

eVIEWS

An interview with Doug, Consul General of the U.S.A.

GLOSSARY

diplomatic resident	permanent adviser on diplomatic careers
broad	wide
to advocate	to promote(an idea)
budget	amount of money allocated to a task
constituency	the people you represent or look after, group of potential voters
crunch	serious review and reduction of budget
in tune with	to have a feeling/understanding for
mindset	way or manner of thinking
predictable	what you would normally expect
to show up	to arrive
snapshot	quick evaluation of the situation, photograph
disciplines	facets, aspects
arrears	money owing
host (country)	country where the diplomats are working
far flung	distant
fair	right and just
legal jam	difficult situation relating to the law
hat (that we are wearing)	role that we are playing
think-tank	group for talking and solving problems
to be stationed	to be sent to work
folks (U.S.)	people
nascent	just born
indictment	accusation
evil	morally bad, wicked
plot	plan
to overthrow	to destroy, to take over
range	varying collection
portrayal	interpretations
gracious	courteous, charming

COMPREHENSION EXERCISE

1. Which of the following does he mention as necessary to be a diplomat?

language aptitude	medical knowledge
specialist background	general background
knowledge of mathematics	managerial skills
sporting ability	hard-working
flexible	strong interpersonal skills
2. What is the main reason for the diplomatic service having budget problems?
3. Douglas's speciality is related to the Balkans. What is the significance of the following periods of time in connection with this speciality?

10 years	3 years
1 year	2 years
4. Why was he working in Washington?
5. What are the advantages of spending a lot of time in a specific region?
6. He outlines 5 disciplines that he considers part of diplomatic practice. What are they?
7. The most satisfying thing he has ever done was in Sofia, helping to establish an independent think-tank.
 - a) Who was involved?
 - b) When did he do this?
 - c) Where was he stationed at the time?
 - d) What did they convince people of?
 - e) What were the results?
8. Does he agree with the image given by the consular sector in books and films?
9. What adjectives does he use to describe consul work in his summing up?

COMPREHENSION EXERCISE ANSWERS:

1.

language aptitude	general background
managerial skills	strong inter-personal skills

2. The diplomatic service lacks a constituent group, or lobby, to argue for better funding.
3. He spent 10 out of the last 11 years in the Balkans
He served in Albania and Bulgaria, each time for 3 years.
He spent a year in Washington learning both Albanian and Bulgarian.
He spent 2 years working in the Washington office responsible for the Dayton peace plan.
4. He was working on the Dayton peace plan.
5. You become a little more in tune with the culture and a little more appreciative of the ways the locals think.
6. a) Reporting and analysis.
b) Assistance to, and serving as an intermediary for your citizens.
c) Public diplomacy (i.e. getting "our" message across to the public in the host country, advocating the US's position.)
d) The commercial aspect, advocating the fair treatment of US businessmen.
e) Administering the diplomatic mission.
- 7 a) A local group of sociologists and historians.
b) Just after the fall of the wall.
c) The Sofia embassy.
d) That it would help democracy.
e) It has been very successful.
8. It depends on which book or film, but essentially "there's a little truth in all of them."
9. human, fun

LESSON PLAN:

1. Students define a consul. Compare their definition with the following:
(from the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary)
"An agent commissioned by a sovereign state to reside in a foreign town or port, to protect the interests of its subjects there, and to watch over its commercial rights and privileges."

What qualities do they think a consul would need to have?

2. Talk about consular work. What do students imagine it involves.
Have they ever used a consulate either in their own country or while abroad?
Why might they? (e.g. to replace a stolen passport)
Do they think consular work is important?
Why/why not?
3. Glossary. Go through the vocabulary, checking meaning and pronunciation.
4. Go through the questions, predicting answers where possible.
5. Listen, check answers (see 6 below for more detailed work of question 8), repeat and pause at appropriate spots.
6. Repeat listening from "Our particular work ..." to "... depending on the hat we are wearing on a given occasion."
Students try to fill in the gaps: This will give them a detailed answer to Q.8.

Our particular work, I mean we have many aspects to it; there are essentially 4 or 5 disciplines that you'll find practised in any diplomatic installation, and making personal contact has to do what people, I guess, would consider the traditional diplomatic function of _____ and _____. As I say that's one of perhaps 4 or 5 disciplines that you'd normally find. There's that, there's the purely consular aspect of _____ to _____ and _____ as necessary between your citizens and those of the host country, there's a public diplomacy element that is practised all over the world. That's essentially _____ to the public in the host country, _____, explaining its position, _____ of local authorities and even local citizens: Why did we bomb Iraq a year ago? What do we care about Kosovo and why? Why do we have arrears owed in the United Nations? What are our positions on important world issues? And advocating these issues and explaining them. There's a _____ of our work, consuls have been around since Roman times, they were the emperor's representatives in the far flung regions of the empire. I would add that they probably had a heck of a lot more power than we do today in that respect, but they were originally established largely for commercial purposes, to _____ and _____ between the empire, the empirical centre, and the more far flung elements areas of that empire. We serve the same.. not the same but a similar purpose today, in that we continue to advocate for _____, for _____, for fair treatment for our businessmen who are here, to ensure that they are not _____, merely because they are foreigners, in the same kind of way we would advocate for a US citizen that got in, some kind of legal jam here, try to ensure that he's not been dealt with differently. And then finally, the fifth is the obvious one, to a great extent, we have to take care of our _____, we have to _____, the personnel that work here, there are about 25 people that work in this particular establishment

and that takes some administrative work so, we would do one of these 5 things depending on the hat we are wearing on a given occasion.

7. How does what Douglas Smith says about consul qualities/consular work/diplomatic practice compare with what the students thought?
8. What would interest students about being a consul?
What would they least like?
Why?
What country would they most like to be sent to as a consul?
Why?
9. Being a consul involves meeting a lot of new people and probably making a lot of “small talk”, i.e. polite conversation about not much of substance. Students work together and think of 10 questions they could ask someone they’ve never met before.
10. They then roleplay the conversations. Firstly, the person responding to the questions is friendly and gives full answers and asks questions back. Then repeat the conversations and the person responding is unfriendly and gives short answers. Record the conversations. Re-play them and compare them.
11. What are some of the big international issues in which the U.S. is involved at the moment? Students (in pairs) roleplay a conversation between a local government figure and the U.S. consul in the relevant country where the U.S. consul is explaining his/her country’s position. The journalist can be as awkward as he/she likes!
Again, record this, and correct it after.

TRANSCRIPTION:

eV How did you get into the Diplomatic Service? How did you choose consular activities as a career?

Doug Well I'd always been interested in that. There happened to be, what we called, a diplomat in resident at the university where I attended in Texas, and he and I talked, when I was, I guess, a junior or sophomore, in under-graduate school. And I'd always considered it as an option because I'm interested in international affairs. I studied political science.

eV What sort of skills are necessary to be a diplomat?

Doug Well obviously since, in our system you could do any number of things from the starting point, in other words you rarely come in to our service with a predetermined specialty or course-of-action, we like to hire, what we refer to as generalists, so we could have a very, very broad background. My own, as I mentioned, was international affairs, political science, and law. We have people from all walks of life in our service, from medical doctors to PhDs in very specific subjects, physics, chemistry even, literature, generally what we are looking for is a person who is broadly backgrounded, who can represent America as the mixture of cultures and disciplines that it is. People who have a language aptitude or already know some languages, and people who are good managers and people with good interpersonal relationships because I guess at the bottom of it all, a good diplomat must be someone who can, not only get along with people but represent and advocate particular positions, and that takes not only an intellectual capability, it also takes strong inter-personal skills.

eV Is the service changing at all?

Doug It's changed considerably, it's been changed by external factors, and I think some internal factors have also forced some changes in it, but we've had some significant budget difficulties over the 20 years that I've served. One of the real problems for the U.S. Foreign Service is that it has no real domestic constituency, there's nobody out there in America that really stands up and fights for the needs of the Foreign Service in the budget crunches. We haven't done a terribly good job of defending our own interests, and in our system where decisions are made many times as the result of pressure brought by constituent groups or particular lobbies, or at least influenced by these factors, it's a, it's difficult to get the resources that you need to conduct diplomacy. And we've suffered from that.

eV Now you say that when you started in the service, you weren't a specialist. Have you developed a speciality?

Doug In a manner of speaking, I mean I've spent the last 10 out of 11 years in the Balkans. I served in Bulgaria. I served in Albania, each time for 3 years. I spent a year in Washington previous to those 2 tours learning those languages. I then spent 2 years working in Washington, in the office that was responsible for implementing the Dayton peace plan for Bosnia, so... I have a total of about 10 years working on Balkan issues and I suppose that that's become my speciality as a result of that. When you spend that much time in a region, it's not only the aspect of what's going on there right now, but you also become a little more in tune with the culture of the region, a little more appreciative an understanding

of the way they think, the way they do things, and while I wouldn't want to make generalisations and certainly all the countries in the Balkans are individual in their own respects, there is a kind of a Balkan mindset, a kind of a ... a similarity of approach... a more or less predictable pattern of behaviour in some instances, commonalities among these countries that when taken together and when they result, when a person spends a significant amount of time in a region like that, I think you come to understand the thought processes (sic) and the logic of a particular people, or type of people a little better than someone who just kind of shows up from the outside to take a snapshot and go back out. Our particular work, I mean we have many aspects to it; there are essentially 4 or 5 disciplines that you'll find practiced in any diplomatic installation of course, and making personal contact has to do what people, I guess, would consider the traditional diplomatic function of reporting and analysis. As I say, that's one of perhaps 4 or 5 disciplines that you'd normally find. There's that, there's the purely consular aspect of providing assistance to your citizens and serving as an intermediary as necessary between your citizens and those of the host country. There's a public diplomacy element that is practised all over the world. That's essentially getting our message out to the public in the host country, advocating the U.S.'s position, explaining its position, answering legitimate questions of local authorities and even local citizens: Why did we bomb Iraq a year ago? What do we care about Kosovo and why? Why do we have arrears owed in the United Nations? What are our positions on important world issues? And advocating these issues and explaining them. There's a commercial aspect of our work, consuls have been around since Roman times, they were the emperor's representatives in the far flung regions of the empire. I would add that they probably had a heck of a lot more power than we do today in that respect, but they were originally established largely for commercial purposes, to promote trade and resolve trade disputes between the empire, the empirical centre, and the more far flung elements areas of that empire. We serve the same.. not the same but a similar purpose today, in that we continue to advocate for US exports, for investment in the United States, for fair treatment for our businessmen who are here, to ensure that they are not discriminated against merely because they are foreigners, in the same kind of way we would advocate for a US citizen that got in some kind of legal jam here, try to ensure that he's not been dealt with differently, that he enjoys the same rights and privileges. And then finally, the fifth is the obvious one. We have to take care of our own existence here, we have to administer the facility, the personnel that work here, and that takes some administrative work so, we would do one of these 5 things depending on the hat we are wearing on a given occasion.

I think one of the most satisfying things I've done certainly was to, to encourage a group of sociologists and historians in Sofia, to found what was one of, and perhaps the first independent, think-tanks in Eastern Europe after the fall of the wall. I was stationed at our embassy there, and together with the fellow who was in charge of U.S. information agency at the embassy, we were able to convince these folks that this was the kind of thing that would help their nascent democracy, this was the kind of thing that they could do themselves, we were able to find a little money to help them get started and

they did an amazing job. It's been a very successful enterprise and I think it really was a contribution to their society and to their country and I'm very pleased with that.

eV I guess one question I've got to ask: consular activities have given birth to hundreds and hundreds of books and films. How do you feel about that sort of image that the consular sector sometimes has?

Doug Well, of the ones I've seen or read... you have the full range. You have everything from Costa Gavras' indictment of the non-responsive, unhelpful and even if you will, evil embassy employees portrayed in his movie, you have the similar approach in the film I think it was Istanbul Express¹ perhaps, set in Turkey, you have Graham Greene's "Our Man in Havana", which is a funny take, you have the wonderful "Under the Volcano" book. So I guess it depends on which one you're talking about. You have the movie, I've forgotten the name of it, I don't know if it's "Seven Days in May" or not, where the Consul who finds the hand-written evidence of the plot to overthrow the Presidency, turning out to be the hero, so you have a whole range of portrayals. I suppose there's a little of truth in all of them? It's fun. You have some great stories from consular work, we all do and... it's a very human experience. People can be very abusive, people can be extremely gracious, and I'm sure we all have a little bit of each extreme in us and... you see the whole range.

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¹ "Midnight Express"