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Remarks at the Council on Foreign Relations

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Well, I want to thank Isabelle for that nice introduction. It's great to be here before this premier foreign policy group and to have an opportunity to talk with you and to learn from you. I hope in some of your questions you'll give me a little advice because, as Isabelle noted, we have a big challenge and I can use all the advice I can get. So I would welcome any thoughts and comments and recommendations that you have for me.

I want to thank Isabelle for the very generous introduction. It was a little more elaborate than most of my introductions these days. Most of the times I'm running through a busy airport or pushing my shopping cart down the grocery aisle and I'll see somebody look at me and all of a sudden they'll look again and then they'll stare, and I can see them thinking, did I go to school with her, she looks kind of familiar. And all of a sudden, almost inevitably, they will take out their finger and they'll point and they'll say, "I know, aren't you that woman who moved home to Texas?" (Laughter.)

Anytime that I'm on television a lot, there's a sharp increase in what my husband calls Karen sightings and it's actually diminished a little bit since I've been at the State Department but you don't have to worry about it going to my head anyway. I was thinking about what to talk about with this group and I thought you would appreciate this story very much. I was getting on a small commuter airline out in California. It was kind of one of those planes that was so small that you probably wouldn't have made the reservation if you'd seen the plane before you made the reservation. And the pilot of this airplane looked very young, younger than my son, I thought, and way too young to be even flying this very small airline. And he saw me and he got all excited and he came back and he said, "I am so glad to have you here. I never thought I'd have Madeleine Albright on my airplane." (Laughter.) I didn't know quite what to tell him.

But my favorite all-time recognition story happened -- I was with my family and I was getting on an elevator and it was one of those real deep elevators and we were crowding more and more to the back. And at the very end, these two elderly women kind of pushed their way onto the elevator and one of them looked at me and then she looked away, and then she looked again and stared and she elbowed her friends, and in a very loud stage whisper she said, "Condi Rice is on this elevator." (Laughter.)

Obviously, our Secretary of State is not here today. She is in New York and I had several meetings with her yesterday and she asked me to please give all of you her very best regards. And I think as I watch her, how fortunate we are as a country to have this gracious, strong lady as America's Secretary of State representing us across the world.

I want to tell you a little bit about how I got to be the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and then share with you a little bit about some of the pretty significant changes that we've put into effect during my first eight and a half to nine months. I think it's coming up on nine months now on the job. I frequently tell people at the State Department that had I known when I started my career what I know now, I probably would have gone into the Foreign Service because I've met so many people who have had fascinating careers.

I was always interested -- I grew up as an army brat and so my dad, we hop-scotched around the world. He changed assignments every couple of years. I was born in Paris. When I'm in Texas I have to say Paris, France, but I don't have to make that distinction here to distinguish it from the place down the road in east Texas. I also lived in Canada. I lived in the Panama Canal Zone. I spent several years there. And while we were there, I had the privilege of going to a number of foreign embassies there, of meeting a number of visiting dignitaries and ambassadors. And so that really -- I remember being very intrigued and fascinated with the different countries and languages and cultures, and so my interest in public diplomacy I think was first sparked as a child.

And then at the White House in the aftermath of September 11th, I realized that coming into the White House off a presidential campaign, that until September 11th I was focused really more on communicating with the American people. I had been through a campaign where we were thinking about New Hampshire and South Carolina and Iowa and voters in those places, and I really hadn't focused much at the White House, I don't think, on communicating with foreign audiences until September 11th.

And in the days and weeks afterward, I remember as our military went into Afghanistan, we would wake up in Washington and that Taliban ambassador who fled to Islamabad was having news conferences every morning in Islamabad in which he was accusing us of terrible things -- bombing hospitals and killing babies and all kinds of things that usually turned out later not to be true. But they played across the world, across the Arab world, across Europe, as we slept and often when we woke up the impressions of wrong things were cemented in people's minds already. And so I became very concerned about that. I set up coalition information centers in Islamabad and London to begin to try to respond more quickly and more aggressively to these kind of accusations.

Eventually I recommended, and the President created, the White House Office of Global Communications. And that was my effort at the time to try to set up an office to do what I am currently doing at the State Department as the Under Secretary. Many of you know that I left the White House in the summer of 2002, as Isabelle mentioned, to return home to Texas to spend more time with my family, to have my son have his high school years in the place where I thought he would best thrive, and we were in Washington in 2005 for the President's Second Inaugural and the President and Secretary had begun to sort of gently remind me that with my son preparing to go off to college, perhaps I might consider a return to government. And they started talking to me specifically about this job and I think it's because they knew I had a passion and an interest in these issues.

I remember asking my son what he thought. We were sitting at breakfast one morning during inaugural week and he immediately said, "Mom, you have to do it." And I said -- well, I was kind of surprised. You know, I figured he wouldn't -- my husband didn't particularly want to come to Washington and I figured my son might be a little reluctant. And he said, "Well, mom," he said -- I said, "Why? Why do you think I need to do this?" And he said, "Well, first of all," he said, "you really care about it." "And second," he said, "it's really important for my generation."

And I truly believe that we face no more important challenge for America's national security and for the future not only of our own children but for all the world's children than reaching out to the rest of the world to foster common interests and values and to confront common threats together.

The topic today here is transformational public diplomacy and that's very much how I'm approaching this job, because I believe that changing times really require us to change some of our systems and change some of the ways that we've traditionally done business. I noted recently that Secretary Rumsfeld made some headlines when he spoke here not too long ago about the Defense Department and our government as a whole struggling to adapt to a dramatically different communications environment. And we're indeed facing many different challenges in today's much different world.

During the Cold War we were trying to get information into societies that were largely closed, where people were hungry for that information. Well, today in places like the Middle East there's an information explosion and no one is hungry for information. What we are competing for there is for attention and for credibility in a time when rumors can spark riots, and information, whether it's true or false, quickly spreads across the world, across the internet, in literally instants.

Our government also retrenched in our outreach efforts, in our public diplomacy efforts, as you all know, once we thought the Cold War was won and the battle of ideas we thought was over, and we began to scale back. And so we are now faced with rebuilding as well as facing new challenges like security, which in many places has caused our embassies and our personnel to have to retreat behind guards. I hear people say sometimes that we look like Fortress America and that's a requirement as we protect our personnel, but it's also a challenge for public diplomacy as we seek to reach out to publics across the world.

President Bush and Secretary Rice and I are all very committed to rebuilding and transforming our public diplomacy efforts. Last September at my swearing-in ceremony, the President gave me pretty clear marching orders. He said spreading the message of freedom requires an aggressive effort to share and communicate America's fundamental values. He noted the war against terrorism will not be won by force of arms alone but in the battle of ideas.

And so our transformational public diplomacy is being implemented through a comprehensive strategy that's based on three strategic objectives: first, that we must offer people throughout the world a positive vision of hope and opportunity that is rooted in our belief in freedom, equality, justice and opportunity for all. I saw an interview -- one of the things I've done since coming to the State Department is done some research into what foreign publics value and what they care about. And I saw an interview with a young man from Morocco who said, "For me, America represents the hope of a better life." We have to continue to offer that hope. We represent that hope and must always do so. People around the world need to know that America proudly stands for not only our own rights but also for human rights, human freedom, human dignity, the value of every person everywhere.

Our second strategic imperative is to isolate and marginalize the violent extremists and confront their ideology of tyranny and hate. We must undermine their efforts. They want to portray the West as in conflict with Islam. That's the window into which they recruit. We have to undermine those by providing platforms for debate, by empowering mainstream voices and by demonstrating respect for Muslim cultures and contributions to our society and to world society.

That's why I've spent a great deal of time during my initial time at the State Department reaching out to Muslim Americans to engage them in the discussion because I believe they're an invaluable bridge as we discuss how to best counter ideological support for terrorism.

One of the points they've made very powerfully -- I reached out to them after Usama bin Laden's most recent videotape and I convened conference calls regularly to discuss with them their thoughts of how to best communicate. And one of their points, the lead points when Usama bin Laden came out with the tape, was that leaders across the Muslim world have clearly stated and are stating more and more that bin Laden's views do not represent the values of Islam. He offers death and destruction only, in contrast with those who are working to address legitimate grievances through an ideology of life and constructive engagement. And that's -- theirs is a message of destruction and death, ours a message of life and opportunity. And more and more people, including more and more Muslims across our world, are speaking up and saying that. And I think it's very important that we empower the voices of our fellow Americans to join us in saying that.

Our third strategic imperative is to foster a sense of common interests and common values between Americans and people of

different countries and cultures across our world. Now, that sounds pretty simple but that actually came from a conversation I had with the beloved former Ambassador Frank Wisner. And I know many of you know Frank well and have worked with him, and I was talking with him when I first accepted this job and he said, "Karen," he said, "You know, I worry that at a time of war that too often our foreign policy is viewed as being based on common threats. We have to more proactively nurture a sense of common interests and common values." And they're meant for people everywhere, our values are universal and we seek to promote them in a spirit of partnership and respect.

Now, you'll note that two of the three of the strategic objectives that I just outlined are not just focused on the war on terror or communicating with Islamic communities, because America's public diplomacy, despite what you read in the press, which sometimes focuses only on the Arab or the wider Muslim world, that America's public diplomacy actually involves the entire world. Our relationships with our neighbors in Latin America, for example, are extremely important and President Bush told me to make that one of my priorities. Public diplomacy works to nurture and strengthen and our transatlantic partnership with Europe, to build on our strengthening and strategic relationships with India and with Pakistan, to reach out to people across an emerging China.

We also try to provide reliable information and establish relationships with people in different countries even when we don't have relationships with their governments, in places like Cuba, in Iran. As you know, the President has recently requested 75 million in supplemental funding to try to support reaching out to people in Iran as part of our commitment to the people at the time when we're having some -- when we don't have dealings with their government.

Our transformation public diplomacy is fundamentally changing the way we do business to try to become more effective in six key areas, and I want to quickly go through them and then we'll be having a conversation where I hope I have a chance to address them a little further.

First of all, we're increasing funding for programs that we know work and making them more strategic and more effective. And I can think of no better example than exchanges. There's no doubt in my mind that our exchange programs have been our single most important and most successful public diplomacy tool over the last 50 years, and as you travel the world and meet leaders who participated in those exchange programs across the world, that's only underscored. Exchanges work and so we sought increases in funding, up 70 million in the 2006 budget, up another 48 million proposed for the 2007 budget.

We are also seeking to make them more strategic, to reach out to young people particularly, and those who influence them, like clerics and teachers and journalists. We've created several new programs. The Edward R. Murrow Journalism Exchange just brought 150 international journalists to America a couple of weeks ago. They spent three weeks studying at communications schools that were working in partnership with them and the Aspen Institute. They spent a week in Washington and had a wonderful program at the State Department where they questioned their fellow American journalists and we had some very interesting programs. We also have started a new women's exchange in conjunction with Fortune Magazine to try to encourage women's entrepreneurship across the world.

Second, we're improving the way our government communicates. When I got to the State Department, I realized we had a lot of different agencies of government monitoring the media, and usually what that meant was a week later you'd get an editorial that ran in a newspaper, and that didn't help us respond in a very timely fashion to what was making news across the world. And so, Pete, I think your group was one of those who recommended the creation of a rapid response unit where we monitor real time. We now have, up and running in the State Department in real time, a Rapid Response Unit where we watch what's being said on the pan-Arab stations, on media across the world. We monitor the blogs. And then we, every morning, produce a one-to-two page report so the busy policymakers have time to -- can read and absorb it quickly of what is driving news across the world and what is America's message, three or four points on each one of those news stories.

And that's my way of -- it now goes to every Cabinet secretary, to the White House, to ambassadors across the world, to our military leadership across the world, my way of trying to get our federal government kind of on the same page, quite literally.

We're also unleashing our ambassadors with new rules. When I arrived, the rule was an ambassador had to have pre-clearance from Washington before engaging in a media interview. Well, as you all know, that became a convenient excuse for ambassadors not to engage in media interviews, because, gosh, it would take a couple of days to get approvals from Washington. And the journalists here know, a couple of days is a lifetime in today's rapid media environment. So now our ambassadors -- we've totally changed the paradigm.

Our ambassadors are now expected to speak out and they don't need pre-clearance from Washington. In fact, we work -- we're making -- rather than taking a risk and speaking out, the risk -- we're now rating them on public diplomacy. We've written that into the rating evaluations of every Foreign Service officer and we expect them to be out there engaging in public diplomacy and we're giving them more tools and resources to do so.

Third, public diplomacy is helping to shape policy. That was again one of the recommendations of all the reports. I'm very involved at the State Department and all of my -- as my staff is and all the secretaries' senior-level meetings. We're participating in all the working groups on all the different issues. We've raised the presence of public diplomacy in the regional bureaus, which as you know, develop much of the policy for the State Department at the earlier stages. So I'm trying very hard to institutionalize the integration of public diplomacy and policy at the State Department, which is one of the reasons the old USIA was merged into the State Department in the first place.

Fourth, we're forging significant new partnerships with the private sector, again another recommendation of the council's group that Pete worked on. We've convened a University Presidents Summit to work with university presidents. The first time this has ever been done to market America as a higher education destination and we've got teams going out across the world this summer to make that case; that we want young people across the world to come to America to study. We're working with the travel and tourism industry in partnership to try to make our airports welcoming. I've been reminding people you never get a second chance to make a first impression, and we're making some pretty bad first impressions right now. And so we've got a couple of model airport projects going where we're trying to improve our ability to present a friendly and welcoming face to people who come to our country. I traveled with business leaders to Pakistan and Central America to raise significant -- and I want to thank the business leaders, many of them based here in New York: Hank McKinnell and Sandy Weill and Jeff Immelt and a group of others who raised more than \$110 million of American private sector money to contribute toward earthquake relief in Pakistan. And so I think these type of partnerships can be very effective and I think went a long way in Pakistan toward contributing to a more positive view of America in the aftermath of that country's earthquake.

Fifth, we're enhancing our use of technology. And I'm the first to say that this is probably one of our biggest challenges and we've got a long way to go. Government does not tend to be a trend leader; they tend to be a trend lagger. And so we have to be better about technology and we're working to do so and that's one of the things I've charged our Bureau of International Information Programs with looking at ways that we could use things like MP3 players to deliver messages or text messaging or to improve the quality. We've got a couple of new web-based programs that we're trying to become more active and engaged on the internet.

And sixth, we're -- and finally, we're working to de-legitimize terrorism. I like to say we need to do for terror what was done to slavery. Slavery went from being an international accepted norm to becoming an international pariah. And the antislavery movement actually sprang from religious convictions about the worth and value of every person, convictions very similar to America's belief in the dignity of every human being.

In 1833, one of every seven adults in Britain signed a petition against slavery and that was twice the number of people who were eligible to vote at the time. It was the largest public petitioning of parliament ever to that date. Today we would call that a grassroots citizens campaign. And I've meeting with interfaith leaders and challenging them to try to launch a similar movement across all faiths and continents, to clearly state that no grievance, no complaint, no matter how justified, can ever justify the targeting and killing of innocent civilians.

I'm excited about the work we're doing. I hope you can tell. I'm energized. I'm enjoying it. It's a huge learning curve for me and a wonderful opportunity to -- a privilege really to travel the world and represent our country. I try to listen. I try -- every place I go to meet with people that maybe have never seen an American or met an American in person before. I've appeared on many television programs, where I'm the first American official to ever appear on that television program. And so we're really making an effort to do a lot of outreach.

We have much more to do. This is a very long-term challenge. I view my job as -- in the remaining years of the Bush Administration to put in place a foundation, because this is the work of decades, not of days or weeks or months. We need to match the commitment that enabled us to prevail in a previous generation when Communists denied freedom to millions of the world's citizens. Today, the struggle have shifted to new regions and different threats in many, many places across our world.

I was in Dallas last Friday, to meet with Bono and talk about the work he's doing to fight poverty and AIDS and how it intersects with what I'm trying to do as we discuss across the world the compassion of America. I've never heard Bono's band in person, but I heard him give a speech Friday night and I realized he's a fabulous communicator even without music. He speaks very eloquently about America and it's interesting to watch this Irish rock star speak very eloquently about America. "Being more than a country," he says, "America is an idea." And people around the world want to look to that idea. He talks about the idea -- the inspiration of America in ways that occurred to me that too often we as Americans don't. He heralds the good that we're doing around the world, even as he challenges us to do even more, makes the point that -- he asked me, "Isn't compassion one of the best ways to demonstrate your values, to communicate your values and isn't it an investment in a safer world?"

And so it caused me to imagine for a minute what the world without America would be like. And I want you to think about that, what would the world be like without America? Not just on the front of human rights or dignity or the values we stand, not just for -- not just because of our military might, but just think about the strength and the breadth and the reach of our compassion. I submit the world would be a far bleaker and less compassionate place, from the camps in Darfur, home to two million displaced people where more than 85 percent of the food aid, more than 85 percent that those people have received has come from the United States of America; to the Palestinian territories where we are helping and committed to helping the Palestinian people despite our disagreements with their government. As we speak right now trucks are arriving today, delivering health and medicine supplies to people who desperately need them in the Palestinian territories; to a half million on the Continent of Africa who are alive because of antiretroviral drugs provided by America under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief.

Public diplomacy is my job, but it's also our shared American challenge. I hope you'll join me in sharing with the world America's story of hope and health as we work to extend freedom, extend compassion and expand the circle of opportunity across our world.

I want to thank you very much for your attention and I look forward to your questions. Thank you all so much.

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