Problems abroad threatened to embroil the United States in conflicts for which it was largely unprepared. Students of foreign affairs will be especially interested in the chapters on assistance to Greece and Turkey under the Truman Doctrine, the partitioning of Palestine and the ensuing Arab-Israeli conflict, the civil war in China and its repercussions throughout the Far East, including the early stages of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and the Berlin crisis of 1948-49, which nearly led to a military showdown with the Soviet Union. Subsequent chapters examine the development of the atomic energy program and growing U.S. reliance on nuclear weapons, the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the origins of the worldwide Mutual Defense Assistance Program, and the drafting of NSC 68, the landmark policy paper that in 1950, on the eve of the Korean War, proposed an unprecedented program of peacetime rearmament.

Steven L. Rearden is a graduate of the University of Nebraska and Harvard University, where he received a Ph.D. degree in history in 1975. He has taught at Harvard and Boston College and served from 1974 to 1976 as a consultant to the Office of the Secretary of Defense. In addition to The Formative Years, he is the author of the forthcoming Reflections of NSC 68: Paul H. Nitze and the Evolution of American Strategic Policy, which he wrote as a guest scholar at The Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies.