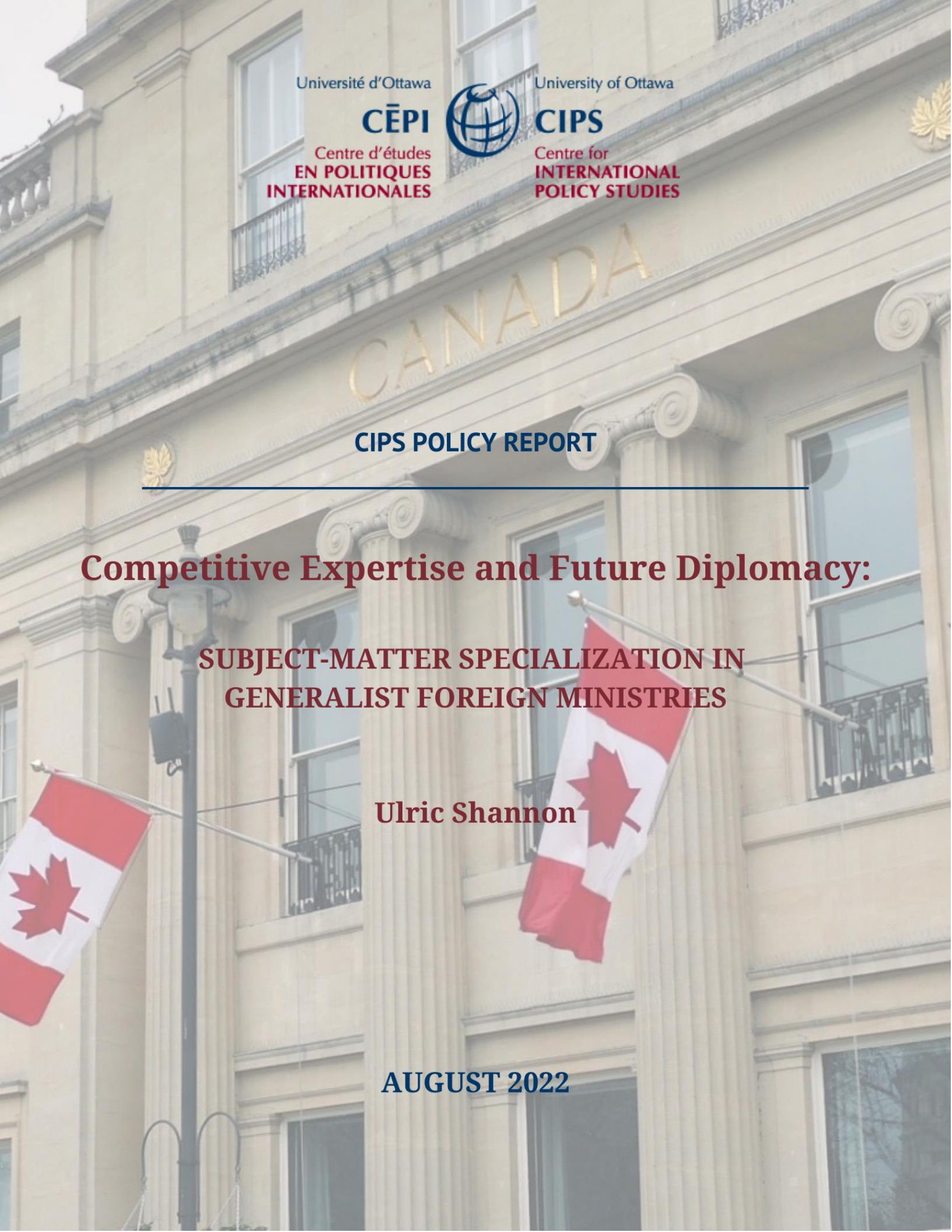

CIPS POLICY REPORT

Competitive Expertise and Future Diplomacy:

SUBJECT-MATTER SPECIALIZATION IN GENERALIST FOREIGN MINISTRIES

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According to a number of my sources, when Kovrig and Spavor were arrested… senior officials held meetings that looked like collective panic attacks. The government was in uncharted waters with Beijing, and it seemed they didn't feel they had the expertise on staff to handle the crisis. At a meeting of the Privy Council Office, the committee that advises the prime minister and cabinet, a frustrated senior official asked, "Where the f--- are the China people?"

–Joanna Chiu, *China Unbound: A New World Disorder*

Immediately after 9/11, in terms of military action we should have done nothing initially. I now believe we should have taken the first year after 9/11 and sent 10,000 young Americans—military, civilians, diplomats—to language school; Pashtu, Dari, Arabic. We should have started to build up the capacity we didn't have.

–Gen. Stanley McChrystal, former commander, US Joint Special Operations Command, 2003-2008

Executive Summary

- Foreign ministries face a risk of marginalization as the international agenda is increasingly dominated by global issues such as climate change, global public health, migration, and cyber-security, as opposed to traditional matters of state-to-state relations. Domestic ministries with expertise on these issues are becoming more active internationally and developing their own networks, challenging foreign ministries to demonstrate what specific value-added they bring to the table.
- In parallel, the growing pressure on the rules-based international order – of which Russia's invasion of Ukraine is but the most recent and violent example – as well as the more transactional approach to international relations occasioned by the rising tide of populism in the West, have weakened the capacity for collective action and multilateral diplomacy. This suggests **an increasingly competitive global environment (even among allies) where states will require the specialized knowledge and networks to pursue their interests unilaterally**.
- Faced with this reality, foreign ministries are re-examining the talent that they will need to be high-performing organizations in the 21st century. This has prompted several of the foreign ministries examined in this study to question whether the traditional 'generalist' model of the diplomat is adequate to current and future needs.
- Although most foreign ministries intend to preserve a 'generalist' core of rotational personnel, **the research reveals a strong trend toward encouraging the development of deeper subject-matter expertise and creating specialist cadres within foreign ministries**, whether on specific regions or on themes such as multilateral relations. The diplomatic services examined in this report either already prioritize excellence in foreign-language proficiency, or are taking steps in that direction.
- **In sticking to a 'generalist' model that has deep roots in its founding ethos, Canada's foreign ministry risks becoming an outlier among its peers and competitors**. Although there are certainly pockets of expertise within the Canadian foreign service, the organizational culture of Global Affairs Canada often discourages specialization by treating it as incompatible with advancement into senior leadership. This phenomenon is not unique to Global Affairs and reflects a broader trend toward 'managerialism' within the Canadian Public Service in the last two decades which has devalued the role of subject-matter knowledge as an attribute of leadership.
- The February 2022 announcement by Canada's Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs of a year-long study into whether the Canadian foreign service is 'fit for purpose', and the May 2022 announcement by Foreign Minister Joly of a parallel Future of Diplomacy review, represent opportunities to reconsider current assumptions and approaches to the diplomatic talent Canada needs.

- If it expects to remain competitive with both its peers and its adversaries in the fight for global influence, Canada will need a foreign service that is credible. This means being represented around the world by people who can speak authoritatively by exhibiting 'causal literacy' on a range of global issues, as well as deep subject-matter knowledge of their assigned region or thematic focus.

- Canada's foreign service is struggling to integrate expertise because it lacks a clear talent-management doctrine and has not sufficiently emphasized diplomatic competencies and knowledge in the promotion of senior managers. It should examine the 'career anchors' model developed in the UK (and under development in Australia), as well as the 'Core Precepts' used by the US Foreign Service to guide career development and promotion, as best practices that could be adapted to Canadian needs.

- Like other foreign ministries, the Canadian foreign service would benefit from more frequent exchange opportunities into other ministries, multilateral organizations, think-tanks and academia, and the private sector. This will require dispelling the perception of a 'career penalty' around assignments outside the organization by adapting performance and talent management tools that currently only assess service within Global Affairs.

- Similarly, the permeability of talent *into* the organization – through mid-career lateral entry into the diplomatic service – is a means that other foreign ministries have used successfully to address specific skills shortages. While Canadian foreign service officers are understandably leery of the implications of lateral entry on their already narrow opportunities for promotion, Global Affairs should consider this approach on a limited basis to address specific talent deficits. With a view to the long term, however, it should also take steps to incentivise foreign service officers to acquire the necessary expert skills and specialize in those areas where knowledge is at a premium.

- To its credit, Global Affairs has identified China as one priority area where more subject-matter expertise and career concentration is needed, both in the foreign ministry and more broadly across government, and where, by implication, a 'generalist' model is no longer adequate. This is also true of other areas, such as trade policy, where the value of specialists is readily acknowledged. As it seeks to deliver a global foreign policy in an increasingly complex world, **Global Affairs should aspire to build at least a small cadre of experts on most, if not all, regions and themes, including in anticipation of crises and opportunities not yet visible.**

- Given its unique advantage of having one of the world's most diverse populations as its talent pool, there is no excuse for the Canadian foreign service not to grow into one of the world's most interculturally savvy, knowledgeable, and networked diplomatic services. This level of ambition is a choice, and it will not happen by mere dint of immutable demographics. Rather, it will require purposeful human resource policies and workforce strategic planning, and, more importantly, a shift in corporate culture that acknowledges the unique competencies needed in the diplomatic profession.

Introduction

The profession of diplomacy exists in a perpetual state of anxiety about its future. In an era when world leaders can communicate with each other instantly by WhatsApp, or with a global audience via Twitter, the messenger function provided for centuries by brick-and-mortar embassies has been usurped. Meanwhile, international relations continue to grow more complex, with state-to-state relations giving way in importance to global threats and issues such as climate change, energy security, migration, terrorism, and transnational organized crime – issues increasingly led or shaped by non-state actors who fall outside the traditional ambit, and comfort zone, of foreign ministries.

There is a rich literature of analysis which responds to this professional identity crisis by advocating a 'new diplomacy' that is more nimble, creative, and risk-tolerant, more adept at conducting real-time advocacy through social media, and more skilled at using big data. Diplomats of the future, according to these visionaries, will earn their keep as tech-savvy networking polyglots operating in flexible hierarchies that can quickly mobilize different skill sets in response to threats or opportunities.* They will benefit from greater permeability between foreign ministries, other government departments, the private sector, academia and think-tanks.[1] A frequent assumption of 'new diplomacy' proponents is that, inevitably, the traditional model of 'generalist' diplomats – well-rounded and adaptable officers who can bring good judgement to an array of problems but lack expertise in any one field – will cede some ground to specialist colleagues – those diplomats with deeper subject-matter expertise, built on years of experience on specific issues or regions, including proficiency in foreign languages and a strong existing network of contacts on the ground.

Over the last two decades, there have been a raft of inquiries and reports in the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Australia, and the Netherlands, questioning the skills profiles of their respective diplomatic services. There has been no such public effort in Canada; indeed, the last official study of its foreign service, the Royal Commission on Conditions of Foreign Service (or McDougall Commission), reported its findings in 1981. And although critical appraisals of the effectiveness of contemporary Canadian diplomacy abound in the popular press, there has been little attention paid to the professional skills of Canada's foreign service and whether they are well adapted to the needs of a nimbler, and at times more expert, diplomacy of the future. On February 24, 2022, however, the Standing Committee of Foreign Affairs of Canada's Senate announced the launch of a major year-long review of Canada's diplomatic service. The brainchild of Sens. Peter Boehm and Peter Harder – former deputy ministers of International Development and Foreign Affairs, respectively – the study will examine whether the Canadian foreign service is "fit for purpose" and has the necessary skills for future success. Insofar as the McDougall

* The concept of a foreign ministry operating as a horizontal network of hybrid, task-specific units was outlined in a major Dutch review in 2013. (See: *Advisory Committee*, *op. cit.*, p.24.)

Commission of 1980-1 was preoccupied largely with issues of pay and benefits and not the core mission of the profession, the Senate's study may truly be the first of its kind in the history of the Canadian foreign service.

Three months later, on May 30, Foreign Minister Joly announced the launch of a review exercise of her own, titled *The Future of Diplomacy*, which will map ways to "modernize and strengthen Canada's capacity to engage globally". One of four pillars of work, 'Our People', will be tasked with "ensuring we are able to recruit, retain and develop a diverse workforce with the right leadership qualities and skill sets to meet the global challenges of today and tomorrow, putting in place effective mechanisms and systems to build expertise and knowledge, as well as deploy and reallocate strategically our human resources, especially in times of crises."[2] A preliminary report and recommendations are expected by the end of this year.

It is timely, therefore, to take stock of how Canada has traditionally addressed the talent-management of its diplomatic corps, and to compare it critically to the approach of our major allies as well as some of our competitors and adversaries. While the perennial 'generalist versus specialist' debate within Global Affairs Canada continues to languish inconclusively, it is clear that other states are taking deliberate steps to incubate greater subject-matter expertise among their diplomats, including through the development of cadres of regional and thematic specialists. The purpose of this CIPS report is to highlight the best practices that other foreign ministries have developed, and which could be adapted to the needs of the Canadian diplomatic service as part of a future reform agenda, perhaps in response to the findings of the Senate or of Minister Joly's *Future of Diplomacy* initiative.

This report does *not* purport to be a vision of what Canada's foreign policy priorities should be, nor does it prescribe specific recommendations beyond those implied by the comparative analysis. It is mute on the issue of budgets, mandates, and organizational design. It is principally interested in the skills required in 'traditional' diplomacy, and thus dwells mainly on the work of the political stream of the various ministries examined as well as ambassadors. The comparative literature available on the seven countries examined does not afford this author the ability to intelligently assess the more technical fields of specialization required in trade promotion, development assistance programming, or consular case management or policy. However, this report *does* endorse the view that all of these streams stand to benefit from deeper area expertise and language skills, both as force-multiplying capabilities in themselves and as a means of breaking down organizational silos within ministries.

Canada: "Honourable Men of Varied Abilities"

The generalist roots of Canada's diplomatic service run deep, and consequently have proven resistant to change. O.D. Skelton, the transformative undersecretary of External Affairs from 1925 to 1941 who essentially built the Canadian foreign service from nothing, described the ideal foreign service officer as "someone of all-around ability, capable of performing in widely different assignments at short notice, rather than a highly skilled specialist paying little attention to matters lying outside his field".[3] A political economist with limited international experience prior to his ascension, Skelton was describing a first generation of Canadian diplomats, selected by him, who likewise boasted sterling academic credentials and strong traits of personal industry and judgement but limited exposure to the world outside the narrow Euro-Atlantic sphere. Constrained by the unambitious interwar vision of Prime Minister Mackenzie King and the miniscule scale of the foreign ministry (only 30 foreign service officers were on the payroll by 1930, with only six overseas missions to staff until as late as 1939), the Department of External Affairs* had no need – and indeed no capacity – to build more than a small, generalist corps of rotational diplomats.

As Canada emerged from World War II and began a significant expansion of its diplomatic footprint amid the proliferation of newly decolonized states – growing from a network of 26 embassies in 1946 to 93 in 1967– the staffing ethos of the service remained unchanged. The legendary Marcel Cadieux, undersecretary of External Affairs from 1964 to 1970, who was hired into the department (as a generalist lawyer) in O.D. Skelton's final year as undersecretary, explained the continuing preference for generalists this way:

> By refusing to get involved in a mania for specialization which would have been as useless for the Department as prejudicial to the essential quality of the profession, the Department has avoided distorting the good management of the service and endangering the nice balance of its officer cadre. Fundamentally, therefore, the rather sparse complement of the Canadian diplomatic service is an obstacle to excessive specialization on the part of its officers. And this is all to the good; our officers thus remain faithful to the spirit of the profession, to the ideal of the honourable man of varied abilities and interests who makes it his duty to apply himself to all aspects of Canadian life that he may represent it abroad with the diversity of resources which is the very essence of his profession.[4]

Early critics agreed that Cadieux's fear of 'excessive specialization' was unfounded: on the contrary, "there seems to be a pride in the *non*-expert," York University professor Thomas

* The Canadian foreign ministry has been called the Department of External Affairs (1909-1982), External Affairs and International Trade (1982-1993), the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (1993-2003), Foreign Affairs Canada (2003-2006), Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada (2006-2013), the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (2013-2015), and since 2015, Global Affairs Canada. This paper uses the terminology corresponding to the era discussed.

Hockin wrote. "Once a member of the Department, an officer is neither encouraged to develop specialties, not does the Department systematically allow for detailed or sophisticated training."[5] The 1960-62 Royal Commission on Government Organization (known as the Glassco Commission) found this to be a deficiency, concluding that "an increasing degree of specialization has become necessary to meet the complex responsibilities of the day with the skills of economists, scientists, international lawyers and other specialists more and more in demand."[6] The commission recommended that External Affairs adopt staffing policies that allowed for specialization "within the framework of 'generalist' development and experience", including by slowing down the pace of employee rotations to ensure a more sustained development and deployment of specialist skills.[7] Commenting on the findings of the commission, Hockin wrote:

> Involvement in certain areas of the world now calls for special linguistic skills or esoteric knowledge of some remote country; complex international negotiation requires the presence of specialists in particular disciplines or fields of professional knowledge. In such cases, the 'generalist' concept when coupled with rotation, tends at worst to break down and at the very least, to be too thin for the needs of effective policy-making and administration.[8]

Others also gave the generalist model a failing grade. Canadian academic R. Barry Farrell, on the basis of multiple visits to Europe between 1954 and 1969, observed that "the most common impression gained of Canadian Foreign Service officers in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union was that the majority of them were not as specialized on the affairs of the host country as their British and American counterparts, nor as well versed in the local languages as were the Americans."[9] Farrell argued that "the development of a more specialized diplomatic corps might, indeed, be a prerequisite for Canada's pursuing a foreign policy which is not reliant on either Great Britain or the United States, and which is responsive to specifically Canadian interests."[10]

Even as External Affairs grew in leaps and bounds, the perception, by its own leadership, that the foreign ministry was too small to indulge in subject-matter specialization remained scriptural well into the 1970s: "Some specialties such as legal, commercial, scientific, or linguistic training are obviously desirable, but no smaller country would be able to afford to maintain diplomatic specialists in each of the ever-increasing areas of international concern."[11] Writing in 1979, T.A Keenleyside found that the ideal Canadian diplomat had hardly evolved since the days of O.D. Skelton, with External Affairs continuing to prefer the generalist officer, who "has been trained for… a variety of different types of positions both in Ottawa and abroad over the course of his career. His value purportedly rests in his broad perspective as a result of his well-rounded experience and understanding of the multivarious activities of the department. He is supposed to have 'the advantages of a global view of world politics and none of the disadvantages of restricted political vision that come from specialization'".[12]

The cost of these 'advantages', however, included troubling blind spots in areas of the world where Canada's diplomatic presence was growing most rapidly as a consequence of decolonization. In his pioneering 1973 survey of Canada's foreign service officers, Keenleyside found only six diplomats who considered themselves specialists on the Middle East or Africa, and only 16 who reported being specialists on Asia, a region where University of British Columbia professor Barrie Morrison found "Canadian analysis and background reporting were distinctly inferior to that of the Australians and the Americans." Keenleyside concluded that "the department must at least to some extent adjust to the changed nature of its global operations by increased area specialization."[13] Interestingly, 40 percent of the foreign service officers surveyed by Keenleyside felt that more specialists were needed at External Affairs (versus six percent who preferred more generalists). Self-identified generalists also reported a significantly lower rate of job satisfaction. Keenleyside concluded that "there appears to be a case for the recruitment of more pre-trained functional and area specialists, for enabling more officers to develop at least partial specialization on the job, and for attaching specialists to the department from outside its ranks."[14]

The next several decades, however, saw little progress toward realizing this vision. In the late 1960s Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau famously disparaged the foreign service, telling an interviewer: "I feel the whole concept of diplomacy today is a little bit outmoded. I believe much of it goes back to the early days of the telegraph, when you needed a dispatch to know what was happening in Country A, whereas now you can read it in a good newspaper."[15] Trudeau would slash External Affairs' budget while gradually moving most key foreign policy files into the Prime Minister's office, turning the 1970s into a period of marginalization and low morale for Canada's diplomats. According to departmental historian Greg Donaghy, this era of lowered ambition coincided with an increased focus on internal administration: "To the disgust of romantics, 'management skills' were to become one of the signal characteristics of the contemporary Canadian diplomat. "[T]he buck stops at the head of mission's desk when it comes to financial responsibility and accountability," declared ambassador Dilys Buckley-Jones, emphasizing the shift in the diplomat's priorities."[16] (Whereas the US, UK, and France place mission-management responsibilities on the deputy head of mission, freeing up the ambassador to focus on networking and high-level diplomacy, Canada does not have DHOMs outside of a small number of large embassies; a routine complaint of ambassadors is the burden of management controls imposed by headquarters which cuts into their focus on high-value activity on the ground.) The McDougall Commission at the end of that decade found that "there appears to be no adequate system for career planning, for identifying the strengths and weaknesses of individual foreign service employees, […] or for providing the training and rational pattern of assignments to ensure that the Service has at its disposal the human resources of the variety and calibre essential to the achievement of its goals as an organization."[17]

The 1982 merger of the Trade Commissioner Service into External Affairs produced a culture shock that "reverberated for a generation".[18] Nonetheless, the merger is credited

with prompting "an infusion of talent with specialist skills from other areas of government" including a number of trade policy experts who have maintained a rich tradition of excellence and of group identity.[19] The following year, an examination led by the Policy Planning group of the department resulted in a scathing internal report titled *A Crisis of Quality*, which diagnosed a department adrift managerially and incapable of creating a culture of excellence: "We seem to be drained of fresh ideas or imaginative responses to new situations, at a time when we are most in need of intellectual rejuvenation."[20] Although little concerned with the matter of subject-matter expertise, the report nonetheless advocated "the additional recruitment of specialized talent", including the "selection of non-rotational expertise for research and intelligence units". It called for university leave and secondments to private industry and international institutions to cultivate knowledge "in those fields where the Department requires on-the-ground expertise", as well as a mechanism to mine the accumulated expertise of retired officers.[21]

The decade beginning in 1988 saw ten rounds of budget cuts to the renamed External Affairs and International Trade, resulting in sporadic recruitment of new officers and a loss of institutional knowledge. More than half of all officers joining the diplomatic service after 1990 had left the department by 2001.[22] Financial bonuses offered to diplomats who acquired and retained foreign-language skills were eliminated, making Canada the only G7 country without such an incentive scheme.[23] By the time the Paul Martin government sought to articulate its foreign policy vision in the 2005 International Policy Statement – the first foreign policy White Paper since 1995, and the last since – the Department of Foreign Affairs had grown headquarters-heavy due to steady cuts to overseas positions. Vowing to rebalance the footprint and strengthen Canada's field presence in areas of growing interest such as Asia, the Statement also promised more investment in training for languages such as Mandarin and Arabic, noting that, by comparison, the Australian foreign service spent three times what Canada did per officer on language training, and New Zealand nine times.[24]

By May 2007, however, the Auditor General of Canada, Sheila Fraser, found that the department was nowhere near meeting the aspirations of the International Policy Statement. Only 16 percent of diplomats in foreign language-designated positions abroad actually met the proficiency requirements of the position. More damningly, Fraser found that "the Department has no strategic human resources plan. It does not have a complete picture of the people, competencies, and experience it will need in the future, and it lacks basic information needed to plan for and manage its workforce."[25] Two years later Treasury Board approved funding for a surge of investment in foreign-language training and this helped push the compliance rate up to 45 percent in 2012. However, according to the department's training centre, the Canadian Foreign Service Institute, "ever since, we have been observing an erosion of Global Affairs Canada's foreign language compliance rate," to 23 percent currently. The compliance rate for executive-level positions is even lower, at 18 percent. Canada badly trails its counterparts from Australia, the Netherlands,

New Zealand, Sweden, the US, and the UK, all of which, as of 2018, could boast a compliance rate above 50 precent (with the Dutch reaching 100 percent).[26]

Canada's fledgling track record at producing diplomats fluent in foreign languages is an unfortunate distinction among its peers. The principal cause appears to be the chronic shortage of junior and mid-level officers at headquarters following years of insufficient recruitment, which results in a reluctance by managers to release officers for their full allotment of training. On average over the last four years, only 55 percent of employees assigned to language-designated positions have had the benefit of their full training entitlement. High-performing language students who meet their designated levels ahead of schedule are routinely pulled back to headquarters to fill urgent gaps despite having training time theoretically still available to them, resulting in atrophy of language skills in the months immediately prior to posting.

Other explanations are more tangible: as stated previously, Canada is alone among G7 countries and many international organizations in offering its diplomats no financial incentives to the acquisition and retention of foreign language skills. A detailed business case proposing the creation of such incentives, prepared in 2018 by the Canadian Foreign Service Institute, was not supported by the senior management of the department, ostensibly on cost grounds.[27] A language bonus scheme does exist elsewhere in the Canadian government: the Communications Security Establishment pays eligible employees a foreign-language fluency bonus that can equate to as much as 5 percent of their salary.[28]

Further reasons for the department's record of under-performance were illuminated in a 2017 survey of 58 Global Affairs employees who had taken difficult-language training in Middle East languages (Arabic, Farsi, Turkish, and Hebrew).* The survey found a high number of 'dropouts', namely officers who had achieved a high level of language proficiency but then declined to serve a second posting in the region, leaving the department to fill subsequent vacancies in the field with officers with no background in the region nor the requisite language skills.† The poor retention of specialist officers, the survey found, was largely due to a perception that the department did not value foreign-language skills in career management and promotion. (One minor but telling example cited by respondents: the assistant deputy minister-level position of Foreign Languages Champion at Global Affairs has been vacant since 2013.) The Canadian Foreign Service Institute likewise concluded that "there are disincentives for applying to language-

* This unpublished survey was conducted by the author with the support of the then-Assistant Deputy Minister for Europe and the Middle East, Alex Bugailiskis, for the purpose of identifying paths to improve specialized talent retention in the Middle East bureaus.

† Until two decades ago, Foreign Affairs required as a condition of employment that foreign service officers receiving foreign language training commit to serving twice the duration of any training offered, in that target language. For 24-month language training programs for the most difficult languages, this was tantamount to committing to a minimum of two postings. The practice appears to have disappeared.

designated positions because officers dedicate up to 2 years to acquire one competency to the detriment of many other, more transferable, competencies."[29] Without clear signals from senior management about the value of specialist skills, officers are left to ponder the costs and benefits of a major life commitment – up to two years – to foreign-language training without any assurance that the department will make an equal commitment to valuing this personal and corporate asset in their career development.

The fact that only 18 percent of language-designated EX-level (i.e., senior management) positions abroad are filled with qualified speakers is further evidence of the perceived irrelevance of language skills to advancement in the organization. The Canadian Foreign Service Institute found in 2020 that "Since foreign language competency is not a requirement for accessing more senior rotational positions, as is the case in other MFAs, foreign language training may impede the career prospects of rotational employees."[30] Interestingly, a third-party evaluation of Foreign Affairs' language program in 2014 recommended that "a high level of proficiency in at least one foreign language be a requisite for any executive position in the department".[31] This would be a direct parallel to the US State Department requirements for entry into the Senior Foreign Service. The recommendation was ignored, perhaps in recognition that all employees historically have not enjoyed equal access to foreign-language training opportunities – in particular, those from the Consular and Development streams.* Around 2019 foreign language proficiency began to appear among 'asset qualifications' for promotion into the executive cadre, but whether this has been of any consequence for individual candidates is a matter of conjecture.

At the level of ambassadors, the unique and complex process for head of mission nominations, which require the assent of the Foreign Minister and Prime Minister, is subject to frequent delays and uncertainty, meaning that ambassadors rarely have the opportunity to take significant language training prior to posting. This is in marked contrast with the UK system, for example, which staffs head of mission positions one to two years in advance – sufficient lead time to ensure that most British ambassadors – 74 percent of them, in fact – possess the expected level of fluency in advance of their posting.

Other human resources practices have amounted to structural disincentives. A number of promotion processes in recent years at the working and mid-management levels have required recent financial or human resources management experience which full-time language students by definition cannot accrue while on training, making many ineligible. To its credit, the department in 2019 began to exempt language training time from the period in which management experience must be demonstrated. But for diplomats expected to spend as much as two years on full-time training to acquire fluency in a difficult

* It would also make it more difficult to attract executive-level lateral hires from other government departments or from outside the Public Service. (Although these are infrequent, they are part of the department's strategy for addressing specific needs at the EX level.)

language like Mandarin, Korean or Arabic, perceptions of a career penalty associated with being off the senior management's radar for such a long period remain widespread.

Although still wedded to a 'generalist' philosophy, one area where Global Affairs has clearly identified a need for greater depth of subject-matter expertise is China. Reputedly the brainchild of then-Ambassador to China Dominic Barton, who had argued that "Canada should have the strongest China desk in the G7", the 'China Capacity Project' launched in 2021 found that the department's expertise on China, including its Mandarin-language talent, was skewed toward the Trade stream and deficient in the area of political and regional analysis. It also found that other government departments were increasingly preoccupied with the China dimension of their work and soliciting Global Affairs' expert advice, adding to the aggregate demand. The project advocated creating a Centre of China Excellence within the department, a renewed focus on language skills, the targeted recruitment of experts within Global Affairs and in other government departments for assignments in (or on) China, knowledge partnerships with the private sector and academia, and more sophisticated training on China issues for assistant deputy minister-level officials across government. Acknowledging perceptions of a 'career penalty' around difficult-language learning (with a compliance rate of only 14 percent for Mandarin-designated positions), the project advocated adding fluency in Mandarin to the asset qualifications for future recruitment and promotion processes, and it recommended creating incentives to persuade employees with Chinese language skills to commit to at least a second posting in China.*

The department has a mixed track record in developing thematic as well as area expertise. Following the September 11, 2001 attacks, Foreign Affairs secured funding to create the Global Security Reporting Program (GSRP). This program, unique to Canada, deploys three dozen officers to embassies in hot spots around the world where they focus exclusively on generating analysis and reporting on international security issues of strategic interest to Canada. Their reports – about 1,800 per year in pre-COVID days – are given a wide audience within the ministry and are shared with partner departments and, selectively, with our allies, yielding valuable inter-service currency. National security scholar Thomas

* One challenge unique to Canada is its official-language requirements. All foreign service officers must meet a high level of proficiency (level CCC) in both English and French. Historically, unilingual officers who were recruited at the entry level were hired on a probationary basis (known as *ab initio*) and given up to one year of full-time training in order to reach CCC level in their second official language. However, due to budget constraints, Foreign Affairs suspended its official language training program in 2012 and began to limit recruitment to candidates with existing level-CCC fluency in both official languages. This practice was noticeably detrimental to the department's efforts to attract more Mandarin speakers, in particular from the Chinese-Canadian community in areas of Canada where all school districts do not provide French instruction. One targeted recruitment effort in 2016 ended up turning away many qualified candidates who were told that they would only be hired if they were already fluent in both official languages. Fortunately, Global Affairs restored official language training in 2021.

Juneau writes: "GSRP reporting is one of the greatest assets for Canada within the Five Eyes community and with other intelligence partners. According to one interviewee, it is 'hard to overstate how unique GSRP is, how much Five Eyes partners love it . . . it is a crown jewel.'"[32] The GSRP program is particularly noted for investing in foreign-language training for its officers (29 of its 36 positions abroad carry an 'imperative' language designation)* and as a result has contributed disproportionately to the department's stock of linguists and subject-matter specialists. However, since GSRP officers manage neither budgets nor staff, the program suffers from a perception of offering poor career prospects because the department's eligibility criteria for promotion weigh management experience so heavily.

As well, from 2009 to 2011, the department's Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (START) experimented with a comprehensive talent-management program that aimed to develop deeper expertise on conflict management, peacebuilding, and humanitarian response in crisis contexts through dedicated training and managed career progression up to the director level. The initiative proposed a deliberate sequencing of assignments at headquarters, in conflict zones, in multilateral posts such as the UN and NATO, and appropriate strategic bilateral posts in the G7, bolstered by deployment opportunities at the Canadian Forces staff college and in UN senior leaders programs.[33] However this drive does not appear to have survived subsequent changes in leadership.

As part of START's efforts, University of Ottawa professor Peter Jones was commissioned to write a paper in 2010 taking stock of Canada's history of involvement of international mediation efforts. He found that a number of Foreign Affairs officials had developed varying levels of expertise on mediation over the years but that this had happened in an *ad hoc* fashion. The department did not maintain a roster of employees with these skills nor offer training to deepen their knowledge of this technical field. Diplomats interviewed by Jones shared their view that, if the department wished to create a small cadre of mediation specialists, it would need to offer better training, career development, and mentoring support. "Good people will not devote career-development time to [mediation] if the Department does not demonstrate that it values it and will reward them." Jones concluded that, if it wished to excel in this sub-field, "DFAIT's Personnel system will have to accept the idea that there will be a cadre of officers who will have rather unusual career streams – including periods of time on mediation training and periods of time seconded outside DFAIT for work on mediation processes run by the UN, regional organizations and NGOs."[34]

The Canadian foreign service has faced a number of human resources challenges that have impeded efforts to develop subject-matter specialization and reinforced the default model of generalism. Recruitment of foreign service officers has been sporadic since 1997 due to budget pressures and was essentially paused for much of the period from 2009 to 2019, causing dire shortages of entry-level officers and forcing managers to prioritize short-term

* A 'language imperative' position is one where the selected employee, theoretically, is not allowed to proceed to post until they have reached the target proficiency level of the position. Only Canada applies this concept.

staffing fixes at the expense of career and workforce planning. When recruitment did take place, it was on the basis of a generic Public Service-wide entrance exam where international-knowledge questions had been eliminated since 1999 in favour of weighing generic behavioural competencies. One fluent Mandarin-speaking applicant weeded out by the multiple-choice Public Service test wrote of her frustration with the "outdated" foreign service recruitment system: "A multiple choice exam does not give any insight into a person's ability to navigate living, working and representing Canada in a foreign country far from home."[35]

Numerous senior officials involved in human resource management over the last two decades offered a variety of other theories to explain the department's drift toward generalism. Some believed that the Public Service Modernization Act of 2003, or corporate practices adopted in its wake, had fostered a mind-set of conformity with government-wide human resource regulations, diluting the unique requirements of an internationally oriented workforce. Another contentious change during this era was the decentralization of positions and salary budgets to geographic branches, which some believe weakened the practice of individualized career management and assignment planning and the ability of the corporate HR function at Foreign Affairs to defend the longer-term talent management needs of the organization.

Former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Morris Rosenberg testified to the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs in June 2022 that "human resources policies need to promote the development of deep geographic and language expertise and provide incentives to diplomats who do multiple tours using these skills".[36] One such attempt was the launch, in 2016, of a competency-based approach (CBA) to talent-management, which was expected to provide each foreign service officer with a 'competency passport' that would reflect their accumulated skills and experiences, and the credentials needed for onward assignments and promotion. According to then-Executive Director of Assignments Mark Fletcher, the CBA was meant to ensure a higher return on investment in specialized skills, including foreign-language abilities, through a pattern of planned assignments. A key function of this system was to track the assignment promises made to officers willing to commit themselves to years of language training to ensure that they had 'career guarantees'.[37] As of 2022, the 'competency passport' and related career-planning elements of the CBA appear to have been abandoned.

Another attempt to recognize the value of specialists came in 2004, when management and the foreign service union agreed to split the two-level Foreign Service classification into four grades, with the senior-most (FS-04) overlapping the salary band of the junior executive cadre (EX-01). The idea was to create an advancement path for subject-matter experts who did not wish to become managers. This experiment has proven largely unsuccessful, as the FS-04 grade is now routinely attached to middle-management positions to make them more appealing, diluting the intended focus on incentivizing specialization. The FS reclassification attempt also further propagated the unhelpful view that specialists require a career off-ramp from the management track, and that expertise

and leadership are somehow incompatible. (One could argue the former is essential to the credibility of the latter.)

The 2013 merger of the Canadian International Development Agency with Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, as with Australia's experience later that same year, is believed to have resulted in a loss of development expertise. The 2018 OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Peer Review of Canada's development program warned that the churn of pool-managed development staff amid the restructuring of the department "runs the risk of further diluting development expertise and undermining the quality of partnerships with partner governments and implementing partners."[38] It found that the merger had perpetuated the trend – first identified in the 2012 DAC Peer Review – of "a shift towards greater use of generalists and outside advisors by CIDA," due to "the lack of a management model which uses and values CIDA's professional and specialist resources effectively".[39] Conversely, some foreign service officers believe that the amalgamation of CIDA has contributed to diminishing career prospects and loss of expertise in the foreign policy stream of the foreign service because promotion into the executive cadre rewards experience in managing people and budgets (which development officers typically have) as opposed to subject-matter expertise.[40]

Specific human resource practices aside, the most pernicious obstacles to restoring the place of Global Affairs Canada as a centre of policy excellence based on subject-matter expertise relate to corporate culture. Unlike other foreign ministries (most notably the US State Department) that have articulated precepts around talent management, the Canadian foreign service has, instead, developed a tradition of word-of-mouth career guidance which consistently stresses the virtues of a generalist trajectory as the surest way to get ahead – and conversely, the risks associated with being "pigeon-holed" as a specialist. This advice typically goes on to advocate spending the bulk of one's career at headquarters in Ottawa where promotion is perceived to be easier ("careers are made in Ottawa", says one former senior ambassador),[41] ideally with stints at central agencies, or else posted to major Euro-Atlantic capitals that enjoy high visibility from senior management. Postings to more expeditionary locales that are off the management radar – or, worse, that require time-consuming language training – are not seen as professionally advantageous.

While some are tempted to dismiss such advice as folklore, a senior executive who served in human resources at Foreign Affairs in the mid-2000s reported that he had commissioned a study of 'urban legends' surrounding promotion in the department (such as the bias in favour of headquarters-based staff, or those posted to large embassies such as Washington), and was dismayed to find that "it was all true".[42] Former ambassador Abbie Dann, in her testimony to the Senate, pointed to an even more subtle shift, arguing that the government's Ottawa-centric emphasis on program delivery over the last 15 years had caused Global Affairs to short-change its policy development capacity, including geographic

expertise.[43] (This trend has likely been exacerbated by the merger with CIDA, which significantly increased the program responsibilities of Global Affairs.)

These findings are consistent with broader trends in the last few decades in the Canadian Public Service generally, which have elevated the perceived career benefits of a generalist profile at the expense of subject-matter specialization. Public-administration scholar Donald Savoie describes an ethos of careerism elsewhere in the Public Service, where "mid-career officials now see the road to the top is through brief stays in departments, joining a central agency, gaining visibility, and learning to fight or manage political fires rather than staying with one department to gain a deep understanding of its policies and programs to promote systematic change."[44]

One key manifestation of this drift toward generalism is the growing permeability of senior executives, such as deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers. Whereas undersecretaries traditionally were expected to manage departments as both leaders and substantive experts, they now operate in a public-administration culture that seeks 'diversity of experience' in senior managers in an "environment where issues are increasingly horizontal". Consequently, according to Savoie, deputy ministers are now "selected for their knowledge of how the system works rather than for their sectoral expertise or for their knowledge of a department, its policy, and history."[45] This is reflected in the much higher frequency of turnover: while before 1967 the average term of a deputy minister was 12 years, today it is closer to 2-3 years.

This presumption of inter-changeability of deputy ministers has gradually been replicated with assistant deputy ministers as well. One member of that cadre reminisced that "you used to become an ADM because you had policy smarts or you had subject-matter expertise. Management and leadership skills were not sought, were not even asked about. At most there was a presumption that you could manage, at worst a view that it wasn't important."[46] However in 1998 ADMs were formally moved into a collectively managed pool, which meant that they no longer 'owned' a specific position but were considered deployable anywhere in government at that level. According to a landmark 2013 study of ADM talent management, this accelerated the trend toward "ADMs being more generalists, 'generic' managers rather than subject-matter experts. Decision-making is being pushed up and centralized, and knowledge pushed down."[47] As with deputy ministers, the authors found that ADMs were subject to increasingly short rotations and that amid this churn they were struggling to master their files. They concluded that the Public Service is "increasingly at risk of creating a generic managerial class, focusing too much or almost exclusively on management skills and competencies, with a view that a manager-is-a-manager-is-a-manager, and under-valuing knowledge and expertise in subject-matter".[48] The study concluded that the Public Service has moved too far in recent years toward 'generic' managers and that greater emphasis and value should be placed in the future on ADMs having strong knowledge and expertise in the content of their area of responsibility.[49]

Global Affairs Canada has not been immune to the broader, government-wide shift toward 'managerialist' leadership skills, including the high degree of permeability of senior management positions to non-career diplomats. Since 2003, only one career diplomat – Len Edwards, from 2007 to 2010 – was asked to serve as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs; the others serving in this role over the last two decades have been accomplished civil servants but with varying, at times modest, degrees of international experience. Interestingly, in his April 2022 testimony before the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Edwards proposed that one of the full deputies of Global Affairs be given an additional new role as 'Head of the Foreign Service' and lead the rebuilding of Canada's diplomatic service to being one of the best in the world. Acknowledging the recent permeability of the top position, Edwards added: "Ideally, it should be the deputy minister of foreign affairs, but it should always be someone who has been in the foreign service and understands its role and unique characteristics."[50]

Michael Small, a career diplomat who occupied the position of ADM for human resources following the 2007 Auditor General's report, confirmed his view, in testimony before the Senate, that "the department has undervalued diplomatic knowledge and skills in its executives in recent decades in favour of other management competencies".[51] Former NATO ambassador Kerry Buck concurs, stating: "Too many key jobs at Global Affairs are filled with temporary staff, and promotion and retention don't sufficiently value diplomats' international knowledge or their international networks."[52]

Part of the explanation lies in the consequences that naturally accrue from managing Global Affairs' talent in the same manner as the rest of the Public Service. In 2005, Key Leadership Competencies were unveiled across the Canadian government and have guided the selection of future leaders at Foreign Affairs ever since. These competencies describe generic managerial behaviours and do not include a knowledge component. It was only in 2017 that the department developed a separate set of International Competencies (including foreign-language proficiency as a core competency), as well as specific Head of Mission competencies. These have been added to the criteria for selection processes among both foreign service officers and executives, but the relative balance between international and managerial competencies in individual promotion processes can only be guessed at. What is clear is that, more fundamentally, diplomatic experience is not even a requirement for advancement at Global Affairs. One ADM involved in a 2016 promotion board for the EX-02 and EX-03 levels recalls insisting on experience at a senior-level post abroad as a basic eligibility criterion, and being overruled on the grounds that it was "unfair to candidates from other departments".[53] In contrast with the UK, which has moved toward applying learning criteria to assignments and promotion, there are no knowledge criteria or professional qualifications for either in the Canadian system.* Finally, the performance of senior managers at Global Affairs is assessed through a Public Service-wide

* While the Canadian Foreign Service Institute offers training on a range of topics and has developed learning roadmaps for most categories of employees, uptake is *ad hoc* and self-directed, and training must be taken alongside usual duties.

Executive Talent Management System where the vast majority of objectives being evaluated are automatically pre-set corporate or management priorities, with very little space afforded to assess actual foreign policy goals and the diplomatic skills or knowledge needed to achieve them. Collectively, these features of talent management at Global Affairs provide at least a partial answer to Morris Rosenberg's rhetorical question to the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee: "Are we doing enough in our incentive structures to actually reward people that bring deep expertise?"

The Public Service's use of generic leadership competencies that do not include subject-matter expertise is itself hotly debated. As one assistant deputy minister has stated, "Knowledge competency among senior managers seems to have dropped dramatically. This is wrong. The Public Service should consider itself one of the learned professions, with senior managers bringing deep and strategic thinking leadership capacity to the area they are leading."[54] However, applying such generic competencies to a foreign ministry, with its need to grasp unfamiliar issues in a unique, globally competitive intercultural environment, seems especially short-sighted. As scholars of Canadian public administration have pointed out, the principle that senior civil servants are stronger for having a knowledge base that is 'broad, not deep' is also riddled with inconsistent application. For example, most agree that it would be unthinkable for a deputy minister or ADM at the Department of Finance not to have a background in economics. The notion that foreign policy is any less complex or risky, or deserving of a professional approach, seems at odds with the pace of global fragmentation, which the veteran British ambassador Sir Jeremy Greenstock has suggested is increasing the premium on diplomatic expertise:

> The world is becoming more *à la carte*, complex and *ad hoc*, and on any issue you could have a different set of partners or opponents from the previous issue you were dealing with. Nowadays you must have an *ad hoc* response to such issues, which may need a small country here, a region there, or a collection of states across the globe that only your diplomats can bring together for you. That is going to increase, not decrease. We are not globalising in politics and identity, we are polarising. Diplomacy has to interpret that, and the government needs instruments to understand how to get the most out of the next meeting on a given issue from the most important governments at the table, which could be almost anyone.[55]

In contemplating the merging of the two senior ranks of the French diplomatic service into the general public administration (discussed in a later section), a columnist in *Le Figaro* recalled Canada's move toward greater permeability of senior officials and asserted that "countries applying this kind of reform have seen their diplomatic effectiveness deteriorate quickly".[56] While this characterization is debatable if not unfair, it is nonetheless sobering to see Canada cited as a cautionary tale by other countries.

Within the context of Global Affairs, however, it is worth noting that one of the singular successes of Canadian diplomacy in recent decades – the re-negotiation of NAFTA amid growing US protectionism – was accomplished by one of the department's recognised

'priesthoods', its specialist cadre of trade policy and law experts. As one senior official put it, "We didn't send a team of generalists to negotiate with Bob Lighthizer" [the US Trade Representative].[57] This raises a vital question for the organization: Are trade policy and China the only areas important enough to warrant the deployment of expertise? Is the generalist approach good enough, except when it really matters?

The experience of other foreign ministries suggests that it is possible to operate a diplomatic service with a generalist core, while nonetheless incubating cadres of rotational specialists at all levels of seniority across a range of regions and thematic issues. Global Affairs is a complex organization that currently delivers 56 different programs; as Morris Rosenberg told the Senate, "We need people with deep expertise in *all* areas. […] You need people who understand the whole of government and how to relate to other departments, but you also need people who really understand nuclear disarmament, for example, or how to work in sub-Saharan Africa."[58]

But, like other foreign ministries examined in this study, Global Affairs is not the lead agency on a growing array of emerging global issues such as climate change, global public health, migration, or cyber-security. Two thirds of the priorities identified in Minister Joly's mandate letter require close collaboration with departments outside the Global Affairs portfolio, many of which have built significant international relations divisions with deep expertise on the substance of their issues and robust networks of domestic and foreign contacts. If it is to preserve its credibility 'downtown', Global Affairs will be compelled to demonstrate that it has expertise to contribute as well, not just on program delivery or client services delivered through its global platform, but on the high-value mission of foreign policy development.

The next sections of this report review the practices and approaches of other foreign ministries, with a view to identifying best practices and possible models for Canada.

United States

> *An American Foreign Service officer starts his career with some high school Spanish. The State Department, for whatever reason, decides not to build on that existing foundation. Instead, it teaches him Italian for six months and sends him to the Vatican for two years.*
>
> *Years later State gives him a year of Hungarian and assigns him to Budapest for three years. He stays an extra year, giving the department an extra 12 months on its language investment. After Budapest, it gives him a year of Russian and assigns him to Moscow for two years. Staying for four, he doubles their investment return.*
>
> *Now, after six years in English-speaking America, this officer is not conversant in any of the four languages he learned at great expense to taxpayers.*
>
> *In the recent assignment cycle he bid on an Italian job and a Hungarian job, but received neither. Instead, the State Department assigned him to Shanghai via (you guessed it) one year of Chinese-language training. I am this officer.*[59]
>
> –Phil Skotte, US Foreign Service

America's diplomatic service is the largest in the world, with nearly 7,950 Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) responsible for staffing 277 diplomatic posts abroad.[60] Its scale has allowed it to develop tremendous depth of subject-matter expertise, fulfilling the objective set out in the *Foreign Service Act* of 1980 which envisioned a Service "characterized by strong policy formulation capabilities, outstanding leadership qualities, and highly developed functional, foreign language, and area expertise".[61] However, other features unique to the US continue to undermine the effectiveness of the Foreign Service, leaving the State Department, in the unsparing words of former Director of Policy Planning Anne-Marie Slaughter, "tackling twenty-first century global problems with a twentieth century diplomatic corps trained for a nineteenth century world".[62] The debate between the merits of a 'specialist' vs. 'generalist' foreign service is nowhere as vigorous as in the United States, where discussion about the needs and future direction of the State Department has spawned dozens of think-tank reports in the last two decades. But there is broad consensus that subject-matter expertise is central to the value-added of American diplomats, and a reform initiative announced by Secretary Blinken in October 2021 promises further efforts by the State Department to develop deeper specialization in "areas that will be critical to our national security in the years ahead".[63]

Although the US Foreign Service Officer selection process is theoretically one of the least exclusive (it does not even require a college degree), its competitiveness – with up to

20,000 Americans taking the Foreign Service Officer Test annually and a pass rate of less than 3 percent – ensures a quality crop of new recruits. Up to three-quarters have postgraduate degrees, many in politics, foreign cultures, languages, and international affairs[64] and at least 80 percent of entering officers have spent time working or studying abroad, including in military service or the Peace Corps.[65] More than a quarter already speak two or more foreign languages, due in part to the hiring process itself, which offers bonus points for applicants who have passed the Foreign Service Officer exam and demonstrate proficiency in a foreign language, with emphasis on critical languages like Arabic, Mandarin, Farsi, Dari, Pashto and Urdu.[66]

Unlike other diplomatic services (most notably the French) which seek subject-matter expertise at the hiring stage, the FSO test is largely cognitive, and has been criticized for "not test[ing] for specific knowledge about the history and functions of diplomacy… or an understanding of the requirements, special knowledge and skills needed to perform successfully as an American diplomacy professional".[67] This is reflective of the State Department's prevailing ethos, which views diplomacy as a craft mastered largely through years of on-the-job learning, as opposed to through education or purposeful professional development: "The service expects its officers to acquire the knowledge they need assignment by assignment, without regard to a larger picture, and to enhance their skills on the job and through haphazard in-service training. Longer-term professional education, such as that provided to our military officer corps, is scarce to nonexistent. "[68] New recruits are typically afforded only a few weeks of orientation training before being assigned to an overseas post or placed into foreign-language training. According to one major report, "American diplomacy functions on a highly amateur basis compared to the entry-level training and professional-level development of the diplomats of every other major power".[69] Another compared the US Foreign Service unfavourably to global peers: "In virtually every service surveyed, aspiring officers are expected to be highly and purposefully educated for diplomatic service before they apply, with fluency in one foreign language (and in some cases two or three) as either a formal or practical requirement. Most services require new officers to pass through substantial initial professional formation and training programs, lasting as long as two or three years, before their first assignment abroad."[70]

Multiple studies have recommended a stronger focus on professionalization of US diplomats, for example through an expanded career-long program of professional education that focuses on mastery of substantive foreign policy issues, diplomatic expertise, and leadership.[71] Although annually over 100 slots are available at Princeton, the National Defense University, the Army War College, the National Intelligence University, and elsewhere for FSOs to take courses and earn a master's degree,[72] officers complain that the State Department does a poor job of mobilizing the expertise acquired outside the service back into the organization through sensible assignment planning.[73] Overall, the academic opportunities for FSOs pale in comparison to other services: the Harvard Kennedy School currently has over 50 military and intelligence officers enrolled and just

two Foreign Service Officers.[74] Then-Secretary Colin Powell famously advocated increasing hiring into the State Department above the number of needed positions in order to create a permanent 'training float' (as exists in the leadership cadre of the US military), to "deepen officers' command of the fundamentals of diplomatic tradecraft, including policy development and doctrine, case studies, negotiation, crisis management, program management, and specialized knowledge throughout their career path".[75] Secretary Blinken pledged funding to make the training float a reality at the launch of the latest State Department reform initiative in October 2021.

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> *There are two components to the foundational skills of the Foreign Service — the value added that US diplomatic professionals bring to the policy table. The first is area expertise, i.e., a profound knowledge of the political, economic, and social realities of other countries, societies, and groups. The second is a solid command of foreign languages, a necessary skill if one is to develop true area expertise.*[76]
>
> –American Academy of Diplomacy

The State Department invests heavily in language training, and consequently the US foreign service has long been noted for its excellence in recruiting and developing foreign-language speakers. However, State has often struggled to match its capabilities with needs in the field, which grew exponentially following the large civil-military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The 2006 Iraq Study Group report mandated by Congress found that, of the 1,000 officers working at the US embassy in Iraq, only 33 possessed any Arabic skills, of which six could speak it fluently.[77] By 2009 this number had scarcely improved, to fewer than 20.[78] Although the Foreign Service attracts many foreign-language speakers, they are not always the languages most critically needed: to this day, the State Department still has more Portuguese speakers than Arabic and Chinese combined, and more Albanian speakers than Urdu, Dari, or Farsi. Language-designated positions overseas are 15 percent vacant, and 24 percent of those staffed are filled by officers who do not meet the minimum language requirement.[79]

Reasons for this mismatch are many. One report noted a "widely held perception among FSOs that State's promotion system does not consider time spent in language training when evaluating officers for promotion, which may discourage officers from investing the time required to achieve proficiency in certain languages."[80] Performance evaluations are an important factor in promotions in the US Foreign Service, and therefore a gap of up to two years for officers taking full-time difficult language training is widely perceived as a career penalty, in contrast with the "tried-and-true route to professional advancement… through

repeated staff jobs in Washington, handling paper flow and logistics for the Department's most senior officials who will make sure you will get the next career-advancing assignment".[81] In addition, security policies prevent some heritage speakers from serving in their country of family origin.[†82]

Undeterred, the State Department has experimented with pilot projects that aim to bring a select cadre of diplomats to a more advanced level of fluency than is typically required, for service in positions overseas that would benefit from a higher level of language competency.[83] One example of flexibility not found in most other diplomatic services is that the State Department supports foreign-language training 'off-cycle' – meaning not tied to a specific upcoming assignment abroad – in the interest of promoting advanced levels of fluency, especially for Public Diplomacy officers. Another pilot project aims to build a cadre of advanced linguists in Mandarin Chinese specifically, through a managed pattern of assignments. After one year of full-time language training at the Foreign Service Institute, officers are assigned to China, followed by another year of language training in Beijing or Taipei, followed by another assignment to China, for a total of about seven years. According to the then-dean of the FSI language school, this approach represents a change to the traditional Foreign Service career: "In the past, we'd be bouncing around from one part of the world to another. Now we're looking for much more sustained commitments."[84] The Foreign Service Institute is also currently developing a concept for an intensive, one-year regional studies program overseas that would combine language training and subject-matter scholarship, which would aim to bring graduating diplomats to the level of "a true regional expert" prior to posting. China is the principal focus of this effort, but other priority regions will be included as well.[85]

Not unlike the Canadian foreign service,[*] American Foreign Service Officers work in one of five career tracks, or 'cones': Consular Affairs, Economic Affairs, Management Affairs, Political Affairs, and Public Diplomacy. Indeed, they are required to select their cone at the moment of applying for the FSO exam, and once hired, movement between streams is rare. A US Institute of Peace report argued that the 'cones' were developed "in an era when it was possible to think that politics and economics were separable and that the flow of information fundamental to 'public diplomacy' could be managed in such a way that it could not and would not be accessible to people in the United States – that is, before the Internet".[86] According to one Foreign Service Officer critical of this career-track approach, "While some may argue that most Foreign Service Officers are already well-rounded 'generalists', the data suggests most diplomats stick narrowly within their specialty, and

[†] Security vetting policies have been a stubborn impediment to recruiting difficult language speakers who were born or have lived in certain countries. This was especially noted in the post-9/11 surge in need for Arabic speakers. (Dan Ephron, "Smart, Skilled, and Shut Out", *Newsweek*, June 26, 2006.)

[*] The five career tracks of the Canadian foreign service (called 'streams') are: Foreign Policy and Diplomacy, Trade, Development, Management and Consular, and Immigration (the only stream outside the remit of Global Affairs Canada).

indeed, are frequently penalized with slower promotions when they stray into adjacent functions (an economic track officer moving into public diplomacy, for example)."[87]

Promotion through the ranks of the US diplomatic service into the Senior Foreign Service is predicated on developing exposure to diplomatic practice along with depth in specific areas, culminating in a balance of "broad management and deep specialization".[88] This approach is articulated in the 'core precepts', the set of competencies required for promotion which are negotiated jointly every three years by the State Department and the American Foreign Service Association (the union representing FSOs). The 2022-25 precepts require five core competencies for promotion into the Senior Foreign Service including 'substantive and technical expertise'. A qualified candidate, according to the precepts, "uses sophisticated knowledge of foreign cultures and other US G[overnment] agencies to advance U.S. goals and solve complex problems… Maintains and further develops proficiency in foreign language(s), and uses language skills to promote U.S. interests with a wide range of audiences."[89] Foreign-language proficiency is one tie-breaker in case of candidates for promotion who achieve the same score.

Such sophisticated knowledge of foreign cultures is unlikely to develop without deliberate career focus, and here as well the State Department's promotion process sets out clear expectations about subject-matter specialization. Since 2005, the Career Development Program (now known as the Professional Development Program) has laid out a 'major/minor' career plan as essential to promotion into the Senior Foreign Service. Candidates must have accumulated three tours of duty in one region (the 'major') and two tours in a second region or in a thematic bureau (the 'minor'), ensuring at least some degree of subject-matter specialization.* Officers will not be considered for entry into senior management unless they speak and read two foreign languages (or one very difficult language) at a level of General Professional Proficiency or higher.[90] Long-term training at FSI's overseas facilities for languages like Arabic or Chinese counts as a regional tour.[91]

One admirable trait of the US Foreign Service, which partially explains its success at developing subject-matter expertise, is that it deliberately seeks to maximize time in the field by diplomats. While most other foreign ministries – including Canada's – limit consecutive assignments abroad and require periodic assignments to headquarters (ostensibly to reacquaint the officer with headquarters perspectives and cure any incipient 'localitis'), the State Department requires its FSOs to serve in the United States only "once during each period of 15 years". By contrast, it enforces rotationality abroad and does not allow its officers to stay in the US for longer than six years, whereas most fellow foreign ministries (including Canada's) have no such requirement.

* The precepts were amended in 2017 to incentivize service by FSOs in thematic rather than geographic bureaus of the State Department. However, officers who joined the service prior to 2017 have the option of choosing the set of precepts they wish to follow.

> *The US is virtually alone in delegating some of its most important and sensitive diplomatic posts to those with little or no diplomatic experience.*[92]
>
> –American Academy of Diplomacy

One unique – and notorious – feature of American diplomacy is the high number of senior positions, including ambassadorships, that are entrusted to non-diplomats. According to one study, from 1975 to 2013 the number of career diplomats in senior positions (Assistant Secretary and above) declined from over 60 percent to between 25-30 percent,[93] a trend that reached its nadir under the Trump administration when not one of the 23 Assistant Secretary positions at the State Department was filled by a career diplomat.[94] By the end of the Trump Administration, the proportion of political appointee ambassadors stood at a modern-day high of 43 percent, relative to the historic average of about 30 percent from the Kennedy through Obama administrations.

In some respects, the permeability of senior positions with academia or the private sector ensures access to a global talent pool and therefore a diversity of views and experiences in the State Department. Non-career ambassadors "can bring fresh ideas, leadership acumen, and political cachet to a bilateral relationship".[95] However, this comes at the cost of a loss of field perspective (the "knowledge essential for melding the desirable with the possible")[96] and while some non-career appointees no doubt bring expertise to the organization, they take it with them when they leave. Political appointees "do not notably contribute to the institution's longer-term vitality, and their ascension creates a system inherently incapable of providing expert, nonpartisan foreign policy advice".[97]

The use of ambassadorship as rewards for top campaign donors – a particularly egregious bipartisan practice in the US – "undercuts U.S. national security as well as career officer advancement and sets the United States apart from most of its allies, China, and Russia."[98] It also would appear to violate section 304 (a) of the *Foreign Service Act* of 1980, which states that "An individual appointed or assigned to be a chief of mission should possess clearly demonstrated competence to perform the duties of a chief of mission, including, to the maximum extent practicable, a useful knowledge of the principal language or dialect of the country in which the individual is to serve, and knowledge and understanding of the history, the culture, the economic and political institutions, and the interests of that country and its people."[99] In April 2022, Senators Tim Kaine and Cory Booker introduced the *Ambassador Oversight and Transparency Act*, which "would require the President to detail how a nominee's language skills, foreign policy expertise, and experience have prepared that nominee to effectively lead U.S. diplomatic efforts in the specific country in which they are nominated to serve".[100]

Another unique feature of American diplomacy is the extent to which subject-matter expertise is provided not by the rotational corps of Foreign Service Officers but rather by the permanent, headquarters-based personnel of the non-rotational Civil Service.[101] These staff, who represent 43 percent of State Department personnel, actually outnumber their Foreign Service colleagues, who represent only one-third of the department.[102] While Foreign Service Officers form a majority in the six regional bureaus dealing with specific geographic areas, Civil Service staff provide specific expertise in ten major categories and fill most positions in the State Department's 25 or so functional bureaus, which deal with thematic issues such as migration, arms control, climate change, and communications policy.[103]

While all foreign ministries have some strength of permanent headquarters-based staff who can accumulate years of experience on highly technical files, the US State Department is unique in the sheer scale of the expertise it possesses by virtue of its massive, non-rotational Civil Service workforce. One Foreign Service Officer commented "We live and die by Civil Service personnel."[104] Although one report suggested that the Civil Service "encourages narrow, technical expertise and assumes no overseas experience or knowledge, nor does it make it easy to acquire such",[105] a representative of the American Foreign Service Association indicated that the Civil Service provides policy expertise and continuity not found elsewhere, including on esoteric issues such as sanctions, aviation law and telecommunications, through personnel recruited from agencies such as the Office of Foreign Assets Control and the Treasury Department.[106] The State Department has made modest attempts at creating opportunities for Civil Service officers to serve abroad but this program remains embryonic.

The State Department has also made use of retired Foreign Service Officers as a reserve pool of expertise (including foreign language abilities) that can be deployed to meet critical staffing needs both in Washington and overseas.[107] Known as While Actually Employed (WAE), this particular employment status has filled as many as 700 positions (about 5 percent of the workforce) at the State Department at any given time,[108] aiding in the retention of aggregate knowledge and skills. The American Foreign Service Association has recommended formalizing this practice through the creation of a Reserve Corps of qualified retirees with 10 years or more of experience.[109]

This ability to employ retired diplomats at scale is an important factor in attenuating the loss of subject-matter knowledge resulting from another unique feature of the US Foreign Service: its 'up or out' approach to career progression. Modeled on the American military, this principle requires all employees to have successfully reached a certain level of seniority at progressive thresholds of service time, failing which they are dismissed from the corps. While some loss of experience and expertise is inevitable with such an approach, some affected officers are able to convert into positions in the non-rotational Civil Service, keeping their skills within the organization.

> *Our vision for the Foreign Service is an organization where all its Officers not only have deep expertise in their areas of specialization, including a deep knowledge of culture, religion, and languages. They should also be skilled leaders, thoughtful and persuasive analysts of contemporary foreign policy issues, policy leaders within the U.S. government, effective advocates for U.S. business, and even if they are not experts, conversant with science and new technologies. They should be able to speak knowledgeably and proudly about their own country's diplomatic history and argue persuasively for its values. And they should be the finest group of language experts in government.*[110]
>
> –American Diplomacy Project, Harvard Kennedy School

Whether the US foreign service is on track to meet the ambitious vision expressed above is hotly debated. Nearly all observers agree, however, that *more* subject-matter expertise, rather than less, will be expected from American diplomats if they are to remain effective. According to the US Institute for Peace, "The future calls for multidimensional officers at home and abroad, officers expected to develop and command a mix of substantive knowledge; geographical expertise; interpersonal, functional, and operational skills; and know-how," as well as "experience in interagency coordination, constructive relations with NGOs, the private sector, and Congress".[111] However, another report, taking note of the growing list of global issues now competing for urgent attention, warned of "a twenty-first-century policy environment that has, in some priority areas, evolved beyond the core competencies of most Foreign and Civil Service officers".[112] In the wake of the COVID pandemic, one report noted that "Most American diplomats do not have the background to judge the scope or significance of transnational challenges emanating from disease vectors, climate change, or new technologies. Nor is our diplomatic establishment structured to evaluate the potential of new scientific discoveries to make the world a safer, healthier, and more peaceful place."[113] It went on to advocate the creation of a new Foreign Service career track for diplomats with substantial prior background in the hard sciences, adding that field diplomacy "must involve expertise in the STEM disciplines meaning the need for career professionals with sufficient scientific background and direct diplomatic authority".[114] Another report expanded on this point, saying that "An aim should be to integrate science and technology into diplomacy, to recruit people with expertise in cyber, artificial intelligence, data analytics, and financial technologies."[115]

In October 2021, Secretary Blinken responded to these calls, announcing a reform initiative at the State Department that would aim to "build our capacity and expertise in the areas that will be critical to our national security in the years ahead, particularly climate, global health, cyber security and emerging technologies, economics, and multilateral diplomacy." Most observers agree, however, that a foreign service with deeper specialization in

traditional skills (such as regional and language expertise) and more cutting-edge fields (such as climate, energy, and public health) will not happen without an overhaul of the State Department's talent management approach. One American diplomat, Christopher Smith, writing in the journal of the American Foreign Service Association, advocated a greater focus on professional doctrine describing diplomats as experts, rejecting the 'generalist' school which prioritizes broad knowledge of multiple countries and themes over the development of true expertise on a particular region or functional issue:

> In its generalist approach, the U.S. Foreign Service is an outlier in the world of diplomacy, particularly when compared to our great power competitors. Chinese and Russian diplomats can expect to spend their entire careers working on a single country, or a small group of related countries united by language or shared regional history, with the specific objective of gaining unique knowledge and expertise. […] Without professional, regional and linguistic mastery and a network of long-term foreign contacts, a "generalist" misses out on what should be an FSO's singular comparative advantage in the policy debate.[116]

Whether the US actually is, as Smith suggests, an 'outlier' is debatable. As noted thus far, the State Department actually leads most other Western foreign ministries in its focus on specialization through the development of foreign-language speakers and through the incentives, created by its promotion system, toward regional expertise. Geographic bureaus at the State Department have strong group identities and traditionally have developed informal mechanisms for keeping people in the same bureau over the course of multiple assignments, contributing further to specialization.[117] Nonetheless, one recurring suggestion made by advocates of the specialist school is to replace the current competitive bidding process for assignments with a "more directed, portfolio approach to Foreign Service assignments that builds skills, develops talent and expertise".[118] "Do we see a future world where deep regional expertise will be highly prized? Then we should incentivize long stretches in the field and use the assignments system to encourage the development of language, contextual knowledge, and cultural acumen," argued one FSO.[119] Another, Phil Skotte, wrote: "My modest proposal is to move us around less, and incentivize us or force us to concentrate on fewer areas and languages. Instead of the current helter-skelter approach to assignments, develop a system that truly enables the State Department to bring cultural and linguistic expertise to the table."[120]

Two unique features of the US foreign service pose challenges in this regard. First, State Department policies since 2004 have limited individual postings to three years regardless of the hardship level (a much shorter rotation than is found in other foreign ministries around the world, where a typical non-hardship assignment usually lasts 4-5 years).*

* Postings were shortened in the early 2000s in order to create more turnover in low-hardship posts (such as in Europe), given the need to create more plentiful 'reward' posting opportunities for the large number of diplomats deployed to unaccompanied posts such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

According to AFSA, on tour lengths the State Department is an outlier even compared to other US government agencies that are part of the Foreign Service occupational group, such as USAID and the Foreign Commercial Service.[121] Reform advocates have called on extending overseas tours of duty to 3-5 years, to "deliver a greater return on investment and anchor greater continuity and expertise on the ground".[122] Second, all US diplomats are required to serve their first posting as consular officers, due to a post-9/11 regulation which mandates that all visa applicants must be interviewed by an American official, and not by local embassy staff as is the case for most other countries.[123] (Many FSOs actually serve their first *two* postings in consular affairs.) This tour of clerical duty arguably denies US diplomats the benefit of several formative years developing subject-matter expertise in their chosen stream. The State Department is currently experimenting with alternate ways to satisfy this vetting requirement.

Another frequent suggestion is to open up the US Foreign Service to mid-level entry – similar to direct commissions in the U.S. military – in order to recruit Americans with critical or unique skills in areas such as technology, science, business, and engineering.[124] A related proposal would involve increasing limited noncareer appointments, aimed at "bringing on board top outside practitioners" with specialized expertise for shorter-term public service options.[125]

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> *America's diplomatic ability to lead globally is declining. American diplomacy is increasingly politicized, reversing a century-long effort to create a merit-based system of high professionalism. Despite recent improvements, State is neither educating its staff to the professional level of our allies and competitors nor systematically preparing its future "bench" to assume senior roles.*[126]
>
> –American Academy of Diplomacy

Regardless of what steps the State Department takes toward bolstering its expertise and policy capacity, it may face an inexorable decline of influence in Washington as foreign policy is increasingly controlled by the White House and the National Security Council, whose staff comprises many outside experts from academia and think tanks along with officers seconded from the Pentagon and the intelligence community.[127] Many agencies of the US government now interact directly with their foreign counterparts, bypassing the State Department.[128] According to Robert Hutchings, "The policy role of the diplomat is increasingly constrained by political appointees, outside experts, and the expanding interagency process… The State Department still has a comparative advantage in providing the "inputs" to foreign policy decision making, but its advantage is shrinking."[129] A 2014

report further contrasted the State Department's "American embassy brand" of operational effectiveness abroad with its "Foggy Bottom brand" of relative ineffectiveness in the Washington interagency process: "Overseas, State often performs above its weight, using its unrivaled presence and skills to help integrate political, military, economic, and cultural affairs into coordinated "whole-of-government" U.S. policies that cut across national and regional borders. In contrast, State is now often perceived as underperforming in Washington," its effectiveness in the complex interagency process undermined by, among other things, "lack of expertise".[130] One scholar notes that "the Foreign Service has been slow to acquire sufficient specialized skills within the service to compete with other agencies for influence."[131] The fact that political appointees – and not career diplomats – tend to represent the State Department in the interagency policy process may explain this perception.

The US approach to diplomacy is *sui generis*, its strengths, weaknesses, and sheer scale mostly without parallel. Nonetheless the US Foreign Service, in pursuing greater depth of expertise among its diplomats especially through its laudably transparent Core Precepts, has developed tools and principles that have broad applicability in other foreign ministries, including Canada's. As the State Department adapts its needs to newly emerging thematic priorities, the American model will be deserving of continued study.

United Kingdom

> *We need more skilled diplomats on the ground in the places that matter, who are able to get under the skin of those countries, who are immersed in their language, culture, politics and history and who have access to decision-makers and can tap into informal networks of influence.*[132]
>
> –Foreign Secretary William Hague, 2012

One of the most accomplished and respected diplomatic services in the world, the British foreign service has made a clear commitment in recent years toward greater subject-matter specialization. Multiple reform initiatives have emphasized the need to adapt the traditional generalist approach of the British foreign service in order to deepen regional and foreign languages expertise (particularly on China and Russia), trade expertise, and knowledge of Europe post-Brexit. However, the 2020 merger of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development (DFID) has disrupted many of these efforts as the new foreign ministry (the FCDO) focuses on integrating two departments with distinct organizational cultures and differing approaches to subject-matter expertise.

Prior to the merger, several parliamentary inquiries and internal studies within the then-Foreign and Commonwealth Office over the last decade had found that the quality of British core foreign policy work had declined in recent years, particularly "the FCO's specialist geographical expertise, including knowledge of foreign languages".[133] In the words of one retired British ambassador, a "startling loss of quality" in the FCO's work had been "noted by many foreign diplomats".[134] This decline had accompanied a period of budgetary cuts which had seen the number of British diplomats abroad slashed by 30 percent between 2004 and 2010,[135] with many of those positions filled by locally-hired staff instead. The reorganization of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office along functional rather than geographic lines during this period was another factor cited as contributing to the decline in the FCO's regional expertise,[136] as was the heightened focus on trade promotion assigned to British embassies at the expense of traditional diplomatic work.

In December 2010, concluding that the FCO had become "devalued and sidelined in British government",[137] the new Conservative government launched the Diplomatic Excellence initiative, a five-year programme of internal reform aimed at ensuring British diplomats had "an unrivalled knowledge among diplomats of the history, culture, geography and politics of the countries they are posted to, and [ability] to speak the local languages".[138] An Expertise Fund was created to deepen thematic and geographical policy expertise across the Foreign Office, such as the establishment of an India cadre enabling diplomats to study Indian culture, politics and history in India prior to posting there.[139] In addition, the FCO's in-house foreign language school was reopened in 2013 after a period of six years

when language training had been outsourced, providing renewed focus and investment in language ability as a core diplomatic skill.

In 2015, the Foreign Office commissioned Tom Fletcher, a former British ambassador to Lebanon, to lead a review of the future needs of British diplomacy. With input from two thirds of FCO staff surveyed, the resulting report, *Future FCO*, was a *cri de coeur* for deeper expertise in both policy and professional skills: "We must shift from a culture that prioritises competences, hierarchy and process to one based on skills, networks and real world outcomes… We should place greater value on our experts and put them at the heart of policymaking."[140] *Future FCO* suggested a need to recalibrate the traditional human resources instincts of the Foreign Office:

> We continue to put a premium on the notion of 'widely deployable' staff but we crave deeper knowledge of countries, institutions and ideas. In the past, we resolved these tensions by recruiting and developing a mixture of generalists and specialists. We will continue to need both, but the current balance favours the generalist while not sufficiently recognising the advantages that specialisation can bring.[141]

The report called for a human resources system that incentivises individuals to focus on career strengths: "The FCO has a history of mapping out career paths for UK-based generalists, but has avoided doing so for specialists… the FCO should either offer a better career path for that specialism, increase allowances for specialist expertise, or restructure the way that it uses that specialism." In addition to arguing that more senior roles should be reserved for specialists including the FCO's strong bench of research analysts, *Future FCO* proposed that greater specialization – whether in traditional areas such as geographical and multilateral expertise, foreign languages, and negotiation, or more novel ones such as stabilization, mediation, and digital diplomacy – should be expected from *all* foreign service members: "Not every diplomat will need to master each of these skills. But all non-specialists should understand the basics and develop expertise in a few." The report suggested that all diplomats should develop one 'professional' and at least one 'geographic/thematic' strength over the course of their careers.

In response to the *Future FCO* report, the Foreign Office in 2016 launched Diplomacy 20:20, a four-year program of organizational reform consisting of three pillars, including an Expertise pillar aimed at restoring the FCO's knowledge leadership. Along with the development of a Languages Strategy, the centrepiece of Diplomacy 20:20 was the creation of a new Diplomatic Academy with twelve faculties led by subject-matter experts from within the department offering training at Awareness, Foundation, Practitioner, and Expert levels.[142] Accompanying this was the 2018 launch of the Priority Skills Statement, which identified regions and themes where the FCO would seek to deepen organizational expertise. Under the rubric 'Diplomatic Skills and Tradecraft', the statement identified proficiency in Arabic, French, Mandarin, Russian and Spanish, while under 'Geographical Knowledge and the International System', it identified Europe, Russia, the Middle East and North Africa, India, China, Japan, and major multilateral institutions. The Statement was

accompanied by a Skills Framework, which listed the full range of skills the FCO needed at the Foundation, Practitioner and Expert levels. [143]

Linking, for the first time, expertise and career development, the FCO thus launched a talent management model known as 'career anchors': areas of thematic or regional specialization to which officers and senior diplomats should return multiple times over their careers. By suggesting a more deliberate approach to assignment planning, the FCO was departing from a decades-old 'laissez-faire' attitude toward staffing which a previous parliamentary committee had found was "one of the factors behind the department's loss of geographic knowledge". Relatedly the FCO also increased tour lengths in some overseas postings in order to "deepen expertise, reduce churn, and deliver better value for money".[144]

The concept of career anchors was designed to link advancement to more deliberate career management and to learning, by requiring British diplomats to reach Foundation level in two to four areas throughout their career and to identify career anchors with skills relevant to the FCO.[145] Staff moving into the Senior Management Structure were to reach Practitioner level in both Diplomatic Practice and International Policy. Performance evaluation would now measure not only what officers had achieved but include an assessment of how they had "used skills and knowledge to build credibility, influence stakeholders and deliver outcomes". Commenting in 2018, the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee urged the FCO to push its career anchors model to even deeper levels of specialization. It noted that the Foreign Office had yet to define expert-level abilities for the majority of its Priority Skills, and urged the FCO to produce a definition of expert-level attainment in core diplomatic skills and add this to the criteria used by the Senior Appointments Board.[146]

> *Ever since 1856, when Lord Clarendon insisted on aspiring diplomats having 'a high qualifying standard in French', there has been an unshakeable conviction in the Foreign Office that members of the Diplomatic Service cannot represent their country effectively unless they are good linguists.*[147]
>
> –John Dickie, *The New Mandarins*

The Foreign Office has always prized the ability of its diplomats to be proficient in the language of the country in which they are serving. Over the course of decades, if not centuries, British diplomats have acquired a reputation for speaking foreign languages with a fluency matched by few competitors, with the possible exception of the Russians and Chinese (on which, more later). An archetype of this tradition would be Paul Bergne, an amateur archaeologist who, over the course of a distinguished career that included serving as ambassador to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, mastered all the Central Asian languages along with Arabic, Farsi, Greek, Russian, and Azeri. Bergne came out of retirement at Prime

Minister Blair's request to serve as the UK's special envoy to Afghanistan in the immediate wake of 9/11, using his Uzbek language skills in particular to recruit the Northern Alliance as partners for the international coalition.[148]

The Foreign Office is unique among foreign ministries in designating the majority of head of mission positions in the non-English speaking world as requiring foreign-language fluency. Despite the complications that are specific to ambassadorships (which require the approval of the Foreign Secretary, Prime Minister, and Buckingham Palace), the Foreign Office has consistently been able to staff these positions one to two years in advance and assign candidates to language training, resulting in a compliance rate of 74 percent (and trending upward) today.[149] An equal number of Britain's ambassadors – 75 percent – are fluent in three or more languages,[150] a testament to the FCO's commitment to training, given that the FCO does not require foreign-language abilities at the hiring stage.

Historically, the Foreign Office has relied on recruiting highly educated candidates from elite academic institutions rather than diplomatic training in producing skilled diplomats. Entrance testing consists of interviews, exercises, and written tests, with a focus less on subject-matter knowledge than on generic reasoning and problem-solving ability.[151] For years, the FCO's principal training program "has focused on developing strong managerial skillsets in an effort to produce agile policy generalists".[152] The FCDO is a rarity among foreign ministries in requiring neither a second language nor a language aptitude test as part of the recruitment process. In the words of a 2013 report, "The language skills of its intake, by its own admission, are below those of other comparable foreign ministries."[153] In the past, the FCO has debated adding a post-entry language requirement, wherein staff would be expected to reach a level of foreign language proficiency within five years of joining the Foreign Office. This is seen as a reasonable alternative to making language skills a condition of hiring, for fear of "deterring those who have other highly-developed diplomatic skills and would otherwise make excellent diplomats".[154] But the Foreign Office is nonetheless adjusting its recruitment strategy to better target candidates with critical language skills, such as the summer placements it offers in its Future Talent Scheme for a limited number of undergraduates who are studying a difficult language.[155]

Despite the traditional language proficiency of British ambassadors, the budgetary cutbacks of the last two decades nonetheless resulted, in the words of a 2013 report, in "persistent deficits in foreign language skills that threaten our future capacity for influence".[156] The closing of the FCO Language Centre in 2007 marked the low point of a gradual decline in the language skills of British diplomats. By 2012, only 48 diplomats out of a total number of 1,900 were receiving bonus pay associated with fluency in the language of their host country.* This decline was especially severe for difficult languages

* Like most foreign services (but not Canada's), the FCO offers financial bonuses for diplomats who maintain a proficiency in a foreign language, ranging from around £200 a year for functional French up to £4,334 a year for mastery of Chinese, Korean or Japanese. Diplomats are tested every four years to confirm they have maintained their skills. To encourage officers to maintain their language skills, particularly in priority

such as Arabic, Mandarin, and Korean. In 2010, it was reported that of the 161 British diplomats in Afghanistan, only three spoke Dari or Pashto with any degree of fluency. [157] The House of Commons found in a 2012 inquiry that "the impact that FCO staff are having in Afghanistan is severely constrained by a relative lack of language training and skills".[158] Former Minister of State for Africa Mark Malloch Brown suggested that inadequate knowledge of Arabic had led the FCO to fail to anticipate the developments leading to the Arab Spring.[159]

In 2012 and again in 2018, the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee took an interest in these trends. It found that language capabilities were not among the core competencies evaluated by the Foreign Office in assessing personnel for appointment and promotion, a fact it found "somewhat at odds with the tone of speeches by the Foreign Secretary" that spoke of the need to re-prioritize cultural knowledge and language skills.[160] In a similar vein, a major 2013 report on the British government's foreign language assets found that "not only are there insufficient incentives to encourage language learning, but there are also, in some cases, longstanding career disincentives to doing so."[161] The FCO's *ad hoc* assignment structures, the report found, meant that those applying for language-designated positions abroad (especially in the more difficult languages) might feel disadvantaged for promotion, due to the singular time commitment required by full-time language training. In addition, "some diplomats expressed concerns about being viewed as too 'niche' if they spend long periods in a particular part of the world". This concern over being 'pigeonholed' as a specialist at the expense of one's promotion prospects affected not just diplomats but the broader public service as well: "The traditional divide between 'generalists' and 'specialists' within the Civil Service often works to the detriment of specialist roles such as linguists, resulting in restricted opportunities for upward promotion. Those linguists who 'rebrand' as generalists in order to move on to managerial levels will often find themselves in positions where their language skills are not utilised."[162]

As indicated earlier, the reopening of the FCO Language Centre in 2013, along with the reforms associated with the Diplomacy 20:20 initiative which linked career progression with the development of subject-matter expertise, have shown early success in reversing the slide in Foreign Office's capabilities. The FCO's compliance rate in filling language-designated positions now stands at 72 percent, up from 39 percent at the end of 2015, while the priority language of Mandarin has reached a success rate of nearly 70 percent.[163] The FCO has now set a more ambitious overall compliance target of 80 percent.[164] In October 2018 the Foreign Secretary made a commitment to increase the number of languages taught at the FCO from 50 to 70 in the next five years, and to double the number of language-speakers in the FCO from 500 to 1,000.[165] In support of its wider efforts to modernize its diplomatic footprint, the FCO aims to increase the number of language-designated positions in Arabic and Mandarin by 40 percent, and Spanish and Portuguese by 20 percent, from 2010 levels. The FCO has also implemented longer training times for

languages during their 'home postings', language allowances are also paid to officers in the UK who have re-qualified in hard' languages such as Mandarin, Arabic or Russian. (British Academy, p.25)

those studying hard languages and become stricter in resisting a tendency for training to be curtailed early due to competing operational requirements.[166]

To address the issue of *ad hoc*, 'laissez-faire' career management, the FCO reasserted corporate imperatives by giving the final word on staffing recommendations made by heads of mission to an appointments board in London. This gives the Foreign Office "the ability to ensure a more strategic allocation of staff with valuable language skills and a stronger ability to plan for future allocation and provision."[167] As well, geographic bureaus covering countries that speak the six core languages of Arabic, Mandarin, Russian, French, German and Spanish encourage staff to join specific 'cadres' that promote the use of these languages. These cadres encourage staff to keep their skills up to date and to use them in multiple postings during their career.[168] Although membership in cadres does not represent a formal commitment, the FCDO's intent is to start to build specific career pathways around them.[169]

The reform efforts of Diplomacy 20:20 have extended beyond critical foreign languages to include fostering deeper subject-matter expertise in key regions identified in the Priority Skills Statement, most notably Russia and China. Spurred by calls by the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee to "invest in the analytical capability to understand Russian decision-making, engage with outside sources of expertise, and develop Russian language skills," the FCO led the creation of 'EECADRE', a cross-government network of experts in the region. It extended the duration of Russian-language training for British diplomats from 10 to 14 months, and increased by a third the proportion of staff meeting their designated language level.[170] In the case of China, the FCO succeeded in deepening its expertise by placing about 20 officials annually at an LSE summer school on Chinese policy at Peking University, and was considering proposals to create a number of new positions on issues related to China including the Belt and Road initiative.[171] Speaking recently about British influence in the Indo-Pacific, Lord Peter Ricketts, former Permanent Secretary of the FCO, stated that "Our expertise is largely in our intelligence relationships and our diplomatic relationships. British ambassadors tend to speak Chinese, Japanese, Korean in a way that most other Western ambassadors don't. We know these countries, and we can offer the Americans and the wider democratic community genuine expertise and depth."[172]

Perhaps an even more urgent need for subject-matter specialization in British diplomacy is rebuilding trade policy expertise to assist post-Brexit trade negotiations after the UK ceased being included in EU trade deals. Acknowledging that "The scale of the UK's challenge in building trade capability from a very modest base is unparalleled amongst developed economies," the FCO in 2018 identified a need to train at least 240 staff to Expert level in trade policy and negotiations within a year. More broadly, the House of Commons urged the FCO to create a dedicated cadre of diplomats with a deep understanding of EU institutions and the domestic politics of member states.[173] As early as 1999, another large-scale internal FCO review titled *Foresight 2010* had advocated "a step change in expertise" in British diplomacy. Alongside greater expertise in difficult languages and broad "EU literacy" across the entire Foreign Office, the study stressed the need for

deeper expertise in technical issues such as climate change, migration, transnational crime, and capital markets.[174]

Beyond the matter of talent management, a broader cultural point made by both the *Future FCO* report and parliamentary inquiries in 2012 and 2018 was that geographical expertise and foreign language skills had been de-prioritised within the Foreign Office due to "a reorientation towards managerialism and the development of generic skills" over the last 20 years. Foreign Secretary Hague acknowledged that "Management has been over-emphasised at the FCO at the expense of core diplomatic tasks and capabilities," while the House of Commons found that "discontent about 'managerialism' was one of the strongest themes in our evidence. Specifically, several witnesses said that time and attention was being diverted into managerial activities at the expense of the FCO's core foreign policy functions and capacities."[175]

One of the most notorious critiques of 'managerialism' in the FCO was a leaked 2006 cable from the British ambassador to Rome, Sir Ivor Roberts, who wrote that "in wading through the [...] excrescences of the management age, we have [...] forgotten what diplomacy is all about".[176] Another ambassador, Sir Jeremy Greenstock, charged that the capacity of the Foreign Office to focus on diplomacy had been undermined by central agencies' insistence that the Foreign Office "conform to objective-setting and explanation of its work against criteria that weren't fully fitting for diplomacy and overseas work."[177] Former diplomat Rory Stewart, who was later a Member of Parliament and Secretary of State for International Development, argued that incentive structures for promotion in the Foreign Office valued generic managerial skills over subject-matter expertise: "People are rewarded for good corporate approaches. […] They're not particularly rewarded for getting out of the embassy, spending hours developing contacts with foreign nationals or learning their languages. And that's been going on now for 30 years."[178]

Acknowledging this reality, the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee recommended that "the promotion process to the most senior positions in the Foreign Office should reflect the importance of traditional diplomatic skills, including knowledge of foreign languages, and should not over-emphasise the need for purely 'managerialist' expertise".[179] In response, the then-Foreign Secretary, William Hague, concurred, stating that he "aimed to accentuate in a diplomat's career the value of serving in a difficult place, or knowing a region of the world with great intimacy and of the language expertise that comes from that. Those things have to be re-accentuated, so that the people who get to the top of the organisation 20 to 30 years from now have come through that background."[180]

However, efforts to impose stricter skills- and knowledge-based requirements on the selection of heads of mission have been resisted by the FCDO Senior Leadership Board, which insists on the flexibility to use the appointments to meet other organizational objectives. While the majority of high-ranking UK diplomats have spent their career working for the foreign service and political appointments of ambassadors are rare,[181] in

October 2018, Foreign Secretary Hunt announced that in order to "broaden the pool of talent we tap into for our Ambassadors," the FCO would open up the process to external candidates, especially those with commercial backgrounds.[182] Already, all Senior Foreign Service positions are open to competition across Whitehall, and there is consideration underway to opening them to candidates from outside government.[183]

Another recurring suggestion in favour of greater permeability of talent in the Foreign Office has been to facilitate greater movement into and out of the organization through secondments and exchanges, as a "vital means of injecting the FCO with new ways of thinking, wider networks and important skills".[184] Asserting that "the FCO is bad at valuing expertise acquired outside the organisation and worse at using it", *Future FCO* argued that time spent outside the organization should henceforth be considered an important part of a Foreign Service career path.[185] In response, in 2016 the FCO established a Secondments & Interchange Unit, responsible for overseeing 120 FCO staff deployments into other government departments and multilateral organizations and ten new secondments of staff to organizations in the private sector and civil society. However, one FCDO official admitted that staff are reluctant to seek outside placements because of the persistent inability of the department to assess such professional experiences within its own criteria for career advancement.[186]

Looking ahead, the newly merged Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office faces a number of long-term challenges. In addition to the disruption associated with the integration of two distinct organizational cultures, new fiscal pressures including a hiring freeze beginning in 2023 and a 20 percent reduction of staff by 2025 will likely incapacitate the talent management efforts of the department in the near to medium term. Many of the initiatives associated with the Diplomacy 20:20 reform effort aimed at incentivizing the development of subject-matter specialization have been paused, given the need to accommodate ex-DFID's own, more technical, definition of expertise.* According to one senior FCDO official:

> The debate between 'specialists' and 'generalists' in the new FCDO ends up leaving both groups feeling diminished. The diplomats think "We *are* experts," not on technical issues but on diplomatic practice more broadly. As for ex-DFID, most of whom were hired as technical specialists, they see a new organizational culture where they feel that expertise is being devalued.[187]

* DFID managed its expert advisory talent through a system of 13 professional cadres on technical issues such as governance, social development, and health. DFID recruits – mainly mid-career professionals with extensive field expertise in the international assistance sector – would be subjected to a strict evaluation process in order to be recognized as 'qualified' for membership in a cadre, which would then determine eligibility for specific specialist overseas assignments. Cadre requirements were sufficiently strict that few advisors were qualified in more than one. The future of the cadre system in the merged FCDO is unknown.

In particular, the merger has complicated efforts to move toward stricter skills-based requirements for assignments and for access to the promotion queue using the Diplomatic Academy's four levels of knowledge proficiency, given the inherent difficulty in measuring and validating such skills. Whereas elsewhere the UK civil service is experimenting with skills-based pay, the FCDO is nowhere near ready to contemplate the recommendation made in the *Future FCO* report that jobs within a pay band should be rewarded according to expertise level as defined in the Diplomatic Academy categories.[188]

In addition to sparking a "big exodus of development talent" estimated at 213 ex-DFID staff in just the first year,[189] the FCO-DFID merger has further exacerbated what the House of Commons as early as 2011 had described as "a process of change virtually uninterrupted for the last 20 years" in the FCO.[190] This constant organizational churn, concluded the *Future FCO* report, had served as a barrier to the department becoming more expert in its field of responsibilities, and this had diminished FCO's weight in policy discussions in Whitehall.[191] This loss of influence has also accelerated a trend toward centralization of power in the Prime Minister's office and "presidentialism" in foreign policy making, most notably under Prime Minister Tony Blair in the early 2000s when the FCO "saw its role in foreign policy decision-making severely sidelined."[192] A 2019 report by the think-tank British Foreign Policy Group did not mince words:

> The Foreign Office is a pale imitation of its former self. Its monopoly on foreign affairs has been eroded by globalisation, EU integration, and reorganisations that have moved trade and development aid* to separate departments outside of its grasp. A generation ago it would have been unimaginable for a department to even dare to discuss areas of foreign policy without the Foreign Office being present, now it finds itself shut out of the biggest diplomatic crisis and foreign policy issue the UK has arguably faced since Suez: Britain's exit from the EU.[193]

Despite the fact that the Foreign Office's annual budget, in the words of former Foreign Secretary David Miliband, is less that a single day's spending by the National Health Service,[194] the FCDO is facing staff cuts in the coming three years that will test once again the resilience of British diplomatic excellence. Nevertheless, for Canada, the British Foreign Office offers a veritable laboratory of experiments aimed at professionalizing diplomatic skills and expertise, based on a clear commitment to move away from the traditional 'generalist' model toward a more specialized approach.

* This report preceded the FCO-DFID merger by 15 months.

France

France boasts one of the largest and most highly regarded diplomatic services in the world. The *Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères* network of 163 embassies is the third largest in the world after China and the United States. French diplomats form an elite corps with a deep tradition of intellectualism and expertise, with mastery of foreign languages, cultures, and history prized as core values of the profession.

The French foreign service is unique among its peers in seeking expertise at the recruitment stage, through a highly competitive and selective process that attracts some of the best graduates of France's robust public educational system. Trilingualism (working knowledge of French, English, and a third European language) is an essential requirement, while knowledge of a fourth language is considered an asset for recruitment into the senior cadre. In the French system, "mastery of the culture and history of a foreign language area is also required and considered as important as speaking the language itself."[195]

The personnel of the French foreign ministry is divided into three categories or cadres, each of which is selected through separate exam processes. "Catégorie A" is considered the top level, and places employees on tracks to reach the most senior diplomatic positions. "Catégorie B" is made up primarily of consular, management, and administrative officers (including some who may also pass by exam into the A cadre). The final level, "Catégorie C," consists primarily of support personnel, such as clerks, personal assistants, and security and communications technicians.[196]

For generations, there have been two main paths of entry into the *Catégorie A* positions of the French diplomatic service: the so-called *grandes écoles* – most notably the prestigious *École nationale d'administration* (ENA) – and the *Concours d'Orient*, a selection process unique to France and dating back to the Napoleonic era which seeks subject-matter experts in more exotic foreign languages and cultures.

The *grandes écoles* do not specifically aim to produce future diplomats. Rather, their mission is to incubate a broad class of public-administration generalists who can be deployable across the public service. Upon completion of a two-year degree at either the *École Polytechnique* or the *École nationale d'administration*, students are ranked for eligibility to join the French civil service. Those ranked in the top third are eligible for assignment in the foreign ministry at the rank of Foreign Affairs' General Advisor (*conseiller*).[197] By contrast, the *Concours d'Orient* is explicitly aimed at recruiting diplomats with existing area specializations and foreign language skills. Most are graduates of *Sciences Po* or the famed *Institut des Langues et Civilisations Orientales* (INALCO),[198] and emerge from their studies with rigorous academic skills and a mastery of at least one difficult language such as Mandarin, Hindi, Arabic, or Farsi.[199]

While it is tempting to describe the ENA and *Concours d'Orient* paths as representing 'generalist' and 'specialist' streams operating in parallel, the reality is more nuanced.

Concours d'Orient recruits do indeed tend to fill most geographic jobs in the ministry requiring regional knowledge and expertise. They are typically more mobile and spend more of their career posted overseas than their colleagues graduating from the ENA. "Their mobility can be explained by the fact that serving abroad is a vocation for the *Orient* Advisors."[200] Only 20 per cent of them focus on multilateral affairs within the foreign ministry or work in the French permanent representations to the major international organizations.[201]

ENA graduates are no less inclined to the development of subject-matter specialization, however they typically achieve this in thematic areas such as global issues or multilateral affairs. Within the multilateral path, diplomats recruited from the ENA tend to develop their career around a specific area of expertise, such as EU affairs or disarmament. The complexity of technical and legal issues involved in EU work has resulted in a specialized stream of ENA graduates who alternate between Brussels, Paris, and EU capitals.[202] They frequently become appointed as ambassadors in large bilateral and multilateral posts (for example, all French ambassadors to the Permanent Representation to the European Union since 1977 have been graduates of the ENA).[203]

For decades, the French foreign ministry laboured under an organizational culture that was inclined to view the *Concours d'Orient* hiring track as less prestigious than the ENA pipeline, long described as "the Royal Way" into French diplomacy.[204] The careers of *Orient* advisors start at a slightly inferior rank compared to their ENA colleagues. They are first appointed abroad as third or second secretaries, contrary to ENA recruits who are usually posted as first secretaries, because the two years spent at ENA are counted toward their seniority. For decades the *Concours d'Orient* path led to hiring only at the lower grade of Officer (*secrétaire*), until 1999 when a new Foreign Affairs' *Orient* Advisor Examination was created, which like the ENA track created opportunities for hiring at the more senior Advisor (*conseiller*) level. This very selective examination — with only eight people accepted out of hundreds of applicants every year — features both an external examination for young university graduates, and an internal examination to which current employees of the foreign ministry can apply. In addition to perfect command of English and of one difficult language, the test includes a general knowledge examination, a law or economics assessment, and questions on international and European issues.[205]

One study of career progression between 1970 and 2010 concluded that ENA entrants had a slightly better rate of advancement than those recruited through the C*oncours d'Orient*. ENA graduates are quicker to reach the rank of Minister Plenipotentiary, which is the most important step toward the position of ambassador.[206] They are also more likely to be chosen for coveted positions as political advisors to the Minister of Foreign Affairs or diplomatic advisors to the President of the Republic or to the Prime Minister.[207] Since the early 2000s, however, the collective influence of ENA recruits has begun to dwindle as hiring trends started to favour *Concours d'Orient* recruits. In 2008 the number of positions in the ministry available to ENA graduates was reduced (ostensibly to alleviate overcrowding in the leadership ranks, which had resulted in slow career progression) and

by 2011 their share among Foreign Affairs Advisors had diminished to 20 percent.[208] In 2020, the ENA track produced only five new hires while the *Concours d'Orient* produced 25, including seven at the more senior Advisor (*conseiller*) level.[209]

Although the French diplomatic system (unlike the American and Canadian) does not work according to functional 'streams' or 'cones', officers of Catégorie A self-select into various areas of specialization such as "representation," "negotiation," "protection of French interests," "promotion of bilateral relations," and "communication on the ground." According to Robert Hutchings, "They are encouraged to focus their roles in these specific areas and apply to positions that promote the streams."[210] This self-sorting toward functional specialization happens despite the historical weakness of human resources planning within the ministry, which only began to develop individual career management practices in the late 1990s.[211]

By tradition, career progression in the French service has been largely self-managed, and guided by unwritten (but widely understood) sets of expectations about the seniority levels that a successful officer is expected to reach by different periods of service – for example, "By ENA+ 15 [years], you need to have gotten this far."[212] Aspiring ambassadors are expected to have served as advisors in a ministerial office, and to have accumulated at least two areas of deep but complementary specialization, "such as Europe and culture", or both a bilateral and a multilateral set of experiences.[213]

Because of its decades-long record of success in recruiting an elite cadre of diplomats, the French foreign ministry has not tended to prioritize the need for ongoing training. France only belatedly in 2010 established a diplomatic training school, the *Institut diplomatique et consulaire,* following a critical 1999 report by a national commission of inquiry into the French diplomatic service (the Heisbourg Report) and a White Paper published in 2007.[214] The institute is meant to address long-standing complaints about insufficient training for first-posting diplomats.[215] Upon admission, all senior (Catégorie A) diplomats are now required to complete a six month curriculum of instruction offered by an internal education institute, the *École Diplomatique*, which is staffed by retired diplomats, practitioners, journalists, and academics.[216] In 2011, the French foreign ministry also introduced formal mid-career training, at the 15 years of service mark, which aims to "strengthen the managerial skills and leadership capacities of diplomats who will exercise upper management roles within the Ministry, as well as to deepen their knowledge in priority areas of international action (including economic diplomacy, soft power, security and defence, European affairs, and climate change)."[217]

The French diplomatic service enjoys a strong group identity and healthy self-regard, fuelled in part by decades of deference over its prerogatives to lead on matters of foreign

policy. The Secretary-General of the ministry* has, almost without exception, been a career diplomat, as have all of the diplomatic advisors to the Prime Minister and President of the Republic. (Uniquely in the French system, chiefs of staff to the Foreign Minister also have tended to be career diplomats as opposed to political staffers.) Between 1981 and 2016, no fewer than three of 13 foreign ministers were themselves former diplomats.[218] They were joined in June 2022 by the latest foreign minister, Catherine Colonna, another career diplomat. According to Christian Lequesne, author of a pioneering ethnographical study of the French foreign ministry, French diplomats expect their ministers to rise to the same level of technical mastery of files as they themselves demonstrate: "Diplomats, who are the experts, have a high regard for this."[219]

However, this elite group identity, further fuelled by the French tradition of corporatism and union solidarity, has also contributed to perceptions of a guild mentality within the service that has rankled France's political leaders. Until 2019, union representatives enjoyed a right of consultation on lists for upward promotion.[220] Whether recruited through the ENA stream or the *Concours d'Orient*, French diplomats have fought to keep outsiders away from the upper echelons of their ministry. They opposed a 1984 decree allowing the appointment of a limited number of senior public servants from other ministries to the rank of Minister Plenipotentiary, the traditional step before an ambassadorship.[221] In 2012, a powerful union representing many French diplomats took administrative legal action – ultimately successfully – to block President Sarkozy's appointment of two ambassadors from elsewhere in the French public service,[222] and in 2018 did the same to thwart President Macron's nomination of a prominent writer as Consul General in Los Angeles.

Not surprisingly, the French diplomatic service has been characterized by limited lateral movement into and out of the organization. Following the foreign ministry's acquisition of the mandate for trade promotion, from the Ministry of Economy, in 2012, and the resulting new focus on economic diplomacy, Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius directed the creation of an alternative path of entry for individuals with five to ten years of experience in the private sector, such as former company managers and experts, in hopes that they would bring private-sector contacts and institutional knowledge of non-governmental entities to the table.[223] The experiment was largely unsuccessful. A 2016 internal review of France's diplomatic future called for the promotion of greater mobility outside the diplomatic service by encouraging all staff to take posts outside the foreign ministry, including in civil society, the private sector, and international organizations. It called for a specific career management strategy for staff specializing in European issues, enabling them to acquire and diversify their experience in this field and form a talent pool for positions in the European External Action Service. The review also called for compulsory mobility for staff aspiring to senior management roles; this goal, too, remains unmet.[224] As of 2021, only 180 diplomats out of a total of 1,600 were serving outside the foreign ministry, most in other

* The senior bureaucrat in charge of the ministry; in Canadian parlance the Undersecretary or Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

parts of the public service and only 25 in the private sector, far below the aspirations of the leadership.[225] One notable change, however, has been the ministry's increasing reliance on contract employees to fill skills gap. It now recruits approximately 100 temporary staff per year, most on contracts of 5 years or less, to address staffing shortfalls in areas such as international development and cultural promotion. But the practice increasingly includes more senior-level experts in the directorate-general for global affairs and the policy-planning staff, including in management positions. As a result, some 10 percent of senior managers in the ministry are no longer career diplomats.

In 2019, in reaction to the populist *gilets jaunes* protests of the previous year, the French parliament passed a major reform of the public service, ostensibly to break down its elitist modes of recruitment and make it more representative and diverse. Anticipating the effect of these reforms on the diplomatic service, in the fall of 2020 Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian commissioned an internal review of the ministry's human capital by senior diplomat Jérôme Bonnafont. In his report, Bonnafont urged the foreign ministry to quickly adopt a new approach to talent management including mandatory assignments outside the ministry in order to "permeate the state and society with high-level practitioners of international relations," while equally "receiving and training civil servants from other parts of the state to sensitize them to European and international affairs". He called for expanding the hiring of contracted staff, including as a means to quickly improve the ministry's gender balance. However, Bonnafont also stressed the importance of a career diplomatic service and urged further emphasis on professionalization through a more deliberate model of career management. Diplomats, he wrote, should develop 2-3 areas of career specialization and follow a more rigorous pattern of assignment progression, including a mandatory first assignment in one's region of foreign language proficiency. He also called for a more predictable schedule for head of mission nominations so that ambassadors could be given weeks or months of language training prior to assignment.[226]

Perhaps seeking more radical change than proposed in the Bonnafont report, President Macron in 2021 announced a major overhaul of the French diplomatic service, essentially disbanding the senior ranks of the Foreign Affairs Advisor (*conseiller*) and Minister Plenipotentiary cadres and merging them into the senior administrative service of the French government. The move followed Macron's earlier decision to dissolve the ENA and other *grandes écoles* into a new National Institute of Public Service, whose graduates will form a new, generic class of 'state administrators' who will no longer be attached to a specific department; instead, state administrators will be expected to rotate regularly between ministries throughout their careers.

The stated goal of these reforms is to ensure greater diversity in hiring, increase mobility and adaptability of senior bureaucrats, and break down the traditional, elitist group identity of the different *grandes écoles*. For the foreign ministry specifically, the elimination of the two most senior grades is aimed at achieving greater permeability of personnel, by opening up diplomatic service overseas to staff from domestic agencies, while "providing diplomats with greater flexibility to take positions in other ministries".[227] Although it

appears the famed *Concours d'Orient* will be preserved as a means of recruiting subject-matter experts on foreign cultures and languages, those recruits now face uncertain prospects of career progression toward senior positions abroad, including ambassadorships.

The Macron reforms met with vociferous protests by French diplomats and even strike action in June 2022 (for only the second time in the history of the foreign ministry). A group of 500 employees wrote an open letter, published in *Le Monde*, arguing that the diplomatic profession risked simply disappearing into a larger pool of generic managers trained mainly for domestic departments: "This decision will permit nominations motivated by indulging people rather than favoring competence and will lead to the destruction of careers, a loss of expertise and a vocational crisis."[228] Another diplomat wrote:

> Diplomacy involves specific skills — on a country, a region, a language, even dialects — which require long and difficult studies. Is there not a risk of losing credibility and influence, at the very moment when the balance of power is being replayed on the international scene, if France now finds itself without career diplomacy? How will prefectural officials or people specializing in agricultural issues deal with these issues during their mobility at post?[229]

Feeding this outrage was suspicion at Macron's motives. "It is common knowledge that President Macron does not like the diplomatic corps," wrote one commentator, recalling accusations leveled by Macron against his country's diplomats in 2019 that they were working to undermine his efforts at rapprochement with Russian president Putin.[230] Animated by visions of a "deep state" thwarting his bold initiatives, Macron, say his critics, appears to be marshalling his talent for creative disruption to settle scores and gain tighter political control over foreign policy. Fuelled by Macron's own top-down and highly personal style of governing, these reforms are likely to accelerate the trend toward 'presidentialization' of foreign policy – and further marginalization of the foreign ministry – begun under President Sarkozy, including, it is feared, by expanding the president's prerogative to appoint ambassadors at his discretion.

These reforms are seen as exacerbating a number of other structural challenges, most critically the budget cuts of 20 percent between 1990 and 2010 that have seen reductions of 53 percent of diplomatic staff in the last three decades, at a time when more is expected from the French foreign ministry in the wake of its amalgamation with the international development ministry in 1998 and its absorption of responsibilities for trade, from the Ministry of Economy, in 2012.[231] These budget cuts also prompted a much-decried rise of managerialism in the work of the French foreign ministry: "As in most administrations, staff are devoting more and more time to managing bureaucratic tasks to the detriment of the core business." [232] The Bonnafont report of 2021 warned that some of France's traditional areas of diplomatic excellence and expertise, in particular European affairs, Africa, and development cooperation, were witnessing symptoms of decline.

The French model of diplomatic talent management is unparalleled given the country's unique colonial, revolutionary, and corporatist traditions. In the words of former diplomat Michel Duclos, the recognized effectiveness of the French diplomatic service "comes from the amalgamation of polyglot adventurers and senior technocrats, cemented by a common vocation and a shared passion, which creates an *esprit de corps*".[233] Its roots in elite recruitment are at odds, however, with the pressing need for greater diversity and equity of opportunity, and the place of expertise in that winning formula may yet be transformed by reforms still to come.

Australia

Among the case studies examined in this report, Australia is unique in terms of the challenges posed by geography. Excepting New Zealand, it inhabits a region populated mostly by developing countries with entirely different cultures, languages, and social systems. In the words of one senior Australian diplomat, "While Western countries may not need a deep understanding of these societies, Australia needs to be able to analyze in depth their processes of cultural and social change and of nation building," particularly given Australia's growing economic interdependence with this region.[234] This would appear to suggest a compelling interest in creating a diplomatic service strongly specialized in the Asia-Pacific region. Yet decades of budget constraints and understaffing have impeded the efforts of the foreign ministry to incubate specialist knowledge, leading it to be overshadowed in foreign policy making by Australia's better funded defence and security establishments. Since 2019, however, the foreign ministry has chosen to make a renewed effort to break with the traditional generalist model and move more deliberately toward greater specialization.

When established in 1935, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs was "perceived as a small elitist institution, primarily focusing on overseas representation and negotiation, and reflecting British norms and styles of diplomatic practice."[235] In its early years, the department recruited for the diplomatic stream at university graduate level while the rest of the public service recruited from high school graduates, contributing to this elite identity. From the mid-1950s until the 1970s, however, the department lost some of its standing and "was not highly ranked in the informal Canberra public service pecking order", as the Department of Trade rose in importance amid the complex shift in emphasis in trading relationships over those decades, from Britain to Japan and the USA, and then more widely across Asia.[236]

In 1987 the Department of Trade was merged with Foreign Affairs, rescuing the latter from "becoming increasingly marginalized in the management of Australia's international affairs". According to the then-secretary of the new Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Stuart Harris, "As a result of the amalgamation, DFAT became an important department of state. It lost much of its exclusivity, and its own sense of being an elite department derived from its mission as a diplomatic service and the way it recruited its diplomatic staff. It has become like other departments within the public service. It has gained in professional credibility among other departments, however, and improved its effectiveness in interdepartmental discussions and negotiations."[237]

DFAT's core talent-management model has traditionally been that of "an organisation of generalists reinforced by specialists", balancing a core of "flexible generalists who give the department agility and responsiveness" with other colleagues with deeper specialization

and expertise.[238] A 2013 capacity review of DFAT likened the approach to "a series of guilds, with staff focusing on certain areas of specialisation such as trade negotiations or China in the policy areas and ICT and security in corporate areas".[239] Australia is unique among the countries examined in this study, in the extent to which its diplomatic service has relied on mid-career lateral recruitment from elsewhere in the Australian Public Service as a complement to career-long service. Begun in the early 1980s and expanded in the last two decades, lateral entry has become a key tool for addressing specific skills shortages. A 2013 report found that fewer than 50 percent of DFAT's Senior Executive Services (SES) had started in the department's entry-level program, while half of the department's SES Band 3 staff (the most senior grade) had joined the department as lateral recruits.[240] A 2009 blue-ribbon panel nonetheless urged DFAT to promote even greater mobility, by providing incentives for managers to undertake secondments to other agencies.[241] The department has resisted, however, the recommendations made in a 2019 review of the Australian Public Service which advocated opening up overseas diplomatic assignments to "high-performing and high-potential staff from across the [public] service, regardless of agency".[242]

For decades, commentators have warned that Australia's diplomatic service is "overstretched and increasingly ill-equipped to deal with the foreign policy agenda of Australia as an active middle power".[243] Australia has one of the smallest diplomatic networks of all developed nations, ranked 25th out of 34 nations in the OECD and smaller than those of Chile, Portugal, Hungary and Greece.[244] Australia's diplomatic presence abroad dwindled from 862 diplomats in 1989 to a low of 494 in 2005, a contraction of nearly 43 percent.[245] Modest growth in the 17 years since has still left Australia with roughly as many diplomats posted overseas today as it had in 1989, a period in which the country's GDP quadrupled.[246] Parliament's joint foreign affairs committee concluded in 2012 that DFAT had suffered from chronic underfunding for the previous three decades at the hands of successive governments, leaving it with a 'seriously deficient' diplomatic network, concluding: "Australia clearly is punching below its weight."[247] The underfunding of DFAT is even more striking when compared with the boom years experienced by Australia's defence and intelligence establishments. Between 2000 and 2010, the Australian Secret Intelligence Service, the Office of National Assessments and the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation experienced budget growth of 437 per cent, 471 per cent and 562 per cent respectively, while DFAT's resourcing stagnated.[248] In 2020, expenditure on defence was projected to cross the threshold of 2 percent of GDP while funding for diplomacy, having fallen to just 0.63 percent of GDP by 2013, was expected to decrease to as little as 0.08 percent of GDP by 2024.[249]

DFAT's budget woes have resulted in low levels of recruitment, and therefore actual workforce numbers "considerably less than the level of approved Full Time Equivalent staff".[250] According to one scholar, "Australia has not kept up its human skills or capacity to handle economic, social, environmental, security, and development issues sufficiently. With flat-lining staffing levels and chronic underfunding, it is no wonder there is little

capacity for DFAT staff to specialise."[251] Only 23 percent of DFAT staff are based overseas, forcing deployed officers to spread themselves too thin and diluting any expertise they may be inclined to build. The department has also had to lean heavily on the hiring of contractors to provide specialized knowledge, because of the Public Service-wide staffing cap known as the Average Staffing Level.

Despite this dire financial and human resource situation, the mandate of DFAT was expanded suddenly in 2013, with the snap announcement that it would be merged with Australia's development agency, AusAID. Characterised by some as a raid to fund DFAT on the back of AusAID using the A$397 million saved,[252] the merger prompted a reassessment of development priorities that led to an immediate loss of subject-matter expertise, as Head of Aid positions at embassies abroad were abolished, locally-engaged development staff were cut, and specialist development positions at headquarters became fewer.[253] The former head of AusAID's human resources estimated that almost 1,000 years of expertise were lost in the merger, and another 1,000 years since,[254] in what one analyst described as a "deliberate reduction of expertise arising from lack of experience of what is needed to plan, design, implement and manage successful development cooperation".[255] One former senior government official stated that the merger was "predicated on the idea that 'anyone can do anything', and that public servants are interchangeable".[256] In his detailed audit of the impact of the merger, Richard Moore wrote of the new foreign and development ministry:

> DFAT runs on smart generalists – people who can get across the fundamentals of issues quickly and communicate them succinctly. That is a very valuable skillset many development people might usefully acquire, but its not enough to shape and manage complex programs. It can also be an impediment to assembling and effectively managing the depth of specialist expertise needed to deliver the cutting edge assistance critical to accelerating development and forging deep relationships. Having this expertise is also essential to develop the profile, credibility and authority needed for policy influencing.[257]

The erosion of DFAT's skills and knowledge in development came at a significant cost to Australia's reputation. According to Moore, in Asia and the Pacific, reports abounded of first and second secretaries being sent to conduct complex policy dialogue with ministers and directors general. "Increasingly, doors that had been open are reported to be closing. A senior former minister of a major Asian country recently reflected on reduced policy engagement, asking one interlocutor, "What happened to Australia?" Others have asked similar questions."[258] The UK downgraded Australia to third tier status for knowledge-based staff exchanges in the wake of the merger, wrote Moore, and "a major regional partner wrote to Australia recently saying it had gone from being its top partner of choice to one that is difficult to work with. Another told us that we are not currently bringing enough ideas to the table."[259]

Even prior to the merger, one recurring criticism of the Australian diplomatic service has been its lack of diversity and "stubbornly anglophone character". A blue-ribbon panel in 2009 found "indications that language skills of DFAT staff have been in decline over the last two decades", with only about 26 percent of Australian diplomats being proficient in a language besides English.[260] Despite the significant role Asian and Pacific languages play in Australia's international policy objectives, the panel found that only 227 diplomats in the Australian service possessed working proficiency in any Asian language, as compared with 107 fluent in French. Numbers for other languages such as Arabic and Hindi/Urdu were worse. The panel found that the DFAT budget for language training in 2006 (A$2.19 million) was virtually unchanged from 1996 (A$2.16 million), representing a significant cut due to inflation. It recommended a major reinvestment in language skills (particularly East Asian and Pacific languages, Arabic and Hindi/Urdu) and expansion in the number of language-designated positions and funding for other specialist skills. The panel noted that the need for language and other specialist training extends beyond DFAT, however, to the many other agencies with staff overseas performing diplomatic functions: "A more strategic approach is required across the Australian international policy community, not only to language training, but also other specialised skills that will be essential to rebuilding Australia's diplomatic muscle."[261]

Following a burst of new funding for language training, by 2011 the number of diplomats with a working-level proficiency in an Asian language increased from 227 to 266, a number still corresponding with only around 10 percent of DFAT's staff.[262] DFAT explained to a Parliamentary committee in 2012 that its difficulties in filling foreign-language designated positions were due in part to attrition: "Firstly, you lose some because they do not want to continue on with the speciality in that country. Secondly, you lose some because the private sector grab them. They have been well trained up and the private sector pay them more. We regularly lose people from that. Thirdly, you lose people sometimes because, while they have the language skills, they do not have the judgement you want with a policy job."[263] A former secretary of DFAT, Stuart Harris, suggested that a corporate culture that valued "managerialism, rather than area or subject specialization, has also been a factor".[264]

However fledgling DFAT's overall performance on foreign language proficiency, one area of relative success has been at the ambassador level. One former senior official credited Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister from 2007 to 2010 and himself a Mandarin-speaking former diplomat, with having insisted that Australia's ambassadors in key posts such as Beijing, Tokyo, Jakarta and Seoul speak the local language.[265] Recent examples of fluent ambassadors include Graham Fletcher in Beijing, James Choi in Seoul, Penny Williams in Jakarta, Bruce Miller in Tokyo, and Glenn Miles in Cairo.* In 2015, DFAT updated its

* Fletcher, Australia's ambassador in Beijing since 2019, is on his fourth posting to China and has accumulated 12 years of experience there in addition to six years as head of the North Asia division at DFAT. Prior to being named ambassador in Cairo (his second posting to Egypt), Miles also served in Lebanon, Kuwait, the Palestinian Territories, Jordan, and Iraq. Miller, a fluent Japanese speaker since university, served a total of 14 years in Japan on three separate postings including as ambassador from 2011 to 2017.

Language Proficiency Allowance scheme, with fluent speakers of Arabic, Cantonese, Korean, Japanese or Mandarin now eligible to receive an additional A$13,000 per year.[266] The allowance is paid even when the employee is based at headquarters, subject to maintaining a level of General Professional Proficiency that is re-tested every three years. By 2018, the compliance rate for language-designated positions reportedly crossed the 60 percent mark.[267] The allowance scheme has existed for decades and was promoted, most notably, by Ashton Calvert, Secretary of DFAT from 1998 to 2005 and a fluent Japanese speaker following four separate postings to Tokyo including as ambassador.[268]

One impediment to maximising DFAT's return on language training is the ministry's practice of discouraging back-to-back postings abroad. A major trade association, the Australian Industry Group, raised its concerns to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Australian Parliament in 2012 about this practice, "which meant returning diplomats had to wait before another posting, probably to a different country 'to broaden you out'. This differed from the British diplomatic service which had back-to-back postings and "seemed to keep its people [in a given region] longer"".[269] While DFAT responded that there was "an equity issue" given the number of headquarters staff eager for posting opportunities, that "it is important for policy officers in Canberra to actually have experience of the countries they are working on", and that cross-posted officers "can sometimes forget the country they come from", the Committee bluntly replied that it "does not accept DFAT's arguments concerning the back-to-back posting of staff. In certain circumstances there are clear advantages for a longer posting in a particular country, such as developing a greater depth of understanding of the country and developing broader networks. The Committee rejects the notion that diplomats on longer postings can "forget the country they come from"."[270]

Australia's understandable focus on the Indo-Pacific region has resulted in a relative dearth of expertise in other regions of the world, such as Africa and Latin America. A 2011 inquiry by the parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs faulted DFAT for its reduced coverage of embassies in Africa over the prior two decades – from 12 posts to 8 – and its lack of presence in Francophone Africa, where most Australian mining interests were concentrated.[271] The committee urged the foreign ministry to "take deliberate steps to expand its expertise and capacity to engage" by working with Australian universities to establish a centre specialising in African studies.[272] The deficit in subject-matter expertise persisted, however; one former senior Canadian official recalls that Australia approached Canada for help in seconding an Africa specialist to provide policy support during Australia's term on the UN Security Council in 2013-14.[273] Another area where DFAT's thin bench was noted was peacebuilding, where the department had managed to bring in peace and conflict specialists as consultants only to lose them due to budget constraints.[274] As well, a 2009 blue-ribbon panel urged DFAT to invest more in specialist skills such as international finance and economics, public diplomacy, and new media.[275]

In the last several years, DFAT has begun to respond to these challenges and to take tentative steps toward becoming a more specialist organization. Interviewees credit this change to the appointment of Frances Adamson as Secretary of DFAT in 2016. An accomplished diplomat and Mandarin-speaker with postings as Ambassador to China and previously in Hong Kong and Taipei, Adamson recognized a deficit within the diplomatic service in terms of geographic and economic expertise. Under her leadership, and at the urging of then-minister Julie Bishop, "who underlined the importance of subject-matter expertise" upon Adamson's appointment,[276] DFAT began to act on recommendations made in a 2013 capability review of the department conducted by the Australian Public Service Commission, which had advocated "language and processes that more explicitly manage the accumulation of expertise during the course of a generalist career, for example through the idea of 'career anchors' – areas of expertise to which they will return several times in the course of a broader career".[277] The career anchors approach was also aimed at reassuring ex-AusAID employees that they could maintain a professional focus on development and still enjoy healthy career progression.

A DFAT human resources review completed in March 2020 concluded that the department needed to "move away from the generalist model" and adopt a more rigorous approach to defining the skills and knowledge needed in the organization, including by favouring more targeted hiring of required skills instead of bulk recruitment processes.[278] A three-year implementation plan is currently underway. The turn toward greater professionalization is supported by a new diplomatic academy, which delivers training in diplomatic tradecraft in areas such as advocacy, negotiation, forecasting and strategic planning, with a particular focus on the Indo–Pacific.[279]

As with other foreign ministries examined in this study, DFAT faces an increasingly competitive environment around the cabinet table. With 18 of 19 government departments now boasting international divisions, DFAT's primacy in foreign-policy expertise and influence is under pressure, especially now that coordination of international relations has progressively been concentrated within the Prime Minister's Office and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, including with the creation of the office of National Security Advisor in 2008.[280] The 2012 capability review of DFAT by the Australian Public Service Commission further found that the excellence of the foreign ministry's overseas network was undermined by "difficulties… in operating as effectively in Canberra". Noting the "more frequent than usual churn in Canberra-based positions", the review found that DFAT was struggling to "quickly master new areas of work" and to adequately "disseminat[e] the knowledge drawn from its overseas network throughout the APS [Australian Public Service]".[281] More recently, the COVID crisis and the 2019-20 bushfires emergency saw DFAT's engagement and communications efforts praised. The 2022 election of a new Labour government that has a strong view of DFAT's central role, and the appointment of an influential foreign minister in Penny Wong, may offer a window for DFAT to move along its reform agenda toward greater specialization and equip itself with the resources necessary to compete for influence across the Indo-Pacific region.

China

China's global network of an estimated 4,500 diplomats posted abroad is the second-largest after the United States. It is known mainly for the exceptional discipline of Chinese diplomats as well as for their commitment to linguistic and regional expertise. Especially impressive is the speed with which the Chinese diplomatic service has professionalized, since its establishment in 1949 following the Communist revolution which left it "no prior structure to inherit, nor archives to guide the new diplomats".[282] The post-revolution service was staffed mainly with members of the People's Liberation Army and its early ethos was as "the PLA in civilian clothes". The first 17 ambassadors appointed after the revolution were drawn from the ranks of the PLA. However, the decade beginning in 1954 saw the emergence of a civilian diplomatic cadre and by 1966, ambassador appointees from the PLA were in the minority.[283]

According to Robert Hutchings, China's focus on language ability and regional expertise reflects a diplomatic culture that predates the revolution, with Chinese diplomats trained to report on foreign countries and represent the official position as dictated from Beijing.[284] Whether for that reason, or because it self-consciously modeled itself on the Russian diplomatic service, the Chinese foreign ministry chose to elevate mastery of foreign languages to a signature strength. By 1957 the ministry had 600 qualified interpreters specialized in 27 languages.[285] Uniquely among foreign ministries, and at the personal initiative of Premier Zhou Enlai, China required its diplomats to study the languages even of small states, eventually bringing the foreign ministry's interpreter-level expertise to over 40 languages, including all the languages spoken in China's neighbourhood. This was buttressed by a system of directed assignments wherein diplomats were rotated exclusively between the headquarters and their region – or country – of specialization. (It is only in the 1990s that cross-regional movement at middle and senior ranks was introduced, now extended to the junior levels.)[286]

The death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and China's opening to the outside world beginning in the 1980s ushered in a process of professionalization for the Chinese diplomatic service. This period marked the first ambassador appointments for the post-1949 cohort of career diplomats, a process assisted by a new mandatory retirement law in 1983 which accelerated the replacement of PLA veterans with civilian professional diplomats.[287] Of ambassadors appointed between 1980 and 1984, 64 percent possessed foreign language fluency,[288] and they proved themselves more capable of establishing a collegial rapport with diplomats from other countries.[289]

This change in style was noticed by, among others, the CIA. "Since 1983, Beijing has transformed its Embassy in Washington from a fledgling establishment designed merely to monitor bilateral relations into an organization that pursues China's national interest with increasing effectiveness," the agency reported in 1986. It noted the increasing independence of the commercial and science and technology sections of the embassy from

the political section, evidence of the increased importance the embassy attached to technical expertise.[290] Along with its continuing focus on regional and language expertise, China during this period also began to invest in its multilateral tools, beginning with arms control policy, where the ministry started the practice of rotating diplomats to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, providing them with the opportunity to learn from global experts.[291] Today China's multilateral specialists are routinely sent on repeat assignments to the same international entity, while at home they continue to work on issues relating to that organization. Some are deployed for jobs in the UN and its specialized agencies based on their acquired expertise in sub-themes such as culture, health, or labour migration, extending Chinese influence across the organization.[292] Some of China's best diplomats are reserved for service at their delegation to the UN.[293]

Up until the late 1990s, new Chinese diplomats were recruited almost exclusively from the Beijing Foreign Language University, with many serving as interpreters and translators before being entrusted with diplomatic responsibilities. This sparked criticism that 'translator diplomacy' had come at the expense of a more well-rounded diplomatic corps. Ironically, as well, the ready availability of interpreters was blamed for breeding complacency among senior officials, including ambassadors, who no longer felt driven to acquire foreign-language skills. Over the last two decades, the Chinese foreign ministry has diversified its catchment of talent to include a wider variety of international relations and public policy schools and a broader range of humanities and international relations backgrounds, to better match the requirements of other leading diplomatic services.[294] All applicants must have some English language competency, and the ministry continues to seek recruits offering a variety of language backgrounds.[295] Chinese junior diplomats receive six months of training upon entry, designed to familiarize them with the foreign ministry and the Chinese diplomatic system. A new China Diplomatic Academy, opened in 2016, has taken over training for diplomats under closer scrutiny from the ministry's senior ranks.[296]

The Chinese foreign ministry imposes educational and targeted training requirements on their officers as a condition of advancement, using an incentive-based system of credits toward promotion.[297] For example, diplomats must complete a leadership and management training course, along with courses on international relations, economics and finance, international history, protocol, and consular affairs in order to be promoted to second secretary.[298] However, one weakness of the ministry's training approach is that it has significantly curtailed opportunities for study abroad compared to earlier generations.[299] (Similar misgivings about foreign influence have prompted the ministry, it is said, to no longer recruit applicants who have studied overseas.)

Officers typically spend an entire career in (or on) a single region or theme, continuing the Chinese tradition of hyper-specialization. However, with new recruits joining with broader backgrounds, there are fewer barriers to gaining experience outside their region of primary focus. The foreign ministry's fixation with the mastery of more esoteric languages, in the 1950s and 1960s, has given way to a pragmatic focus on major languages, partly due

to the reluctance of young officer to devote a career to a 'marginal country'.[300] However, work at the junior and mid-level ranks appears extremely regimented and limited in scope. Only very senior diplomats are expected to engage directly in international negotiation or provide input to strategic decision-making.[301] The foreign ministry also appears very insular, with no tradition of exchanges with other departments to provide officers with more diverse experience.[302]

Regional expertise and knowledge of foreign languages continue to be important factors in the selection of China's ambassadors. A 2018 study by the Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS) found that in recent years, the Chinese Communist Party has increasingly favoured ambassadors with more experience in their respective region than their predecessors. This trend has combined with the Chinese practice (shared in common with Russia) of expecting lengthy tours of duty for senior ambassador positions, resulting in an extreme concentration of expertise in a small number of individuals. For example, China's ambassador to Russia, Li Hui, has spent a decade in his current post, culminating a career spent entirely working on Russia and its neighbors. (Previously he was ambassador to Kazakhstan and the director general for Eastern European and Central Asian Affairs in the foreign ministry.) According to MERICS, "Li's considerable regional expertise is hardly unusual in China's foreign service and may be seen as a strength. However, Li's example also underscores a persistent problem in China's diplomacy: a lack of renewal in top posts."[303] This approach also suggests that the Party only trusts a select few people to fill the most sensitive positions.

Assessments of the effectiveness of the Chinese diplomatic model vary greatly. One scholar, Peter Martin, finds that Chinese diplomats are "more professional, more cosmopolitan, and more expert than any previous generation… [with] specialized expertise on topics from global finance to nuclear weapons. To a great extent, they closely resemble the very best of their international counterparts."[304] MERICS agrees, to the extent that "policymakers in Europe and elsewhere should not underestimate China's key competitive advantage: the strong focus on regional experience. Extensive previous exposure to the region in which they serve and knowledge of the local language could put Chinese diplomats at an advantage vis-à-vis their counterparts from other countries who traditionally want their diplomats to be generalists."[305] Other assessments are less sanguine, with some commentators charging that China's focus on defence and commercial issues often comes at the expense of insight into decision-making in foreign capitals. *The Economist* recently cited a foreign diplomat in Beijing to whom Chinese counterparts had admitted that they had limited understanding of central and eastern Europe, "but were fortunate to have the Russians to explain it for them".[306]

More systemically, however, the Chinese approach suffers from the highly subordinate role the foreign ministry occupies, as a mere implementation arm of the foreign policy decisions made by the Standing Committee of the Politburo.[307] Peter Martin argues that the

professionalization of the diplomatic service from the 1980s onward came at the expense of the prestige that had surrounded the first generation of diplomats who were veterans of the People's Liberation Army and enjoyed strong links to top Party leaders.[308] He adds that "paradoxically, China's growing global role weakened its foreign ministry". As Chinese businesspeople and tourists ventured out into the world, the foreign ministry was brought into competition with other players such as the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Public Security, and powerful state-owned companies – organizations with bigger budgets and often more clout than the foreign ministry.[309] As well, the Party's more pervasive role under Xi Jinping could further stifle the sense of initiative in the diplomatic service. In a 2018 speech to assembled diplomats, Xi reminded them that they are first and foremost "party cadres". This may signal a shift in which loyalty is valued more highly than professional skill.[310]

In Martin's assessment, "China's diplomats are unable to extricate themselves from the constraints of a secretive, paranoid political system. They will continue to be bound by institutions forged through underground revolutionary struggle and that matured at the height of the Cold War."[311] Their fear of looking weak in front of Party leaders or the Chinese public "makes them focus excessively on small tactical wins at the expense of strategic victories". This produces a diplomatic style in which Chinese diplomats are "effective at formulating demands, but poorly equipped to win hearts and minds. Their constant repetition of official talking points is unpersuasive at best and, at worst, looks like bullying; and their limited space to improvise, show flexibility, or take the initiative leaves them unable to tailor their approach to different audiences." [312]

One illustration of this point is the recent phenomenon of so-called 'wolf warrior diplomacy', characterized by bellicose public statements by officials, including diplomats, in response to perceived slights against China. The practice takes its name from a popular Chinese action film. It emerged around 2017 and became widespread after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the Chinese government faced a storm of global criticism for its handling of the emergency. Criticism of China's treatment of the Uighur minority was also met with abuse, with the Chinese ambassador to Canada accusing that country's media of "Western egotism and white supremacy". Twitter was a popular medium for 'wolf warrior' broadsides, delivered almost always in English. But while the tweets highlighted Chinese diplomats' linguistic prowess – insofar as being comfortable with the cut-and-thrust of trolling in a second language – the overall impression created was one of thin-skinned insecurity. The backlash sparked by 'wolf warrior diplomacy' seemed to register in Beijing. One former Chinese ambassador to the U.S. publicly admonished his colleagues in Beijing to "always have the country at large in mind, and not always think about being an internet celebrity". Even President Xi – ostensibly the wolf warriors' muse – told a study session of the Politburo of China's need to improve its international communication, in order to "enlarge the circle of friends who understand China".[313] By late 2021, the practice appeared to be on the wane.

China's commitment to excellence by its diplomats through the development of specialized expertise is laudable. However, the Chinese example also proves that knowledge alone is no guarantee of success in the practice of diplomacy, which often solicits organic, and intuitive, interactions and instincts. While China's diplomatic toolkit has some strong elements, other pieces are deficient due to the rigidity of the overall system it serves – a system that, in Peter Martin's words, has left China with "tremendous international influence but few true friends".[314]

Russia

Russia's diplomatic approach is very similar to China's and indeed served as a model for the new, post-revolutionary Chinese foreign ministry starting in 1949. Its senior leadership consists of officials trained in the Soviet tradition and consequently, like the Chinese diplomatic service, Russian diplomats are characterised by profound linguistic and cultural knowledge of their regions of assigned specialization, but also by rigid discipline and minimal personal autonomy. As Russian foreign policy reverts to Soviet-era tendencies toward centralized decision-making and anti-Western hostility, the advantage conferred by individual Russian diplomats' regional expertise and foreign-language proficiency risks being squandered.

Since the 1940s, the majority of recruits to the Russian foreign service have come from the Moscow State University of International Relations (or MGIMO), which operates under the umbrella of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. With its 8,000 students and 2,000 staff, MGIMO is both a university and a think-tank, and serves as "the *alma mater* for the bulk of Russia's foreign policymaking elite – both those at the MFA and foreign policy specialists at other state institutions and in large companies."[315] To gain admission to MGIMO's Department of International Relations, students must pass exams on history, a foreign language, and the Russian language. According to Robert Hutchings, "In an interview with *Russia Today*, many Russian diplomats mentioned that they had the impression that their language and theoretical training was more intensely focused than that of other nations' diplomatic services."[316]

Russian diplomats are expected to specialize in one region of the world, with most of their assignments in Moscow and abroad serving to deepen their expertise in their area of specialization. To this end they undergo "intensive study of foreign languages and deep training in the customs, traditions, and political history of foreign countries". Most Russian ambassadors are assigned to their region of deepest experience.[317] Consistent with this vision, the foreign ministry is staffed nearly exclusively with career diplomats, and mid-career entry, as well as lateral movement to and from other ministries, are extremely rare. (As one Russia scholar puts it: "The MFA is like a steel tube – one can enter it from one end and leave from the other, but not in the middle.")[318]

One American diplomat who served in Moscow recalled meeting a Russian colleague who said that he had served with the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for 21 years, of which 17 had been spent in Pyongyang. "About his Korean-language skills, he said that if he was on the phone, Koreans thought he was Korean—he had no accent at all."[319] Another example of the Russian predilection for hyper-specialization is Alexander Kadakin, who served cumulatively some twenty years in India including twice as ambassador, from 1999 until 2004 and again from 2009 until his death in 2017. He had also served in Delhi for

three years earlier in this career. (Kadakin's first posting as an ambassador, from 1992 to 1997, was next door in Nepal.) Kadakin had begun his specialization on India while a student at MGIMO and, as a fluent speaker of Hindi and Urdu, had served as interpreter during Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev's official visits to India in the 1970s. Kadakin endeared himself to Indians through his ability to quote Indian literature as well as Bollywood classics, and upon his death he was awarded India's third-highest civilian honour, and a street in Delhi was renamed in his memory.[320]

Interestingly, the Russian diplomatic service does not consider such specialization as inconsistent with advancement to senior management positions in the foreign ministry. The current Deputy Foreign Minister, Mikhail Bogdanov – who has been in that role for 11 years – also carries the title of Russia's Special Presidential Representative on the Middle East. A fluent Arabic speaker, Bogdanov has spent the bulk of his career in the Middle East, as ambassador to Egypt and to Israel, following previous postings to Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen.

There can be no doubt that such degrees of specialization represent a competitive advantage. In a scathing 2014 article titled "Russia's Diplomats Are Eating America's Lunch", former US Foreign Service officer James Bruno took stock of the depth of diplomatic experience and expertise that Russia was mobilizing across Europe in the months following its annexation of Crimea, juxtaposed with the United States' cast of ambassadors, many being non-diplomats appointed as a reward for their success in political fundraising: "Russian ambassadors are using their many close connections with continental elites to press Putin's case, to seek to stifle or limit economic sanctions and to foster divisions between Washington and its allies. In most cases these Russian envoys have spent the bulk of their diplomatic careers dealing with the countries to which they are posted and have extensive decades-long contacts with whom they can speak, often in the latters' native languages. This gives them a decided edge."[321] Bruno cited the example of Germany, where the US ambassador, John Emerson, was an entertainment lawyer (and prolific Democratic fundraiser) who spoke no German, while his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Grinin, had served in Germany in multiple tours totalling 17 years in addition to four years as ambassador to Austria. According to Bruno, Russia's ambassadors to the 28 NATO capitals totalled 960 years of diplomatic experience (an average of 34 years) while the American ambassadors totalled 331 years, or an average of 12 years.

The cultivation of subject-matter expertise as a means of influence reflects Russian tradition beyond the foreign ministry as well. As early as the 1950s, the US military took notice of the Soviet Union's edge in the use of foreign language proficiency as a tool of defence diplomacy. One American senior officer recalled a situation where the Soviet Union had needed to land a transport plane in Indonesia: "Down to the very last man on board – a janitor – *everyone* spoke fluent Indonesian. Shocked, the Indonesians processed the passengers in record time. The Jakarta leadership never forgot that calculated gesture of goodwill."[322]

Russia also leavens its subject-matter expertise with a deep respect for institutional memory and experience. Ambassadors and other senior diplomats typically stay in their positions much longer than in other foreign ministries, both increasing the return on training investment (in foreign languages, for example) and deepening their wealth of contacts. Russia's current foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, has held that role since 2004, and immediately prior to his appointment served as Russia's ambassador to the UN for a decade. (One of his Soviet-era predecessors, Andrei Gromyko, held the foreign minister portfolio for an unfathomable 28 years.) This emphasis on continuity gives Russia a "deep institutional memory and working knowledge of certain countries and organizations" that leaves it "better prepared than most of its counterparts to nurture long-term working diplomatic relationships".[323]

However, like China, Russia's diplomatic service – and, more importantly, the government it serves – features a number of rigidities that undermine the value of the wealth of expertise accumulated by its diplomats, leaving a whole that is somehow less than the sum of its parts. One US diplomat who served in Russia and in former Soviet republics faulted Russia's bureaucratic culture, which "discourages innovation and risk-taking". Another noted that, despite their cross-cultural and linguistic proficiency, Russian diplomats "tend to confine their contacts to the foreign ministries of the countries in which they are serving, neglecting to engage with a cross section of society as American diplomats are trained to do." Russian diplomats are notably weak in the area of social media engagement, for example.

This culture appears to reflect a tradition, certainly reinforced under President Putin, of the Russian foreign ministry serving as the mere implementer of centralized, top-down foreign policy decisions originating in the Kremlin. One academic described the Russian foreign ministry as "a hierarchy for quickly taking and executing orders from the president and his executive office rather than as an institution with the capacity for coming up with new initiatives."[324] A report for the European Council of Foreign Relations found that "In recent years, but especially since the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of Russia's military operation in Syria in 2015, the MFA has become much less central to policymaking than it used to be. The Presidential Administration and its security council are increasingly prominent. It is not diplomats that have the upper hand in these bodies but officials from the intelligence services and the Ministry of Defence."[325]

Based on interviews with young Russian diplomats, the ECFR discovered a significant loss of prestige following Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, which had 'militarised' the tone of Russian diplomacy. Noting that it was a criminal offence in Russia to even discuss the return of Crimea, one Russian diplomat confided that "this makes discussions very different from what they were like at the turn of the century, when everything could be discussed." Rather than producing problem-solvers, one Russian expert said, the foreign ministry was increasingly churning out propagandists.[326] The report noted that, as a result, the

diplomatic service was losing interest among graduates of Moscow State University of International Relations in favour of other international careers. The use of Russian diplomats as pure propaganda agents increased significantly after the ban by many European countries on Russian state-backed multilingual media outlets such as *Russia Today* and *Sputnik* following the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. The German Marshall Fund found that the Twitter accounts of Russian diplomatic missions have become "more belligerent in how they push disinformation" about the Ukraine war, and more promiscuous in amplifying fake content and conspiracist material. A former Russian diplomat recently wrote that "Russia's isolation can be considered a failure of Russian foreign policy, which now speaks only one language: that of propaganda".[327] Whereas Russian diplomats have traditionally evinced a reticent presence on social media, they appear to be experimenting with their own version of 'wolf warrior diplomacy', in yet another parallel with the Chinese experience.

Writing recently about the importance of maintaining an impartial, professional diplomatic service, US Foreign Service officer Aaron Garfield argued that "One need only look to Putin's historical blunder in Ukraine to appreciate an appropriately independent national security bureaucracy that can temper a political leader's preferred policy prescriptions with the nuance, seasoned judgment, and cold reality necessary to avoid disaster." The case studies of Russia and China illustrate that, in highly centralized and authoritarian systems, the diplomatic function – however expert and professionally delivered – can be quickly reduced to simply implementing decisions taken without the benefit of that expertise. Or, as one British scholar has stated, "Expertise and skills of diplomats can only serve a foreign policy strategy, but not replace it".[328]

Conclusion

> *We live in an era of competitive expertise. When fewer people practiced diplomacy, there was a greater margin for amateurs. But the proliferation of diplomatic actors—state and non-state—and competing sources of information drive an urgent need to refine our skills base.*
>
> –*Future FCO*, 2015

Foreign ministries are under unprecedented pressure to deliver results amid growing global uncertainty and potent new threats. No longer are they simply mandated with managing state-to-state relations; they are being asked to support leaders with sound advice to anticipate and resolve a seemingly endless series of crises in an "unpredictable environment that is infused with culture, language, religion, and history, as well as economic, humanitarian, political, and security interests".[329] Along with this policy role they are also expected to be operationally nimble, able to deploy worldwide on short notice to rescue their citizens or deliver aid, and to implement multimillion-dollar development programs (now that so many foreign ministries have been merged with formerly distinct development agencies). All of this is happening in a hyper-critical climate of 24/7 media scrutiny, amid the proliferation of new domestic stakeholders including increasingly assertive diaspora communities, and a constellation of new non-state actors including citizen diplomats, private foundations, murky networks of online bots and trolls, and the transnational private sector.

This study has found that in all countries examined, the foreign ministry has experienced a loss of status and influence over the last several decades, as the traditional messenger function of diplomats and embassies has been obviated by communications technology. The international agenda has shifted away from a narrow focus on state-to-state relations toward a more nebulous array of global issues such as climate, energy, and migration, which has empowered domestic line ministries with expertise on these topics. These ministries have now spent years building their own international affairs bureaus and competing for talent that, in past decades, would have gravitated toward the diplomatic service; they no longer require embassies to broker their discussions with international counterparts. As one ambassador told an Israeli academic: "In the past, if a Ministry of Agriculture attaché from my [non-English speaking] country was sent to the US or Canada, he wouldn't have the tools to operate, he wouldn't know the language or how to form relationships. Today, it's likely that he has already spent time studying or living abroad, and he can operate independently."[330]

This empowering of line ministries has exacerbated the tendency for foreign policy to be re-centralized (or 'presidentialized'), including through National Security Council-like structures in which the foreign ministry is but one stakeholder alongside others (especially

defence ministries and intelligence agencies) that are considerably better resourced. This study has also found that foreign ministries have frequently been subjected to structural reforms, such as mergers, that have resulted in hemorrhaging experience and subject-matter expertise, and that have distracted them from addressing other talent-management challenges, such as the question of how to reposition foreign ministries as knowledge organizations fit for the 21st century.

If they fail to demonstrate sufficient subject-matter expertise and networks of influence to support both operations and policy, foreign ministries face a risk of having their comparative advantage questioned, and seeing their role dwindle to that of a mere service provider: a purveyor of consular, visa, and passport services, and the landlord of their country's network of embassies, with waning influence over foreign policy. Clearly, senior officials in some foreign ministries are content with the reduced expectations of merely participating in an inter-agency foreign policy process rather than leading it. However, without the value-added of subject-matter expertise and the credibility that accrues from it, foreign ministries may not be treated as indispensable to policy formulation.

Amid this disruption, foreign ministries are struggling to define the talent that they will need in the decades to come. All are wrestling, in one way or another, with the classic debate between 'specialist' and 'generalist' skill sets. The strengths and weaknesses of both groups have been debated at length in the context of public administration theory, often in caricature.

Specialists are accused of narrowness of vision and preoccupation with hobby horses: "They may not merely be committed to a subject but to a school of thought within it that is not even shared by all their professional colleagues."[331] They are said to be insensitive to practical and political realities and blind to the 'bigger picture'. In the US, specialist cadres at the State Department have been subjected to far worse slanders: the Foreign Service's expert Sinologists of early 1950s were tarred by McCarthyites for the 'loss of China', and the purges that followed left the Foreign Service with only 12 Mandarin speakers by 1981. Likewise, the department's Arabists have regularly faced casual accusations of anti-Semitism.[332]

Writing in the 1960s on trends in British government, F.F. Ridley offered a defence of specialists, writing: "There is no evidence, of course, that the generalist always escapes over-identification with a particular set of proposals… The ethos of the generalist is that of the cultivated amateur, sceptical and detached – and quite unsuited to modern, complex, and purposive government. The argument used against specialists can be turned in their favour: by their very calling, they are more likely to be *purposive*."[333] Generalist managers must manage *something*, he added, "and a knowledge of that something is a necessary qualification for a high administrative rank".[334] Ridley took issue with the then-fashionable notion that in public administration, 'the expert should be on tap, not on top', retorting: "There is little point in turning on the tap if one cannot understand what comes out. The

self-confident amateur who has misunderstood, without realising it, is as dangerous as any over-enthusiastic specialist."[335]

History is replete with examples of diplomats who leveraged their subject-matter expertise with transformative results. George Kennan, for example, wrote "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" in 1947 based on his cable (known as the "Long Telegram") sent the previous year. This analysis of Russian thinking, which built the intellectual foundations of the containment strategy that guided Western strategy through the Cold War, "was based on Kennan's deep understanding of Russia, its language, culture and people – expertise acquired through repeated tours in the region and career-long study."[336] The Arab Bureau – the British government's political and intelligence office in Cairo, charged with providing London with expert understanding of the Middle East from 1916 to 1920, including through the legendary exploits of Arabists like T.E. Lawrence and Gertrude Bell – left a complicated legacy, but it inarguably contributed to enlisting Arab support for Britain, and against the Ottoman empire, at a critical time. Abba Eban, the polyglot Israeli diplomat (he spoke ten languages including perfect English)* and later foreign minister, used his almost bicultural intimacy with the United States – including nearly a decade as ambassador to the US and the United Nations, simultaneously, from 1950 to 1959 – to cement the status of the new state of Israel. According to his biographer, "Eban's oratory talent, linguistic skills, and effective style of diplomacy augmented both Israel's image in the view of the American public and relations with official Washington." Eban achieved a level of celebrity in the US that was instrumental in overcoming early skepticism about Israel and laying the groundwork for a strategic assistance relationship that is unparalleled today. One Jewish-American periodical concluded that Eban's appearances at the General Assembly and the U.S. State Department were worth "a division of soldiers to the Israeli army, if not more".[337]

In a similar vein, major geopolitical blunders have resulted from a failure to marshal subject-matter knowledge of other societies. An internal FCO report commissioned after the UK was blind-sided by the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran identified "failings in the conduct of British policy" arising from factors including "an insufficiently deep awareness of some aspects of Iranian history and culture".[338] (In the midst of the same crisis – in which 52 embassy staff and American citizens would be taken hostage months later – only nine out of 60 Foreign Service Officers at the US embassy in Tehran could speak Farsi.)[339] Similarly, a 2015 study found that most major embassies in Cairo had failed to appreciate the significance of the protests leading to the overthrow of President Mubarak, except for a small number of mostly junior 'expeditionary diplomats' who "spoke Arabic and the Egyptian language; frequently interacted with common people; met with NGOs, activists

* Henry Kissinger said of Eban: "I have never encountered anyone who matched his command of the English language. Sentences poured forth in mellifluous constructions complicated enough to test the listener's intelligence and simultaneously leave him transfixed by the speaker's virtuosity." Eban's Arabic was no slouch either: he published the first English translation of one of the most celebrated works of the Egyptian playwright Tawfiq al Hakim.

and members of the opposition parties on a regular basis; went to Tahrir Square; and monitored social media."[340]

More recently, the failure of the Afghanistan campaign has highlighted the pitfalls of operating at an information disadvantage. Writing for Chatham House, British Army Col. Will Davies argued that personnel deployed in complex and unfamiliar human terrain, usually on short rotations, do not accrue sufficient expertise through 'on the job' learning and risk never rising beyond "a perfunctory level of analysis leading to the concomitant risk that their progress assessments are over-optimistic, meaningless or misleading".[341] Davies argues that defence engagement roles should therefore be filled by "operators with specialist knowledge, skills and experience forged beyond the mainstream discipline of combat and warfighting", including "regional expertise enabled by language skills, cultural intelligence and human networks".[342] Davies goes on to highlight the competitive nature of influence – even among allies – and the opportunity costs associated with underinvesting in cross-cultural effectiveness, citing the advantage enjoyed by the French in Libya by virtue of having a defence attaché with "a year's intelligence training, two years Arabic language training, a year in Egyptian Staff College, 3 years in Cairo, 3 years in Abu Dhabi, and now 2 years as DA in Tripoli".[343]

§

> *If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.*
>
> –Nelson Mandela (apocryphal)

The historical relationship between language and diplomacy is intimate. In the early days of the profession, in the Middle Ages, diplomats were selected primarily for their ability to interpret between cultures. Failure to make sense of different languages could be catastrophic: the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, which killed nearly half a million people, arguably was sparked by the mistranslation of a single word – a military rank – in a telegram.[344] In modern times, proficiency in foreign languages is but one sub-set of the subject-matter expertise that effective diplomats are expected to bring to the table. In the view of the British parliament, "Languages are the foundation of diplomacy, and failure to excel in foreign languages undermines whatever other skills our diplomats may develop."[345] This reflects the concept of language ability as a *force multiplier* that enhances the effectiveness and credibility of the diplomat's other, more conventional talents. A report from Chatham House elaborated: "The better an individual's grasp of language and culture, the better their relationships, levels of trust and mutual understanding with partners, which in turn results in enhanced insights and decision-making. If progress in the

human terrain moves only at the 'speed of trust', then proficiency in language and cultural competence must be a priority."[346] Fundamentally, conducting diplomacy in host languages is essential to operating in a next-generation environment that is not limited to the exchange of diplomatic notes or to interacting only with English- or French-speaking local elites: from public diplomacy in the social-media age to working with non-state actors, diplomats who cannot communicate in a nimble and locally-resonant fashion will be producing not signals but noise.

The foreign ministries covered in this study all have unique strengths in their approach to foreign language proficiency. The Chinese and Russians train some of their diplomats to interpreter-grade fluency through career-long regional focus and repeat, planned assignments. The French recruit accomplished linguists as one of two main paths of entry into their diplomatic service. The Americans offer career-long opportunities for language training and make fluency in at least one foreign language a condition of promotion into the senior ranks. The British invest heavily, and plan smartly, to ensure that their ambassadors – the public face of the UK abroad – are fluent in the local language. The Australians prioritise Asian-language proficiency in key regional capitals and rely on ambassadors with years of experience – often through multiple postings – in individual countries.

Canada has its strengths as well. Global Affairs has designated about 433 positions abroad as requiring some level of foreign language fluency – nearly as many as the UK, which boasts a service roughly twice as large. For the most difficult languages, such as Mandarin, Korean, and Arabic, it offers up to 24 months of full-time training (the UK only recently increased training time for Mandarin to 22 months). Canada is also unique in having designated a significant number of positions – 197 out of 433 – as 'foreign language imperative', meaning that the employee, theoretically, is not allowed to proceed to post until they have reached the target proficiency level of the position. No other foreign ministries surveyed are that strict.*

There are, of course, areas for possible improvement. Global Affairs only trains its diplomats to the level of 'general professional proficiency', which is often inadequate for more nuanced or sensitive conversations, or for engaging with the media confidently. (By contrast, both the UK and the US train some of their diplomats to 'advanced proficiency', including 25 percent of Britain's ambassadors.) This seems incongruous given the often communications-focused nature of Canadian foreign policy; a more ambitious approach might suggest that certain key streams of the department's work abroad – whether the Global Security Reporting Program, our Public Affairs officers, our special envoys, or our heads of mission, who are the public face of Canada abroad – should strive where possible for full fluency. As one think-tank report suggests, "If broad people-to-people engagement is to be a hallmark of future diplomacy, very highly developed language skills will be even more at a premium."[347] Although Global Affairs has experimented with training at more

* The compliance rate for imperative positions is currently only 32 percent, due to short staffing which results in officers not getting the required training time.

advanced levels, including a Foreign Language Fellowship program launched around 2009 that aimed to bring select employees with existing foreign-language fluency to an advanced level, such efforts have become victims of cost-cutting. More broadly, Canada also trails its peers badly in terms of filling designated positions with officers possessing the required level of fluency. In 2021 the overall compliance rate stood at 23 percent, and only 18 percent for executive-level positions, far behind its counterparts from Australia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, the US, and the UK, all of whom could boast a compliance rate above 50 precent. (UK compliance today stands at 72 percent overall, and 74 percent for its heads of mission, while the US boasts a compliance rate of 75 percent.)

One key dimension of the discussion around retention of expertise, and return on training investment, relates to service in the field. It is a truism that the development of regional subject-matter expertise, including language skills, is enhanced by spending more of one's career in the field than at headquarters. In organizations committed to excellence in this regard, "individuals should be employed for longer periods and repeatedly in the same region as a way to deepen expertise and to build continuity, familiarity and trust with their network and in-country partners while improving institutional memory and expertise."[348] While China and Russia (with their tradition of sometimes decade-long ambassador postings) already take this point to heart, other foreign ministries covered in this study are beginning to adapt as well. In the last few years, Canada and the UK have increased the standard length of most postings by one year, while the US is considering following suit. However, one area where Canada is an outlier is in its practice of capping the allowed consecutive service time abroad at seven years (at which point an officer must return to Ottawa for an assignment at headquarters). By comparison, the US State Department allows its diplomats to serve up to 15 years consecutively abroad.

Based on the experience of the other countries examined in this paper, Global Affairs' performance on foreign language acquisition and retention would benefit from clearly making these skills a meaningful credential for advancement (as they are in the US Foreign Service); the department could model desired behaviour by setting more ambitious expectations of foreign language fluency among its heads of mission, as the UK and increasingly Australia are doing; it could extend difficult-language speakers preferential consideration for cross-posting, including through planned assignments, along with exemption from the rule capping consecutive overseas service at seven years; it could ensure that employee performance management evaluations actually assess their use of language skills, and relate this to employee ratings; and it could look more creatively at other aspects of the 'career penalty' associated with long-term language training, for example by addressing spousal employment constraints in countries where neither English nor French are spoken. And while some are skeptical that a financial incentive scheme would be a panacea, the fact that Canada is the only G7 country that does not offer its diplomats a foreign-language proficiency bonus is a message about management priorities, whether intended or not.

It is worth considering the importance of foreign languages in the parallel professions of intelligence and the military, going back to the intelligence failures leading to the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, when reportedly one third of conversations intercepted by American intelligence services in connection with the plot could not be translated in time due to insufficient linguistic capacity. The subsequent Western misadventures in Afghanistan and Iraq prompted some military professionals to conclude that "timeliness and accuracy is everything in intelligence, and thus, a linguist's skills are more important than firepower. With the former, you might not need the latter."[349] Unfortunately, these skills were not prioritized until it was too late. In 2005, the Pentagon's *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap* concluded that

> the Department of Defense needs a significantly improved organic capability in emerging languages and dialects, a greater competence and regional area skills in those languages and dialects, and a surge capability to rapidly expand its language capabilities on short notice. […] Conflict against enemies speaking less-commonly-taught languages and thus the need for foreign language capability will not abate. Robust foreign language and foreign area expertise are critical to sustaining coalitions, pursuing regional stability, and conducting multi-national missions especially in post-conflict and other than combat, security, humanitarian, nation-building, and stability operations."[350]

However, despite the *Transformation Roadmap* urging that mastery of a foreign language be phased in as a criterion for general officer advancement, one year later the Iraq Study Group report mandated by Congress concluded that "All of our efforts in Iraq, military and civilian, are handicapped by Americans' lack of language and cultural understanding." It found that only about 130 US servicemen and women, out of an occupying force of 130,000, possessed any Arabic skills.[351]

In 2011, with the Iraq adventure concluded and the Afghanistan campaign on a tapering trajectory, the Secretary of Defense nonetheless stressed in a memorandum to the Pentagon leadership the importance of language skills, regional expertise and cultural capability as "enduring warfighting competencies that are critical to mission readiness in today's dynamic global environment".[352] The British Army's 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review likewise identified language abilities as a "critical enabler" of defence diplomacy and influence operations, finding that "objectives will be more quickly, effectively, efficiently and enduringly achieved if overseas activity is conducted in native languages".[353] The UK Ministry of Defence now seeks to re-purpose members' generalist knowledge and experience, forged in the mainstream disciplines of combat, to specialist engagement tasks, and it has created a defence engagement school to train personnel in language, culture, intelligence and security.[354]

The irony is that some foreign ministries that are wedded to a 'generalist' skills model are finding themselves outperformed by their defence counterparts. A 2018 report by the Berlin-based Global Public Policy Institute was critical of the German foreign ministry,

which it saw as "rigidly clinging to the idea that all diplomats should be generalists and able to rotate into any post". Noting that the German army often sends its officers on one-year language courses before they are stationed abroad, "a German diplomat is lucky to have a three-week Arabic course before starting a job in the Middle East, and there is no guarantee that they will get the chance to use the skills and regional expertise they gain during that posting ever again." The Institute concluded that "the notion that diplomats should not have a strong specialization is simply outdated and no longer feasible for the 21st century".

As the case studies in this project illustrate, there is no single answer to the question of what an ideal diplomat should look like. Retired Indian diplomat and scholar Kishan Rana has offered one perspective, worth quoting at length:

> The formula that has worked for most good systems is to blend the individual's specialization with generalist skills. A young diplomat should begin with an "assigned" foreign language that he is required to learn, which morphs into area expertise in a region or country. As the career advances, the official adds to this other functional skills or special knowledge, for example on security and disarmament affairs, or environmental issues, or on legal issues relevant to his own country, or multilateral economic diplomacy. The range is vast. In this manner, by mid-career the official would have typically absorbed three or four special skills, making him a kind of "generalist–multispecialist." Taken collectively, within the foreign ministry a range of expertise is thus built up, spread across the hierarchy. The MFA's professionalism, and credibility with domestic partners, hinges on the quality, range, and depth of its expertise.[355]

Most foreign ministries examined in this study have acknowledged that the skills toolkit of diplomats needs to evolve beyond the conventional areas of regional or linguistic expertise. As one blue-ribbon panel has suggested, "In a complex and internationalised public policy environment, traditional diplomats armed only with traditional diplomatic skills are no longer sufficient."[356] This points to the increasing dominance, on the international agenda, of global issues that defy the traditional frame of state-to-state relations, such as climate change, migration, cyber-security, and disinformation. For example, the eight foreign policy priorities announced by the Biden Administration in March 2021 were dominated by thematic issues such as global health and emerging technology, and included only one bilateral relationship (China).[357] As former Canadian diplomat Daryl Copeland argues, "Diplomats, as they have traditionally been trained and developed, are particularly ill prepared to diagnose or treat the growing range of political, economic, and especially science-based global problems that have become a prominent feature of the evolving international landscape."[358] The COVID pandemic has focused minds on the need for diplomats to possess at least a grounding in health and science issues, without which "they may not even know that there is a science question to be asked concerning a specific foreign policy challenge".[359] While it is unreasonable to expect that diplomats with

backgrounds mostly in the humanities and social sciences can reinvent themselves as scientists, it seems realistic to achieve at least a broad level of 'causal literacy' on a range of global issues.[360]

An obvious challenge to broadening diplomatic knowledge is the traditional insularity of most foreign ministries. This has been identified as a problem requiring, in some cases, radical treatment, such as France's dismantling of its two senior-most foreign service cadres. Other countries have advocated more frequent exchanges by diplomats into other ministries (including ostensibly domestic ones) but struggled with the perceived career penalties involved in taking an unorthodox assignment. In the Canadian foreign ministry, as in others, performance and talent-management assessments are geared toward service within the organization and are poorly adapted to evaluating outside professional experiences. Former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Morris Rosenberg told the Canadian Senate: "I think it would be helpful if when people came back from their postings, rather than taking a job in the department, at least some of them would look for positions elsewhere. It could be another government department, an NGO, a corporation or a provincial government. And then there should be incentives. If you do that, that should be given weight when you're considering promotions or when you're considering your next assignment."[361] One way of abating the perceived 'career penalty' around hiatuses outside the diplomatic service is to make them mandatory – an option the US Foreign Service is now considering.[362]

A related – and more controversial – aspect of permeability is the question of lateral entry into the diplomatic service. Senior executives in most ministries examined in this study have identified a need to supplement the knowledge and skills of rotational career diplomats with the targeted recruitment of mid-career professionals possessing capabilities in demand, or simply 'fresh perspectives'. As Morris Rosenberg told Canada's Senate: "There should be more opportunities for mid-career entry into the Foreign Service from other sectors and from other government departments. Moreover, if expertise on emerging global issues like climate, pandemics or cyber is found in other departments, there should be more opportunities for these experts to be part of Canadian missions abroad."[363]

Calls for increased lateral entry, predictably, tend to meet resistance from foreign service officers and their unions, who argue that the practice diminishes promotion opportunities for career diplomats and dilutes the professionalism of the craft. The notorious example of non-career ambassadors in the US is often cited as the logical, and unenviable, result of that slippery slope.* Objections to the practice are often dismissed as evidence of a 'guild mentality', a protectionist response by people with suspect credentials and weak claims to membership in a distinct profession. In this view, diplomats are little more than civil

* According to one scholar, "There seem to be a greater number of horror stories about US ambassadors who have completely gone off track compared with other countries, but that might also owe to greater US transparency on such matters." (Rana, *Contemporary Embassy*, p.26)

servants who happen to live abroad, and therefore highly interchangeable with bureaucrats from other ministries. Some advocates of this view go as far as to call for the elimination of the diplomatic service in favour of public service-wide eligibility for overseas assignment.

In the words of Indian diplomat Kishan Rana: "Diplomacy is a profession, even if not always recognized as such. It lacks an established qualification process, unlike, say, chartered accountants or lawyers, but it entails the same element of domain knowledge, apprenticeship, and skill accumulation."[364] American diplomat Aaron Garfield puts it more succinctly: "Diplomats are neither born nor trained; they are grown."[365] Retired Canadian ambassador Abbie Dann explains the cumulative benefits of career-long commitment: "Diplomacy isn't 'Get a smart person, add water, and stir'. […] As a diplomat, your reputation and networks travel with you and you build knowledge, contacts and credibility in international circles. This professional baggage becomes an asset for Canada."[366] While foreign ministries are not immune to the broader labour market shift away from lifetime employment, the notion of a more promiscuous approach to talent management (built around secondments and contractors, for example) is especially inimical to the core diplomatic skill of networking, which requires the patient accumulation of relationships built through trust, often over the course of several assignments.

Although not himself a career diplomat, former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ian Shugart has spoken eloquently about his regard for the language and tradecraft of diplomacy: "We have to be able to use it in normal and crisis situations. This is not a language that can be learned overnight. It cannot be ramped up quickly. It is a resource that has to be cultivated, kept in reserve and used continuously."[367] This underscores a key distinction of diplomacy, which is the amount of foresight and pre-emptive investment that it requires, sometimes decades in advance. One French diplomat highlighted the years of relationship-building and practical knowledge that had gone into securing the necessary flight authorizations to evacuate thousands of nationals during the COVID emergency: "These close links with our foreign interlocutors are woven in the local language through detailed knowledge of foreign cultures, and this cannot be learned in a few months."[368] By contrast with this success, the failure of Western governments to anticipate, prior to 2001, the looming need for expertise and language skills in the Arab world or in Afghanistan is notorious. (In the words of former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Peter Harder, "When we started out in Afghanistan, we had nobody speaking the tribal languages of Afghanistan and Pashto in particular. That harmed our ability.")

These setbacks underscore the definition of diplomatic work as a form of *insurance*, "which by definition does not become evident unless and until it is needed".[369] They also highlight the importance of expert diplomacy in leveraging the value of *time.* As discussed previously, China and Russia direct their diplomats to devote years of focus to individual countries and regions in order to master their files in detail, much as some of their senior ambassadors and ministers measure their tenures in decades. In democratic countries, however, diplomats are expected to be custodians of long-term national interests across

the short lifespans of individual administrations, and across even shorter assignment cycles. This is where competitive expertise can help level the playing field. Whereas generalists might be inclined to focus their efforts on building relationships with conventional contacts within host foreign ministries (whose relevance may prove ephemeral), specialists with high intercultural savvy are more likely to succeed in reaching non-traditional audiences outside elite circles, whose significance may take years or decades to materialize. In British lore, it was the Foreign Office's expert Kremlinologists who shrewdly picked out both Mikhail Gorbachev and Vladimir Putin as up-and-comers worth cultivating well before they became ascendant in the eyes of most other diplomats.[370] Similarly, according to his biographer, Abba Eban used his deep knowledge of the US political scene to cultivate personal relationships with marginal contacts he anticipated could one day be in positions to influence American-Israeli relations. "I wanted whoever might become President to be a man who had once dined in my house during his humbler days," recalled Eban.[371]

If the slow bend of the arc of time speaks to the wisdom of maintaining capabilities, including subject-matter expertise, in regions of the world where the need is not yet obvious or pressing, it also suggests the folly of disinvesting from regions or topics whose importance seems to have waned. One former British Ambassador to the US has argued that by the time of the Ukraine crisis of 2014, "the old cadre of British Cold War experts, with their historic analytical capacity, were simply not there to provide the insight and clarity needed. The scaling down of FCO resources in Russia and Eastern Europe after the Cold War has left the Foreign Office without vital expertise as a whole generation of diplomats have retired and taken invaluable experience and institutional knowledge with them, resources which are now needed more than ever given renewed tensions with Russia and increased tension in the Black Sea states."*[372] Similarly, the FCO has had to scramble to rebuild its expertise in trade law following Brexit. This highlights the reality that once expertise is lost, it can be very time-consuming to rebuild, and argues favourably for maintaining a cadre of experts, at different levels of seniority, on *most* issues.

One modest way of compensating for the loss of expertise is to mobilize the knowledge of retired diplomats. In 2011 British Foreign Secretary William Hague announced the creation of the 'Locarno Group', an *ad hoc* advisory forum that would allow him to "tap into the expertise of serving or former diplomats on issues like the EU and soft power". (It met only a few times, however, and did not endure past Hague's term.) In a similar vein, France has occasionally bestowed the honorific grade of *ambassadeur dignitaire*, an emeritus status that marks the continuing availability of retired ambassadors to provide special service to the foreign ministry and to serve as members of the consultative *Conseil des*

* A similar observation was made in the US by Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, who served on the National Security Council from 2018 to 2020, where he found that "very few officials had specialized knowledge of the region, let alone of Ukraine". He attributed this to the decline of area studies in academia following the collapse of the Soviet Union, which had led to "a dearth of funding for the languages and specialized knowledge needed to develop regional expertise". (Alexander Vindman, "Stop Tiptoeing Around Russia", *Foreign Affairs*, August 8, 2022.)

affaires étrangères.[373] Retired American diplomats can return to service for up to half the calendar year without endangering their pensions, which helps fill gaps in knowledge and experience. As well, since 1986 the non-profit Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training has recorded the oral histories of more than 1,700 retired senior American diplomats, creating a unique corpus of scholarship. In China, about 20 retired ambassadors serve on a Foreign Ministry advisory 'wise men' group created in 1998, meeting monthly to discuss thematic issues and produce papers.[374] By contrast, Canada has not taken advantage of the opportunity to tap the accumulated expertise of retired diplomats, despite the readiness of the Canadian Ambassadors Alumni Association (AmbCanada) to build a strategic relationship with Global Affairs Canada. In late 2015, former ambassador Robert Peck led an initiative called 'Generations at Work' which examined ways to mobilize the expertise of retired heads of mission. One proposal would have created an advisory council of retired ambassadors along the lines of the UK's Locarno Group, but the suggestion met with little enthusiasm from Global Affairs management.

It is worth acknowledging the contribution that locally hired employees at embassies abroad make to continuity and to the accumulation of local expertise. While diplomats rotate typically every 3-4 years, local staff, who sometimes stay in the employ of embassies for decades, provide a permanent body of knowledge as well as local language fluency, and are key to maintaining relationships with local stakeholders through the regular churn of diplomats assigned to the mission. Local staff are also much less expensive, and therefore the conversion of diplomat positions to local-hire status has been a popular move during periods of cost-cutting. However, there are limitations to this approach. Local staff are not expected to abandon their loyalty to their home country, which constrains their ability to pursue ruthlessly the interests of their employer. They are also generally not seen as speaking authoritatively for the country whose embassy they serve, which can limit their influence. As one Canadian ministerial staffer puts it, "A Canadian business-person will want to be briefed by a diplomat; a local staffer will not have the CEO-level contacts he needs."[375] Local staff can represent a vulnerability in difficult environments where security is an issue, because they do not enjoy the full protections of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. Furthermore, when the British FCO converted many, mostly junior, diplomat positions to local-hire status in the first decade of the 2000s, it created a bottleneck of officers who were told that they could expect to have one posting abroad for each one in London, whereas the ratio had previously tended to be two-to-one.[376] The British Parliament criticized this "speedy cost-cutting measure which may have damaging consequences for the UK's longer-term diplomatic capacity. The FCO must regard the overseas postings of junior UK-based staff as part of a succession strategy for the next generation of senior British diplomats."[377] So while local staff will always be valuable sources of local knowledge, the ability to leverage that information in an embassy's pursuit of national interests must inevitably fall to diplomats with the ability to master the nuances of both sides of the relationship.

The case studies examined in this report demonstrate that, if they are to succeed in reinventing themselves as centres of policy excellence and expertise, foreign ministries will need to be more purposeful, and at times assertive, about human resource management. While the highly directive staffing approach of the Russians and Chinese (wherein diplomats are told, not asked, what their career focus should be) is a poor fit in Western democracies, the *laissez-faire* approach to career progression in the Canadian system and elsewhere needs an injection of discipline that recognises that subject-matter expertise, including foreign-language skills, are a *corporate asset* that has value and requires careful stewardship. No lesser a figure than Ian Shugart, former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Clerk of the Privy Council, told the Senate:

> We should have a professionalized approach to career management based on the needs that the Foreign Service has, so that if we invest, for example, in somebody learning a difficult language, we should get the value from that person learning that language. We shouldn't give them the guarantee that they've done Asia, and now they can do Europe. Then, they're interested in South America, so they can do that. There's a balance in realizing the benefit of our investment and honouring the prospect that if you do well and are effective, there will be a career path for you.[378]

Increasingly, foreign ministries such as the British and the Australians are gravitating toward a concept of 'career anchors' wherein diplomats will be urged to identify complementary areas of specialty in which they would develop expertise and to which they would recurringly be assigned over the course of an otherwise generalist rotational career. In France, the human resources department of the foreign ministry has adopted a proactive policy of only appointing *Orient*-track advisors to their region of speciality.[379]

The US State Department's development of Foreign Service Core Precepts, in partnership with the American Foreign Service Association, is a noteworthy practice that deserves much praise. Renewed every three years, the Precepts "reflect the competencies determined to be the most critical to successful service throughout a Foreign Service career and comprise the most essential competencies to advance".[380] They articulate the expectation that American diplomats develop several areas of specialization including proficiency in at least one foreign language as a condition of entry into the Senior Foreign Service.

In Canada's case, as argued in an earlier section, the absence of written talent-management precepts has given rise to a tradition of informal career guidance that stresses the career benefits of a generalist trajectory and, conversely, the risks associated with being 'pigeon-holed' as a specialist. This informal doctrine is scriptural for many ambitious diplomats and it reflects, as well, the shift toward managerialism – observed in all foreign ministries examined – in defining desired leadership skills. This was articulated by former British

diplomat and development minister Rory Stewart, in words that could apply as easily to Canada as to the UK:

> One of the big changes in the Foreign Office over the past 15 or 20 years has been to emphasise management and administrative skills, as opposed to hard languages and political knowledge. You can see that in the promotions over the past 10 years. What you are hearing out of the Foreign Office embassies is people who are specialists in particular languages and countries feeling that they are being marginalised in favour of rather slick purveyors of management jargon, who rise effortlessly up to the top. Such people are not really in a position to challenge policy on Iraq and Afghanistan, because they simply do not have that depth of knowledge.[381]

The case studies examined in this report found that budget cuts affecting most foreign ministries in the 1990s and early 2000s were accompanied by a rise in 'managerialist' culture as described by Stewart, which prioritized abstract notions of corporate performance – often measured with generic public administration 'metrics' – at the expense of core diplomatic skills and subject-matter expertise. This was also an era of restructuring of foreign ministries, including through mergers with aid agencies, which further depreciated these assets. In the words of one British report, "Specialist skills such as languages or area expertise can be a disadvantage, particularly in a time of restructuring, if it means that staff are not widely deployable to other roles."[382] If the Canadian foreign service is to take inspiration from the 2015 *Future FCO* report's motto, *More Foreign, Less Office*, this will require a sustained reprieve from any further structural churn, an acknowledgement that Global Affairs cannot be managed exactly like a domestic line ministry, and a conscious decision to reinvest in core diplomatic skills.

Interviewees shared a range of views on what diplomatic expertise should consist of. Morris Rosenberg described it as comprising foundational area knowledge of cultures and languages, the ability to extrapolate from this knowledge an understanding of the implications for Canada of events and trends, and finally the ability to navigate within government to ensure that the resulting advice is treated as credible.[383] All agreed that future diplomatic successes will require diverse teams with multiple complementary skills, capable of delivering operational effect and robust, evidence-based policy. While the scale of the Canadian foreign service suggests that it will always be generalist at its core in order to meet the sheer demographic demand of overseas rotational assignments, the need for small cadres of specialists on most of the world's regions as well as on key global issues, at different levels of seniority, is inescapable if we are to remain relevant in Ottawa and competitive globally. Other foreign ministries examined in this report place more emphasis on area expertise than Canada does and recognize the problems they face from the loss of these skills. There has been less reflection about this in Canada, and this is overdue for change.

One argument frequently encountered, in rebuttal to the need for investment in subject-matter specialization, is that the trend toward recruitment of increasingly diverse foreign service officers will, over time, naturally provide the diplomatic service with a better grasp of regional knowledge and language familiarity. However, there are important reservations to any approach that relies heavily on the recruitment of individuals (such as second-generation Canadians) with so-called 'heritage' skills. In some specific contexts, posting an individual to their region of family origin may complicate their work and expose them to undue misgivings about their ability to operate impartially. There is also a risk of creating unfair assumptions around the expected career progression of that individual: not every Urdu speaker may wish to serve in Pakistan, for example. And whereas the department has a certain equity stake in expecting a return on investment from trainees it has paid to acquire language skills, it risks creating the perception of ethnically foreordained career paths for those it has recruited with native abilities. Hiring of recruits with pre-existing specialized knowledge or language abilities should encompass a wide variety of sources, including those who acquired them in university, from prior work placements abroad, as well as those who have a native capacity due to family history. But targeted recruitment will not obviate the need for significant investment to further upgrade these recruits' language skills, as well as to train officers who develop an interest in regional specialization post-recruitment.

But the fact that the Canadian foreign service is drawing on one of the world's most multiethnic populations as its talent pool, and that it is rapidly growing more diverse as a result, gives Canada a unique competitive advantage over most of its peers, not to mention its adversaries. The era of 'honourable men of varied abilities' is giving way to bold new possibilities. If we fail to draw on our strengths to build the most interculturally knowledgeable, networked, and savvy diplomatic service in the world, it will be a failure by choice.

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This study has focused on Canada and six other countries – four of them allies, and two that fall in the camp, currently, of adversaries. The choice was driven largely by availability of documentary sources and interview subjects. But other countries not covered by the scope of this research have ideas to offer. Norway, for example, has accumulated decades of experience and expertise as a third-party mediator in conflicts as diverse as Israel-Palestine, Sri Lanka, South Sudan, Guatemala and Colombia.[384] New Zealand, despite the tiny size of its diplomatic service, has elected to concentrate on bolstering China knowledge and language capabilities across its public service through an initiative called 'China Capable'.[385] Germany, following a 2014 review led by Foreign Minister Steinmeier, decided to invest in systematic learning and the pooling of expertise on crisis prevention and stabilization through the creation of a centre of excellence, in the form of a new

Directorate-General for Humanitarian Assistance, Crisis Prevention, Stabilisation, and Post Conflict Reconstruction.[386] In the Netherlands, the foreign ministry in 2010 decided to introduce a system of career 'circuits' to promote expertise in key policy areas; this idea was endorsed by a high-level advisory panel on modernising the Dutch diplomatic service in 2014 which concluded that the foreign ministry should adopt "a promotion and placement policy that focuses on assessment and development, with a heavy emphasis on acquired specialist knowledge and expertise".[387] Although the concept was never really implemented, one senior Dutch diplomat concluded that the foreign ministry had succeeded in creating "clear specialization within a specific EU circuit" in response to the demand for expertise stemming from EU integration.[388]

This study has hopefully demonstrated that most foreign ministries are experimenting with various forms of innovation to bolster specialization and expertise either in traditional diplomatic skills or in new multi-disciplinary fields of work. By contrast, the Canadian foreign ministry remains wedded to the generalist model that has defined the ethos of its foreign service since it was created. There is a risk that Canada will become an outlier among its peers and competitors and miss the opportunity to modernize its diplomatic service. Although this study does not prescribe a specific approach, it has highlighted a number of strengths found among our like-minded partners that could serve as inspiration for future reform efforts.

Interview subjects for this study consistently made one final, critical point, which ultimately falls outside the scope of this paper and merits full, separate treatment: that specialized knowledge is of little value if decision-makers are uninterested in it. In the words of former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Morris Rosenberg, in a foreign ministry "you need a receptor capacity that seeks out the expertise available".[389] Former Deputy Minister Ian Shugart likewise told the Senate: "Truth to power is often spoken, and it has made no difference. […] There can be an easy assumption that all we need is for people, whether it's ministers to their colleagues or public servants to their higher-ups and to ministers, to speak truth to power and everything will be okay. The first assumption is that they are right. The second assumption is that if they just speak, that advice will be taken. Neither of those assumptions can be taken for granted."[390]

Many of the countries covered in this study have had recent experience of foreign ministry advice being ignored at the top. In Australia, according to one retired senior official, "in the last decade, several governments have gotten into trouble not taking advice from the foreign ministry, thinking, 'how hard can diplomacy be?'";[391] the Trump Administration's contempt for career diplomats is legend; in the UK, the FCO visibly lost standing with successive Conservative governments over its Brexit skepticism; in France, the Macron reforms of the senior diplomatic cadre, rightly or wrongly, are seen by many as an attempt to put the foreign service in its proper place. The perception in many governments that diplomats are overly analytical, risk-averse, and aloof from domestic priorities may also

explain their loss of influence at the hands of other ministries. One Australian official states that politicians are increasingly drawn to the analysis produced by intelligence agencies, instead of DFAT, "because they get the analysis without the commentary".[392]

The broader fashion of anti-intellectualism in government has roots in recent societal trends, thoroughly examined in Tom Nichols' sobering 2017 book, *The Death of Expertise: The Campaign Against Established Knowledge and Why it Matters.* These trends have been reinforced in the business world by popular books such as *Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World* and *The Silo Effect.* Closer to the world of foreign policy, Philip Tetlock's 2005 book *Expert Political Judgement* lampooned the poor predictions made by some experts in order to discredit expertise generally. Behavioural economist Daniel Kahneman famously charged that "in long-term political strategic forecasting, it's been shown that experts are just not better than a dice-throwing monkey".[393] (Competent diplomats, of course, generally prefer to avoid making predictions *precisely because* their specialized knowledge acquaints them with all the sources of uncertainty, both seen and unseen.)

Interviewees argued eloquently that the diplomatic profession needs to improve both its public image and its reputation within government. Morris Rosenberg suggested that the Canadian foreign service "needs to do some public diplomacy in Canada", for example by showcasing its ambassadors domestically so that they can better explain how their work overseas serves the domestic agenda. In his internal reform plan, French diplomat Jérôme Bonnafont likewise argued for a communications blitz to demonstrate the value of diplomatic excellence, by placing current and retired ambassadors more prominently into the public discussion about world events and by putting more of the ministry's high-quality analytical products into the public domain. To illustrate the latter point, the British Defence Ministry's publishing of daily unclassified defence intelligence updates on the Russian invasion of Ukraine has been hailed as a success in countering Russian propaganda and seems to have inspired the Canadian Armed Forces to follow suit.[394]

In a public information environment that is increasingly degraded by disinformation leading to record-low levels of trust for media as well as governments, diplomats will need to fight on the home front as well as abroad to defend their credibility. Meanwhile, our adversaries are turning increasingly to their diplomats as new vectors of that disinformation. If we are to successfully contest the information space and win the battle for credibility, we will require a better command of the facts than they have, and more effective means of reaching audiences culturally unfamiliar to us. This will place an even greater premium than before on diplomats with the nuanced, deep understanding of societies necessary to reach both hearts and minds, and the tradecraft required to change both attitudes and behaviours in a way that protects our interests.

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[110] Burns, p.32
[111] US Institute of Peace, *op. cit*.
[112] Zeya, p.1
[113] Pearson, *op. cit.*
[114] Ibid.
[115] Burns, p.41
[116] Smith, *op. cit.*
[117] Increasing pressure for more transparency in staffing may also undermine specialization. Recently, the Europe bureau boasted that two thirds of positions in its missions had been filled by officers from outside the bureau. Interview with former official in the State Department Bureau of Global Talent Management, March 28, 2022
[118] Zeya, p.24
[119] Garfield, *op. cit.*
[120] Skotte, *op. cit.*
[121] Interview with senior official at the American Foreign Service Association, April 7, 2020
[122] Zeya, p.25
[123] Hutchings, p.193
[124] Zeya, p.15; Burns, p.7
[125] Zeya, pp. 3, 24
[126] American Academy, *Risk*, p.9
[127] Hutchings, pp.214-5
[128] Hutchings, p.190
[129] Hutchings, p.216
[130] Pollard, p. v
[131] East, p.229
[132] Speech of Secretary Hague, "Our diplomatic network is the essential infrastructure of Britain's influence in the world", October 17, 2012: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretary-speech-on-diplomatic-tradecraft
[133] House of Commons, *Role of the FCO*, p.3
[134] House of Commons, *Role of the FCO*, p.22
[135] House of Commons, *Role of the FCO*, p.71

[136] House of Commons, *Role of the FCO*, p.69
[137] Speech of Secretary Hague, "The best diplomatic service in the world: strengthening the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as an Institution", September 8, 2011: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-best-diplomatic-service-in-the-world-strengthening-the-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-as-an-institution
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[141] *Future FCO*, p.21
[142] House of Commons, *FCO Skills,* p.9
[143] House of Commons, *FCO Skills*, p.9
[144] House of Commons, *FCO Skills*, p.15
[145] House of Commons, *FCO Skills*, p.12
[146] House of Commons, *FCO Skills*, p.13
[147] Dickie, p.57
[148] "Paul Bergne, Accomplished linguist and ambassador who was Blair's special envoy to Afghanistan". The Guardian, April 17, 2007: https://www.theguardian.com/news/2007/apr/17/ guardianobituaries.obituaries
[149] Interview with senior FCDO official, July 6, 2022
[150] Dickie, p.58
[151] Hutchings, pp.168-70
[152] Hutchings, p.162
[153] British Academy, pp.23-24
[154] British Academy, p.24
[155] British Academy, p.24
[156] British Academy, p.6
[157] British Academy, p.21
[158] House of Commons, *UK's foreign policy approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan* , HC 514, para 234
[159] Huxley, *op. cit*.
[160] House of Commons, *FCO Performance,* para 55
[161] British Academy, p.11
[162] British Academy, p.32
[163] House of Commons, *FCO Skills*, p. 18
[164] House of Commons, *FCO Skills*, p. 18
[165] Wintour, *op. cit*.
[166] House of Commons, *FCO Skills*, p.19
[167] British Academy, pp.26-27
[168] British Academy, p.27
[169] Interview with senior FCDO official, July 6, 2022
[170] House of Commons, *FCO Skills*, p.20
[171] House of Commons, *FCO Skills*, p.21
[172] Peter Ricketts, cited in King's College London, "State of British Diplomacy", June 29, 2022: https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=x84b3E8UElE
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[175] House of Commons, *Role of the FCO*, p.66
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[182] Hutchings, p.173
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[195] Hutchings, p.47
[196] Hutchings, p.46
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[199] Lequesne and Heilbronn, *Senior Diplomats*, p.271
[200] Lequesne and Heilbronn, *Senior Diplomats*, p.279
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[202] Lequesne, *Ethnographie*, p.47
[203] Lequesne and Heilbronn, *Senior Diplomats*, p.275
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[205] Lequesne and Heilbronn, *Senior Diplomats*, p.278
[206] Lequesne and Heilbronn, *Senior Diplomats*, pp.276-7
[207] Lequesne and Heilbronn, *Senior Diplomats*, p.276
[208] Lequesne and Heilbronn, *Senior Diplomats*, p.284
[209] Pommier, *op. cit.*
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[212] Lequesne, *Ethnographie,* p.57. Lequesne, Diploweb, *op. cit.*
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[234] Harris, p.29
[235] Harris, p.25
[236] Ibid.
[237] Harris, p.35
[238] Australian Public Service Commission, p.14
[239] Australian Public Service Commission, p.14
[240] Australian Public Service Commission, p.13
[241] Lowy Institute, "Diplomatic Deficit", p.49
[242] Australian Government, "Our Public Service", p.205
[243] Oliver, "Australia's Deepening Diplomatic Deficit", p.16
[244] Oliver, "Budget of Skewed Priorities", *op. cit*.
[245] Oliver, "Australia's Deepening Diplomatic Deficit", pp.16-17
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[250] Langmore, p.44
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[254] Gulrajani, *op. cit.*
[255] Moore, p.4.
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[257] Moore, p.2
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[259] Ibid.
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[261] Ibid.
[262] Oliver and Shearer, p.vi
[263] Parliament, "Punching", p.79
[264] Harris p.31
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[267] Canadian Foreign Service Institute, "Business Case: Foreign Language Allowance", 2018, p.6
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[269] Parliament, "Punching", p.79
[270] Parliament, "Punching", pp.79-80
[271] Senate, p.x
[272] Senate, p.100
[273] Interview with Michael Small, former ambassador to Australia, January 27, 2022
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[275] Lowy Institute, "Diplomatic Deficit", p.48
[276] Interview with former senior official at DFAT, August 11, 2022
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[278] Interview with former senior official at DFAT, August 11, 2002
[279] Australian Government, White Paper, p.18

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[281] Australian Public Service Commission, pp.12-13
[282] Rana, *Asian Diplomacy*, p.18
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[285] Rana, *Asian Diplomacy*, p.19
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[292] Rana, "Multilateral Training", *op. cit*.
[293] Rana, *Asian Diplomacy*, p.36
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[296] Hutchings, p.29
[297] Burns, p.29
[298] American Academy, "Forging", p.42
[299] Hutchings, p.22
[300] Rana, *21st Century Diplomacy*, p.254
[301] Hutchings, p.26
[302] Rana, *Asian Diplomacy*, p.39
[303] Mokry, *op. cit.*
[304] Martin, p.227
[305] Mokry, *op. cit.*
[306] *The Economist, op. cit.*
[307] Rana, *Asian Diplomacy,* p.21
[308] Martin, p.182
[309] Martin, p.182
[310] Mokry, *op. cit.*
[311] Martin, p. 227
[312] Martin, p.15
[313] Powers-Riggs, *op. cit.*
[314] Martin, p.15
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[318] Liik, p.23
[319] Skotte, *op. cit.*
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[329] American Academy, *Risk*, p.30
[330] Fredman, p.12
[331] Ridley, p.199
[332] Kaplan, p.112; Roland, p.153
[333] Ridley, p.200

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[335] Ridley, p.207
[336] Smith, *op. cit.*
[337] Siniver, p.199
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[339] Roland, p.153
[340] Cornut, p.398
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[345] House of Commons, FCO Skills, p.19
[346] Davies, p.25
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[348] Chatham, p.31
[349] Western, p.50
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[370] Dickie, p.99
[371] Siniver, p.132
[372] British Foreign Policy Group, p.17
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[374] Rana, *Asian Diplomacy*, p.38
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[392] ibid.
[393] Cited in: http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2099712,00.html
[394] Examples at https://twitter.com/CanadianForces/status/1552746632424439808?s=20&t=zITW6cUJnaCvJcszMlHMuw; https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1552874663612764162?s=20&t=zITW6cUJnaCvJcszMlHMuw