

**Remarks as delivered by ADM Mike Mullen  
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Well, thank you. And Helen, I actually remember that conversation on the pier. I wasn't quite sure you'd take me up on it; but I'm glad you did. And thank you for your service. I know that you've been heavily involved in the defense committee of the DAR since you joined. We appreciate your steadfast support, all of us who serve.

Madame President, it is indeed a special evening. Speaking of service, I know that you are about to complete your third year. And I think that, if I understood you correctly in the reception, you indicated that you hadn't been home much the last three years. Those of us in uniform understand that, but your service the last three years as the leader of this great organization is a good reminder that there are many from our country who serve in other ways, which are very important. And we are very grateful for all your service to not just this organization and these people, but to our country.

I suspect – and I'd also like to say thanks to the Navy Band. I love that band. In the armed forces, we have the opportunity each year to celebrate our birthday here, our birthday concert on October 13<sup>th</sup>, and also a Christmas concert. But I know that that reservation, blocking time here can be pretty tough. I suspect that you didn't have much difficulty blocking time for tonight or the other events this week.

Last week, I traveled to Vietnam. And it was the first time I had been to Vietnam since I left there my first deployment as a young officer in 1969. And it was in many ways a nostalgic trip; I was in Hanoi and Hai Phong. And I met other people who were reaching out to us to improve and make stronger a relationship which has evolved obviously greatly since the last time that I was there. I was there to meet the head of their Navy. I was traveling in other places in the Orient as well.

But as I left there after two and a half days, I was struck by how warm the people were, how supportive of this evolving relationship they were. And it struck me that it was so nice, after all these years, to be able to go back and to see the Vietnamese people smiling and to be able to return those; and to shake hands and to greet them warmly in a place that decades ago was very difficult. And it was a reminder of what is possible and what should be possible in all things we are about.

As Helen mentioned, before I came to this job, I spent a little over a half a year in Europe, in Naples, Italy. And I'd like to tell you a story, which affects me to this minute. Part of my responsibility was in the Balkans. I was the operational commander for the Balkans. And in 2004-2005, when I was there, the principal challenge was Kosovo. And

it was five, going on six years since the fighting has stopped in Kosovo, and yet it was still a very difficult situation for the people that lived there, because there had been no decision about the future of Kosovo.

And in one of my visits there, I was responsible for the ground forces over there, and there were still thousands. And there are today 17,000 ground forces still in Kosovo providing the security so that decisions can be made so these people, these citizens of this part of the world, can move forward.

And I visited a mother who was in a trailer that had been displaced from her home some four or five years before that. And there were two messages that – she had a disabled son – and there were two messages essentially that I took away from that visit. One, it is very important for all of us to move forward, make the decisions, so that this mother and the father could move back into their home. And two, the burning desire on the part of this mother to raise her son to a higher standard of living and a better life than the one she had seen for herself.

And I find that story, and that message in my travels – and I've probably visited 30 countries around the world since that time. And I find that story and that message to be very consistent. And that literally, where I was, last week, there were parents who had smiles on their faces because they saw a way forward to be able to raise their children in ways they hadn't had just a few years ago. That doesn't mean it's easy; that doesn't mean it isn't a struggle. But I find it to be an enduring principle almost everywhere I go.

When I was in Europe, the other story was I watched the world respond to the terrible disaster in Indonesia and that part of the world. And the response – so many people from around the world, so many navies – our Navy and Marines Corps, because we were out there – assisted in ways that we hadn't even imagined. We hadn't prepared for that. And yet, it was in that response that so much of our heart and good will and who we are as Americans – all those things were expressed in ways that send messages to the people of that part of the world, which changed their minds about who we are and what we represent. And we'll live in the lives of those people that were helped for all of their lives.

And there was a young boy there who was very ill, it seemed, and was actually near death. And he was seen, and he recovered on the hospital ship Mercy, which was part of this rescue effort, this humanitarian assistance and disaster relief effort. And when he got well, one of the things he got was one of these coins from one of the doctors that was there, which she kept with her. And I'll come back to this in a second.

But there were thousands and thousands who were assisted, not just there, but all over that part of the world. And what the Navy and Marine Corps is able to do, with the assistance of other services in many other countries. What we had the ability to do was build a city at sea, provide that need, and then, when it was time for us to take that city down and go elsewhere, we were able to do that. It's a great capability that we all

invested in here in this country in our Navy and our Marine Corps and other services, as well as in the people who did that.

Not too long after that, I returned to this job. I watched actually and marveled when I would go to sea what we could do as a country. I returned to this job and within a couple of months of taking over – actually a little over a month – we were sent – I was sending the hospital ship Comfort down to our own Gulf to rescue our own people. And I went down there toward several of our ships. And the satisfaction, the joy and pride of sailors who have saved lives for your own country, it would be very difficult to capture in words how good they felt about what they were doing. And many of them told me it was the best they'd ever felt in their professional life because of the ability to assist our own people in our own country. And we didn't expect to have to be able to do that, but we did it and did it exceptionally well.

And again, my good friend Thad Allen who is now the commandant of the Coast Guard led that effort. And there was a response from all over the country – and in many cases all over the world – from all of our services. And I talked to young men and women in uniform from all services who provided that kind of help, and each of them said they were never more satisfied in what they in fact were doing.

Part of that then said to me, I was not anxious to just respond to emergencies. So the next – so last year, we actually sent our hospital ship back to Indonesia, back to Bangladesh, back to the Philippines. We visited and we saw over 61,000 patients in that part of the world, and performed miracles in ways the people in that part of the world, young people in that part of the world – children who could not see who were given glasses – children with cleft palates who were surgically treated and saw much better lives. And again, the great joy and recovery of that part of the world – and I actually went out to Mercy when she went back.

One of the things that happened after our first time out there was people who viewed Americans a certain way viewed us negatively with a number up around 65 percent. After that tsunami relief effort, in fact, they saw us positively to the same number, around 65 or 70 percent. It changed minds immediately in a lasting way.

So when Mercy went back last year for a deliberate purpose, to go back and revisit, that young boy came back and he came back to see his big white ship. And he had that little coin with him. And someone wanted to take the coin from him and look at it, and he couldn't get it out of his hand. But what he did see was this coin, which was probably a year – maybe 18 months – after he had received it. And the boy's father said, it never left his hand. And it was rubbed so bare that it was almost rubbed through. And there is a young boy – a young Muslim boy, as it turns out, who will remember us for the rest of his life.

So this year, fast forward to where we are right now, in fact this hospital ship fleet – I've only got two – one on the East Coast and one on the West Coast – but we're on a humanitarian cruise this year down in South America. And the Secretary of the Navy,

Don Winter, was down in Guatemala, where the ship was yesterday – I'm sorry, earlier this week – and he told me the story yesterday, which was run through with the impact of what Americans can do. And this is just military, because we've got non-governmental organizations; we've got doctors and nurses that provide the help; we've got members of all services; we've got members of the State Department who are participating in this several month cruise.

But the story that said it all to me yesterday was that a woman in Guatemala who had gotten word that this great white ship was coming, she went on a 15-day walk to get medical care, because she never imagined she could get in her life. And it changed her life, and it is the kind of dedicated support that we get, and again, has had a positive impact.

So there are many things going on in the humanitarian assistance and – unfortunately – in the disaster relief world that many in all of our services are participating in to make a difference in people's lives. And that is the engagement piece; that should be the around our world piece. Our Navy and Marine Corps, and the Navy in particular – about 40 percent of our Navy is deployed around the world. Some 64,000 sailors today are deployed around the world. Now, we're just one service. We're just one service, because as you know, there are Marines and soldiers and airmen and coast guardsmen also deployed. Obviously, the Marines and the soldiers deploy heavily into the Central Command theater.

And then that gets to, obviously, the challenges that we have there. We must not only – at the beginning of this evening when I was standing up here looking at the music, which can certainly get you going – to see everybody cheering, to see the flags flying, and the spirit that is associated with that, and the feeling of courage and dedication consistent what our beliefs are about that we will get through these challenges in the Middle East; we will get through in a way that in the long run back to what I said about Vietnam some 30 years later, that in the right vision down the road, we will be having the same kind of conversation with the Iraqi people that I had with the Vietnamese last week.

But it will be a struggle. And you know that as well as I. And to the point that Madame President mentioned early in her remarks tonight, we have thousands and thousands of young men and women who are in harm's way tonight, and are out there every bit as patriotic, every bit as dedicated. In the almost 40 years that I have been serving, they are the most professional, best-trained, best-led, and most exceptional young people I have ever had the pleasure to serve with. We are lucky to have them. (Applause.)

And while they are deployed around the world – and it's not the only place in the world we have challenges – it's certainly the part of the world that leads us in challenges right now – they will sustain us. I also would like to say tonight congratulations to those who are receiving awards. And I know that there are wounded warriors who are receiving awards tonight. And when you talk about where we go and what we do, if you talk about the equipment, and sometimes we get caught up in the stuff, the stuff that makes us go, that isn't it. It's the people. It is the young people in uniform who make us who we are.

And I see them in the desert and I see them at sea and I see them in the air, and I see them actually underwater – that would be in a submarine – and they are exceptional. You are and you can be very, very proud of who they are and what they do and how they represent. And they – when I travel and talk to them, they only ask me one question. They ask whether or not the American people are supporting them. And you are as great a barometer of that as any we have in this country.

So it is vital that that support be sustained in these very challenging times. And they will be called on for years to come in the circumstances that we are in right now in this war on terror. That is not going to go away. We can wish it away and it will be our young ones – as it has been for our country for almost 231 years – our young people bear that burden. We must continue to support them.

I'll tell you one final story, which I think says so much. We have the great fortune of having provided – being able to provide medical care to those who have been wounded, unlike any I have ever seen. And they deserve that. Secretary Gates says it very well. He says, we should have as a top priority getting the right people to the fight. Our second priority must be taking care of those who are wounded and injured.

And if I could describe – and I can't in words – the spirit that I see when I visit Walter Reed and Bethesda and Landstuhl in Germany and Balboa and Portsmouth, and other hospital facilities who are taking care of those who have been injured and very badly wounded – I always come away from those visits uplifted by those who are injured and comforted by the families who surround you to help them heal. And we, as I indicated before, must support. You can rest assured that medical care is the best not just in this country; it's the best in the world.

And our doctors and nurses and corpsman and medics have never been better – never been better. And I'll tell you one last story, now that I think that I'm probably over the time. One last story, when I was in Fallujah over Christmas, over the holidays. I walked into a medical unit, and they were operating on an Iraqi – actually, it turned out to be an Iraqi combatant. And I was asked by the doctor – who was a Navy captain by the name of Khan and he was a Muslim, out of Texas. And he was on his seventh deployment to Iraq. And the stories that surrounded him once I got into the medical unit were left and he cared only about one thing.

And this was an enemy combatant who they invited me into the hospital rooms to see the extent of his injuries. And there was a surgical team working feverishly to save this individual's life as if it were one of their children. And there is, I believe, there are very few places in the world where you would have individuals who are serving who are working to save somebody's life who literally an hour before were trying to take the lives of our people.

And that doctor followed that patient until his recovery. That says a lot about us; it says an awful lot about him; it says an awful lot about who we are as a people and how our people are performing, whether it's on the battlefield, in the hospital room, or anywhere else around the world.

So what you do and what you represent tonight means an incredible amount to all the young men and women who serve so notably. I applaud what you're doing. I applaud your organization. I am thankful that we live in a country that will have – that will create the kind of spirit and support and inspiration that you do as an organization.

God bless you. God bless our men and women in uniform. And God bless our country. Thank you.

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