

THE RICHARD C. HOLBROOKE AWARD FOR DIPLOMACY

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On December 22, 2010 President Barrack Obama sent the following memorandum to the Secretary of State:

“To honor the legacy of one of America's greatest diplomats and to reaffirm our commitment to diplomacy, I hereby direct you to establish the Richard C. Holbrooke Award for Diplomacy, to be awarded annually. You are authorized to take all necessary steps to establish an appropriate award program under the auspices of your department to recognize distinguished Americans who have made especially meritorious contributions to diplomacy.

Sixty days prior to presenting the award, you shall present to me a list of nominees, from which I will select up to five individuals or groups of individuals to receive this award. In preparing your list of nominees, you may consider the recommendations of appropriate individuals and groups, coordinate your nominations in consultation with other executive agencies as appropriate, and may include recommendations for posthumous awards.

You are authorized and directed to publish this memorandum in the Federal Register.”

This memorandum was received by the Office of the Federal Register on December 19, 2012.

The President's memorandum of December 22, 2010 is interesting in several respects. First, it establishes an award in another part of the executive branch by a simple memo rather than by an executive order, which would have been more formal and correct. Second, it does not specify the form the award is to take; and thirdly, it does not make clear whether the award is a Department of State award or a Presidential award administered through the Department of State.

How did the Department of State respond to the President's memorandum? As near as can be determined, they didn't do anything for a year (that's how long it took them to get the memorandum to the Federal Register). It did have the US Army's Institute of Heraldry design and develop a great looking medal for the State Department. It has elements of the Presidential Seal as part of the design.



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Below obverse and reverse



The first award was reportedly made posthumously to Christopher Stevens, the American Ambassador to Libya who was murdered in Benghazi on September 11, 2012.

(Author's comment) It is curious that President Obama directed the creation of this award. He has at his disposal the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Presidential Citizens Medal, both of which he can award at his own discretion. It is not clear why the Holbrooke Award for Diplomacy is a presidential award (which it apparently is), when it seems to be more logically placed under the purview of the State Department. Even though the presidential directive states that it will be awarded annually, odds are that over time it will follow the same route as the Presidential Medal for Lifesaving on Railroads and the Presidential Medal for Lifesaving on Highways and simply drop from view.

Sources:

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Photos courtesy of the US Army Institute of Heraldry