

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

PROPOSAL: The department should begin publication of Politique étrangère du Canada, perhaps as a joint venture with a university or NGO which specializes in Canadian foreign policy.

Standard operating procedures

When it first came into the language, "bureaucracy" used to connote a rationale and efficient method of organization. With its hierarchical authority and functional specialization, it was designed to bring the same logic to government work which "management" and the assembly line had brought to manufacturing. Bureaucracy has since lost much of its luster, but it remains indispensable to the effective functioning of large organizations both public and private. Bureaucracy provides the structure and internal systems which an organization needs to make rational decisions, to mobilize resources effectively, and to operationalize experience in the pursuit of predetermined objectives. Success is more often the result of systematic execution of "bread-and-butter" tasks than splendid improvisation.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade has well developed standard operating procedures (SOPs) -- for every program other than foreign policy. Trade promotion, consular assistance, protocol, mission management, personnel postings, financial administration and other operations are all governed by established procedures, often consolidated in an operations manual. Similarly, other government departments and agencies involved in foreign operations (immigration processing, development assistance programming, police and security liaison etc.) have special systems and procedures to ensure that the discretionary dimension of operations is restricted to issues and circumstances where judgement is required. But there are few SOPs governing the main operations in which political officers are engaged. Inspiration can be found in many places.

Political reporting

- The State Department requires all missions to develop a Post Reporting Plan to ensure mission reporting is driven by demand rather than supply, "to focus mission attention on correlation of policy goals with reporting targets". Guidance and feedback from Washington is expected to be provided daily, weekly or biweekly depending on the size of the mission. Even small missions are required to report, on the grounds that "today's backwater can be tomorrow's headlines". Some US ambassadors have formed working groups across section lines to prepare specific analyses.

- The State Department routinely employs foreign nationals and local firms to perform some collection and analysis work.