



August 12, 2020

United Nations Issues: Cabinet Rank of the U.S. Permanent Representative

The U.S. Permanent Representative is the chief representative of the United States to the United Nations. The President appoints the Permanent Representative with the advice and consent of the Senate. Of the 30 individuals who have served since 1946, approximately two-thirds have been accorded Cabinet rank by Presidents. Some Members of Congress have demonstrated an ongoing interest in the Cabinet rank of the Permanent Representative in the context of the Senate confirmation process and broader U.S. policy toward the United Nations.

Role of the Permanent Representative

The position of Permanent Representative is authorized in the U.N. Participation Act of 1945 (UNPA; 22 U.S.C. §287(a)). As this law requires the President to appoint the Representative at the rank of Ambassador, all such appointments are subject to Senate advice and consent. The UNPA provides that the Representative shall represent the United States in the U.N. Security Council and may also serve ex officio as U.S. representative to any U.N. organ, commission, or other body (with the exception of U.N. specialized agencies, which have separate U.S. ambassadors). The Permanent Representative shall also perform other functions as directed by the President. As head of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations (USUN) in New York City, the Representative works with the Secretary of State and relevant State Department bureaus and offices, including the Bureau of International Organization Affairs (IO), which is led by an assistant secretary and charged with developing, coordinating, and implementing U.S. multilateral policy.

The President's Cabinet

The President's Cabinet is an institution based in custom, rather than statute, and its beginnings date to the presidency of George Washington. Some have traced its origins to Article II, Section 2 of the Constitution, which provides that the President may require "the Opinion, in writing, of the principal Officer in each of the executive Departments." This provision suggests that the framers intended that the President would seek advice from department heads, although it does not require that he or she do so by meeting with them.

Successive Presidents have used the Cabinet for varied purposes and to a greater or lesser extent—in some cases very little. Some Presidents have used it as a deliberative or decisionmaking body. Others appear to have used it chiefly as a means of maintaining communication and the flow of information among key Administration officials.

By tradition, permanent Cabinet membership comprises the President, the heads of the executive departments and, in

more recent decades, the Vice President. Beginning with Dwight D. Eisenhower, each President also has accorded Cabinet rank to select senior executive branch leaders, including the U.S. Permanent Representative. The positions and individuals granted this distinction vary by presidency and, sometimes, within a presidency. Some positions, including the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, the United States Trade Representative, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, and the White House Chief of Staff, have all consistently been accorded this status over the past three decades.

In general, providing an agency head with Cabinet rank can be a way for a President to publicly convey his or her view that the agency is one of the most important in the executive branch. It also can potentially provide an official with parity in communications with, and access to, Secretaries and other Cabinet members.

Cabinet Status by Administration

President Eisenhower appears to have been the first President to accord Cabinet rank to his Permanent Representative, Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., in 1953. It is unclear whether Lodge's successor, James Wadsworth, held the same status. Nearly all subsequent Permanent Representatives appear to have been granted Cabinet rank until the presidency of George H.W. Bush in 1989. In the following years, Presidents Clinton and Obama provided the position with Cabinet rank, while George W. Bush did not. During the Trump Administration, Ambassador Nikki Haley was accorded Cabinet rank; to date, Ambassador Kelly Craft does not appear to have this status. Over the years, Presidents appear to have usually communicated their intent to accord Cabinet rank to the Permanent Representative through public remarks or communications with the Senate during the appointment and nomination process. **Table 1** identifies each of the Permanent Representatives since 1946 and their status with regard to Cabinet rank.

Overall, it appears that many Presidents who have granted Cabinet status did so to prioritize sustained engagement and coordination with the United Nations as an element of U.S. foreign policy. Historians have also suggested that Cabinet rank in some cases was meant to compensate for the fact that the past status and achievements of appointees otherwise exceeded the position (in particular, Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. under President Eisenhower and Adlai Stevenson II under President Kennedy). In other instances, Cabinet rank might have been negotiated as a condition of accepting the appointment (as was reported in the case of Ambassador Haley under President Trump). Conversely, Administrations that did not accord Cabinet rank may have

sought to limit the size of the Cabinet or determined, based on their perception of the United Nations, or other reasons, that the Permanent Representative did not merit a Cabinet seat (for example, Presidents George H.W. and George W. Bush).

Policy Issues and Congressional Considerations

Although the decision to accord Cabinet rank to the Permanent Representative lies with the President, over the years some Members of Congress have expressed an interest in the issue. Members may view the Permanent Representative's Cabinet rank (or lack thereof) as reflecting both his or her relationship with the Secretary of State and, more broadly, the relationship between the United States and the United Nations.

Many policymakers and observers have debated the benefits and drawbacks of Cabinet rank. On the one hand, some argue it reflects the President's view on the importance of the United Nations. They also suggest that it provides Permanent Representatives with significant influence and standing in U.N. fora. For example, some maintain the Permanent Representative might have more credibility during U.N. negotiations because other governments may perceive that he or she participates in high-level U.S. policy discussions with the President and other Cabinet members. Many may also view the Permanent Representative as having the flexibility and autonomy to react more quickly to changing circumstances during negotiations because there may be a minimal chain of command to which he or she reports. In U.N. fora, where diplomatic rank and protocol are widely respected, Cabinet status may also provide Permanent Representatives with the ability to negotiate not only with their counterparts but also with foreign affairs ministers who report directly to their heads of government.

On the other hand, some contend that holding Cabinet rank, which often includes attending frequent meetings in Washington, DC, can distract Permanent Representatives from responsibilities in New York that often require his or her physical presence (such as formal and informal Security Council negotiations). On the working level, some observers suggest that having two Cabinet members from the State Department (the Permanent Representative and the Secretary of State) might be inefficient. For example, it might create confusion regarding chain of command within the State Department and potentially lead to limited coordination among USUN and the IO Bureau staff, particularly in areas where the IO Bureau holds expertise. Some have also highlighted the need for consistent budgeting procedures for additional staff or resources often required by a Cabinet-ranked Permanent Representative.

More broadly, some observers have suggested that the overall authority and effectiveness of the Permanent Representative does not depend on Cabinet rank, and that such rank does not necessarily confer the additional authority or access that may be attributed to it, given the fluid role of the Cabinet. They contend that the personality, knowledge, and diplomatic skills of the Permanent Representative, both within U.N. fora and the U.S. government foreign and national security establishment

(particularly the State Department), can play a significantly larger role in his or her success.

Table I. Cabinet Rank of U.S. Permanent Representatives: 1946-2019

Name	President	Years	Cabinet?
Kelly Craft	Trump	2019-	No
Nikki Haley	Trump	2017-19	Yes
Samantha Power	Obama	2013-17	Yes
Susan Rice	Obama	2009-13	Yes
Zalmay Khalilzad	W. Bush	2007-09	No
John Bolton	W. Bush	2005-06	No
John Danforth	W. Bush	2004-05	No
John Negroponte	W. Bush	2001-04	No
Richard Holbrooke	Clinton	1999-01	Yes
William Richardson	Clinton	1997-98	Yes
Madeleine Albright	Clinton	1993-97	Yes
Edward Perkins	H.W. Bush	1992-93	No
Thomas Pickering	H.W. Bush	1989-92	No
Vernon Walters	Reagan	1985-89	Yes
Jeane Kirkpatrick	Reagan	1981-85	Yes
Donald McHenry	Carter	1979-81	Yes
Andrew Young	Carter	1977-79	Yes
William Scranton	Ford	1976-77	Yes
Daniel Moynihan	Ford	1975-76	Yes
John Scali	Nixon	1973-75	Yes
George H.W. Bush	Nixon	1971-73	Yes
Charles Yost	Nixon	1969-71	Yes
James Wiggins	Johnson	1968-69	Yes
George Ball	Johnson	1968	Yes
Arthur Goldberg	Johnson	1965-68	Yes
Adlai Stevenson II	Kennedy	1961-65	Yes
James Wadsworth	Eisenhower	1960-61	Unclear ^a
Henry Cabot Lodge Jr.	Eisenhower	1953-60	Yes
Warren Austin	Truman	1947-53	No
Edward Stettinius Jr.	Truman	1946	No

Source: Adapted by CRS from congressional documents, presidential documents, and other relevant articles and transcripts.

- a. Determination of each Permanent Representative's status is made on the basis of the preponderance of evidence from publicly available sources. Based on examination of these sources, CRS was not able to determine whether Ambassador James Wadsworth, who was confirmed and held the position for less than five months at the end of the Eisenhower Administration, held Cabinet rank.

Luisa Blanchfield, Specialist in International Relations
Henry B. Hogue, Specialist in American National Government
Susan G. Chesser, Senior Research Librarian

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.