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U.S Naval Academy, Annapolis, MD. USA.

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Title: 'Two Steps from Abolition: The U.S Navy and U.S Defence Unification 1945-1964.'

Abstract:

In 1945 the British Admiralty and U.S. Department of the Navy were freestanding ministries of state representing the institutional, strategic and cultural concerns of their respective naval services. They did so through many mediums, helping to create and disseminate naval identity while supporting national interest in and of their service in political life. After 1945 unification was the chosen vehicle of change for a U.S. political executive seeking to increase civilian and political controls over defense, the asymmetric debate between the services and the political establishment was aggravated by evolving technology and reducing budgets. It led the naval establishment to become highly charged over issues such as the future of military aviation. Although scholarship has focused on an era commonly and often incorrectly termed, 'the revolt of the Admirals' and focuses on the 'aviation question,' new research as part of the authors PhD research demonstrates it was a period of anxiety for the U.S. Navy over a more vital question: its future existence. Scrutiny of unification and the Department of the Navy of the period of 1945 to 1951, has often led to a narrow, negative view of the period and has become embedded into modern-single focused defence debates and historical scholarship. This paper explores the relationship between the intellectual culture of senior U.S naval leadership, unification and concepts of sea power and maritime strategy, which struggled during a period of self-reflection on the role and mission of the Navy. Questions such as these became a fundamental factor to the development of the U.S. Navy during the period, with lasting effect that can still be seen today.

Over the past three years the author has been working closely on a significant declassification effort covering the period and topic. At McMullen it will be the first chance to discuss findings and challenge existing ideas by revealing how close the U.S Navy came to abolition between 1945 and 1964.