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A Diplomat at Work ^[1]

In his 1939 book *Diplomacy*, British statesman Sir Harold Nicolson defined his topic as the execution of a nation's foreign policy through negotiation. That is nicely concise, but perhaps too much so. During the nearly 80 years since Nicolson's book was published, the work of diplomacy has expanded and become much less insulated from the tumultuous context in which those who design and implement foreign policy must operate.

To get a sense of how modern diplomats do their jobs, I suggest you read *Outpost: Life on the Frontlines of American Diplomacy*, by Christopher R. Hill (Simon and Schuster, 2014). Hill served as U.S. ambassador to four countries and as a senior State Department official, and he is now dean of the Joseph Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver. As ambassador to Macedonia during the Kosovo war, Poland during that country's climb to democracy, South Korea during difficult talks with its northern neighbor, and Iraq as the United States was trying to determine how to extricate itself, Hill had to live foreign policy, not just ponder it.

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Some memoirs concentrate on self-promotion and score-settling, but Hill avoids the former and mostly eschews the latter. He focuses instead on the on-the-ground work of the diplomat, which may entail dangerous forays far beyond embassy walls. Hill's description of his work in Macedonia is a good example of this. He was involved in providing emergency assistance to thousands of Kosovar refugees as well as dealing with an attack on the U.S. embassy in Skopje. All the while, U.S. policy was in a state of flux and Hill needed to respond swiftly to political and military exigencies as they popped up all around him.

As for negotiating, Hill worked with one of the great masters of the craft, Richard Holbrooke, during the bloody and frustrating war in the former Yugoslavia. In this case, as in others that Hill describes in *Outpost*, diplomacy is not a genteel minuet but rather is a wrestling match between powerful adversaries.

What comes through with exceptional clarity in this book is Hill's concept of service. He did not always agree with the policies he was assigned to carry out, and his family life was often disrupted by professional demands. He nevertheless took on one assignment after another,

bringing courage and creativity to his responsibilities. Denigrating public servants is in vogue in some circles and ambassadorial appointments have too often become politicized, but after reading *Outpost* you will better understand why people such as Christopher Hill are so valuable to their country.
