

What is the Foreign Ministry?

BRIAN HOCKING

Professor of International Relations, Loughborough University

THE THEME OF THIS BOOK INVITES AN OBVIOUS BUT PERTINENT QUESTION: why should we be interested in the past, present, and future state of that part of the national bureaucracy designated as the ‘ministry of foreign affairs’ (MFA)? Why is it that conferences, workshops, and seminars should be devoted to the *foreign* ministry whilst ministries of agriculture and transport, for example, do not attract such attention? This is the point of departure for my discussion, since whereas there are sound reasons for engaging in this enterprise, they may not always be clearly articulated. Beyond this basic question, the chapter is concerned with what I suggest is a fundamental issue in appreciating the challenges that confront the MFA in the 21st century—namely its character as an organization and the significance of organizational culture in understanding this.

The analysis of any organization demands a consideration of its nature and role. It is this issue, encapsulated in the question, ‘what is the foreign ministry?’ that constitutes the core of this chapter. Here, my premise is that at least some of the conflicting observations as to the present and future state of MFAs are rooted in a failure to appreciate their nature as organizations and their patterns of evolution. More specifically, I suggest that many of their perceived problems (whether these are identified from within the foreign ministry or from outside it) can be better appreciated through the recognition that these are organizations located in distinctive environments. From here, the chapter proceeds to consider what its defining features are, how these are related to organizational culture, and

how this might explain some of the opaqueness that surrounds the debate on the status of MFAs.

WHY WORRY ABOUT MFAS?

There are several possible arguments for examining the pathology of MFAs. Perhaps the most compelling is their relationship to, and role in, the processes of diplomatic interaction, which remains a critical feature of the international system. In one sense, the debate about the MFA—what it does, and its significance—is a metaphor for the transformation of the international environment and helps one to appreciate significant phases of change in the system and how states have adapted to these changes.¹ As Jørgensen has suggested, foreign ministries, ‘because they change form and content’ and are ‘historical–concrete and dynamic organizations’, are informative indicators of international systemic change.²

A second reason for examining the MFA follows directly from this point. Given the fact that the MFA is the bureaucratic embodiment of the state’s sovereign power in its relationship with the international environment, the patterns of change within its structure and operations should provide significant evidence as to how the state responds to external change. In the light of the debate concerning the impact of globalization and regionalization on the power, role and organization of government, the condition of that part of the bureaucracy most closely identified with the interface between the domestic and international *milieus* is, *prima facie*, of interest. Indeed, the changing role and status of the foreign ministry have constituted a continuing theme in discussions for the adaptation of international policy management. Thus the twin forces of globalization and regionalization have been portrayed as changing the structure and role of the MFA and, in particular, its relationship with and relative importance to other parts of the national bureaucracy. In the European Union (EU) context, for example, the theme of ‘Europeanization’ of the MFA is a familiar one as the impact of EU membership has

¹ G.R. Winham, ‘The Impact of System Change on International Diplomacy’, paper presented to the annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Carleton University, Ottawa, June 1993.

² K.E. Jørgensen, ‘Modern European Diplomacy’, paper delivered at International Studies Association Convention, Toronto, March 1997.

demanded changes in the roles and relationships between government departments, including the MFA.³

INTERPRETING THE EVIDENCE

But if there is a case for examining the MFA, this certainly does not imply a uniformity of opinion regarding its current—or even its historical—position within its international or domestic environments. This is hardly surprising given the complexity of the contemporary international system and the varying roles which diplomacy and its agents are portrayed as discharging. Henrikson, for example, identifies at least five scenarios which, whilst overlapping in certain respects, carry different implications for the future state of diplomacy and by implication, suggest differing roles for the MFA.⁴ This is reinforced by the diversity of approaches to the analysis of International Relations as a field of academic enquiry. The emphasis on the growing significance of global governance, for example, emphasises the role of a diverse range of actors operating alongside, or even in place of the traditional diplomatic networks associated with the state system.⁵ This is not the place to pursue this theme at any length, but it is important to note that evaluations of the MFA's place in its domestic and international settings reflect fundamental assumptions and differences as to the latter's nature in an era of profound change, and how we should conceptualize and analyse world politics.

Thus we find very different conclusions being drawn from similar bodies of evidence. At one end of the spectrum lie arguments which suggest that the MFA is irrelevant. In its international cloak, this is associated with (frequently confused) debates about the nature of contemporary diplomacy, reflected, for example in propositions concerning the role of

³ See, for example, H. Kassim, B. Guy Peters, and V. Wright, *The National Co-ordination of EU Policy: the Domestic Level*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000; B. Hocking and D. Spence, *Foreign Ministries in the European Union: Integrating Diplomats*. (revised edn) Houndmills, Palgrave, 2005.

⁴ A.K. Henrikson, 'Diplomacy's possible futures', *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 1(1) 2006: pp. 3–27.

⁵ R.A. O'Brien, M. Goetz, J.A. Scholte, M. Williams, *Contesting Global Governance: Multilateral Economic Institutions and Global Social Movements*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

bilateral diplomacy and its association with the foreign ministry and the network over which it presides. In its domestic guise, the case is linked to the changing relationship between 'domestic' departments and the MFA. On the one hand, it has long been noted that the conduct of diplomacy has been spread amongst a greater cast of bureaucratic players, whilst on the other, that the conduct of international policy has migrated to centralized bureaus, notably prime ministerial and presidential offices. In part, the confusion is reinforced by the dynamics of change within foreign ministries. Not only are they subject to bewildering internal structural changes, the precise implications of which often seem to be lost even to those who work in them,⁶ a proliferation of data can be utilized to support quite different conclusions.⁷ This is no small problem. Data which appear to suggest an enhancement of resources, for example, may reflect the assignation of new functions which are inadequately supported.

In part, of course, interpreting the impact of change depends on a greater precision as to the phenomena being investigated. Wesley's discussion of the impact of globalization on the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAT) is one instructive example.⁸ Moving beyond the usual generalizations characteristic of such discussions, Wesley suggests a more nuanced evaluation which differentiates the impact of globalization in terms of four dimensions—such as diffusion in terms of policy agendas and actors, and the 'transformation' of international relations and the domestic environment. Unsurprisingly, a major facet in both cases is the enhanced significance of economics, and the demands imposed by the 'competition state' on the monitoring of the global economy. This leads him to identify three broad contextual changes that impinge on DFAT in differing ways: a politicization of its operational environment, challenges to its role as the dominant information system as rivals emerge and, third, pressure on resources. Each of these echo findings in other MFAs, but Wesley sees the

⁶ I have frequently been surprised when interviewing diplomatic staff, at how often they profess confusion about (or sometimes ignorance of) change in the MFA.

⁷ This is very evident in Berridge's evaluation of the current state of the MFA which employs a range of statistics to support the argument that there has been a 'counter-revolution' in diplomatic practice. See G.R. Berridge, 'The counter-revolution in diplomatic practice', *Quaderni di Scienza Politica*, Year 12, new series 5 (1), April 2005: pp. 7–24.

⁸ M. Wesley, 'Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the challenges of globalisation', *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 56 (2) 2002: pp. 207–22.

consequences of them playing out in different ways, posing challenges in some senses whilst, on the other hand, offering the opportunity for task expansion and the development of new domestic constituencies.⁹ Interestingly, however, he suggests that the key challenge for DFAT in an era of profound international change lies in a weakness in terms of its capacity for creative policy thinking in an increasingly unstable environment.

This analysis, whilst lacking detail, does point us in a useful direction. Not only is it the case that we need to be more precise about what the environmental changes and challenges impinging on MFAs are, but also how they are affecting its various roles. Rather than the former having a uniform effect on the latter, it is quite possible that the developments associated with globalization—such as the revolution in information technology—impact on different functions in different ways. MFAs are not identical, but one of their features is that by virtue of their evolution and place in the diplomatic network, they do possess notable similarities in terms of function. Thus whilst it is true that the orientation of some MFAs has tended towards specific roles—such as the Netherlands MFA whose origins stressed a commercial rationale¹⁰—there are broad generic functions which they share. As Morgan notes, organizations are not commonly established as ends in themselves but as the means to accomplish other goals.¹¹ In the case of MFAs, we can identify the following generic roles:

- A node in a communications system through which information is gathered, analysed and disseminated.
- A policy advice function, providing expertise to politicians, other parts of the bureaucracy and to non-governmental actors with interests in international policy.
- A memory bank, gathering and storing information. As Hill notes, ‘without the capacity to relate myriad past commitments and treaties to the present, and to each other, decision-makers would be left floundering in chaos, given the complexity of the contemporary international system.’¹²

⁹ Ibid., p. 220.

¹⁰ D. Hellema, ‘The Netherlands’ in *Foreign Ministries*, Hocking and Spence, pp. 177–90.

¹¹ G. Morgan, *Images of Organization*, Thousand Oaks, CAL, Sage, 1997, p. 15.

¹² C. Hill, *the Changing Politics of Foreign Policy*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 77.

- A policy transfer function through which the channels of diplomatic communication are used to exchange information and ideas on a range of issues between countries on diverse issues. Some of these—such as combating international terrorism lie in the area of international policy, but many are firmly located in the domestic arena: education, pensions, environmental, and transport policy, for example.

It is the first two of these functions that are most commonly regarded as being challenged. As a communications system, the rapid dispersal of information through the electronic media is, however misleadingly, frequently regarded as rendering the diplomatic network redundant. Similarly, the emergence of rival sources of policy advice and expertise, both in other government departments and outside them, in the form of non-governmental organizations for example, is seen as threatening the role of the MFA as the pre-eminent source of expertise in an environment where specialist rather than generalist, diplomatic expertise is valued. On the other hand, the ‘memory bank’ function rarely if ever features in this debate, suggesting either that observers do not value it, are unaware of its existence, or accept that it is insulated from the pressures of exogenous change. The development of the ‘policy transfer’ role which similarly tends to be ignored in discussions of contemporary diplomacy functions can be interpreted as indicative of decline or adaptation to changing circumstances.

But all of these functions draw attention to one of the key features of the MFA, namely that it is located at the boundary of two linked systems. On the one hand, it is an inseparable component of the global diplomatic network—what Steiner terms ‘a common field of diplomatic action’—through which much—but not all—international interactions are mediated.¹³ On the other, it is a major element in the national diplomatic system—that is, the machinery through which governments seek to pursue their international policy goals. This bifurcated environment helps to explain the organizational culture of the foreign ministry, but it also explains its evolving character. I will develop this point below, but for the present want to suggest that this environmental ambiguity underpins the operation of the MFA. And one facet is of particular significance—namely the relationship between the foreign ministry and what are frequently referred to as OGDs—other government departments. Rather than a

¹³ Z. Steiner, Introduction, *The Times Survey of Foreign Ministries of the World*, London, Times Books, 1982, p. 11.

manifestation of globalization and regionalization, intra-bureaucratic relationships have long constituted a key feature of the MFA's role, both nationally and, through its diplomatic network, internationally. Thus there is an historical dimension to understanding what may be regarded as a contemporary phenomenon: the challenge to the claims of the MFA to perform the key functions identified above. The implications of this can be seen from a brief overview of the evolution of the British Foreign Office (FO) into what had become by 1968, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO).

It is worth noting in passing that prior to the emergence of the earliest foreign ministries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the norm was to combine the management of domestic and foreign policy within a single department.¹⁴ It was the recognition by Richelieu of the need for continuity and coordination in the management of French foreign relations in the increasingly complex system of states that led to the emergence of a separate foreign ministry. In the case of Great Britain, up to 1782, the Northern and Southern Departments dealt with both domestic and foreign policy. From that date, the growing needs of dealing with the international environment and the inefficiencies and frictions that two often-competing Secretaries could create were recognized in the form of two departments, one for home affairs and the other for foreign affairs.¹⁵ But the FO, defined as a department offering policy advice to the Secretary of State, did not emerge until the reforms of 1906. Until then, its role was largely clerical whilst foreign secretaries conducted policy:

The functions of the staff were purely clerical; they were almost entirely confined to matters of routine. Even the Permanent Under Secretary had no higher duty than that of superintending the clerical work... Not only was high policy left entirely to the initiative of the Secretary of State, but he also wrote all the important dispatches himself.¹⁶

However, even after the 1906 reforms, the FO was by no means an uncontested mediator of Britain's external relations. Before 1914, its role

¹⁴ K. Hamilton and R. Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy: Its Evolution, Theory and Administration*, London, Routledge, 1995, p. 73.

¹⁵ Sir John Tilley and S. Gaselee, *The Foreign Office*, London, Putnams, 1933, pp. 26–49; N. Hart, *The Foreign Secretary*, Lavenham, Dalton, 1987, pp. 9–27; V. Cromwell, 'The Foreign and Commonwealth Office', in Steiner, op.cit. pp. 542–51.

¹⁶ V. Wellesley, *Diplomacy in Fetters*, London, Hutchinson, 1945, p. 191.

was being challenged, but the First World War presented new demands as the conduct of diplomacy adjusted to the imperatives of war. Commercial and propaganda work, for example, not only required new skills but elevated the status of bureaucratic rivals. In addition, the role of the Prime Minister's Office in the conduct of the war effort inevitably lessened the status of the Foreign Office. During the war, the foreign secretary, Balfour, was not a member of the War Cabinet and his successor, Curzon, frequently found himself at odds with Prime Minister Lloyd George as the latter pursued independent foreign policy initiatives, leaving the control of foreign policy in the Prime Minister's Office even after the disbandment of the War Cabinet in 1919. 'The result was that the Foreign Office was deprived of its monopolistic position as adviser to the Prime Minister.'¹⁷

During the inter-war years, the conduct of external policy became the subject of inter-bureaucratic conflict as the FO saw the work of its Commercial Department assumed by the newly created Department of Overseas Trade. More serious implications for the conduct of external policy lay in the conflict between the Foreign Office and the Treasury over the latter's insistence that post-war reparation issues lay firmly within its province. Despite an agreement whereby Treasury negotiators would keep the Foreign Office informed on the conduct of reparations negotiations, the latter knew nothing of the negotiations during 1921, which fixed the total German reparation debt or of Anglo-French negotiations on the Allied Financial Agreement of the same year. Against this background, an intensive exchange regarding the management of the growing interface between domestic and foreign policy developed, in which the FO, the Prime Minister's Office, and domestic departments jostled for advantage. Not surprisingly, the core issue was to which agency of government should primary oversight of the coordination processes deemed necessary to avoid conflict between objectives, be assigned. The politics of the situation ensured that issues of coordination and control became matters of departmental status more than techniques through which desirable policy objectives could be achieved.¹⁸

Bringing this brief narrative into the contemporary environment inhabited by the FCO, a major focus of attention, as with other EU member

¹⁷ E. Maisel, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy: 1919–1926*, Brighton, Sussex Academic Press, 1994, p. 63.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 73–4.

state MFAs, has been the impact of Europeanization.¹⁹ Here, the pattern of intra-bureaucratic relations is often located within a dynamic network framework comprising actors clustering around a common strategic agenda, and adapting to both external and internal stimuli. As James has demonstrated, the response of what is termed the 'core executive'²⁰ in the UK to the Europeanization process involves shifts in the relative power of each participant, not least the FCO. James' findings demonstrate just how fluid the position of an MFA can be in a complex policy environment: developments such as a shift in resources from the FCO to the Cabinet Office and UKRep (the UK Mission to the EU), together with the relative failure of attempts to strengthen the FCO's EU coordinating role through a Minister for Europe, have resulted in a more significant role for the Prime Minister's Office. At the same time, this has to be set against other developments—for example, the FCO's leadership of the Step Change initiative, intended to raise awareness of the UK's position in the EU and of other member states within the UK, and its production of an annual White Paper on EU policy objectives to which other government departments are required to respond.²¹ In short, the history of the FO/FCO has been one of continual change, marked by a response to a dynamic external environment and a redefinition of its relationships with key bureaucratic actors sharing an interest in that environment.

This makes it hard to sustain simple zero-sum images of the role and status of the MFA alongside its bureaucratic competitors in the management of international policy. Rather, history seems to suggest that the location of the MFA at the cusp of two systems, the international diplomatic network and the national diplomatic system, creates a dynamic environment within which roles and relationships with other actors are

¹⁹ John Dickie discusses the relationship between the FCO and other government departments in *The New Mandarins, How British Foreign Policy Works*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2004 (see chapter 11).

²⁰ S. James, 'The triumph of network governance? The Europeanization of the core executive since 1997', Political Studies Association (UK) conference, April 2006. Rhodes defines the core executive as 'those organizations and structures which coordinate central government, and act as the final arbiters of conflict between different parts of the government machine'. See R. Rhodes, 'From prime ministerial power to core executive', in R. Rhodes and P. Dunleavy (eds), *Prime Minister, Cabinet and Core Executive*, London, Macmillan, 1995, p. 12.

²¹ James, *The triumph of network governance*, p. 12.

in a continual process of redefinition. But if role adaptation within fluid networks helps to define what the MFA is, its organizational culture is of equal significance.

THE CULTURE OF THE MFA

I want to develop this point in terms of a consideration of foreign ministries as organizations possessing a distinctive culture. Nearly all studies of organizations start with observations regarding their complexity. Handy, for example, provides a diagram comprising more than sixty variables impinging on any organizational condition.²² Part of this complexity relates to organizational culture—that is to say the norms and values that characterize a system, its structures and processes. Schein emphasizes the significance of the organizational culture as a mode of coping with external adaptation and internal integration.²³ In other words, it assists the organization in dealing with the kinds of change that we have noted above. Pettigrew focuses on the significance of meaning and image: ‘Culture is a system of publicly and collectively accepted meanings operating for a given group at a given time. This system of terms, forms categories and images interprets a people’s own situation to themselves.’²⁴ Culture, however, is not externally imposed. Rather, organizational psychologists such as Weick argue that through processes of enactment, we create our own realities even whilst believing that these possess objective characteristics.²⁵ Narrative approaches to analysing organizational culture carry this idea further by suggesting that organizations develop stories or narratives about themselves and that how the story is told and by whom is as significant as its content.²⁶ Social constructionists suggest that people acquire knowledge by listening and telling stories and that studying these provides an important source of information about the organization.

²² C. Handy, *Understanding Organisations* (fourth edition), London, Penguin, 1999, pp. 13–15.

²³ E. Schein, *The Corporate Culture Survival Guide*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1999, p. 6.

²⁴ A. Pettigrew, ‘On studying organizational culture’, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24, 1979, p. 574.

²⁵ G. Morgan, *Images of Organization*, Thousand Oaks, CAL, 1997, pp. 140–1.

²⁶ M.J. Hatch with A.L. Cunliffe, *Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic and Postmodern Perspectives* (second edition), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 197.

Developing this point, what can we learn about the status of the MFA in terms of its culture?

As noted earlier, there are plenty of contributors to the debate about the state of contemporary diplomacy and its agents, and a good deal of this debate focuses on organizational culture. Generally, the MFA and its foreign service are portrayed as having a well-defined and 'strong' culture. This derives from the nature of the work, patterns of recruitment and, as noted above, the location of the MFA at the cusp of two environments, the international and the domestic. Serving overseas—particularly in an era when this poses very real security issues—creates amongst Australian diplomats, suggest Gyngell and Wesley, a culture akin to that of the military, based on shared experience and a sense of distinctiveness.²⁷ Moreover, as Wiseman notes, the diplomatic network possesses its own distinctive culture. Inevitably, this permeates the MFA environment.²⁸

Put another way, the 'foreignness' of the MFA is a critical part of its culture. 'Foreign' is derived from the Latin word 'foris' meaning outside.²⁹ Not only is the MFA linked to the 'outside' defined in terms of the international, it is also portrayed as being an *outsider* in its own domestic environment, distinctive from other government departments and lacking natural constituencies on which it can draw for support in times of trial. These two modes of 'outsideness' are reinforcing. The role of the diplomat as part of the transnational diplomatic community feeds back into headquarters whose operations are attuned to the needs of servicing the overseas network. One of the current tensions in the operation of both the MFA and its network is the result of the need to cope with a challenge to this dimension of their culture as they respond to the demands of the 'public service' culture and a consequent 'consumerisation' of diplomacy. More mobile populations, experiencing the joys of global tourism and the threats of global terrorism, generate new expectations of diplomats and the services they provide.

It is not easy and may be oversimplistic to try to crystallize the ethos of the MFA in a neat formulation, but much of it accords—as I have

²⁷ A. Gyngell and M. Wesley, *Making Australian Foreign Policy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 71.

²⁸ G. Wiseman, 'Pax Americana: Bumping into Diplomatic Culture', *International Studies Perspectives*, 6 (4) 2005, pp. 409–30.

²⁹ Hill, *The changing politics of foreign policy*, p. 3.

argued elsewhere—with the concept of a *gatekeeper*, deriving from its location between the international and domestic environments. The term is a metaphor, and these, as Morgan argues, simplify reality, distort that which is being observed and create what he terms ‘constructive falsehoods’, which, nevertheless, can provide valuable insights in understanding an organization.³⁰ In this context, it suggests a narrative which explains the importance of the organization in terms of a filter through which messages between the two environments pass, its repository of skills in terms of policy advice on international issues and—although not usually emphasized as much—its role as the institutional memory in the conduct of international policy. What appears to be happening within the MFA and the world of diplomacy more generally, is an attempt to substitute for this narrative which, as I have suggested above, has dubious credentials in the sense that it fails to recognize the intra-bureaucratic conflicts which have usually surrounded the conduct of international policy, a new story aimed at reinterpreting its role and, most simply put, ensuring its survival in an increasingly challenging environment.

But what can we learn about the MFA in terms of this change of narratives? Several sources of evidence are available to us. One comes in the form of diplomatic memoirs which, whilst usually focused on policy and events, can cast shafts of light on how the overseas network operates, its relationship with headquarters and other parts of the political and bureaucratic machinery. Thus Christopher Meyer’s description of his years at the British embassy in Washington DC recounts a number of stories about the role and value of diplomats, the character of the FCO and the embassy’s relations with the Prime Minister’s Office.³¹ A second source comes from writings of former—less commonly serving—diplomats on contemporary diplomacy, how it is conducted and proposals for reform. Riordan and Copeland fall into each of these categories.³² Albeit in different contexts, the messages that they convey are similar: a sense of closedness and conservatism; a failure to engage adequately with other government departments and societal actors; inattention to key domestic consistencies

³⁰ Morgan, *Images of Organizations*, pp. 4–7.

³¹ C. Meyer, *DC Confidential*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005.

³² S. Riordan, *The New Diplomacy*, Cambridge, Polity, 2002; D. Copeland, ‘New rabbits; old hats: international policy and Canada’s foreign service in an era of reduced diplomatic resources’, *International Journal*, 60(3), 2005.

and inadequate public diplomacy strategies. Typically, diplomacy itself is portrayed as in need of responding to changing international and domestic policy environments, the management of which requires networks rather than traditional hierarchical structures. Woven into all of this, of course, is the need to utilize information technology effectively and the impact of inadequate resourcing on the MFA and its overseas posts.³³ In one sense, this constitutes a *counterculture*, espousing values and beliefs that challenge the prevailing organizational culture.

There is a third source of narratives focusing on the MFA and its contemporary role in the form of the numerous papers that they themselves produce, analysing where they fit in a rapidly changing environment and how they are adapting to it. These are of interest because they are written by members of the organization itself, and therefore reflect the transformation of a culture that, in turn, can help us to understand what the MFA sees itself as doing in the 21st century. They are of added significance in the sense that they carry with them the political imprimatur of government, suggesting that the images they convey possess a degree of official acquiescence, if not approbation. One could select any number of reports of this kind. Usually they combine interpretations of the changing international environment with a redefinition of the responses that this demands of the national diplomatic system. To illustrate the point, I have taken two recent official documents, the White Paper on British foreign policy published in 2006³⁴ and Canada's International Policy Statement published one year earlier (see Table 1).³⁵ Embedded in both documents are the answers to a series of questions which are an attempt to explain to both itself and to external constituencies, what it is, and how it is attempting to redefine its role.

Although each set of narratives is determined by the specific circumstances of each country, one of the striking features is the degree of similarity between the two. One obvious function of the narrative is

³³ The impact of developments in IT is dealt with in detail by Jozef Batora in 'Diplomacy.com or Diplomacy.gone? Foreign Affairs Administration in the Information Age', Dr Polit dissertation, University of Oslo, 2006.

³⁴ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 'Active Diplomacy for a Changing World: The UK's International Priorities', White Paper, London, 28 March 2006.

³⁵ Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, *Canada's International Policy Statement. A Role of Pride and Influence in the World: Diplomacy*. Ottawa, 2005.

TABLE 1: MFA: Narratives of change

	<i>Foreign and Commonwealth Office (UK) Adaptive Diplomacy (2006)</i>	<i>Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (Canada) International Policy Statement: Diplomacy (2005)</i>
Who are we?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A network of overseas posts. • A 'value for money' organization. • High-calibre staff with skills experience and expertise. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Highly professional and globally engaged institution' comprising extensive overseas network.
Are we important?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes. Demands of a globalizing world make our skills indispensable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes. Demands of a globalizing world make our skills indispensable.
What do we do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence developments overseas. • Provide services to business and citizens. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Actively influence international developments in line with Canada's interests.'
What are our roles?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead agency • Partner • Adviser • Knowledge transfer agent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Foreign Affairs will provide leadership across government on international matters, both within and outside Canada.' • Interpreter of international events. • Articulator of Canadian international policy. • Integrator of Canada's international agenda and representation abroad. • Chief advocate of Canada's values and interests abroad.
What are our problems?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjustment to change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of 'policy capacity'. Must be 'rebuilt'. 'Foreign policy leadership is key to bringing coherence to the international activity of the government'. • Only 25% of staff posted abroad.

(contd...)

Table 1 (continued)

How are we changing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearer strategic priorities. • Moving resources overseas • Refocusing representation. • Working more closely with other government departments. • Becoming more representative of society. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rebuilding ‘policy capacity’. • Moving resources overseas. • Refocusing representation. • Increasing consular services. • Closer links with OGDs: senior positions in FAC open to OGDs. • Enhancing coordination at home: speaking with ‘unified voice’ abroad. • Strengthening public diplomacy.
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to assert the importance of the organization and both MFAs are firm in their argument that globalization, rather than eroding it, makes new demands on and underscores the significance of the foreign ministry.

In response to the question ‘who are we?’, it is interesting to note that the prime referent is not the ministry *per se*, but the network. The web of overseas posts is regularly identified as the key value-addition that the MFA brings to the management of international policy, and yet this is not a coherent justification for the latter’s role outside that of managing the network. Nor is it the case that the answer to the question ‘what do we do?’ is clearly related to the ministry in its domestic setting.

Answering the latter question in both cases produces assertions concerning the projection of national influence overseas, but a notable development creeps in here—in the form of ‘service delivery’ and the need to respond to the demands of a more mobile and internationalized public. This leads inevitably to the more difficult issue of how these aspirations are translated into actual roles. It is here that the gatekeeper narrative confronts the realities of a more diffused policy environment in terms of both issues and actors. In the case of the FCO, the picture is more nuanced in the sense that contrasting images are offered: ‘lead agency’ and ‘partner’ depending on the policy area and the government departments involved. In the Canadian case, role definition is made much more firmly, the key words being ‘interpreter’, ‘articulator’, ‘integrator’ and ‘chief advocate’. Whilst in both cases, the core rationale of coordinator (‘integrator’ is the preferred word in the Canadian document) is present, both narratives appear to recognize its centrality in terms of justifying the

MFA's position, but equally are conscious that the activity of coordination is sensitive in both bureaucratic and political terms.

Whereas the UK document is not very forthcoming in the self-analysis of the FCO's problems, the one from Canada is much more forthright, particularly in acknowledging what it terms 'loss of policy capacity'. This is associated with, and justified by, the pleas for coherence in international policy, taking us back to the coordination role. But both narratives stress that the FCO and FAC are adaptive organizations: each has recognized the challenges confronting it and is responding in similar ways. Recognition of the need to work with other government departments, stressing service delivery, clarifying objectives, redefining structures of representation—these are not only significant in themselves but in the messages they are intended to deliver to the members of the organization and to its external stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

Evaluating the challenges confronting the MFA requires us to recognize it for what it is—namely an organization. As such, it behaves as organizations instinctively do, attempting to maximize its autonomy by seeking to control its environment. In this sense, its actions have to be viewed outside the demands imposed on it by its functions, for it has a self-interest in survival and is the interpreter and articulator of these functions. As we have seen, a significant feature of the MFA as an organization is its location at the point of interface between two systems: the international diplomatic network and the national diplomatic system. One of the problems that this poses is to reconcile the needs of adaptation to the demands of both environments, where specific changes in one may not serve the interests of the other. In other words, a bifurcated but linked environment creates particular kinds of pressure, whilst also providing resources for coping with change.

Making sense of this is as much a challenge to observers and commentators as it is to diplomats themselves. It leads me to suggest, however, that the notion that MFAs over the last thirty years or so have experienced a revolution to which they have successfully launched a counter-revolution distorts both historical and present realities.³⁶ There

³⁶ As noted above (note 8), this is Berridge's argument.

is no gainsaying that we have experienced huge changes in international and domestic affairs over this time. But much of the available evidence suggests that MFAs have always been challenged in terms of defining and protecting their roles in the management of international policy. This is simply a manifestation of the fluidity of the environments in which they work. I have suggested that this fluidity is reflected in the organizational culture and the narratives regarding the nature and role of the foreign ministry on which it rests and is projected. MFAs have potent and skilled narrators in the shape of their diplomatic personnel whose attributes can be turned as effectively to institutional preservation when the occasion demands, as to the management of conflict in the international arena.

The real, underlying challenge is not to the existence of the MFA. Despite frequent predictions concerning the imminent demise of both the MFA and its foreign service, they continue to operate. This may simply reflect bureaucratic interest and political inertia underscored by a realization that what the MFA does has to be done somewhere and by somebody and that the alternatives may simply recreate the MFA under another name and in a different location. But there is a challenge and this lies in the culture of the organization and escaping from the 'psychic prison'—a situation 'where people become trapped by their own thoughts, ideas, and beliefs or by the unconscious mind'.³⁷ Undoubtedly, this has been true of the MFA, whose dominant source of narratives about its role is rooted in an often fallacious set of claims as to its role as gatekeeper. I have suggested elsewhere that there are other images, other stories to be told which may offer a renewed vision for the MFA and the role of the diplomat.³⁸ These newer narratives emerge from a dialectic between a 'counterculture' in the form of critiques from present and former diplomats and the kind of documents produced by the FCO and FAC. Both seek, in some measure, to redefine what the MFA is and how it operates—or should operate—in an environment where domestic demands and international pressures associated with globalization and regionalization pose diverse and complex challenges.

³⁷ Morgan, *Images of Organization*, p. 3.

³⁸ B. Hocking, 'Diplomacy', in W. Carlsnaes, H. Sjursen, and B. White, *Contemporary European Foreign Policy*, London, Sage, 2005.