

**The Written Testimony of Ambassador Karen Hughes
Submitted to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, Senator Kaufman—with whom I had the great pleasure of working on the Broadcasting Board of Governors and who is a great champion of public diplomacy and particularly international broadcasting—thank you for inviting me here today.

Let me start by saying the two and a half years I spent as Under Secretary were among the most challenging and difficult, yet in the end some of the most rewarding, of my entire career.

Working with an outstanding team of career foreign and civil service officers and public diplomats around the world, we were able to make a number of significant changes. Much more needs to be done and I want to outline some thoughts about that today.

People often talk about public diplomacy in the context of the most recent opinion poll but to view public diplomacy as an international popularity contest is a fundamental misunderstanding.

America's engagement with foreign publics is actually a vital foreign policy and national security priority that seeks to promote our national ideals and interests and to undermine our enemies.

When I took office, a strategic plan for US public diplomacy did not exist. We worked in an interagency process to develop one and put in place three strategic imperatives, which I believe remain vital today.

First, that America must offer a positive vision of hope and opportunity rooted in our most basic values, values which are not merely American, but universal human rights—liberty, justice, the rule of law, rights for women and other minorities, a fundamental belief in the dignity of every individual.

Second, to isolate and discredit Al Qaeda, and other violent extremists, and undermine their attempt to appropriate religion to their cause.

Third, to nurture common interests between Americans and people of different countries across the world.

You can put most US public diplomacy activities into four broad categories:

- 1) Communications
- 2) Education and exchange programs (the heart of public diplomacy)
- 3) The Deeds of Diplomacy (concrete things we do in areas such as education, health and economic development that make such an impact on people's lives)
- 4) International broadcasting (which now reaches 171 million people across the world)

Communications

With the explosion of media channels across the world, today's ambassadors and public diplomats have to be trained and effective communicators and empowered to speak on behalf of our country.

I found the bilateral set-up of the State Department is often counterproductive, particularly when dealing with regional networks like Al Jazeera that reach broad audiences across an entire region. I remember meeting with an Ambassador; Al Jazeera was by far the number one source of news and information in his country yet they weren't headquartered in his country so he had no strategy or personnel to deal with them. We set up hubs and put language qualified communicators there. The daily job of those communicators was to get out and explain and advocate our policies.

We need better language training of our personnel. Most of State's training teaches officers to be able to engage in conversations, but not television interviews. We need effective spokespeople who are able to communicate on television in key languages.

Public diplomacy has to be more involved in assigning State Department personnel and have the flexibility to move people to respond to urgent needs or world events.

Communications have to be two-way. It's imperative to put in place a unit to monitor international media, listen to what they are saying about US policies, provide US government's position in response, etc. Secretary Clinton's team has kept up with that practice and I believe it's vitally important.

And I'd like to mention two other areas. One, we were more engaged on Internet and put in place a program blogging in Arabic, Farsi, Urdu to correct misrepresentations and undermine the work of extremists. Two, there was a concerted effort to communicate that Al Qaeda's attacks often killed fellow Muslims. These are vitally important communications strategies that undermine extensive communications of extremists.

Education and exchange

Education and exchange programs are the heart of public diplomacy. During my tenure we dramatically expanded English language training; it's a skill young people across the world want because it gives them opportunities, and also gives them access to a wider body of knowledge and brings them in contact with an American. We are also allowed to reach much younger demographics (8-14 year olds) with in-country programs to learn English.

Doubled participation in exchange programs worked to make more strategic and focused on those who have a wide circle of audience and influence such as clerics and journalists, and also women who have a rippling impact on societies.

We worked with university leaders and reversed the trend of decline in student visas, that had occurred after 9/11, and the number of students has been growing and setting new records ever since.

We began using technology to expand the impact of exchanges, encouraging them to blog about their experience, giving them a camera and asking to make YouTube videos. However, much more needs to be done in this area to maximize the impact of exchanges.

Also, the act of citizen dialogue: We sent Muslim Americans overseas to engage with Muslim communities through sports diplomacy, music and culture. These are spaces where Americans can come in contact with foreign publics.

Most of these programs that build relationships and understanding over the long term are hard to fund, but they are vital and must be expanded in a world that is increasingly inter-connected.

Deeds of Diplomacy

Collaborative programs such as a breast cancer initiative with women in Middle East does more than share expertise in a way that improves women's health – it also teaches them to learn to network, to stand up for themselves, to more fully participate in their societies.

I believe there are many such ways to partner on issues of mutual interest in ways that improves people's lives and shows the heart and compassion of our country.

The USNS Comfort and the AIDS initiative in Africa are examples of things that are not just development, they are also public diplomacy that communicate who we are and we must view them that way.

International broadcasting

Improved television offerings: Members of the Broadcasting Board of Governors had had the foresight to start new Arabic television and radio stations before I arrived. We worked to get additional funding and provide relevant programming such as a new midday show, women's programs and others that build value. They now have a weekly audience of 35 million.

I just returned from Dubai where I announced the results of the most comprehensive survey every done with Arab youth. The survey compiled 2,000 in person interviews and was conducted by my company Burson-Marsteller. Findings from the survey showed Arab youth are increasingly connected: 3 out of 4 have mobile phones, 3 in 5 use the Internet at least once a day. The survey also highlighted the crucial importance of television in the lives of Arab youth.

78 percent said they get their news and information from television. Overwhelmingly 66 percent said their favorite leisure pastime is watching television.

Let me tell you why I worry about that for our national interests; if you see something on television, you tend to give it more credibility because you've seen it with your own eyes. Yet the view is often quite misleading. I'll close with a story from a young man I met in China, who had just returned from his first trip to America. I asked him what surprised him. He said he was surprised by how friendly Americans were, how much they cared about their families and how many of them went to church or synagogue or mosque.

I told him that if you take a survey of Americans and ask what's most important to them, not all of them, but most will say family and faith – yet he just told me that surprised him, so I asked: What's the disconnect. His reply has haunted me ever since: America, he said, is NOT the way it looks on television.

There should be calls for continued investment in international broadcasting, and additionally a lot more private sector partnerships (documentaries, etc.)

Some recommendations:

We need changes in personnel training and deployment at State, more in-depth language training of spokesmen in key languages and maybe we need to keep those people in one region of the world, rather than transferring them around. This will strengthen public diplomacy within the regional bureaus, which is the power structure at State, and give the Under Secretary greater authority to assign personnel and allocate resources.

We need more accessible spaces and expanded American corners. We need Americans staffing them; we cannot conduct public diplomacy while walled off in embassies

We have to encourage more conversations and recognize that's going to mean less control. Internet chat means someone may not like what is said, a call-in show means someone may not agree with all the opinions expressed. Al Qaeda is a one way communicator; we have to be a two-way facilitator.

We need to confirm board members at the Broadcasting Board of Governors and continue to improve international broadcasting.

Public diplomacy needs an advocate at the White House. I regularly met with, and saw, President Bush and he put me in the lead of inter-agency. I was in all of Secretary Rice's highest level policy meetings and all that was important but it was still very hard to get it done. We need someone at White House who cares and comes to work every day thinking about this and coordinating with the Under Secretary and that's hard because the White House tends to focus on the domestic audience – after all, that's who elects the President. But for our national interests we have to do a lot more thinking and planning about our conversations and interactions with publics across the world.