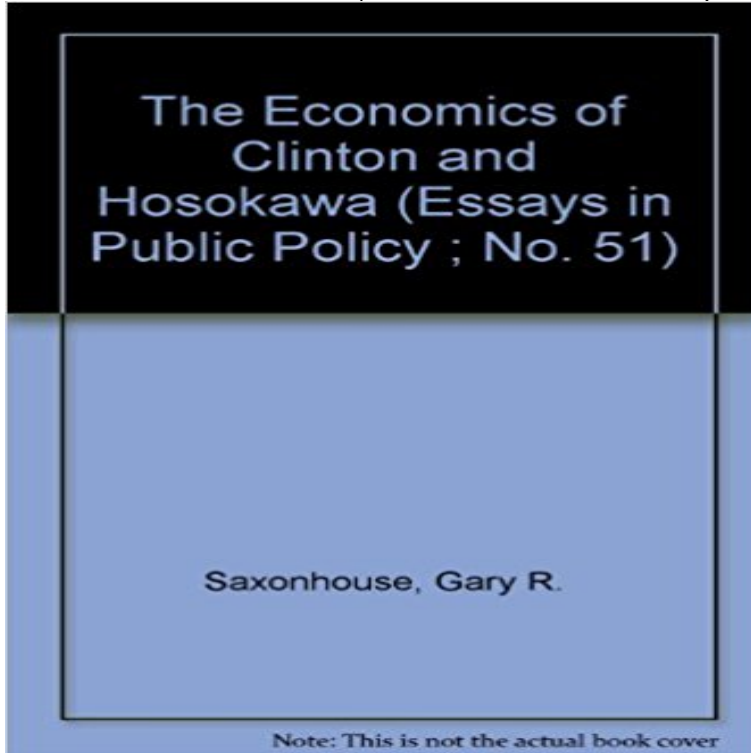


American Security: Back to Basics (Essays in Public Policy)



The widespread assumption that America never again need worry about first-class security threats is abetting thoughtless cuts in U.S. military forces. Reduced military power, however, tends to turn allies into bystanders, to magnify minor threats, and to actualize potentially major threats. American security policy ought to be based on the assumption that, as Charles de Gaulle used to say, the future lasts a long time, as well as on historical lessons. The founders built America's security on America's founding creed, on the best navy the country could afford, and on the state militias. Theodore Roosevelt summed up their common sense in the formula Speak softly and carry a big stick. They dealt easily with emperors, tsars, shoguns, and sultans without either mincing the distinction between freedom and tyranny or attempting to reshape foreign regimes. Since 1917, U.S. policymakers have oscillated between a realism that denies that importance of the laws of nature and nature's God and an idealism that denies the centrality of America's national interest. In recent years they have come to misunderstand the very role of military power, wasting America's patriotism and American lives. Today, halfhearted declarations about the internal affairs of other nations combined with cuts in U.S. military power amount to speaking loudly while shifting out stick away. Worse, because American policymakers and their families no longer serve in the armed forces, little sympathy remains between those who make security policy and those whose bodies enforce it. The only remedy is to reacquire the efficacious simplicity of the Founding Fathers thought and habits.

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