



Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

STUDIES

Rethinking Armageddon

March 1, 2016 | **Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jacob Cohn**

Resources: Future Warfare & Concepts

The First Nuclear Age was characterized by the Cold War era bipolar international system and a corresponding bipolar nuclear competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. While a few other states, such as Great Britain and France, also possessed nuclear arms, their arsenals were very small compared to those of the two superpowers.

The world is far different today. On the one hand, both the United States and Russia have far smaller nuclear arsenals than they did at the Cold War's end. At the same time, new nuclear powers have emerged in pace with advanced conventional precision warfare capabilities. The rise of cyber warfare has also led to concerns over the security and reliability of early warning and command-and-control systems, and weapon systems as well. Advances in the cognitive sciences and research on Cold War crisis decision-making have challenged some of our thinking as to how strategies based on deterrence work, or risk failing. Together, these and other recent developments have combined to form what some are calling a Second Nuclear Age.

Dr. Andrew Krepinevich and Jacob Cohn have authored a scenario-based assessment of the competitive dynamics of the Second Nuclear Age. The assessment explores, among other things, the implications for extended deterrence, crisis stability, missile defense, prompt conventional global strike, growing multipolar or “n-player competitions, and planning assumptions as they have been influenced by advances in the cognitive sciences, to include prospect theory. Their paper also includes an analysis of the implications for U.S. interests, with an emphasis on preserving the seventy-one-year tradition of non-use of nuclear weapons (since their only use in 1945), also known as the “nuclear taboo.” The existing and prospective challenges posed by the Second Nuclear Age, as reflected in these scenarios, are sobering. If the United States seeks to preserve the nuclear taboo, it ignores them at its peril.