

Title: American Defense Reform: Lessons from Failure and Success in Navy History
Speaker: Rear Admiral Dave Oliver (USN Ret.) and Dr. Anand Toprani
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POC: Dr. Evan Wilson

SYNOPSIS:

The United States military must be continually reshaped to adapt to evolving technologies, shifting adversaries, and a changing social environment for its personnel. However, introducing reform into the vast Department of Defense and its service branches is notoriously difficult. In *American Defense Reform*, retired admiral and defense executive Dave Oliver and historian Anand Toprani use US naval history as a guide for leading successful change in the Pentagon, showing how close collaboration among civilians and the military can create a path forward.

Part One begins with a historical analysis of the Navy during four key periods of disruptive transformation: the 1940s Revolt of the Admirals, the McNamara revolution in systems analysis, the fallout from the Vietnam War, and the end of the Cold War. Oliver and Toprani offer insights from historical documents, previously unpublished interviews from four-star admirals, and Oliver's own experiences as a senior naval officer and defense industry executive. Part Two examines the roles of civilian political appointees, Congress, and private industry in influencing defense innovation. Although each makes important contributions, these case studies show that Congress alone cannot effectively create change and reveal barriers to applying the experience of the private sector to the public sector.

Ultimately, Oliver and Toprani show that change can only come from a collaborative effort between civilians, the military, and industry that leverages each groups' particular strengths for the collective good. The book's final chapters offer practical recommendations to reform national defense to meet the demands of the future.

BIOS:

Rear Adm. Dave R. Oliver (USN, ret.) is a former chief of staff of the US Seventh Fleet and former CEO of EADS North America Defense Company, Inc. He is the author of *A Navy Admiral's Bronze Rules: Managing Risk and Leadership* (USNIP, 2021).

Anand Toprani is an associate professor in the Department of Strategy & Policy at the US Naval War College. He is the author of *Oil and the Great Powers: Britain and Germany, 1914–1945* (Oxford University Press, 2019), which received the 2020 Richard W. Leopold Prize from the Organization of American Historians.