Air, Space, and Cyberspace Power for the Future?

We live in uncertain times. Just a few years ago there was a rather common acceptance that US hegemony—political, economic, cultural, and military—would continue. The dominance of US airpower, and of USAF airpower in particular, seemed similarly guaranteed. Today, neither condition seems as certain as it did in the 1990s and early 2000s. The domestic and international consensus that reflected US interests and desires has given way to challenge and debate over nearly every policy issue. While the United States maintains the world's strongest economy, there are signs of concern that ripple across the globe. The pervasive influence of what Thorstein Veblen presciently called "conspicuous consumption" has sparked resentment and reaction against US culture from societies that struggle to reconcile images of US wealth with persistent poverty among their own populations. US military dominance has remained equally conspicuous since before Operation Desert Storm, which showcased American airpower.

Today, Airmen find themselves focused on present battles. Those in Iraq, Afghanistan, and lesser known theaters rely on the full range of USAF capabilities. While these battles rage, our leaders fight to recapitalize the force to preserve our lead. The measures of success in these different, but related, battles are remarkably similar. One hears veterans returning from Central Command's area of responsibility (AOR) talk with justifiable pride about the high quality and responsiveness of Airmen within the theater. One also hears veterans from the "Washington AOR" talk about winning the fight for dollars and programs. We must also simultaneously build a strategic vision of how air, space, and cyberspace power will secure the nation in the future.

As our chief of staff, Gen T. Michael Moseley, wrote in the first issue of *Strategic Studies Quarterly* (*SSQ*), it is time to recapitalize our Air Force—for Airmen to think strategically—if we are to secure the future for those who come after us. Airmen have a long intellectual heritage in this arena that involves forging partnerships among military, government, and civilian thinkers. Most of *SSQ*'s military readers are familiar with the history of the Air Corps Tactical School of the 1930s. For our government and civilian readers, the tactical school was where Airmen of the interwar

years developed the theory of daylight precision strategic bombardment. They challenged accepted wisdom about how to fight and win wars. Their efforts to challenge accepted paradigms laid the foundations for the war-winning strategies of World War II. They thought of war from a unique perspective predicated on airpower as the dominant weapon.

Today, we need thinkers who will challenge accepted paradigms to propose new ways of fighting from air, space, and cyberspace. Sometimes our perspectives become too mired in present battles, our references too wedded to established joint and service doctrines, and our willingness to follow promising ideas too restricted by fear of failure. If today's Airmen hope to secure the future, they must reach beyond the boundaries of their technical and intellectual universe. They must develop relationships with people who are working on problems and innovations that have strategic implications for the future—people who seek to revolutionize the world. Airmen, in short, must win the present fights, in whatever AOR they occur, while they simultaneously think strategically about winning future fights with ideas, concepts, organizations, and tools that do not exist today.

The strategic question of the moment may be, When we win the war on terror, and if we recapitalize our technology, what contribution will air, space, and cyberspace make that leads to a more secure nation in the future? I have every confidence that Airmen, along with other military, government, and academic professionals, can solve present-day problems—the resources of the nation are at their disposal to do so. But how many of our intellectual partners are thinking about the challenge after next? How many are laying the intellectual and theoretical foundations for capabilities we do not even know we will need? And how do we give such ideas a fair hearing if we allow the urgency of the present to dominate and jeopardize the necessity of thinking clearly and forthrightly about future air, space, and cyberspace capabilities upon which our nation will depend?

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