

Eyeing the Red Storm: Eisenhower and the First Attempt to Build a Spy Satellite

By Robert M. Dienesch

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In 1954 the U.S. Air Force launched an ambitious program known as WS-117L to develop the world's first reconnaissance satellite. The goal was to take photographic images from space and relay them back to Earth via radio. Because of technical issues and bureaucratic resistance, however, WS-117L was seriously behind schedule by the time *Sputnik* orbited Earth in 1957 and was eventually cancelled. The air force began concentrating instead on new programs that eventually launched the first successful U.S. spy satellites.

Eyeing the Red Storm examines the birth of space-based reconnaissance not from the perspective of CORONA (the first photo reconnaissance satellite to fly) but rather from that of the WS-117L. Robert M. Dienesch's revised assessment places WS-117L within the larger context of Dwight D. Eisenhower's presidency, focusing on the dynamic between military and civilian leadership. Dienesch demonstrates how WS-117L promised Eisenhower not merely military intelligence but also the capacity to manage national security against the Soviet threat. As a fiscal conservative, Eisenhower believed a strong economy was the key to surviving the Cold War and saw satellite reconnaissance as a means to understand the Soviet military challenge more clearly and thus keep American defense spending under control.

Although WS-117L never flew, it provided the foundation for all subsequent satellites, breaking theoretical barriers and helping to overcome major technical hurdles, which ensured the success of America's first working reconnaissance satellites and their photographic missions during the Cold War.

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Review

"Readers searching for a detailed analysis of early spy satellite development will approve of Dienesch's accessible work."—*Publishers Weekly*
(*Publishers Weekly*)

"An intriguing and incisive study. . . . *Eyeing the Red Storm* puts readers into the middle of the Cold War."—Scott Neuffer, *Foreword Reviews*
(Scott Neuffer *Foreword Reviews*)

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"For those who have a 'Space and the Cold War' shelf in their library, this book deserves a place on it."—Pat Norris, *Aerospace*
(Pat Norris *Aerospace*)

"*Eyeing the Red Storm* is an important contribution and a worthy resource for undergraduate or graduate settings as well as for readers interested in the history of satellite reconnaissance and Cold War strategy."—Nicholas Sambaluk, *H-War*
(Nicholas Sambaluk *H-War*)

"In his well-researched and convincingly argued book, Robert Dienesch has demonstrated clearly that the American spy satellite program, rather than being a knee-jerk reaction to the launching of *Sputnik* by the Soviet Union in 1957, was instead the culmination of years of effort by the Truman and Eisenhower administrations."—Galen Perras, associate professor of history at the University of Ottawa and author of *Franklin Roosevelt and the Origins of the Canadian-American Security Alliance, 1933–1945: Necessary but Not Necessary Enough*

(Galen Perras 2015-09-14)

"Dienesch combines an explication of high-level policy formulation with technical details about reconnaissance satellite development. He penetrates the secrecy that surrounded America's first military satellite program, WS-117L, to assess both its contributions and disappointments."—Rick W. Sturdevant, deputy director of history, Air Force Space Command
(Rick W. Sturdevant 2015-09-14)

About the Author

Robert M. Dienesch is an adjunct assistant professor of history at the University of Windsor, Ontario, and a research affiliate with the Gregg Centre for the Study of War and Society. His work has been published in *Quest: The History of Spaceflight* and *Northern Mariner*.

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