

1962

Thinking About the Unthinkable

Herman Kahn

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Kahn, Herman (1962) "Thinking About the Unthinkable," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 15 : No. 8 , Article 7.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol15/iss8/7>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

stimulating blend of factual information and considered interpretation of historical and contemporary events. The subjects propounded for the original essays were divided into the following main headings: (1) Contexts, (2) Formation of Policy, (3) Instruments of Policy, (4) Policy in Action and (5) Retrospect and Prospect. Eminent authorities—Kennan, Garthoff, Barghoorn and others—were invited to write essays within each group. The result is a work which is valuable to the student of historical trends in Russian foreign policies and which offers new perspectives for the study of international relations as well.

Kahn, Herman. *Thinking About the Unthinkable*. New York: Horizon, 1962. 254 p.

'The outcome of decisions that are well-meaning, informed, and intelligent can be disastrous. However, few would argue that this is a good reason to be malevolent, ignorant or stupid.' With this plea, Herman Kahn, of *On Thermonuclear War* fame, both opens and closes his newest book—a book whose primary purpose appears to be a defense of the necessity for thinking about modern war. Kahn has good reason to be sensitive about this point, for it was his daring to think about such a horrible subject as thermonuclear war rather than the substance of what he had to say that earned his first book its most critical and violent reviews. (For example, see *Scientific American*, March 1961, p. 197-200.) Kahn accomplishes his purpose very effectively in Chapter I, and then nails it down tight in the final chapter with a plea for serious study of our future prospects. As with his first book, this one too is quite weak in the area of definitions, and contains no index at all. Kahn does define many technical terms, but frequently the definition does not appear until many pages—even several chapters—after the word was used. A consolidated list of key words with their meanings, as Kahn defines them, would be a tremendous aid to the reader. In spite of these weaknesses—lack of continuity, definitions and index—*Thinking About the Unthinkable* should be read by every serious student of strategy.

Cadwell, Roy. *Communism in the Modern World*. Philadelphia: Dorrance, 1962, 251 p.

'Communism is a diabolical system, conceived in hate, nurtured by resentment, and framed by an iron-bound system of control that stifles the lives, the hearts, and the minds of the people it embraces.' This is the theme of Mr. Cadwell in his complete denunciation of the communistic system of government in today's modern world. In his book, the author attempts to investigate first the attitudes of the communist leaders in the fields of foreign policy, economics, power politics, agriculture, colonization, and their use of propaganda and words as weapons. He then delves