

MFA Reform

Global Trends

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RARE IS THE FOREIGN MINISTRY TODAY THAT IS NOT ENGAGED IN THE adaptation to what may be termed as ‘globalized diplomacy’. A striking feature of this change is an urge to anticipate the future and to reorganize the diplomatic machinery structure and its methods to meet new challenges. Documents sketching this adaptation, such as ‘Foresight 2010’ and ‘Vision 2015’, are the order of the day.

Foreign ministries (MFAs), while outwardly similar in structure and practices, in conformity with international norms and usage, hide the different stages of development that they have reached. We may think of three broad clusters. First, some MFAs are post-modern, using the concepts, methods, and technologies that change the very process of interstate dialogue—such as the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) formulation methods used by the European Union, or by a number of individual countries like Canada and the US. Their diplomatic services are radically altered: career loyalists rub shoulders with lateral entrants coming in at different hierarchy levels, some in short-term sojourns before taking flight to other vocations. A few such ministries encounter an unprecedented angst, even demoralization.

Second, in contrast, the establishments in developing countries fall into two groups. There are those where somnolence reigns; the forms of diplomacy are pursued with little regard for substantive content, or concern for national interests. These are the exceptions. More typically, where change has not taken place, owing to the weight of conservatism,

traditionalists occupy senior positions and are unable to move away from the concepts and methods that they imbibed at the start of their careers, often three decades back. In other states of the global South, ranging from Argentina to Zambia, propelled by an international demonstration effect, or through 'structural adjustment' guidelines imposed by international financial institutions—part of public service reform—many foreign ministries are reviewing their procedures to improve governance. A few look around to learn from others.

Third, the transition states of East and Central Europe and Central Asia are among the quick learners, unburdened by memory, having swept away their past, looking to quickly align themselves to the European standards that dominate their ambition—EU membership is a spur even to foreign ministries; those working actively for this goal place the foreign ministry in the frontline, a priority for modernization. The socialization process they are undergoing impels their personnel to absorb good practices from others.

In a word, foreign ministries everywhere are adapting themselves to the changing environment of world politics. Several recent studies have examined foreign ministries, focused on clusters of countries.¹ While their salience in world affairs is self-evident, detailed studies on many foreign ministries do not exist. This could be owing to difficulties that scholars face in obtaining information, and a relative scarcity of analytical or thematic writing by diplomacy practitioners, even after their retirement—besides customary memoirs.² Where published material and oral histories are

¹ These are listed in the Select Bibliography.

² A study on the diplomatic process in five Asian countries on which the author has worked since 1999 is under finalization. *China*: there is a growing body of writing by former ambassadors in the Chinese language, by way of memoirs and narratives on particular incidents, but there is no comprehensive material in English, other than two major works: David Lampton, ed., *The Making of China's Foreign and Security Policy* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000), and Liu Xiaohong, *Chinese Ambassadors: The Rise of Diplomatic Professionalism Since 1949* (Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2001). *Japan*: No known recent work, even in Japanese. During a visit to Tokyo in 2001 the author was told by scholars at reputed thinktanks that 'the subject is difficult, because it is confidential'. But at the *Gaimusho* and elsewhere no difficulty was encountered in accessing information. *India*: only notable works are Shashi Tharoor, *Reasons of State* (New Delhi, 1981); Rana, *Inside Diplomacy* (New Delhi, Manas, 2000, revised paperback edition, 2003); J.N. Dixit, *The Indian Foreign Service: History and Challenge* (New Delhi, Konarak, 2005). *Singapore*: no published study on diplomacy, though fine studies on foreign policy exist. *Thailand*:

not available, one information source is interviews with practitioners and with personalities of the foreign affairs establishment, but this is time-consuming and expensive. A few Western foreign ministries have carried out their own comparative studies and benchmarking, but such internal documents are not publicly accessible.

THE REFORM ENVIRONMENT

The French Foreign Ministry declares: ‘The *Directoire* and Napoleon had already identified the problem and, through laws that are still in force, gave the Ministry of “External Relations”, a monopoly on contacts with foreigners. Nowadays, it is more a question of coordinating.’³ The old gatekeepers of external contacts have become shepherds that try and keep the flock going to foreign pastures more or less together, attempting to push them to act with coherence.

The reform environment in MFAs and in diplomatic services is shaped by the following factors:

1. Reform of the entire public administration is a priority in most countries, to transform the bureaucracy, as also to improve governance and accountability. For instance, Thailand has established ‘public sector divisions’ and ‘change management’ units in each ministry, to implement new management methods.⁴ France has changed its organic law concerning public finance, and with effect from 2006, ministries are required to provide quantified results that flow from public expenditure; the Quai d’Orsay is not exempt. Management techniques borrowed from business have entered many public services, and this demands continual adaptation by MFAs. Countries as varied as Ireland and the UAE have used management consultants, though not always to the desired effect.
2. The publics want greater transparency and information on foreign affairs. MFAs also find that engagement with parliament, the media, and with civil society has deepened. The result is expanding domestic

a study on the foreign ministry was published some years back, available only in the Thai language.

³ The website of the French Foreign Ministry.

⁴ Thailand has created a new Public Sector Commission as a counterpart to the Civil Service Commission, to oversee reforms. Each ministry has a ‘chief change officer’ to handle the introduction of the new reform methods.

‘public diplomacy’—though a more accurate term might be ‘public relations outreach’. Winning support of domestic publics for the country’s foreign policy, and for its diplomacy as well, impels countries such as Canada and the Bahamas to engage in town-hall meetings with citizens across the country, sometimes creating single-country ‘focus groups’ that bring together specialists and institutions interested in selected states, that the foreign ministry deems to be of contemporary importance.

3. The MFA is forced to network with many official and non-official actors, overcoming traditional inhibitions. These actors do not accept any pre-eminent ‘right’ of the MFA; they consult and coordinate because the MFA brings value to their specific concerns. This requires the MFA to track a wide range of non-political, low diplomacy issues, and to leverage its embassy network to work out the cross-linkages and potential leverages that help these varied actors. Many MFAs are on a learning curve.
4. The MFA’s human resources have changed. In most countries new recruits now come from a wider catchment than before, in terms of the academic institutions and disciplines studied; the domination by social elites has reduced, be it in Brazil, India, or Japan. MFAs need skills that are *both* generalist and specialist; each official needs to be rooted in language and area knowledge, plus some functional specialties, but also requires the flexibility to handle multiple tasks.⁵ S/he has to relate to specialists belonging to different agencies, a kind of ‘big picture’, broadband ability. The service as a whole needs specialists covering many disciplines, spread across hierarchy levels. The old notion that skills are accumulated on the job is no longer sufficient; mid-career and senior level training, adapted to the MFA’s own requirements, has become the norm. Human resource management also involves updated methods for promotions and career planning, to ensure high motivation.
5. At the same time, in most Western countries, MFAs face budget cutbacks (the US reversed that trend in 2001); they are forced to learn to do more, with fewer financial and human resources. In the developing and transition states, the resource crunch is acute in some

⁵ Many large services now require diplomats to master two foreign languages; UK requires all diplomats to master French, besides at least one foreign language, while China and Japan do the same with English.

regions such as Africa and Latin America, but less so in parts of Asia. Everywhere, the media and publics insist on better accountability.

6. Modern communications technology, coupled with the application of information technology (ICT) has integrated the MFA more closely with its network of embassies, qualitatively changing the diplomatic process. Germany has been a trend leader in this, consciously creating a seamless single diplomatic network, in place of the earlier conceptual division between the headquarters and the field units. This has been one result of the implementation of the innovative Paschke Report of September 2000.⁶ Implementation throws up new challenges, but this significantly transforms the way the MFA and missions relate to one another (see below).

In the past, foreign ministries seldom engaged in the emulation or even study of their counterparts, despite obvious similarities. That is now changing, as some realize that many ideas and methods are transportable. Australia carried out a bench-marking study in 2000, approaching seven or eight comparable MFAs with a questionnaire that ran to over 200 pages. The results were not made public, but have produced a series of reforms. Canada carried out benchmarking in 2005. Thailand has done the same. Since 1993, China has carried out low-profile surveys of its own, looking closely to particular aspects of the diplomatic process in some countries; this is tied with evolutionary reform that has been underway in its *Waijiaobu* since that time. Croatia has looked at Finland and New Zealand, in its reform effort. The heads of administration of the Austrian and Swiss foreign ministries meet regularly. The EU is ahead of the game; since the late 1990s, its unified member-state dialogue includes periodic meetings of the heads of the central administration of foreign ministries. The result is a cross-fertilization of ideas. One and two-year exchanges of EU diplomatic personnel, to work in MFAs, help this process; even EU embassies implement short-term staff exchanges at third-country locations.⁷

The global South's study of other systems is inadequate; the exceptions are China, Thailand, and some Caribbean and Latin American states that have looked around the world. In 2005, Peru carried out a global

⁶ Kishan S. Rana, *The 21st Century Ambassador: Plenipotentiary to Chief Executive* (Malta, DiploFoundation, 2004; New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁷ No other group of countries implements such exchanges.

study of diplomatic training methods. Neither ASEAN, nor any other regional organization, includes foreign ministry reform in the ambit of regional cooperation.⁸

COMPARISON TOOLS

Comparative studies of MFAs would be easy if there were a simple way of measuring efficiency, but of course that is impossible. One window through which the achievements of MFAs are visible to the outside world is its public posture, the statements by ministers in parliament, to the media, and the published documents, including the treaties and agreements, the joint statements worked out with foreign governments and the like, as well as reports of parliamentary committees. A number of MFAs publish annual reports, but this is not standard practice even in democracies such as Germany or Singapore. Most key foreign ministry documents are internal, including the vast feedback generated by the network of ambassadors and their staff. These become accessible only when 'freedom of information' procedures kick-in, say under a typical thirty-year rule that UK and many other countries apply, releasing the bulk of diplomatic documentation. But there are other countries with no firm procedures for even delayed document release and others that have a thirty-year rule but do not implement it.⁹

One research method is to look at a major international issue, say the Prague Spring of 1968 and the subsequent Soviet clampdown, or the overthrow of the Shah of Iran in 1979, and examine this through the documents in several foreign ministry archives, to gauge the quality of reportage and the prescience of observers.

For a current analysis we perforce rely on episodic data and impressions gathered through direct observation, including the perception of foreign partners of the country under study. Other devices offer an approximate comparative measurement of the way a foreign ministry works. The

⁸ An exception is the ASEAN+3 group that for the past three years holds annual meetings of the deans of diplomatic training, where ideas on human resource management, as well as training, are exchanged.

⁹ India is a case in point, unwilling to release all but a handful of anodyne documents, on grounds of continuing sensitivity of documents, relating to the 1947–50 period, the first years of independence, or even the later years.

author in a recent essay has suggested some indices, though these reveal only a few points of comparison.¹⁰ The information that we need includes:

- The relation between the resources provided to the MFA and the outcome, as a moving or dynamic picture, through data accumulated over some years. An analysis of changes in the budget and personnel figures in MFAs and their networks helps in estimating effectiveness.
- The range, depth and quality of the MFA's relationship with the other national actors, official and non-official, in its role as the coordinator and network operator within the country's foreign affairs community.
- The MFA's contribution to achieving targets in trade and investments, and its consular work and other public services—areas in which the quantification of results is possible.

This subject deserves more attention than it has hitherto received, and is a fit issue for dialogue among foreign ministries, as an aspect of performance management.

TRANSFORMATION WITHIN FOREIGN MINISTRIES

Let us consider the reforms taking place.

One. The foreign ministry as the diplomatic system's core and its field units, the embassies, almost unnoticed, are moving into a new relationship. The resident embassy is 'empowered' to co-manage bilateral relations. One reason: subject plurality and multiplicity of home actors—public and private—making it almost impossible for the MFA to keep track of all the dossiers that are in play.¹¹ The embassy abroad becomes the single best real-time source with a panoramic view all the issues, particularly in countries where the engagement is multilayered. In like fashion, in multilateral and regional diplomacy, the resident permanent mission has gained as the one agency where the full multiple dialogue is visible. This is the *rationale* for closer MFA–embassy integration.

¹⁰ See Kishan S. Rana, *Performance Management in Foreign Ministries: Corporate Techniques in the Diplomatic Services* ('Studies in Diplomacy' series of papers, Clingendael, July 2004), [www.clingendael.nl/cli/publ/diplomacy/pdf/issue93.pdf].

¹¹ This thesis has been presented in the author's works, starting with *Inside Diplomacy* (2000). The German Paschke Report of September 2000 comes to a similar conclusion; that report is available in English translation, through the courtesy of the German Foreign Office, at the website of the DiploFoundation, www.diplomacy.edu and at the website of Prof. G.R. Berridge, www.grberridge.co.uk.

The process is *aided* by technology, the ‘intranet’ or the ‘virtual private networks’ that most Western countries now operate, integrating missions and headquarters into a single, seamless communications network. This overcomes geography, and the simplistic notion that the embassy abroad is an implementing and listening agency, run from the centre. Some countries have recognized this and have reorganized their functioning, notably Austria, Canada, Germany and the UK. The German Paschke Report (2000) declared:

...is there much validity in the old argument that our headquarters staff, by reason of their familiarity with the whole spectrum of foreign policy automatically have the superior expertise?... The various documents needed in Berlin (briefings for the minister, draft speeches, reports, information for visiting politicians, dossiers contributions) should normally be prepared by embassies *and be recognizable as embassy products*. Any comments added or diverging opinion expressed by the responsible division in Berlin should likewise be recognizable as such... *Berlin should conduct the ongoing dialogue with embassies as if embassy staff were in fact members of the country division on the ground* [emphasis added].¹²

Since 2002, the German Foreign Office has implemented such concepts; one consequence is a gradual thinning out of the territorial units. The British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has done the same in the post-2000 reforms implemented.¹³ Accepting that the bilateral embassy is in the best position to advise on relationship management, it has drastically reduced staff in the territorial departments, redeploying headquarters personnel for thematic tasks (see below).¹⁴ Embassies are also involved in the management in other ways. The UK Permanent Under Secretary told a parliament committee:

¹² Paschke Report (2000).

¹³ John Dickie, *The New Mandarins: How British Foreign Policy Works* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2004); this is an excellent guide to the origin and the first phase of the UK reforms up to about 2003.

¹⁴ Large British embassies have also reorganized themselves on a thematic basis; for instance, a task force on cultural diplomacy or on environmental issues may be led by an official in one of the consulates, bringing together staff located in other places, including the embassy. Again, the intranet makes this feasible.

I am working much more closely now with the key ambassadors and high commissioners overseas because they need to be brought into part of the corporate leadership. We now have every three months a meeting between the board [note: the 14-member Board of Management runs the FCO includes two private sector corporate chief executives] and the top most senior 20 ambassadors and high commissioners, plus a representative also of a smaller overseas post, in order that we can get the concept of leadership and changed management imbued, not just in the centre of London but more widely.¹⁵

Austria and Canada also recognize this, delegating more power to the envoy. Other major services may not have made similar changes, but the logic is clear.

Some risk is inherent in a closer fusing of embassies with the center. First, MFAs want that embassies sustain an objective, holistic vision, untainted by *localitis*, i.e. be guided by the center's perspective, not local considerations. A hollowed-out territorial department imposes a greater responsibility on the embassy. Second, the process is predicated on a reliable, truly private 24x7 communications network that permits such tight fusion of the embassy into the MFA decision process. Countries such as China, India, and Japan hesitate shifting to intranets, worried over security. Third, the system may lead to new confidential message exchange protocols, different from the traditional MFA–embassy cipher links (see below). Some doubt if this is desirable. Fourth, the territorial department no longer acts as the filter or second check on the embassy. It erodes the notion of a 'country director' at home, typical in the US State Department system. These factors may explain the caution in other countries.

Two. Foreign ministry structures are in flux in many countries. Some small ministries, such as the Malta Foreign Ministry, are abandoning the old single 'bilateral affairs department' and are embracing territorial units, in addition of course to their traditional functional departments.¹⁶ Canada has moved the other way, merging several territorial departments,

¹⁵ Report of the Foreign Affairs Committee of Parliament, 26 October 2005, uncorrected version from the Parliament website.

¹⁶ Malta announced these changes in August 2005.

and now has just two, one dealing with the US and Mexico, and the other with the rest of the world. Splitting old departments and creating new ones is almost continuous in some foreign ministries.¹⁷

The British ‘thematic’ approach is one way of dealing with issues that do not fall into country or regional boxes, but involve cross-cutting interconnections. The themes handled may be as varied as public diplomacy, the EU budget, or hydrocarbon transport pipelines.¹⁸ Sweden has appointed almost a dozen ambassadors at the Foreign Ministry to deal with similar cross-cutting issues such as the reduction of conventional arms. Thailand is doing the same. The US has a tradition of naming home-based ambassadors to cover regional or thematic issues. India has appointed, for almost the first time, several special envoys to cover different regions.¹⁹

The common aim of these changes is an intensification of the diplomatic process, concentrating on new priorities, such as energy diplomacy. This also involves the other actors taking matching actions, such as an oil ministry setting up advisory groups to pursue external opportunities for oil prospection, supply or marketing. The process works well when it uses a ‘joined-up’ method that brings together the ministries concerned, or when other forms of inter-ministerial cooperation are in good working order.

An invariable consequence of establishing a unified communications network within the foreign ministry (either a ‘wide area network (WAN)’ or a ‘local area network’ (LAN)) is that communication becomes flatter. The head of Germany’s central administration declared in June 2002:

We have changed the age-old rules about submissions. Before, submissions would advance up the hierarchy from the divisions [*Referate*], to the head of directorate [*Unterabteilungsleiter*], to the Director-General [*Abteilungsleiter*] and only then to the State Secretary. This cost valuable time. Now they are as a rule submitted from the divisions [*Referate*] directly to the State

¹⁷ Thailand and India are two instances where such changes have been carried out.

¹⁸ Thematic departments are a kind of functional department. As the French Foreign Ministry website declares: ‘The organization of the Ministry has always oscillated between geographic and functional criteria.’ Many foreign ministries are in such a situation.

¹⁹ India has used retired ambassadors for these appointments; it appointed a special envoy in 2001–02 to deal with Afghan affairs.

Secretary, with copies going to the Director-General [*Abteilungsleiter*] and, if relevant, to a Commissioner [*Beauftragter*].²⁰

Such changes affect the work culture, which makes some hesitate. Some foreign ministries are ‘unconnected’, having neither a WAN nor a LAN.²¹

One trend is the unification of diplomacy management. Around 20 countries have unified their ministries of foreign affairs and foreign trade (Australia, Mauritius, Swaziland, Sweden, among others). In 2004 Canada unzipped an earlier unification, to go back to two separate entities; they were joined up again in 2006. Others have unified their foreign aid activities into the MFA (Denmark, France, Japan). The wonder is that more countries do not unify foreign affairs and external commerce.

Sometimes countries separate what is interconnected activity. In 2004, India created a Ministry of Overseas Indians, with no organic connection with the Ministry of External Affairs (though this work was earlier handled in the Overseas Indians Division created in that ministry in 1982). The new ministry wants to set up overseas offices, which will duplicate the ethnic outreach currently handled by embassies.

In some systems, the foreign ministry structure is set by decree or law, as in Japan. In the US too, the creation of new units in the State Department is subject to Congressional scrutiny. At the other extreme, these structures are in constant flux, to the point that the foreign ministry cannot publish a chart that sets out the hierarchy of units and the span of control of the senior officials.

Three. Diplomatic networks are also metamorphosis, not just in coverage—which is normal, now accelerated because of world affairs flux—but also in conception. Several ideas are being tried out.

- Some countries are winding up embassies in peripheral locations (i.e. places of low importance), transferring staff to new priority posts, sometimes to strengthen regional ‘hubs’.²² Three years ago, Colombia

²⁰ Speech by Steffen Rudolph, Director-General for Central Services to the Diplomatic Corps in Berlin, Tuesday, 19 June 2002.

²¹ There exist several ‘unconnected’ foreign ministries in South Asia, including India. Concern with network security is one reason. Another is an old-fashioned mindset that views information as power, and loathes the sharing that IT networks represent.

²² UK is closing down eight embassies in 2005–06, using the personnel to move to regional hubs, plus some to new posts.

closed 16 embassies in its network of 60 missions. Finland and Croatia are experimenting with shifting selected ambassadors to the home capital, having them travel periodically to the assignment capital, where a small office is maintained, headed by a junior diplomat; they believe that this will reduce costs without affecting results.

- Others use more intensively the concurrent accreditation method, with a senior ambassador responsible for a number of countries, a variation on the hub-and-spoke model.
- The ‘non-resident ambassador’ method, developed by Singapore and Malta, where the part-time envoy is based in the home capital; this is attracting notice in other countries.²³
- Another formula is ‘joint ambassadors’, used by the nine Eastern Caribbean state group OECS. Some EU states have also talked of this formula. ‘Co-location’ is a more limited way, to share logistics, used by some EU states and by the Nordic group.
- Thinning out embassies is one option—by cutting staff, giving home staff positions to locally engaged personnel. For instance, Australia has handed over the jobs of trade commissioners in its consulates in the US to qualified local personnel, on the premise that they know best how to promote exports to the US market. New Zealand and Singapore have similarly cut overseas staff.
- UK has fully converted some of its consulates into local staff posts, notably its Consulate General in Milan. Few others want to go so far.

Sometimes the driving force is the public policy-mandated staff cuts that all ministries have to enforce. Another factor is the availability of well-trained local personnel in many countries, costing a fraction of the total expense on home-based personnel.

While this is happening, the diversity within the embassy has increased, in that they are host to representatives of a larger number of home agencies than before. Major US embassies have upwards of 30 different government departments represented within the embassy, so that the proportion of State Department personnel within their embassies is also declining, sometimes falling to a mere 25 to 30% of the total. Since it is the latter

²³ Such non-resident envoys may be drawn from business or public life, or can be retired foreign service officials; they travel to the assignment country twice or thrice a year, accompanied by a desk-officer from the foreign ministry. It is possible to link this with a ‘virtual envoy’ method of Internet-based contacts, though this has not so far been tried by any state.

that handle logistics and the common services, the burden on them becomes acute. That is another contradiction that foreign ministries face in their overseas posts.

Federal states confront a different issue, a greater activity by their sub-state entities in the international process. The 19 German *Länder* run what amount to their embassies in Brussels, which is probably owing to the nature of the European Union as an integrating entity. The *Länder* engage in overseas promotion, sometimes with their own representative offices, bypassing or working in parallel with their embassies. Some US states also run their own promotional offices abroad in selected countries. We can expect more direct initiatives from sub-state units.

Four. The external policy process is more open in its non-official participation, and is more public than before. We see this in the way that foreign ministries report on their work and performance (see below); performance reporting has become a *mantra* for the public services.

The US State Department places on its website parts of the reports of the Foreign Service Inspectorate covering the inspection visits to embassies, and some portions excluded from these online documents are available to US citizens under the Right to Information Act. The full text of the proceedings of UK's Foreign Affairs Parliamentary committee is similarly available on the internet.

The French Foreign Ministry has a unit in its economic department that keeps in touch with major industrial and financial groups, helping them in external markets, with the Foreign Minister personally supporting this action. In 2005, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs created its first 'advisory committee' of about fifteen former envoys, journalists, academics, and others, meeting the Minister once a month. That Ministry also has extensive cooperation with the Indian commerce and industry associations, though this is not institutionalized through any permanent mechanism.²⁴ Japan, a latecomer in 'ethnic diplomacy', now gets its ambassador in the US and the consuls-general to periodically meet with Japanese-American leaders, in the presence of senior *Gaimusho* officials.

Another powerful public-private concept in bilateral and regional diplomacy is the 'eminent person' group, bringing together businessmen, scientists, scholars and others in public life, who meet bilaterally or in

²⁴ The Indian Prime Minister's Office has an economic advisory council, but not the Ministry of External Affairs.

regional clusters, to brainstorm on ways to improve a set of relationships. While the method has been known for long (witness the Germany–US Atlantic Bridge, dating to the 1950s, or the UK–Germany Königswinter Group), it has come into extensive usage since the 1990s, but is relatively less known in Africa or Latin America. It opens up diplomacy to non-official inputs, winning support from influential domestic stakeholders.

NGOs, as representatives of civil society, are now the foreign ministry's dialogue partners, in the West and in many transition states; some recruit NGO specialists to work in the MFA. Traditional developing countries may lack a mechanism for such contact (a few do not yet have units to handle human rights).

Five. Public diplomacy is a hot topic, exemplified by the US effort to reach out internationally, especially to Arab and Islamic opinion, after the terrorist attacks of 9/11.²⁵ The US investment in its public diplomacy is enormous, e.g. the *Alhurra* satellite TV network; the BBC is about to launch its Arabic TV channel, addressing the same market. Examined closely, public diplomacy involves wider actions than evident at first sight.

Publics are involved in international affairs in different ways. The 1999 street riots in Seattle during the WTO conference signaled a surge of activism by the opponents of globalization, scenes that have been replicated at other similar gatherings, and at G-8 summits. NGO activists have created a 'World Social Forum' as their counterpoint to the World Economic Forum. Governments have reached out to these dissenters, to involve them in dialogue. Official trade negotiation and domestic socio-economic development networks now include NGOs as regular partners, some incorporate them in their delegations to global conferences. Foreign ministries in the West also use them as partners on world hunger and disaster relief, development aid and in relation to human rights advocacy. The NGOs, having gained a status as interlocutors, would like to become part of the policy formulation process; there are finite limits to how far foreign ministries can accommodate them in decision-making councils—they are special-interest groups, sometimes making conflicting demands.

²⁵ Public diplomacy has many definitions, but the common strands are: an effort by governments, and their home partners, to reach out to and persuade foreign publics on external issues; similar efforts to convince domestic publics are also included. Further, it covers efforts to influence and improve the country image, with actions in culture, publicity, education, and other fields that mould this image.

Developing states are reserved in their dealings with NGOs on international issues.

Public support has always been a factor in foreign affairs, as leaders have intuitively understood, long before we devised the ‘public diplomacy’ label. Roosevelt’s fireside radio talks harked back to speeches at the senate in Ancient Greece, efforts by leaders to sway publics in favor of their position. Take the example of South Asia. In 2004, India and Pakistan engaged in ‘cricket diplomacy’, which shattered old ways of thinking and showed that in both countries ordinary people were weary of confrontation and possessed the goodwill to resolve intractable disputes. Subsequent New Delhi–Islamabad dialogue has been influenced by the invisible presence of these publics; both countries have embraced the methods of public diplomacy to the hilt.²⁶ In March 2004, the Chinese Foreign Ministry established a Department for Public Diplomacy, focused on home diplomacy; for some years now that Ministry has taken seriously the task of explaining foreign policy to the home population.

The French Foreign Ministry Secretary General heads a steering committee for information and communications policy. His British counterpart chairs a ‘public diplomacy board’ that similarly brings together organizations that are autonomous, but willing to listen to suggestions on projecting abroad a consistent message.²⁷ Such public diplomacy activities represent efforts to develop the country’s soft power.

Six. Human talent is the only real resource in a foreign ministry. It is best amenable to management techniques borrowed from the corporate world. Some examples:

- Systems for evaluating performance have been modernized, with ideas such as ‘360° appraisals’ (incorporating the observations of the persons that an official supervises). This has been customary in China for long; several Western MFAs use this now, including Japan since 2004. Germany applies a variation, using this as ‘bottom-up’ feedback that supervisors must take into account and discuss at an open staff meeting with all the officials under their control, but it does not enter their annual evaluation reports.

²⁶ The relief efforts following the disastrous October 2005 earthquake in Kashmir has also been animated by concern in both countries to reaching out to the publics—one’s own, as well as the other side’s.

²⁷ In the UK, BBC, the British Council, and the Tourism Authority are among the autonomous agencies that accept such gentle guidance.

- A few countries have an official ‘fast-track’ promotion policy; Singapore is one of them, applying a unique ‘current evaluated performance’ method (borrowed from Shell) that annually estimates the level that officials are likely to reach after ten, fifteen, and twenty years, and then proceeds to groom the best for high office. This fits with the elite culture of the island-state. Most Western countries, and several others such as Brazil and Peru, apply highly selective procedures, including in-service exams, and rigorous interviews, to identify the best talent. Some require an official to apply for promotion (Australia, the US), and failure to win this over several years can mean an exit, under ‘up-or-out’ formulas. A key issue is transparency, which enables these countries to be highly selective, and yet maintain good morale. At the other end of the scale, some countries (India, Japan) stick to seniority, with unsatisfactory results.²⁸
- Bidding for overseas and home assignments is applied in many systems, improving transparency and fairness in a process that is inherently unequal, given the huge disparities between the posts that have to be manned. In 2001, the UK introduced a point system for all its 450 ‘senior management’ assignments (spread from 27 to 8 points); officials make a single-page application, underscoring their special competence for the job that they want. The system continues, but the point allocation for each job was abandoned in 2005, as it undervalued jobs with low points.²⁹
- Enhanced demands on personnel skills make training a continuous process. This becomes a clear differentiator between the efficient systems and the others. The wider the range of courses offered, the better the prospect for skill enhancement. Canada and the US lead in e-learning, well suited to the dispersed cadres of diplomatic services.
- Training courses for ambassadors have emerged as another value-enhancement tool, used extensively by Canada, China, Denmark, Malaysia, and the US, among others. Leadership training is a priority. A few extend it to cover deputy chiefs of mission as well; disharmony between the head of mission and his/her deputy is a poorly hidden skeleton in many diplomatic services.

Human resource management has risen to the top of the agenda because it is impossible to run a public service simply on discipline and

²⁸ The Indian Ministry of External Affairs uses the seniority standard, but has been considering shifting to some kind of a blended system.

²⁹ See Dickie, *The New Mandarins*, for details on this system.

authority. Team spirit hinges on participation by the entire team in the foreign policy delivery process, not just carrying out instructions from the top. Lateral and multi-direction communication is possible only when all contributors are respected, regardless of hierarchy. This is a hard lesson for the conservative diplomatic services.

Seven. Changes in information and communications technology (ICT) have altered the ways MFAs work. Information has become a ‘commodity’; the priority is credible, user-specific analysis.

The intranet has produced a new kind of MFA–embassy communication, confidential messages sent by one official to another, often not copied to anyone else. Earlier, such messages went via the cipher system, which followed a fixed communication protocol (as per foreign ministry practice): copies of both incoming and outgoing cipher messages go to a predetermined set of recipients, depending on the subject and the originator of the message. This invariably includes the top hierarchy, from the head of government downwards (and their offices). Even cipher messages bearing a limited circulation motif, go to the top personalities. But this does not apply to the person-to-person confidential exchange via the intranet. This has consequences. On the plus side, it makes the dialogue more fluid; a ministry official may share a proposal at an inception stage with the bilateral embassy colleague, to gauge his or her reaction before that proposal is formalized—this means closer links with the embassy, as described earlier.³⁰ On the negative side: an ambassador may not know of exchanges carried out by an embassy colleague representing another ministry, who may quietly torpedo a proposal that the ambassador is developing, without giving the ambassador the benefit of fully explaining that proposal.³¹ Put another way, such communication takes away a key MFA feature, the well-circulated cipher telegrams that are read by the top hierarchy, ensuring that at their traditional morning meetings, they are all on the same sheet of music.

Eight. ‘Strategic objectives’ has become a buzz-phrase in diplomacy. The British have broken new ground in applying this to their overseas network. In January 2003, all overseas ambassadors were called to London—the

³⁰ A Western diplomat abroad described how he received a proposal from his headquarters as a trial balloon; he quickly pointed out the weak points in the idea, and it was dropped before it got any further.

³¹ This comment, based on experience, came from a Western diplomat.

first such conference held by the FCO—one outcome was a document published in 2003 setting out the strategic objectives of foreign policy, again a first. These objectives are summarized in eight bullet-points. The FCO then asked all its embassies to re-examine their activities and report on the way their embassy contributed to one or more of the objectives. It was no longer sufficient to report that ‘good relations were maintained’ or that so many delegation visits had taken place. In the words of a senior British envoy: ‘The system shifted from process to outcome.’

Is this a universal panacea? Some countries hesitate to narrate publicly their strategic objectives. Others may argue that such methods are relevant only for those countries that have global aims. But the real question is if such a shift, from universal principles of goodwill and peaceful cooperation, to a hard expression of self-interest, is useful in all situations. Even for the British, at some places the rationale for a resident embassy cannot be found in their contribution to hard goals.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Performance management has become a buzz word in foreign ministries. Borrowed from the world of business, it relates to three areas: first, human resource management (see above); second, the management of subsidiary units, especially the embassies abroad; and third, reporting to publics, the parliament, and others on the functioning of the entire system. Foreign ministries are experimenting with different approaches.

For embassy supervision, the methods are:

- *Foreign service inspections*, used by large ministries for over fifty years, now sharpened by adding human resource management techniques (e.g. questionnaire-based interviews with staff, home-based and local; examining the mission’s work performance in a range of functional areas; scrutiny of all communications from the embassy over several months).³² The best services ensure that all missions are inspected at least once in three to five years. In France

³² When I received our Inspectors (administration officials who handle this as an add-on task) for the first time at Algiers in 1976 they were pleasantly surprised to receive written briefs on the state of bilateral relations and the issues under dialogue; one of them remarked that this was not normally provided to them. By the time I met my last set of Inspectors at Bonn in 1993, they demanded full data on the embassy’s role in bilateral relations, viewing as a key task their assessment of the embassy’s performance. India is yet to establish a permanent Inspectorate.

and elsewhere, the Inspectorate functions directly under the Minister, reflecting its importance.

- The simplest new device, popular since the 1990s, is for missions to produce *annual action plans*, or *corporate plans*, usually in consultation with the headquarters. They set out objectives and targets, prioritizing the activity areas on which the mission is to focus. This has spread to many African countries, applied with varying efficacy. UK links these with the FCO's master plan on 'public performance targets', published on its website;³³ missions designate their own 'milestones', as target outcomes. Other countries attempt to quantify the goals as far as possible. Singapore ties resources to the plans, giving autonomy to missions on their allotted budgets, as long as the assigned targets are met; large bonus payments are tied in. The US works on a 'mission program plan' that focuses on the resources applied in pursuit of the assigned key priorities of missions. Tunisia has annual plans for embassies that are monitored through three-monthly reports on a matrix format, supervised by both the Foreign Ministry and the President's Office.
- Australia and Canada supplement their annual plans with '*program management agreements*' signed by ambassadors and other senior officials that tie in with the goals set out by the foreign ministry in cascading fashion. They specify targets in quantifiable areas and outcomes in others. Not everyone in the system concerned is impressed with the result; one encounters a comment that the agreements are anodyne in content, and most officials play it safe with generalities.
- Sometimes the payment of bonus is tied with the results achieved by individuals. The Swiss have applied this method since the early 1990s, but found that paying an extra 3% to some, by reducing payment to the under-performers was unpopular, and the system fell into disuse. But Singapore shows that sizable payments do work.
- The French pioneered a system of '*ambassador's instructions*': custom-designed, these are handed over immediately prior to the ambassador's departure for a new assignment by the *Quai d'Orsay* Secretary General; the consolidated document covers the priorities of all the ministries that have a stake in that target country. The ambassador returns within six months with his own 'plan of action' to implement these. The

³³ Published by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office since 1997, initially called *Department Report on the Government Expenditure Plans*, the latest is now called *FCO Department Report 2005*. These reports are a model of clarity and brevity.

method provides an overarching set of goals and tactics for the duration of the envoy's assignment. Japan has a similar system in the first part; after its 2002 reforms, it has added the second element, i.e. the envoy's action plan. Germany and Italy are implementing a system that emulates France, with mixed results.

- Germany tried out a *controlling method*, applying a costing yardstick to the activities performed by missions, to apply accurate expenditure norms. 'In summer of last year (2001) we introduced a resource management and planning system (*controlling*) which, once fully operational, will enable us to check whether resources are being used in line with agreed goals.'³⁴ They hoped that calculating the cost would make it easier to weed out unproductive activity. In 2005, this was abandoned as unproductive.
- A few diplomatic systems have obtained *ISO 9000 certification* for the services they provide, in a bid to respond to 'customer expectations'.³⁵ Thailand obtained this certification for its consular services, and France for its economic services. One may expect others to follow suit.

The second dimension of performance management is reportage to publics on the MFA's contribution, i.e. good governance. Some models are:

- The UK was the first to report on the FCO's performance, in the mid-1990s, as part of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's transparency policy. A feature common to these and the other performance reports since introduced (e.g. Australia, Denmark, New Zealand, the US) is the three-level narrative presentation: the *strategic goals*, the *targets*, and the *performance*. Countries use different words, but that three-level matrix is uniform. Another common point: the manner of narration at the third level—some results are shown as hard targets, others as descriptive 'outcomes'.
- The US Annual Performance Plan Report is especially detailed, providing a colour-coded bird's eye view of the results; this is also the most exhaustive report.³⁶

³⁴ Rudolph, Berlin, 2002. The concept had come from a German management consultant hired by the Foreign Office in 1999.

³⁵ Senior officials of the Thai Foreign Ministry used this term in describing their approach, as part of a government-wide reform of the administration.

³⁶ These reports are available at the website of the US State Department, as are similar reports at the websites of the concerned MFAs.

- A French system went into effect in 2006, as a result of a 2001 organic law on public finance; all ministries must furnish to the National Assembly a statement on the concrete *results achieved from the use of public funds*. This implies a quantification of results, though it is not clear as yet how the *Quai d'Orsay* will implement this.
- India introduced 'output budgeting' in 2005, as an adjunct to the traditional expenditure budget. The first Output Budget, presented by the Indian Finance Minister in August 2005, covered 'plan expenditure', and left out the Ministries of External Affairs (MEA), Defense, and Home. In 2006, non-plan expenditure is to be covered, which will challenge MEA to narrate its achievements in a new format, listing 'targets' and 'outcomes'.

The above methods raise some questions. First, is performance in diplomacy measurable? There is no unanimity of practice; some focus on outcomes rather than quantified targets. While the result of export promotion drives, or the foreign investment mobilization is visible, this depends on efforts by a myriad agencies, most outside the control of the embassy team; the latter's contribution is a matter of subjective judgment. Yet, setting a hard target focuses the embassy's attention in a way that a vague formula cannot. Therefore targets are desirable, provided the results are interpreted in a balanced, non-mechanical way. Second, what is the object of the exercise—management control by the ministry or performance enhancement? While some sanctions should apply to compulsive non-performers, the real aim should be to raise the average output of embassies. That means that the headquarters has to assist and encourage, rather than wield the big stick. Third, the world of theory and practice finds a meeting ground in such activity. We should treat this experimentation as an aspect of foreign affairs' democratization and the much-in-vogue public diplomacy.

Can we identify the efficient foreign ministry? In 2004 a method was devised by Deloitte, comparing the budgets of foreign ministries with the total number of personnel, with due weightage for the range of the task handled.³⁷ That identified the average cost of officials and the ministry, but said nothing of the quality of services delivered. A matrix analysis or a survey by observers qualified to make assessments is another way, for instance like the way world rankings on competitiveness or investment attractiveness are calculated. This concept awaits further research.

³⁷ *Danish Foreign Ministry Annual Report, Annex I.*

DEVELOPING AND TRANSITION COUNTRIES

Many developing countries have been slow learners in the adaptation process, whereas some of the transition states of East and Central Europe and Central Asia have been proactive in carrying out changes, as noted earlier. Perhaps this is because their institutions are new and thus more flexible.

The process of change, or at least the examination of change should begin with a simple truth: the efficient MFA delivers huge value to the country and its citizens across a range of external activities, not just in political relations, but in trade, investments, tourism, and the service industry; it does this in harmony with official and private agencies, catalysing and expanding their overseas activities. We live in a time when diplomacy is in a renaissance, because countries need to forge durable partnerships around the world, taking advantage of a congruence of interests, wherever these are to be found. Adapting the MFA to perform as best as possible should thus be a priority goal.

The MFA can provide leadership to public and private agencies at home in managing the country image, which in turn can produce multiple benefits; this is its natural role in our globalized world.

One comparative difficulty that developing and/or smaller countries face is in obtaining authentic information on the reforms implemented by other foreign ministries, even when ideas and methods are easily 'transportable'. This gives salience to the comparative study of foreign ministries. The subject has unexplored facets, meriting a partnership between scholars and practitioners.

REFORM METHODS AND PITFALLS

A word on reform methods: in 1999, British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook was persuaded to try an experiment, to let the young diplomatic service members network among themselves to suggest reform; the result—some 1,000 officials at home and abroad participated in over 100 contact groups looking at eight themes, producing in six months their 103-page report, 'Foresight 2010'.³⁸ Dickie's book *The New Mandarins* (2004) gives a fascinating account, e.g. how the Permanent Under Secretary designated senior officials to act as coordinators, to keep the process from going off

³⁸ This document has not been published by the British Foreign Office.

track, but not to block new ideas. Dickie adds that the reform proposals took the establishment by surprise. The Germans did something similar in 2001.

We set up a chat room on our intranet, which generated hundreds of messages and suggestions for reform. The Minister and State Secretary Dr Pleuger held a series of open meetings at the Auswärtiges Amt and at many of our missions. Ad hoc groups sprang up and produced proposals covering virtually every aspect of our work. Employees of all ranks wrote to us often with very specific suggestions for reform.³⁹

A bottom-up process has the obvious advantage that it captures the vision, and enthusiasm, of current practitioners. Those at the apex of the system may not necessarily have the best view of the future, and may even be out of tune with the ground realities. It also automatically facilitates implementation.

Is it possible to have too much of reform? Some examples given above narrate major changes carried out and abandoned a few years later. Implementing radically new ideas without trial is unwise; too much experimentation is a real danger, the more so without studying the experience of others. Some systems with an excess of reform have seen churning, and demoralization. Those that start late have the opportunity to learn from the errors of others, if only they can access this information.

CONCLUSION

'All countries still perceive their foreign relations in bilateral terms...(there is) an "illusion of familiarity" among politicians.'⁴⁰ While this is the viewpoint of a seasoned German practitioner, academic scholars, even those with some experience in contributing to policy formulation take divergent views. At Wilton Park (2005) the different perspectives were summed up in the conference report:

A key need is to strike the right balance between multilateral approaches to foreign policy and bilateral connections based on a resident embassy. Three distinct perspectives emerged at the conference. The first held that

³⁹ Rudolph speech, 19 June 2002.

⁴⁰ Karl Th. Paschke, at the Wilton Park conference, January 2003, unpublished notes.

the need for posts had been greatly reduced by the potential of information communications technology (ICT), which is facilitating direct desk-to-desk communications between relevant officials in different countries without the need for intermediaries. A second view was that more use might be made of hub and spoke arrangements which are being used by some EU members. The third view was that far from being undermined by multilateralism, strong bilateral relations are more vital than ever as the key lever for achieving goals at the supra national level. Similarly, bilateral relations between the major actors and medium-level powers remain the key means of engaging those who are outside the G8 and P5 but are significant regional and global actors in their own right.⁴¹

More comparative studies relating to MFAs and diplomatic services should improve our understanding of this segment of international affairs and the evolution that is taking place. It would also open up the subject to wider debate.

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⁴¹ Report on the Wilton Park conference, 'Diplomacy Today: Delivering Results in a World of Changing Priorities', March 2005.