# POSITION DESCRIPTION

# undersecretary for political affairs, Department of state

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| **OVERVIEW** |
| Senate Committee | Foreign Relations |
| Agency Mission | The Department of State is the lead institution for the conduct of U.S. diplomacy, and the secretary of state is the president’s principal foreign policy advisor. |
| Position Overview | The undersecretary for political affairs, ranked as the State Department’s fourth-highest official, is the day-to-day manager of overall regional and bilateral policy issues. Since Congress authorized the position in 1959, 17 of 22 undersecretaries have been career foreign service officers, including every one since 1993, making the undersecretary traditionally the department’s highest-ranking foreign service officer. |
| Compensation | Up to $172,100 per year[[1]](#endnote-1) |
| Position Reports to | Deputy Secretary of State and the Secretary of State |
| **RESPONSIBILITIES** |
| Management Scope | The undersecretary for political affairs oversees the bureaus of Africa, East Asia and the Pacific; Europe and Eurasia; the Near East; South and Central Asia; and the Western Hemisphere as well as the Bureau of International Organizations. Fourteen staff members report directly to the undersecretary, and the seven bureaus, encompassing 270 distinct posts and nearly 30,000 department employees, support the work of the undersecretary. |
| Primary Responsibilities | * Assists the secretary and deputy secretaries in formulating and conducting foreign policy
* Serves in roles requested by the secretary, including crisis management and special missions
* Reconciles policy differences among assistant secretaries before presenting unified proposals to the secretary and deputy secretaries
* Coordinates closely with senior officials from other national security departments and agencies
* Performs representational duties, testifies before Congress and frequently appears in the media
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| Strategic Goals and Priorities | [Depends on the policy priorities of the administration] |
| **REQUIREMENTS AND COMPETENCIES** |
| Requirements | * Top-notch foreign policy experience
* Expertise in formulating, analyzing and implementing international affairs priorities
* Familiarity with Department of State operations, and in-depth knowledge of the interagency policy process
* Crisis management experience
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| Competencies | * The ability to step in for the deputy secretary or the secretary to represent the department on a wide range of issues
* High level of energy for extensive foreign travel, often on short notice
* Ability to testify before Congress
* Effective public speaking skills, and the ability to appear in the media on short notice
* Proven negotiation skills
* Must be able to establish strong relationships with members of Congress, key congressional staffers and individuals throughout the top levels of government
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| **PAST APPOINTEES** |
| Thomas Shannon, Jr. (2016 to 2017) – Counselor of the State Department; Ambassador to Brazil; Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs; Senior Director for Western Hemisphere Affairs at the National Security Council |
| Wendy Sherman (2011 to 2015) – Counselor of the State Department; Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs |
| William Burns (2008 to 2011) – Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Russia; Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs; Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Jordan |

1. 2017 data [↑](#endnote-ref-1)