The Requirement for a Future Strategy

> *We must also look at the world as it is, not as we'd like it to be, and we must acknowledge that much of the world does not necessarily see us as we would see ourselves. And we must look clear-eyed beyond Iraq and Afghanistan. Only with that understanding can we determine where we want to go and how we want to get there. But as this vision develops, we must keep in mind that it is no good if we cannot provide the means to achieve it, nor is it useful if it is not a realistic fit with the rest of the world.*
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> —Representative Ike Skelton (D-MO), 10 July 2008

First of all, I want to take the opportunity that writing this editorial presents to thank former Air Force secretary Mike Wynne and Gen Buzz Moseley for their many contributions to our Air Force. Among these contributions are the establishment of the Air Force Research Institute and the *Strategic Studies Quarterly*. We will do our best to live up to their great expectations.

Today, our Air Force is the best in the world. However, to remain the best we must take on some of the most critical challenges we have ever faced—especially with regard to modernization. Having said that, in my view, the most significant challenge all of us in the military face today concerns developing a unifying strategy that will guide our contributions to solving the problems our nation confronts. This challenge has at least two components.

First, our leaders must institute a balance between meeting the needs of the present and preparing for those of the future. This is not an either/or proposition; both are essential strategic tasks. Our country finds itself in a particularly difficult era with respect to this strategic component because of the immediacy of the present conflicts and the ill-defined nature of the future threat. Achieving our strategic objectives in Iraq and Afghanistan after removing the regimes in those two countries has required our forces to develop new skills and operating concepts in the crucible of irregular warfare. While critics may argue about the decision to become involved militarily or about the pace of progress, no one can dispute that US and coalition forces have demonstrated unparalleled operational flexibility in adapting to the post–9/11 environment. That adaptation has provided the fledgling

democracies in Iraq and Afghanistan time and security to organize and start the process of resolving core issues for their societies. Regardless of the justifiable pride in our progress, we must seek to do even better in the near term. We must also integrate the lessons from this experience into our Services so that they become part and parcel of our doctrines, organizations, and capabilities.

Regarding the future, our challenge is to present to our national leaders a realistic assessment of the threats we expect to face. With the fall of the Soviet Union, our national security planning lost its focal point. Instead of a single enemy against which to plan, program, and budget our military capabilities, we now find few states that confront our interests and capabilities directly in the same way the Soviets had. Instead, we see failing states, humanitarian disasters, genocides, transnational criminals, and the rise of transnational terrorism. The picture becomes even more complicated with the addition of interconnected trends spawned by globalization, environmental degradation, global demographic imbalance, and energy and resource scarcity. This stream of nontraditional challenges came into sharp relief in the form of the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001—we are no longer in just a post–Cold War era, we find ourselves also in the post–9/11 era. But as important and immediate as the complex threats that coalesced into the terrorists attacks of 9/11 are, their immediacy can tend to obscure potential threats from nation-state adversaries. To repeat, this is not an either/or proposition—our national security depends on fielding capabilities and forces to cope with the full range of security challenges.

The second component of our strategic challenge involves presenting options that provide national leaders and operational commanders the flexibility to gain a return on our Services' investments in training, organizing, and equipping. This is an intellectual challenge that requires us to question our preconceived notions of how best to employ military capabilities to serve the national interest. It requires integrating policy development with planning and programming rather than dealing with those essential activities as if they were divorced from each other and from the ends of strategy and national defense. This intellectual activity requires research, discussion, debate, and engagement with a wide range of public policy, strategy, academic, and defense professionals. On occasion we will find that our partners in these discussions will disagree with our perspectives—that is part of the process. We need to be effective and knowledgeable advocates of our positions as Airmen as well as sufficiently confident

to listen carefully to the range of perspectives presented by those outside our community or technical specialties. Our charge is to synthesize the best options for securing the nation by engaging with the most creative, perceptive, professional, and thoughtful people who, like us, dedicate themselves to providing for our nation's security.

Research, debate, publication, outreach, and engagement are some of the lines of operation that converge into solutions to these components of strategy. Those of us in the military, in the government, and in academia must evaluate our progress, question our assumptions, and propose creative alternatives that help us confront the complex challenges of today's and tomorrow's global security environment. *Strategic Studies Quarterly* is one forum for these exchanges to take place—I look forward to participating in these engagements as we move ahead, serving our nation.

JOHN A. SHAUD
General, USAF, Retired
Director, Air Force Research Institute
Maxwell AFB, Alabama