



Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

STUDIES

Forging the Tools of 21st Century Great Power Competition

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Resources: Strategy & Policy

The U.S. national security community has, in recent years, begun to focus its attention on the need to compete with China and Russia. The move to embrace the reality of great power competition, and with it the prospect of great power war, comes after a three-decade respite from serious thinking about what it means to face an economically powerful and technologically sophisticated adversary in peace and in war. How can our governmental organizations, our defense planning premises and priorities, and the linkages among diverse elements of national power be revamped to focus our collective energies on a more demanding set of security challenges than has been the case since the end of the Cold War? Are there lessons that can be applied from the past 30 years – the era of “unipolarity,” the first Gulf War, and the post-9/11 conflicts? Or should we cast our mental template further back to identify useful policy antecedents, such as the period in which the United States organized for and adapted to long-term competition with the Soviet Union?

Thomas G. Mahnken, CSBA President and CEO and a member of the independent National Defense Strategy Commission, explores these and other questions in *Forging the Tools of 21st Century Great Power Competition*. Dr. Mahnken reviews our current national tools to compete and, if necessary, wage war in the future, looking back on decades of U.S.-Soviet rivalry to determine whether that very different experience can still shed light on current conditions. Chapters include assessments of alliance management, defense policy, arms control and competition, economic relations, political warfare and internal security. Also included is an appendix surveying past “whole-of-government” efforts to compete with the Soviet Union and resulting insights on the effectiveness of various instruments of power during the Cold War.