

Chapter 19

OVERVIEW OF A U.S. MISSION

THE ORGANIZATION

A U.S. mission exists to manage American diplomatic and consular activities within a country. A mission may consist of an embassy, consulate general, consulates, and other offices. Where the U.S. does not have full diplomatic relations with a nation, the U.S. may be represented by only a liaison office or interests section. More than one U.S. mission may exist in a country if the U.S. has a multilateral mission, which is a delegation to an international organization such as the United Nations. Since ambassadors also head multilateral missions, two or more U.S. ambassadors might work in the same country but in different missions. The U.S. maintains more than 260 embassies, consulates general, consulates, and special missions in 172 countries.

The U.S. embassy is the basic unit for conducting U.S. diplomacy overseas. The chief of mission (usually an ambassador) personally represents the President of the United States, while reporting to and receiving instructions through the Secretary of State. The chief of mission directs all U.S. programs and personnel, except for those under the command of a U.S. area military commander, under the authority of another U.S. diplomatic post, or detailed to an international organization. The chief of mission thus carries ultimate responsibility for executing U.S. foreign policy goals and coordinating and managing all U.S. Government functions in the host country.

THE STAFF

At an embassy or special mission, if the ambassador leaves post even temporarily, the person acting in the ambassador's place is called the *chargé* or *chargé d'affaires*. At consulates and consulates general, the consul or consul general is in charge but reports to the ambassador at the embassy. All of these are also known as principal officers.

The deputy chief of mission (DCM) is the second most senior person in the mission. The DCM has primary responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the mission and coordination between the various agencies at post.

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Ambassadors manage the work of a mission through the country team, which is made up of the heads of each State Department section and all other agencies. The country team meets regularly to discuss local conditions and mission activities, review management and security issues, coordinate programs, and plan and evaluate progress on meeting the mission goals.

The number of people assigned to an embassy usually depends on the size of the foreign country and depth and breadth of U.S. bilateral relations with that country. Besides the head(s) of the mission, staff includes employees from the four foreign affairs agencies—the Department of State, Agency for International Development, Department of Commerce, and Department of Agriculture—and other U.S. Government agencies. By far the largest group of employees, however, consist of locally employed staff, often known as Foreign Service nationals (FSNs). U.S. embassies also employ, on a regular and part-time basis, other U.S. citizens (including family members of foreign affairs agency employees) or citizens of another country, known as third country nationals.

THE STATE DEPARTMENT AT A U.S. MISSION

The State Department is the lead institution for the conduct of U.S. diplomacy and compares to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in many other countries. Every mission includes at least one American from the State Department.

Management Section

The management section provides the support that allows the other sections and agencies to do their jobs. Management handles areas such as:

- human resources
- financial management
- information management, including radio, mail, telephone, computer, and diplomatic pouches
- general services (buildings, maintenance, purchasing, supply, customs and shipping, and transportation)

- health and medical provisions
- community issues, often through the Community Liaison Office (CLO) Coordinator

Consular Section

The consular section provides services and assistance to American citizens living in or visiting the country. It also issues visas to citizens of other countries who seek entry to the United States for work, travel, business, or immigration purposes. Consular duties include issuing and renewing passports, reporting births, deaths, and marriages of U.S. citizens, registering Americans who are in the country, visiting U.S. citizens who have been arrested, assisting in emergencies such as deaths or natural disasters, and providing U.S. voting and tax information.

Political and Economic Sections

The political and economic sections analyze political, social, and economic developments within the host country and region. Employees working in these sections meet with political parties and non-governmental organizations, make recommendations on foreign policy, and work with foreign government officials to promote U.S. interests.

Public Affairs Section

The public affairs section administers cultural and educational exchange programs, manages information research centers, and serves as the official media contact point, handling all inquiries from the local news media.

Security Section

The security section develops and maintains systems to provide a safe, secure workplace for everyone at the mission and safe, secure homes for American staff and family members. This section provides access controls such as guards, security for visiting dignitaries, and security information to American businesses situated in the country. A Marine security guard detachment plays an important role in protecting many U.S. missions.

DIPLOMATIC READINESS

Begun under former Secretary of State Colin Powell, the Human Resources strategy of “diplomatic readiness” seeks to establish the Department of State’s ability to get “the right people in the right place at the right time with the right skills.” Three major administrative functions make up what is called the “diplomatic readiness platform”: human resources and training, information management, and infrastructure and operations. In other words, “diplomatic readiness” is the people, equipment, money, and build-ings that allow the mission to conduct its diplomatic activities.

TRANSFORMATIONAL DIPLOMACY

I would define the objective of transformational diplomacy this way: to work with our many partners around the world to build and sustain democratic, well-governed states...We seek to use America’s diplomatic power to help foreign citizens better their own lives and to build their own nations and to transform their own futures.”

~Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice,
January 18, 2006

In a multiyear process, hundreds of positions will move to critical emerging areas in Africa, South Asia, East Asia, the Middle East, and elsewhere, including the nearly 200 cities with over one million people which lack a formal American diplomatic presence. American Presence Posts, operated by one diplomat living and working in key population centers outside of the embassy, will expand.

Information technology will impact diplomacy in new ways. It will speed the development of regional centers providing management support and regional public diplomacy platforms that will take America’s story directly to the local people. Virtual Presence Posts will provide interaction with embassy personnel from other locations. Cutting-edge technology will enable sharing information across regions and between agencies.

Now, to advance transformational diplomacy all around the world, we in the State Department must rise to answer a new historic calling. We must begin to lay new diplomatic foundations to secure a future of freedom for all people.”

~Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice,
January 18, 2006.

RESOURCES

Dorman, Shawn, ed. *Inside a U.S. Embassy: How the Foreign Service Works for America*. Washington, DC: American Foreign Service Association, 2003.

Available at www.afsa.org.

This book describes how an embassy functions, gives real “day-in-the-life” portraits, and offers first-hand descriptions of key diplomatic moments.

<http://careers.state.gov> describes the various State Department positions at an embassy and offers “Assignment Abroad,” an interactive take on what different Foreign Service employees would need to do in case of an earthquake or trade summit overseas.

<http://usembassy.state.gov/>
Listing of U.S. embassies online

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2006/59339.htm>
Description of Transformational Diplomacy