

On Escalation: Metaphors and Scenarios

By Herman Kahn



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In this widely discussed and influential book, Herman Kahn probes the dynamics of escalation and demonstrates how the intensification of conflict can be depicted by means of a definite escalation ladder, ascent of which brings opponents closer to all-out war. At each rung of the ladder, before the climb proceeds, decisions must be made based on numerous choices. Some are clear and obvious, others obscure, but the options are always there.

Thermonuclear annihilation, says Kahn, is unlikely to come through accident; but nations may elect to climb the ladder to extinction. The basic material for the book was developed in briefings delivered by Kahn to military and civilian experts and revised in the light of his findings of a trip to Vietnam in the 1960s. In *On Escalation* he states the facts squarely. He asks the reader to face unemotionally the terrors of a world fully capable of suicide and to consider carefully the alternatives to such a path.

In the never-never land of nuclear warfare, where nuclear incredulity is pervasive and paralyzing to the imagination even for the professional analyst, salient details of possible scenarios for the outbreak of war, and even more for war fighting, are largely unexplored or even unnoticed. For scenarios in which war is terminated, the issues and possibilities of which are almost completely unstudied, the situation is even worse. Kahn's discussion throws light on the terrain and gives the individual a sense of the range of possibilities and complexities involved and are useful.



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Editorial Review

Review

"This [reissue of Kahn's *On Thermonuclear War* and *On Escalation*] could not come at a better time. Human nature has not made much moral progress since the end of the Third Reich but its very worst instinct for total destruction has, so far, been held at bay by the certainty of self-destruction. We need someone to remind us again of how to think about the unthinkable." -- Mark Safranski, zenpundit.com

About the Author

Herman Kahn (1922-1983) was a renowned political scientist, economist, historian geo-strategist, and considered by many to be the founder of futurology as a serious field of study. Associated for many years with the RAND Corporation, he was the founding director of the first independent "think tank," the Hudson Institute. Among his many books are *Thinking About the Unthinkable, The Year 2000, The Next 200 Years, The Coming Boom, The Resourceful Earth*, and *On Thermonuclear War*.

Thomas Schelling is Distinguished University Professor at the School of Public Policy, University of Maryland. In addition to being the 2005 Noble Prize Laureate in Economics he is the author of numerous works including *Choice and Consequence, The Strategy of Conflict,* and *Micromotives and Macrobehavior*.

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