

US Foreign Service: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is diplomacy?

A: Diplomacy is one of the main instruments of foreign policy. Diplomacy entails influencing the decisions and conduct of foreign governments and officials through dialogue, negotiation, and other nonviolent means.

Q: Foreign Service – who are we?

A: Members of the Foreign Service are professional diplomats, non-partisan public servants charged with carrying out as well as guiding the foreign policy of the United States. As career professionals, they are trained in foreign languages, international relations, and diplomacy.

U.S. diplomats operate out of U.S. embassies and consulates at 276 posts around the world. The only countries in which the US **does not** have representation are North Korea, Bhutan, Iran, and Syria.

As of 2020, there are about 16,000 members of the Foreign Service from across all these agencies working around the world on behalf of the U.S. government.

Q: Where do we work?

A: Diplomats work in U.S. embassies and consulates when they are overseas, led by an ambassador. An ambassador is the President’s personal representative and the highest-ranking U.S. official in the country.

In addition to the Foreign Service members, representatives of other agencies also work at the embassy, including Drug Enforcement Agency, Defense, FBI, and Justice, among others.

Embassies also hire local staff who know the local culture, have essential skills or have significant contacts in the government and civil society.

Q: What do we do?

A: Posted in almost every country around the world, members of the Foreign Service are our eyes and ears on the ground. Diplomats work to promote and protect American interests and values and to keep Americans secure and prosperous at home.

Diplomats move from post to post, accumulating knowledge and experience that they then apply to new issues and problems that arise.

Did you know?

In addition to the State Department, there are Foreign Service members in five other U.S. government agencies:

- U.S. Agency for International Development,
- Foreign Agricultural Service,
- Foreign Commercial Service,
- Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, and
- U.S. Agency for Global Media.

Did you know?

Ben Franklin was the first American Ambassador in 1779.

Did you know?

The International Affairs budget, which funds the operations of the State Department/USAID and our foreign assistance, represents less than 1% of our overall federal budget.

The jobs and roles of diplomats are varied and include:

- Supporting Americans abroad- everything from registering the birth of an American citizen child to assisting jailed Americans or helping to evacuate Americans in danger.
- Alerting Washington to developments and events overseas that could threaten the United States or American citizens.
- Ensuring a level playing field for American businesses overseas.
- Supporting joint counter terrorism cooperation and criminal investigations.
- Deciding who has a legitimate reason to travel to the United States and issuing visas accordingly.
- Negotiating with other governments on shared challenges, like climate change and nuclear proliferation.
- Fighting pandemics and delivering humanitarian and other assistance to those in need.

Did you know?

On average, diplomats stay in service for 25 years.

As the first line of defense when it comes to solving or buffering international misunderstandings and problems, diplomats play a major role in our national security.

Q: What is the Foreign Service role's in America's national security?

A: In addition to terrorism, there are a variety of issues- economic, political, climate, disease, agricultural, or cybersecurity related - that can become threats to American national security. Though the Foreign Service doesn't have tanks, or ships, or guns like the military, Foreign Service members also work on the front lines around the world to keep Americans safe.

Did you know?

Secretary of Defense James Mattis told the Senate in March 2013 when he was Commander of U.S. Central Command, "If you don't fund the State Department fully, then I need to buy more ammunition."

Foreign Service members have expertise on a range of topics to be able to address and counteract issues that can pose threats to American national security:

- Diplomats are experts on their respective regions and on domestic and foreign policy. They interpret and analyze events on the ground to report to Washington for policy decisions.
- **US Agency for International Development** has expertise and experience on disease prevention, humanitarian assistance, as well as advancement of democracy worldwide.
- The **Foreign Commercial Service** promotes American businesses and exports abroad, while the **Foreign Agricultural Service** opens markets for U.S. agricultural products and works on food security. APHIS helps keep America's animal herds and food supply safe from disease.
- **US Agency for Global Media** brings independent reporting to global audience about developments in the United States, free from foreign propaganda.

