

“Emergency Wars”



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Passed in 1976, the National Emergencies Act ended 42-years of continuous national emergency, dating to 1933. Repealing four national emergencies, which allowed the president to draw on 470 emergency laws empowering him to run the nation "without reference to normal constitutional processes," the law instituted new procedures for exercising emergency authority, signifying a broader resurgence of congressional power in the 1970s. This thesis also examines the politics of presidential power, and how liberals became disillusioned with the presidency after Watergate and Vietnam, while the New Right gradually embraced executive authority to restrain the federal government and implement a hawkish foreign policy. The complex partisan and inter-branch politics of emergency powers fits into the broader distrust of government which pervaded the 1970s. This thesis explores the history of national emergencies in the 20th-century United States, the legislative history of the National Emergencies Act, and American politics in the 1970s to elucidate the important role executive power plays in American politics.