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Experts discuss future of Asia-Pacific

The Air Force Research Institute, or AFRI, hosted the Asia-Pacific Symposium at Maxwell this week. The event, titled “The Asia-Pacific Century: Overcoming the Strategy Gap,” brought together key experts to discuss the shifting economic and strategic focus of the United States, according to Dr. John Shaud, the director of the AFRI and retired Air Force general.

“We have brought in experts from not just the United States but truly all over the world to come here, speak to us and share some thoughts on the emergence of the Asia-Pacific region,” he said. “The president of the United States recently visited the area, and the Secretary of State was in Myanmar very recently, so it’s an area we are really focusing on.”

Justin Logan, the director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute, a think tank in Washington D.C., echoed Shaud’s comments, stressing the need for a shift in priorities.

“I think it’s important for everyone to take a broader interest in the Asia-Pacific region, not just the AFRI. I think that it’s become clear, particularly over the last decade, that our most important strategic interests don’t lie in the Middle East; rather they lie in the Asia-Pacific region. I think this conference is a reflection of that realization,” he said. Shaud said holding the conference will allow the AFRI to publish key research on the area.

“We want to have a greater understanding of the region, and in the process, we will produce papers that examine some of the aspects, particularly, of the United States and the Air Force, as far as air strategy would be concerned for the Pacific region,” he said.

That research is what sets this conference apart, according to Shaud. The information the AFRI staff learned from this conference could have far-reaching effects. “One of the outstanding things that came out of the conference is that we have proceedings. In other words, this isn’t a coffee shop talk kind of thing where everybody feels like they know each other better and then we go back home,” he said. “We actually make a product and distribute it, and people take a look [at it] when they are formulating policy.”