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President's Forum

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President's Forum

The Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Jay Johnson, has stated that we have four Navies: the Navy of history; the Navy we are currently operating; the Navy being procured through the present budget process; and the Navy after Next. Our focus here at the Naval War College, and indeed our special operating domain, is the future—the Navy after Next. Admiral Johnson has rightly observed that we neglect any of these four navies at our peril.

The Navy of history is logically connected to the Navy after Next. If that connection is lost, we may draw the wrong conclusions from current observations. For example, many have said that any future Navy would necessarily take a long time to achieve, that anyone who wants to know what the Navy of 2015 might look like need only go to the piers at Norfolk or San Diego today. This perception is flawed. The factors that cause the Navy to change so slowly are all under human control. That is, the pace of change is a result of choices we have

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made, consciously or otherwise. History shows that navies can change quickly. For example, shortly after the turn of the nineteenth century, Sir John Fisher, First Sea Lord of the Royal Navy, rendered his navy and all others obsolete when he produced HMS *Dreadnought* in the course of a year. Of course, it takes a long time to mature the requisite technologies, concepts, and underlying strategy, but that maturation is not what is holding us back now. Without a study of history we forget that though in 1935 the Kriegsmarine had no U-boats, by 1939 fifty-six of them were the scourge of the Atlantic. In 1935 there were no panzer divisions, but in 1939 they were in Poland. None of these examples is technologically insignificant. Perhaps most striking, the shape and mode of operation of the United States Navy was dramatically altered on one Sunday morning in December 1941.

Because of the power history can have in informing our decisions about the future, I will break from my usual practice of using this space for future focus and use it to consider history. Here are the reflections of Congressman Ike Skelton (D-Mo.) on the importance of the study of history to those serving in, and supporting, the armed forces. I am sure you will find his thoughts both enjoyable and useful.

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Vice Admiral Cebrowski has commanded Fighter Squadron 41 and Carrier Air Wing 8, both embarked in USS *Nimitz* (CVN 68). He later commanded the assault ship USS *Guam* (LPH 9) and, during Operation DESERT STORM, the aircraft carrier USS *Midway* (CV 41). Following promotion to flag rank he became Commander, Carrier Group 6 and Commander, USS *America* Battle Group. In addition to combat deployments to Vietnam and the Persian Gulf, he has deployed in support of United Nations operations in Iraq, Somalia, and Bosnia. He has served with the U.S. Air Force; the staff of Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet; the staff of the Chief of Naval Operations, on four occasions; with the Joint Staff (as J6); and as Director, Navy Space, Information Warfare, and Command and Control (N6). Vice Admiral Cebrowski became the forty-seventh President of the Naval War College in July 1998.