

On Tuesday, April the 3rd, we, students of the French High school of Djibouti, had the honor to meet an American diplomat named Ian who enlightened us on his job. In a friendly and relaxed atmosphere, we discovered the many pros of a job like his but we were also warned about the qualifications it requires. In this presentation, I will first discuss diplomats in general using the American ones present in Djibouti as examples then I will focus on American embassies.

### **I- What is a diplomat?**

At first, Ian presented himself then vaguely explained, using a screen-projected power point, the very essence of a diplomat's job. He used the very popular parable of the blind men and the elephant to illustrate the basics of his job: to be a link between his home country and the country he's currently working in. In fact, he was lucky enough to travel all around the world: : Columbia, Cyprus, Ethiopia ...and now Djibouti!

However, as fun as that sounds, American diplomats here are also in charge of protecting the American citizens in Djibouti, of guaranteeing peace in Djibouti. And although the changes involving the current presidential administration in the United States do not affect diplomats directly -as they are apolitical-, the decisions taken by the current President have a significant impact on the negotiations led by them. These decisions can either speed things up such as the peace process in Columbia or on the contrary slow things down and lead to much greater tensions like in Jerusalem.

To avoid political chaos, we need people to negotiate and talk about the many stakes of the 21st century, we need people to find peaceful solutions to problems that sometimes have lasted up to a decade, we need patient people, and more importantly people who will handle the pressure and actually fix things overseas.

Those people are called diplomats.

### **II- What are the political powers of American embassies ?**

American embassies, handled by diplomats, are not just links between the United States of America and over 100 countries in the world, they also are an important place of power. Ian pointed out that if a major cultural event involving Americans takes place on the Djiboutian soil, the American embassy can inform the inhabitants back home in the United States. So in a way, American culture finds itself broadcasted all around the world through the embassies which therefore exercises a cultural power, commonly called soft power.

As for hard power, it is expressed through the military bases strategically put out in Djibouti, a politically stable country in a very insecure zone. In fact, Djibouti, contrary to its neighbors, is not linked to dictatorship or terrorist attacks which partly explains its diplomatic relationship with the US.

However, the case of Djibouti is not universal: the political relationships between the United States and the rest of the world can sometimes go awry and American embassies reflect these conflicts very well.

### **III- How do American embassies reflect the state of relationships between the US and the rest**

## **of the world?**

The political power that American embassies possess can find itself subjected to deep conflicts caused by decisions taken by the presidential administration. This was the case in Russia when several American diplomats were evicted because of tensions between the two countries. However, these embassies also reflect the good terms between nations: for instance, the all new American embassy in Jerusalem translates the good partnership between Israel and the United States, although the rest of world does not seem to agree with this particular decision. In a nutshell, since American embassies are led by American diplomats which rely on the decisions taken by the American president (a pretty significant ladder!) they reflect the state of relationships between the United States of America and the rest of the world. These relationships vary according to the political strategy of the current president.

All in all, American embassies hold a very significant amount of power, they are not just links between the US and the rest of the world, they're representative of the cultural, military and diplomatic power held by the US. Plus, they're an honest reflection of the state of relationships between the US and the world.

As for American diplomats, they are in charge of keeping it all smooth through negotiations, conference, events and so much more.