

American Leadership in a Global Century
Commencement Address at Fort Leavenworth
By Carlos Pascual¹

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Lieutenant General Caldwell, thank you for inviting me here today, for your leadership, and for your kind introduction. Let me extend my thanks as well to Lieutenant General Arter, Command Sergeant Major Johndrow, Brigadier General Cardon, and most importantly to the families and graduates of the Command and General Staff College.

Thank you for allowing me to join you today and to pay tribute to this graduating class – all 960 of you – from the United States and abroad.

I wanted to come here because I believe this is an institution dedicated to building peace. Of course your fundamental mission is to protect our nation: indeed to protect the more than 60 nations from which all of you hail, but we live in a world where protecting our national interests cannot be separated from engaging in our global community.

Seven decades ago, Winston Churchill exhorted the United States this way:

One cannot rise to be in many ways the leading community in the civilized world without being involved in its problems, without being convulsed by its agonies and inspired by its causes. If this has been proved in the past, as it has been, it will become indisputable in the future. The people of the United States cannot escape world responsibility.

And if that was true seven decades ago, it is even truer today. Let me read to you from Barack Obama's *Audacity of Hope* – written when his presidential aspirations were still a distant vision.

When Truman, Acheson, Kennan, and Marshall sat down to design the architecture of the post-World War II order, their frame of reference was the competition between the great powers that had dominated the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries....America's greatest threats came from expansionist states like Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia....That world no longer exists.

[Today] the growing threat...comes primarily from those parts of the world on the margins of the global economy where the international "rules of the road" have not taken hold ...lands in which an overwhelming majority of the population is

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poor, uneducated, and cut off from the global information grid; places where the rulers fear globalization will loosen their hold on power....The very interconnectivity that increasingly binds the world together has empowered those who would tear that world down.

I raise these perspectives not to engender a fear of globalization, but to instill a respect for its power, an understanding of how to engage it, and a sense of humility about the limits of our capacity to act alone in shaping it.

We live in a world where capital, technology, ideas and people know no boundaries. It is this very capacity to transcend borders, to tap world capabilities, and to have access to world markets that has lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty in China and India. It has created unprecedented wealth here in the United States. It has even contributed to a global capacity to advance peace. Forgotten by many is this reality: that cooperation through bodies like the United Nations has cut in half the number of conflicts within states since the end of the Cold War.

But globalization has its dark side when we fail to govern it, and here we have yet to succeed – as a nation, or as a global community. Hence, we have:

- A world where a housing crisis in the U.S. turned into a financial crisis and then a global recession with unemployment over 9 percent in the U.S., with 20 million displaced in China, with the poorest of the poor pushed to the margins of survival in places like Mali, Chad, or the mountains of Peru.
- A world where the industrial revolution has brought cars, televisions and refrigerators to billions, but it has entrenched a pattern of fossil fuel use that is causing carbon concentrations in our atmosphere that threatens life as we know it.
- A world where nuclear technology has created capacity for a carbon-free future in producing electricity, but the uncontrolled proliferation of this technology has made countries, such as North Korea and Iran a menace to world peace and stability.

In this world that transcends borders, no one nation can succeed along, yet no nation can isolate itself from global problems.

This is why President Obama says American security is inseparable from global security. Our futures are intertwined.

But our challenge, your challenge, is to understand how to make operational these perspectives on our global environment. Let me leave you with a few observations:

First, the scale of international challenges is greater than any we have ever known:

- We face today crises. You know them well – in some cases too well: Afghanistan/Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, North Korea, the Middle East;
- Geopolitical challenges to global stability: managing productively the rise of China and India; an aggressively assertive Russia; and throughout Latin America, a dynamic of change where the United States has become at times a secondary player; and
- Existential or global challenges: the financial crisis, climate change, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and conflict within and between states.

What on this agenda can we put off? What can we place aside? Very little. Thus, an important lesson for our country and for everyone one of us: leadership in this world means to build partnerships with other nations to share this burden for the sake of a peaceful and prosperous world. It requires building respect for our nation – and that means setting a shining example in our adherence to the rule of law – so that we can leverage these partnerships and relationships to succeed in advancing our national interests. If this is true for the United States, it is equally true for every nation represented here today.

These are not idealistic fantasies. Today, the ability to develop and sustain effective partnerships and the respect of the world has become the new American realism.

I leave you with this observation as well. The problems that we face are interconnected – their interaction defines our future – but at the same time we cannot find solutions unless we understand the interlinked forces that are defining our reality.

The economic crisis is not only shedding jobs, it affects the capacity of every nation to put a price on carbon, a measure seen as critical to encouraging conservation and innovation, and thus deterring the environmental changes that even now are a cause of floods, draughts, disease and migration.

Climate change is exacerbating competition for scarce resources – especially land and water – that could drive future conflicts. One thing we know for sure is that without addressing the underlying scarcities of land and water there are no permanent solutions to conflict in places like Darfur.

And for those who wonder why we should care about distant conflict, let us not forget that the most significant strife we have ever had on American territory was orchestrated from one of the poorest countries in the world – Afghanistan.

What do we learn from this?

Let's not assess the world based on the static realities before us – but seek instead to gauge the interactive effects of global forces if we are to understand where future threats may emerge.

As we prepare for the future and search for solutions to today's problems, we must understand how the military dimensions of today's threats intersect with the other social, economic, cultural and religious factors driving the security environment. But I also caution this: it is not for our militaries to solve all of these problems, but to be a conscience and driver to our civilian authorities to invest and build these capabilities.

As a basic test of whether we are headed in the right direction – to test whether we are honest with ourselves – focus on local realities. Ask what it will take to deliver security and prosperity in a community in Southern Afghanistan, for example, and then ask what will make it sustainable – and here I suspect you'll find these realities:

- We can't sustain success without building the capacity of local counterparts – whether they be military, police, government officials, entrepreneurs.
- Building that capacity means an investment of our people in their people – that is why we are sending 4,000 troops to train and mentor Afghan police and military
- But I know you will be sorely disappointed, and perhaps have already been, in our nation's capacity to invest from the civilian side of our government – not because the will is not there, but because we don't have the people. Look at this stark contrast: the 4,000 military trainers we are sending to Afghanistan constitute two-thirds of 6,5000 foreign service officers across the world.

As a nation, we have begun to make some critical changes. President Obama requested an 11 percent increase in his FY 2010 Foreign Affairs budget. It is a modest beginning. It will take the support of those of you with a stake in the nation's security, and from America's heartland, to achieve this and to continue to grow this capacity.

In our hearts, I believe we must be humble, but not bleak. We have a unique moment.

I have traveled the world – nowhere have I seen a rejection of American leadership. Instead, there is a thirst for a change in the style of leadership based on partnerships and shared investments. That is in our interest.

In the United States, poll after poll shows that the American people want international partnerships and cooperation. Intuitively, we as a nation understand the wisdom of working with others and sharing the burden of extraordinary times.

A core means to achieving sustainable partnerships in adherence to the rule of law. That plays to our strength – not our weakness – it is what makes us strong at home and we should welcome this internationally as well.

Yes, we will encounter problems – a global environment also means global competition. There are those who mean to hurt us and good people throughout the world. We have seen tragic acts of terror in London, Madrid, Mumbai and many cities in Pakistan and throughout the Middle East.

But we cannot be deterred in transforming our perspectives on this transnational world, modernizing our capabilities, and building our capacity to act together. Our strength is in our people – our creativity, honesty, decency, commitment to hard work, and a moral belief that we are in these global endeavors together – for the sake of our families and the generations that come behind us. Our hope is in people like you, and that is a source of confidence.

Command and Staff College Class of 09-1, congratulations. Good speed to you, and to your families. You have the gratitude of our nation, and every nation represented here today.