

# Silent statecraft: The revocation of ambassadors as a diplomatic tool

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# Silent Statecraft

## The Revocation of Ambassadors as a Diplomatic Tool Olivia McCaffrey, MCAS International Studies 2017



### INTRODUCTION: WHY THE RECALL OF AMBASSADORS IS SIGNIFICANT

Ambassadors are an integral facet of diplomacy, and are therefore a potential pawn in nonverbal signal sending. If the revocation of ambassadors can be used to influence foreign countries, it can be used as a diplomatic tool. If, however, it is merely a response to a security threat or personal gaffe, it is reactionary rather than proactive and cannot be employed as a bargaining strategy.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Under what conditions do states recall their diplomats, and what do they hope to achieve by doing so?
- What proportion of diplomatic revocations are politically significant, and how can we measure this?

### METHODOLOGY

In answering Question 2, I compiled an extensive original dataset cataloguing 1,000 instances of diplomatic revocation into three levels of political significance:

Political Significance

#### Level 1 - High Political Significance

- Ambassador is recalled to send a strong external policy-related message
- Paired with at least one of the following: economic or military sanctions, war, or multilateral or comprehensive action

#### Level 2- Moderate Political Significance

- Ambassador is recalled to send a moderate political signal
- Stand-alone; unaccompanied by other avenues of persuasion

#### Level 3- Peripheral Political Significance

- Ambassador is recalled for internal or non-political reasons
- Usually related to ambassador conduct or internal political transition

### EXAMPLES

#### Level 1



Iranian protesters breached the US embassy during the Iranian Revolution in 1979, a conflict that led to the eventual severing of all diplomatic, economic, and political relations with Iran.

#### Level 2



Belarus recalled its ambassador to Sweden in 2012 after Swedish activists illegally entered Belarusian airspace to drop the teddy bears carrying pro-democracy messages. No further action was taken.

#### Level 3



France recalled its ambassador to Hong Kong after he allegedly attempted to smuggle over \$5000 in burgundy wine out of an exclusive Hong Kong nightclub in his suit.

### CONCLUSIONS

Diplomats represent the sending state in the receiving state, protect the interests of the sending state and its nationals, negotiate with the government of the receiving state, and promote friendly relations between the two. Ambassadors are both practically and symbolically important to negotiations between the sending and receiving states.

Despite this, the revocation index shows that **diplomatic recalls do not usually correspond to greater political plans**. This tactic is not primarily used to advance political agendas or effect change. **Over 50% of diplomatic revocations are initiated for non-political reasons**, like ambassador conduct and internal political transition.

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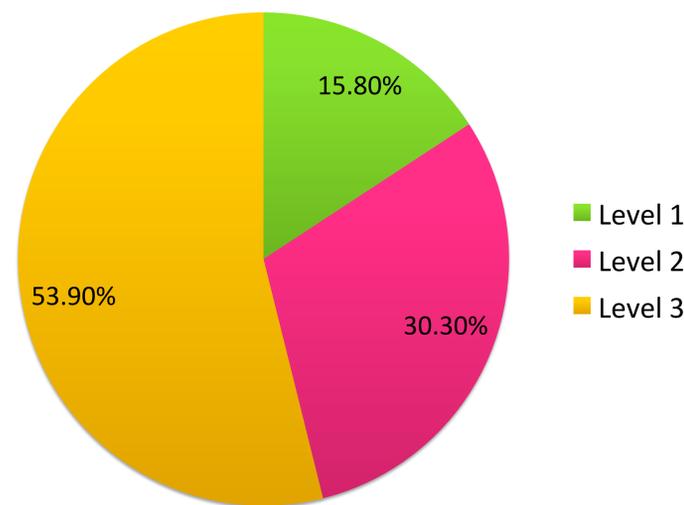
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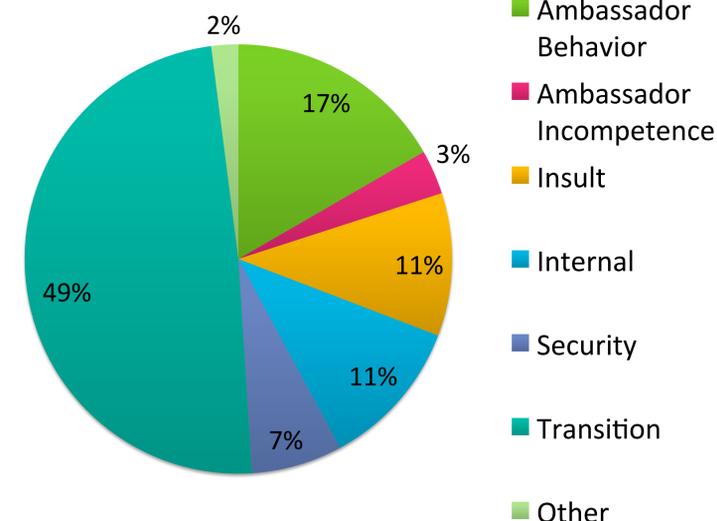
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### RESULTS

#### Diplomatic Revocation Categories



#### Level 3 Sub-Categories



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