



SECDEF: The Nearly Impossible Job of Secretary of Defense

Charles A. Stevenson

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SECDEF offers an expert's insights into one of the most difficult jobs in Washington. Of the twenty-one men who have held the post of secretary of defense since it was created in 1947, only half served more than eighteen months. The first, James Forrestal, committed suicide soon after leaving the Pentagon. Seven of his successors were fired or allowed to resign gracefully after losing the confidence of the president. Many left frustrated and disappointed, while few retained the celebrity and esteem they held while in office. One observer has called the job "the graveyard of political ambitions."

Charles A. Stevenson, who as a national security adviser to four U.S. senators has seen several defense secretaries in action, examines the unique challenges of this office to learn why the failure rate has been so high. *SECDEF* focuses on how the secretary performs in the broader world of national security policymaking, how he handles civil-military relations in planning strategy and wars, how he functions on the National Security Council and deals with the president and secretary of state, and how well he performs as a politician, especially in dealing with Congress. In office, Charles Stevenson finds, these men have tended to fall into one of the three general roles for executing such responsibilities: revolutionaries, firefighters, or, the most common role, team players. Stevenson analyzes each type for its defining characteristics and evaluates individual secretaries. This book will appeal to defense professionals and students alike and to readers interested in American defense and foreign policy who want to learn more about the important role often played by the person informally labeled the SECDEF.

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