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On 16 August 1978 the Under Secretary of the Navy, the Honorable R. James Woolsey, delivered the principal address at the Convocation of the 95th Class of the Naval War College. Much of his address will be of interest and value to Review readers and the following is adapted from it.

DIFFERENT VALUES – COMMON GOAL

by

The Honorable R. James Woolsey

The military promotion system tends to value highly and to promote those individuals who are competent operators. You [military officers] are thus products of a system that rewards you for becoming skilled in organizing for combat, for readily subordinating your own will to that of a superior, and for being able to obtain the loyalty and dedicated service of your own subordinates. Your training is focused on learning how to apply force against an enemy's weak point, on analyzing problems from a conservative, some would say a worst case, perspective in order to ensure that you always have enough to do the job. You stress the need to prepare solidly for any contingency and not to engage in rash or emotional action—as Teddy Roosevelt put it, to speak softly but carry a big stick. This is a largely coherent and useful set of values.

But it will come as no great surprise to you that much of civilian society and a number of those in the civilian government hierarchy with whom you must work do not share many of these values and characteristics. Those that can potentially get the most from their War College experience are those who are not merely defensive or scornful about that, but those who try to puzzle it out, those who can get outside themselves enough to wonder about, explore, and understand these differences. It's a perplexing business.

But this is an important and necessary effort for several reasons. In the years following World War II there was in Congress, in the executive branch, and in positions of authority in civilian society as a whole, a vast reservoir of Americans who had served with honor and pride in World War II. Although they had known the exasperating and bureaucratic side of military life—they had served under their Captain Queegs and many had viewed the world from the perspective of Willie and Joe—they also had known hours of greatness and glory in uniform. They knew that they had been engaged in a vast cooperative enterprise with comrades in arms that in a very real sense had saved the world from barbarism.

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That generation is passing. One now needs to be able to work with a generation of civilian leaders, both in Washington and in communities around America, who are from the generation of the student deferment.

I don't need to tell you that the last war, the war for which we did not mobilize, was the most unpopular in our history. Increasingly in future years when you deal with a civilian counterpart, an Assistant Secretary, a Member of Congress, or whomever, you will not be dealing with someone who served prominently on Eisenhower's staff, or who helped run the OSS. You will not even be dealing with a Willie Keith, the central figure in the *Caine Mutiny*, who entered the war as a young dithering confused brat and emerged from it as the competent, even courageous, last skipper of *Caine*. You will be dealing with many men and women who came into adulthood looking upon you and many of your values as part of the problem, not as part of the solution: veterans not of the Battle of the Bulge, but of the demonstrations in 1970 against the invasion of Cambodia.

Ernest May of Harvard, in his fascinating book "*Lessons*" of the Past describes some of the misuses of history in making foreign policy over the last several generations. One central problem is that people seem to have a difficult time learning from events further back than those that shaped their own youth. This is partly because of the decline in the study of history in our schools and colleges, a development about which I may wring my hands with you another time. In any case, the generation of civilian leaders of the 1920s and the 1930s had learned the lesson of how Europe stumbled into World War I, of how the "merchants of death" and entangling alliances created wars, and they vowed that it would not happen again. Much of that generation concluded, for example, that international agreements alone would suffice to restrain the military appetites of potential aggressors, and that the notion of "America First" was compatible with the appeasement of Hitler. Because of their mistakes the next generation learned a different lesson, and made different mistakes. Having seen what appeasement had brought in the 1930s, the next generation spent much of the late 1960s and early 1970s avoiding another Munich, in the jungles of Southeast Asia.

The point is clear. The generation that is now coming into positions of authority and prominence in the civilian community is a generation that will require some effort for you to understand and work with. Many of their assumptions are not yours. They are products of a recent history that has far more in common with the agony and ambivalence of the World War I era than with the triumphant victory of World War II. What can you do about that? How can you work with them? How can you communicate with them? What can you read to understand their assumptions better? When is the last time you read a thoughtful history of Europe or the United States that deals with the 1920s and 1930s? What about the series of naval treaties that occurred during the 1920s and 1930s? Did they work or not? How did Carl Vinson and others get the two-ocean-Navy built during the 1930s? And so on.

Apart from problems of generation and experience, what about the differences between you and those in civilian society with whom you must deal that stem from the different heritages of your professions? The list is long but let's take two of the largest civilian species in the Washington Zoo—the economists and the lawyers. What makes them tick? How are their professional assumptions different from yours? How did the economist become such an important advisor to government? What was the course of

Lord Keynes' career in Britain and why did he become a model for many other economists? Have you ever read a biography of him? Why is everything from the overall size of the federal budget to the flight characteristics of the next generation of Marine close support aircraft heavily determined by models constructed by economists or by those who approach decisionmaking with a similar set of tools? From what intellectual tradition do our current economists spring? Does economic man provide a reasonable basis for predicting human behavior, especially in war? Are there other competing intellectual traditions and visions of society and the role of government? Would the British philosopher Edmund Burke have designed a military compensation system the same way a group of modern economists does?

And lawyers, my God, the lawyers. Like the all-pervasive thick fog that permeates London in the opening pages of Dickens' *Bleak House*, his classic dismemberment of the Victorian legal system, you can't go anywhere—Congress, the executive branch, or your local city council—without plowing into them. Why are they always haggling over jurisdiction? Why do they always seem to first stake out a strong position and then compromise? What is the root of their emphasis on the procedural aspects of decisionmaking? How can they defend a guilty man or honorably turn from careers in the private sector to government and back again? Why did Brandeis and Frankfurter become their models? What have you read by or about either of these men?

I can only answer a few of these many questions myself, but I will draw one conclusion: it is only the sort of officer who asks these kinds of questions and ponders them who will be capable of being more than an executor of civilian decisions. It is only the officer who worries these sorts of problems, who restlessly turns to history or philosophy or novels or other sources for admittedly partial and imperfect answers, who will be the sort of thoughtful colleague, advisor, and teacher, that many in the civilian world, particularly in Washington, will need in the years to come.

For War College students: this year you have a chance to explore such matters—to step back and do some reading and listening and talking that can help you look into the recent history of our country—the judgments that we've made, and what we're becoming. The questions I've asked and the areas I've suggested are not the ones you need explore. But I know now that if by next July you've become captured by any such chain of inquiry—if you've got caught in any one sequence of reading and discussion that gets under your skin and leads you to examine how you and your profession fit into our country's government and society, and into our world, if you apply yourself to any such inquiry with the same sort of dedication with which you would plan a military operation, then the year will have been a pearl of great price. You will then not only have learned some things about the world outside your profession, you will have learned something about yourself. And that's the highest and most important course of study the Naval War College or any college has to offer.

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