

sadors were chosen based on the commercial ties they had with their countries of appointment. They worked without a salary and were expected to earn a living through the private business they might conduct in the course of government service. Possible conflicts of interest were not a concern.

Since 1924, with passage of the Rogers Act, American career diplomats have followed a path similar to that of their counterparts in other countries: they survive a rigorous screening to join the Foreign Service, work their way up through the ranks and are carefully prepared to serve in the countries to which they are posted.

The American Foreign Service Association (AFSA), the organization representing active and retired members of the Foreign Service, is not opposed to political appointees per se, but believes that professional diplomats should be at the centre of U.S. foreign policy formulation and implementation.

According to AFSA, since 1960 the ratio between career and political appointments for ambassadors has remained steady at roughly 70% career and 30% political. President Jimmy Carter named the highest percentage of career diplomats (73%) and Gerald Ford the lowest (about 62%).

Also relatively unchanged over the last half century are the destinations of political appointees. "They are not sent to hardship posts. That is no reward for their service," points out Tom Fina. Who wants to go to Mongolia when you can serve in Montecarlo?

In fact, Montecarlo is one of nine posts that have hosted only political ambassadors since 1960. The others are the African Union (Ethiopia), Andorra, the Holy See (the Vatican), the International Civil Aviation Organization (Canada), Ireland, Liechtenstein, San Marino and the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) in Rome. Perhaps not co-

incidentally, three of these are located on the Italian peninsula.

The practice has become so engrained in the Washington spoils system that academic studies have calculated the 'price' of certain ambassadorships. Among these is "What price the Court of St. James?", a 2012 study by Professor Johannes Fedderke of Pennsylvania State University, and Dennis Jett, a former US career ambassador. The "Court of St. James" is diplomatic jargon for Great Britain.

A political appointment is not necessarily a 'bad' appointment, just as a career ambassador is not necessarily 'good'. Both categories have their share of successful and unsuccessful diplomats. A high-level observer in Washington notes that host countries are "more often than not pleasantly surprised by the desire of political ambassadors to succeed and often believe that person may be able to represent their views at senior levels in the White House. As a result, the governments in many major countries will ask for someone with 'connections.'"

The new ambassador to Japan, Caroline Kennedy, continues that tradition. What she lacks in language skills and diplomatic experience, she makes up for in star power and high-level access in Washington.

"We welcome her selection because we understand that she is extremely close to the President," said Yoshihide Suga, the senior government spokesman for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

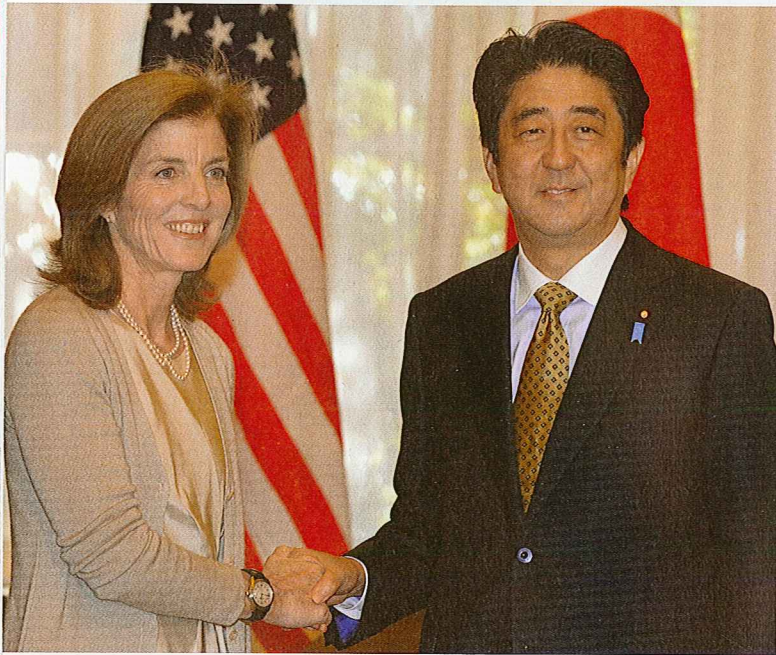
As former diplomat Fina notes, "An advantage of a political ambassador is that a good one has more clout with the President and the member of his Cabinet." He adds mischievously, "One disadvantage is that a bad one also has clout!" **E**

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E US Ambassador Caroline Kennedy with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe before she took office in Tokyo.

The American way: paying for privilege

As many as a third of the country's Ambassadors purchase their post



by Claudia Flisi

Ambassadorships are explicitly for sale in the United States, where up to one-third of America's highest-ranking diplomats are men or women who pay to be sent abroad for their country. 'Political appointees' become ambassadors without prior diplomatic experience or professional training in foreign affairs, and often without the ability to communicate in the language of the country to which they are posted.

The issue has been underlined by the recent appointment of Caroline Kennedy as the U.S.

Ambassador to Japan despite her lack of diplomatic experience and limited knowledge of the country. Her major qualification instead would seem to be the endorsement of the Kennedy political dynasty favouring the candidacy of Barack Obama for the Presidency over that of Hillary Clinton, who then went on to become the U.S. Secretary of State herself.

It is most often though a question of cash: "Candidates for the Presidency and other powerful offices have to raise huge amounts of private money and one way to reward big donors and fund-raisers is with ambassadorships," explains Tom Fina, a former career diplomat in the American Foreign Service who served as U.S. Consul General in Milan.

One advantage of wealthy donor diplomats is that they are able to personally cover their entertainment expenses, since postings to capitals like London, Paris and Rome cost ambassadors huge sums of money that is not reimbursed.

Some political appointees are selected on the basis of non-financial criteria that simply make them particularly qualified to serve in a specific location. Edwin O. Reischauer was a Harvard professor and Asian scholar - with a Japanese wife - when he was appointed ambassador to Japan in 1961. Richard Gardner was a Columbia professor with experience in Washington - and an Italian wife - when he became ambassador to Italy in 1977. Jon Huntsman, Jr., was a former governor of Utah, fluent in Mandarin Chinese, when he was appointed ambassador to China in 2009.

The practice of appointing non-career ambassadors is not new and is not exclusive to the United States. Nor is interest in enlisting the services of the rich. Some other western democracies, including Japan, do the same, though in more limited numbers.

From an historical perspective, the concept of a 'career foreign service' is a fairly recent one for the U.S. Until 1856, America's Ambassadors