



**AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY
OF BEIRUT**

2024 Student Commencement Address

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Good evening, everyone.

It's about 2 am, one stormy night, eight years ago, and I am crouched behind a small pile of stones guarding my point during a camp for the Lebanese military academy. Looking through the scope of my rifle, I witness some dark forms in the distance making their way toward my position. I watch these moving shadows for several minutes trying to decide whether or not to pull the trigger.

I bet you weren't expecting me to say that. Well, eight years ago, I wasn't expecting to be talking to you tonight.

Behind each one of us is a unique story. A story with different circumstances, different plot lines, and a different cast of characters. A story that each one of us, at this very moment, can imagine differently, remembering its ups and downs, its good times and bad times, its joys and sorrows. But all of these varied story-versions, tonight, reach their common end.

Which is itself the beginning of a new chapter, a new story, and a new hope.

I remember myself applying to AUB two years ago. A university I had always heard about as a destination for professional education, and an environment for continuous development. Yet, I was unsure. As a French-educated student holding a bachelor's degree in political science, and as a lieutenant serving in the Lebanese Internal Security Forces, enrolling in this master's program was a challenging choice.

Doubts and questions invaded my mind: How would I succeed in committing to my education while managing to do it in parallel with my job? How could I merge my security background and the knowledge gained at AUB? How could I reach a better version of myself but also benefit the society to which I belong?

Without having clear answers to my questions, I took my first step inside this beautiful campus... Armed with hope and supported by a grant from AUB dedicated to the Lebanese Armed Forces, my academic journey started.

In the PSPA Department, I delved into studying public policy and international affairs. I was passionate about navigating this field and trying to unpack its political complexities, social dynamics, and historical contexts. My research covered contemporary topics, from security sector reform and community policing to sustainable security development, and all of this has added a solid theoretical dimension to my practical security background.

Applying this knowledge to address real-world challenges has enabled me to implement more effective approaches in my assigned duties. This synergy between academic pursuits and professional responsibilities has been invaluable, driving my personal growth and

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enhancing my career performance, while also contributing to a better and safer society in Lebanon.

I am sharing my story because, like any other graduate's story, it remains part of AUB's wider experience. This experience – which is rooted in history since 1866 – has taught us that whatever circumstances arise, with a goal-oriented mentality, progress always remains possible. I am saying this also, because I don't believe reality exists out there by itself. Instead, I believe that reality has a constructed nature. It's shaped not only by our actions and motives but also by our thoughts and ideas. So, what distinguishes hope from despair, success from failure, and understanding from judgment, is only a matter of perception.

Today, we are leaving a place where we always felt comfortable and safe. By safe, I don't mean the human security that is strongly witnessed on this campus, nor do I mean security in terms of identity, technology, or institutional care. I mean that sense of intangible moral security felt in this healthy environment of freedom and respect. Over the years, this environment has shown itself to be a place where not only free minds flourish, but also where future leaders are made.

Dear graduates, I address my warmest congratulations to you and your families. But let us all keep in mind that the end of one chapter is only the beginning of another. In our new chapters, we will find new purposes to seek, and new goals to achieve. Along with the new personalities that we've built, and with the knowledge we've gained, there also comes a great responsibility that asks us: What future roles do we want to play?

And what type of people do we want to be?

In fact, whatever our answers are, and whatever tracks we aim to follow in this evolving world, there is one decision we will all have to make. Will we walk this path with despair? Or will we walk it with hope? Hope, that makes us stand in the face of difficulty and overcome uncertainty. Hope, that has to persist in the spark of your eyes despite all that this beautiful city, this beloved country, and this region have gone through... That audacious hope, in your positive impact, in your ability to rise... and rise again, is what truly ensures that brighter days will definitely come.

Again, congratulations, and thank you.