What is the Foreign Ministry?

Brian Hocking

Professor of International Relations

Department of Politics, International Relations And European Studies

Loughborough University, UK

B.L.Hocking @ lboro.ac.uk

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The background paper for this conference poses two initial propositions: first, that significant change is occurring in ministries of foreign affairs (MFAs) around the world and, second, that this is `largely unseen and unremarked' by scholars.[1] Whilst not contesting the first point, I have attended enough conferences and workshops over the last decade to query the second.[2] Setting this point aside, however, it invites a question: namely, why should we be interested in the past, present and future state of this particular arm of the bureaucracy? Why is it that conferences, workshops and seminars should be devoted to the *foreign* ministry as opposed to ministries of agriculture and transport, for example? This is the point of departure for my discussion, since there are sound reasons for engaging in this enterprise, although they may not be the ones that explain the activity we are engaged in.

Asking why we analyse any phenomenon leads, inevitably, to 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 paper. 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 organisations and their patterns of evolution. More specifically, I suggest that

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K. Rana, Foreign ministries: change and reform, conference working paper, November 2005: 1.

[2] For example, the FCO conference centre at Wilton Park has run a series of conferences on foreign ministries and aspects of diplomacy over the last twelve years.

many of their perceived problems (whether these are identified from within the foreign ministry or from outside it) can be better appreciated through recognition that these are organisations located in distinctive environments. From here, the paper proceeds to consider what its defining features are, how there are related to organisational 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.[3] As Jørgensen has suggested, foreign ministries, `because they change form and content' and are `historical-concrete and dynamic organisations' are informative indicators of international systemic change.[4]

A second reason for examining the MFA follows directly from this point. Given the fact that the MFA is the bureaucratic embodiment of the sovereign power of the state in its relationship with the international environment, patterns of change within its structure and operations should provide interesting evidence as to how the state is responding to external change. In the light of the debate concerning the impact of globalisation and regionalisation on the power, role and organisation of the state, the condition of that part of the bureaucracy most closely identified with the interface between the domestic and international milieus is, at least potentially, of interest. Indeed, this has provided one theme in discussions of the impact of external environmental change on the ways in which state international policy is formulated and implemented. The impact of globalisation and regionalisation has been portrayed as changing the structure and role of the MFA and, of particular note, its relationship with and relative importance to other parts of the national bureaucracy. In the European Union (EU) context, for example, the theme of `Europeanisation' of the MFA is a familiar one as the impact of EU membership has demanded changes in the roles and relationships between

[3] 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.
[4] K. E. Jørgensen, Modern European Diplomacy, paper delivered at International Studies Association Convention, Toronto, March 1997.

government departments, including the MFA.[5] Associated with this is the fact that they are an interesting organisational phenomenon which, as we shall suggest later, possess highly distinctive qualities.

Interpreting what we see

If there is at least a prima facie case for paying attention to the MFA, this certainly does not imply a uniformity of opinion regarding its current – or even its historical – position within either 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.[6] 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.[7] This is not the place to pursue this theme at any length, but it is important to note that evaluations of the place of the MFA in its domestic and international settings reflects fundamental assumptions and differences as to the latters' nature in an era of profound change and how we should conceptualise 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 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 centralised bureaus, notably prime ministerial and presidential offices. In part, confusion is reinforced by the dynamics of change within foreign ministries. Not only

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

[6] A. K. Henrikson, `Diplomacy's possible futures', *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy,* 1(1) 2006: 3-27.

[7] O'Brien, R. A., M. Goetz, J.A. Scholte, M. Williams (2000) *Contesting global governance: multilateral economic institutions and global social movements*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

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[8], a proliferation of data can be utilised to support quite different conclusions.[9] This is no small problem. Data which appear to suggest an enhancement of resources, for example, may reflect a restructuring assigning new functions which are inadequately supported.

In part, of course, interpreting the impact of change depends on greater precision as to the phenomena being investigated. Wesley's discussion of the impact of globalisation on the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAT) is one instructive example.[10] Moving beyond the usual generalisations characteristic of such discussions, Wesley suggests a more nuanced evaluation which differentiates the impact of globalisation in terms of four dimensions - such as diffusion in terms of policy agendas and actors, and `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 politicisation of its operational environment, challenges to its role as dominant information system as rivals emerge and, third, pressure on resources. Each of these echo findings in other MFAs, but Wesley sees the 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.[11] 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 developments associated with globalisation – 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

[8] I have frequently been surprised when interviewing diplomatic staff, how often they profess confusion about (or sometimes ignorance of) change in the MFA.
[9] 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: 7-24.
[10] M. Wesley, `Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the challenges of globalisation', *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 56 (2) 2002: 207-222.
[11] Ibid: 220.

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 rationale [12] - 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.[13] 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.'[14]

It is the first two of these functions, rather than the third 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 in this respect. 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 organisations for example, are 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 or unaware of its existence, or accept that it is insulated form the pressures of exogenous change.

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

[12] D. Hellema, `The Netherlands' in Hocking and Spence, *Foreign Ministries*: 177-190.
[13] G. Morgan, *Images of Organization*, Thousand Oaks, CAL, Sage, 1997: 15.
[14] C. Hill, *the Changing Politics of Foreign Policy,* Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003: 77.

mediated.[15] 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 organisational 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 manifestation of globalisation and regionalisation, intra-bureaucratic relationships have comprised 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 form 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.[16] 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 recognised in the form of two departments, one for home affairs and the other for foreign affairs.[17] 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

[15] Z. Steiner, Introduction, *The Times Survey of Foreign Ministries of the World*, London, Times Books, 1982:11.
[16] K. Hamilton and R. Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy: its Evolution. Theory and Administration,* London, Routledge, 1995: 73.
[17] Sir JohnTilley and S. Gaselee, *The Foreign Office,* London, Putnams, 1933: 26-49; N. Hart, *The Foreign Secretary,* Lavenham, Dalton, 1987: 9-27; V. Cromwell, 'The Foreign and Commonwealth Office', in Steiner, op.cit.: 542-551.

himself'.[18]

But even after the 1906 reforms, this did not mean that the FO was an uncontested mediator of Britain's external relations. Even before 1914 its role 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.'[19]

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 reparations 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, 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.[20]

Bringing this brief narrative into the contemporary environment inhabited by the FCO, a

[18] V. Wellesley, *Diplomacy in Fetters*, London, Hutchinson, 1945: 191.
[19] E. Maisel, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy. 1919-1926,* Brighton, Sussex Academic Press, 1994:.63.
[20] ibid, pp. 73-4.

major focus of attention, as with other EU member state MFAs, has been the impact of Europeanization.[21] Here, the pattern of intra-bureaucratic relations are 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' [22] in the UK to the Europeanization process involve 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 such a complex 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 produced a shift towards the Prime Minister's Office. At the same time, this has to be set against other developments such as the FCO's leadership in 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.[23] In short, the history of the FO/FCO has been one of continual change marked by response to a shifting 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 in a continual process of redefinition. But if role adaptation within fluid networks helps is to define what the MFA is, another approach is to be found in terms of its culture.

[21] 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).
[22] 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 organisations 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: 12.
[23] James, *The triumph of network governance*: 12.

The culture of the MFA

I want to develop this point in terms of a consideration of foreign ministries as organisations possessing a distinctive culture. Nearly all studies of organisations start with observations as to their complexity. Handy, for example, constructs a diagram summarising the variables impinging on any organizational condition – and more than sixty appear in it![24] Amongst this complexity is organisational culture – that is to say the norms and values that characterise a system, its structures and processes. Schein emphasises the significance of the organisational culture as a mode of coping with external adaptation and internal integration.[25] 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.[26]

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.[27] 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.[28] Social constructionists suggest that people acquire knowledge by listening and telling stories and that studying these provides an important source of information about the organisation. 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 organisational 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

[24] C. Handy, *Understanding Organisations* (fourth edn), London, Penguin, 1999: pp13-15.
[25] E. Schein, *The Corporate Culture Survival Guide*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass 1999: 6.
[26] A. Pettigrew, `On studying organizational culture', *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 24, 1979: 574.
[27] G. Morgan, *Images of Organization*, Thousand Oaks, CAL, 1997: 140-1.
[28] M. J. Hatch with A. L. Cunliffe, *Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic and Postmodern Perspectives* (second edn), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006: 197.

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.[29] Moreover, as Wiseman notes, the diplomatic network possesses its own distinctive culture. Inevitably, this permeates the MFA environment.[30]

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.[31] 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 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 over simplistic to try to crystallise the ethos of the MFA in a neat formulation, but much of it accords – as I have 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.[32] In this context, it suggests a narrative which explains the importance of the organisation 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 emphasised 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 recognise the intra-bureaucratic conflicts which have usually surrounded the conduct

[29] A. Gyngell and M. Wesley, *Making Australian Foreign Policy,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003: 71.
[30] G. Wiseman, `Pax Americana: bumping into diplomatic culture', *International Studies Perspectives,* 6 (4) 2005: 409-430.
[31] Hill, *The changing politics of foreign policy*: 3.
[32] Morgan, *Images of Organizations*: 4-7.

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? Well, 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.[33] 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.[34] 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 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 require networks rather than traditional hierarchical structures. Woven into all of this, of course, is the need to utilise information technology effectively and the impact of inadequate resourcing on the MFA and its overseas posts. In one sense, this constitutes a *counterculture,* espousing values and beliefs that challenge the prevailing organisational 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 organisation itself, and therefore reflect the transformation of 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

[33] C. Meyer, *DC Confidential,* London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005.
[34] 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.

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 2006 and Canada's International Policy Statement published one year earlier (see Table 1). 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.

Table 1 MFA: narratives of change

	UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office ***Adaptive Diplomacy* (2006)**	**Foreign Affairs Canada** International Policy Statement: Diplomacy (2005)
Who are we?	• A network of overseas posts. • A `value for money' organisation. • High calibre staff with skills experience and expertise.	• `Highly professional and globally engaged institution' comprising extensive overseas network.
Are we important?	• Yes. Demands of a Globalising work make our skills indispensable.	• Yes. Demands of a Globalising work make our skills indispensable.
What do we do?	• Influence developments overseas. • Provide services to to business and citizens.	• `Actively influence international developments in line with Canada's interests.'
What are our roles?	• Lead agency • Partner • Adviser • *Knowledge transfer agent*	• `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?	• Adjustment to change	• Loss of `policy capacity'. Must be `rebuilt'. `Foreign policy leadership is key to bringing coherence to the international activity of the

		government'. • Only25% of staff posted abroad.
How are we changing?	• Clearer strategic priorities. • Moving resources overseas and refocusing representation. • Working more closely with other government departments . • Becoming more representative of society.	• 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

Although each set of narratives are 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 to assert the importance of the organisation and both MFAs are firm in their argument that globalisation, 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 s*e, but the network. The web of overseas posts is regularly identified as the key value-added 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 internationalised 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 recognise 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 self-analysis of the FCO's problems, that 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 organisations: each has recognised 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 organisation and to its external stakeholders.

Conclusion

Evaluating the challenges confronting the MFA requires us to recognise it for what it is – namely an organisation. As such, it behaves as organisations instinctively do, attempting to maximise 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 organisation 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.[35] There 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

[35] As noted above (note 8), this is Berridge's argument.

simply a manifestation of the fluidity of the environments in which they work. I have suggested that this fluidity is reflected in the organisational 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 it and its foreign service, they continue to operate. This may simply reflect bureaucratic interest and political inertia underscored by a realisation 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 organisation and escaping from the `psychic prison' - a situation `where people become trapped by their own thoughts, ideas, and beliefs or by the unconscious mind'[36] 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.[37] These newer narratives emerge from 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. One aspect of the official narrative that may prove to be of considerable significance for the position of the foreign ministry in the long run is the tendency to justify its existence in terms not of the of the headquarters but of the overseas network.

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[36] Morgan, *Images of Organization*: 3.
[37] B. Hocking `Diplomacy', in W. Carlsnaes, H. Sjursen, & B. White, *Contemporary European Foreign Policy*, London, Sage, 2005.