

SEPARATE AND UNEQUAL

BY HARRY CHAMBERLAIN

I enjoy working for the Department of State, and if I had it to do all over again I would still join. That said, here is a summary of the problems that specialists encounter as seen through my eyes over the past 13 years.

In my new-hire class in the hot summer of 1990 there were no punches pulled: we were being hired as specialists, not officers; and in many cases our privileges would be different. Officers, we were told, have contacts with their counterparts in the host governments, and thus need to be on the diplomatic list and have appropriate titles.

I have been in countries where this was indeed true, but it is the exceptions I have encountered that make me wonder if that is, in fact, the only reason, or if there is another, unspoken reason lurking in the background.

The Dip List Issue

My first assignment was as a Regional Information Management Center Communications Electronics Officer based in Abidjan. The RIMC director was on the Dip List, while the rest of us were on the administrative and technical staff. I didn't give any thought to this until one night the vehicle in which I was riding was stopped by the local police. I showed the officer my A&T ID cards, whereupon he loudly commented that I wasn't a diplomat and I had better pay his "fine."

In Africa, as in many other areas of the world I am sure, the A&T staff are the ones who are called into the office in the middle of the night during civil unrest to receive NIACT Immediate (top priority) cables from the department. We are the ones who have to get through the police

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and military roadblocks, sometimes with little more than our wits. There are many times when there would be hassle and danger regardless of the type of ID one has, but isn't it proper to provide the best protection possible?

While on the Information Management VIP program, I had occasion to visit a post that had a supervisory General Services Officer and three assistant GSOs. Two of the A/GSOs were officers and one was a specialist; guess which one wasn't on the Dip List! All the officers were on the Dip List, while all the specialists, including the Regional Security Officer — who probably had more contact with the host government than many of the officers — were excluded. So much for the criterion of host government contact.

In Ouagadougou everyone was on the Dip List, so there were no issues there. In Mexico City, only the Information Management Officer was on the Dip List, while all the other IM employees were on the A&T list. Fortunately, in Mexico the list you were on determined only which parties you were invited to.

But there can be severe financial penalties if you are not on the Dip List; often the reimbursement for the value-added tax, for instance, is wholly dependent on which list you are on.

A Zero-Sum Proposition?

Many people perceive the officer-specialist equation as a zero-sum affair: anything given to the specialist must come from the officers. It is my understanding that composition of the Dip List is a reciprocity issue stemming from a desire by Congress to limit the number of foreign diplomats on the diplomatic list in the United States.

Nonetheless, I believe all our people deserve the maximum protection and benefits in these perilous times. We are in the trenches and in many cases face genuine peril in our day-to-day encounters overseas. ■

THE VAGARIES OF THE DIP LIST CAN CREATE SERIOUS PROBLEMS FOR SPECIALISTS.
