

2018

President's Forum

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PRESIDENT'S FORUM



Breaking the Mold

THE NATURE OF THE CHALLENGES we foresee for the Navy and the nation in the decades ahead has resulted in a series of organizational changes and realignments at the Naval War College since the summer of 2016. As one approach to understanding better the myriad futures that may arise, we recently conducted the “Breaking the Mold: Strategy and War in the 21st Century” workshop. This event was conceived as a way to bring together a diverse set of critical thinkers, futurists, and seasoned operators to “break the mold” of conventional thinking and develop a series of recommendations for senior leaders within the Navy and the Department of Defense.

The workshop, held in Newport in early March 2018, was sponsored by the Under Secretary of the Navy, the Honorable Thomas B. Modly, who provided the broad outlines of the task and identified his desire to see innovative recommendations put forward to address a host of future challenges. Sixty scholars, researchers, and proven maritime and joint-warfare operators were invited to gather at the College to spend two days engaged in free-flowing and unconstrained thinking and debate.

In this exercise, the “mold breakers” were empowered to consider options that some considered radical, controversial, and revolutionary. Such ideas deserved to compete in the intellectual arena—and could help shape the way ahead for America’s national security forces.

Under Secretary Modly traveled to Newport to kick off the event and to participate in the working-group discussions personally. In his keynote remarks he stated, in part:

Whether on active duty, as a Navy civilian, or even in the private sector, we have all witnessed profound changes together during the past four decades. These changes

will impact the U.S. Navy and our nation for years to come. The changes are coming at us fast—so we need to be prepared to break free of the organizational paradigms, behaviors, and biases that suited us in the last century. They are not well suited for today, and certainly not for the future.

Our National Defense Strategy . . . cannot be executed without a significant commitment of national resources and, perhaps more importantly, a significant application of national resolve and urgency—and an approach to maritime supremacy that “breaks the mold” of conventional thinking. Our maritime advantage is, and will continue to be, almost entirely dependent upon the quality of our people. It follows, therefore, that the agility of our future force will be almost entirely dependent upon the agility of the people we identify now to lead it. Therefore, I encourage you to think about breaking the mold in a way that allows us to recruit, train, equip, and educate the most quick-minded, flexible, collaborative, innovative, and transparent people we can find. If we do this, we will set the Navy on the course for maritime superiority well into this century.

Among the outcomes of this unique workshop was the development of a series of strategic and operational concepts that focused on four broad areas: a “porcupine strategy” of defense in Europe; a mobile maritime barrier in Asia; an increased reliance on special forces, unmanned systems, and cyber; and a possible reorganization of portions of the U.S. government to promote enhanced national security. Each of the ideas generated during this workshop will provide the Naval War College’s superb faculty with topics to research and refine, applying a bottom-up analysis to the group’s top-down formulations. The College is planning to conduct a larger, follow-on conference on these topics in October 2018.

In a related initiative, the College is taking another important step in preparing our national security professionals—at the College and throughout the Navy—for the future. In early April 2018, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral John Richardson, USN, visited the College to announce the establishment of the College of Leadership and Ethics (CLE) under the Naval War College’s academic umbrella. This effort is an expansion of the Leadership and Ethics Department that has been operating under Dean Peg Klein’s direction since late last year. The mission of the new college is to imbue Naval War College students with a desire for continuous learning and development as leaders of character. In addition, the new college will supplement and support each Navy community in its community leader development and maintain a strategy for leader development beyond major command.

In establishing the new CLE, Admiral Richardson noted that “[w]orld-class leadership is our Navy’s decisive advantage over our adversaries. Our operational and war-fighting success depends on developing leaders who learn and adapt to achieve maximum possible performance. Opening a College of Leadership and

Ethics (and providing a fleet-centered development framework) will create opportunities for us to become better leaders, build winning teams, and maintain America's maritime superiority.”

The workshop and the new college are just two examples of the ways in which your Naval War College is having significant impact on the Navy and the larger national security community. Watch this forum for discussion of other significant initiatives as the calendar year progresses.

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