

Testimony for Mike Hammer
Nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
September 21, 2011

Thank you Chairman Shaheen and Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to serve as Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs at the Department of State. I am deeply grateful and humbled by the confidence the President and Secretary Clinton have shown in me by this nomination.

I would like to recognize my partner, staunchest supporter, and wife of 22 years, Margret Bjorgulfsdottir, as well as our three wonderful children; Monika, Mike Thor and Brynja, who have moved with us, as part of my Foreign Service career from country to country, becoming in their own right junior American representatives. I would also like to mention my parents, Mike and Magdalena, who set the foundation for who I am today. In my formative teen years, my father gave his life for our great country. It was his sacrifice and the commitment to public service that he had instilled in me, that set me on the path that brings me here today.

For the past 23 years, serving as a Foreign Service Officer, it has been my duty and honor to work to advance and promote America's interests abroad. If confirmed, I look forward to directing the State Department's public affairs efforts to aggressively and innovatively communicate our foreign policy to fellow Americans and the world through every media platform and tool available, 24 hours a day/7 days a week/365 days a year. My approach would be to echo Secretary Clinton's vision in presenting the first ever Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review: "How can we do better?"

In my prior position as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Public Affairs Bureau and since I was named Acting Assistant Secretary in March, I have spent time with every office and met with the fine civil servants, foreign service officers, political appointees, contractors, student hires, and interns who make up the public affairs team at the State Department. It would be a great privilege to

lead this talented, dedicated, and hard-working group. The Public Affairs Bureau has an extremely challenging and important mission -- to engage domestic and international media to communicate timely and accurate information with the goal of furthering U.S. foreign policy and values, as well as national security interests. This task is carried out in the face of a dynamic and rapidly changing media environment.

When I was called upon to serve as the National Security Council spokesman at the outset of the Obama Administration, it was striking how much the media world had evolved since my prior stint at the NSC during the Clinton and Bush administrations. Events anywhere in the world now get instant coverage and social media is a prime competitor to the mainstream media. For communicators, this is surely a challenge. But, Secretary Clinton, the Public Affairs Bureau, and I view it more as an opportunity for reaching new and larger audiences and for engaging people on a broader scale.

At the State Department, with Secretary Clinton's strong leadership and call for "smart power" and use of "21st century statecraft," we are adapting to the ongoing communications revolution and making better and increasing use of all available platforms, while ensuring all these platforms work in concert with each other. It is vitally important that we not only conduct diplomacy between governments, but that we also use all the tools at our disposal to reach people around the world directly. Audiences globally are increasingly using the internet as a primary means of consuming and sharing information breaking down barriers to information. The communications revolution has fundamentally transformed how information moves through networks and how rapidly it can penetrate societies. We must ensure that our messages and people are aggressively engaging on all key platforms - new and old.

This spring, as the dramatic events in the Arab world were beginning to unfold, the Public Affairs Bureau launched nine foreign language Twitter feeds in Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, French, Hindi, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Urdu. We are listening, communicating our views, and participating in the conversations that will shape this century. The State Department is committed to using technology effectively and creatively. This effort includes the creation of a new

Digital Division within the Bureau and placing all of our digital content under unified leadership. The Digital Division recently launched *State Department Live!*, a new interactive on-line video briefing platform that already has allowed hundreds of foreign journalists around the world – many of whom have never before interviewed an American official – to speak with our policymakers and get their news directly.

In today's highly competitive international media environment, we need to present America's foreign policy and not leave it to others to define for us or shape our narrative. We do this by telling the truth about our policies, explaining the logic and values that guide us, and aggressively countering misrepresentation and distortion. This requires rapid response and constant engagement by public affairs officers in the field and in Washington, in a variety of languages. Our approach needs to align with and enhance that of the White House, the Pentagon, other national security agencies, and our USAID press office. I believe my time at the National Security Council, as well as my time within the Public Affairs Bureau at the Department, have prepared me for this challenge, if I am confirmed.

The Public Affairs Bureau runs six regional media hubs with communicators who engage foreign media in their languages throughout Africa, Asia, the Arab world, Europe, and the Western Hemisphere. The State Department is also working to better integrate our policy formulation with our public diplomacy efforts, thereby creating a synergy that better informs our policies and more effectively presents them. And, as we address the pressing questions from each day at our daily press briefings and across all our other platforms, we are thinking strategically about communicating our message and harnessing the power of technology to reach the broadest audiences possible. Our web engagement must put the audience first and we need to communicate directly with networked individuals on their platforms in order to better promote understanding and support of our policies.

The Public Affairs Bureau also connects directly with the American people. We arrange for our foreign policy experts to speak to schools and universities, engage citizen groups across the country, and reach out to diaspora communities inside the United States. We field their inquiries, respond to their concerns, and

listen to their opinions. We are also charged with bringing to life an interactive museum and visitor center that will tell the story of American diplomacy and run a Hometown Diplomat program that enables us to inform communities across America about the work we do in service of United States interests abroad. The American people are also benefiting from the Public Affairs Bureau with initiatives such as, the new mobile travel application that provides quick and easy access to relevant Department travel information informing them of fast breaking international developments like the evacuations in Egypt and Libya, as well as the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear incident in Japan earlier this year. We are also working to improve our crisis communications capabilities and are developing fly-away public affairs teams that bolster our Embassies' efforts on the ground when serious international events warrant it. In fact, we have already deployed effectively to Cairo, Tokyo, Juba and Tripoli. Furthermore, everyone can learn about our diplomatic history in the Foreign Relations of the United States series published by our historian's office.

The United States plays a singularly vital role around the world promoting stability and prosperity. The Bureau of Public Affairs is committed to using all of its communications resources – the tools and the people behind them – to promote who we are as a country and stand up for our beliefs, including speaking out for universal rights and basic freedoms like freedom of speech and of the press. If confirmed, I look forward to working with this Committee and Congress to ensure America's message is as vibrant and dynamic as it can be to move our country and the world forward, and if confirmed I would welcome your ideas and suggestions on how we can even more effectively present America's foreign policy, history and amazing story.

Thank you.