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AMERICA'S FADING FOREIGN SERVICE

First of a Four-Part Series

Clout and Morale Decline

Reaganites' Raid on the Latin Bureau

By John M. Goshko
Washington Post Staff Writer

In January 1981, William G. Bowdler, then assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, knew that he was one of several career diplomats holding policy-making positions in the Carter administration who was likely to be replaced in the incoming Reagan administration's reshuffle of policies and personnel.

Bowdler was an accomplished professional diplomat who had been in the Foreign Service for 30 years. Before taking over the Latin American policy job, he had served under Republican and Democratic presidents as ambassador to El Salvador, Guatemala and South Africa and as the State Department's director of intelligence and research. By traditional Foreign Service standards, those credentials would have entitled Bowdler to a major ambassadorial appointment from the new administration.

Instead, within 24 hours of President Reagan's inaugural, Bowdler was told to empty his desk and leave, that there was no longer a place for him in the Foreign Service. It was the opening move of a purge; in the next few months the Reagan team at the State Department swept aside virtually every career diplomat who had been involved in planning and directing the Carter administration's Central American policies.

For the Foreign Service it was the beginning of what has turned into one of its most troubled periods in three decades. During the 1980s, problems that had festered for years inside the Foreign Service have come to the surface; new criticisms challenged traditional ways of doing business; morale

plunged; future prospects dimmed.

The factors that brought this about are the subject of this series of articles. They include:

■ Changes in the promotion system that many believe now discriminate unfairly against officers with the greatest language and area expertise.

■ A big crimp in chances for advancement caused by Reagan's awarding of unprecedented numbers of ambassadorships to political appointees, most of whom are poorly qualified by Foreign Service standards.

■ The austerity imposed by Congress' unwillingness to provide money for foreign policy purposes.

■ The inability of the Foreign Service, a formerly tradition-bound bastion of white male elitism, to better reflect contemporary American society by providing opportunities for women and minorities.

What happened at the State Department in the early days of the Reagan administration seemed to demonstrate how vulnerable the Foreign Service bureaucracy is to shifting political winds. In Britain, France or West Germany, election results may lead to modest changes of direction in foreign policy, but they have only marginal effects on the career diplomatic services of those countries, which are left in command of all but the most senior policy-making diplomatic posts.

Administration Denies Bureau Purged

The election of Ronald Reagan demonstrated that in the United States such stability is far from guaranteed. The impact of the Reagan revolution on Foreign Service morale was severe, according to many officers. Some privately compared it to the early 1950s, when then-Sen. Joseph McCarthy (R-Wis.) made it fashionable to blame the alleged incompetence and treason of professional diplomats for the gains made by communists in Eastern Europe and Asia.

The Reagan administration always has denied that there was a purge in 1981. In private, though, senior officials admit that their aim was to get rid of everyone who they felt could not be entrusted to implement what would become the most controversial foreign policy of the Reagan presidency: Its effort to block what the new administration perceived as a Soviet-Cuban effort to use Nicaragua as a base for spreading communist subversion through the hemisphere.

Over time, the administration's pursuit of that goal would evolve into its now embattled policy of support for the guerrilla war waged by the contras against the leftist Sandinista government in Managua. The treatment meted out to Bowdler and his associates hit the

Foreign Service with a shock whose aftereffects are still being felt. Other administrations, including the one of President Jimmy Carter, had sought to impose their ideological

views on foreign policy, particularly in regard to Latin America.

But the wholesale purging of the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs carried out by the Reagan team caused many career diplomats to conclude that a new rule was being written: That if they are too diligent in trying to carry out the policies of a specific administration, their loyalty may be questioned when the shifting tides of American politics

cast up a different president with very different views.

Ideological pressures have receded, according to many career diplomats, since George P. Shultz succeeded Alexander M. Haig Jr. as secretary of state in 1982. Shultz restored morale considerably by picking bright young members of the service as his key aides. And he has stood up for the Foreign Service in difficult moments. For example, in the furor involving security at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, Shultz has asserted that the responsibility is his and has sought to avert a new wave of Foreign Service bashing by Congress.

Still the 1980s have been an especially unhappy time for the nation's career diplomats. It began with the trauma of seeing 52 of their colleagues from the U.S. Embassy in Tehran held hostage for 444 days while the American government looked on in helpless anguish. Now, as the decade nears an end, the Iran-contra affair has exposed the Foreign Service to new humiliation, revealing how its ostensible role as the principal instrument of U.S. foreign policy was usurped by the staff of the National Security Council.

State Department Was Circumvented

Foreign Service officers with years of experience in dealing with Iran and the Middle East had to face the realization that the White House consciously chose to ignore their advice and expertise. Instead, Lt. Col. Oliver L. North, a supposedly low-level NSC staff member with no background in Mideast affairs, had been allowed to circumvent the authority of Shultz and the State Department.

North's adventurism and the chaos it created for Reagan's ability to govern was described privately by one senior State Department official as "the worst-case, horrible example of what can happen when the government and people of this country can't decide whether they want a professional diplomatic service and are willing to entrust it with the conduct of foreign policy."

Increasingly, the State Department has been relegated to the humdrum routine of diplomacy—the unglamorous work of stamping visas and helping American tourists who have fallen ill or lost their passports, of acting as mail carriers in routine exchanges with other governments and, at a time when terrorism has become the sinister mirror image of diplomacy, of assuming the risks inherent in maintaining an American presence abroad.

However, when policy decisions are being made, presidents and their senior advisers, usually trained in the result-oriented school of domestic politics, are easily frustrated by the caution and compromises that are the traditional tools of professional diplomats. Often,

their impatience with "the fudge factory," as John F. Kennedy called the State Department, causes them to turn to agencies advocating solutions that seem to promise quicker and more clear-cut results.

Throughout the postwar period, the struggles for power and influence between the State Department and other agencies with a stake in foreign policy—the National Security Council staff, the Defense Department, the Central Intelligence Agency—often have been as dramatic as the world events they mirrored. And the State Department has often been on the losing side.

"It's more important for senior diplomats to learn to speak the language of domestic politics than it is to learn a foreign language," said David D. Newsom, who served in the Carter administration as undersecretary of state for political affairs, usually the department's highest career post.

"The typical Foreign Service officer knows more about the politics of Gabon or Bolivia or whatever than he does about Wisconsin or Alabama," added Lawrence S. Eagleburger, who held the same post in the Reagan administration.

Expertise Most Valuable Asset

But even this expertise about far-off places, which once was considered the Foreign Service's most valuable asset, often is not put to its best use. In the Iran-contra affair, it was ignored. And in policy situations such as Central America, where the State Department has had a big role, such traditional skills as the ability to speak Spanish and knowledge of the area's history, politics and culture have been regarded as less important than a reputation for can-do managerial talent.

Ideological pressures have been greatest in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, according to State Department officials. In that area Shultz has not reversed the pattern first set in 1981.

That year, in addition to Bowdler, Robert E. White, the ambassador in El Salvador, was summarily fired; Lawrence A. Pezzullo, the ambassador in Nicaragua, was farmed out to a university as a diplomat in residence and retired shortly afterward; George W. Landau, who had been slated to become ambassador in Guatemala with a mandate to take a tough line toward the military dictatorship then in power, saw his nomination put on permanent hold. (Landau later was made ambassador to Venezuela.)

Here, John A. Bushnell, who had been Bowdler's principal deputy, was blackballed by the White House for an ambassadorial appointment and, after a year in limbo, finally was sent to Argentina as deputy chief of mission. An even more distant exile was decreed for James R. Cheek, Bowdler's deputy for Central America, who was appointed deputy chief of mission in Katmandu, Nepal.

Haig took office with frankly radical plans—described in his memoirs—for defeating the left in Central America. To implement his policies, Haig picked a group of career diplomats known for their energy and ambition rather than their knowledge of the region.

To replace Bowdler as assistant secretary, the administration chose Thomas O. Enders, who had held a succession of top ambassadorial and policy posts, none related to Central America. Enders had been deputy head of the U.S. Embassy in Cambodia at the height of the involvement in Southeast Asia. And many of those who worked with him on Central America had experience in Indochina during the Vietnam war.

Enders, the first of three men to head the bureau under Reagan, came to doubt the plausibility of a mil-

itary solution to the Nicaragua question; he was resigned because hard-line Reaganites regarded him as lacking sufficient commitment. By contrast, the current assistant secretary, Elliott Abrams, a political appointee, is a conservative Reaganite closely identified with support of the contra program.

Last fall, Abrams fired a highly experienced career diplomat, John A. Ferch, as ambassador to Honduras because he allegedly was insufficiently zealous in supporting contra operations from that country. More recently, Francis J. McNeill, one of the Foreign Service's most respected Latin America hands, retired as the State Department's deputy director of intelligence after charging that his analyses of weaknesses in the contra program had led Abrams to question his loyalty.

Instead of area experts, the administration has tended to rely in Central America on Foreign Service officers with reputations as good generalists willing to follow orders and not raise troubling questions. These have included senior diplomats such as Deane R. Hinton and Thomas R. Pickering, both career ambassadors at the peak of the service. Each served a hitch as ambassador to El Salvador.

More typical of the type of Foreign Service officers who came to be associated with Central America in this period were John D. Negroponete, who, as ambassador to Honduras before Ferch, was the on-scene overseer of contra activities, and L. Craig Johnstone, who served successively as director of Central American affairs and deputy assistant secretary for Central America.

Both were diplomatic veterans of South Vietnam who had come to the attention of senior officers there as take-charge types. After moving into Central American affairs, they acquired reputations for acting with abrasive disregard for Latin American sensibilities or the cautions of domestic American critics. Negroponete, in particular, stirred controversy by allying himself with those conservatives in Congress who are the strongest supporters of the contras and by criticizing U.S. diplomats whose reports differed from his assessments.

Disagreement on Latin American Policy

However, while the administration has found many officers such as Negroponete willing to pursue its Central America policy with enthusiasm, very few have come from the department's experts on the region. It is an open secret throughout the State Department that the majority of old Latin American hands privately disagree with much of the rationale of administration policy. This group regards support of the contras as a policy that has little chance of achieving its stated objectives and one that may work against U.S. interests.

"By supporting the contras, we are pursuing a policy that gives Nicaragua a credible excuse for presenting itself as the aggrieved victim of American-supported military intervention, but that does not give the United States a credible vehicle for getting rid of the Sandinistas," one of these diplomats said.

Said another Foreign Service officer, concluding a tour of duty in Central America midway through the Reagan administration:

"It isn't embarrassing that the secretary of state doesn't know anything about Central America. And it is only moderately embarrassing that the assistant secretary doesn't know very much. But it is very bad when the deputy assistant secretaries and even the office directors know so little."

The fact that State Department experts can be so critical of a centerpiece of administration foreign policy suggests why Foreign Service morale is so low and explains why the White House is so suspicious of the career diplomatic service it inherited.

NEXT: Experts or generalists?

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AMERICA'S FADING FOREIGN SERVICE

Second of a Four-Part Series

Tradition Bows To the Demand for Management Skills

By John M. Goshko
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When Loy W. Henderson died last year at the age of 93, the news stirred only the faintest echoes at the State Department, from which he had been retired for almost 30 years. Younger members of the Foreign Service were aware of him only as a ghost from an earlier time whose name adorns the cavernous room where secretaries of state now hold their news conferences.

Few were aware that almost 50 years ago, Henderson helped set the stage for what is currently a matter of anguished controversy within the Foreign Service. It is a debate about whether the demands of diplomacy can best be served by training officers in management techniques or in the specialized expertise—knowledge of the language, culture, politics and economics of a country or a region—that was once considered the most important attribute of a professional diplomat.

One officer, who asked not to be identified, cited as an example of "how not to get ahead under the currently fashionable rules for promotion" the 15 years he has spent concentrating on West European affairs and learning to speak fluent German and French. He said:

"The question facing those of us who now are a rung below senior rank is whether you want to really know an area and be able to operate in it with ease or whether you want an a la carte career where you dabble in many different areas on the theory that you're learning to be a manager. Now to concentrate on a specific area is a recipe for not getting promoted."

This is a far cry from the days when Henderson played a leading role in establishing the principle that depth of area expertise should be the major standard for judging a Foreign Service officer's qualifications.

In the early 1930s, Henderson, then in charge of the State Department's Soviet section, was instrumental in recruiting a group of 14 promising young officers for intensive training in the Russian language and Soviet affairs.

Only a few survived the grueling regimen. But those who did—among them George F. Kennan, Charles E. Bohlen and Llewellyn E. Thompson—went on to form the cadre of diplomats who skillfully managed U.S. policy to-

ward Moscow during the superpower confrontations of the postwar era.

Their accomplishments are still remembered as one of the prouder chapters in the history of American diplomacy, and are frequently cited by contemporary diplomats as an example of the Foreign Service at its best.

But the idea that diplomatic professionalism is synonymous with expertise has come under increasing challenge from a new generation of management-oriented officials. They argue that a diplomat who is a brilliant linguist or political or economic analyst will not necessarily be equally effective as an ambassador or assistant secretary.

Streamlining the Senior Officer Corps

The clash between these two points of view has been exacerbated by the Foreign Service Act of 1980, adopted by Congress to streamline the service by eliminating what was considered an excess of senior officers. The idea was to give the Foreign Service the equivalent of the armed forces' rigid up-or-out promotion system, which enables competent officers to serve for about 20 years, but allows only a select few to stay longer and earn a general's or an admiral's stars.

The law means that many Foreign Service officers, who previously could serve until age 60 or 65, now are being forced into involuntary retirement in their late 40s or early 50s. Under the complex new rules, an officer has roughly 20 years to advance through the ranks and win promotion into the Senior Foreign Service. Those who do not make it after a certain number of tries—a process that Ronald I. Spiers, undersecretary of state for management, calls "sudden death overtime"—must retire.

At present, the service's most experienced mid-level diplomats are being pushed out at the rate of about 100 a year. While this figure will begin to fall next year, the wrenching dislocations caused by the new system have created a severe morale problem in Foggy Bottom.

Two weeks ago, the White House announced with great fanfare that the United States and six other major industrial countries had reached an agreement to limit the threat of nuclear war by putting stricter controls on the export of missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

The U.S. team that spent four years negotiating the agreement was headed by William H. Gussman, 53, of the State Department's politico-military affairs bureau. While Gussman was deeply immersed in the talks that produced what some senior administration officials called "the most significant nonproliferation agreement of the past decade," he was notified that he had not been promoted and would have to retire later this year.

Thomas F. O'Herron, 47, has devoted 10 of the 21 years he has spent in the Foreign Service to working on international trade questions; he is considered one of the State Department's most knowledgeable experts on the subject. Yet, at a time when trade issues are moving to the top of America's foreign policy agenda, O'Herron is being pushed into retirement.

Continued

"I can't afford to miss any paychecks," said O'Herron, who has three children in college. "Two of my daughters are at Bryn Mawr, where the tuition, room and board for each next year will be \$17,000. So the retirement pay I'll be getting—about \$25,000 a year—doesn't allow me to sit back and relax."

O'Herron, who is a lawyer, feels confident that he can parlay his trade expertise into a law practice. But, he added, "While I don't anticipate any financial hardship, it's likely to be very different for the other guys who are pushing 50 and who have degrees in political theory or Italian literature. Only so many can go into consulting. A lot of the others are going to be scrambling to teach high school."

In belated recognition of this fact, the State Department now is advising younger Foreign Service members to cultivate a second career in their spare time so they will have some way of paying their mortgage and tuition bill if they do not clear the promotion barrier when they reach their mid-40s.

"Our personnel system makes it more difficult to develop and retain our best and brightest," said Gerald Lamberty, president of the American Foreign Service Association, the official representative of the diplomats. "The nation will see an uneasy bleeding of our foreign expertise at a time when it is more than ever needed. Those who have acquired it will be gone, and younger officers will be unwilling to risk their promotion prospects by taking nonmanagerial assignments."

Many of the service's most talented people have been reluctant to accept assignments as political or economic counselors in key capitals such as Moscow, Paris, Manila or Mexico City, even though these are posts of great importance to the mainstream interests of American diplomacy and formerly were regarded as the glamorous, fast-track routes toward an ambassadorship. Filling these jobs takes months of pressuring and cajoling reluctant officers.

But the department now is having similar problems in attracting applicants for the job of deputy economic counselor in Tokyo and the top economic posts at the American embassies in South Korea, Argentina and Venezuela.

Instead, ambitious diplomats are in a cutthroat competition to become a deputy chief of mission at embassies in the smaller, diplomatic backwaters of the Third World. Impelling them is the near hysterical conviction sweeping through the Foreign Service that an officer who does not have "managerial experience" noted in his personnel file cannot be promoted.

According to department officials, in the cycle of reassignments that began last November, 80 officers applied for the deputy chief of mission job in the Bahamas.

Younger officers fear that their promotion chances will be jeopardized if they undertake the multiyear commitment required for specialized study of difficult languages. A recent internal study by Monteaegle Stearns, a former ambassador to Greece, concluded that the State Department faces a critical shortage of diplomats with fluency in Russian, Arabic, Chinese and Japanese and is doing very little in its promotion and assignment policies to encourage younger officers to fill the void.

Lamberty noted that nearly half of the almost 200 officers facing their last chance for promotion in 1986 and 1987 had the department's highest levels of language skills. He said eight spoke Russian, seven Chinese, six Japanese, six Arabic, seven Indonesian; 19 have various East European languages other than Russian; eight speak Vietnamese, three Turkish, three Hindi, four Greek, two Farsi, two Swahili, two Swedish, and others are fluent in Hebrew, Somali, Burmese, Lao, Malay, Afrikaans, Cambodian and Dari, a local language of Afghanistan.

The Need for Managerial Talent

Spiers and his boss, Secretary of State George P. Shultz, make no secret of their belief that seeking people with managerial talent for the department's top jobs is the correct course. One justification for this is the fact that diplomacy in the postwar era has become so complex that many of its specialized functions are handled not by the State Department but by the many other agencies such as the Defense and Treasury departments and the Central Intelligence Agency.

In the typical American embassy today, less than 30 percent of the personnel belong to the State Department. As a result, proponents of the managerial approach argue, an ambassador's real task is to gain control over the staff and ensure that it works together harmoniously.

David D. Newsom, who during the Carter administration was undersecretary for political affairs, the department's highest career post, summed up the situation this way:

"When an ambassador goes abroad, he carries a letter designating him as the president's personal representative in the country to which he is accredited. But the letter is not an invitation to command. The experienced diplomat knows that the letter is only an invitation to negotiate with the other agencies that have a toehold in his embassy."

Spiers noted that he has seen the situation from both sides. After years of specializing in arms control, he served as ambassador to Turkey and later to Pakistan. Reflecting on these experiences, he said:

"There are many jobs—deputy assistant secretaries, office directors, economic and intelligence analysts—where you want specialists. Similarly, there always will be a role at the senior level for people who are deep specialists in critical languages. In the light of the Stearns report, we are allowing younger officers who want to study the hard languages to forgo some normal assignment requirements so they will have more time for study.

"But there comes a transitional or break point where something else is needed. We used to choose ambassadors almost exclusively from political officers, and most couldn't manage their way out of a paper bag. It forced us to realize that ambassadors and assistant secretaries should not necessarily be specialists. No one is going to become our ambassador in Tokyo simply because he speaks excellent Japanese. That's more important for the political counselor than for the ambassador.

"When I went to Turkey, I didn't know three words of Turkish. It would have been better if I did. But that wasn't the main job requirement. I had maybe 14 subordinates who could speak Turkish for me. My job was to sort out a big mission—one that had major non-State Department func-

tions like a huge military assistance program and a huge narcotics control program—and see that the various parts did their jobs without getting at each other's throats."

Other senior diplomats, while acknowledging that there is some merit in Spiers' arguments, still are concerned that the pendulum might be swinging too far. Stearns, currently a diplomat in residence at the Woodrow Wilson Center of the Smithsonian Institution, said:

"Embassies are too big today for ambassadors to be able to ignore their management responsibilities and busy themselves with being scholars of the local culture. Still, the one thing an ambassador can supply to the U.S. government that no one else can is a sense of the foreign environment in which U.S. policy initiatives must function. That requires a very high degree of sensitivity to the country and a profound knowledge of the country in all its aspects."

"Ideally an ambassador should be both a manager and an expert," added John D. Scanlan, an East European and Soviet specialist who currently is ambassador to Yugoslavia. "But if I had to choose between the two qualities, I'd pick the one with substantive knowledge and leave the management to a good DCM [deputy chief of mission]. I wouldn't want a superb manager who doesn't know much about the country. In the countries I've served in—particularly in Eastern Europe—an ambassador like that wouldn't be of much use."

Another former ambassador still serving in the department put his criticism of the managers-first philosophy more bluntly. "It's a lot of crap," he said.

Those who prefer senior officers who are managers or at least good generalists also contend that specialization can create problems of excessive parochialism. In that respect, they say, the later career of Loy Henderson is instructive.

Henderson was nudged out of Soviet affairs during World War II when President Roosevelt, seeking to deflect Moscow's complaints about Henderson's tough, anti-Soviet attitudes, made him the U.S. minister to Iraq. The resilient Henderson quickly became the dominant figure in what would grow into the Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs; and under his leadership, it developed qualities that illustrate both the strengths and weaknesses of area specialization.

Under Henderson, the bureau became the domain of the department's Arabists—a term that originally applied to Arabic-speaking officers, but that took on other meanings when Israel came into being in 1948. The Mideast specialists led by Henderson pushed the department into such open opposition to creation of a Jewish state that President Truman was forced to repudiate it.

For years afterward, long after support for Israel had become a major tenet of bipartisan national policy, the bureau continued to be dominated by officers who insisted that Israel was a detriment to U.S. interests and had no right to exist. Although such views no longer are heard in the bureau, because of its earlier reputation it remains the object of lingering suspicion among Israel's supporters.

Many officers feel that the 1980 act's emphasis on preventing an oversupply of senior diplomats frustrates efforts to accommodate the talents of both specialists and generalists.

Spiers said, "If a man is performing capably at the level of a first secretary of embassy, I'd like to see him be able to stay and keep working at that rank." But, he added, it is unrealistic for the For-

eign Service to expect that Congress, at a time of extreme budgetary austerity, will back away from its insistence that the service slim down and end the old system that frequently resulted in unpromoted senior officers becoming so-called "corridor walkers" looking for something to do.

Yet, despite these realities, there is no question that the present emphasis on a stripped-down, management-oriented Foreign Service threatens to deprive the department of some precious assets.

Nowhere has the decline in expertise been more evident than in Soviet affairs. In marked contrast to the postwar era, the Reagan administration has spent six years dealing with Moscow without one top-flight Soviet expert at the senior levels of the State Department.

On the Soviet side, political leaders long have relied on their professional diplomatic corps to produce personnel whose influence on policy has been far greater than that of any career diplomat in this country. This is particularly true in regard to relations with the United States.

Andrei Gromyko's three-decade career as Soviet foreign minister followed considerable firsthand American experience in Washington and at the United Nations. Anatoliy Dobrynin, whose 24 years as ambassador here gave him legendary access to the Washington establishment, now serves at the pinnacle of power in Moscow, and appears to be Mikhail Gorbachev's most important adviser on the United States. Alexander Bessmertnykh, a former Dobrynin deputy here, appears to have a similar status in relation to Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze.

By contrast, both Ambassador Arthur A. Hartman, who recently left Moscow after a five-year stint, and Rozanne L. Ridgway, the assistant secretary for European affairs, are highly regarded diplomats of the generalist stripe; but they have had to deal with the Soviet Union on a learn-as-you-go basis.

Hartman has now been succeeded in Moscow by the department's most senior Soviet specialist, Jack Matlock, 57, who has spent most of his career working on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Matlock is a fluent Russian speaker and scholar of Russian literature.

In seeking help from a Foreign Service that currently is thin in Soviet experts, they and Shultz have had to lean heavily on two up-and-coming but relatively junior officers: Thomas W. Simons Jr., 48, Ridgway's deputy for Eastern Europe, and Mark R. Parris, 36, director of Soviet affairs.

Simons, who holds a BA from Yale and an MA and PhD from Harvard, has been a political officer in Poland and the Soviet Union. In his State Department records, he lists Polish but not Russian among the languages in which he has at least reasonable fluency. However, other officials say that he is able to converse easily in Russian and works regularly to improve his proficiency. Parris, who served in Moscow from 1982 to 1985, ending his tour as political counselor, is considered to have a good command of Russian.

Both are regarded by their colleagues as able officers who are expected to rise much higher in the department hierarchy. But at this point they cannot represent the State Department with the authority that a Thompson, Kennan or Bohlen once were able to bring to internal administration policy debates about the superpower relationship that is the principal concern of U.S. diplomacy.

NEXT: Underqualified ambassadors

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AMERICA'S FADING FOREIGN SERVICE

Third of a Four-Part Series

Appointing Loyalists As Envoys

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Early last year, Peter E. Voss, then vice chairman of the U.S. Postal Service Board of Governors, decided that he wanted to be an ambassador, and obliging White House officials, after scanning the list of pleasant European capitals, told the State Department that they thought the Netherlands was a country well-suited to Voss' ambitions.

The department protested that Voss, who was cochairman of Ronald Reagan's 1980 Ohio campaign, didn't have the best qualifications for representing the United States in a country where it has important strategic and trade interests. But the White House rejected these protests and proceeded with its plan to nominate Voss for the ambassadorship—until it was discovered that Voss had a prior engagement with a federal judge.

Last May, a major probe of Postal Service contracting illegalities resulted in Voss pleading guilty to charges of expense fraud and accepting kickbacks. He was sentenced to four years in prison and fined \$11,000.

Until now, the administration has managed to keep quiet the fact that it almost sent a soon-to-be-convicted felon to represent the United States in an important West European capital. But the incident illustrates what has become an increasingly contentious issue within the Foreign Service.

That is the feeling that the Reagan White House has abused its prerogative to name the president's ambassadors by filling 40 percent of the nation's 148 diplomatic missions around the world with political loyalists rather than career diplomats.

Foreign Service officers contend that the White House has unfairly blocked deserving professionals from promotion and devalued the quality of U.S. overseas representation.

The Voss case was not an isolated incident. Within days of his guilty plea, the administration was embarrassed by the forced resignation of William A. Wilson, a political appointee who had been serving as Reagan's emissary to the Vatican. Wilson left after it was revealed that he had engaged in a number of bizarre indiscretions, including a secret 1985 meeting with Libyan lead-

er Moammar Gadhafi at the time the administration was pressuring its European allies to isolate Libya.

Sources familiar with the case said that for reasons never made clear, Wilson, a former oil company executive and longtime friend of Reagan, repeatedly ignored direct orders from superiors in Washington to break off unauthorized contacts with Libyan officials. Instead, they said, he apparently exploited his relationship with Reagan to mislead Italian Foreign Minister Giulio Andreotti into thinking that the White House wanted the Italian government's help in arranging the meeting with Gadhafi.

Another well-connected Reagan loyalist, Faith Ryan Whittlesey, fared somewhat better. She has held on to her post as ambassador to Switzerland, but only after Attorney General Edwin Meese III decided there wasn't sufficient evidence to pursue a criminal investigation of charges that she misused an \$80,000 embassy fund raised from private donors and hired the son of one donor for a \$62,400-a-year job at the Bern embassy.

The Whittlesey case forced Secretary of State George P. Shultz to decree a ban on future solicitation and use of privately donated funds to cover embassy expenses such as entertaining.

Not all of Reagan's political ambassadors have been embarrassments, of course. Some have performed competently, and at least one—Arthur F. Burns, former chairman of the Federal Reserve Board—won high marks from professional diplomats for his skillful representation of the United States during four years in West Germany.

Tradition of Noncareer Appointments

Appointees whose qualifications are limited to their connections or the size of their election contributions are not a phenomenon unique to the Reagan administration. Former president Jimmy Carter, who made a special effort to appoint ambassadors of distinction and set up a special review panel to assess their credentials, reserved a number of embassies for Georgia cronies and people who had been generous to his campaign.

wear and a willingness to use it have long helped would-be ambassadors win appointments. So have political connections. For example, Julian M. Niemczyk, the ambassador to Czechoslovakia, is a former head of the "ethnic" division of the Republican National Committee and a retired Army officer. To the dismay of the Foreign Service, the White House picked him ahead of Saul Polansky, one of the State Department's most senior and most respected specialists on central and east-European Europe.

Many political appointees have been content to enjoy the ambassadorial life and leave the diplomatic work to their Foreign Service subordinates. However, the Reagan administration also has been noted for a goodly number of political ambassadors who have seemed surprised that the countries to which they are accredited don't do things according to Reaganite precepts and who have not shrunk from publicly scolding foreign governments about perceived shortcomings.

A number of ambassadors over the past six years—among them John A. Gavin in Mexico, Evan G. Galbraith in France, Paul H. Robinson Jr. in Canada, Curtin Winsor Jr. in Costa Rica and David B. Funderburk in Romania—have spent much of their time in noisy feuds with the press and officialdom of their host countries and, when Washington tried to rein them in, with their State Department superiors.

Winsor, a business consultant who served for a time in the Foreign Service, became known among Costa Ricans as "the cancer specialist" because of his constant denunciations of the leftist government in neighboring Nicaragua as "a cancer" that should be excised by military intervention.

In October 1983, when the administration was weighing whether to invade Grenada, it wanted to know if the action would be supported by other island states of the eastern Caribbean. However, the ambassador to Barbados and the neighboring islands, Milan D. Bish, a former Nebraska state highway commissioner, was regarded—as one official who took part in the planning put it—as "so incoherent and befuddled" that neither the State Department nor the Pentagon was willing to depend on him. So Shultz sent a veteran career diplomat, Francis J. McNeil, on a secret mission to sound out the views of regional leaders.

A year earlier, when the South Atlantic war broke out between Argentina and Britain, Reagan's first ambassador to London, John J. Louis Jr., a Johnson's Wax heir, was traveling in the United States. According to several State Department officials, the department, whose initial inclination was to order him back to his post immediately, was reminded that Louis was regarded by the British as an amiable but utterly ineffectual diplomat. On reflection, the officials said, it was decided that the wiser course was to keep Louis out of London until the crisis had wound down, leaving the diplomacy to his highly regarded deputy chief of mission, career diplomat Edward J. Streater Jr.

In the past, such situations would cause career officers to do little more than grit their teeth and privately remind each other of the famous Foreign Service story about Malcolm Toon, an outspoken retired ambassador who, commenting on Louis' nomination as ambassador to Britain, described him as a man "whose only qualification for the job is the fact that he speaks English."

During a meeting several years ago, the admiral commanding the U.S. Mediterranean fleet told Toon that he wanted to become an ambassador after he retired from the Navy. Toon shot back that after his retirement from the Foreign Service, he wanted to command an aircraft carrier.

The admiral said that was ridiculous, because years of training and experience were necessary to acquire

To which Toon replied: "That's how it is with an embassy."

Last November, Ronald I. Spiers, undersecretary of state for management, provoked the ire of the White House staff by making the same point in an unusually blunt speech to the National Academy of Public Administration.

Spiers noted that since 1981, when 75 percent of U.S. ambassadors were career diplomats, the figure had fallen to 60 percent. He added:

"This is a low point for the past four decades. A net reduction of 23 senior positions filled by career personnel since 1981 makes managing the Foreign Service difficult indeed Recently we have lost a number of superb officers who spent a lifetime preparing for senior appointments, only to see those prospects dissolve at the last minute."

He charged that the quality of many administration political appointees "makes it painful to recognize the lack of respect this implies for our profession" and concluded:

"A disturbing trend is the use of Foreign Service positions for political patronage. I believe this will have a corrosive effect on the career service. Years ago, generals were commissioned on this basis. No one today would argue for appointing a political supporter to command the 24th Infantry Division, although in peaceful times, and with a good deputy, the division would probably survive as well as our embassies."

Elaborating later in an interview, Spiers said: "The White House has made clear that they don't want me talking about this, but it's not really possible to run a rational career personnel system when you don't know how many top jobs will be available for officers to aspire to. I'd almost rather be told that the Foreign Service will get only a flat 50 percent of ambassadorial appointments. Then you'd at least have some parameters to work within."

"I have 25 ambassadors coming up for reassignment this summer—all of them good people and no jobs for them because 23 more senior positions in the department and abroad are being held by outside political appointments than was the case in January 1981," he said. "The blockage that this creates has a cascade effect down the ranks that's not helpful to retaining younger officers who see a likelihood that their career aspirations will be blocked."

Robert Tuttle, White House personnel director, denied that the Reagan administration had appointed unqualified persons to ambassadorships and insisted that many of the president's political appointees are fluent in foreign languages and have extensive knowledge of the countries to which they are accredited.

"This administration came to Washington to make a difference, and it has been extraordinarily successful in coming up with people who are extremely well qualified to be ambassadors," he said. "They got their jobs because they are qualified and not because they are friends of the president. There are people outside the Foreign Service who know about foreign affairs, and it's not right to infer that appointment of a few well-qualified outsiders should be a cause of poor morale in the Foreign Service."

Americans have been arguing about what makes a good ambassador since 1778, when Benjamin Franklin was dispatched to the French court to enlist the aid that became a major factor in helping the rebellious colonies win independence.

Franklin was the progenitor of a long line of inspired amateurs whose diplomatic skills have been displayed most notably in recent years by men such as W. Averell Harriman, David K.E. Bruce and Ellsworth Bunker—all outsiders who came to be accepted by the career service as revered figures in the pantheon of American diplomatic history.

In the postwar era, the slimmest pickings for career diplomats before the Reagan administration were in the early 1960s when John F. Kennedy, who had limited regard for the Foreign Service, sought to infuse overseas embassies with new blood from academic and journalistic circles.

But while career officers resented what Kennedy did, they grudgingly acknowledge that many of his outside appointees—academicians such as Edwin O. Reischauer in Japan and former diplomats such as George F. Kennan in Yugoslavia—had impressive foreign policy credentials. The difference between then and now, they add, is that the same can't be said for most of Reagan's choices.

Distrust of the Establishment

"This administration has been very atypical both in terms of the number of political appointments it has made and its tendency to keep them on long past the point where other administrations would have sent them back to their old jobs," said Diego C. Asencio, a retired diplomat who heads the Una Chapman Cox Foundation, which is devoted to strengthening the Foreign Service.

"It even is atypical in terms of Republican administrations," Asencio added. "Its appointees are not the old eastern establishment Republicans with which the Foreign Service has been accustomed to working, but people with a radical distrust of the eastern establishment and of the Foreign Service."

Career officers who worked under Whittlesey during her two separate tours at the embassy in Switzerland say her problems resulted from what one privately called "a feeling of paranoia that she was surrounded by liberals who were out to get her. If you wrote her a speech on the most innocuous subject, she'd go over every line looking for Marxist influences. She honestly believed that there was no one she could trust except those people she brought into the embassy from outside."

Such suspicions are common among "movement conservatives" who, despite Reagan's hard-line policies, have waged an unrelenting war against the State Department throughout his presidency. The activist part of that campaign has been led most noticeably by Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), who has delayed Senate approval of scores of Reagan's ambassadorial and departmental nominees in an effort to force more conservative appointments.

In return, 22 of Reagan's politically appointed ambassadors publicly endorsed Helms for reelection to the Senate in 1984, an unprecedented public gesture that caused Shultz to send a cable to all embassies stating that partisan political activity was inappropriate for American ambassadors.

Many intellectual underpinnings of the Helms campaign come from the Heritage Foundation, the conservative think tank whose theories have greatly influenced Reagan's domestic policies.

Foundation analysts concede that they have had much less success in winning serious attention for their foreign policy ideas—for example, a proposal by James T. Hackett, a former Foreign Service officer, to fill all State Department policy-making positions with political appointees who share the president's "philosophy and objectives" rather than career diplomats "who often have little or no commitment to the political philosophy of his party."

But if Shultz has kept most aspects of foreign policy on a course that is more centrist and pragmatic than the ideologues want, he has had to pay a price by accepting what George S. Vest, director general of the Foreign Service, calls "the larger political role inserted into the system by this administration."

Secretary of State's Limited Power

So Shultz has not fought the White House insistence on retaining a large number of ambassadorships as patronage plums. He has generally accepted the tendency of many political appointees to think of themselves as representatives of the president rather than subordinates of the secretary of state.

Usually, when one of these ambassadors has become too difficult to control—when a Funderburk denounces as hypocritical the State Department's tendency to soft-pedal the dictatorial practices of Romania's communist regime or when a Galbraith publicly lectures France's socialist government—Shultz has managed over time to ease them back into private life.

However, as John Gavin's five-year tenure at the embassy in Mexico City made clear, Shultz has had to maintain a well-developed instinct about which political ambassadors he could and couldn't fire.

When Gavin went to Mexico in 1981, he was known, like Reagan at an earlier time, primarily as a former grade-B movie actor. The Mexican press sarcastically suggested that an appropriate response would be to send Cantinflas, the comedian who gained international fame in the film "Around the World in 80 Days," as Mexico's ambassador to Washington.

But Gavin did have some qualifications. He spoke near-perfect Spanish learned from his Mexican-born mother, had majored in Latin American economics and history at Stanford and, having worked in Mexico as an actor and businessman, had extensive first-hand knowledge of the country.

More important, he was a close friend of Reagan and of William P. Clark, who served for a time as Reagan's national security adviser. That meant Gavin knew Reagan's political views intimately and, unlike many other ambassadors, had the clout to bypass normal State Department channels and take a problem directly to the White House.

Yet, once he got on the job, Gavin frequently seemed intent on trying to break all the rules of diplomacy by ignoring State Department objections and engaging in name-calling feuds with key officials of Mexico's left-of-center government.

By the time he left in 1985, Gavin often was cited by conservatives as a model political ambassador. In particular, his admirers applauded his pugnacious determination to respond in kind to every Mexican criticism of the United States and to keep matters such as the fight against narcotics trafficking at the top of the Mexican-American agenda.

He was able to do these things, his supporters argue, because he was not a career diplomat concerned with smoothing the sharp edges of policies and messages the Mexicans might not like. Instead, they say, as a certified Reaganite with ties to the inner White House circle, he was able to give the Mexicans a first-hand look at the president's attitudes toward their country.

Nevertheless, a story told in Mexico City indicates that the Mexicans didn't particularly appreciate the experience. At a dinner before his departure, Gavin made a graceful farewell speech. But according to the story, when it came time for a response, the remarks in praise of Gavin came not from the senior Mexican officials present but from Cantinflas—a sign that the Mexicans hadn't changed their minds in the five years of his tenure about what would have been an appropriate exchange of diplomatic representation.

NEXT: Blacks and Women

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29 April 1987**AMERICA'S FADING FOREIGN SERVICE**

Last of a Four-Part Series

Tackling a White Male BastionBy John M. Goshko
Washington Post Staff Writer

Yvonne Thayer probably could write the book on what it is like to be a Foreign Service wife: It is a way of life that she's seen from every angle.

In the early 1970s, while in Brazil on a graduate fellowship, she married Randolph Reed, a Foreign Service officer at the U.S. Embassy in Rio de Janeiro, and settled into the routine that long was the traditional lot of a diplomat's dependent wife—balancing the management of a household with the social functions and charitable work expected of every spouse.

Then, in the mid-1970s, Thayer was accepted into the Foreign Service herself and became half of what the State Department calls a "tandem couple." For 10 years, she grappled with the conflicting demands of pursuing a career while seeking assignments that would take her to the same places as her husband and allow time out to have and care for two children.

Now the cycle has come full circle for Thayer. Her husband is one of many career diplomats who failed to cross the new hurdles into the Senior Foreign Service and are being forced into retirement. While Reed ponders the problems of developing a new career.

Thayer, at 39, is a Foreign Service officer with a dependent spouse.

"It's not the kind of situation where you're thinking about becoming an ambassador or even about less ambitious career moves," said Thayer, who currently works on Central American refugee problems. "My husband's pension annuity is not all that great, and right now our plans involve more immediate matters: making sure that I keep working so that we have an income."

George E. Moose, 42, has spent the last 20 years—his entire adult life—in the Foreign Service. This is unusual in an organization in which blacks like Moose normally do not stay long. Even more unusual is the fact that Moose has been an ambassador. It was only a

beginner's posting to the tiny West African state of Benin, but his colleagues seem certain that Moose is destined to hold big-time ambassadorships and senior State Department posts in the years ahead.

"George has been marked as a winner; he's on his way," said Donald F. McHenry, who served as ambassador to the United Nations in the Carter administration.

Moose is understandably reluctant to discuss his situation. But he did say that many of the breaks that came his way have been denied to other blacks "not because of any conscious racism but by the natural workings of a system that is instinctively clubby for people of similar backgrounds and simultaneously so competitive that it doesn't dispose them to be generous or concerned for people outside their little group."

"It's a system that makes blacks feel like outsiders—like they are being isolated and looked down upon," he said. "So it should come as no surprise when so many blacks finally say, 'This is costing me too much in terms of the wear and tear on my psyche. I'd rather go elsewhere.'"

Finding ways to satisfy the professional needs of women and minorities is an enormous challenge to the Foreign Service, one it has only begun to try to meet. Senior diplomats—products of simpler times, when most women had limited career ambitions and minorities were rarely members of the Foreign Service—have had a difficult time taking the challenge seriously, according to many younger diplomats.

The case of Eleanor Hicks, 44, is instructive. She walked away from a promising Foreign Service career—a surprise and disappointment to many who remember that only a short time ago Hicks seemed a living recruitment poster for a new type of American diplomat: an attractive, charming and brainy person who also was a woman and a black.

In the 1970s, while serving as U.S. consul in Nice, she became a celebrity. She was cultivated by the local establishment and doted on by the French news media, which ran countless reports about every aspect of her life from her fluency in languages to her after-hours fondness for singing with local rock groups.

Yet, in 1983, after 17 years in the Foreign Service, Hicks quit. She did so, she said, partly for personal reasons. But, she added, she also was influenced by a feeling that "political and philosophical differences were impinging on evaluations of my work—that the perceptions I brought to some subjects as a woman and a black clashed with the preconceived notions of some of my superiors."

"I can't say that I was discriminated against because I was a woman or black, but perhaps the publicity that I received in Europe caused some people to regard me as not a serious person," she said. In any case, having decided that she was at a dead end, Hicks went back to her home town of Cincinnati, where, as associate professor of political science at the University of Cincinnati, she has discovered that "there is life after the Foreign Service."

For most of this century, the Foreign Service was the province of what historians of U.S. diplomacy called "aristocratic amateurs"—socially well-connected people with the independent incomes that were necessary to supplement the service's parsimonious salaries and travel allowances. Gradually, a more professional approach took hold, but as late as the eve of World War II, the Foreign Service was dominated by people who shared the narrow caste attitudes of the Protestant monied class.

The tendency of its members to regard the service as a "gentlemen's club" was evident in the way in which the oral exam taken by all candidates for admission was used for years as a device for screening out applicants regarded as socially unacceptable. It was applied with particular vigor to bar the entry of Jews.

Anti-Semitism was such a pervasively undisguised force in the Foreign Service during the prewar years that several historians have ascribed part of the blame

for the Holocaust to the State Department's wartime soft-pedaling of rumors about Nazi atrocities and its opposition to permitting Jewish refugees to enter the United States in sizable numbers.

After the war, the Foreign Service increased its size and professionalism in response to America's new superpower status. Jews and other ethnic Americans began coming in, and recruiters started looking beyond the Ivy League in their search for new talent. But, while the base was broadened, it remained essentially a white male bastion—one that as recently as the early 1970s was gripped by a major internal debate about whether a dependent wife's social graces should be noted on her husband's efficiency reports.

Phyllis Oakley, now the State Department's deputy spokeswoman, joined the service in 1957, but after marrying a fellow officer, she recalled, "I unquestioningly followed the unwritten rule that said I had to resign." It was not until the 1970s when this practice had been discarded that she was able to come back "as one of the oldest junior officers in captivity." Oakley said her "wilderness years" experiences in teaching and working with the YMCA "may have made me a better-rounded person, but they certainly didn't enhance my ability to compete with men who spent those years gaining first-hand experience as diplomats."

Recruitment: a Lack of Follow-Through

Beginning with blacks in the 1960s and women in the 1970s, the service has been struggling to break free of its ingrained old attitudes and make these groups feel welcome and useful to the practice of U.S. diplomacy. But, despite a resort to a number of special recruitment programs aimed at minorities and women, everyone involved says that the results have been disappointing.

The record is especially poor with respect to blacks, who are substantially underrepresented at all levels of the service and who account for a disproportionate

number of the officers who fail to achieve tenure after completing their probationary early years or who stand at the bottom of each promotion class. According to the most recent available figures, only 12 blacks are among the 670 members of the Senior Foreign Service.

The situation recently prompted Ronald I. Spiers, undersecretary of state for management, and George S. Vest, director general of the Foreign Service, to announce plans for more vigorous recruiting and "the application of real affirmative action in the assignment process."

Black officers, many of whom are reluctant to be identified, counter that they have heard it all before. As one put it, "Every few years there is a reinventing of the wheel that concludes more has to be done about the special problems of blacks. It's all well-intentioned and sincere, but because managers and administrations change so frequently, there never seems to be a sustained follow-through."

The sense of alienation among black Foreign Service officers is so strong that several recently filed a class-action suit charging the State Department with systematic racial discrimination. The suit voiced complaints that white officers tend to denigrate the skills of black subordinates because many of them entered the Foreign Service under the relaxed rules of special recruitment programs; that blacks are ghettoized by being assigned primarily to Africa and Latin American countries with large black populations; that they are denied postings to other regions such as the Middle East because of a feeling that "blacks are not effective there," and that, in domestic assignments, they are pushed by subtle discrimination patterns into jobs and bureaus that offer the fewest chances for advancement.

Many note that the few blacks who have attained important foreign policy positions usually came from the outside rather than rising through the ranks. The most notable case was McHenry, who began as a Foreign Service officer but who quit for a career as a think-tank scholar before being sent to the United Nations by President Jimmy Carter.

McHenry, now a professor at Georgetown University, said his experience illustrates "the need to teach young blacks how to build political alliances if they're

going to be on the outside and how to maneuver successfully within the bureaucracy if they're going to work from within."

"Too many blacks go to African affairs, either because they're interested in it or because the system pigeonholes them there," he said. "But it's the bottom priority. You may be a world-beater. But no one in authority sees you and gets to know your abilities."

Citing his Foreign Service background and that of younger, rising black officers such as Moose, McHenry said: "There is a classic success route in the Foreign Service. The way you get breaks is to be assigned while a young officer as a staff assistant to someone high up who will be sensitive to your talents. That happened to me. It happened to George Moose [who became an aide to Undersecretary of State Philip C. Habib]. It happened to almost all the successful white officers, and steps must be taken to assure that the opportunity is made available to a lot more blacks than just the occasional Don McHenry."

Continued

For all its difficulties, the department's minority problem seems relatively simple in comparison to the complications of regearing U.S. diplomatic practice to the changing situation of women, whether they are wives, Foreign Service officers or both.

There are the spouses of older officers who married when Foreign Service wives were expected to further their husband's careers by being gracious, well-spoken hostesses and charity workers. Now, these women have seen the rules abruptly changed in ways that make them feel scorned and unappreciated.

Their resentment has forced the State Department to explore ways of finding employment abroad for dependent spouses and to suggest that the government pay them a stipend for work formerly contributed on a volunteer basis. However, such ideas have evoked little sympathy from a Congress preoccupied with budgetary austerity or a public unwilling to pay people for participating in what it sees as the glamorous, black-tie whirl of diplomacy.

Then there are the female Foreign Service officers who, unlike blacks, have responded to the department's recruiting campaigns in large numbers. This has forced the department to deal with the same problems—equal advancement opportunities, sexual harassment and allegations of male chauvinism—that have become common personnel issues in business and the professions.

Problems of 'Tandem Couples'

But there also are situations unique to the service, such as accommodating the needs of tandem couples. As Yvonne Thayer noted:

"When problems or conflicts result, there still is an innate tendency to expect that the women will make the sacrifices. Everyone says they are all in favor of women having careers as diplomats. But when the kids get sick, it's automatically assumed that it's the wife and not the husband who will stay home and take care of them."

As couples rise in rank, it becomes much harder to match them with jobs commensurate with their grade and experience. To give them automatic preferences for job openings evokes charges of reverse discrimination from other aspirants. And, when one member of the couple achieves managerial rank, such as an ambassador or deputy chief of mission, federal laws and rules against nepotism bar their spouses from working under their control.

"The solutions that we can offer aren't very satisfactory," Vest said. "About all we can do in most cases is offer the couple assignments in adjoining countries or strike a deal where if one takes a leave of absence, he or she will be the one that gets first preference on the couple's next assignments."

Until now, most tandem couples have settled for such arrangements. When it sent Carleton Coon to Nepal and Jane Coon to Bangladesh, the Reagan administration was able to boast that it had set the precedent of the first husband-and-wife ambassadors from the career ranks to serve in neighboring countries.

But this approach is encountering increasing resistance from younger couples, who are more reluctant to endure forced separations or make choices about

whether to place marriage above career. Many say privately that if they find their advancement blocked by the need for one or the other to endure an involuntary leave, they will leave the service.

"There is no perfect answer for two people wanting interesting and mobile careers," said Sharon Weiner, who is beginning an assignment as Libya desk officer. "You always have to be willing to make compromises and to think a few moves ahead."

She and her husband have been doing that since they joined the service in 1978. She has a doctorate in international relations. He is a lawyer with a special interest in labor law. "We joined because we thought that diplomatic work would allow us to pursue our special interests and our desire to travel better than if he had gone into a law firm and I had stayed with my original intention to be a university teacher and researcher," she said.

"We have had no separations or situations where one of us had to take leave without pay," she said. "We expect that eventually there will come a time when we and the system will clash. But up to now, we haven't had to face it."

The most difficult personnel problem facing the Foreign Service, though, involves the growing number of wives who want to pursue careers outside the Foreign Service but who find they cannot make much of a career in the private sector if they must take frequent leaves of absence to accompany their husbands on assignments abroad. The increasing reluctance of working wives to follow their husbands abroad applies not only to undesirable Third World countries but also to once-coveted postings to the glamor capitals of Europe or key posts like Moscow and Peking.

In some cases, this has meant late-career problems for officers who have invested many years in the Foreign Service. James S. Landberg, 50, who has been deputy director of the office of Mexican affairs, must retire because he was not promoted into the Senior Foreign Service. He believes that his chances were hurt because he took several extensions of his service in Washington in order to accommodate his wife's career in real estate and local politics.

"I had several overseas opportunities that might have improved my promotion chances substantially," he said. "But I knew that my wife had become frustrated by living overseas where she couldn't work. In the early years of our marriage, she accommodated to my job needs. I felt that now I owed her the same. It came down to a question of whether my career or my marriage was more important."

Lawrence B. Lesser, 46, another of the group that did not win promotion, also found domestic problems clashing with his career aspirations. During his last assignment as deputy chief of mission at the U.S. Embassy in Bangladesh, his wife remained here.

"When we were married in the 1960s, she encouraged me to join the service," he said. "But over the years, our interests diverged. She is a painter and a teacher and wants to establish herself in the Washington area. So when I went to Dacca, she didn't accompany me. Now we are separated."

Continued

The specter of separation or divorce looms as an even bigger problem among younger officers who have grown up in an atmosphere in which the two-career marriage has become the accepted norm. This raises the stakes to the point at which the Foreign Service soon might find itself severely curtailed in its ability to recruit and retain the coming generation of potential diplomats. As one who asked not to be identified described the situation:

"My wife is a lawyer. Her attitude is that she didn't go to school for seven years to sit around in Quito or La Paz letting her skills go unused. The other wives, who have invested years in getting an MBA or an architecture degree or whatever, feel the same way. For me and for many other officers of my generation, it means that we very likely will have to choose between our marriage and our career—and we'll have to make that choice very soon while there's still time to do something else."