

**U.S. Public Diplomacy and Foreign Policy in the Arab World**  
**The Hon. Lee H. Hamilton**  
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**I. Introduction**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. I commend Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School, the Baker Institute at Rice University, and the National Press Club for hosting today's conference on the interplay of media and politics in the Arab world. Policymakers need to look to the expert community for ideas on how U.S. public diplomacy in the Arab world can become more effective. I think they will learn from today's proceedings.

You are the experts on the Arab media; I am not. What I hope I can offer you this morning are some reflections from my participation in the work of the 9/11 Commission, and my experience with the U.S. policy-making process. I will make a few observations about public diplomacy, foreign policy, and the unfinished tasks before us, and then I would be pleased to turn to your questions.

**II. Public Diplomacy**

**The Value of Public Diplomacy:** What the 9/11 Commission found is that American public diplomacy in the Arab world just isn't doing a very good job. We have very fine public affairs officers who are dedicated, patriotic and hardworking, and they do outstanding work. We just don't have enough of them. Public diplomacy efforts in the Middle East, and around the world need more resources that are more effectively spent.

Our task in public diplomacy is to tell the truth about America as persuasively and widely as possible – about our policies, our values, our ideals, and – yes – even our shortcomings. Obviously we want to cast ourselves in the best light. But we must do so in a spirit of truth and dialogue.

The emphasis must not be America speaking *at* the world, but rather America speaking *with* the world. Dialogue is not a one-way street. It is a process of engagement – of developing relationships. That means listening and debating on a sustained basis – effective public diplomacy cannot be turned on and off like a spigot.

We must reach audiences that are skeptical, if not hostile, to America's power and purposes. That means – among other things – directly addressing the lies, illusions, and misinterpretations about us that so often circulate around the globe. It also means building up the level of understanding about America, our policies, and our best intentions. This is no small matter. It is an essential element of how we stop people from coming here to kill us.

**Resources:** The United States spends about \$1 out of every \$100 in the federal budget on international affairs. Of that \$1, about 5 cents is spent on public diplomacy. Each year, we spend on public diplomacy about what the Defense Department spends in a day. As one witness told the 9/11 Commission, it's not just that we are losing the public relations battle in the Arab world – we are barely in the game.

The Administration's budget request for public diplomacy for Fiscal Year 2006 is \$1.4 billion, up 11 percent from the current year. That is good. Only since 9/11 has spending on public diplomacy increased from historically low levels following the dismantlement of the U.S. Information Agency in 1999.

Even in current dollars, we spend less on public diplomacy that we did 15 years ago. If you judge by results, and how the Arab world views us, we are not doing very well at all.

So what do we need to do in public diplomacy? The answer is quite simple: More. We need more efforts across the board if we are going to reach a skeptical world.

#### **A. Embassy Outreach**

We need a stronger public affairs presence at every American Embassy in the Arab world.

- That presence should include libraries, English language instruction, cultural and education programs, and educational advisors.
- That presence should include Arabic-speaking Embassy officers who appear continuously and join in public affairs discussions in local media outlets. We need public affairs specialists, but every American diplomat needs some public affairs training. We cannot articulate and defend American policy and perspectives if we don't participate in the media markets where Arab populations get the news and information that shape their opinions.
- We all understand the security concerns that lead us to put up barriers around our Embassies to protect our people. Surely we must find a way so that our Embassies and officers are not cut off from the populations whose views we are trying to shape. You cannot conduct public diplomacy from the far side of the moat. Our diplomats must spend less time in these fortresses, and more time in old fashioned, face-to-face diplomacy.

#### **B. Educational Outreach**

We need broader and deeper educational exchange programs with the Arab world. My personal view is that the bulk of our public diplomacy money should be spent on exchange programs. They have a slow but certain impact that is huge over the course of a generation.

I have consistently found that the foreign leaders who have the best appreciation of our perspective -- and are most willing to work with us -- are those who have had the opportunity to study in the United States.

- Today, over 3 years after 9/11, the bulk of U.S.-funded educational exchange programs are still directed toward Europe.
- Those programs helped us win the Cold War, and after the fall of the Berlin Wall, these programs in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union helped us win the peace. These are good programs.
- But we need to expand resources and, if necessary, redirect resources, so that we can have a comparable impact in the Arab world.

I like the idea of a constant flow of people between the U.S. and the Arab world – students, scholars, performers, artists, athletes, farmers, tourists – with private sector and government involvement.

Looking beyond U.S. government programs, we need to recognize that most students and visitors from the Arab world come to the United States with private funding. Right now, they're not sure they want to come.

- Arabs who want to visit the United States have difficulties and delays in getting visas. I am pleased that progress is being made on this issue. We should applaud the efforts of the State Department to address these delays. But more remains to be done.
- Arabs are often subject to additional and sometimes even humiliating scrutiny at the border.
- They experience discrimination during their time here.
- Such stories and perceptions are widespread among both Arab elites and the general population.

Policymakers used to console themselves that even if Arabs didn't like American policy, they loved coming to visit America. Now I'm not so sure about that. As it becomes more difficult for young Arabs to obtain visas, they are choosing to study elsewhere.

This is unfortunate, because we need to reach out to young Arabs at this important moment in history – among the most important challenges for American foreign policy in the coming years is our outreach to the Arab and Islamic world.

The trends on international students coming to the U.S. since 9/11 are not good. More students are opting for places like Great Britain and Australia.

That may not be a big deal for a year or two. But if that trend holds for a period of years, it will have grave consequences – on the U.S. economy, our leadership in the world, and our relationship with the world’s Muslims.

We need to improve our monitoring of foreign students in this country. We need to be sure that people are who they say they are. We need to be sure that we do not welcome people who could pose a security threat, and we need to ensure that students adhere to the terms of their visas. Universities – and all kinds of groups associated with Universities, as well as the government – must step up to this responsibility.

But we must be careful to not adopt excessively burdensome or restrictive policies that deter foreigners from studying here. We should recognize that international students make up only 2% of foreign visitors to our country, and that they are easier to monitor than most other groups.

International educational exchange should be seen as a solution to terrorism – not part of the problem. Indeed, education is one of the most potent weapons that we possess in fighting terrorism.

Instead of turning away young Muslim men and women, we should seek to educate them. Education allows us to open the doors of opportunity and understanding, while debunking misconceptions about America and its intentions in the Islamic world. Welcoming foreign students enables us to engage in a dialogue rather than a clash of civilizations.

There does not have to be a trade-off between having a secure homeland and welcoming foreign students. We do not need to become Fortress America. If we are efficient in our screening and monitoring, we can put the proper safeguards in place while maintaining our commitment to international education.

### **C. International Broadcasting**

We also need to tell our own story directly to the people of the Arab world.

Today, the U.S. government is funding new broadcasting ventures in the Middle East to directly present an American perspective. Since 9/11 two new ventures, Radio Sawa (sah-wah) and Alhurra (al HOOR-uh) satellite television, are making inroads into the Arabic-speaking audience. Sawa, which went on the air four months after 9-11, draws a strong under-30 audience by airing a mixture of Arabic and Western pop music.

Every half hour Sawa airs up-to-the-minute world news. The station also broadcasts thirty minute primetime newscasts, and special live coverage of major events, such as the recent elections in Iraq. It attempts to present U.S. positions accurately and fairly. In a part of the world where 60% of the population is under 30 years old, Sawa is

now one of the top drawing stations among young people in many Middle Eastern cities. It is number one in several, including the two largest cities in Morocco.

Al hurra went on the air in February 2004, broadcasting news, entertainment, sports, and informational programming across the Middle East. The editorial slant is similar to that of Radio Sawa or the Voice of America. After one year in operation, Alhurra has gained a modest audience in the Arab world.

I know there is strenuous debate in the public diplomacy community about the merits of these ventures. These two stations are experiments. I believe they should continue. It will take time to judge their impact and effectiveness. But surely the United States needs its own voice in the Arab world. As the 9/11 Commission stated, “If the United States does not act aggressively to define itself in the Islamic world, the extremists will gladly do the job for us.”

Radio Sawa and Al hurra television are a useful start. They are worthwhile efforts. At the same time, we should also be open-minded about assessing how to change or adjust formats, content – or even broadcasting concepts. The goal here is maximum impact and effectiveness for the United States.

### **III. The importance of policy**

Even if we take all the steps I have outlined this morning – and I strongly believe we should – we need to recognize the limits of public diplomacy. It can only do so much. American policies are often at the center of the divide between Americans and others around the globe. Public diplomacy cannot change the policies it presents.

**Perceptions:** Poll after poll makes clear that American policy is the key factor in determining views toward the United States. It is clear that the reputation of the United States is at low ebb in the Arab world.

Favorable views of the United States are down 50 points in Morocco since 1999, and stand at 27 percent. Favorable views of the United States in Jordan stand at 5 percent, up from 1 percent at the time of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Perceptions in the Arab world that U.S. policy in the Middle East is “fair” stand in low single digits.

Right or wrong, it is simply a fact that American policy regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and American actions in Iraq are dominant staples of public commentary in the Arab world – and profoundly shape attitudes toward the United States.

There are, of course, other American policies that shape attitudes towards the U.S. – including our support for some repressive governments in the region. But I will focus on these two.

So what should we do?

**Israeli-Palestinian Conflict:** There is little question that an Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement would have a huge and positive impact on U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. No other issue polarizes relations between the United States and the Islamic world as much as this one.

A peace settlement would benefit Israel and the Palestinians. It would stop the human carnage, reduce the huge expenditures on security, and provide great opportunities for cooperation by the Arab world with Israel, the region's most dynamic economy and society. Moreover, a peace settlement would make it easier for Arab leaders to work with the United States and support a wide range of U.S. foreign policy objectives.

Fortunately, we are entering a period of opportunity. There is a willingness to negotiate on both sides. All parties must now take action to seize this opportunity.

The Palestinians must recognize Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state and commit themselves to stopping terrorism. The Israelis must go forward with their withdrawal from Gaza, freeze the growth of settlements, and demonstrate that Palestinian moves towards peace will be reciprocated. The United States must monitor progress and recognize that there will be no final settlement without robust and sustained U.S. engagement.

If we have learned any lesson from the Arab-Israeli conflict, it is that the parties cannot get to peace by themselves. From the time of Secretary Kissinger to the present, American leadership by Presidents of both parties has been necessary, and has been responsible, for moving the peace process forward.

Therefore, I am pleased that the Administration is placing new emphasis on American diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli peace process. I hope that the Administration will press very hard. I hope that President Bush will use his influence to monitor agreements and move the parties to a settlement.

We have a window of opportunity, and we don't know how long it will last. Opportunities come and go quickly in the Middle East. In the past, assassin's bullets and terrorist attacks have closed off any number of possibilities. So we should act now, with energy, creativity, and a sense of urgency comparable to the American national interest at stake, which is considerable.

**Iraq:** The other great issue affecting both perceptions of the United States and our interests in the region, of course, is Iraq. The elections in January have given us a lift and give hope to the Iraqi people. The path ahead is a clear one, even though it is a very hard one: the insurgency continues, and the thorniest political questions lie ahead. We need to help Iraqi leaders as they form a new government, and we need to learn from the missteps that we have made in the last two years.

The new government must not only provide security and carry out the will of the majority; it must protect the right of minorities. The overarching goal must be inclusiveness – all of Iraq’s factions must feel that they are represented in the process. The Constitution can serve as a kind of peace treaty amongst the different groups.

American military training and economic assistance to Iraq remain necessary, but the Iraqi government must itself take on the responsibilities of governing in order to defeat the insurgency. The insurgency gains its strength in part from resistance to foreign occupation. Only when the perception of occupation ends will the insurgency end.

The United States must make clear – again and again – that our goal is to leave Iraq to Iraqis. We do not want to stay indefinitely. Nor should we leave abruptly on a rigid timetable. The goal should be a gradual reduction of the American commitment, and a process that leads to a stable, non-threatening Iraq based on democratic principles – not an Iraq created in America’s image.

#### **IV. A Message of Hope to the Arab World**

I want to return to the topic of public diplomacy again. But this time I want to talk about content, not about the process or the message of transmission.

The 9/11 Commission stressed the importance of a message of hope from the United States to the people of the Arab and Islamic world.

The President talks about the importance of freedom. He is right about that, of course. We have seen elections for Palestinian leaders, elections in Iraq, and the first stirrings of elections in Saudi Arabia. President Mubarak is now talking about contested presidential elections. The trend lines in the region, however tentative, are positive.

Freedom is important and necessary, but freedom is not sufficient. We also need justice. The Pledge of Allegiance ends with the words: “with Liberty and Justice for all.” The message of America to the Arab world – and the broader world of 1.3 billion Muslims – should be the same: liberty and justice for all.

Right now, millions of Muslims around the globe grow up lacking political freedom, economic opportunity, and hope.

- the unemployment rate in some Muslim countries is 50%, particularly for young men;
- a vacuum in education sometimes means the only option is a *madrasa* that preaches radical Islam and hatred of the U.S.;
- the governments of many Muslim countries – including U.S. allies – repress their populations and deny them political participation.

The 9/11 Commission recommended a comprehensive strategy to defeat radical Islam and eliminate al Qaeda – but only one of its 41 recommendations discussed the use of military force.

We cannot fight and win a war on terror simply by pursuing terrorists militarily. We have got to find a way to reach out to and strengthen moderate Muslims. We need to give young Muslims peaceful and productive avenues for expression. We must beat the terrorists in the war of ideas.

That is why the 9/11 Commission recommended an agenda of opportunity for the Islamic world. Our message must be one of economic and educational opportunity for young Muslims, and hope for the future.

#### Economic support

The combined gross domestic product of the 22 countries of the Arab League is less than the GDP of Spain. Forty percent of adult Arabs are illiterate; two-thirds are women. One-third of the Middle East lives on less than two dollars a day. Less than 2 percent of the population has access to the Internet. No counterterrorism strategy can work without economic policies that support it.

We recommend:

- foreign aid programs that brings hope to the hopeless;
- and initiatives that encourage development, trade, and open economies, so that young Muslims can find empowerment through employment.

#### Educational support.

We need to expand educational alternatives in the Islamic world. We recommend:

- joining other nations to support a new International Youth Opportunity Fund, to help committed Muslim countries build and operate secular primary and secondary schools;
- expanding educational assistance to promote basic literacy, for both boys and girls; and
- expanding vocational training so that young people will develop the skills necessary to participate in the global economy;

#### Support for political reform.

Where governments, including our allies, do not respect our values of openness and democratic participation, we should stand for a better future. Elections are good, and important, but there are many steps necessary, in addition to elections.

We should support:

- tolerance, especially of religious and ethnic minorities;
- step-by-step pragmatic reforms toward more accountability, including greater transparency in government;
- the development of civil society and a free media;
- the rights of all members of society, including women;
- and the rule of law.

These changes will not happen overnight. It will take many years for economies to open; educational systems to change; and political reforms to take hold. But the U.S. must orient its long-term policies with progress in the Islamic world.

Ultimately, it falls to Arab and Muslim governments to improve the lives of their people. But where terrorists offer death, destruction and regression, the United States and its allies must offer life, progress and hope.

## **V. Conclusion**

The strength of America's public diplomacy rests upon the strength of America's foreign policy. Our foreign policy best serves the national interests of the United States when it represents the values for which our country stands. We want liberty and justice for all. We cannot attain that goal in a year, or a decade, or even many decades.

Yet America is judged by its aspirations as well as its accomplishments. We will make greater headway in the Arab world, and in the broader Islamic world – and we will better protect and promote the national security of the United States – if our message to the world is one of hope and human dignity, and of freedom paired with justice.

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