

Fellow veterans, friends, families – good morning.

What a great honor it is to stand before this distinguished crowd on this fine Boston morning. I can't think of a better way to celebrate the 20th anniversary of my class' graduation from Boston College than by sharing a few moments with you today. Speaking of reunions, my wife and I may be celebrating our 20th, but let me extend a special greeting to the Class of 1964 celebrating their 50th class reunion this weekend. They are certainly well represented with us today.

I am especially grateful to Paul Delaney and Bob Sherwood for granting me the podium – completely unvetted and uncensored. And as I reflected on their invitation to speak there were essentially two directions I could take. On the one hand was I call the 'Pentagon Special' where I could stand here and recount in some excruciating detail the process of programmatic planning and force structure analysis. Believe me I have access to statistics that would blow your mind. The alternative however was to follow my heart. I chose the latter and hope I don't disappoint.

So perhaps I should start with a brief description of who I am. You heard my name and you may have even read my bio. Let me keep it simple: I am an American Soldier – a Soldier for Life. I was

born to French parents who emigrated to the U.S. when I was 12. Like most kids growing up in Europe of my generation, we lived in the shadow of the Soviet Union – never quite certain what that meant – but also in awe of the power of the United States and quite frequently reminded of the not so distant memories of World War II. In fact still today, my grand-mother recounts her grueling experience under Nazi occupation and how one night in June 1944 – while six months pregnant – she went to sleep in her Normandy home with German soldiers in her backyard. She emerged the next morning after enduring a night of bombardment and gunfire to find that... ‘American Soldiers’ had expelled the Germans and liberated her town. That was 70 years ago – almost to the day. And I still listen intently as my father tells of his father who after five years as a German prisoner of war was freed by... American Soldiers, and finally reunited with his family.

So when the time came for me to decide what I wanted to do with my life, the choice seemed almost predetermined, I wanted to be... an American Soldier.

But that’s only part of the story. Who you are – who I have become – is also shaped over time by the people and the institutions

you encounter and learn from along the way. How you spend your early adulthood years, when you learn so much about yourself and the wider world around you, are especially critical. And I was blessed to spend four of those formative years right here at Boston College, as a student, a cadet and a volunteer. So I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to thank this distinguished Jesuit institution and the faculty that many years ago developed the foundation for how I look at the world and strive to make a contribution where and when I can. It was here that I truly understood the value of service: service to your community, to your nation and to your fellow man.

And over the years I have increasingly appreciated the value of my Boston College liberal arts academic foundation. I think it's important to highlight this because the state of global affairs today demands of our military a much deeper understanding of the complexities of the human domain than ever before.

Take a moment with me to consider the strategic environment of the next decade as we emerge from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The world remains highly volatile. The threat of terrorism to the homeland has morphed and persists through increasingly decentralized al-Qaeda affiliates and violent extremist groups. Civil and

sectarian war is tearing apart Syria but also threatening peace and stability in African nations like Nigeria and Libya and several other far-flung places that many Americans have never even heard of. And instability in nuclear states like North Korea, Pakistan and Iran pose very real threats to our allies and our interests overseas.

The future is uncertain. In Europe, the NATO alliance is emerging from highly successful combined operations in Afghanistan to face increasingly assertive Russian geopolitical maneuvering, not only in Ukraine but across its former Soviet satellites. The global fiscal uncertainty presents very quantifiable challenges to our allies and to our own military. Funding constraints at home are leading to reductions in force size and capability limiting our unilateral national security options.

International relations are increasingly interdependent and complex. Our relationship with China – some would argue as one of the most strategically important relationships of the 21st Century – is still very tenuous. Territorial rights and energy access in the South China Sea continue to risk regional conflict. Cyberspace is a new and still unchartered domain where future conflict can very quickly

escalate with drastic effects on an increasingly interconnected global society and economy.

In short, conflict in our future will be unlike any form warfare we have experienced in the past. In the coming decade our military will be increasingly engaged with regional partners to develop capacity and capability. Our general purpose forces and special operations forces will become more interoperable. While SOF will maintain its ability to conduct targeted surgical strikes when required, but will also through a spectrum of special warfare activities build a global SOF network with highly trained partners who can be leveraged at a moment's notice to react to a crisis in a given region.

Our global presence and engagement must reassure our friends and deter our foes. And it is our service men and women, who now more than ever, will be our nations' ambassadors overseas. Out of necessity they will operate in the realm that defines a major segment of the post-war strategic environment – that 'human domain' I just spoke of – that of clashing cultures, language barriers, religious differences, sectarian tensions, ethnic fault-lines, abject poverty, pandemic disease, natural and man-made disasters, uncontrolled migration and mass urbanization. This list only touches the surface,

but it does highlight the need for the continued education and professional development of not only our military but our entire civil society because our national power at the end of the day is our human capital.

And so we turn our attention back to that human capital in our military. Every service member out there today – whether Active, Reserve or National Guard – is a highly-skilled professional volunteer and who somewhere along the way was inspired to serve much like I was. On any given day, I look to my left and to my right, I am awe inspired at the immense diversity, quality and potential of our joint force. Our Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors and Marines today are emerging from 14 years of persistent conflict and are the absolute best this nation can muster. Even now they stand ready to continue to defend our nation's values and our freedom well into the 21st Century. I am honored every day to be counted among their ranks.

But let us not forget that many are leaving the service – several bearing the visible and invisible scars of modern warfare. Eternally grateful for their selfless duty and sacrifice, we as a nation and a community have a sacred obligation to provide them the best care possible as they continue their lives as civilians because I can tell you

that this generation of warriors will significantly shape the future of our nation.

To my fellow veterans and their families in this distinguished audience, I say simply thank you. I know the sacrifice you have all made in the course of your service to this country. Whether you made a career out of the military or served honorably for a period and then moved on to other aspirations, the point is that you served. Every veteran in this room knows what it's like to rise before the break of dawn, build a team from the ground up, train on an assigned task until you have so perfected it that you could do it in your sleep, then deployed without question when the nation called, and in some cases watched your fellow service members make the ultimate sacrifice for their nation.

Just this past week on Memorial Day, as the President laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown in Arlington, millions of Americans across this nation descended on the hallowed ground of our national cemeteries to pay their respects at the graves of our warrior heroes. It was a day to remember our fallen and honor their sacrifice. I too remembered my own lost brothers and sisters in arms, and every year I pay special tribute to one in particular: my Boston College

classmate, friend and mentor Dave Connolly. ROTC programs are often enriched by men like Dave who join the program with prior service experience. Dave brought maturity, real-world experience and discipline to our ROTC program which I believe made our individual leadership development as cadets much more valuable. Here was our rock, the cadet who even then epitomized what we were meant to be as future officers in the military. I never had the opportunity to thank Dave for his leadership because I never realized what a blessing he was until well after we were commissioned and he was gone. I know in my heart that his sacrifice was not in vain. He, like the close to the two thousand (1,878) who gave their lives in Afghanistan and the almost four thousand (3,684) who died in Iraq, define my generation as an American Soldier and will never be forgotten.

If anything, their loss should remind us that the work of securing this great nation is never done. We have all carried the burden of defending our nation and our way of life. Serving in our military is the noblest of professions. Leading and mentoring our service men and women is the greatest honor I have ever had bestowed upon me. If I leave you today with nothing else, let it be this : military service is noble and selfless, our human capital is priceless and far more

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**important than any hardware, I believe our nation is strong and I
assure you that millions of Americans stand ready today to defend it
and if need be give their lives for all of us.**

Thank you and God bless.

Ever to Excel !