



# **Irrational Security: The Politics of Defense from Reagan to Obama**

*Daniel Wirls*

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The end of the Cold War was supposed to bring a "peace dividend" and the opportunity to redirect military policy in the United States. Instead, according to Daniel Wirls, American politics following the Cold War produced dysfunctional defense policies that were exacerbated by the war on terror. Wirls's critical historical narrative of the politics of defense in the United States during this "decade of neglect" and the military buildup in Afghanistan and Iraq explains how and why the U.S. military has become bloated and aimless and what this means for long-term security.

Examining the recent history of U.S. military spending and policy under presidents George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, Wirls finds that although spending decreased from the close of the first Bush presidency through the early years of Clinton's, both administrations preferred to tinker at the edges of defense policy rather than redefine it. Years of political infighting escalated the problem, leading to a military policy stalemate as neither party managed to craft a coherent, winning vision of national security. Wirls argues that the United States has undermined its own long-term security through profligate and often counterproductive defense policies while critical national problems have gone unmitigated and unsolved.

This unified history of the politics of U.S. military policy from the end of the Cold War through the beginning of the Obama presidency provides a clear picture of why the United States is militarily powerful but "otherwise insecure."

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