas off on a good flight quickly. Economic and other restrictions on the missile programs will be lifted. Missilemen will now probably get what they want, even if their requests seem wasteful, or even if other parts of the defense program suffer.

The central fact that must be faced up to is this: As a scientific and engineering power, the Soviet Union has shown its mastery. The U.S. may have more cars and washing machines and toasters, but in terms of the stuff with which wars are won and ideologies imposed, the nation must now begin to view Russia as a power with a proven, frightening potential.

This is something our top scientists have known for some time, something the leaders of research and development have preached constantly within the military. They have urgently deplored the scarcity of youngsters going into science; they cry for more money for basic research; they cry for the kind of economic sacrifice that it takes to win an epic struggle in space.

But the Administration and Congress have been confronted with persistent demands for economy. Both will listen to the missilemen now. The harsh fact is that whatever we're doing is not enough.

Source: *Newsweek*, October 14, 1957.