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Nota di contenuto

Frontmatter -- Contents -- Preface -- Introduction -- 1. The Food Power Presumption -- 2. India: Domestic Sources of Grain Trade Policy -- 3. The Soviet Union: Retreat from Food Power -- 4. The United States: Food Power Forgone -- 5. Testing Food Power: U.S. Food Aid to India 1965-1967 -- 6. Testing Food Power: Embargo on U.S. Grain to the Soviet Union 1980-1981 -- Conclusion -- Notes -- Bibliography -- Index

Sommario/riassunto

When U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Earl L. Butz announced in 1974 that "food is a weapon," he voiced a growing national belief in the political power of food resources. President Carter's 1980 decision to embargo grain sales to the Soviet Union appeared at first to confirm this popular notion. But can exporting nations, such as the United States, really use food as a powerful instrument of foreign policy? If so, are they using that weapon more frequently? Are importing nations taking steps to reduce their vulnerability? Challenging the view that food has emerged as a political weapon, Robert Paarlberg undertakes the first systematic inquiry into the relation between food resources and international power. Paarlberg maintains that food trade is seldom manipulated for reasons of foreign policy, due to the greater priority assigned by most nations to domestic food and farm policy objectives. To support his argument, he reviews the recent grain trade experience of three significant and divergent nations—India, the Soviet Union, and the United States. He then examines in detail two exceptional instances in which the coercive power of the U.S. food weapon was put to the test: Lyndon Johnson's manipulation of food aid to India in 1965–1967 and the Carter embargo on grain sales to the Soviet Union in 1980–1981. He concludes that the difficulties experienced in each instance only reinforced the larger trend against linking grain trade policy to foreign policy—a trend that can be applauded by those concerned with world food security and trade efficiency. Robert Paarlberg's challenge of the food power concept provides a valuable comparative insight into the conduct of national as well as international food policies.
