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Experiencing America: Public Diplomacy at Its Best

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and Ambassador Said T. Jawad*

AMBASSADOR NANCY G. BRINKER: It is a pleasure to be here today, and I appreciate the invitation to share what we are doing at the Office of the U.S. Chief of Protocol to engage with the diplomatic community. The Heritage Foundation is a respected and highly regarded institution in Washington and around the world, and I appreciate your interest in our mission and providing the opportunity to discuss it today.

I'm proud to be joined today by Ambassador Chris Hill, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs at the Department of State, as well as Ambassador Said T. Jawad of Afghanistan who will be speaking later this morning.

As many of you know, I've spent most of my life fulfilling a promise I made to my sister, Susan G. Komen, as she lay dying of breast cancer 30 years ago—the promise to do everything in my power to spare other women and families the horror of that disease. Fulfilling that promise has been the work—the passion—of my life, including when the President asked me to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Hungary. In addition to my traditional diplomatic duties, I was able to support Hungary's fight against breast cancer, which was only discussed in whispers.

During my time in Budapest, I learned anew the lesson that had always guided my breast cancer advocacy: It is possible to connect with people—regardless of race, religion, or culture—if you simply reach out to them with respect and understanding. And so, when the President asked me to serve as U.S. Chief of Protocol, I was honored to return to public service, but I

Talking Points

- The Department of State's Office of Protocol created a new outreach division to give as many of the 180 foreign ambassadors in Washington as possible an opportunity to experience more of America, beyond traditional diplomatic circles.
- In just 10 months, the Office of Protocol organized some 70 outreach events to expose the diplomats to American communities, high-tech businesses, advanced medical institutions, and even local, state, and federal government entities like NASA.
- The diplomatic community had expressed a desire to get to know America better: not just the large cities, but each region and even small-town America. Who better to communicate America's values and shared interests overseas than the foreign ambassadors and their families who live and work among us and who know us best?

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
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wanted to make sure it was the right fit—that I could really do something to make a difference and that it would be relevant.

Protocol Transformed

When I accepted this position, I remembered a simple lesson my mother always taught me: “Leave things better than when you found them.” I am indebted to the work of my predecessors and to the incredible staff I inherited.

As we looked ahead, we came to the realization—as I said before—that the Office of Protocol must be truly relevant to our times. Protocol, like diplomacy, must modernize, evolve, and stay current with the challenges and opportunities of our ever-smaller world.

In other words, we have to embrace the guiding spirit of the President’s global democracy agenda and Secretary Rice’s emphasis on transformational diplomacy, both of which are rooted in partnerships between nations and people-to-people relationships. The day-to-day work of diplomacy and protocol paves the way for a much greater transformation—a global transformation. So we need to be promoting, strengthening, and furthering bilateral relationships in a way that has never been done before.

We need, simply put, *diplomacy in action*. But how?

As ambassador to Hungary, I learned that diplomats have the unique ability—indeed, the responsibility—to understand the people and countries where they serve and to translate it back home. Think about it: Who better to carry and communicate America’s values and shared interests back home than the foreign ambassadors—and their families—who live and work among us, who know us best?

Outreach and the Five Pillars

There are over 150,000 diplomats living and serving in the United States: That is the same size as a small town. Who better to communicate our ideals and beliefs? So, immediately after I was sworn into office, my team and I went to work surveying more than 180 foreign ambassadors serving here. We asked them:

- What do you want to experience in America?
- What issues concern you the most?
- Who do you want to meet, to engage with?
- How can we help?

When the surveys came back, there were five main areas of interest, or Five Pillars:

- *The Economy*—how our nations can forge deeper economic bonds;
- *Health Care*—how we can work together to eradicate worldwide diseases;
- *Science and Technology*—how innovation can create foundations for growth;
- *Energy*—how we can work together to find new, sustainable forms of energy; and
- *Security*—how we can work together to make the world a safer place.

Next, we extended the Office of Protocol to be at the forefront of public diplomacy by creating a new outreach division. Its mission is simple: Give ambassadors the opportunity to experience more of America—exploring these topics, connecting with America’s foremost leaders and institutions—beyond traditional diplomatic circles. In short, help strengthen the bridges of understanding that are at the heart of our bilateral relations.

I’m proud to tell you that in the past 10 months, we have organized nearly 70 outreach events covering the Five Pillars of most interest to them:

- *The Economy*—an Economic Roundtable.
- *Health Care*—a Global AIDS event, an event with Jenna Bush, and a Heart Healthy Briefing and Luncheon which included a Neiman Marcus fashion show.
- *Science and Technology*—We enabled the diplomats to meet executives from Google, Hewlett Packard, Cal Tech, and NASA out where they have their headquarters.
- *Energy*—We visited an ethanol production plant and a Florida solar energy center.
- *Security*—we visited the Miami Port Authority and Minnesota to see bridge reconstruction.

We also have hosted partnership dinners to continue to build relationships of goodwill with Cana-

da, Ireland, Mexico, and Hungary. We've hosted events to share the full breadth of American culture—from arts (a private viewing of Edward Hopper's work at the National Gallery, for example) to athletics (a Washington Nationals baseball game).

I even hosted all the ambassadors—about 186 of them, 20 at a time—at my home for dinner, although I'll confess I did have help in the kitchen. One of my favorite events was hosting the Deputy Chiefs of Missions for a special reception at the Blair House. We know how hard they work and all they do here in Washington.

Experiencing America

Because the ambassadors also expressed interest in getting outside Washington to experience the full fabric of America's society, we created the Experience America Tour. Ronald Reagan said, "If you close your eyes and try to picture our country, chances are the first thing you'll see is your own hometown. It is the hometowns of America, both big and small, that remind us what a diverse and yet united country we are." So our Experience America Tours have been sharing our hometowns, big and small, with foreign diplomats.

For our first tour, we took over 45 ambassadors and their spouses to Florida, where they experienced a vibrant tourism industry by visiting Disney; efforts to develop renewable and reusable energy at a visit to the Florida Solar Energy Center; our incredible advances in space exploration at NASA's Kennedy Space Center; how state government and federalism works in a visit with former Governor Jeb Bush; exactly how a state like Florida is improving security and border protection at the busy Port of Miami while ensuring economic vitality; and sampling our cultural diversity by a visit to Art Basel.

In fact, our first trip was so well received that we planned a second trip—to California. In Los Angeles, they experienced the health care system with a visit to the UCLA Medical Center; preservation of presidential archives with a visit to the Ronald Reagan Library; more on our space expertise with a visit to the Jet Propulsion Laboratory; and our academic vitality with a visit to the California Institute of Technology.

In Silicon Valley and San Francisco, they experienced our wonderful entrepreneurial spirit at a roundtable meeting with CEOs and venture capitalists, and technology and innovation at Hewlett Packard and Google, where they had the chance to talk to the founders, Larry Page and Sergey Brin, and at Cisco Systems. We took them to see how we are working on market solutions to developing green technology at the California Academy of Sciences; we talked about global democracy efforts in a briefing with former Secretary of State George Shultz; and we took them to a fair and expo, where vendors' booths presented on such topics as emergency preparedness, agriculture, tourism, trade, and energy.

And we just returned from Minnesota where the diplomatic corps attended the Republican National Convention, visited an ethanol plant as well as Lieutenant Governor Molnau's farm, met with top leaders from Best Buy, and were hosted by Governor and Mrs. Pawlenty for breakfast.

The response to these trips has been so overwhelmingly positive that we are preparing trips to New York City and Texas during the next two months. Through these trips, speakers' series, and events, we have seen proof that, while people and countries may differ on policy, there is much to unite us.

Success in Medical Diplomacy

This is especially true in the area of medical diplomacy. No matter the country, creed, race, or belief, disease can have global effects. Horrific pandemics can destroy lives and communities, but if the desire and energy to do something to eradicate diseases is harnessed, then the results that connect people and countries are unimaginable.

Let me give you an example of medical diplomacy as we have tried to deploy it in this Administration. In June 2006, to support health care and advocacy of women's issues—something that is close to my heart—First Lady Laura Bush launched the U.S.–Middle East Partnership for Breast Cancer Awareness and Research. It was a direct response to calls from women in the Middle East who are leading the fight against breast cancer. Just over one year later, in October 2007, Mrs. Bush traveled to

the region to break the silence around breast cancer, promote the ongoing activities of the Partnership countries, and help launch the Partnership in Saudi Arabia.

Support for the Partnership has come from the highest levels of government in both the Middle East and the United States, demonstrating a strong commitment by all countries involved to improving women's lives through health education and medical research. Currently, the Partnership unites breast cancer experts from the United States of America, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In 2008, the Partnership will expand to Egypt, Morocco, and the Palestinian Territories.

In the first months following the launch of the Partnership in Saudi Arabia, awareness of the need for early detection and treatment increased. The number of women receiving breast cancer screenings at the Abdullatif Cancer Screening Center, which the First Lady toured on her visit to Saudi Arabia, increased almost fivefold, from an average of six patients a day to more than 25.

In March, the Partnership with Saudi Arabia celebrated a major milestone with the beginning of the Course for the Cure™ program. Seventy-eight Saudi women were trained in four cities to start conducting community outreach activities to spread information about breast cancer and the importance of early detection.

Through these breast cancer research and advocacy programs, the U.S.–Middle East Partnership for Breast Cancer Awareness and Research is continuing to build a platform for shared knowledge between the U.S. and the Middle East and support the empowerment of women around an issue that affects us all, no matter our nationality, religion, or economic status. This means so much to me because of the work I have done with Susan G. Komen for the Cure.

While there may be many things that divide us, medical diplomacy is something that every country, no matter the policy, color, creed, or beliefs, can come together to establish foundations of common ground.

Conclusion

The diplomatic community has expressed a desire—a need—to know America: not just large cities, but each region of the country and small-town America. They know that there are so many experiences across America that they can take to their home countries.

When the Algerian ambassador met with me for his exit interview, he expressed how he felt about being an ambassador and about the new outreach program. He told me that “when an ambassador comes to D.C. to serve, they need to get out and know the people. The outreach program is making people feel as if the Protocol Office, the State Department, and the U.S. government were listening more, and this is very important to the diplomatic community. The Experience America Tours created a new way of thinking, allowed us to see things in a time frame and structure that is extremely valuable.”

This is the opportunity we have been granted: the opportunity to make a difference; the opportunity to engage in transformational diplomacy, reaching out to the international community to develop relationships and build goodwill; the opportunity to be that “first face of America,” to make the Office of Protocol more relevant to our times, connecting with people—regardless of race, religion, or culture—by reaching out with respect and understanding. It is the opportunity, my friends, to open new doors of communication and understanding, not only with the diplomatic corps, but with their fellow citizens back home, and in so doing build a stronger, safer world.

I love this job. I get to celebrate history as it unfolds—and to share our country with the world. I love this country and the freedoms and values she stands for. Thank you for your time this afternoon and the opportunity to share how we are working to build bridges of cooperation and goodwill domestically and across the globe.

It is now my great honor to introduce our distinguished guests, Ambassador Chris Hill, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, and Ambassador Jawad of Afghanistan, who are here today to share firsthand insights about the new outreach program.

AMBASSADOR CHRISTOPHER HILL: Thank you very much, Nancy. It is a great pleasure to come here and a particular pleasure to endorse this program. I think anyone who has lived abroad knows the task of trying not only to understand the country to which you're accredited, but also to tell the story of America.

Rarely is anyone out there in the world indifferent to the United States, and what we find so often is that the people who know us best probably like us best. So the question is: How can we show America to as many people as possible? How can we show America to people who really are going to be opinion leaders back in their country?

This program, I think, has been particularly important for a reason that Ambassador Brinker pointed out. A lot of the ambassadors who come to Washington to serve here as their country's chief representative are either the top diplomats in their country or politicians who are going to go on to even bigger things. Many times, we see the name of a person who has been here as ambassador pop up 10 years later as foreign minister or prime minister and, in a number of cases, president. I think trying to reach these people now to show them what our country is all about is a very important task, and it's a task that's often not fulfilled.

In fact, when I leave here, I'll go back to the State Department and meet with the Chinese ambassador. An hour later, I'll meet with the South Korean ambassador, and later tonight, I'll see the New Zealanders. There are many other countries whose ambassadors I'd like to see, like Indonesia, which is a country of 240 million people and has an extremely capable ambassador here.

A lot of these countries don't get as much exposure as we'd like them to get. Indeed, often, when we invite their diplomats to the State Department, it's to complain about something—perhaps about some American citizen who got arrested there and we haven't been able to get access to them. Usually it's kind of an adversarial situation, and it's not the kind of situation that fills everyone in the room with good cheer and good feelings that bring us closer together.

That's where I think the program Ambassador Brinker is talking about can really come into play.

Ambassador Brinker and I were neighbors when I was ambassador in Warsaw and Nancy was ambassador in Budapest, so we know each other from those days. So when Ambassador Brinker came to this position in the State Department, she suggested that perhaps we could get some ambassadors together and do something that would be kind of fun.

Being a Foreign Service Officer, I don't often think outside the box as much as I should, but I said, "Well, maybe we could get them together and give them a briefing on North Korea." Nancy diplomatically said, "I don't think that's fun enough. Can't we do something better?"

So we came up with ideas like going to the new baseball stadium here, just a stone's throw from this building. We took all our ambassadors from East Asia, which included a few people who knew what we were talking about, like the Japanese ambassador. He was very familiar with who was playing second base for the Philadelphia Phillies, for example. And we had the Papua New Guinea ambassador, who was less familiar, and even various sports-minded countries like New Zealand—they follow sports 24-7, but they have no idea about baseball.

So there we were, in a box, and over the course of a three-hour baseball game, not one but two foul balls fell in our box. One of them fell into the hands of the New Zealand ambassador, who said to me, "Should I throw it back?" I said, "No, no." The other rolled around a little and was picked up by the Papua New Guinea ambassador, who said, "I've never gotten something like this!" I said, "Few of us have." It was a very good experience, especially in the sense that these ambassadors, who often don't get to talk to each other, were in fact able to talk to each other.

I spent a lot of time doing things like explaining baseball instead of talking about the North Korean nuclear issue. I explained the infield fly rule, what a bunt is, why you would bunt, the concept of sacrifice in baseball, etc. It was a lot of fun, and I think when those ambassadors left the event that night, they not only learned a lot more about baseball; they learned a lot more about the United States, and it made a real impression on them. In fact, I just saw the New Zealand ambassador, and he still talks about that foul ball. He's since come to understand that not everyone catches a ball.

I do think we really need to reach out to people, not just systematically, but as much as we can, because at the end of the day, we're going to need other countries and people out there who, when we're asking them to do things that, frankly speaking, they'd rather not do, say, "Sure, you want me to do that? OK, I'll do it."

That's happened to me. I've been in places like Kosovo, and I remember an incident where we needed help from a Serbian policeman. He said, "You know, I don't want to do what you're asking, and frankly I think I'm going to get in a lot of trouble if I do it, but about 20 years ago I spent three months in your country." And he starts telling me about his trip through all these places and then says, "And you know, that's why I'm going to do this for you."

So the more people know about us, the better for our country, and I think this is the kind of program that can help people understand America. Nancy, thank you so much for this initiative—not only this initiative, but for everything you do at the State Department. We greatly appreciate it. Protocol is so important.

AMBASSADOR SAID T. JAWAD: Thank you very much, Ambassador Brinker. Ladies and gentlemen, I am really delighted to be here, and I am very grateful to Ambassador Brinker for allowing me to be part of one of these trips and to have the opportunity to talk to you about this unforgettable experience.

Truly, it's a privilege for any diplomat to serve here in the United States. You have access to and interact with world-class politicians, officials, Members of Congress, academia, and others. And you live in one of the most beautiful cities in the world—a very cosmopolitan and beautiful city. But still, living in Washington and doing what we do in Washington is not the complete American experience.

The United States is a very rich country culturally, a very beautiful country as far as natural beauty is concerned. And if you look at a map of the United States, it's more of a mosaic of 50 beautiful gems and jewels. In order to appreciate the beauty of the entire country, you need to spend some time to examine, to see each jewel, each gemstone to better understand the entire picture.

I have been fortunately here longer than some of my colleagues, and I have had the opportunity to travel to all 50 states. And I have learned so much about the hospitality and the deep-rooted traditions of sharing and giving to charitable causes in the United States from sitting down with a sailor in Anchorage, Alaska, or going to an evening gala in Palm Beach, Florida, with investment bankers.

You can imagine how diverse it is for someone like me, coming from Afghanistan to the snow-covered Alaska and to Palm Beach. But unless I get out of Washington, I don't get an opportunity to see that beauty, that diversity, to realize particularly how much Americans give to charities and foundations. There are people in Anchorage who are helping to build schools in Afghanistan; and when I went there for the first time and sat down and talked with a teacher, she was able to relate to the kind of struggle we are going through, and I could understand the great sense of beauty and sharing that exists in this country.

I think this great initiative is, of course, due to the leadership and the hard work of Ambassador Nancy Brinker and her staff. Absolutely, they're doing a great job. They gave us a chance, for instance, on the Florida trip to sit down with the governor, to talk with an astronaut, to engage local artists, to visit museums, research centers, and national parks on this and other trips.

We all have demanding jobs here in Washington, and we really do not get much time to travel or interact with ambassadors outside of our specific geographic area or area of common interest. The trip I went on gave me a chance to spend time with 70 diplomats from 45 countries. It was a fascinating trip to Florida to see Disney World, the Kennedy Space Center, the Port of Miami, and to engage with the people in the arts, business, and government. It also gave us a chance to enhance our friendship with ambassadors who are serving from different parts of the world that we normally don't have much time with or an opportunity to talk to.

I personally was very affected by being at the Kennedy Space Center, because it reminded me of Afghanistan's peaceful days when I was young and I had the opportunity to walk casually to the U.S. embassy or U.S. Information Center and to watch

Neal Armstrong's landing on the moon. That's how the exposure to America started for me, and it's how I saw America. Unfortunately, today, it is much more difficult for many parts of the world to have this kind of access to information centers or embassies. You cannot go to an embassy unless you have an appointment or for business.

These are really very good undertakings, to broaden the perspectives of ambassadors here on the real way Americans live. I think the experience that Nancy Brinker had serving as ambassador helped to formalize this program, and her leadership and the very hard work of her staff have made this a very popular program among ambassadors here.

There is a need to ensure the continuity and institutionalization of such programs. Previously, when I was chief of staff to President Karzai back home, someone told me that a protocol officer is a professional, and even if he or she has to tell you to go to hell, she will do it with such a grace and delight that you find yourself looking forward to the journey. Ambassador Brinker and her staff never told us that, but, truly, they are very professional, and I hope this program will continue. I'm sure that many ambassadors are interested, and my recommendation to the diplomats who are hearing this is to take part. It's a great opportunity and a great experience.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: As somebody who studied protocol many years ago, it's clear that your office is re-inventing the concept. You hinted in your speech about the question of sustainability. What are your expectations after the elections that this concept will develop further? Are you confident that this is something that's now part of the State Department's mission?

AMBASSADOR BRINKER: We have a budgetary allowance in our department to do these sorts of things. That's the good news. The not-so-good news is that the staffing needs to be refashioned. We need a couple more full-time employees to actually do the work, because a lot of the people we were able to gather on our staff have actually been detailed to us from other areas.

We need to make sure that we keep the two-deputy arrangement. We should have some of the pub-

lic diplomacy young officers who are waiting to be posted overseas so they understand what we are doing when they are posted there. And I'm hoping that whoever they appoint as the next Chief of Protocol is someone who has served overseas already or who has global experience in some way.

QUESTION: I noticed you had efforts in science and technology like visits to Cal Tech and Silicon Valley. Are you planning further things in that area?

AMBASSADOR BRINKER: Yes. Our last Experience America trips will be to New York to the financial world and Texas, where I'm hoping we spend time at medical institutions in Houston and Dallas so people can see advanced technology not just for treatment, but for research and biological sciences.

QUESTION: Ambassador Jawad, could you tell us an incident or two in your travels of the new ideas you've picked up or that are more deeply ingrained now from your talks with Americans?

AMBASSADOR JAWAD: I was very surprised—actually very struck—when I went on my trip to Palm Beach and realized that an organization was raising half a billion dollars for a charitable cause and was close to their target. This does not take place in my part of the world, nor in Europe; this sense of charity and giving was remarkable. In most places in the world, there is the expectation that the governments will do it; but here, people participate themselves.

I mentioned the shop in Alaska. I went to Anchorage for a presentation and to visit some schools and show my appreciation for a group of teachers who were helping to build schools in Afghanistan. That evening, it was snowing and cold, and when I was walking down the main street of Anchorage, I stopped in a fur shop. It was a very modest, small shop, and the gentleman realized that I didn't look much like I'm from around there. I'm wrongly dressed in a blue suit. He asked me what I am doing and why I was there, so I told him who I was, and he insisted that I accept his most expensive fur hat that he had in his shop. I said I can't; it's legally for sale. And he said this is our tradition. To me, this is a new tradition, and it was just amazing. I said, "Even in Washington I might not need this

hat,” and he said, “Well, use it when you go back to Afghanistan.”

So it's this kind of personal connection, personal attachment, as I mentioned, from the highest level of billion-dollar charitable causes to actually caring about an individual. He considered me more as a guest there rather than an ambassador—just a guest visiting Anchorage, Alaska. And that is very moving to me. These are values that exist all over the United States, but we don't necessarily get exposure to it just being here in D.C.

QUESTION: Thank you very much for coming and sharing your experience. If I could follow up on your comment, just how do you translate what you experienced and learned to take back to your home country? I'm sure this view of America has to compete with what is in the media, with the images of America emanating from Hollywood and what they say on TV and in the movies.

AMBASSADOR JAWAD: This is a very good question. As you mentioned, it's one thing to mention statistics and numbers of how much is per capita assistance to a certain country, and another thing to specifically take a consignment of school supplies from a remote area in New Mexico to Afghanistan, sometimes something like a guide on how to improve your vineyards.

This is a lot more touching, and it has happened. A farmer asked me, “Do you grow grapes in Afghanistan?” and I said, “Yes, we do.” He said, “I know this very special technique for tending vineyards and vines; can you take it with you and tell the people?” This was very personal, and when I go back and tell them, monetary wise it might be a small amount, but it shows the personal connection, the personal caring.

As I mentioned, taking back a small package of school supplies with a picture of the teacher or the

children who collected them—and sometimes they've written messages with funny faces and things like that—it is building a very strong bridge of understanding. And when I go into America, it also puts a face with Afghanistan; they hear our struggles, they see what an Afghan looks like, and they hear what is our challenge. It's both ways—a great learning experience for me, and I hope that it also is a way for me to convey my gratitude.

QUESTION: Ambassador Brinker, if you could speak specifically to how the Office of Protocol deals with diplomatic relationships with countries that may perhaps be more isolationist or even hostile to the United States, and how—you spoke a little bit to how you try to put that behind you and be as diplomatic as you can—but how at the end of the day, if you have to tell someone no or there is a disagreement, how that is done without interfering with the international relationships we have with that country.

AMBASSADOR BRINKER: Very good question. It's never easy, but we do have a way to deal with these situations. At any one time, people can be unaccredited to serve here because of some real dispute. Recently, we had a situation where one of the governments had a coup, and the ambassador had to quickly return. There are some that we do not have official diplomatic relationships with, and we may not be able to include them in some of the events and programs we do for very real reasons.

Yet we always try, if there is any hope or a glimmer of a relationship, to do so. Sometimes, if they are not fully accredited, or if there has been a significant political event, there may be private opportunities to see them and say, “Hopefully, our countries will get back together some day.” We try to be as diplomatic as we can be within the framework of our foreign policy.