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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AT UNITED STATES COAST GUARD ACADEMY
COMMENCEMENT
United States Coast Guard Academy
Groton, Connecticut
May 22, 1996

Thank you very much. Secretary Pena, Commandant Kramek -- thank you for doing such an excellent job, Admiral. Admiral Versaw, Commander Wiemer. To the United States Coast Guard Band, thank you today. To the members of this fine class, your families and your friends, this is your day and I am deeply honored to share it with you.

I am especially indebted to the Coast Guard right now because there are four members of the White House staff who are Coast Guard officers. Three of them are graduates of this Academy -- Commander Peter Boynton, Lieutenant Matt Miller, Lt. Commander Bob Malkowski. The fourth is not a graduate of this Academy, but she is my Coast Guard military aide, and I'm very proud of her -- Lt. Commander June Ryan. And she informed me that every Coast Guard officer was a supporter of this Academy. I am delighted to be here with all of you.

I must say I only had one pause when I was invited to be your commencement speaker, and that's when I heard that the mascot for the Class of '96 is the guinea pig. Having been in that position more than once in my life -- I was not particularly anxious to take on another one. But then I remembered what a wonderful reception the Coasties gave the First Lady and our daughter, Chelsea, when they visited here two years ago. And I told the pilot to go on and hold course for New London.

I am honored to be here today. God has given us a beautiful day, and I hope you all enjoy it and remember it fondly for the rest of your lives.

We gather before the Coast Guard cutter, Eagle, the largest tall ship flying the Stars and Stripes. On its decks and its riggings, you cadets were tested time and again to ready you for the important responsibilities you are about to assume as Coast Guard officers. I can look at you and tell that you are ready.

The course you're on will not always be easy, but it will be exhilarating because you are serving at a time of extraordinary challenge and change; a time of new risks to our security, but also real opportunities to make the future brighter for every American, especially the Americans of your generation and the generations to come.

You will know this by the virtue of the work you will be doing week in and week out, along the 47,000 miles of America's coastline, lakes and rivers; from the frigid waters of the North Pacific and the North Atlantic to the balmy Caribbean; and far from home patrolling the Baltic, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea with our allies.

Consider the average Coast Guard -- something I hope the American people will get to do as a result of this appearance. Most of your fellow citizens have no idea the sweep, the scope, the importance of the work you do. But in the average week, you and your fellow sailors will seize drugs with a street value of \$50 million, stop hundreds of illegal immigrants from reaching our shores, respond to 260 hazardous chemical spills, salvage property worth \$17 million, conduct 1,250 search and rescue missions and save the lives of nearly 100 people. That's an average week. That's a pretty good average, and the American people should be very, very proud of the United States Coast Guard.

But since you're facing such a heavy load in the future, I think I should lighten it for now. So as Commander in Chief I hereby grant amnesty to all cadets marching tours or serving restrictions for minor offenses.

To the members of this graduating class, from this day forward you will be guardians of America's security. There is no higher calling. And so, as you celebrate today, I ask you just to take a few moments with me to join in thinking about the future that you will help to shape for your fellow Americans and for the citizens of the world. What do you want the future to look like? What do we want the future to look like? How do we want America to enter the 21st century?

Four years ago I said that the answer to that question for me is as straightforward as the path ahead is full of twists and turns. For me, America must enter the 21st century as a nation of opportunity for all and responsibility from all; a nation that is coming together, instead of drifting apart; a nation that remains the strongest force on Earth for peace, freedom and prosperity.

For nearly four years our administration has pursued that vision with a strategy that involves making American people more secure, by leading a powerful movement now sweeping the globe for democracy and peace, by creating greater prosperity for our people, by opening markets abroad.

And that strategy is working. Our military is stronger, our alliances are deeper, the danger of weapons of mass destruction and the other major threats to our security are receding. Conflicts long thought to be unsolvable are moving toward resolution. More markets than ever before are open to our goods and services. And more markets than ever before are open to the goods and services of other nations, as well.

The mission before you is to build on these achievements, at a time when the world we live in is going through profound and fast-paced change, perhaps the fastest pace of change in all human history. In so many ways this change is clearly for the good, and you have been a part of it. Democracy and free markets are on the march; the laptops, the CD-ROMs, the satellites that are second nature to all of you send ideas, products, money, all across our planet in a matter of seconds. Political, economic and technological revolutions are bringing us all closer together, and bringing with them extraordinary opportunities for all to share in humanity's genius for progress.

But we know these same forces also pose new challenges. The end of communism has opened the door to the spread of weapons of mass destruction and lifted the lid on religious and ethnic conflicts. The growing openness we so cherish also benefits a host of equal opportunity destroyers -- terrorists, international criminals, drug traffickers, and those who do environment damage that cross national borders.

None of these problems has any particular respect for the borders of the nation you are sworn to defend. Because the Cold War is over, some of these challenges are underestimated, and Americans that typically don't have much in common from the left to the right find themselves saying it is now time for us to retreat from our global leadership role.

But we cannot withdraw into a fortified America -- there is no wall high enough to keep out the threats to our security -- or to isolate ourselves from the world economy and other trends in the global society. There are some who say we should lead, all right, but they would deny us the resources to do so. To them I also ask, reconsider your position.

One of the most important lessons of the last 50 years is that democracy and free markets are neither inevitable nor irreversible. They need our support, the power of our example, the resolve of our leadership. My job as President is to match the need for American leadership to our interests and to our values; to act where we can make a difference; to do so wisely,

not reflexively; relying on diplomacy and sanctions when we can, force when we must; working with our allies whenever possible, but alone when necessary; rejecting the call to isolationism, refusing to be the world's policeman.

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For all the new demands on our troops and our treasure, the basic tools of leadership still require a powerful military and strong alliances. Those things allowed us to triumph through two world wars and a Cold War. And for this new era we must first sharpen and strengthen these tools. Our military has never been more ready than it is today, prepared to fight and win on two major fronts at once, to deter aggression and to defeat it.

Because of our military strength we can often achieve our objectives by ourselves or with our allies without a fight. In the last couple of years that's why Saddam Hussein pulled his forces back from Kuwait's border; why the military dictators stepped down in Haiti; and why, after a bombing but not a ground campaign, the Bosnian Serbs turned from the battlefield to the bargaining table. We still have the best-trained, best-equipped, best-prepared fighting force in the world. It is being strengthened every day. It is also strengthened by strong alliances and cooperative action with like-minded nations.

As we saw in the Gulf War, in Haiti, and now in Bosnia, there are a lot of other countries who share our goals and who are willing to share our burdens -- through NATO, the United Nations and other coalitions. The end of the Cold War presented

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We also have vital strategic and economic interests in Asia, the fastest-growing part of the world economically. They require new efforts to maintain stability. I recently returned from a trip to Korea and Japan, reaffirming our security relationship with Japan, launching a new initiative to make peace on the Korean Peninsula, committing to maintain 100,000 troops in North Asia, and reaffirming our determination to engage China in developing a productive security dialogue.

These are the things that you will have to carry out. By living up to the legacy of American leadership, being steady and strong in the judgments necessary to advance our interests and our values, keeping our military ready, deepening our alliances, we will meet the challenges of your time.

But there is more to be done for America to keep moving forward and to pass on an even safer and more prosperous world to our children as we enter this new century and a new millennium. First, we must continue to seize the extraordinary opportunity to reduce the threat of weapons of mass destruction. We have set the most far-reaching arms control and nonproliferation agenda in history, and I am determined to pursue it and complete it. Already, there are no Russian missiles pointed at our cities or our citizens. We are cutting our arsenals by two-thirds from their Cold War height. Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan have been convinced to give up their nuclear weapons.

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The possibility of a long-range missile attack on American soil by a rogue state is more than a decade away. To prevent it, we are committed to developing by the year 2000 and defensive system that could be deployed by 2003, well before the threat becomes real.

I know that there are those who disagree with this policy. They have a plan that Congress will take up this week that would force us to choose now a costly missile defense system that could be obsolete tomorrow. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that this cost will be between \$30 and \$60 billion.

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The right way to defend America includes eliminating weapons of mass destruction, stopping this dread, and building a smart missile defense system. It also includes continuing the fight against the increasingly interconnected forces of destruction like terrorism, organized crime and drug trafficking.

Believe me, no one is immune to their danger, and you will see them more in your career: Not the people of Tokyo where the sarin gas attack in the subway injured thousands of commuters; the people of Latin America or Southeast Asia where drug traffickers wielding imported weapons have murdered hundreds of

innocent people. Not the people of Israel where hatemongers have blown up buses full of children; nor the people of the former Soviet Union and Central Europe where organized criminals are undermining new democracies. And, of course, not the people of our United States, where home-grown terrorists blew up the Murrah Federal Building in the heart of America and foreign terrorists tried to topple the World Trade Center, where drug traffickers poison our children and bring untold violence to our streets.

As Coast Guard officers, you will be on the front lines of this struggle against these forces of destruction, especially drugs. With every seizure, like last summer's record haul of 12 tons of cocaine from a Panamanian fishing vessel, you are literally saving the lives of American citizens. Today I pledge this to you: With our military and law enforcement agencies, you will have the tools you need to get the job done.

We must cooperate as never before with countries around the world, sharing information, providing military support, pursuing anticorruption efforts, shutting down front companies and money laundering operations, opening more FBI training centers. We have to keep up the funding, the personnel, the training for our law enforcement agencies. We have to keep the heat on states that sponsor terrorism or violate international law with tough sanctions like the one the international community has imposed on Iraq since the Gulf War.

And I'd like to take this occasion to congratulate the Coast Guard, which recently completed its 10,000th boarding in the Persian Gulf in support of those sanctions. Thank you and congratulations.

Since the forces of destruction never give up, we must never give in. And your job will be to help America remain vigilant and victorious. We also have to continue to advance the fight for peace and democracy faster than before. Nothing can strengthen our security more in the long run. When people are free and at peace, they are less likely to resort to violence or to abuse the rights of their fellow citizens. They are more likely to join with us in common cause.

We see this so clearly here in our own hemisphere where the powerful movement to democracy has produced unparalleled cooperation in dealing with drugs and illegal immigrants and has brought freedom to every single country in our hemisphere but one.

We see the promise of peace in Northern Ireland where negotiations are set to begin next month. We see it in the Middle East where a comprehensive, lasting settlement is within

reach. In the last three years alone, Israel and its Palestinian and Jordanian neighbors have committed to peace and they're making good on their commitments, including just a few weeks ago, Chairman Arafat fulfilling his pledge to rid the Palestinian Charter of all references to the destruction of Israel.

We know that many difficult issues remain to be resolved between Israel and Syria, between Israel and Lebanon. We know there will be problems from time to time, as there was in the tragic fighting along the border between Israel and Lebanon, which I am grateful has been resolved now. We know that, most importantly, every step along the path to peace, the enemies of peace will show their own desperation with bullets and bombs.

So I say this to the people of Israel: We've been with you every step of the way for the last three years. As Israel takes further risks for peace in the future, it can count on further manifestations of American support. We must be with you every step of the way until there is a comprehensive, lasting peace in the Middle East. Now is not the time to turn back, and the United States must do its part.

Finally, we must never forget that the true measure of our country's well-being and our security not only includes physical safety, but economic prosperity as well. Decades from now people will look back at this period and see the most far-reaching changes in the world trading system in 50 years, since the end of World War II; changes that are making a dramatic difference in the lives of ordinary people -- through the negotiations that produced the GATT and NAFTA agreements, through the persuasion we had in working with Japan on 21 separate agreements. Barriers to our products have come down and our exports have gone up, creating more than one million new jobs in the last three years alone.

We still have a lot to do in the Asia Pacific region and in other areas of the world. We have to extend free and fair trade on every continent. We have the best workers and the best products in the world. If we give them a fair deal with free trade, they will bring even greater prosperity home to America.

Members of the Class of 1996, I want to leave you with this one final thought as you go forward: This new era calls on all of us to rise to more different and difficult challenges than in the past. I know the rewards of serving on the front lines of change may seem distant and uncertain from time to time, but you will succeed if you remember always to measure your success by one simple standard: Have you made the lives of the American people safer? Have you made the future of our children more secure? That must remain our guiding principle for the years ahead.

If it does, we will enter the 21st century with a military whose fighting edge is sharper than ever; with a peaceful, undivided Europe and a stable, prosperous Asia; with fewer nuclear weapons in the world's arsenals and tough new agreements to control chemical and biological weapons; with terrorists, organized criminals, and drug traffickers on the run, not on the rampage; with more barriers to American products coming down; with more people than ever living with the blessings of peace and democracy.

For 50 years now, our country has been the world's leading force for freedom and progress around the world, and it has brought us real security and prosperity here at home. If we continue to lead, if we continue to meet the peril and seize the promise of this new era, that proud history will also be your future and the future of your children.

Good luck, and God bless you, and God bless America.

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We see this so clearly here in our own hemisphere where the powerful movement to democracy has produced unparalleled cooperation in dealing with drugs and illegal immigrants and has brought freedom to every single country in our hemisphere but one.

We see the promise of peace in Northern Ireland where negotiations are set to begin next month. We see it in the Middle East where a comprehensive, lasting settlement is within

reach. In the last three years alone, Israel and its Palestinian and Jordanian neighbors have committed to peace and they're making good on their commitments, including just a few weeks ago, Chairman Arafat fulfilling his pledge to rid the Palestinian Charter of all references to the destruction of Israel.

We know that many difficult issues remain to be resolved between Israel and Syria, between Israel and Lebanon. We know there will be problems from time to time, as there was in the tragic fighting along the border between Israel and Lebanon, which I am grateful has been resolved now. We know that, most importantly, every step along the path to peace, the enemies of peace will show their own desperation with bullets and bombs.

So I say this to the people of Israel: We've been with you every step of the way for the last three years. As Israel takes further risks for peace in the future, it can count on further manifestations of American support. We must be with you every step of the way until there is a comprehensive, lasting peace in the Middle East. Now is not the time to turn back, and the United States must do its part.

Finally, we must never forget that the true measure of our country's well-being and our security not only includes physical safety, but economic prosperity as well. Decades from now people will look back at this period and see the most far-reaching changes in the world trading system in 50 years, since the end of World War II; changes that are making a dramatic difference in the lives of ordinary people -- through the negotiations that produced the GATT and NAFTA agreements, through the persuasion we had in working with Japan on 21 separate agreements. Barriers to our products have come down and our exports have gone up, creating more than one million new jobs in the last three years alone.

We still have a lot to do in the Asia Pacific region and in other areas of the world. We have to extend free and fair trade on every continent. We have the best workers and the best products in the world. If we give them a fair deal with free trade, they will bring even greater prosperity home to America.

Members of the Class of 1996, I want to leave you with this one final thought as you go forward: This new era calls on all of us to rise to more different and difficult challenges than in the past. I know the rewards of serving on the front lines of change may seem distant and uncertain from time to time, but you will succeed if you remember always to measure your success by one simple standard: Have you made the lives of the American people safer? Have you made the future of our children more secure? That must remain our guiding principle for the years ahead.

If it does, we will enter the 21st century with a military whose fighting edge is sharper than ever; with a peaceful, undivided Europe and a stable, prosperous Asia; with fewer nuclear weapons in the world's arsenals and tough new agreements to control chemical and biological weapons; with terrorists, organized criminals, and drug traffickers on the run, not on the rampage; with more barriers to American products coming down; with more people than ever living with the blessings of peace and democracy.

For 50 years now, our country has been the world's leading force for freedom and progress around the world, and it has brought us real security and prosperity here at home. If we continue to lead, if we continue to meet the peril and seize the promise of this new era, that proud history will also be your future and the future of your children.

Good luck, and God bless you, and God bless America.