

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

Globalization has, however, required governments to re-think how they perform their functions. The stakes are high for failing to understand and deal with the effects of globalization, but it is a perilous task nonetheless. For states determined to design their own future, the single best instrument at their disposal may be the foreign ministry.

Foreign ministries

Only a few years ago, foreign ministries were being dismissed as an anachronism, institutions whose vocation seemed to be to tend the dikes of national sovereignty as the tides of history washed over them. In fact, they are often among the most advanced of state institutions in adapting to global changes and fashioning instruments of power and leverage to protect and promote national interests in a global context.

The reason is that foreign ministries are at the intersect of domestic and foreign policy. Domestic policy now must take account of the impact decisions have on international partners and regimes. Foreign policy, in turn, is the management of international issues which engage domestic interests -- through the negotiation of solutions within rule-bound systems and the promotion of acceptable norms and rules for dealing with issues when international regimes are deficient or non-existent³). Foreign ministries bring international realities to bear on national decision-making, help to develop strategies for achieving national objectives abroad, ensure coherence in the state's international operations, and negotiate for national governments with sovereign states and international organizations. In addition, foreign ministries deliver programs abroad to meet specific constituency needs, such as business development services and consular assistance.

To perform these functions effectively, a foreign ministry needs a combination of resources not found elsewhere in government:

- a worldwide infrastructure to generate the information, contacts and methods for successfully pursuing national interests abroad, i.e. missions in major decision-making centres, at the seat of international organizations whose deliberations affect national interests, and in locations where national interests are particularly exposed;
- a global communications system to link missions with decision-makers at home;
- a capacity for developing national policy to deal with globalization; and
- "globalist" foreign service officers.

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