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In an ideal world, one participant remarked, the geographics could play a larger role but they lacked the resources to do so. "They are too involved in events management and geographic desk officers have too many countries to coordinate, so they cannot do it." Some regional desks did take a very "hands-on" approach, but in the final analysis "about a dozen countries affect about 95% of what we do, which by-passes a lot of geographic relationships".

Geographic bureaux see themselves as being responsible for "the management of the whole". From their perspective, the world is comprised of countries and the issues that unite or divide them, some of which are bilateral and some international. International conferences are where countries meet to talk, but national capitals are where they make their decisions. The country focus, therefore, is the one that is "rooted in the realities of the world". It encompasses all the issues and all the stakeholders, and it is "real time". Geographic bureau participants argued that their functional counterparts tended to deal with fewer issues, a more limited set of stakeholders, and longer time-frames.

Geographic bureau participants shared the view that there is "real scope for flying in the geographics, even interns can launch policy". But a number argued that the shortage of resources in the geographic bureaux meant they were "incapable of allowing people fully to take on the core mandate". The work was "theoretically very exciting, but the capacity to do it is not there". Moreover, "the functionals are seen as dealing with what really matters". One individual commented that "the word on the street is that functional desk jobs can be very focused, involve fewer crises, deal with less crap, and offer better travel."

It is to be expected that functional and geographic bureaux should see their roles as different, but not that they should reflect so little sense of common purpose and complementarity. One of the disturbing consequences, workshop participants noted, was that some of the functional bureaux were beginning to devote resources to the development of in-house geographic expertise and geographic bureaux were responding by developing functional expertise. In the words of one individual, "They're replicating rather than dividing or sharing responsibility, and with replication you get competition".

Relations between the two groups have not been helped by a departmental planning and management system which has placed the geographic bureaux in a distinctly subordinate position, for example:

- A departmental Planning, Reporting and Accountability Structure (PRAS) organized along functional lines, and