AMERICAN AMBASSADORS

The Past, Present, and Future of America's Diplomats

Dennis C. Jett

MORE PRAISE FOR DENNIS C. JETT'S
AMERICAN AMBASSADORS

"Dennis Jett, who knows whereof he speaks, has written a book that sparkles in its candid explanations of how US ambassadors are chosen, perform, and should be chosen and perform. He also provides lucid and amusing commentary on current US foreign policy and practice, citing our tendency to manifest both a desire to wage ideological jihad and a blind insistence on American exceptionalism."

—Dan Simpson, associate editor of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and former ambassador to the Central African Republic, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo

"Ambassador Jett provides a thought-provoking, important contribution to the study of diplomacy in general, and to the role of the American ambassador specifically. He deftly weaves his own experiences into the larger narrative and addresses head-on the unique American ambassadorial system of employing both career diplomats, typically seen as competent, and political appointees, who many see as little more than hacks. Jett looks into the truth or falsity of these beliefs, demonstrating through that process why, in the age of modern communications and social media, the right ambassador in the right place can still make all the difference for the United States."

—Peter Van Buren, US Department of State, Foreign Service Officer (ret.), author of *We Meant Well: How I Helped Lose the Battle for the Hearts and Minds of the Iraqi People* and *Ghosts of Tom Joad: A Story of the #99Percent*

"*American Ambassadors* is a thorough study of the process by which we select those who would serve as the president's personal representative to foreign leaders. Ambassador Jett takes the reader step by step through the arcane labyrinth that both political appointees and career Foreign Service officers must successfully navigate to secure an appointment. Students of American diplomacy and aspirants to Ambassadorships will find it a must-read."

—Ambassador Joseph Wilson (ret. USFS), author of *The Politics of Truth*

"Dennis Jett is that rare author who knows his subject—the importance of skilled diplomatic representation—equally well in theory and practice. His book makes a compelling case that ambassadors who know little about the countries to which they are accredited, or the conduct of diplomacy, cannot represent the United States nearly as effectively as can the career professionals of the US Foreign Service."

—Steven Alan Honley, editor, *Foreign Service Journal* (2001–2014)

"If you worry that the US risks losing its footing in the world, it is due in no small part to money corrupting the ambassadorial appointment process and

political gridlock in Washington. Dennis Jett tells us what ambassadors do and why sound diplomacy is key to America's leadership. This book should be a must-read for every member of Congress."

—James Bruno, author and journalist

"Known for his insightful critique and analysis of American diplomacy, Dennis Jett draws on his extensive experience as professional diplomat and scholar to explain in this volume how ambassadors are chosen, why that matters, and how the process can be improved. His book will interest anyone who cares about America's future in world affairs and enjoys an informative and provocative read."

—Kenneth L. Brown, former US ambassador to Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, and Ghana, and president of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.

"A lively and informative read for anyone wondering why the United States, of all the countries that count in the world, is the only one that has a large number of ambassadors whose only job qualification is to have given money to winning presidential candidates and have little or no experience relevant to the position itself. But don't expect to be reassured. As Jett explains, it actually does matter that we have capable ambassadors abroad. At least, we don't select any of our military commanders the same way."

—Ambassador Stephen Bosworth, former ambassador to South Korea, the Philippines and Tunisia, and former dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, USA.

ADST-DACOR DIPLOMATS AND DIPLOMACY SERIES

Series Editor: Margery Boichel Thompson

Since 1776, extraordinary men and women have represented the United States abroad under widely varying circumstances. What they did and how and why they did it remain little known to their compatriots. In 1995, the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST) and DACOR, an organization of foreign affairs professionals, created the Diplomats and Diplomacy book series to increase public knowledge and appreciation of the professionalism of American diplomats and their involvement in world history. Dennis Jett's study of the selection, deployment, and value of U.S. ambassadors is the 56th volume in the series.

Related Titles in the Series

Jonathan Addleton, *Mongolia and the United States: A Diplomatic History*
Herman J. Cohen, *Intervening in Africa: Superpower Peacemaking in a Troubled Continent*
Charles T. Cross, *Born a Foreigner: A Memoir of the American Presence in Asia*
Robert William Farrand, *Reconstruction and Peace Building in the Balkans: The Brčko Experience*
Donald P. Gregg, *Pot Shards: Fragments of a Life Lived in CIA, the White House, and the Two Koreas*
Brandon Grove, *Behind Embassy Walls: The Life and Times of an American Diplomat*
Paul Hacker, *Slovakia on the Road to Independence: An American Diplomat's Eyewitness Account*
Parker T. Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States: Birth of a Security Partnership*
Edmund J. Hull, *High-Value Target: Countering al Qaeda in Yemen*
Cameron Hume, *Mission to Algiers: Diplomacy by Engagement*
Robert H. Miller, *Vietnam and Beyond: A Diplomat's Cold War Education*
Ronald Neumann, *The Other War: Winning and Losing in Afghanistan*
David D. Newsom, *Witness to a Changing World*
Nicholas Platt, *China Boys: How U.S. Relations with the PRC Began and Grew*
Howard B. Schaffer, *Ellsworth Bunker: Global Troubleshooter, Vietnam Hawk*
Raymond F. Smith, *The Craft of Political Analysis for Diplomats*
James W. Spain, *In Those Days: A Diplomat remembers*
Jean Wilkowski, *Abroad for Her Country: Tales of a Pioneer Woman Ambassador in the U.S. Foreign Service*

For a complete list of series titles, visit <adst.org/publications>

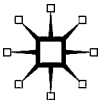
This page intentionally left blank

American Ambassadors

The Past, Present, and Future of America's Diplomats

Dennis C. Jett

palgrave
macmillan



AMERICAN AMBASSADORS

First published in 2014 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®
in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world, this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

ISBN 978-1-349-48433-1 ISBN 978-1-137-39276-3 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9781137392763

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Jett, Dennis C., 1945–
American ambassadors : the past, present, and future of America's diplomats / Dennis C. Jett.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Ambassadors—United States. 2. United States—Foreign relations—2001– I. Title.

E840.J48 2014
327.2092'2—dc23
[B] 2014026294

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Knowledge Works (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: December 2014

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Emma, Eleanor, and Sophia, who deserve better diplomatic representation and a better world than the one we are leaving them.

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

This page intentionally left blank

Figures and Tables

Figures

Tables

This page intentionally left blank

Acknowledgments

A great many people contributed to making this book possible. I would like to thank them and offer my apologies to any that I may have inadvertently omitted. At the School of International Affairs at Penn State, they include an extraordinary economist, Dr. Johannes Fedderke, the director of SIA, Dr. Tiya Maluwa, and the interim dean of SIA and the Law School, Admiral James Houck.

No animals were abused in the writing of this book, but over the years a number of able research assistants were. In alphabetical order, they are Jan Burnett, Matthew Ceccato, Shriya, Chadha, Ryan Crotty, Ashley Francis, Casey Hilland, Greg Kruczek, Garrett Redfield, Aridaman Shah Singh, Daniel Smith, Christine Sylvester, and Yuqi Zhao.

My former colleagues from the State Department who helped with this project are too numerous to name, but they include Adrian Basora, Eileen Malloy, Sharon Hardy, Sharon Bisdee, Harry Thomas, Robert Pearson, Skip Gnehm, Tony Motley, Genta Holmes, George Staples, and Anthony Quainton.

At the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Ambassador Kenneth Brown has been very supportive and helpful. And the man who has recorded and preserved the oral histories of thousands of diplomats, Charles Stuart Kennedy, deserves special recognition. His efforts have resulted in a legacy that will be mined by scholars for many years to come. Thanks also to Chris Sibilla at ADST and to Dan Caldwell at Pepperdine University.

My thanks to Dr. Russell Riley at the Miller Center at the University of Virginia. The oral histories collected there are another tremendous resource for scholars. Another great resource is the data put together by the American Foreign Service Association. Many thanks to Kristen Fernekes and Shawn Dorman for allowing me to use that material. Another AFSA person who deserves recognition is Tex Harris, who never stops trying to make both AFSA and the State Department better organizations. Thanks also to Mike Yared for his useful suggestions for resource material.

At Palgrave Macmillan, I would like to thank Brian O'Connor, who made this book possible, as well as Nicole Hitner, and Scarlet Neath before her, whose assistance made the process much easier.

Special thanks should also go to Tim Haggerty at Carnegie Mellon University, who edited the manuscript. And also to Daniel Smith, who also read through the entire manuscript and caught many errors. Any that remain are of course my fault and not Tim's or Daniel's.

Finally, my children, Brian, Allison, and Noa, and grandchildren, Emma, Eleanor, and Sophia, provided inspiration and the incentive to try to make the world a better place. Last but certainly not least is my spouse, Lynda Schuster, my best friend and toughest editor.

Introduction

On the face of it, the first ambassador for whom I worked seemed perfect for the job. If the director of a movie called up central casting and told them to send over actors to audition for a role as an ambassador, he would have been a shoo-in for the part. He had, in fact, been an actor, costarring in movies with Marlene Dietrich and Shirley Temple. He had also been a successful politician, elected to Congress twice and as governor of Connecticut. The Connecticut Turnpike is named after him.

He came from a wealthy and illustrious lineage—his family included a senator, an admiral, and another ambassador. They could trace their roots back to the pilgrims. Tall, handsome, and silver-haired, he was fluent in several languages. According to one expert on style, he was "one of the most polished gentlemen in America" for more than half a century.[1] He was also named ambassador three times by three different presidents. In referring to him, a journalist once wrote: "If the United States could be represented around the world the way it is represented in Argentina, it would be loved by the peoples of all nations."[2]

In reality, the ambassador was a disaster—and a dangerous one at that. Although he seemed to some to be the perfect diplomat, those who knew him better considered him, in effect, a threat to national security. The reason for such a divergence of opinion is that there is more to being an ambassador than simply glitz and glamour. And when it came to John Davis Lodge, there was little else.

I did not know all of that when I was assigned to Buenos Aires as my first diplomatic posting. In early 1973, I had only been in the Foreign Service for a few weeks. All newly minted Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) are introduced to the State Department through a six-week course, a kind of boot camp for bureaucrats. There the raw recruits get basic training about the government they are to represent. Toward the end of the course, the fledgling FSOs are given a list of all the postings in the world that are available for their first tour of duty. They have to decide on their preferences and then hope that the personnel system answers their prayers.

D.C. Jett, *American Ambassadors The Past, Present, and Future of America's Diplomats*

Having grown up and been educated mainly in New Mexico, where the Hispanic and Native American cultures had an influence on even a transplanted Northeasterner like me, I decided Latin America would be my first choice. Because Argentina seemed the most exotic of the possibilities in the southern hemisphere, that country was at the top of my list. As luck would have it, none of my peers ranked it as high, so the job was mine. But first I had to take additional training, including learning Spanish.

It was then that I came across an article in the *Washington Post* about Lodge written by Lewis Diuguid, the paper's Latin American correspondent. In essence, the article said that Lodge was all style and no substance; dinners at the elegant ambassadorial residence inevitably dissolved into songfests, with Lodge belting out his favorite tunes from Broadway shows.[3] He was described as mainly being interested in getting his picture in the local newspapers. The article claimed that Lodge kept four staff members in the embassy's information section engaged full time in trying to get the local press to run photos and articles about his latest social activities.

Diuguid implied that Lodge's desire to appear in the newspapers did not extend beyond photographs and the society pages. It was an era when far more newspapers believed in having foreign bureaus, but Lodge's contacts among the dozen American correspondents based in Buenos Aires were virtually nonexistent. Diuguid wrote that he tried without success for a month to get an appointment for an interview. The article went on to quote anonymous sources, who said a serious conversation with Lodge was impossible and that if anyone had any real business to conduct with the embassy, they went to see the deputy chief of mission, the number two person in any embassy and one who is always a career diplomat.

As I read the article, I found it hard to believe it was not grossly exaggerated. I wondered how someone in such an exalted position could be such an apparent lightweight. The story was also disconcerting because it mentioned that "the ambassador's reactions to frequently perceived failings of embassy personnel have alienated him from most of his staff." I reasoned that even if this were true, I would have little contact with him. As a junior officer, there would be several layers of bureaucracy in the embassy between us. So I completed my training and departed for my first overseas tour of duty with enthusiasm.[4]

Although the job had been advertised as one where I would rotate through various sections of the embassy, when I got to post, I was informed I would be assigned to the political section just down the hall

from the ambassador's office for my entire tour. That sounded great to me. Rather than spend the majority of my two years dealing with visa applicants or the embassy's maintenance problems, my time would be spent reporting on the politics of a volatile nation. Among my responsibilities was covering the rapidly expanding terrorism that was beginning to engulf Argentina.

A military junta had just allowed elections, but it had also prevented the former president, Juan Peron, from running. The Peronist candidate was nonetheless victorious and promptly resigned, paving the way for new elections, which Peron won by a comfortable margin. Peron had been a populist during his previous time in office in the early 1950s and had never hesitated to encourage and capitalize on anti-American sentiment. After 18 years in exile, however, he was an enigma. Although no one was quite sure where he stood politically, he initially had enthusiastic support across Argentina's political spectrum.

Communists on the Left, fascists on the Right, and those in between saw Peron as a potential political savior. When he first returned to Argentina from being abroad for so long, a million people went to the airport to welcome him home. As they awaited his arrival, Right-wing Peronists attacked Left-wing Peronists and scores were killed or injured.

As the internecine fighting within Peronist ranks continued, two leftist terrorist groups, the Montoneros and the People's Revolutionary Army, began attacking military bases and assassinating policemen and army officers. Right-wing death squads started to retaliate, and dead bodies in burned-out cars became an increasingly common news item. As the country seemed to be slipping into chaos, one of my chores was updating Washington on the mayhem. After a couple of attacks on embassy personnel, the official American community was cut in half to reduce the number at risk.

A few weeks after arriving in Buenos Aires, I had the opportunity to witness Lodge in action. He gave a large formal dinner at the residence for a visiting official from Washington. It was not a social occasion but rather an important opportunity to gather impressions on how the new government would conduct itself. One big question was whether Peronist officials would even come to the dinner. It was feared they might not if hostility toward the United States was going to again be one of Peron's policies. They not only came, but they also were eager to talk.

The evening unfolded, however, as if the Diuguid article had scripted the event. At the end of the sumptuous meal, as coffee and dessert were

being served, Lodge called over an accordionist who had been providing soft background music. With this accompaniment, Lodge burst into song while still seated at the table and rolled off a number of tunes. We all then adjourned to the ballroom, where he continued the entertainment. Among his favorite Argentine guests was a couple whom he summoned to join him at the grand piano. While the husband played, the wife and Lodge sang duets from *Porgy and Bess* and other Broadway hits.

As the show dragged on, the Peronist officials signaled they wanted to talk to the visiting official and the deputy chief of mission privately, so they all slipped off to the library. The Peronists made it clear that the new government would be open to a constructive and productive relationship with the United States, unlike in the past. This was a significant shift in policy that would be welcomed in Washington.

Finally, after the songfest, the guests began bidding the Lodges good night and thanking them profusely for the evening. The embassy staff members were always the last to leave; it was customary to stay until dismissed by the ambassador. As we waited for this to happen, Lodge learned of the discussion that had taken place in the library while he was singing in the ballroom. He became furious at his deputy, ranting that he had been stabbed in the back before but never in his own home. Unmoved by the success of the discussions, Lodge continued to berate the poor man in front of all of us. That evening I learned an important lesson: a country is not well served by an ambassador who thinks entertaining is the most important of his duties.

Although those who inhabited the society pages with Lodge saw no faults, Washington was well aware of his shortcomings. When he had his confirmation hearing in front of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee before going to Argentina, Senator J. William Fulbright asked him what kind of government the country had. Lodge said it was democratic, even though it had been a military dictatorship for years by then.[5]

Perhaps he thought any dictator who was an anti-communist had to be embraced by the United States. He had been an unabashed supporter of Franco when he was ambassador to Spain; after leaving Argentina, one of his pastimes was mustering support for the Pinochet regime in Chile.[6] And in 1970, he wrote to President Nixon questioning whether a return to representative democracy in Argentina was in the best interest of the United States.[7]

Some in Washington thought keeping Lodge in Buenos Aires was damaging American interests even before Argentina started heading

toward chaos. In November 1971, a National Security Council staff member wrote a memo to the National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, saying:

> We are all acquainted with Ambassador Lodge's peculiarities and accustomed to a system which requires us to make do with ambassadors (both political and career) who are sometimes less than qualified for their positions. However, the situation in Argentina has gone beyond all bounds. Ambassador Lodge and his Embassy not only fail to have any contact worthy of the name with the Argentine Government, but the Ambassador has become an object of contempt with that Government. The country is paying a very heavy foreign affairs cost by retaining Ambassador Lodge in his present position.[8]

The memo had little effect. Some months later, Peter Flanigan, an assistant to President Nixon, told Kissinger the president felt Lodge could be left in Argentina because he "was surrounded by competent people."[9] Lodge did not leave for another two years, and at that point he was already 70 years old. Ten years later, President Reagan, a friend and fellow former actor, appointed him ambassador to Switzerland.

The memo to Kissinger was marked "Secret," "Sensitive," "Eyes Only," and "Outside the System" by its author. Classified government documents, even ones marked "Secret," can be given a very wide distribution, with copies going to thousands of officials around the government. The other three captions on this particular document, however, were all designed to make sure that as few people saw it as possible. Before it was declassified, it is unlikely that more than half a dozen people had read it.

Restricting the number of people who read the memo on Lodge was essential, but not because it could damage national security, the usual justification for the government keeping something secret. It was important because personnel issues are always extremely sensitive and can have a tremendous impact on professional reputations. A memo as frank and critical as the one on Lodge would have devastated the career of a less well-connected official.

Because people's careers are at stake, personnel decisions are always tightly restricted to a small group of officials and advisors. They are therefore among the most difficult to understand. Although they are never transparent, they are always important and can determine whether an embassy functions efficiently or not.

I went on to work for and with scores of other ambassadors, both political appointees and career officers. Perhaps because Lodge was the

first and the worst, his impression lasted. Twenty years later I became an ambassador, first in Mozambique and then Peru, where I had my own firsthand opportunity to experience and understand the challenges that come with the job.

Everyone is familiar with the title "ambassador," and many people think they know what the job entails. Those who had nothing but praise for Lodge certainly thought they did. Most of those impressions are wrong, however, because they do not go beyond an image of attending cocktail parties and avoiding the payment of parking tickets. Few people have any idea who gets the title or what that person really does. And in today's world of instant communication, the question is often raised as to whether ambassadors are necessary at all.

For those reasons, it seemed to me that a book that explains where ambassadors come from, where they go, what their work entails, and why they still matter would be worthwhile. There are a number of books about the Foreign Service, but they tend to be both general and generic. The treatment of this topic might be left to academics, but that would not provide much insight. Although the pursuit of grand theories to explain human interactions is a standard part of social science, they cannot explain everything. In fact, I doubt they serve to explain much at all except for the way academics talk to one another. Because success in academia is driven by the opinion of one's peers, much of what is written by academics is not intended to inform a wide audience but rather to impress a very narrow one consisting of other academics interested in the same issues.

This book therefore will not propose any single theory to predict who becomes an ambassador and why some succeed at the job and others do not. There are too many exceptions to say that there is a rule. There are certain similarities and patterns that can be described, however, even if they do not fit neatly into a theory that explains the past and predicts the future. For instance, regardless of whether a political appointee or a career officer is chosen, the process for making that decision has several common characteristics. It is always a decision by a committee where different interests are balanced and tradeoffs are required. It is also dependent on the personalities and the degree of interest, involvement, and influence of the committee members and others who are not on the committee but can influence it. Individual decisions, when viewed by someone outside of the process, may therefore make little sense because these factors come into play in ever-changing ways that often can produce a less-than-optimal choice for a specific job.

As a 28-year veteran of the State Department who observed the results of this process throughout his career and experienced it twice, I believe I can provide some insight into its operation. And having been an academic for the past 14 years, I appreciate the value of research and of gathering as many other opinions and as much information as possible.

The remainder of this book will therefore talk about the differences and similarities between career officers and political appointees in becoming ambassadors, why they get the job, and where they are likely to go. It will discuss why ambassadors are as necessary as ever despite technological and social changes. The system for choosing ambassadors is the product of history and tradition and will defy being changed even though the occasional less-than-capable ambassador will pose a threat to the nation's interests. It could be improved nonetheless and steps that would accomplish will be considered.

To do that the book will be laid out as follows: chapter 1—"A Brief History of the Title"—will begin with the founding of the country and describe how in its first century no one held the title of ambassador. That was what the envoys of kings were called, and the political leaders of the young, egalitarian republic did not want to imply that anyone held a higher station because of a government appointment. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, American interests abroad grew, as did the need for those interests to be more capably protected. There then followed 60 years of gradual professionalization of the diplomatic service until the middle of the twentieth century.

As the United States emerged from World War II as the most powerful nation on earth and began to engage in the Cold War, it realized it had worldwide interests to protect. And it had to confront communism in even the most far-flung corners of the globe. So American embassies, and ambassadors to run them, became the norm in virtually every country. It was at this time, during the Eisenhower administration, that the percentage of ambassadors who were career officers reached its peak. A ratio of roughly 30/70 for political appointees versus career ambassadors has persisted ever since.

Chapters 2–4 describe the two routes to becoming an ambassador and the steps in the clearance and confirmation process. For the career diplomat, it is not just entering the Foreign Service and working one's way to the top. There are five different specializations within the Foreign Service—political, economic, management, consular, and public diplomacy—and which one is chosen will have much to do with whether or not one becomes an ambassador.

The route for political appointees is, of course, very different, and, based on interviews with former noncareer ambassadors, oral histories, and other sources, that process will be described as well. A person taking that route has to enhance the president's political prospects in some way. That can be through making personal campaign contributions or bundling those of others, adding gender and/or ethnic diversity to the ambassadorial ranks, providing a political payoff, or simply by being a loyal staff aide or close friend. Those different types of linkages to the president are not mutually exclusive, but one is usually more predominant and more important when it comes to securing the appointment.

The two routes converge when the president makes a decision on the person to be appointed, whether it is a career officer of political appointee. At that point, the paperwork goes back to the State Department and the last steps in the process begin. The final hurdles to be cleared—obtaining a security clearance and Senate confirmation—can trip up the nominee, sometimes for reasons that have nothing to do with that person.

After this consideration of who becomes an ambassador and how that happens, chapter 5 then looks at what that person does once on the job. It also describes why the performance of ambassadors is difficult to measure. The best measure of how well an embassy is run comes from the State Department's internal auditor, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), which is supposed to inspect each embassy once every five years. After extensive preparation in Washington, the OIG dispatches a team of about a dozen inspectors to the country in question. They talk to virtually everyone who works in the embassy during the course of their visit, which lasts several weeks. They then write up a comprehensive report that covers everything, including the performance of the ambassador. Although they were withheld from the public in the past, these reports are now public and can be found on the OIG website with only minor redactions.

These inspection reports are negotiated documents, because the inspectors discuss them extensively with those being inspected before they are put into final form. They can still be brutally candid and critical, however. The ambassadors to Malta, the Bahamas, Luxembourg, and Kenya have all resigned in recent years as a direct result of the reports done on their embassies.

After the chapter on what ambassadors do, the question of where they go will be considered in chapter 6. Different kinds of ambassadors go to different kinds of countries. There is, for instance, a clear divide between where career diplomats go and which posts are reserved for

political appointees. The latter are very rarely sent to places that are dangerous or unhealthy. Even within the ranks of the political appointees, depending on the ambassador's relationship to the president, there are differences in where that person is sent. For such reasons, there are a few political appointees in Latin America, very few in the Middle East and South Asia, and there have never been any in Central Asia.

The chapter will also discuss how religion, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation can all play a role in determining who goes to a particular embassy and how the importance of those factors have changed over time. There is one embassy, for example, where the ambassador must not only be a Catholic but also be opposed to abortion or at least be very quietly pro-choice.

Chapter 7 will consider whether the way ambassadors are selected, what they do, and if they matter is going to change in today's increasingly globalized world. No other major country selects its highest-level diplomatic representation in the way the United States does; because it amounts to little more than selling ambassadorships, it astounds the rest of the world. It is surprising to so many because today's gravest problems can only be addressed through effective diplomatic action and cooperation. No country, not even the world's only superpower, can effectively address those challenges on its own, even though the United States often acts as if it thinks it can.

The growing cost of presidential campaigns has led to a political process driven by money where big donors are essential. To attract those donors, a certain number of them will have to be paid off with ambassadorial appointments. Although an explicit quid pro quo is illegal, this tradition continues and is a form of corruption only slightly less thinly veiled today than it was during the Nixon era when the president's personal lawyer went to jail for selling ambassadorships. The process can be improved, however, and recommendations will be made for ways to make it more transparent and thereby less likely to be abused. In a democracy, for change to occur and the defenders of the status quo to be overcome, citizens have to take the time and make the effort to understand what their government is doing and why. I hope this book makes a contribution to that process.

CHAPTER 1

A Brief History of the Title

If it were not for the charm and skill of some of the earliest American diplomats, the United States might still be a British colony. Benjamin Franklin was one of the first official envoys sent abroad as the struggle for independence got under way. His diplomatic efforts were so successful at eliciting the support of Louis XVI for the revolution that France played a vital role in determining its outcome.

Although the purpose of America's diplomats has remained essentially the same over the years—to protect and promote the interests of their country—the background, preparation, and professionalism of today's diplomats have changed significantly since the time of Franklin. In order to appreciate the importance of diplomats, and in particular ambassadors, to the country's security today, it helps to understand how their role has evolved as the United States has grown from a colony to the world's only superpower.

There were three stages in this evolution. The first period lasted a century and was characterized by the fact that virtually all American diplomats were political appointees and none bore the title "ambassador." They had varying degrees of ability, and their tenures in their positions were likely to end with the inauguration of the next president. There was no thought given to creating a cadre of career diplomats, as it was believed anyone could carry out the business of government. That belief, coupled with a degree of distrust of those exposed to foreign influences, led to the frequent replacement of the men who were appointed to diplomatic positions. The only thing they could depend on was that they had little prospect for staying in the job for long.

The second period, which lasted the next 60 years from the end of the nineteenth century until the middle of the twentieth, saw the gradual professionalization of the civil service and the creation of a corps of career diplomats who had a degree of job security. Entrance

D.C. Jett, *American Ambassadors The Past, Present, and Future of America's Diplomats*

and promotion based on merit became the norm, and most diplomats could expect that their jobs would not come to an end the next time there was a new occupant of the White House. During this period, the title of ambassador began to be used and the percentage of career ambassadors gradually rose from next to nothing to about 70 percent of the total.

During the third stage, occurring over the past 60 years, the 30/70 ratio between political appointees and career officers as ambassadors has remained remarkably constant. This consistency persisted despite the fact that during this period the number of ambassadors expanded greatly, as did the number of interests they were supposed to protect. Because the Cold War was a worldwide struggle, and given the new nations that came into being as a result of decolonization, more ambassadors were needed to be dispatched to even the farthest-flung corners of the globe.

The Early Years—The Sometimes-Able Amateurs of a Third-Rate Power

In the earliest days of the republic, the focus of the founding fathers was on setting up a government and ensuring its survival. Benjamin Franklin played a key role in that effort in many ways, including by being considered America's first ambassador even though he was never given the title. He was sent to Paris in 1776 with the critically important task of ensuring French support for America's struggle for independence from Britain. Despite the fact that he did not conform to diplomatic conventions in dress or other formalities, he performed brilliantly because of his charm and intellect. Had he not been such a success, the American Revolution might well have had a different outcome.

In 1781, when American legislators created a new government under the Articles of Confederation, that new government included a Department of Foreign Affairs. A few "ministers" were dispatched to key European countries to handle the new country's official business, and a handful of "consuls" were named to help Americans do business overseas.

In the country's early years, anything that hinted at special status for a government official was considered to be against republican principles. Even though Article 2, Section 2 of the Constitution gave the president the power to appoint "ambassadors, other public ministers and consuls," for the country's first 115 years, it was represented abroad only by men with the title of minister or consul. An ambassador was

considered to be the emissary of a king, and the title was believed to be inconsistent with the values of an egalitarian society.

Having fought for independence from a British king, Americans were presumably uncomfortable with lofty titles or anything that hinted at special status. This distaste for giving, or even receiving, such honors is also reflected in the Constitution. Article 1, Section 9, which mainly describes things the Congress may not do, states: "No title of nobility shall be granted by the United States. And no person holding any office of profit or trust under them, shall, without the consent of the Congress, accept of any present, emolument, office or title, of any kind whatever, from any king, prince, or foreign state."

Nonetheless, diplomatic titles mattered even to the founding fathers who were sent on the earliest diplomatic missions. John Adams, who was to become the second president, was one of those who cared about such things. As Jack Rakove notes in his book on the invention of America:

> Adams had been sorely miffed when he mistakenly thought that Congress had made him a mere commissioner while giving John Jay the higher rank of minister plenipotentiary. A similar slight had marred his previous trip, when his name appeared below that of Arthur Lee in the commission for France even though Adams held weightier credentials as lawyer and public servant.[1]

Despite the sensitivity to titles that Adams displayed, those that were given to the earliest American diplomats were modest, but so was the entire foreign policy establishment of the time. In 1789, Congress passed an act that changed the name of the Department of Foreign Affairs to the Department of State, because that department was given responsibility for maintaining certain domestic records as well as handling international relations. That same year, President Washington appointed fellow Virginian Thomas Jefferson to be the first secretary of state.

When Jefferson assumed the position in March 1790, his bureaucratic empire consisted of four clerks, a translator, a messenger, and an annual budget for domestic operations of a bit less than $8,000, including his salary. The total expenditures for the department, both in Washington and abroad, the next year totaled $56,600.[2]

Reflecting the egalitarian sentiment of the time, Jefferson made clear he had no use for the formality and intrigue that was characteristic of European diplomacy. He had enough experience as a diplomat, however, to realize that the United States had to be well represented overseas

if the country was to be taken seriously. He and Washington lobbied Congress for the funds to support a small number of missions abroad headed by men with the title of minister. Each man was charged with reporting on political events in the country to which he was assigned and for handling relations with that government.

This small but growing number of American envoys brought with them a new style of diplomacy consistent with the values of their newly independent nation. This style was reflected in their dress as well as their behavior. Beginning with Franklin, American representatives abroad wore unpretentious clothing and adopted simple manners, which contrasted sharply with the formality and ostentation of European courts.[3]

The spirit of the era and the limitations of the new nation are aptly described by George Herring in *From Colony to Superpower*:

> In keeping with ideals of republican simplicity—and to save money—the administration did not appoint anyone to the rank of ambassador. That "may be the custom of the old world," Jefferson informed the emperor of Morocco, "but it is not ours." The "foreign service" consisted of a minister to France, *chargés d'affaires* in England, Spain, and Portugal, and an agent at Amsterdam. In 1790, the United States opened its first consulate in Bordeaux, a major source of arms, ammunition, and wine during the Revolution. That same year, it appointed twelve consuls and also named six foreigners as vice-consuls since there were not enough qualified Americans to fill the posts.[4]

When Jefferson became president, he continued and even extended the official disdain for the traditional trappings of diplomacy. He regarded professional diplomats as the "pest[s] of the peace of the world" and, as a result, cut back the country's extremely small representation abroad to what he considered the essential minimum.[5] He also put his personal beliefs into practice in his own office by avoiding the pomp and circumstance of his predecessors. In contrast to Washington and Adams, Jefferson made a point of dressing plainly, and he opened the presidential mansion to visitors from all level of society.

Jefferson's disdain for formality may have been motivated by his personal feelings or by an image he wished to project as president. Some presidents even today seek to deliberately downplay the aura of the office as a way to show they can connect with common people: Jimmy Carter, for instance, insisted on carrying his own bags on trips. When Bill Clinton first took office, it was decided that one way to distinguish

him from his Republican predecessor was to have very few formal state dinners for visiting dignitaries.[6]

Whether Jefferson's motivation was personal or political, his approach did not sit well with some of the more traditionally minded foreign diplomats in Washington at the time. Herring notes:

> His disdain for protocol scandalized other members of the small and generally unhappy diplomatic community in Washington. Outraged when received by the president in a tattered bathrobe and slippers and forced at a presidential dinner to conform to the "pell-mell" seating arrangements respecting no rank, the British minister to Washington, Anthony Merry, bitterly protested the affront suffered at the president's table. Jefferson no doubt privately chuckled at the arrogant Englishman's discomfiture, but his subsequent codification of republican practices into established procedures betrayed a larger purpose. By adapting the new nation's forms to its principles, he hoped to establish a uniquely American style of diplomacy.[7]

Although Jefferson apparently enjoyed Merry's pique, an argument can be made for observing the strictures of diplomatic protocol. It provides a structure in which people from different countries and cultures can relate to one another with little chance of unintentional insults. For instance, if a diplomat's place at a dinner table is determined by the pecking order of protocol, then both he and his host will know where that is, and a potential insult will be avoided. In this case, Jefferson considered the insult to the British diplomat less important than the image he wanted to project.

Because of Jefferson's desire to promote that uniquely American image of simplicity, during his term of office, American envoys, even those to the most important countries, only carried the rank of minister plenipotentiary. After the War of 1812 ended, it appeared that America's survival as an independent nation was no longer in doubt, and it had, according to Herring, "surged to the level of a second-rank power."[8] That growing strength and status of the country prompted a bit of title inflation under Jefferson's successor, James Madison. The official designation for the chiefs of the most important diplomatic missions was elevated to envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary.

Diplomatic titles were expanding to keep pace with the overseas influence and interests of a country that was becoming a more important player on the world stage. With its survival assured, the emphasis of American diplomacy shifted to expanding the country's commerce and