Understanding the Career of a US Diplomat

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The US Foreign Service is sometimes derided, often underappreciated, occasionally praised, rarely examined, and almost never understood. And yet whether America’s diplomacy succeeds or fails depends to a large extent on its foreign service professionals. Career Diplomacy—now in its second edition—is an insider’s guide that examines the foreign service as an institution, a profession, and a career.

Harry W. Kopp and Charles A. Gillespie, both of whom had long and distinguished careers in the foreign service, provide a full and well-rounded picture of the organization, its place in history, its strengths and weaknesses, and its role in American foreign affairs. Based on their own experiences and through interviews with over 100 current and former foreign service officials, the authors lay out what to expect in a foreign service career, from the entrance exam through midcareer and into the senior service.

The second edition addresses major changes that have occurred since 2007: the controversial effort to build an expeditionary foreign service to lead the work of stabilization and reconstruction in fragile states; deepening cooperation with the U.S. military and the changing role of the service in Iraq and Afghanistan; the ongoing surge in foreign service recruitment and hiring at the Department of State and US Agency for International Development; and the growing integration of USAID’s budget and mission with those of the Department of State.

Ronald E. Neumann, former ambassador and president of the American Academy of Diplomacy, applauds the new edition, saying, “Current, dispassionate, and accurate, Career Diplomacy is the must-read book for those seeking understanding of today’s Foreign Service. From traditional diplomacy to work in the provinces of Afghanistan and Iraq, it is all here.” The authors also include several useful and updated appendices, including the Department of State’s organization chart, pay scales, career trajectories, and a list of internet resources.

Harry W. Kopp is a former foreign service officer and consultant in international trade. He was Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Trade Policy in the Carter and Reagan administrations and his foreign assignments included Warsaw and Brasilia. He is now president of Harry Kopp, LLC, a consulting company. He is the author of Commercial Diplomacy and the National Interest.

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