

## Introduction

In implementing Canada's foreign policy, geographics are where the rubber hits the road. This paper outlines the pressures and challenges facing geographics, and suggests concrete steps that can be taken to enhance these divisions' effectiveness. It will argue that their role as managers of bilateral relations is key to promoting Canadian interests abroad, and that this role needs to be strengthened, not weakened. It will also show how even a relatively minor restructuring of their personnel and available resources can make a positive difference. Finally, the paper underlines the point that the key pressures facing geographics do not come from outside "clients" but from current operations and expectations *within* our organization.

### I. The Current State of Geographics

The demands placed on geographics are high. Geographics have a number of mandates: providing policy advice to ministers, liaising with Canadian missions overseas and foreign missions in Ottawa, planning and implementing visits, producing briefing notes and Q & A's, responding to ministerial correspondence, access to information and diverse public enquiries, and conducting public outreach, among others. All this "busy work" notwithstanding, the geographics are responsible for Canada's over-all bilateral relations with other countries.

This function is performed through a variety of means, but key are the geographics' on-going liaison with other HQ divisions and our overseas missions. Increasingly, this key relationships management function, and what should be the focus of promoting Canadian interests abroad, is being eroded. Along with the heavy transactional work-load of geographics - visits, routine correspondence, etc. - demands from other divisions within the department often leave little time or energy to develop and implement coherent strategies and work plans to promote Canadian interests in the bilateral context. The priorities of the line divisions working in such areas as security, trade policy, human rights, and the environment, which tend to emphasize multilateral issues and considerations, increasingly dominate the work agenda of the geographics.

#### Pressures:

"Modern management" approaches to organizational change focuss on identifying key clients, and then defining what services and service standards are provided to those clients. However, the real pressures facing geographics do not stem from outside clients, but from within our own organization. The pressures are many, with three of the most salient being: high staff turnover; having to serve multiple masters; and responding to time-sensitive crises.