

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

- Second, the department faces significant obstacles in supplementing the resources of a bureau or mission struggling to manage a crisis. The department is too stretched to afford redundancy or to carry a reserve capacity. At DND, officers are more interchangeable and call spell off each other in shifts. At DFAIT, there is never more than a small pool of officers versed in the subject at hand who can take over when the A team tires. In a crisis, about the only supplementary resources immediately available is the small but able contingent of watch officers in the department's Operations Centre. Otherwise, resources have to be borrowed from other work units, which naturally resist encroachments on their own scarce resources, or they have to be hired "off the street". One workshop participant noted that the team handling Kosovo did not receive additional resources until the fourth month of the crisis.
- Third, the department has few standard operating procedures for managing a crisis. As one workshop participant observed, "there is too much gifted amateur can-do". Officers at the workshops shared the view that "the department has to reinvent itself for every crisis". It was important that it develop a "generic crisis response system which identifies responsibilities and defines functions".

Visits and conferences

No single issue appears to cause more grief for political officers than managing visits and conferences. Part of the problem is the sheer volume:

- In the 1980s, there was an average of two prime ministerial trips abroad per year; since the mid-1990s, the annual average has been seven PM trips abroad involving travel to some 17 cities -- about one trip and three foreign capitals every two months.
- Foreign travel by DFAIT ministers (there are five of them) has doubled since 1995 and now averages about 50 per year -- about one a week. Most of these are bilateral visits, but about 20% are to attend multilateral conferences -- each of which can spawn any number of "bilaterals" on the margins of a conference.
- The number of visits to Canada by foreign heads of state/government averages about 15 per year, by foreign ministers about 15, by trade ministers about 5, and by others about 13, for a cumulative total of 48 -- about one a week.
- Every year, Canada also hosts a number of international conferences. In FY95/96, there were nine of these; in FY98/99, there were 23 -- about one every two weeks.