

THE FORMATIVE YEARS 1947-1950

The first volume in an important new series that will provide a comprehensive history of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), *The Formative Years* traces the evolution of OSD from its establishment in September 1947 to the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950. As the title indicates, these were years of beginnings that ushered in the present-day era of service unification and saw the development of policies and programs that would have lasting impact on national security. A richly documented volume, it draws on a wide variety of primary and secondary sources to present a commanding account of the evolution of both defense organization and national security policy during the critical post-World War II years.

The book opens with the swearing-in of the first Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal, who faced the dual challenge of effecting unification of the armed forces and of reconstituting U.S. defense policy to meet an increasing array of problems and threats abroad, the Cold War with the Soviet Union heading the list. As Forrestal discovered, to make unification work, he needed more authority and assistance than the 1947 National Security Act gave him. His successor, Louis Johnson, had the benefit of amendments in 1949 that enhanced the secretary's power. But like Forrestal, Johnson confronted fierce interservice competition for scarce funds and deeply divisive quarrels, especially between the Air Force and the Navy, over the assignment of roles and missions. A series of chapters on the making of the defense budgets for the period strikingly illuminates the intricate relationships among strategic policies, military programs, roles and missions, and money.

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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.



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