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POLITICS AND SPACE NAKASONE YASUHIRO AND JAPANESE SPACE PROGRAMS

Abstract

How does a country embark on large-scale RD programs? Among RD programs, this is an intriguing question for large scale Science and Technology(ST) projects such as space programs, because of the necessity for large resource commitments, and the difficulty of being accountable to the taxpayers when the outcome is not always known.

It can be assumed that engineers, scientists, bureaucrats, and politicians play respective roles. This paper aims to shed light on the specific role of politics, through the examples of policies of and decisions by NAKASONE Yasuhiro. Nakasone was the minister for science and technology, and later became the prime minister. He played a crucial role in establishing the Science and Technology Agency and the National Space Activities Council in the 1950s, which would be the foundational institutions responsible for space policy for the next half century. As prime minister, he decided to participate in the Space Station program.

Within his vision for Japan for the 21st century, he emphasized the need for radical change in economic policy, education, defense and ST investment. He was one of the few politicians that had vision to promote ST and recognized the strategic value to the nation. He was able to explain to the nation why Japan should promote the development of a launch vehicle, when the engineers faced development difficulties in doing so. Thus, he was influential both in the policy layer and in promoting specific programs to support his national vision.

Politics intersects with ST projects because of the uncertainty and tradeoffs associated with these efforts. Japan was a rare country that did not address space programs for national security and commercial space for a long time. It is a politician's role to create institutions, to allocate resources and, more importantly, to explain to the taxpayers why policy measures or programs are necessary. RD investment is a societal activity: it reflects the social, political, and economic situation, as well as being important for diplomacy and international relations. Bearing in mind that it would be misleading to attribute the initiation of large-scale ST projects to the leadership of a single individual, this paper will attempt to show the driving forces behind, and fundamental objective of Japan's space policy, in addition to the historical shift in that policy by examining the influence of this notable politician.