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## Career Officers and Political Appointees in American Diplomacy: Contending for Diplomatic Positions through Boundary Work

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## **Career Officers and Political Appointees in American Diplomacy: Contending for Diplomatic Positions through Boundary Work**

**Kathleen Angers<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

American diplomacy has long included a larger contingent of non-career appointees than is found in many other countries' diplomatic corps. Since the 1950s, successive White Houses have allocated about 30% of ambassadorships to individuals outside the diplomatic profession (so-called "political appointees"). These political appointments are a source of controversy within the career Foreign Service and in the national media. While news reports and academic studies remain focused on the formal boundary between career and non-career diplomats, this paper calls attention to the symbolic boundary determining the legitimacy of participants in American diplomacy. I argue that, in their attempt to secure their access to diplomatic positions, career members of the Foreign Service and political appointees compete for the social recognition of their respective "boundary work", that is to say, the symbolic boundaries that they respectively produce through their discourse and practices and that differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate diplomats. On the one hand, career diplomats try to protect their dominant position through turf claims establishing restrictive distinctions, based on quantitative and qualitative criteria, between legitimate and illegitimate political appointees. On the other hand, political appointees try to carve out a place for themselves by promoting less restrictive selection criteria for diplomatic appointments while at the same time downplaying the formal distinction between career and non-career practitioners. Methodologically, the paper builds on interviews with members of the Foreign Service and political appointees as well as on written primary sources.

### **Résumé**

Alors que la plupart des pays industrialisés s'appuient essentiellement sur les services de diplomates de carrière pour leur représentation à l'étranger, les États-Unis ont pour tradition d'allouer environ 30% de leurs postes d'ambassadeur à des individus n'ayant pas fait carrière au sein du service diplomatique national. Ces nominations politiques sont une source de controverse dans les médias et parmi les diplomates faisant carrière au sein du Service extérieur américain. Tandis que le traitement médiatique et les quelques études universitaires sur la question demeurent concentrés sur la frontière formelle entre diplomates de carrière et diplomates non permanents, ce texte attire l'attention sur la frontière symbolique

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déterminant la légitimité des acteurs diplomatiques américains. Je soutiens que cette frontière symbolique est l'enjeu de luttes entre les membres de carrière du Service extérieur et les praticiens non issus de la profession; les deux groupes font compétition pour la reconnaissance sociale de différentes frontières symboliques entre diplomates légitimes et illégitimes. D'une part, les diplomates de carrière tentent de protéger leur position dominante en faisant la promotion de frontières restrictives sur la base de critères qualitatifs et quantitatifs. D'autre part, les diplomates non permanents tentent de légitimer leur rôle en promouvant des critères moins restrictifs et en minimisant la distinction formelle entre eux et les membres du Service extérieur. Sur le plan méthodologique, ce texte s'appuie sur des entretiens avec les deux groupes de diplomates à l'étude et sur diverses sources primaires écrites.

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## Introduction

Who should get to officially represent the United States abroad? This question is at the center of an old debate in the American public sphere. Its last major occurrence was during the winter of 2014, following the Senate confirmation hearing of three ambassadorial nominees who came from the private sector and had been fundraisers for Obama's two presidential campaigns. The nominees (respectively for Norway, Hungary and Argentina) committed gaffes in their responses to some of the Senators' questions, which generated a great deal of news stories and editorials<sup>2</sup>. These news reports and comments pointed up the nominees' lack of knowledge of their designated host country and, as on other occasions in the past, called into question ambassadorial nominations of financial and political allies with no diplomatic experience.

While many countries' ambassadors essentially all come from a permanent diplomatic service, in the United States (US) it is a long tradition to have a significant proportion of non-career appointees (also called political appointees) in high-ranking diplomatic positions<sup>3</sup>. Before the creation of a career foreign service in 1924, most ambassadors were political appointees. Since the 1950s, successive White Houses have allocated about 30% of ambassadorships to political appointees and 70% to career members of the Foreign Service, whose home agency is the Department of State (Jett 2014). As of December 2015, 56 political appointees (32,7%) and 115 career Foreign Service officers (67,3%) are serving as United States

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<sup>2</sup> e.g. Eilperin 2014, "Obama ambassador nominees prompt an uproar with bungled answers, lack of ties", Washington Post, February 14; PBS 2014, "Recent Confirmation Hearings Raise Eyebrows at Ambassador Nomination Criteria" February 17.

<sup>3</sup> This is not a feature unique to diplomatic appointments. Within the whole US government, there are about 3000 high level positions that go to political appointees, while countries such as France, Great Britain and Germany have between 100 and 200 such political appointments (Lewis 2008, 3). The US practice of rewarding political supporters by giving them government positions, especially the 19th century practices in this regard, has been referred to as the "spoils system".

ambassadors abroad (AFSA 2015a). Within the State Department also, a significant portion of high-ranking domestic positions such as undersecretaries and assistant secretaries have routinely gone to non-career appointees. Of course, by definition all these political appointees, whether ambassadors or senior officials in the State Department, serve at the pleasure of the president and are therefore replaced when there is a change of presidential party.

Journalistic accounts and (the few) academic studies addressing the appointment of private citizens in US diplomatic positions mostly center on the patronage dimension of these appointments and seek to throw light on the determinants and/or on the consequences of presidential appointment decisions. Thus, recent studies address the determinants at play in the selection of career versus non-career ambassadors, the differences in the type of foreign posting given to career and non-career envoys, and the comparative performance of the two groups in their ambassadorial functions (Fedderke and Jett 2012, Hollibaugh 2015, Haglund 2015).

This paper approaches the question of the dichotomy between US career and non-career diplomats from a different perspective, one centered on the competition between careerists and non-career practitioners for the control of, or the access to, diplomatic positions. Considering that members of the Foreign Service practice diplomacy as a profession, how do they deal with the appointment of outsiders in diplomatic jobs? Conversely, how do political appointees approach the contested terrain of their diplomatic appointment in relation to the career Foreign Service? While political appointments in the American diplomatic corps are not a new occurrence, these questions are especially relevant at the start of the 21st century, the boundaries of participation in diplomacy having broadened over the last decades to encompass a greater variety of actors (Cooper, J. Heine, and R. Thakur 2013). Political appointees are one group among several others - like civil servants from specialized government departments, sub-national government representatives, non-governmental organizations, etc. - who challenge the

traditional logic of exclusivity on which the model of the career diplomatic service has been based since its emergence in Europe in the 17th century. But from the perspective of career diplomats, these political appointees arguably represent, for the time being, the leading contender for the diplomatic representation of the US abroad.

The paper argues that career and non-career diplomats both engage in interpretive strategies and practices aimed at protecting their status and their access to diplomatic positions by circumscribing who are legitimate and who are illegitimate political appointees in US diplomacy. The two groups compete for the social recognition of their respective "boundary work"<sup>4</sup>, that is to say, their respective attempt to symbolically establish a border between acceptable and unacceptable political appointees. The Foreign Service's boundary work first circumscribes legitimate political appointees to much smaller quantitative proportions than the current ones. In terms of profile, it restricts legitimate political appointees to those with a distinguished background in public service or academia and those with proved knowledge in the substantive matters of diplomacy. Political appointees, for their part, invoke the presidential prerogative to nominate ambassadors in defense of their occupation - including by financial and political allies of the president - of about one third of ambassadorial positions. But more importantly, in order to legitimize their turf claim on part of the diplomatic positions, political appointees deploy arguments and practices that downplay the formal distinction between career and non-career diplomats and emphasize general competence, dedication and/or the possession of various skills relevant for the job as the ultimate criteria circumscribing legitimate political appointees from illegitimate ones.

The findings imply that symbolic representations and boundaries are key resources through which the protagonists can frame the meaning of the formal categories of

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<sup>4</sup> The concept of "boundary work" refers to the intersubjective production and reproduction of symbolic distinctions (symbolic boundaries) in order to acquire status and monopolize resources (Lamont and Molnar 2002).

"political appointees" and "Foreign Service officers" and promote other categorizations among members of the two groups. The findings also imply a different appreciation of the position of power of career diplomats than the one that tends to be conveyed in existing accounts, which mostly portray careerists as being marginalized by political appointments. The paper adds nuance to this portrayal by pointing out that Foreign Service officers actually exert some power over political appointees. Their status as permanent public servants allows them to assume a gatekeeper role vis-à-vis political appointees, who struggle against exclusionary practices and discourses by the Foreign Service to be accepted as legitimate diplomats. They are at a disadvantage in terms of symbolic resources compared to career officers who enjoy more social recognition as the "real" diplomats. In short, we may say that career FSOs exert symbolic power<sup>5</sup> over political appointees.

Methodologically, I build on 27 semi-directed interviews conducted in 2013 and 2014 with current or former Foreign Service Officers and former diplomatic political appointees. To preserve the confidentiality of the interviewees, the latter are not identified by name in the text. I also draw on the following sources: documents produced by the organizations representing respectively career and non-career diplomats in the US; articles and opinion pieces by FSOs and political appointees; publicly-available interviews with political appointees conducted by third parties (journalists and the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training).

To set the background to the presentation of the findings, the paper first gives a few more details on the two groups of US diplomats under study. Section two and three then respectively address boundary work and legitimacy building by the Foreign Service and political appointees. I conclude by summarizing the argument and the contribution of the paper.

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<sup>5</sup> Symbolic power is the ability, based on social recognition, to construct reality by naturalizing what is actually the result of human invention and social struggles (Bourdieu 2001).

## Who Are America's Diplomats? Career Officers and Political Appointees

### The Career Foreign Service

While in Europe the concept of a career diplomatic service started to be implemented in various countries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in the United States it was only in 1924 that a career organization, called the Foreign Service, was established as the diplomatic corps of the country (Leguey-Feilleux 2009). Today the Foreign Service numbers about 8000 officers (Department of State 2014). Premised, like the domestic civil service, on recruitment and advancement by merit, the Foreign Service is however a distinct personnel system operating with its own set of rules, among which rotation in new positions about every three years. Spending most of their career overseas, Foreign Service officers (FSOs) also serve overall about one third of their career in domestic positions of the State Department. The high requirements for entrance and promotion within the ranks of the Foreign Service tend to unite FSOs around a feeling of being part of an elite corps of public servants.

According to the Foreign Service Act (1980), positions as chiefs of mission "should normally" be accorded to members of the Foreign Service. To become ambassador or reach other senior positions in the department's headquarters in Washington, FSOs must be promoted into the senior ranks, which is possible only after about 20 years of service. Among all ambassadorial positions within US diplomacy (about 170), senior FSOs generally fill about 120 of them, the rest being allocated to non-career individuals (Jett 2014, 47)<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> A very small number of ambassadorships are also given each year to career civil servants from the State Department and/or career officers from other federal agencies using the Foreign Service personnel system (Commerce Department, Agriculture Department and USAID) (Jett 2012, 47).



## Political Ambassadors

Non-career ambassadors have various professional backgrounds. By way of illustration, the following professional profiles are found among Obama's second-term ambassadors (Beckel and Zubak-Skees 2014):

- Private sector: business executives and entrepreneurs, lawyers, consultants, directors of NGOs;
- Presidential campaign staff;
- Government: officials from non-foreign service agencies<sup>7</sup>, officials from the legislative or judicial branch, members of the armed forces, White House staff, former aides for high-level State department officials;
- Academics.

While the precise criteria according to which the White House makes the final selection of non-career ambassadors may vary somewhat from one presidency to the other, the available evidence indicates that primary and key determinants across presidencies have been the political and/or personal connections of non-career ambassadors to the president, notably their role as fundraisers or donors for the presidential campaign or inauguration (e.g. Confessore and Stolberg 2013, Eilperin 2014, Fedderke and Jett 2012, Hollibaugh 2015)<sup>8</sup>. According to a review of the

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<sup>7</sup> Foreign Service agencies are the ones that are authorized to use the Foreign Service personnel system according to the Foreign Service Act: the State Department, the USAID, the Department of Commerce and the Department of Agriculture.

<sup>8</sup> A White House tape recording made public in 1997 revealed that in 1971, Nixon told his chief of staff that "anybody who wants to be an ambassador must at least give \$250,000" (Lardner and Pincus 1997). In line with this evidence, an interviewee from the Council of American ambassadors gave the example of the selection process used by the White House personnel office for ambassadorships in 2000, after George W. Bush's election: the selection process started with the identification of the more than 1000 people "who were deserving" because "they had done enough; they had close enough connections or whatever". Then, this list of over 1000 people was narrowed according to a set of criteria, starting with people's interest and availability to take on an appointment and then, for the about 150 people who were left, according to a "matrix of qualifications" (Author interview, 2014).

Center for Public Integrity, 29 out of the 64 political appointee ambassadors<sup>9</sup> in Obama's second term raised for him between \$50,000 and \$1,2 million between 2007 and 2013 (Beckel and Zubak-Skees 2014). These so-called campaign "bundlers" virtually all come from the private sector. The other 35 Obama appointees are mostly former government officials or staff for Democratic politicians, former presidential campaign staff and scholars (Beckel and Zubak-Skees 2014).

Some non-career ambassadorial appointees who were not financial allies of the president are nonetheless perceived (in the media) as providing a clear payoff for the White House in domestic politics (Hollibaugh 2015). For instance, the nomination in 2009 of an openly gay individual (David Huebner) to be ambassador to New Zealand was perceived as a gesture by Obama to consolidate support within the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community in the US. Furthermore, host countries' preferences can also play a role in the type of ambassador selected; some countries, like Saudi Arabia, want an envoy who is personally close to the president while others, like Japan, prefer a US envoy who is a high-profile personality (Jett 2014).

### **Who Goes Where as Ambassador**

As suggested in the press, ambassadorships in certain parts of the world tend to routinely go to non-career individuals. Since 1960, 72,5% of the chiefs of mission in Western Europe and 71,7% of the ambassadors to the Caribbean region have been political appointees (AFSA 2015b, see table 3). By contrast, and as shown in table 3, there has been significantly fewer political ambassadors than career ones in South Asia, East Asia, South America, Eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. Other types of diplomatic posts that have been filled mostly with political appointees since 1960 are ambassadorships to multilateral organizations, as table 4

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<sup>9</sup> These nominations at the ambassadorial rank include nominations such as special representatives or coordinators for some particular issue, Department of State Chief of Protocol and deputy US Trade Representative.

makes clear (AFSA 2015c). Overall, political appointee ambassadors are more likely to serve in high-income (in terms of GDP per capita) countries and highly touristic venues, while career diplomats are more likely to serve as ambassadors in poorer countries and more difficult environments (Fedderke and Jett 2012). Recent academic research adds that economic partners of the US, democracies and states that share foreign policy interests with the US are also more likely to receive non-career ambassadors (Hollibaugh 2015).

Table 3. Ambassadorial Appointments by Region of the World, 1960-2015

<b>Region</b>	<b>Career Appointments</b>	<b>Political Appointments</b>	<b>% Political Since 1960</b>
Western Europe	106	280	72.5%
Caribbean	45	114	71.7%
Oceania	81	73	47.4%
North & Central America	90	66	42.3%
South Asia	93	33	26.2%
East Asia	157	52	24.9%
South America	171	48	21.9%
Eastern Europe	172	45	20.7%
Africa	669	112	14.3%
Middle East	243	39	13.8%
Central Asia	56	0	0%

Source: AFSA, 2015b, <http://www.afsa.org/history-appointments-continent>

Table 4. Ambassadorial Appointments to International Organizations, 1960-2015

<b>International Organization</b>	<b>Career Ambassador</b>	<b>Political Ambassador</b>	<b>% Political since 1960</b>
African Union	0	3	100%
ICAO	0	12	100%
UN/Rome	0	3	100%
OAS	2	15	88,2%
UN	3	23	88,5%
NATO	4	15	78,9%
UNESCO	3	7	72,7%
UN/Vienna - IAEA	4	9	69,2%
UN/Geneva	6	13	68,4%
OECD	7	10	58,8%
EU	8	10	55,6%
ASEAN	1	1	50%

Source: AFSA, 2015c, <http://www.afsa.org/history-appointments-post>

### **Political Appointees in Domestic Positions of the State Department**

As in other federal agencies, there are three categories of political appointments within the State Department (Lewis 2008):

- Positions requiring Senate confirmation: secretary, deputy secretary, undersecretaries, assistant secretaries, special representatives/coordinators;
- Non-career positions within the Senior Executive Service (senior management level of the federal civil service);
- Mid-level positions of a confidential or policy-determining nature, such as special assistants for senior officials and directors of communications or press.

In comparison with other federal agencies, the number of positions requiring Senate confirmation is particularly high in the Department of State. The latter has about 60 officials in that category (excluding ambassadors), while the Treasury Department,

for instance, has only 30 such officials for a much larger number of employees (Kopp and Gillepsie 2011, 43)<sup>10</sup>.

According to data gathered by American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) and the American Academy of Diplomacy (AAD), in 2014, non-career appointees occupied 51% of the Department's senior leadership positions (i.e. positions requiring Senate confirmation), while in 1975 they represented 37% of the high-ranking officials (AAD 2015). 64% of the so-called special envoys, special representatives, coordinators and special advisors were also political appointees in 2014 (AAD 2015). Taking into account deputy secretaries, assistant secretaries and deputy assistant secretaries (thus leaving aside undersecretaries), the State Department's human resources office, for its part, underlined in 2013 that career FSOs and civil servants occupied then 69% of these positions and political appointees 31% (Department of State 2013).

Very few big campaign contributors serve as political appointees in domestic positions of the department. According to Jett (2014), an examination of the background of the 101 political appointees who required Senate confirmation between 2001 and 2013 indicates that more than half came from political or government backgrounds, 15 had business backgrounds, and the remainder came from academia, think tanks, the media, NGOs, law and the military (Jett 2014, 151).

### **Circumscribing the Room for Political Appointees: Career Diplomats' Boundary Work**

While various US governmental actors are involved in some form of diplomatic activities, Foreign Service officers (FSOs) largely view themselves as the core

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<sup>10</sup> Below the Secretary of State, the Department's chain of command is the following: Deputy secretary; Undersecretary; Assistant secretary (who heads a bureau); Deputy assistant secretary; Office director; Deputy office director; Division chief. For the organizational chart of the Department, see <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/rls/dos/99494.htm>.

professionals of American diplomacy. They see diplomacy as a profession, that is, "a set of skills to be mastered through apprenticeship and training, with restrictions on entry, advancement by merit, and codes of behavior" (Kopp and Gillepsie 2011, 63). Accordingly, their *prima facie* attitude toward non-career diplomatic appointments is generally to consider these as encroachments on their turf and as a denial of the professional character of what they do.

The American Foreign Service Association (AFSA), as both the professional association and the labor union of the Foreign Service, is actively involved in trying to protect the "territory" of FSOs from non-career appointments in ambassadorships and other senior diplomatic positions of the State Department. The association monitors closely the ratio of career versus non-career appointments in various high level positions and often voices concern over the proportion of political appointments or even sometimes over specific non-career appointments (e.g. AFSAa 2015). AFSA is also involved in various other activities aimed at fostering social recognition for the Foreign Service as a profession. Another organization, the American Academy of Diplomacy (AAD), an independent organization of former ambassadors and senior government officials, is also active in promoting a strong Foreign Service and decrying the politicization of the State Department, as it just did in a recent report<sup>11</sup> (AAD 2015).

While FSOs and their associated organizations are critical of diplomatic political appointments in general, most of them nonetheless accept as legitimate that there be some room for non-career appointees among US ambassadors or in positions within the State Department (e.g. Author's interviews, Knowlton 2013, Bruno 2014). Insiders of the Foreign Service also acknowledge that many non-career diplomats

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<sup>11</sup> The report published by the Academy does not necessarily reflect a consensus among the members of this organization, which include several former officials who were not Foreign Service officers. The report was written by a group of four former senior Foreign Service officers, three of which were ambassadors, and many other current or former members of the Foreign Service participated as advisors in the project (AAD 2015, 6).

have been very good diplomatic practitioners (e.g. AAD 2015c; AFSA 2015d; Neumann 2015). However, what career diplomats consider as a legitimate space for political appointees in diplomatic functions is definitely more tightly defined than what current and traditional practice have allowed. Thus, careerists implicitly distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate political appointees according to a set of criteria, which are shaped by the ethos of the Foreign Service. In what follows, I analyze the criteria according to which careerists delineate a symbolic border between legitimate and illegitimate political appointees in US diplomacy.

### **Circumscribing Political Ambassadorships**

The first criterion is a quantitative one, having to do with the proportion of political appointees that career officers are willing to accept. For both AFSA and the Academy, the current proportion of political ambassadors (about 30%) undermines the Foreign Service (AFSA 2015d, AAD 2015). In its "Statement on ambassadors", AFSA states that the practice of appointing non-career individuals as ambassadors "should be exceptional and circumscribed", in line with the provision of the Foreign Service Act that "positions as chiefs of mission should normally be accorded to career members of the Service" (AFSA 2015d). In accordance with AFSA's stance, the American Academy of Diplomacy recommends that "the number of politically appointed ambassadors normally should not exceed 10 percent of all ambassadorial appointments" (AAD 2015, 20).

Secondly, careerists emphasize a set of qualitative selection criteria, a few of which are enshrined in the Foreign Service Act (1980). As AFSA and the Academy remind all interested parties in their advocacy, according to the act (which AFSA itself actively contributed to elaborating), ambassadorial nominees

should possess clearly demonstrated competence to perform the duties of a chief of mission, including... useful knowledge of the language... of the country in which the individual is to serve... and understanding of the history,

the culture, the economic and political institutions, and the interests of that country. (Foreign Service Act 1980, quoted in AFSA 2015d)

This category of criteria, which we may sum up as regional or country-specific knowledge, is frequently put forward by various Foreign Service insiders, although some career officers appointed as ambassadors do not themselves always satisfy that criterion (PBS 2014, Jett 2014, AAD 2015, Haglund 2015).

Regional or country-specific knowledge has been included in a set of guidelines endorsed by AFSA in 2014. AFSA asked a group of ten "distinguished former chiefs of mission", including three who were non-career appointees, to establish guidelines - to be used by the White House and Congress in the nomination and confirmation process of ambassadors - defining what are the requirements for good candidates to ambassadorships (AFSA 2014). According to the guidelines adopted, the qualifications that each ambassadorial nominee should possess are the following (AFSA 2014):

- Leadership, character and proven interpersonal skills;
- Understanding of high level policy and operations, and of key U.S. interests and values in the country or organization of prospective assignment;
- Management;
- Understanding of host country and International Affairs.

While the complete description of each of these guidelines (see complete description in appendix) does indicate that a demanding package of competences is seen as necessary, the guidelines do not convey an important preference of the careerists with respect to non-career ambassadors. I am referring here to the preference that politically appointed ambassadors be individuals who have a "distinguished record" (or, in other words, a reputation for excellence) in public service (executive or legislative branch) or in academia (Kopp and Gillepsie 2011; Bruno 2014). For the AAD (2015, 20), political ambassadors should be "*unusually talented and public service-minded private citizens with relevant experience*" (my



emphasis). In an interview with the then president of AFSA, a senior FSO, the latter also suggested that those non-career ambassadors who are especially welcome are those with a successful record in public service:

We could probably accept... if a certain percentage of ambassadorships were given to highly qualified people that really brought a stature to the profession – and those are like very senior members of Congress, like the Mike Mansfields or people like that. I think that would be fine because that would be almost saying this is a really worthy profession and people who have spent a lifetime successfully, you know, are interested in doing this, it's important work. (Author's interview, 2013)

Moreover, while not framed as a requirement for the legitimacy of non-career ambassadorships, the willingness of political ambassadors to serve in developing countries or otherwise difficult environments can potentially increase the acceptability of a non-career nomination, as a veteran of the Foreign Service, Thomas Boyatt, explained to a journalist: "Whether political appointees or career diplomats, they should accept posts that are located in the developing world - rather than accepting ambassadorships only to European or wealthy nations" (McKelvey 2013). William Rivkin, a political ambassador in the 1960s, earned great respect from the Foreign Service by serving with dedication notably in Africa. According to Krlev (2012, 40), "the Foreign Service thinks of him almost as one of its own to this day". An AFSA award was even established in his name and is still awarded each year to a FSO for constructive dissent.

Of course, if Foreign Service organizations and individual members have spelled out and voiced over the years what should be the criteria or considerations for the appointment of outsiders as ambassadors, it is because they see as illegitimate a number of appointments. In particular, they denounce (along with some commentators in the media) the ambassadorial appointments of outsiders that

seem to be made primarily on the basis of the latter's contributions to the political campaigns of the president's party:

The role of money in politics has made more egregious the practice of appointing political ambassadors who lack the appropriate experience or credentials for that role. ... The practice of calling on private citizens does not justify sending overseas ambassadors so deficient in evident qualifications as to make them laughing stocks at home and abroad. The sale of office is contrary to law. That it appears to be happening, only slightly indirectly through campaign contributions, does not justify the practice and adds nothing to either the quality or prestige of American diplomacy. (American Academy of Diplomacy 2015, 11)

In their struggle against such practice (or the appearance of it), AFSA and AAD recurrently point to the provision of the Foreign Service Act that "Contributions to political campaigns should not be a factor in the appointment of an individual as a chief of mission" (Foreign Service Act 1980).

But besides considerations of lawful and ethical conduct, it is importantly the general profile of many individual "donor ambassadors", in terms of background, general knowledge and dispositions, that makes the Foreign Service regard these individuals as illegitimate diplomats. While they may meet some of the qualifications put forth by the Foreign service institution as requirements to serve as ambassadors, such as leadership and good management skills, they often do not meet more important criteria in the perspective of careerists, namely knowledge and understanding of the substantive matters of diplomacy, which correspond to guidelines 2 and 4 in AFSA's chief of mission guidelines presented above ("understanding of high level policy and operations, and of key U.S. interests and values in the country or organization of prospective assignment" and "understanding of host country and international affairs") (AFSA 2014, Author's interviews, Smith 1980). For instance, talking about his former boss, a political

ambassador who had been an important political supporter of a former president's campaign, a FSO lamented that this chief of mission lacked the substantive knowledge required for the position:

He didn't have a clue about anything! I mean, it was kind of embarrassing... He inherited his father's steel company, they made nuts and bolts... that's great but he knows nothing about like, foreign policy or policy development, or anything. The conversations that he would have with high-level personalities were really just low level. He just didn't know anything. And he never really learned it, his three and a half years there, he never really learned it. Probably not the best choice for a critical country like [this European country]. (Author's interview, 2014)

As the last sentence of this quotation exemplifies, career officers often argue that appointing non-career ambassadors poses the risk of damaging the conduct of US foreign policy, in addition to being susceptible to public embarrassment (Kennan 1997, Bruno 2014, AAD 2015). In this regard, the non-career ambassadors that they are referring to are particularly the "wealthy campaign donors" from the private sector, as this excerpt from an opinion piece by a former career diplomat illustrates, with reference to the ambassadorial nominees who caused a controversy in early 2014:

Of course, we have little reason to worry about longtime Montana Senator Max Baucus, whose appointment to serve in China the Senate passed unanimously... But some wealthy campaign donors with backgrounds a bit further afield from public service should give us concern. They've already embarrassed themselves (Bruno 2014).

Hence, while non-career ambassadors who were political donors are often successful business people, their success in the private sector very often does not fit with what career diplomats consider a "distinguished record". As already

mentioned, the most legitimate non-career ambassadors are considered to be those with a distinguished record in public service or in academia. This quotation from a career diplomat further illustrates that and makes particularly explicit the symbolic distinction that careerists make among political ambassadors:

An important distinction can be made between [political appointees]. ... U.S. administrations have routinely reached outside the ranks of government to appoint private citizens of demonstrated ability and often distinguished records to ambassadorial positions. ... If one sets aside university presidents, scholars, retired legislators and civic-minded philanthropists whose appointments ... can be seen as at least reasonably appropriate for the job, we are left with a residue of other non-career appointees. These are the ones who have no visible qualifications for the position and nothing in their backgrounds to suggest any particular affinity for foreign affairs. They are the true political appointees, those who have obviously been selected for reasons that have nothing to do with the conduct of foreign policy. It is primarily from this group that the diplomatic horror stories of the past have come from. (Smith 1980)

All things considered, in addition to seeking a limit of 10% of political ambassadorships, the most important criteria according to which the Foreign Service circumscribes legitimate political ambassadorships appear to be these two:

- Individuals with a distinguished record in public service or academia;
- Individuals with knowledge of the host country or region, knowledge of international affairs in general, and understanding of high-level policy and operations.

The non-career ambassadors that the Foreign Service is mostly struggling against are individuals from the private sector who were campaign fundraisers for the president. Although these individuals may be good at leading and managing organizations, they often do not have what careerists value most, that is, knowledge

of the region or country of destination, knowledge of international affairs and understanding of foreign policy operations.

### **Circumscribing Non-Career Appointees in Domestic State Department Positions**

While it is more rarely the object of media attention, the question of political appointees' presence in positions within the State Department actually tends to be a bigger point of contention for members of the Foreign Service. Many career officers lament that the department "has become a lot more politicized than it was 40 years ago", with "a growing number of the policy and senior positions in the department going to non-career people" (Author's interviews; Johnson et al. 2013; AAD 2015). According to the American Academy of Diplomacy, since 1975, there has been a 14% increase of non-career appointees in the department's senior positions (assistant secretary and above) (AAD 2015). In addition, career officers bemoan a greater tendency to put political appointees into positions below the assistant secretary level: "the degree to which political appointees have penetrated the bureaucracy is really far greater now than ever before and so, you've got political appointees down to the deputy assistant secretary and sometimes at the office director level" (Author interview, 2014; AAD 2015). The Academy also notes with concern a "recent explosion of ambassadors-at-large, special representatives, and coordinators", 64% of which were political appointees in 2014 (AAD 2015, 16).

Wishing to rein in the reach of political appointees within the bureaucracy, the AAD recommends in a recent report that "the president and the Secretary of State should systematically include career diplomats in the most senior of State's leadership positions", especially in at least one of the two deputy secretary positions and in the undersecretary for political affairs position (AAD 2015, 17). The deputy secretary positions have generally gone to non-career people since their creation, but the position of undersecretary for political affairs, the oldest and most prestigious of the undersecretary positions, has traditionally been filled by a career officer (AFSA 2015e). Other recommendations of the Academy include limiting the number of

mid-level non-career appointees serving as special assistants in the offices of assistant secretaries and officials of equivalent rank. Further, special envoys, representatives and coordinators "should be appointed only for the highest priority issues" (AAD 2015, 21). While they do not propose any specific target in terms of what would be an overall acceptable proportion of political appointees within the department, the Academy and AFSA implicitly suggest that the number of political appointees in high-level positions should be at least closer to what it was in the 1970s, that is, about 37% (AAD 2015; Johnson et al. 2013).

In comparison with ambassadorships, the specific profile of political appointees hired for positions within the department is not as much the object of criticisms and recommendations by careerists. A mid-level FSO remarked, "They're usually better, the political appointees who come over to work in the department are usually, not always, but usually experts in their areas. Plus, it's really hard work" (Author interview, 2014). Similarly, a former career ambassador points out that the non-career people working in the department are much more likely to be "policy wonks who have an interest in and the qualifications for work that is heavy on substance and short on glamor" (Jett 2014, 151). But another FSO, while recognizing the value of what these political appointees can bring, suggested nonetheless that the "real" diplomatic expertise rests with the Foreign Service: "a lot of the deputy assistant secretaries are ... political appointees who have done other things which are fabulous... and interesting and substantive, but they don't know diplomacy. And they don't know policy in the same way, the way that we make it" (Author interview, 2014).

The perceived inflated presence of political appointees within the department is seen as detrimental to the institutional strength of the department, in part because these appointees are there for a short time and therefore lack a longer-term perspective and institutional memory (Johnson et al. 2013, AAD 2015). They also jeopardize "expert, nonpartisan foreign policy advice", according to a group of

veteran FSOs (Johnson et al. 2013). This in turn poses a greater risk of producing bad policy, as a senior officer explained:

[...] it tends to stifle debate in a way, because many of these people view themselves as sort of 'policy enforcement officers'. In other words, whatever that administration's policy is, they feel that they're there to defend it. And among Foreign Service officers we fully understand that we are there to follow the instructions of the elected officials, but we feel it's our obligation to debate the pros and cons. And so when you have somebody who comes in, who's sort of lagging their finger, it tends to lead to some bad decisions, like perhaps the Irak war. So it is very important I think that a bureaucracy be allowed to debate things so that they can provide the best possible advice to the political leaders: the leaders make the decisions but the quality of the advice is our responsibility. And so I think that that balance [between career and non-career officials in Washington] is one that has to be very carefully watched. (Author's interview, 2014).

The AAD's recent report emphasizes three negative consequences of the “declining representation of the Foreign Service at senior levels in Washington” (AAD 2015, 15-16): 1) a loss of field perspective in the policy-making process, “knowledge essential for melding the desirable with the possible”; 2) a loss of Washington experience for FSOs, which undermines their ability to be promoted in the senior levels of the service and which is detrimental to their excellence in the implementation of policy abroad; 3) a loss of merit-based incentives for career officers, as they see non-career appointees “climbing rungs above them on the career ladder”. In relation to the third point, members of the career service resent the presence of political appointees to the extent that it has the effect of blocking their career advancement. A mid-level FSO illustrates this when she talks about a senior Foreign Service colleague:

[My office director], she's been in for 27 years... she's an experienced diplomat, knows her stuff... Here comes a deputy assistant secretary to be above her, who is much younger and is from the legislative branch. ... There are these people who slug their way up the diplomatic ladder from 27 years and now she can't be a deputy assistant secretary. [With] all these political appointees in those positions, where are the career diplomats gonna go? ... What happens to those professional diplomats who are the ones who practiced it all their lives and have learned it, lived it? (Author interview, 2014)

In sum, career officers are not opposed to political appointees occupying some of the department's positions (from the assistant secretary level upward), but they seek to tightly restrict their number and the specific positions in which they are appointed. They portray as an encroachment on their turf the current proportion of political appointees in senior positions and the latter's presence below the assistant secretary level. To gain social recognition of the claim that these are illegitimate encroachments, career officers argue that the current portion of political appointees serving in these positions undermines the quality of policy and blocks the career advancement of dedicated and worthy FSOs.

## **Defending and legitimizing the domain of political appointees in US diplomacy**

### **The Council of American Ambassadors' turf claims and legitimacy building**

Since 1983, politically appointed ambassadors have had their interests represented by the Council of American Ambassadors, a non-profit and non-partisan association representing 230 former and incumbent non-career US ambassadors. The Council of American Ambassadors notably seeks to enhance the reputation of non-career



ambassadors in the US foreign policy community and the broader public opinion. In the words of the senior vice president of that organization, himself a former political appointee, "the Council's mission is to stand for the contribution of the non-career appointees" (Author interview 2014). Accordingly, the Council portrays the latter on its website as "citizen diplomats" who "bring to their ambassadorial assignments important knowledge and experience accumulated from successful careers in academia, business, the law, the arts, the military, and political and public life" (Council of American Ambassadors 2015).

The reputation of non-career ambassadors has of course tended to be tarnished by negative media coverage and their stigmatization as interlopers by the Foreign Service, both of which have caused some former non-career ambassadors to feel unfairly disrespected and unrecognized for their contributions to American diplomacy (Valdez 2013; Author interview 2014). In an effort to reverse that trend, the Council has established over the years various programs promoting "effective foreign policy and diplomacy for the United States" (Council of American Ambassadors 2015). Current programs include an orientation initiative for newly appointed non-career ambassadors, fellowships for aspiring diplomats, an ambassadors' roundtable with foreign diplomats, and conferences around the country on foreign policy issues (Valdez 2013). "We're bending over backwards to make substantive contributions to the conduct of American diplomacy abroad", said the Council vice president in reference to these various programs (Author interview 2014). In addition, members of the Council are involved in supporting financially the US diplomatic establishment, notably by helping to fund the maintenance of embassy buildings and helping to raise money for the upcoming establishment by the State Department of a diplomacy museum.

The Council of American Ambassador has kept a low profile in the public debate over the balance between career and non-career ambassadorial appointments and the issue of the selection criteria for non-career appointees. The organization,

nevertheless, obviously has a stake in this debate. In an interview with the vice president of the Council, the latter portrayed the attitude of the Foreign Service on ambassadorial appointments as importunate for implying that the Foreign Service has a special right over these positions: "The Foreign Service's view is: in principle, the whole thing is our playpen and the president's slice should be as small as possible" (Author interview 2014). He recounted the following anecdote as an illustration:

I was back in the State Department preparing for my assignment and this FSO who had worked for me as a deputy [in the department] came filtering through and said: 'what are you doing back here?' I explained I was getting ready to go to Barbados [as an ambassador]. He said: 'Oh, that could have been one of ours!'. There it is. That's the actual summary of the whole attitude right there. The jobs are ours and we'll let the president have some to play with. Wrong! The constitution says the jobs are the president's. (Author interview 2014)

Upholding the president's prerogative to appoint those who he/she chooses is a "cardinal principle" for the Council of American Ambassadors (Author interview 2014). Hence, when I first asked him what he thought should be the balance of career versus non-career people in ambassadorships, the Council member interviewed felt compelled to point out that, in contrast with the Foreign Service's approach of the issue, the fundamental question is not one of "balance" or "ratios": "They think in terms of ratios. I don't think in terms of ratios. I think that you have to have 100% of the very very best people. And where they come from is secondary" (Author interview 2014).

Notwithstanding his emphasis on the president's prerogative, the interviewee explained that the "best practical accommodation" is that the State Department and the White House agree on and respect their respective "jurisdictions":

...these are the places in the world where we imagine that we will mostly be appointing political ambassadors and these are the places where we don't normally expect to be appointing a non-career appointee. So, in plain language, State Department, this is your sandbox to play in. This is our sandbox. Let's stay out of each other's sandboxes except on those occasions when there's something exceptional. (Author interview 2014)

This suggests a practical arrangement similar to the one that has prevailed for many decades, with ambassadorships in European and Western countries normally going to non-career individuals and most of the rest (i.e. about 70% of ambassadorships) going to career diplomats.

But within the White House's "sandbox" of ambassadorships, who should be eligible for an ambassadorial appointment? The Council's position is slightly ambiguous in this regard. On the one hand, it supports the widely agreed principle that all non-career ambassadorial appointees should be the most qualified people for the job. In the words of the organization's vice president, "100% of ambassadorial positions should be occupied by supremely qualified, supremely competent, supremely dedicated and sophisticated people... 100% should be the very most competent people we could find" (Author interview 2014). In line with this view, the Council has expressed support for AFSA's recommended guidelines for the appointment of chiefs of mission (see appendix).

On the other hand, having as its members many who probably obtained their ambassadorial appointment in no small part due to their political and financial support of a president and its party, the organization is not bound to fundamentally challenge appointments made primarily on the basis of such political factors<sup>12</sup>. Hence the cardinal importance that the Council attaches to the president's

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<sup>12</sup> Also relevant in this regard is the fact that the Council relies financially on members' contributions and on corporate and private foundation sources (Council of American Ambassadors 2015).

constitutional prerogative to appoint the candidates of his/her choice. Given the presidential authority in the matter, the president is in his right, according to the Council vice president, to send as his envoys "people to whom he is politically indebted" or others who are personally close to him. The interviewee hastened to add, nevertheless, that such appointees should be "excellent", i.e. "people of substance, of competence, of demonstrated capability, of dedication" (Author interview 2014).

It is interesting to note that the Council presents as "distinguished non-career ambassadors" individuals with the same kind of background that career people value for the role, that is to say, a solid record of government service prior to their diplomatic appointment and a stature in US public affairs. In a section of its website called "Profiles in diplomacy", the organization showcases six former non-career ambassadors with such distinguished records, among which: Howard Baker, ambassador to Japan from 2001 to 2005, who was previously majority leader in the US Senate from 1977 to 1985 and White House Chief of Staff in 1987-1988; James Blanchard, ambassador to Canada from 1993 to 1996, who was governor of Michigan from 1983 to 1996; Michael Mansfield, the longest serving ambassador to Japan (1977-1988), who previously served for 34 years in the US Congress after having served in the military.

In sum, while the Council's vice president defends the legitimacy of virtually all non-career appointees by emphasizing the presidential prerogative for ambassadorial nominations, he and his organization seem well aware that such boundary spanning is not sufficient to foster the social recognition of the legitimacy of these appointees. In an apparent effort to further legitimize the latter, the Council downplays the distinction between career and non-career diplomats. Indeed, various aspects of the Council's practices tend to have the effect of blurring the dichotomy between the two groups: the programs developed to support in various ways the operations of the US diplomatic establishment; the claim that 100% of ambassadors should be the

most competent individuals regardless of where they come from; and the presentation of distinguished non-career ambassadors who are most likely to be accepted by the Foreign Service as highly respectable diplomats and almost ones of their own.

### **Turf claims and legitimacy building by other political appointees**

Beyond the Council of American Ambassadors, individual political appointees also try to legitimize their turf. This is notably visible in the various arguments that incumbent or former political appointees put forth (notably in the press and in interviews) in favor of non-career appointments. These arguments highlight the important skills and the new perspectives that political appointees can bring, and have brought in the recent past, in the fulfillment of diplomatic assignments; the dynamism that they can infuse in the policy work of the bureaucracy; and the greater proximity and access to the White House of non-career ambassadors (e.g. Benjamin 2014, Rivkin 2013). For a scholar who served three times in the department over the last 25 years, political appointments in various positions of the State Department are essential to the conduct of US foreign policy:

You wanna be sure there are enough spots for career foreign service people to move up and actually have senior jobs, but you also want to be sure that you have enough space for political appointees. I'm firmly of the view that political appointees are central to US foreign policy and America's role in the world: you need the dynamism that comes with people who are there for a short time but have an agenda. The US role in the world includes setting the political agenda, you need people who want to do that, and so it's absolutely central. (Author interview, 2014)

However, the same interviewee portrayed as unfair the dominant framing of the typical political appointee in the context of the debate over non-career appointments:

I personally think it's an artificial debate. ...because the debate tends to be unfairly framed as in political: friend of the presidential political party, knows nothing about foreign policy. Or, career Foreign Service officer: knows a lot about foreign policy. That is artificial. It ignores people who are foreign policy experts who come in as political appointees. There are a lot of those. ... What you don't want to have is people sent to posts who don't know anything that's relevant for the job. The tendency is to use 'political/non-' as shorthand for that; I am very critical of that analysis, cause I think that it's unfair to smart political appointees. (Author interview 2014)

Many political appointees seem to feel unjustly represented by the publicized image of the totally unqualified diplomatic political appointee and, consequently, seek to counter such negative representation. For instance, in a letter to the *Foreign Service Journal*, William Attwood, a three-time political ambassador under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, was decrying the publication of an article for perpetuating "the hoary myth that all chiefs of mission who didn't shoulder their way up the FSO ladder have been bumbling dolts" (Attwood 1980). Against this "myth", Attwood (1980) pointed out that he had met during his diplomatic assignments "a lot of dedicated and talented men and women and also a fair number of stuffed shirts and damned fools. And the latter included both career people and political".

As the Attwood example illustrates, as part of their struggle against perceptions of illegitimacy, incumbent or former political appointees stress that both career and non-career diplomats are mixed bags, thus blurring the distinction between the two groups. The US ambassador to France, for instance, was quick to underline, in response to an interview question addressing the fact that he was not a career diplomat, that "There are extraordinary career ambassadors and extraordinary non-career ambassadors, or political appointees. It isn't that one is one way and one is the other. I think there are a variety on both sides" (Rivkin 2013, ambassador to France, 2009-2013). "Political appointees, like career officers, come in all different

shades and colors and sizes. Some of them are great; some of them are catastrophic", said for his part David C. Miller, a two-time non-career ambassador (Miller 2003, ambassador to Tanzania (1981-1984) and Zimbabwe 1984-1986). Further, in the context of the controversy that erupted in 2014 following the gaffes committed by three ambassadorial political nominees in their Senate hearing (see introduction), some former political appointees, while expressing their disapproval of the nominees' selection for the position, warned against making generalizations about the quality of non-career ambassadors:

...the conclusion many draw - that political appointees are almost by definition inferior to Foreign Service ambassadors - is flat wrong. In recent years, we've had a batch of unusually talented political appointees - ones who added skills and insights that few, if any, career diplomats could match. (Benjamin 2014, see also Carlson 2014)

For one of the former political appointees interviewed, in the debate over the legitimacy of non-career appointments, too much focus is put on the formal "label" of appointees, i.e. whether they are FSOs or political appointees: according to her, while "enough" senior diplomatic jobs should be kept for career FSOs, ultimately the legitimacy of any senior officer depends on the relevance of this person's skills and expertise for the specific position he/she is appointed in:

...the tendency to say, 'oh, we shouldn't have so many political appointees', overlooks the fact, it's the quality of the political appointees and the quality of the Foreign Service officers. Just because they're Foreign Service officers, they may be excellent but that doesn't necessarily assume that they will have the expertise needed for the job today. ... The question is, what's your expertise and is it relevant for that job. Which means that job might go to a political, might go to a career foreign service... People in personnel management... they're having to think about what's the right person for this.

Who has the right mix of skills; they might not come with the label you're used to. (Author interview 2014)

Overall, these illustrative pieces of evidence suggest that, in an effort to counter a negative image and be recognized as legitimate diplomatic practitioners, political appointees focus on downplaying, like the Council of American Ambassadors, the formal distinction between career and non-career diplomats. They seek to move the boundary of legitimacy away from Foreign Service membership to make it correspond, notably, with the possession of the relevant skills and knowledge for the job.

## Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the representations and practices enacted by US career and non-career diplomats as part of their struggle to secure their access to diplomatic positions. Through these representations and practices, they make symbolic distinctions regarding who are legitimate and illegitimate diplomats and seek the social recognition of these distinctions as principles that should guide official diplomatic appointments.

Career Foreign Service officers (FSOs) are arguably in a more advantageous position, in terms of social recognition of their legitimacy, than political appointees. Through the Foreign Service Act (1980), the US Congress has recognized them as forming the diplomatic corps of the country and has stipulated that positions as chiefs of mission should normally be accorded to them. The journalistic coverage of diplomatic political appointments, mostly focused on the nomination of financial and political allies, also tends to convey a negative image of political appointees and a bias in favor of the careerists. Against that background, FSOs try to protect their dominant position through turf claims establishing restrictive distinctions, based on



quantitative and qualitative criteria, between legitimate and illegitimate political appointees.

Political appointees cope with the Foreign Service's restrictive gatekeeping by seeking the social recognition of their own boundary work. By emphasizing the fact that "all ambassadorial jobs are the president's", thereby rhetorically rejecting the idea of a "balance" between career and non-career appointments, the Council of American Ambassadors tries to move the boundary of legitimate "diplomathood" away from Foreign Service membership. This boundary spanning is however moderated by the Council's and individual political appointees' claims that general competence, dedication and/or the possession of the specific skills relevant for the job should be the criteria for the selection of senior diplomatic officials. Such criteria get closer to those advocated by the careerists, but the Foreign Service is clearly more restrictive, notably with its attempt to limit to 10% non-career ambassadorial appointments.

In relation to existing accounts on non-career appointments in American diplomacy, this paper has highlighted that the distinction between career and non-career diplomats is in itself a social fact to be problematized and researched. While news reports and academic studies certainly provide valuable insights as they address the determinants and consequences of diplomatic political appointments, they remain focused on the formal dichotomy between political appointees and the career Foreign Service. This paper has called attention to the fact that the actual boundary that is at stake is the symbolic boundary determining the legitimacy of members of the two groups. It is that boundary which is the object of struggles and therefore, we must pay attention to the social and symbolic resources that are mobilized in that struggle. Moreover, this paper has brought nuances to the common portrayal of career diplomats as being marginalized by political appointments; while this is in part true, FSOs' permanent tenure and their greater capital of legitimacy put them in

a better position to assume a gatekeeper role vis-à-vis political appointees than the other way around.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, as a first step in the examination of how career diplomats and political appointees negotiate their respective "territory" in relation to one another, this paper has not delved into the actual relationships of the two groups on the workplace, but this aspect is certainly a key one that needs to be examined to complete the analysis of the question.

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<sup>13</sup> These remarks are not to be interpreted as a defense of political appointees to the detriment of career diplomats.

## Appendix - AFSA's Recommended Guidelines for the Selection of Chiefs of Mission

- **Leadership, character and proven interpersonal skills:** The nominee has demonstrated the interpersonal skills necessary to represent the United States, including utmost integrity, honesty, moral courage, fairness, empathy, an appropriate measure of humility, awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses, overall judgment and decisiveness, and the ability to inspire, as well as a proven ability to be effective in taking on new challenges. A demonstrated understanding and mastery of working in a complex environment where the objectives of multiple and sometimes competing organizations must be balanced, and a demonstrated ability to prioritize wisely, especially concerning issues of one's staff and facilities. A key skill is the ability to listen in order to better understand the host country's perspectives, as well as the mission staff's views and concerns. These skills can be demonstrated through leadership and management of government organizations, private sector companies, or non-governmental and private volunteer organizations.
- **Understanding of high level policy and operations, and of key U.S. interests and values in the country or organization of prospective assignment:** The nominee possesses the knowledge and capacity to lead the operations of a diplomatic mission effectively; to participate constructively in the formulation of policy and implement policy in a creative manner that yields positive results where possible; and to communicate persuasively with government stakeholders (White House, State Department, other executive agencies and Congress), host nation officials, political leaders and civil society. He or she demonstrates the capacity to negotiate, and has the proven ability to take on various challenges, including working with U.S. and foreign business communities and other nongovernmental interests, and providing services to U.S. citizens.

- **Management:** The nominee has relevant management experience. He or she possesses a commitment to team building, innovation, problem-solving, strategic planning, mentoring and career development. He or she also possesses experience in setting goals and visions, managing change, and allocating resources. He or she has the capacity to work well with a deputy and other members of a team, and to delegate effectively.
- **Understanding of host country and International Affairs:** The nominee has experience in or with the host country or other suitable international experience, and has knowledge of the host country culture and language or of other foreign cultures or languages. He or she has the ability to manage relations between the U.S. and the country or organization of assignment in order to advance U.S. interests, including the interests of U.S. commercial firms as well as individual U.S. citizens and nationals. The nominee skillfully interacts with different audiences – both public and private.

Source: AFSA 2014, Chief of Mission Guidelines, available online at:  
<http://www.afsa.org/chief-mission-guidelines>.

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