

VIII. THE DEPARTMENT'S CAPACITY TO PERFORM THE ROLE

A. The Department's Place in the Government

There is some feeling in the Department of External Affairs that the Department's place in the Government is somehow less central than it used to be and that it has less influence on Government policy than formerly. As far as centrality is concerned, the enquiries conducted for this study confirmed that the Department continues to be seen as one of the major institutions of Government, comparable to the Treasury Board, the Cabinet Secretariat, or the Department of Finance in the importance of the role it is expected to play. While some officials elsewhere in the Government may seek to minimize the policy or managerial role of External Affairs, it is widely recognized that an effective foreign ministry is an essential instrument of any modern nation and that the Department of External Affairs is a "central agency" in the sense that it has a role to perform relative to all the activities of Government in their international dimension.

The view that some External Affairs officials have of their Department's place in the Government may be unconsciously affected by the fact that for the first 40 years of its existence the Prime Minister was also the Secretary of State for External Affairs and that a former officer of the Department was subsequently SSEA and Prime Minister for periods totalling another 12 years. The more normal situation is that the Department of External Affairs does not have significantly closer links to the Prime Minister than other major agencies of the Government. The nature of its functions may call for more frequent proffering of advice to the head of the Government from External Affairs than from many other Departments but it has to compete for his attention in the quality of advice it offers and the effectiveness of the services it performs.

The view that the Department of External Affairs has a relatively smaller degree of control or influence over the Government's international activities is probably attributable to the fact that so many new activities or extensions of activity have developed independently of the role of External Affairs. It is not so much that the Department has lost ground it already occupied, as that it has not fully succeeded in establishing a firm position on the new ground. While the Department has expanded its functions and has adapted itself to new features of Canadian and international activity, those activities may still be growing faster than the Department's capacity for adaptation. As can be seen from Part II of this report, other countries comparable to Canada are experiencing problems in adapting the institutions of Government to the pressing demands of current international relations and the Canadian Department of External Affairs is