

Graduation Ceremony for Students of International Relations and International Studies

Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr., Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs
Wendy and Emery Reves Center for International Studies, The College of William & Mary
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Thank you, Dean Reiss, and good morning. Distinguished faculty and alumni, ladies and gentlemen, let me offer my warm congratulations to all the distinguished students from the Class of 2003 graduating with degrees in international relations or international studies.

I know this must be a moment in your lives that summons a range of emotions. Your minds are clear: all the anxiety of meeting course requirements, taking exams, writing papers, is behind you -- although many of you will have nightmares for the next 20 years about forgetting you had signed up for a course and having two days to cram for the final.

Now, you can look ahead and see what is out there, waiting for you. You may know what you plan to do next, or you may intend to take a little time before digging in to a major new commitment.

Either way, this is a day for feeling proud of all your hard work, and excited about all the good things awaiting you somewhere along your path to the future.

Standing here in front of you, I have two powerful sentiments of my own. The first is how deeply honored I am to speak at your commencement and to mark this moment in your lives. I have never before been invited to do such an address. I have thought back to commencement speeches I have seen in recent years by Alan Greenspan and the Honorable Hillary Clinton; but somehow the one I remember best is a movie commencement speech by Rodney Dangerfield. I think I will steer clear of that one.

The second sentiment is how old I feel in the presence of this dynamic group of graduating students of international affairs. I am in the part of my career somewhere between college graduation and being an official greeter at Wal-Mart. Today, at least, I'm the voice of experience -- so permit me to offer a few thoughts.

When you study international affairs, it sometimes seems as though all the big questions have been answered. This is an understandable impression. Governments speak with an air of certainty. Academic experts write with a tone of intellectual authority. News media present their stories with an aura of credibility.

And there are times when it all seems so right and orderly that there is nothing left to figure out. In 1899, Charles Duell, the U.S. Commissioner for Patents, announced that "everything that can be invented has been invented." That was right before the greatest century of invention by any country in the history of man.

It was also a century that brought mankind the bloodiest wars, the most fearsome weapons, the most monstrous crimes against humanity, and the most dangerous ideological movements -- fascism and communism -- ever seen on earth.

That's what drew me toward international affairs, and into government service -- the huge importance of world events; the belief that U.S. foreign and security policy was all that protected the human race from Soviet tyranny or a war of unthinkable destruction.

And then, as the 20th century drew to a close, the Cold War ended. Nations long held captive in the communist empire were freed. The threat of nuclear Armageddon between ourselves and the Soviet Union went away. And in the 1990s Americans talked about schools, health plans, and stock portfolios. Some called it the end of history.

In 1993, I left government after 12 years of exciting work as a young official in the Pentagon, the State Department and the White House. After a few years trying my hand in the business world, I thought it really was the end of an era. Foreign affairs did not dominate the news. Five years ago I was certain that that part of my life was over.

Even when Colin Powell did me the great honor of inviting me to join his leadership team in the State Department after the 2000 election of President Bush, I was very pleased to accept the challenge, of course; but I still did not anticipate lots of foreign policy headlines during the new Bush Administration.

The topics of the day, if you will recall, were long-term trends: globalization, the digital divide, the Pacific century, missile proliferation and missile defense. Interesting issues -- but nothing that would shake us from our peaceful daily lives.

How much the world has changed in a few short years. How different foreign policy and national security issues look now. You won't hear me talking about the end of history. Because for billions of beating hearts and aspiring minds all over the globe, history is just beginning.

9/11 affected every person in this ceremony. For all of us sharing an interest in the international field, think about what 9/11 meant beyond our borders. What caused a group of people, holding at least 40 nationalities mainly in the Arab-Islamic world, known as Al-Qaida, to harbor such intense hatred of the United States, and such determination to do us terrible harm, to the point of giving their own lives in the process?

The search for security has taken us down many roads. Much of the effort is about how terrorists might harm us: with governments all over the world we are sharing law enforcement information, searching financial flows and monitoring bank accounts, tightening airline security and customs procedures for people coming into the country. We are, of course, also vigilant in looking for weapons of mass destruction in the hands of terrorists.

But there is an entire other dimension that U.S. foreign policy must address; that dimension concerns the hearts and minds of millions of Arab and Islamic young people, wanting a good life for themselves, and idealistic in their search for dignity and justice.

We can't put a perfect security wall around the United States; our security depends on engaging the world's peoples, coming to a better understanding of their aspirations, and trying to build an image of America among peoples in the Middle East that is closer to the way we see ourselves.

In other words, peace and stability in the 21st century means strong security measures, but we also need, as a people, to get closer to the rest of the peoples of the world, so that we can acknowledge and accept one another's humanity. That is a challenge I offer to each of you; and if you take me up on it, you will be at it for the rest of your lives -- whatever your chosen field of endeavor.

Foreign affairs specialists have drawn lesson after lesson from the cold war, and from the crises of failed states after the breakup of the communist empire, from the humanitarian interventions of the 1990s, and now from the Global War on Terrorism since the 9/11 attacks.

In our perpetual search for orderly conduct among nations and perfect logic in our foreign policy, there have been debates about how much world order is too much; whether the United Nations can step into crisis situations instead of the United States; whether nation-building is a proper or improper use of U.S. military forces; and whether the U.S. should aspire to be the world's only superpower, now and forever.

In the government, we react to those threats we can readily recognize. Terrorists threaten us, so we mobilize a global campaign to disrupt and incapacitate them. Urgent military tasks arise, so we seek out governments to form coalitions of the willing. Missiles proliferate, so we build missile defenses. And so on.

All of this is valid and necessary work. What remains, however, is to understand who is doing this terrorism, who is committing these acts of war, and who is proliferating these weapons of mass destruction and these missiles. If we are interested in who, we are interested in why they are doing these things.

Now, if any among you think that all the answers exist, let me simply point out that a large portion of the six billion people outside our borders are closer to your age than to mine.

So if I need to understand why a young male in the Islamic world is ready to leave home, throw away his entire future and consummate his life's meaning behind the wheel of a truck bomb crashing into an American facility abroad, I am probably going to look to you to figure that out.

We go to universities and study the past. We plunge into our international careers or one kind or another and become

consumed with the present. And yet, so much of what motivates you – so many of the answers about how the world works – relate to the future.

Today, as we speak, 26 million Iraqi people are feeling a mix of relief and anxiety about their future. They know that the Saddam Hussein regime that brutalized them, denied their freedom, their prosperity and their dignity, is finished.

And yet, their needs are great. Electricity and clean water, adequate food supplies, fuel for cooking and transportation, and salaries to pay for family needs – all of these are in the process of being restored. But today they are scarce.

In many cities and towns throughout Iraq, personal security is a problem. People are armed, and gunfire is commonplace, mostly from banditry rather than organized political violence. Once more police and stability forces can be put in place, it will be safe for humanitarian and reconstruction experts from around the world to enter Iraq in far greater numbers. But right now people are on edge.

There are mass graves being discovered in the north and the south of Iraq. Enraged relatives will want to see an accounting for the monstrous crimes of the Saddam Hussein regime before many Iraqis can move on. Thus, our forces are guarding these terrible gravesites.

If that were not enough, Iraqis who never knew life except under a dictator must now find their own way forward in choosing representatives they trust for an interim Iraqi authority, creating a new constitution, and proceeding to a fully democratic government of their own design.

You and I can see that the future should be very bright, even limitless. Most Iraqis don't know that yet. Only now are newspapers, radio, and TV that tell the truth coming into being in Iraq. Soon, the population will know that \$3.5 billion dollars has been pledged by governments to help them get to the future.

One day, if we are skillful and patient, they and millions of other Arab and Islamic peoples will know America and its allies did all these things not to enrich ourselves and steal from their future, but to connect our destinies as true friends and free peoples.

So, what is my message to this distinguished group of graduates? It is this: we are at the beginning of history – it is your life, your times, your era, your century. And you will know as you take up the challenge that it is your country, too, and the shape of the future is not just your opportunity, but ultimately your responsibility.

The great issues of the day are still in search of answers.

- Can the human condition ever improve if the most educated societies shrink while the poor keep growing with high birth rates?
- Can the earth withstand continuous new development, or will we encroach too much on nature?
- Will international relations 100 years from now still run on the basis of sovereign states, even though we see a trend toward transnational identification, such as among followers of Islam, and multinational concepts such as the European Union?
- What will happen when China's economy grows during this century to more than 20 or 30 times its current size? That's no wild prediction, but a reasonable estimate.
- Should America always say, "we're number one," and act like it? Will we still be number one when you come back here for your 50th reunion?
- And: will the world ever truly be at peace?

I can no sooner offer you answers to these questions than tell you whether the Red Sox will ever win the World Series.

But what I can say is that you are every bit as likely as any people on the planet to influence the future.

You already have brains and education – that has now been certified. Let me end by urging each and every one of you to recognize the other simple but precious assets already in your possession for the path ahead.

The first is your passion; no one can stop you from caring about the fate of the world.

The second is your interest and intellect; if you look at life as a search for answers, it won't feel like hard work.

The third is your integrity; no temporary gain is worth the lifelong regret if you are found to be acting unethically. Even when no one is looking – especially when no one is looking – take pride in acting honorably.

The fourth asset is the courage to say what you truly believe; keep doing that, and others will keep listening.

And fifth is the consideration and tact to say it in a way that does not diminish or offend others.

Those are not unreasonable tools to take with you: passion, curiosity, integrity, candor and tact. Those will take you far.

But there is one more that will truly lighten your load along the way. Be sure that whatever you choose to do is fun for you. I have my hands full at work, but I wouldn't trade my experiences for anything; and most of my college mates would say the same about theirs.

A new century, a new history and timeless questions await you outside the gates of this beautiful campus. My wish is that each of you may follow a long and fulfilling road to the future.

And so I say congratulations again, well done, and Godspeed.

Thank you very much.

[End]

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