

## President's Forum

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*The U.S. Naval War College*

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*Rear Admiral Shoshana Chatfield is the fifty-seventh President of the U.S. Naval War College and a career naval helicopter pilot. A native of Garden Grove, California, she graduated from Boston University in 1987 with a bachelor of arts in international relations and French language and literature. She received her commission through the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps in 1988 and earned her wings of gold in 1989. Chatfield was awarded the Navy's Political/Military Scholarship and attended the Kennedy School of Government, receiving a master in public administration from Harvard University in 1997. In 2009, the University of San Diego conferred on her a doctorate of education in leadership studies.*

## PRESIDENT'S FORUM

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WHILE DEVELOPING a comprehensive strategic plan for the Naval War College (NWC), we have returned numerous times to consider what role the institution should have in a “prewar/wartime” environment. I am not an alarmist who sees an inevitable war just around the corner, but in planning we must consider our role during a regional or global conflict.

The ability to synthesize data from disparate sources, analyze trends, and shape an informed vision of future political and military environments is critical to leaders in and out of uniform. Our College focuses on improving these skills for all our students. This form of forecasting is far from an exact science; still, it is vitally important as the foundation of realistic national-security planning. By its very nature, restructuring military forces to prepare for expected futures is a long process. Conceiving, designing, building, and fielding weapon systems can take years, if not decades. Recruiting, training, and educating warriors with the proper skill-sets and experience can take even longer. As it has for fourteen decades, the College will continue to play a crucial role in developing the warriors and weapons the nation will need in the unprecedented years to come.

Russia and China have demonstrated a willingness to undermine overtly the established rules-based world order. The trend lines are clear and unmistakable. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark A. Milley, recently stated that the “potential for significant international conflict between great powers is increasing, not decreasing.” In this context, the College’s educational and research programs need to be resilient and forward leaning.

In his thoughtful 2010 essay “Too Busy to Learn,” retired major general (and former U.S. Army War College commandant) Robert H. Scales discussed the importance of professional military education. He postulated that the British army’s excessive embrace of operational experience at the expense of education had cost it dearly in the early decades of the twentieth century. His essay exhorted today’s military leaders to avoid such a dangerous pitfall, and particularly to spend years of relative peace preparing for conflict. During the “golden era” of the Naval War College—between the First and Second World Wars—midgrade officers prepared themselves intellectually for the often ill-defined but broadly foreseen challenges ahead. These officers ultimately would assume senior leadership positions.

Considerations about the role of our College in the prewar and wartime periods have evolved. For example, NWC professor John B. Hattendorf, former *Naval War College Review* editor B. Mitchell Simpson, and retired rear admiral John R. Wadleigh, in their 1984 book, *Sailors and Scholars*, noted that during the Spanish-American War and World War I the College was closed and all officers went out to sea or to various duty stations. However, leading up to and during World War II, primarily owing to the efforts of Admiral Chester W. Nimitz and Admiral Edward C. Kalbfus, rather than closing its doors the College condensed its courses down to five months. Kalbfus insisted that naval officers needed foundations on which to exercise command properly during wartime.

In a 1960 address at the College, Fleet Admiral Nimitz asserted that taking our correspondence courses in 1922–23 was “one of the most valuable experiences I’ve had.” He particularly highlighted the need to study geography and the requirement to write a long paper on logistics across the Pacific, commenting how much those undertakings had helped him during the war. In addition, Nimitz said, “[T]he war with Japan had been re-enacted in the game rooms here by so many people and in so many different ways that nothing that happened during the war was a surprise—absolutely nothing except the kamikaze tactics towards the end of the war.”

It is enlightening to consider the role of the College before and during the Second World War and how we might carry those lessons into the future. Current policy calls for investment in the intellectual capacity of our most important asset: our people. The Secretary of the Navy’s recent decision to guarantee a 100 percent fill rate for all student billets proves the service’s commitment.

Following the attacks on September 11, 2001, a series of special Newport Papers on the global war on terror, primarily written by our faculty, provided insights on which top decision makers relied heavily. In October 2001, then-Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Vernon E. “Vern” Clark stated, “This effort

is timely because our nation is at war. It is important because, in times of conflict, our Navy and our nation depend on the intellectual capital invested in the Naval War College. We need the product that will come from this conference. This superb institution is composed of our best and brightest—officers and civilians who are not just doers but also thinkers.”

To be clear, we are not now at war. However, if we do not invest in education today, our future leaders will be less prepared for any possible conflict. Our task is to build a cadre of officers with the intellectual strength and flexibility to out-think our competitors in all domains. In the future, it will be our alums who lead the way. They will ensure the continuance of our freedoms, our prosperity, and the international rules-based system that has supported the advancement of the global community of nations for more than seventy years.

As we look internally at our programs and processes, we can ask several salient questions: Who are our students likely to be in the years leading up to and during wartime? What skills and talents do they have on arrival, and where do they need to be strengthened? By the time they reach Newport, most of our students have become quite adept in the tactical aspects of their profession; they know how to fight the ship, employ weapon systems, and handle their airframe, and how their platform, group, service, and organizations fit into the larger tactical picture. However, they need to expand beyond this scope: to consider the operational and strategic levels of war; to understand time, space, and logistics; and to know how joint war-fighting integration empowers our forces. After all, to engage and defeat any adversary, they will need to work in unfamiliar domains across services and agencies and to integrate with international partners and allies.

The landscape of war continues to change, which means our curricula and research efforts also must change. We continually must adapt content and process to enable our students to learn new skills and hone existing ones to face these new challenges. The 2022 National Defense Strategy and the 2020 triservice maritime strategy define China's activities in the Indo-Pacific region as the pacing challenge, considering that country's rapid military and technological growth and its increasingly aggressive posture toward Taiwan. At the same time, we are mindful that the Russian threat to the nations of the West is ever present and growing. The unprovoked and brutal invasion of Ukraine has shown that Russian forces are formidable but not unstoppable. The fact that the specter of nuclear warfare is now a factor in defense planning returns much of the world to the prospect of horrors not considered since the height of the Cold War.

We are the nation's premier war college and the Navy's "Home of Thought." In executing our missions, functions, and tasks, we inform today's decision

makers and educate tomorrow's leaders across our three lines of effort: education, research, and outreach. We provide experience and support our students' intellectual development to enable them to anticipate the most likely future environments; we prepare them strategically for the future. This investment in education ultimately will strengthen the foundations of peace, provide a decisive war-fighting advantage, and ensure the national security of the United States and our allies. I can think of no more significant or noble challenge for us all.



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