

The **Sputnik crisis** was the American reaction to the success of the Sputnik program. It was a key Cold War event that began on October 4, 1957 when the Soviet Union launched *Sputnik 1*, the first artificial Earth satellite.

The launch of *Sputnik 1* and the failure of its first two Project Vanguard launch attempts rattled the American public; President Dwight D. Eisenhower referred to it as the “Sputnik Crisis”. Although Sputnik was itself harmless, its orbiting greatly accentuated the continual threat the United States had perceived from the Soviet Union since the Cold War began after World War II. The same rocket that launched Sputnik could send a nuclear warhead anywhere in the world in a matter of minutes, breaching the oceanic moat that had successfully protected the continental United States from attack during both World Wars.

1. How did the soviet launch of Sputnik affect science and technology in the United States?

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**Eisenhower** helped steer the country on a steady course. He avoided ambitious new government programs, but resisted the pressure to abolish older ones, and sometimes he even expanded them. As he once told reporters: “I feel pretty good when I’m attacked from both sides. It makes me more certain I’m on the right track.” President Eisenhower wanted to make the federal government “smaller rather than bigger.” He supported economic policies aimed at limiting government spending and encouraging private enterprise. With the support of Republicans and conservative Democrats in Congress, the president removed the wage and price controls that the Truman administration had established during the Korean War. He also managed to transfer some authority in financial matters to the states and to make some cuts in government spending. When he left office in 1961, the federal budget had a surplus, or excess, of \$300 million.

2. How did President Eisenhower improve the United States in regards to social programs, federal spending, and expanding the nation?

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In 1956, the U.S. Congress approves the Federal Highway Act, which allocates more than \$30 billion for the construction of some 41,000 miles of interstate highways; it will be the largest public construction project in U.S. history to that date.

During World War II, Eisenhower had admired Germany's autobahn network. In January 1956, Eisenhower called in his State of the Union address (as he had in 1954) for a "modern, interstate highway system. The Federal Highway Act of 1956 provided for a 65,000-km national system of interstate and defense highways to be built over 13 years, with the federal government paying for 90 percent, or \$24.8 billion.

Highway construction began almost immediately, employing tens of thousands of workers and billions of tons of gravel and asphalt. The system fueled a surge in the interstate trucking industry, which soon pushed aside the railroads to gain the lion's share of the domestic shipping market. Interstate highway construction also fostered the growth of roadside businesses such as restaurants (often fast-food chains), hotels and amusement parks. By the 1960s, an estimated one in seven Americans was employed directly or indirectly by the automobile industry, and America had become a nation of drivers.

Legislation has extended the Interstate Highway Revenue Act three times, and it is remembered by many historians as Eisenhower's greatest domestic achievement. On the other side of the coin, critics of the system have pointed to its less positive effects, including the loss of productive farmland and the demise of small businesses and towns in more isolated parts of the country.

3. What were the effects of the Federal Highway Act on the United States? Give text based examples to back up your answer.

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