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ENT: Entrevistas



Entrevistado: *Mr. Alfred Hoffman Jr.*
Embaixador dos EUA em Portugal (2006)

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As respostas do Sr. Embaixador foram recebidas por e-mail a 8 de Dezembro de 2006.*

MSG (Maria Sousa Galito), AHJ (Alfred Hoffman Jr.)

MSG: *Mr. Ambassador, what could Economic Diplomacy be? Is it something that has always been around, and has been shaped by time to deal with the pressures of (Economic) Globalization and the pressures of the new world (after the end of the cold war)? Or is it an entirely new concept? Is Economic Diplomacy conquering the playing field that, traditionally, belonged to Politic & Strategic Diplomacy?*

AHJ: «To answer these questions, we need to agree that we live in an increasingly evolving, interconnected, and interdependent world. The continuing globalisation of the world economy has opened up new opportunities for expanding trade and increasing individual countries' prosperity. However, this also requires new rules of engagement.

«Economic diplomacy goes way beyond the traditional “economic” concepts” of advancing or protecting commercial interests. Examples of today’s economic diplomacy include negotiating debt relief for heavily indebted countries, coordinating the use and implementation of economic sanctions when necessary, working with the WTO to establish fair rules of international trade, negotiating bilateral and regional investment treaties, combating bribery in international commerce, and much more.

«We tend to look at our guiding principles in economic diplomacy. These can be summed up as follows: (1) working in favor of open markets, (2) economic growth and development assistance, and (3) economic security.»

MSG: *What could be the best way for embassies to promote trade and attract foreign direct investment (FDI)?*

AHJ: «We find that one model does not fit all. A large well-established firm may rely on us for providing timely information about political decisions that may affect U.S. businesses, or to influence decision-makers to consider the benefits of selecting a U.S. firm for a project. Because of the political sensitivity of some projects, an Ambassador may be the best advocate a firm has to achieve their business interests.

«Many firms, particularly smaller-to-medium sized companies, use our commercial section to better understand the commercial environment they face in a particular market. Working with a commercial officer to determine their competitiveness in Portugal, locating an appropriate business partner, or using the embassy facilities for receptions and meetings are important tools to a U.S. firm starting to do business or increasing their presence in Portugal.

«The job of the Embassy is to listen to their companies that need help; and as a team, to determine a strategy that best fits their needs in that market.

«Returning to the first quote cited, I would point to the recent Florida mission (September 2006) as an example of the impact that actions by ambassadors can have on trade and commercial relations. Portugal's Ambassador to the United States Catarino and I hosted for a five-day mission to southern Florida for influential Portuguese government, business and academic representatives.

«The idea was to examine how Florida transformed its economy into one of the most dynamic in the country, through creative educational reforms and establishment of focused public-private partnerships. I've been told by participants of that mission that the fundamental changes they witnessed that have ensured the sustained competitiveness of Florida's economy will help them do their part to contribute to implementation of the Prime Minister's Technology Plan, and to pursue collaborative efforts across the Atlantic that will benefit both our countries. For my part, I hope to see joint business ventures and new cooperative activities between universities in Florida and Portugal emerge from contacts made on this mission. That outcome, I believe, would in itself make the effort that went into this mission entirely worthwhile.»

MSG: *Mr. Ambassador, when the United States of America think about making economic diplomacy with Brazil, or with any of the African Countries that speak Portuguese, does Portugal comes to mind? In other words, is Portugal (its State or its major companies) an important key to help the US State or the US companies to better enter or deal with the locals (because of the language or historical-cultural links)?*

AHJ: «We certainly understand the relationship Portugal has with Brazil and the African Portuguese-speaking countries, particularly strong through the CPLP - Community of Lusophone countries. We also recognize that each of these countries are different, and a U.S. firm will need assistance from on-the-ground experts that can be provided by capable embassy personnel. The United States already has strong links with some Lusophone countries (Brazil, for example) and is working on them with others (Angola and Mozambique, for example). Where it makes sense, we certainly welcome the opportunity to collaborate with Portugal on commercial opportunities in these countries.»

MSG: *Muito obrigada, Sr. Embaixador.*