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We will not have the luxury of coming home after the battles

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University of Notre Dame Commencement Address, South Bend, Indiana

By Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Richard G. Lugar

We come to South Bend today to celebrate a high moment in the lives of all who will receive diplomas and in the lives of all who have given love, inspiration, and support to these graduates. We say to the graduates, "You must do better than we have done. We will support your dreams because they are embodied in all that we have hoped for."

I have received personal inspiration from observing the visionary leadership of Father Ted Hesburgh abroad and the strong guidance which Father Monk Malloy has brought to the growth of international leadership studies at Notre Dame.

For generations, the University of Notre Dame has shined brightly as a prolific contributor to the academic life, history, economy, and cultural achievements of our country. It has brought together teachers and students, good people who exemplified creativity and optimism for the future. Its ten-year strategic plan undergirds aspirations for a leadership role among the great institutions of higher learning around the world. It clearly established one of the pre-eminent Commencement celebrations in America.

In preparing for this address I reviewed the roll of past Notre Dame Commencement speakers. It is an amazing list of Presidents and Prime Ministers, writers and religious leaders, scholars and statesmen. I found many distinguished men and women with whom I had the honor of working over the years, including our recently departed friend, Daniel Patrick Moynihan-- a giant of the Senate.

But among the speakers, one had a special significance for me--Admiral Arleigh Burke, who delivered the 1956 Commencement Address when he was Chief of Naval Operations. In 1957 Admiral Burke organized a special Flag Plot in the Pentagon and asked me to be one of his intelligence briefers. On each working day, I commenced reading our national secrets at 2:30 a.m. in preparation for a briefing of 50 Admirals and assorted Administration and Congressional guests at 8:00 a.m. Admiral Burke often sent me to meet with Allen Dulles and his CIA panel, National Security Agency officials, and on a few rare occasions, to brief President Eisenhower from a remote location in the White House. Admiral Burke was my mentor in developing a passion for foreign policy and America's role in the world.

During the past four years, you have witnessed historic and often tragic changes in the world. You have seen terrorists kill thousands of people in our country and destroy the World Trade Center and a part of the Pentagon. United States military personnel have conducted two difficult and costly wars in less than two years.

The experience of September 11, 2001, re-taught a grim lesson that our nation has periodically had to re-learn: trouble will find us whether we choose to be involved in the world or not. Because advances in transportation and communication have shrunk the world and because the United States is now universally regarded as the most powerful nation on Earth, this condition is inescapable.

The World is not benign if left alone. Eventually, any fight will find its way to the biggest kid on the block. An American decision to espouse isolationism would not cause terrorists to warn Americans away from the intended target; nor would American disengagement cause foreign governments that perpetrate human rights abuses to promote justice.

Our economic prosperity is tied to the prosperity of the rest of the industrialized world. Our environment is deeply affected by the practices of nations far beyond our continent and hemisphere. Even maintaining individual health, once the sole province of the family doctor, now depends also on international epidemiologists and globally marketed pharmaceuticals.

Even if you did not know anyone in the World Trade Center or anyone serving with the U.S. Forces in Iraq or Afghanistan, the prospect that your life will be insulated from world events has ended. These events though distant from South Bend, have fundamentally changed what it means to graduate from a prestigious American university. For any new graduate entering American life in the 21st Century – particularly graduates from Notre Dame, a national university steeped in traditions of social consciousness and service -- a simple and uncomfortable face must inspire your actions: the United States stands as the hope of the World.

Some of you who have followed world news carefully and have watched anti-American demonstrations around the world may ask: “How can we be the hope of the world, when so many people and nations seem reflexively to oppose American actions?” Others of you may react to that phrase simply as a harmless appeal to patriotism or commencement platitude.

But I would submit that America’s unrivaled position in the world, our fundamental traditions of freedom and altruism, and the desperate need for international leadership in a time of potential chaos have placed our nation in a position to determine whether the world advances or declines.

Many Americans have no desire to assume such awesome responsibility. The dominant popular mythology associated with America’s response to the world has been the reluctant hero who is skeptical of a corrupt world and its intrusion on the peaceful nature of American life. In our mythology, the American hero ultimately journeys overseas, brings peace to a distant land, and then promptly returns home to family. This modern mythology has been a prominent feature of American cinema from Sergeant York to Private Ryan. We love this vision of American righteousness, because it allows for moral superiority and heroism while limiting our international responsibility and preserving the uncomplicated comforts of home.

As Americans, none of us are immune from these impulses. Always in the back of our minds there is a feeling that if we just communicate the truth that we do not want empire, that we want to live in peace, that we want our basketball, our backyard barbecues, and our races at the Brickyard, that the world will leave us alone.

In coming years, we will not have the luxury of coming home after the battles have been fought. We will not be able to take on the world’s problems in war, but repair to isolationist roots in moments of peace. The United States cannot feed every person, lift every person out of poverty, cure every disease, or stop every conflict. But only the United States can organize the world to overcome the threats to peace and prosperity in the 21st Century.

The United States is struggling with this problem right now in Iraq. While the war was being waged, we watched events with concern, but we could comprehend the strategic goals, the tactics, and the outcome. Planning for the war was brilliant and comprehensive.

But now we have entered into a phase in the Iraqi operation that is far more complicated and much more difficult to evaluate. Our military forces and reconstruction teams are facing the rise of Shiite majority, the infiltration of Iranian agents, the omnipresent threat of terrorist acts, and the problems of re-establishing utilities, securing Iraqi antiquities, creating a police force, and effectively distributing food and medicine to be paid for by oil fields now held in a most uncertain status of ownership and operation. Over the long term, the challenges of developing a constitution and establishing an Iraqi government that is independent, stable, and friendly are enormous. Although we may be reluctant to admit it, we are engaged in nation-building. We are engaged in the complicated and uncertain business of constructing the future of Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. It is a role we must embrace – not only because of altruistic impulses – but because our own existence is threatened by the intersection of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. Iraq must not become a failed state and a potential incubator for terrorist cells.

Recently I published an article that outlined five campaigns that we must undertake to win the war on terrorism. I argued that the United States must improve diplomatic capabilities, enhance international trade, strengthen our alliances, support democracy and development worldwide, and expand our efforts to control weapons of mass destruction.

Each of our campaigns is essential. But I believe that the campaign to control weapons of mass destruction stands out as the most urgent. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is not just the security problem of our time. It is also the economic dilemma and the moral challenge of the coming age. On September 11, 2001, the world witnessed the destructive potential of international terrorism. But the September 11 attacks do not come close to approximating the destruction that would be unleashed by a nuclear weapon. Weapons of mass destruction have made it possible for a small nation or even a sub-national group, to kill as many innocent people in a day on our soil as national armies killed in months of fighting abroad during World War II.

Beyond the horrific loss of life, proposals to advance the standard of living throughout the world would be undercut by the uncertainty and fear that would follow a catastrophic terrorist attack.

The bottom line is this: for the foreseeable future, the United States and its allies will face an existential threat from the intersection of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. Addressing this situation will require an implacable U.S. commitment to organizing the world to prevent this intersection. Hopes for a peaceful world that will accommodate human progress and development rest squarely on the will of the United States and individual Americans to undertake this commitment.

Terrorist organizations have demonstrated suicidal tendencies and are beyond deterrence. We must anticipate that they will use weapons of mass destruction if allowed the opportunity. The minimum standard for victory in this war is the prevention of any of the individual terrorists or terrorist cells from obtaining weapons or materials of mass destruction.

The Cold War was an unconventional war, as is the war on terrorism. The irony of our situation today is that victory in the current war depends very much on cleaning up the remnants of the previous war. We cannot guarantee that terrorists will not strike, but we are not helpless. We can develop the

international practices and norms that can almost guarantee that terrorists will not have access to nuclear weapons. In doing so, we can transform our world into a place that is more secure and more connected than it has ever been.

In an important article in The National Interest last fall, Graham Allison and Andrei Kokoshin former high-ranking Defense officials for the United States and Russia, respectively, made this very point. They wrote: "Though the world's stockpiles of nuclear weapons and weapons-usable materials are vast, they are finite. The prerequisites for manufacturing fissile material are many and require the resources of a modern state... while challenging, a specific program of actions to keep nuclear materials out of the hands of the most dangerous groups is not beyond reach, if leaders give this objective highest priority and hold subordinates accountable for achieving this result."

As part of the global war against terrorism, the United States and its allies must establish a worldwide system of accountability for nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. In such a system, every nation that has weapons and materials of mass destruction must account for what it has, safely secure what it has, and demonstrate that no other nation or cell will be allowed access. If a nation lacks the means to do this, the international community must provide financial and technical assistance. This process will be expensive and painstaking, but international security and prosperity hang in the balance. We must commit the resources and political will required to preserve modern society and the futures of our children and grandchildren.

Some nations, after witnessing coalition military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq may decide to proceed along a co-operative path of accountability regarding their weapons and materials of mass destruction. But other states may decide to test the world's will and staying power. Vigorous and timely joint diplomacy by the United States and all cooperative nations would greatly increase the likelihood of peaceful outcomes. When nations resist such accountability and when all diplomatic and economic tools fail, however, the United States and other responsible nations cannot rule out the use of military force.

While admitting this necessity, we should spare no effort to establish absolute accountability through peaceful means. In 1991, I joined with former Senator Sam Nunn to establish the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction program. This initiative brought Americans and Russians together to ensure the safety and destruction of the huge stockpile of weapons and materials of mass destruction left over from the former Soviet Union that were in jeopardy of theft or accidental use. The program has demonstrated over the last decade that extraordinary, international relationships are possible to improve controls over weapons of mass destruction.

Working in concert, the United States and Russia have destroyed more than 6,000 nuclear warheads and dismantled hundreds of bombers, missiles, and submarines that were built to deliver them. The Nunn-Lugar Program is employing in peaceful pursuits tens of thousands of Russian weapons scientists who are no longer tempted to sell their knowledge. This program also has made progress toward protecting nuclear material, biological weapons laboratories, and chemical weapons stockpiles. Beyond statistics, the program has served as a bridge of communication between the United States and Russia, even when other aspects of the relationship were in decline. It has improved military-to-military contacts and established greater transparency in areas that used to be the object of intense secrecy and suspicion.

Now we must not only accelerate weapons dismantlement in Russia, we must replicate our work with Russia in as many countries as possible and build a global coalition to support non-proliferation.

Many questions have been raised about the security of Pakistan's nuclear program and similar questions will be raised about India's. The exact status of Iraq's weapons and materials of mass destruction is still being investigated. North Korea, Iran, Syria, Libya, and other nations present unique and difficult proliferation challenges. We cannot afford to be defeatist. Using the Cooperative Threat Reduction model, we should attempt to forge relationships to control weapons of mass destruction in previously reticent or hostile nations.

I believe that the United States has a window of opportunity to address proliferation threats around the world. We must make the safe storage, accountability, and destruction of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons a fundamental objective of American foreign policy.

Our power and status have conferred upon us a tremendous responsibility to humanity. If the world is to be secure and just and prosperous, the United States and individual Americans must devote themselves to international leadership. Among the graduates of 2003, many will devote their lives to furthering the idealism that embodies the United States. I have had the pleasure recently to work with one such Notre Dame graduate, Ambassador Francis X. Taylor who serves as Assistant Secretary of State for Diplomatic Security. In this capacity Ambassador Taylor leads the effort to protect our foreign diplomatic posts, many of which are on the front lines in the war against terrorism. It is his job to keep our missions open and safe, so they can facilitate our diplomatic contacts with the rest of the world. Like Ambassador Taylor some of you will choose the calling of diplomacy, politics, humanitarian work, or military service. But you all must know as doctors and lawyers, teachers and entrepreneurs, artists and economists, musicians and engineers, clergy and scientists that you can contribute greatly to achieving a more just and secure world.

This does not require conformity of thought or agreement with governmental policies. It does not require sacrifice of individual goals and dreams of family and material prosperity – though some may make those sacrifices. But it does require that each of you understand how blessed you are to sit here today and how much our country will depend on you. And it does require you to understand that as we honor you as a graduate of one of the greatest universities in the most powerful nation on earth that you must have a global outlook and accept global responsibilities.

I am convinced that the vast majority of American people believe that we have a moral responsibility to foster the concepts of opportunity, free enterprise, the rule of law, and democracy. They understand that these American values are the hope of the world. I am confident that you will not be intimidated or defeated by those choosing terror and suicide. You will affirm the importance of the diploma you have earned today, growing in your ability to worship, to continue learning, to expand your capacity to love and to build a strong family. You will surely find excitement in serving others in a world without limits that now invites you to enter.

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