APPENDIX II

CONSIDERATION OF AN ALTERNATIVE

The original parameters of this study were phrased in terms of a "computerized system" thus implying the development of the single, integrated data base described above. Nonetheless, it became apparent during the course of the study that at least some consideration should be given to alternative means of achieving the objectives set out above.

One means of meeting the Department's objectives would be to expand and enhance the use of existing data bases and information sources to provide a significantly different dimension to the services currently being offered by the Department's Library.

In the past few years there has been a tremendous growth in the number, range of coverage and scale of bibliographic data bases being made available in machine readable form. <See Appendix III for a survey of available data bases.> Orginally largely concentrated in scientific fields (e.g. chemistry, biology, physics, medicine), many data bases are now providing substantial social science coverage while others are being developed in the arts and humanities (e.g. philosophy). Although a very large proportion of these are being built in the United States their coverage is certainly international.

At the same time, however, it must be recognized that few of these data bases are being created in Canada and the coverage of Canadian subjects and sources, while considerable, is far from complete. No single available data base could meet all (or even most) of the Department's requirements for materials as set out above, but the skilled use of several appropriate files would be of substantial value in meeting the requirements of officers as they arise.

The most basic conceptual differences between this alternative and the proposal to build a computerized data base of public materials on Canadian foreign policy and external relations are,
  • (1) it would be expected that searches would be made on a variety of available sources to meet a particular demand or series of demands from members of the Department rather than trying to anticipate in advance what all potential requests might be and assembling the data to meet them.
    (2) no systematic, organized and integrated data base would be created as a result of meeting these particular ad hoc requests. Information would be