

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

But people did believe that political reporting as now practiced required improvement:

- Officials in other government departments hoped the level of political reporting could be “elevated” to provide a better sense of the “big picture”. In the words of one official, the need was for missions “to be able to interpret what is happening in a country in the broadest sense, not just the government or the power networks, but society as a whole”.
- DFAIT officials were concerned about the ad hoc character of reporting. Some missions produce “regular reporting of great value”, others do not, and smaller missions “can get consumed by a visit and go silent for weeks”. In the experience of one individual, political reports carried “good analytical work from a Canadian perspective, but there are no coherent analytical pieces on a regular basis, just bits of info once in a while”.

### **Managing crises**

The department prides itself on being able to rise to the occasion, to respond energetically and creatively to a crisis, marshaling resources from throughout the organization and working cooperatively with other government departments to see a matter through to a successful conclusion. Political officers invariably constitute the core of such operations.

Among political officers, however, there is concern that the number of crises engaging Canadian interests has been growing faster than the department’s capacity to manage them effectively, and that the time has come for more selective engagement and a “less ad hoc and more systematic” approach to crisis management. The fear is that Canada risks losing its capacity to lead international efforts.

The principal concerns appear to be the following:

- First, the “thin red line” is showing signs of strain from repeatedly being called on to deal with recurring crises. The pool of political officers is not large to begin with, and those with the relevant knowledge and experience further limit the numbers available for any particular crisis. The problem is particularly acute in the geographic bureaux which manage the bulk of crises (most crises have a geographic locus).