

**Testimony of Ambassador Kenton W. Keith
Chair, Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange
Senior Vice President, Meridian International Center
And
Member, Public Diplomacy Council**

**Delivered to the
Committee on Foreign Relations
U.S. Senate
The Honorable Richard Lugar, Chairman
February 27, 2003**

Good morning. I'm Kenton Keith, senior vice president of the Meridian International Center, chair of the board of directors of the Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange and member of the Public Diplomacy Council. The Alliance is an association of 67 U.S.-based exchange organizations, and as you know, Mr. Chairman, we have worked closely with this committee over the years on a variety of issues. MIC is a nonprofit organization that promotes international understanding through exchanges of people, ideas, and the arts. The Public Diplomacy Council is a private, non-profit membership organization that works to further the awareness and academic study of America's communication with foreign publics, and is associated with the Public Diplomacy Institute at The George Washington University.

Prior to taking up my current positions, I was a Foreign Service Officer with the United States Information Agency. Much of my career was spent in the Middle East, including my appointment by President Bush in 1992 to be U.S. Ambassador to Qatar. Following that assignment, I headed USIA's area office that supervised all the agency's operations in the Near East and South Asia. More recently, I took on a temporary assignment for the State Department during which I established and directed the Coalition Information Center in Islamabad.

Mr. Chairman, both in my present capacities and based on my past experiences, I welcome the opportunity to provide this statement for the record about the importance of public diplomacy, especially in the aftermath of the horrific events of September 11 and in support of our national campaign to rid the world of terrorism.

To win the war on terrorism, the United States will need more than the might and skill of our armed forces. To ultimately defeat terrorism, we must also engage the Muslim world in the realm of ideas, values, and beliefs. No previous foreign affairs crisis has been so deeply rooted in cultural misunderstanding, and we must address this gulf of misunderstanding if we are to succeed.

It would be naïve indeed if we failed to acknowledge that American policy in the Middle East as perceived by the Islamic world is a persistent and pervasive source of tension and hostility toward the United States. Nevertheless, policy disagreements alone cannot account for the fact that many in Islamic countries regard the United States, the greatest force for good in human history, as a source of evil. As a nation, we have not done an adequate job

of explaining ourselves to the world, or of building the personal and institutional connections with these countries that support healthy bilateral relationships. The gap between us and those people and institutions seems to grow ever wider and deeper. The signs of profound anti-American resentment multiply in today's world, spreading well beyond the Middle East alone. All of us have watched with dismay the overt anger and misunderstanding spilling into the streets of the world in recent days. A survey of nearly 40,000 people across the globe late last year by the Pew Center confirmed the soaring level of world mistrust of the US and its motives.

As a long-term solution to the profound problems of cultural misunderstanding, there will be no substitute for public diplomacy. It must be a key component of our long-term effort to eradicate terrorism. We applaud your leadership, Mr. Chairman, and that of your committee in focusing attention on what must be a critical element in our successful anti-terrorism strategy.

In my testimony today, I want to focus on four aspects of public diplomacy: the critical contribution of international exchange programs; the need for a rational, effective visa policy; the need for improved media outreach to the Islamic world; and the need to correct anomalies in the State Department's bureaucratic structure that I believe diminish the effectiveness of our public diplomacy. Let me turn first to exchange programs.

The Importance of Exchange Programs: Building Cultural Bridges

People-to-people ties are an essential part of our public diplomacy. As Ambassador Arthur Burns once said, "The achievement...of true understanding between any two governments depends fundamentally on the kind of relationship that exists between the peoples, rather than on the foreign ministers and ambassadors."

In the Islamic world, we clearly have not done an adequate job of fostering relationships between our peoples. A Gallup poll conducted in February 2002 reported that 61 per cent of Muslims believe that Arabs did not carry out the attack on the United States. Mr. Chairman, that statistic alone speaks somber volumes about our failure to project our values and ideals effectively in Islamic nations.

We must recognize that we begin this effort in a very unfavorable position. Changing minds – or merely opening them – is a long, painstaking process. There are no quick fixes. And if we are truly to win the war on terrorism, there will be no avoiding the need to build bridges between the American people and the people of the Muslim world. Mr. Chairman, we must begin this process now.

This effort will require us to be creative, disciplined, and patient as we try to reach audiences whose attitudes towards us range from profoundly skeptical to openly hostile. We will not succeed in opening every mind, but we do not need to do so. What we must succeed in doing is challenging and changing a climate of opinion that unjustly paints the United States as a source of evil. Improving the relationships that exist between our peoples is the best way to do that.

America's unique status in today's world as the sole superpower puts new and difficult challenges before us. These new relationships with the people of other nations don't come easy. They can be, and often are, colored by resentment, jealousy, and suspicion. In this world there is an absolute requirement that we demonstrate a true respect for the opinions of mankind, that we listen as well as speak, and that we hear and understand those opinions and take account of them as we set our policies. Our public diplomats are trained to do exactly that, as well as to articulate clearly and persuasively the true nature of US values and goals. The exchange components of our public diplomacy must serve to deepen that understanding that we must achieve.

And if we succeed, terrorists will find it much more difficult to gain support or sympathy, either from their governments or from their societies.

Increasing the State Department's exchanges with the Islamic world will give us the means to build a range of productive, positive relationships based on shared interests. This initiative will engage the American public – in our communities, schools, and universities – in an effort to project American values. We will find no better or more convincing representatives of our way of life.

And the engagement of the American public will leverage significant additional resources to support this effort.

Initial efforts were made during the 107th Congress to both authorize and fund programs on a broad range of exchange activities to build relationships with the Islamic world and enhance U.S. national security.

Mr. Chairman, we commend your work with Senator Kennedy in writing and introducing the Cultural Bridges Act of 2002, calling for an additional \$95 million annually for exchanges with the Muslim world. The Alliance actively supported your bill, which garnered bipartisan support from 12 Senate cosponsors, including several members of this Committee: Senators Brownback, Chafee, Feingold, Dodd, and Hagel.

In tandem with the Freedom Promotion Act introduced by House International Relations Committee Chairman Henry Hyde and passed by the House of Representatives, this bipartisan effort led to initial funding for these programs in the supplemental appropriations legislation for fiscal year 2002. The supplemental included \$10 million for a high school exchange program aimed at Muslim youth and an additional \$10 million for the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Exchange at the State Department to fund more Fulbright exchanges, programs to promote religious tolerance and values, English language programs, American studies programs, media training and other key initiatives for the Islamic world.

The funds are a welcome beginning in building new ties to the Islamic world, yet they are only the initial seeds of a plan that will require a major effort, necessitating our engagement in a very broad range of countries, in an arc reaching from Africa to the Middle East, stretching further eastward from Central Asia to the Indian subcontinent to Southeast Asia. Addressing so many countries and cultures will demand thoughtfully differentiated approaches to public diplomacy. In some countries, significant increases in our traditional

exchanges, such as the Fulbright and International Visitor programs, will be appropriate, welcome, and effective. In other countries, such an approach may be seen as threatening. Particularly in those cases, we must be creative in finding ways of reaching more skeptical publics, such as journalists and religious communities. And everywhere, we must seek ways of reaching younger participants.

Significant new resources will be required to develop these programs. The scope of the task is too great, and its importance to our national security too critical to be able to accomplish our goals by simply shifting money from other regions of the world. The importance of maintaining a broad, worldwide coalition to combat terrorism suggests strongly that shortchanging one area of the world in order to temporarily emphasize another will be an ineffective strategy. To do this job right will require new funding.

Reductions in public diplomacy over time have limited our reach: we have closed posts and cultural centers, reduced numbers of public diplomacy positions in our embassies, and steeply reduced the number of exchange participants. As populations in significant Muslim countries have increased by approximately 15 per cent over the past 10 years, the numbers of exchange participants from key countries such as Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Turkey have declined by approximately 25 per cent.

In the face of those reductions, Mr. Chairman, it is important for us to recognize the dedication, hard work, and effectiveness of the State Department's corps of public diplomacy officers. Faced with diminishing resources and a major reorganization that abolished USIA and moved their function and careers into State, these professionals have performed in their typical fashion: professionally and effectively.

Mr. Chairman, a meaningful and effective Islamic exchange initiative will require \$100 million above the current appropriation for State exchanges. We recognize that this is a significant amount of money. We believe, however, that this funding level is necessary and appropriate given the expanse of the Muslim world and the urgency and importance of the task at hand.

Moreover, this amount of money spent on promoting our ideas and values is very small when compared to the sums we will expend on military hardware, but it is no less crucial to our success.

The level of support we have witnessed from senior members of both parties and both chambers underscores the timeliness and importance of this initiative. This is a moment when our national interests require Congressional leadership to build these cultural bridges. The U.S. exchange community stands ready to assist you in this effort, and is grateful for your support.

Needed: A Visa Policy that Serves All Aspects of our National Security

Since the horrific September 11 attacks on the U.S., the way the United States administers its visa policy has received much scrutiny, and appropriately so. Members of the exchange community, like all Americans, want a visa policy that protects us from

those who would do us harm. We understand that greater scrutiny is required, and we support this. The Alliance, along with NAFSA: Association of International Educators, also actively supported last summer provisions in the Homeland Security legislation that maintained the visa function within the Department of State. We are gratified that Congress shares our view that State is the appropriate locus of consular services.

State's effort to tighten visa adjudication, in consultation with the Department of Homeland Security, is necessarily a work in progress, and has led to unpredictability and confusion. The impact of this somewhat messy process is being felt in virtually all walks of American life: business, medicine, education, scientific research, travel and tourism. The simple fact is that in 2003, there is very little activity in American life that does not have an important international dimension. And by disrupting these activities through slow or inconsistent visa procedures, we pay a high price as a nation.

As spring and summer and their high volume of visa applicants approach, we urgently need to implement a balanced approach to visas, one that addresses our national security concerns and also encourages the many legitimate visitors whose presence benefits the United States. Participants in long-standing summer exchange programs, such as camp counselors and summer work-travel students, are enormously valuable to American businesses and gain first-hand exposure to American life. Often these are individuals who could not afford to come to our country without a job to cover their expenses. Because these programs are of short duration and keyed specifically to the summer season, long delays in visa processing this spring could prove very disruptive both to exchange participants and to the many American businesses that depend on them.

Uncertainty over visas also is having a significant impact on American campuses. I serve on the advisory board for international programs at the University of Kansas, my *alma mater*. KU reports that a Chinese economics professor who returned home to conduct research last summer has not yet been able to return to the U.S. pending background checks. This has caused significant disruption for the university, which had to scramble to find others to teach her classes for the fall and spring semesters.

Further, KU tells me that undergraduate applications for the fall are down 20 per cent, and that it finds good students around the world increasingly looking to Great Britain, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand for higher education. Growing difficulty in attracting foreign faculty and researchers leads my colleagues in the heartland to the conclusion that many in the international scholarly community, both faculty and students, view the U.S. as inhospitable to them.

This perception and the behavior it impels are enormously damaging to our long-term interests, which are well-served by attracting the best and brightest to an American education.

Mr. Chairman, we encourage the Committee to work with the Departments of State and Homeland Security to ensure that our visa policy supports our national security in all its aspects, and to ensure that adequate resources are available for the consular function.

Our security requires that we screen more carefully and effectively identify and screen out those who would harm us. Our security also demands that we welcome those with a legitimate purpose for being here, and whose presence manifestly benefits our nation.

Mr. Chairman, we urgently need to find a balance between these two imperatives, and we encourage you and your colleagues to be active in that effort.

The media challenge: carrying our message more effectively

Mr. Chairman, it is vitally important that our government-sponsored media and our relationships with foreign media must be improved if we are to succeed in the competition for attention in Islamic nations. As Coalition Spokesman during the campaign to unseat the Taliban government and destroy Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, I faced two challenges. One, facing down the disinformation from the Taliban ambassador in Islamabad, was relatively easy to achieve. The second, convincing a skeptical Islamic world press that the Coalition was at war with terrorism and not with Islam, was far more difficult. In truth, we made little headway in that essential struggle. But a useful lesson was learned: the US must take foreign media more seriously. Our government understandably focuses its attention on the domestic press. It should now be clear that renewed efforts to get our message into foreign media are required. Nine out of ten Middle East adults get their news from either their national television networks or satellite stations such as Al-Jazeera. Most of those outlets, including Al-Jazeera, are open to us, and we should use them. Mr. Chairman, I believe this will not require major new funding, but a change in emphasis.

I applaud the innovative FM radio programming undertaken by the Voice of America. Radio Sawa seems to be steadily gaining listenership among Arab youth. However, television is the key. It has been the sense of Congress that the U.S. should initiate TV broadcasting into the Middle East. An increase of \$135 million to the BBG for FY 2004 will make this possible. There is an urgent need for this to go forward as soon as possible.

State Department Structure: Inhibiting Public Diplomacy

Mr. Chairman, I share the view of many in the public diplomacy community that the merger of USIA into State has inhibited rather than enhanced our efforts. Under the current structure, which I believe to be flawed, the primary purveyors of public diplomacy programs and resources – the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and the Office of International Information Programs – have no direct connection with the public diplomacy sections in our embassies, and no formal connection with the regional bureaus that supervise those posts.

This anomalous structure runs the risk of marginalizing public diplomacy within State, and already has diminished its effectiveness. Those senior officials with responsibility for public diplomacy do not control field resources; those with a direct connection to the

field resources are mid-ranking office directors in the regional bureaus, and do not have the clout to take bold action. Instead of sitting in policy-making councils, these public diplomacy office directors spend their very long days responding to task assignments. The structural flaw already is manifesting itself in diminished focus, uncoordinated activities, and reduced field resources.

Mr. Chairman, I would respectfully draw the committee's attention to documentation previously presented by the Public Diplomacy Council that gave recommendations for the enhancement of public diplomacy in its new home within the Department of State. These recommendations represent the distilled wisdom of some of the most distinguished public diplomacy professionals we have had.

I would like to stress just one of those recommendations, which I believe to be the key to effectively addressing the structural flaw – and to strengthening the State Department's management of public diplomacy. Congress should authorize and the Department should create in each regional bureau a Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) position responsible solely for public diplomacy.

Establishing a DAS in each regional bureau would ensure that public diplomacy is actively represented in senior-level meetings and thus an integral component in our approach to every foreign policy issue. A senior officer with these responsibilities could effectively coordinate public diplomacy activities across the region, make the case for additional resources when needed, and play an active role in personnel decisions. The DAS would coordinate closely with the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy, creating a policy-level link between these two functions that is not constricted by the competing demands of a DAS who deals with public diplomacy as one of several responsibilities.

Creating and maintaining new DAS positions for public diplomacy would be a critical first step in changing the Department's culture, and would send an unmistakable message to those who work at State: that public diplomacy matters, and matters enough to require senior leadership.

Mr. Chairman, this proposal has informally surfaced before, and the Department has not appeared to welcome it. There are two primary arguments against adding public diplomacy DAS positions: that State already has all the DAS positions necessary to do its job, and that there are not enough senior public diplomacy officers qualified for these positions. Neither of these objections holds water.

As to the limitation on the number of DAS positions, what we are talking about today is how to increase the effectiveness of public diplomacy, a vital element of our national security strategy. Are we to ignore an opportunity to strengthen our public diplomacy in order to preserve an arbitrary ceiling on DAS positions? I believe the American public is more interested in effective action than it is in the number of senior officers required to accomplish it.

As to the availability of qualified senior officers, my own knowledge of the public diplomacy corps suggests to me that there are any number of experienced officers well suited to this type of leadership role. But State need not exclude senior officers from other career specialties when assessing candidates for these new positions. For example, one can easily imagine many political officers being particularly effective in making the connection between public diplomacy and policy.

Mr. Chairman, the bureaucratic structure imposed on public diplomacy by the merger is not working. The most direct path to a more effective structure is to establish these DAS positions. I would be happy to discuss this matter further with you, Members of the Committee, and your staffs, and encourage you to take the necessary steps to effect this change.