

In this tenth volume of the Secretaries of Defense Historical Series, historian Edward C. Keefer details Caspar Weinberger's role in orchestrating the largest peacetime military buildup in U.S. history and the consequential military engagements of the Cold War's last decade. President Reagan's choice of Weinberger as secretary of defense was paradoxical, given his reputation as "Cap the Knife," a ruthless budget cutter for Governor Reagan in California and for President Nixon in Washington. Reagan hoped that Weinberger would lead a cost-effective military expansion by trimming fat and increasing efficiency. Instead, he sheathed his budget knife and prioritized the buildup. The military services enjoyed record budgets, the U.S. defense industry posted record profits, and even the average service member saw increased pay and expanded training. Efficiency and fiscal moderation, however, took a back seat.

Although he was unwaveringly loyal to President Reagan, Weinberger did not blindly toe the administration's line. He opposed arms control agreements with Moscow, something Reagan came to favor. Weinberger wanted instead to complete the historic military buildup before negotiating; a thawing of relations might only interfere. By the end of Reagan's first term, arms control negotiations had seen little progress, which suited Weinberger. The second term would be a different story.

Weinberger's suspicions regarding overtures from Moscow brought him into conflict with Secretaries of State Alexander Haig and George Shultz, as did his "more friends" policy, which advocated closer relations with friendly Arab nations. He was far ahead of the administration in picking sides in the Falklands War, and proudly described himself as Britain's assistant supply officer. During the Lebanon crisis, he unsuccessfully opposed American intervention. That mission ended in tragedy, and the peacekeepers left a nation that was still far from peace.

Weinberger was not always the odd man out. His views on confronting communism in Central America, using China against the Soviet Union, and keeping NATO allies happy were largely in line with those of the president and his administration. Certainly no one complained about his success in managing and selling the military buildup. But this success could not last. Weinberger's repeated pleas for ever-larger Defense budgets began to lose their appeal as the budget deficit ballooned, and congressional scrutiny would only increase after the Iran-Contra scandal during Reagan's second term.

But in the first term, the one covered by this volume, Weinberger managed to carve out a legacy as the key conductor of the Reagan defense revolution, and this at least remains secure.



Edward C. Keefer earned a BA from McGill University in 1967 and a PhD from Michigan State University in 1974. For 34 years he researched and edited volumes in the U.S. Department of State's official documentary series, *Foreign Relations of the United States*. He edited 25 volumes, many on U.S. policy during the Vietnam War. From 2002 to 2009 he was the general editor of the *Foreign Relations* series. He then joined the Office of the Secretary of Defense Historical Office. In 2017 the Historical Office published his study of President Carter's secretary of defense, *Harold Brown: Offsetting the Soviet Military Challenge, 1977–1981*, the ninth volume in the Secretaries of Defense Historical Series. He has written articles and contributed to books on U.S. policy in East Asia and Southeast Asia and taught courses on 19th- and 20th-century British military and political figures for the Smithsonian Associates Program. In 2022 the Society for History in the Federal Government honored him with the Roger Trask Award for a career reflecting commitment to and understanding of federal history. He and his wife live in Washington, DC. They have three grown children and two granddaughters.

*Front cover photo:* President Reagan and Secretary Weinberger in the Oval Office discussing the 1984 Defense budget, January 10, 1983. *Reagan Library*

*Back cover photo:* *Kinstler Collection*