

INST 154  
Apollo at 50  
Discussion Questions  
Session 18: Voskhod, Soyuz and Zond

The American and Soviet space programs largely had the same goals, but they made different decisions, and those decisions contributed to different outcomes.

1. Name some specific things that the Soviet space program decided one way, but that the American space program decided differently, that helped to advance the Soviet lunar landing program. This question is hard because you know the outcome, and that knowledge will color your opinions on the wisdom of certain decisions. You may find it easier to first assume the alternative outcome (that the Soviet Union was first to land people on the Moon, perhaps because of some accident that substantially delayed Apollo) and then try to explain what it was that they did to achieve that outcome that the Americans could have done, but didn't, do.
2. Now turn the problem on its head and name some decisions that the American space program made, but that the Soviet space program decided differently, that helped to advance the American lunar landing program. This question is hard because there are many things the Americans did differently, but the question asks you to name the ones that actually mattered to the outcome. Because history takes only one path, you can't know for sure which ones made a difference and which did not. But you can test your beliefs by asking yourself what would have happened if they had made the same decision the Soviet Union did on specific points. If it would not have been likely to change the outcome, it isn't one of the decisions we want to be talking about here.
3. Now pick two cases in which the Soviets made a better decision (from question 1), and two other cases in which the Americans made a better decision (from question 2), and, for each, explain why those issues were decided differently. It might be tempting to just claim that it's because different people sometimes make different decisions. But these were all smart people, and smart people don't make decisions capriciously – they make them for reasons – often more than one reason. These reasons might be cultural, political, financial, technical, practical, venal, or any other "...al" you can think of. Dig deep and articulate what you think are the reasons that things were decided as they were on each side for the four issues you have chosen.