

**REMARKS OF CONGRESSMAN IKE SKELTON (D-MO)
CHAIRMAN, HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
BROOKINGS LUNCHEON SEMINAR – JULY 31, 2008
“GAME CHANGERS” AND THE MILITARY:
EXPLORING INNOVATION AND LEADERSHIP**

"I want to thank Dr. Singer for inviting me to address this luncheon seminar. It's an honor to be with you and to share the program with one of our country's most distinguished soldier scholars, my friend Major General Bob Scales.

"From the time I was a young man, reading military history has been my hobby. And while this hobby didn't necessarily serve a professional purpose when I was practicing law in Lexington, Missouri, it has certainly helped me in my work on the House Armed Services Committee. My background as a student of military history also impressed upon me the importance of professional military education, which is key to developing the strategic thinkers and innovative leaders who will serve as military advisers to the President and to Congress.

"Today, I want to talk about a fundamental problem affecting the national security of the United States. The fact is, we suffer from the complete absence of a comprehensive strategy for advancing U.S. interests. As a result, major policies are inconsistent and contradictory in different areas of the world and across different policy realms. We suffer from a splintering of national power, which hinders our ability to address threats coherently and to reassure and cooperate with allies.

"Our next President will have a unique opportunity to develop a strategy suited for today's rapidly changing world. While we lack a comprehensive strategy now, the U.S. has had numerous successful strategies in past years. During the Cold War, both major political parties supported a strategy of containment for confronting the Soviet Union. During World War II, the United States had a widely-supported strategy of focusing first on the War in Europe, and deferring some effort from the War in the Pacific until the Nazi threat was contained. At other times in our nation's history, we have pursued less successful strategies, such as a strategy of isolationism during the period between World Wars I and II.

"In my view, our next President would be well advised to follow the example of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who shortly after taking office commissioned the Solarium Project to review strategies for dealing with the Soviet Union. After a competitive process in which three teams of advisers promoted the merits of three strategies, President Eisenhower decided to continue the policy of containment developed by President Truman.

"Beyond engaging in and personally leading a Solarium-type approach to national strategy, the next President will need to ensure that any new strategy for America can truly develop support across the political spectrum. Congress has a role to play in the process, and to ensure that a new strategy is one that the American people can support, the general debate should involve the American people.

"To develop a new strategy, we have to ask ourselves a number of questions. This list is not exhaustive by any means, but let me share a few thoughts. Ultimately, determining the critical interests a strategy is designed to protect depends upon the

place America occupies in the world. Who do we want to be? What do we see as our role? How do we want to interact with the rest of the world to get there?

"We must consider the effort and the sacrifices we are willing to make. 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. We must look beyond Iraq and Afghanistan. As this vision develops, we must also 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.

"The global environment is ever changing. While we cannot control the sea swell of change, we must prepare ourselves to navigate those waters. Regional power is shifting; some large nation states – such as China, India, and Brazil, to name a few – are ascending and verge on global power status. Russia may already be there, again. Do their interests conflict or coincide with ours? Is their rise a challenge to oppose or an opportunity to engage?

"It is also clear that a number of trans-national issues will challenge us, while others may provide positive potential. Fundamentalist terrorism and the proliferation of dangerous weapons are obvious examples of serious challenges, of course, but what about climate change, the fragility of increasingly connected world financial markets, or the outbreak of pandemic disease? These are challenges that present themselves without any malicious intentional human action.

"Today, the United States is the world's dominant economic, political, and military power. We have no peer or near-peer competitor, nor does one appear likely to emerge in the near future. President Clinton eloquently described a vision of the U.S. as "the indispensable nation," not a world hegemon, but a consistent and ever present ally and arbiter acting around the world. I believe the U.S. should remain the indispensable nation.

"Those who would have us significantly reduce our role on the world stage cannot credibly describe the state of the world's affairs in the absence of U.S. leadership. To embrace such an approach, we would have to accept that significant portions of the world would simply be left to their own devices. Yet we know that places as remote as the Hindu Kush are home to those who would attack us and our allies. So what other corner of the world do we judge to be so distant and so remote as to be beyond our interest? And how would world fault lines, such as the Taiwan Strait, the India/Pakistan Line of Control, and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, respond to a world leadership vacuum? The answer is: not well.

"What, then, does accepting a role of world leadership entail? As the world's indispensable nation, we should take a leadership role in advancing and protecting our interests around the world in concert with our friends and allies, as part of an open and evolving international system that is fair to all nations. With this role as our goal, we can define those interests critical to achieving it, and develop and adopt an appropriate strategy.

"The engines of our claim to leadership in the future are the engines that made this country great in the first place: our robust economy that provides opportunity while connecting us with the rest of the world; in productive partnerships; and our unceasing pursuit of what is right, fair, and just, even when we fall short of those

ideals. To the extent we've veered off course in those areas, whether because of crippling energy dependence, unprecedented levels of foreign debt, our departure from sound constitutional practices, or even when and how we marshal our forces for war, we must refocus internally to address those challenges and master them once again.

"If we redouble our efforts, we can recapture the international prestige that translates our unmatched power into the ability to alter the course of world events. There is no reason why we cannot gain the confidence to understand that the term "challenge," even in the international context, need not always have an adversarial meaning. And we should not miss the opportunity to refine the good things about America so that we remain the obvious – the indispensable – choice for a continued global leadership role.

"So in the course of developing a new strategy, I recommend that the President judge those new proposals against a simple set of principles:

"The first priority of the federal government is the protection of the U.S. homeland and its citizens.

"2. The foundation for continued U.S. leadership is the strength of our economy and our commitment to our values and principles.

"3. Do not let an outside power dominate Europe or the Western Pacific, and in addition maintain freedom of the seas.

"4. U.S. world leadership should be earned by virtue of the esteem other nations hold for us, engendered by our productivity and moral leadership, and not through a self-justifying hegemony which views the peaceful rise of other nations as an inherent threat.

"5. Insulate the Western Hemisphere from hostile outside powers with a collaborative approach.

"6. Transnational events that can undermine states and challenge or dislocate large numbers of people – the AIDS pandemic, terrorism, and global climate change to give a few examples – should be addressed by international coalitions coordinating globally, using the full range of national power.

"7. Our military strength serves as both a source of deterrence for would-be aggressors, and reassurance for our friends and allies, but military action is a last resort. When it is used -- whether multilateral or unilateral -- strict adherence to the essential strategic tenets propounded by Sun Tzu and Clausewitz is mandatory

"These principles do not define our strategy, for they leave many questions unanswered. What kind of international institutions, coalitions and alliances are essential? What red lines should trigger a certain U.S. response, even if it must be a unilateral response? How do we define what constitutes a fair opportunity to advance for those nations which perceive their current share of the world's resources as inadequate? And what transnational events require a concerted international response? These are judgments for the next President; he should make them with

input from a wide variety of sources. But we all should take part in a dialogue to help forge a new national consensus on a strategy that fulfills our principles and helps us answer these hard questions, ultimately guiding us to policies that are wise and just.

"What I've just described is no easy task. It will take a lot of brain power to get this right. The President is going to have to lead this effort and not just delegate to staff, but he will need to have the best and the brightest minds at his disposal. Some of these great thinkers will be civilians, some will be military. We must have a system that finds these people and cultivates them into the intellectual engines that will drive this process.

"New challenges and the range of potential futures will require creative and innovative solutions. But we cannot make the mistake of embracing innovation for innovation's sake. In my opinion, in recent years the Department of Defense has become infatuated by the latest operational fad, embracing war fighting concepts that seemed to ignore the lessons of Thucydides, Sun-Tzu, and Clausewitz. You cannot violate the maxims of these classical theorists and expect enduring success in international conflict. In some respects I think we're seeing that, first in Iraq – although now perhaps corrected – and also in Afghanistan. Innovation without foundation is folly. And so there is a dilemma here: while we want "out of the box" thinkers, they must be bounded by reality and rooted in the fundamentals.

"I would like to think that our efforts over the years to add rigor to the professional military education system have cultivated the heavy hitting thinkers, with real world experience and intellectual grounding, who could make invaluable contributions to any project to develop a new strategy. I know that our country has the talent to undertake this task and to do it well. But it will be up to the next President to lead the way. I firmly believe that a new comprehensive strategy for advancing U.S. interests must be a priority and I am committed to doing all I can to move the process along.