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‘Victory at Sea’ Conference at U.S Naval War College
13-15 March 2019
James W.E Smith
Kings College London, PhD Candidate.



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**The Victory at Sea: Naval Lessons of the Great War and the U.S Navy of the Twenty
First Century**

Conference Paper Abstract

Paper: *The Relationship Between World War and the Future U.S Navy*

Abstract:

It was clear by the end of 1945 that the British Admiralty and U.S. Department of the Navy were a critical factor in the success of their respective naval services. As freestanding ministries of state representing the institutional, strategic and cultural concerns of their respective naval services they had delivered centuries of relative institutional coherence particularly on fundamental questions such as seapower and maritime strategy's role and mission. As the Japanese surrendered aboard the USS Missouri flanked by two Royal Navy Battleships it was clear that the era of great seapowers had ended and naval power's contribution to national defense in the future in more doubt than any era prior. However, neither naval service was prepared for the period of post-war military intellectual reflection and how this resulted in complexities such as defense unification and centralisation. U.S naval intellectuals had limited warning and little time to prepare for an era where the understanding of naval power and the role of the U.S Navy would be dogmatically critiqued as the organisational environment fundamental changed around them. To secure the U.S Navy's future, U.S Naval leadership in the late 1940s and 1950s turned to the experiences of their predecessors – primarily of the First World War era - for guidance on how to secure a future for the U.S Navy. Leadership realised they had been already intellectually equipped and armed with a toolset for understanding how to reform and modernise the U.S Navy to ensure it was not wholly made vulnerable to alternative visions of U.S defense strategy but more importantly how to communicate a sea power message to decision makers. By doing so, the U.S Navy of the second half of the 20th century and into the 21st Century would not exist in the successful form it took without the reforms of the 1950s who themselves were significantly dependent on the experience and professional development of key naval thinkers of the First World War era. This underlines the value of institutional coherence; disregarded in the Royal Navy and an issue the U.S Navy would have a troubled relationship with and the challenge of understanding 'legacy'.

This paper underlines the importance of institutional coherence by reminding readers of the value of creating 'repositories of wisdom' for decision makers to be able to utilise and understand today and tomorrow. Although many so called 'lessons' can be taken from either World Wars, the paper highlights that first and foremost 'intellectual edge', education and mechanisms to pass on experience must be considered, particularly when considering grant and maritime strategy but also seapower/sea power messages. [4th February 2019].