

*The Political Officer
in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade*

Recognizing their statutory responsibilities, departments have been devoting increased shares of their budgets to foreign policy concerns, building up international directorates and staffing a growing number of international meetings. By one estimate, there are now as many people working on international issues in other government departments as there are in DFAIT. And more than half of all program personnel at Canadian missions abroad now work for other government departments (see Annex 3). But in many cases departments have been inclined to pursue objectives which conflict with those of other departments or with broader national interests. Moreover, some have been reluctant to acknowledge DFAIT's responsibility for ensuring the overall coherence of policy abroad and have resented its efforts to play a facilitative role. As one participant observed, "In security policy, DND have historically recognized that defence policy operates in a foreign policy context, but OGDs have not".⁽¹⁸⁾

Workshop participants believed three kinds of action were necessary. The department needed to (a) do more work in clarifying its role in areas where it shares responsibility with other government departments, (b) assume more leadership in the development of overall Canadian strategies on particular international issues where OGD interests are engaged, and (c) enhance its ability to keep track of OGD programs and objectives.

Political reporting

Political reporting can be one of the most important instruments of international leverage available to a country. As Joseph Nye and William Owens have written, "Just as nuclear dominance was the key to coalition leadership in the old era, information dominance will be the key in the information age"⁽¹⁹⁾.

On many issues, the United States exercises leadership because of its ability to apply "dominant situational knowledge" to the management of an issue, i.e. it is better able than others to shed light on what is happening and thereby frame the discussion on how to respond to events. In 1992, a State Department task force reported that "Foreign Service reporting provides more than 70 percent of the foreign political, economic, social, and cultural information used in intelligence

¹⁸ *A curiosity is that DFAIT has negotiated detailed MOUs with other departments governing its provision of support services abroad (office space, support staff, administration etc.), while there are few formal agreements governing cooperation on substantive issues. At missions, DFAIT tends to be regarded as a landlord rather than the lead department for Canadian policy and operations abroad.*

¹⁹ "America's Information Edge", Joseph S. Nye, Jr. and William A. Owens, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 1996