

# 1

## The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

It is difficult to find a state today that does not have, in addition to a diplomatic service, a ministry dedicated to directing and administering it. This is usually known as the ministry of foreign affairs (MFA) or, for short, foreign ministry. It is easy to forget that this was not always the case and that the MFA came relatively late onto the scene. In fact, as commonly defined, its appearance in Europe post-dated the arrival of the resident diplomatic mission by between two and three centuries. This chapter will begin by looking briefly at the origins and development of the foreign ministry, and then examine its different roles. These include staffing and supporting missions abroad, policy advice and implementation, policy coordination, dealing with foreign diplomats at home, and building domestic support.

### **The origins and growth of the MFA**

Until the sixteenth century, the individual states of Europe did not concentrate responsibility for foreign policy and the diplomatic machine in one administrative unit but allocated it between different, infant bureaucracies on a geographical basis. Some of these offices were also responsible for certain domestic matters. This picture began to change under the combined pressure of the multiplying international relationships and thickening networks of resident embassies that were a feature of the early modern period. The first trend increased the possibilities of inconsistency in the formulation and execution of foreign policy, and this demanded more unified direction and better preserved archives. The second trend – foreign policy execution by means of resident missions – brought a vast increase in the quantity of correspondence flowing home. This meant the need

for attention to methods of communication with the missions, including the composition and renewal of their ciphers. It also meant attention to their staffing and, especially, their financing – including that of their secret intelligence activities, because separate secret service agencies did not appear until very much later. All of this demanded better preserved archives as well, not to mention more clerks, cipher clerks, and messengers. In sum, the rapid increase abroad in what was called ‘continuous negotiation’ by Cardinal Richelieu, the legendary chief minister of the French king, Louis XIII, required not only continuous organization at home but also one bureaucracy, rather than several in competition.

It has often been assumed that it was in France that the first foreign ministry began to emerge when, in 1589, Henry III gave sole responsibility for foreign affairs to one of his secretaries of state, Louis de Revol, an administrative innovation that – after some regression – was confirmed by Richelieu in 1626. But there might well be other candidates, within and beyond Europe, for the title of first foreign ministry. Moreover, the office of the French secretary of state for foreign affairs in Richelieu’s time was little more than a personal staff: it was not even an outline version of a modern foreign ministry, with an organized archive and defined bureaucratic structure. This had to wait until the last years of the reign of Louis XIV at the beginning of the eighteenth century (Picavet: 39–40).

Indeed, it was only during the eighteenth century that a recognizably modern ministry of foreign affairs became the general rule in Europe, and even then the administrative separation of foreign and domestic business was by no means watertight (Horn: 1). Britain came late, having to wait until 1782 for the creation of the Foreign Office. The US Department of State was established shortly after this, in 1789 (Box 1.1). It was the middle of the nineteenth century before China, Japan, and Turkey followed suit.

Even in Europe, however, it was well into the nineteenth century before foreign ministries, which remained small, became bureaucratically sophisticated. By this time, they were divided into different administrative units (‘departments’ or ‘*bureaux*’) on the basis either of specialization in a particular function (for example, protocol or treaties), or a particular geographical region. In addition to the foreign minister, who was the temporary political head of the ministry, the typical MFA had, by this time, also acquired a permanent senior official to oversee its administration. As time wore on, this official (in Britain, the permanent under-secretary; elsewhere, more commonly, the secretary-general

**Box 1.1 'Department of Foreign Affairs' to 'Department of State'**

A Department of Foreign Affairs was established by the Continental Congress on 10 January 1781. This title was also initially employed for the foreign ministry of the United States itself under legislation approved by the House and Senate on 21 July 1789 and signed into law by President Washington six days later. In September, the Department was given certain *domestic* duties as well, which subsequently came to include management of the Mint, fulfilling the role of keeper of the Great Seal of the United States, and the taking of the census. No longer charged solely with *foreign* tasks, it was for this reason that, at the same juncture, the Department's name was changed to 'Department of State'. Despite surrendering most of its domestic duties in the nineteenth century, the Department found itself stuck with the name.

or director-general) also acquired influence over policy, sometimes very great. Entry into the foreign ministry increasingly demanded suitable educational qualifications, although the pool from which recruits came was limited to the upper reaches of the social hierarchy until well into the twentieth century.

The foreign ministry still had rivals for influence over the formulation and execution of foreign policy in the nineteenth century. Among these were the monarchs and presidents, chancellors, and prime ministers, who felt that their positions gave them special prerogatives to dabble in this area, as also the war offices with their nascent intelligence services. Nevertheless, if the MFA had a golden age of influence and prestige, this was probably it. It did not last long. Distaste for both commerce and popular meddling in foreign policy was entrenched in most foreign ministries, which were essentially aristocratic in ethos, and this soon put them on the defensive in the following century. World War I itself was also a tremendous blow to their prestige because it seemed to prove the failings of the old diplomacy over which they presided. Much of the burgeoning dissatisfaction with the way ministries such as these were staffed and organized, as well as with the manner in which they conducted their affairs, focused on the administrative (and, in some instances, social) divisions within the bureaucracy of diplomacy.

Despite the intimate link between those in the foreign ministry and the diplomats serving abroad, their work and the social milieux in which they mixed were very different. Persons attracted to one sort were not, as a rule, attracted to the other, and they were usually recruited by different methods. Foreign ministry officials had more in common

with the civil servants in other government ministries than with their own, glittering diplomats, whom in any case they rarely met and had good grounds for believing looked on them as social inferiors. They also tended to develop different outlooks. American diplomats, who closed ranks in the face of constant ridicule at home, developed a particularly strong 'fraternal spirit' (Simpson: 3–4). The result was that, except in small states, it became the norm for the two branches of diplomacy – the foreign ministry and its representatives abroad – to be organized separately and have distinct career ladders. Between the two branches there was little, if any, transfer. It was also usual for the representatives abroad to be divided into separate services, the diplomatic and the consular – and, sometimes, the commercial as well.

These traditional bureaucratic divisions institutionalized the prejudices of their members and impeded not only desirable personnel transfers, but also cooperation between them. However, resistance to change remained strong, and it came only slowly. In Britain, the staffs of the Foreign Office and the Diplomatic Service were merged immediately after World War I, although they retained their separate identities until 1943, when, along with the Consular Service, they became part of the new, unified Foreign Service (restyled 'Diplomatic Service' in 1964). However, it was not until the 1950s that, following the Wriston Report of 1954, the US Foreign Service absorbed the personnel of the hitherto separate Department of State.

The gradual unification during the twentieth century of the bureaucracy of diplomacy, including that of the diplomatic and consular services (on which, see Chapter 8), no doubt played its part in enabling the MFA to resist the next challenge to its position, which came in the century's last decades, chiefly from 'direct dial diplomacy' (discussed later in this chapter). Freedom from the conservative reflexes likely to have been produced by close relationships with powerful domestic interests also assisted the foreign ministry by making it easier to adapt to changing circumstances (Hocking and Spence: 6). There is no doubt, however, that it is the continuing importance of the tasks discharged by the MFA that has ensured its survival as a prominent department of central government (Berridge 2005; Box 1.2). The staff of most MFAs is also now significantly larger relative to that of the body of diplomats in their missions abroad than it was in the nineteenth century, and there is a common view that 'for every two diplomats posted abroad, there should be at least one official at Headquarters' (Rana 2000: 255). What are the tasks that have contributed to the survival of such a relatively large ministry of foreign affairs?

**Box 1.2 MFAs: formal titles making a point, and some metonyms**

Most MFAs are formally described as the 'Ministry of Foreign Affairs', but a few add some words in order to advertise a priority or make some other point. For example, since the last edition of this book appeared in 2005, both the Austrian and French ministries have added 'European' to their titles, in order to stress that they do not regard other EU members as foreigners; and the Senegalese ministry has added 'African Union'. Some additions seem unnecessary, and possibly unwise: 'Cooperation', for example, and, even more so, 'International Cooperation', a choice of language that makes the ministries concerned appear either verbose or anxious to make up for an uncooperative past. Some MFAs are often referred to by the names of buildings or streets with which they are associated (metonyms). The following list illustrates the variety of titles given to foreign ministries, together with some metonyms:

Australia:	<i>Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade</i>
Austria:	<i>Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs</i>
Belgium:	<i>Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade, and Development Aid</i>
Benin:	<i>Ministry of Foreign Affairs and African Integration</i>
Botswana:	<i>Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation</i>
Brazil:	<i>Ministry of External Relations ('Itamaraty')</i>
Croatia:	<i>Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration</i>
France:	<i>Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs ('Quai d'Orsay')</i>
India:	<i>Ministry of External Affairs ('South Block')</i>
Italy:	<i>Ministry of Foreign Affairs ('Farnesina')</i>
Japan:	<i>Ministry of Foreign Affairs ('Gaimusho')</i>
Malaysia:	<i>Ministry of Foreign Affairs ('Wisma Putra')</i>
PRC:	<i>Ministry of Foreign Affairs</i>
Senegal:	<i>Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the African Union, and Senegalese Abroad</i>
South Africa:	<i>Department of International Relations and Cooperation</i>
Spain:	<i>Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation</i>
United Kingdom:	<i>Foreign and Commonwealth Office ('Foreign Office' or 'FCO')</i>
United States:	<i>Department of State ('Foggy Bottom')</i>

**Staffing and supporting missions abroad**

An important task for the MFA is providing the personnel for the state's diplomatic and consular missions abroad, including posts at the permanent headquarters of international organizations. This means not only their recruitment and training (sometimes in a fully-fledged diplomatic academy such as the Rio Branco Institute in Brazil), but also the

sensitive job of selecting the right persons for particular posts. It also means supporting the diplomats and their families, especially when they find themselves in hardship posts or in the midst of an emergency. Because of the murderous attacks on its embassies in recent decades, the US Department of State has had to devote considerable energy and resources to giving them greater protection, and now even has to have an Office of Casualty Assistance. Among other things, this engages in contingency planning and oversees a number of crisis support teams.

The foreign ministry also has to provide the physical fabric of the missions abroad, which means renting or erecting suitable buildings, and then providing them with equipment and furnishings, regular maintenance, guards, and secure communications with home. The efficiency of the *administrative* departments that carry out the tasks mentioned in this and the preceding paragraph is particularly important in the MFAs of states where the diplomatic career has tended to lose its glitter and the loss of experienced staff in mid-career is consequently a serious risk.

A less popular task now undertaken by many MFAs as part of their general support for missions abroad is their periodic inspection. The reports that follow visits need to praise good work, as well as draw attention to embassy failings. This is the more important since inspectors are also usually required to advise on cost-cutting measures. Inspections must be handled with sensitivity and conducted by persons who command professional respect. The *Semiannual Reports* of the Department of State's Office of Inspector General are available on the world wide web. These are unclassified summaries of detailed individual reports of inspections. However, some of the latter are also available. They are all instructive.

## **Policy-making and implementation**

As well as posting diplomats and consuls abroad, officials in the foreign ministry are responsible for advising on the policies they should be required to implement, issuing the appropriate instructions, and ensuring that they are carried out. They also have the task of digesting the information the missions send home. This is where what are sometimes known as the 'political departments' come in, and most of these are arranged partly along geographical and partly along functional lines, although in an acute crisis a special section within the ministry might take over (see Box 1.3). *Geographical* departments normally concentrate on regions or individual states of particular importance to the country concerned, while *functional* departments deal typically with high

### **Box 1.3 Crisis management**

The foreign ministries of states that have to deal regularly with crises with national security implications tend to have a crisis section that is permanently operational. In the Israeli MFA, for example, this is called the 'Situation Room'; and, in the US Department of State, its name is the 'Operations Center'. Significantly, both are located within the office with overall coordinating functions within their ministry, the Coordination Bureau and the Executive Secretariat, respectively. Most states, however, handle crises of this sort by means of temporary arrangements, for which they have more or less precise plans, although increasing numbers have permanent units ready to respond to consular emergencies abroad.

profile general issues such as climate change, drugs and international crime, human rights, energy security, and refugees and migration.

Historically, the geographical departments dominated foreign ministries and so, until relatively recently, had more prestige. Among those in the British Foreign Office, the Eastern Department, which covered the Ottoman Empire and its Russian predator – and, thus, the awesome 'Eastern Question' – was, for many years before World War I, the most prestigious and aristocratic. In the US Department of State, an attempt in the 1950s and 1960s to give more prominence to functional departments at the expense of the geographical ones was made more difficult by personnel distinctions remaining from the pre-Wriston reform era: the functional departments were staffed by civil servants, while the geographical ones were staffed by diplomatic officers (Simpson: 19).

Nevertheless, even issue-oriented functional departments had some historical pedigree. The British Foreign Office's Slave Trade Department, for example, which was its first department of this kind, was created in the early nineteenth century and for many years was actually its largest (FCO Historians: 29). Functional departments concentrate technical expertise and advertise the fact that the MFA is seized with the current international problems of greatest concern. (Hiving off a major function, such as development aid, from the foreign ministry and making it the subject of a separate ministry is an even better way of doing this but can lead to problems of coordination.) Perhaps fostered by the growth of democracy, and certainly more in harmony than geographical departments with the concept of 'globalization', functional departments now tend to be at least as prominent. But it is highly unlikely that they will replace the geographical departments completely and – except in poor states with limited foreign interests (see Box 1.4) – it is a serious

**Box 1.4 MFA structure in less developed countries**

The ministries of very poor states, especially micro-states – which, by and large, have extremely limited networks of diplomats abroad – tend to have few, if any, geographical departments. For example, in 2009 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados had only one geographical department out of a total of ten, although this was larger than most, with separate desks dealing with the Americas, Europe/Asia/Africa, Caribbean/CARICOM, and Multilateral Affairs. The remaining nine functional departments were described as Human Resources and Administration, Protocol and Conferences, Foreign Trade, Consular, Information Systems, Facilitation Unit for Returning Nationals, Public Affairs, Maritime Delimitation Unit, and Strategic Analysis Unit. Even the foreign ministry of the much larger – although certainly not richer – state of Senegal, in West Africa, had only two geographical departments, one for Africa and Asia, and another for Europe, the Americas, and Oceania, although it had a further one dealing with the African Union (AU).

mistake to seek this end. Apart from the fact that the disappearance of geographical departments would weaken the case for a separate MFA (since the international sections of ‘Other Government Departments’ (OGDs) might be regarded as capable of taking over their functional work), there are two main reasons for this. First, globalization notwithstanding, there remain marked cultural differences between the world’s regions, and knowledge of them in functional departments is inevitably limited. Second, the conduct of relations with a state by half a dozen or more functional departments, each with a different global agenda, is hardly likely to be coordinated. Major reforms in the French foreign ministry in 1976/8, which restored administrative divisions on geographical lines after decades of advance by the functional principle, were designed precisely to allay this last anxiety (*France-Diplomatie*). With the rise in importance of international organizations, most MFAs now have *multilateral* departments as well, some of which also have a geographical focus in so far as they deal with regional bodies such as the African Union (AU).

MFAs also have departments known by names such as ‘intelligence and research’ or ‘research and analysis’. These specialize in general background research and in assessing the significance of information obtained by secret intelligence agencies. The MFA is chiefly a consumer of the product of these agencies but – along with other policy-makers – it sometimes plays a key role in its assessment in high-level inter-departmental committees, which might enhance its influence – but



possibly at the cost of objectivity in threat assessment. In Britain, the FCO also has responsibility for the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), which must have its approval before launching 'significant operations', and for Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), the major eavesdropping agency.

If policy is to be well-made and implemented properly, the MFA's institutional memory must be in good order. This applies especially to the details of promises made and received in the past, and potential promises that have been long gestating in negotiations. This is why such an important section of even the earliest foreign ministries was their archive (later, registry) of correspondence and treaties, as well as maps, reports, internal memoranda, and other important documents. Before separate foreign ministries were created, such archives were kept by other secretaries of state or palace officials. They even existed in the palaces of the Great Kings of the ancient Near East (Meier: 212). Preserving securely, organizing systematically, and facilitating rapid access to their archives by indexing are key foreign ministry responsibilities. A related task is determining carefully what sensitive documents – and parts of sensitive documents – can be released to the public upon application under Freedom of Information legislation. Many foreign ministries also have a small historians' section that is responsible, among other things, for selecting and publishing hitherto secret documents of historical interest. In America, these appear under the title *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*.

Since foreign policy should be lawful and, sometimes, be pursued by resort to judicial procedures, and since agreements negotiated by exhausted diplomats need to be scrutinized for inconsistencies and sloppy language, legal advice and support is always necessary. In some states, it has been traditional to provide this from a law ministry (or ministry of justice) serving all government departments. Nevertheless, the predominant pattern is now for the MFA to have its own legal (or treaties) division, headed by an officer usually known as the 'legal adviser' or, in French-speaking states, '*directeur des affaires juridiques*'. It is also now more usual for the members of this division to be lawyers specializing in this work and not diplomats with a legal education who are rotated between the legal division and general diplomatic work in posts abroad. It is interesting, and perhaps hopeful for the strengthening of international law, that since the end of the 1980s informal meetings of the legal advisers of the foreign ministries of UN member states have been held on a regular basis at UN headquarters in New York.

The MFAs of the developed states, and a few others, also have a policy-planning department. Very much a product of the years following World War II, this was a response to the frequent criticism of unpreparedness when crises erupted and was inspired in part by the planning staffs long-employed by military establishments. It is no accident that the State Department was given its first planning staff when a former soldier, General George C. Marshall, became secretary of state after World War II (Simpson: 23, 79, 85). Planning units appear, in practice, to be chiefly concerned with trying to anticipate future problems and thinking through how they might be met and, in the process, challenging conventional mindsets. The FCO's planners appear not to look much beyond the medium term of about five years, although others are more ambitious. They are given freedom from current operational preoccupations but are not left so remote from them that they become 'too academic' (Coles: 71, 87–8). With such a strategic brief and supposed to provide independent judgements, it is not surprising that the policy planners are usually permitted to work directly under the executive head of the MFA. However, it is often difficult to get busy foreign ministers, who must inevitably give priority to current events, to focus on discussions of even the medium term, while the operational departments might well be obstructive. As a result, the policy planners sometimes feel that they are wasting their time, which was the experience of George Kennan. The first director of the State Department's planning staff, he resigned after Dean Acheson, who had replaced Marshall as secretary of state, began to make him feel like a 'court jester' and the operational units began to insist on policy recommendations going up through the 'line of command' (Kennan: 426–7, 465–6). Today's policy planners probably sometimes feel the same but the value of the political protection they afford to the MFA – which, at least in states with a free and lively press, has to be *seen* to be scanning the horizon – should not be overlooked.

It is inevitable that the policy role of the MFA's permanent officials should sometimes lead them to adopt attitudes that become so fixed as to seem part of the fabric of their departments. To take some examples, the FCO was long associated with pro-Arab sentiment although, when the issue of departmental attitudes is raised today, it is normally its pro-European reflexes that are mentioned; the South African Department of External Affairs inherited by the National Party from General Smuts in the fateful election of 1948 was regarded by the new government as hopelessly pro-British, while in the last years of the *apartheid* regime its successor came to be seen as *verligte* (enlightened on race); and according

to certain sections of the Indian press, the Indian MFA was, at least until recently, steeped in conservatism, especially in regard to relations with Pakistan.

The foreign ministry's influence on government policy varies from one state to another. In those with both long-established foreign ministries and a constitutional mode of government, as in Britain and France, the ministry tends to remain highly influential, except in wartime. In others, however, it is much weaker. These include states with shorter diplomatic traditions and highly personalized political leadership. The situation also tends to be the same in any state where anxiety over military security has always generated acute neurosis and, thus, given great influence to the defence ministry, as in Israel and – to a lesser degree – the United States. In all countries, however, the influence of the MFA fluctuates over time. This might occur for any number of reasons but the most important is probably the personality and level of interest in foreign affairs of the head of government, now usually great because of the growth of summitry (see Chapter 10). If a leader suspects political hostility in the foreign ministry, or just that it is stuffed with those who are over-sensitive to the interests of foreigners, its position will tend to be worse still. The FCO is widely believed to have suffered from suspicion of the latter fault by Mrs Thatcher when she was prime minister in the 1980s, although it has been persuasively argued that she found it politically expedient to denigrate it publicly while, in private, showing it respect and, in practice, following its advice (Walden: 208–13). Less debateable seems to be the instance of the Malaysian MFA, which was quite eclipsed when the even more autocratic Dr Mahatir became prime minister shortly afterwards (Ahmad: 121–2).

## Coordination of foreign relations

Despite the MFA's continuing role in foreign policy advice and implementation, it is rare for it now to have the considerable authority in the direct conduct of foreign relations that it once had. The United States is perhaps unusual in having so many departments and agencies devoted chiefly to foreign affairs that they are referred to collectively as the 'foreign affairs community'. Nevertheless, in all states today the OGDs – commerce, finance, defence, transport, environment, and so on, not forgetting the central bank – engage in *direct* communication not only with their foreign counterparts, but also with quite different agencies abroad, and do so to an unprecedented degree. Indeed, the extent of this 'direct dial diplomacy', as it is sometimes called, is now so

great that the OGDs commonly have their own international sections (Rozenal: 139–40). As a result, it is no longer practical – or, indeed, advisable – for the MFA to insist that, in order to ensure consistency in foreign policy and prevent foreigners from playing off one ministry against another, it alone should have dealings with them.

The development of direct dial diplomacy was a result of the growing complexity and range of international problems during the twentieth century, the diminishing ability of the generalists in the MFA to master them, and the increasing ease with which domestic ministries could make contact with ministries abroad. But this development was by no means as threatening to the MFA as some observers thought and its enemies hoped. This is because direct dial diplomacy threatened the overall coherence of foreign policy. So, too, did other trends: pursuit of the same or related negotiations through multilateral as well as bilateral channels, unofficial as well as official channels, and backchannels as well as front ones. The chaos in the conduct of foreign relations threatened by all of these trends could only be prevented by some authoritative body charged not with reinstating exclusive responsibility for handling them, but with the more modest brief of *coordinating* the foreign activities of the OGDs: enter the born-again MFA.

It has been noted earlier in this chapter that foreign ministries have had coordination very much in mind in retaining (even reasserting) the geographical principle in their internal administration, but how do they promote coordination beyond their own doors? There are various options here:

- A standard device is to insist on retaining control of all external diplomatic and consular missions, and to require that officials from other ministries attached to them report home via the ambassador
- A second common strategy is to ensure that senior MFA personnel are placed in key positions on any special foreign affairs committee attached to the office of a head of government, often known by some such title as ‘cabinet office’ or ‘prime minister’s office’, and themselves usually charged with a coordinating role
- A third option, employed in Mexico, is for the MFA to enjoy the legal prerogative of vetting all international treaties entered into by agencies of the government
- A fourth option is a requirement that the MFA must be given prior notice of any proposed official trip abroad by a senior government employee

- A fifth option is the interdepartmental (in the USA, inter-agency) committee, composed usually of senior officials of the departments with an interest in a particular aspect of foreign policy, and preferably chaired by an MFA representative. (Analogous to this is the informal network of private secretaries to ministers, which might well be even more effective.)
- A sixth option is the temporary exchange of staff between the MFA and other ministries
- And, finally, the most radical solution is to house key functions under the same ministerial roof. The favoured, although still minority, option here is to merge the MFA with the ministry dealing with trade, and perhaps with development aid (some examples are mentioned in Box 1.2), although this does not solve the problem of coordinating the foreign activities of the remaining OGDs. This particular variant has not yet been favoured in the United States, although in 1999 the Clinton administration oversaw the integration of three previously separate foreign affairs agencies into the Department of State (the 'lead foreign affairs agency'): the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, the US Information Agency, and the US Agency for International Development.

## Dealing with foreign diplomats at home

Senior officials of the MFA periodically find themselves having to respond to a *démarche* on a particular subject made by the head of a foreign mission in the capital and, occasionally, the foreign minister will summon a head of mission to listen to a protest of his own. When something of this nature occurs, the MFA is engaged in a function that has already been discussed; namely, policy implementation. It should not be forgotten, however, that it has other responsibilities relative to the resident diplomatic corps (Sharp and Wiseman).

Well aware of the capacity for intrigue and the information-gathering role of diplomats, governments have treated their official guests with commensurate suspicion since the inception of resident missions in the second half of the fifteenth century. In some states, as in China in the second half of the nineteenth century, foreign missions were actually confined to a particular quarter of the capital (Legation Quarter), the better to keep their activities under close scrutiny. Today, although this custom is not entirely dead (a purpose-built Diplomatic Quarter was created near the Saudi capital of Riyadh in the mid-1980s), the majority of states are more relaxed about the political activities of the diplomatic corps in their capital cities.

There remains, nevertheless, a concern about the abuse by diplomats of their immunities from the criminal and civil law. Indeed, this concern has grown since the 1950s, chiefly because the increase in the number of states has greatly increased the size of the diplomatic corps. The number of visiting dignitaries has also increased vastly (see Chapter 14). It is not surprising, therefore, that all MFAs should have either a separate protocol department or one that embraces protocol together with a closely related function. Such departments contain experts in diplomatic and consular law and ceremonial. Among other things, they serve in effect as mediators between the diplomatic corps and the local community, and oversee the arrangements for visiting dignitaries. The Chinese government still takes a particularly close interest in the activities of the diplomatic corps, with a Diplomatic Service Bureau (DSB) affiliated to the MFA, as well as a Protocol Department. Among other things, the Bureau provides service staff for the diplomatic and consular missions in Beijing. Old habits also die hard in Russia, where an analogous organization – the Main Administration for Service to the Diplomatic Corps (*GlavUpDK*) – still survives. In some states, too, the MFA is charged with assisting in both the physical protection of certain visiting dignitaries and foreign missions. In the United States, for example, special agents in the Protective Liaison Division of the State Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security are charged with coordinating the protection of all foreign officials and their missions across the country.

### **Building support at home**

For much of the period following World War II, foreign ministries and their diplomatic services were frequently targets of attack from politicians and commissions of inquiry, and persistently sniped at by the tabloid press. It is not difficult to see why: they had acquired reputations for social exclusiveness in recruitment and high living abroad, and faced a growing challenge to their very *raison d'être*. It was, thus, an acute weakness that they had no domestic political base on which to fall back for support. Education ministries had teachers, agriculture ministries had farmers, defence ministries had the armed forces – but foreign ministries had only foreigners, a political base worse than useless. The foreign ministries in many countries have responded to this situation with predictable resourcefulness, and have had some success.

MFAs now nurture the national media at least as carefully as they cosset foreign correspondents in the capital. They also cultivate popular approval directly, especially via their websites. These often provide up-to-date information on foreign travel destinations, including advice on personal safety. Websites also highlight the consular services that are available to their nationals, should they find themselves in need of assistance abroad. The Italian foreign ministry, for example, now goes so far as to say on its website that lending assistance via its Crisis Unit to Italian nationals caught up in emergencies abroad (telephone number in large, bold font) is its 'primary commitment'. A logical bureaucratic extension of arrangements of this sort, also much hyped up, is a separate department devoted to the more routine welfare needs of nationals permanently resident abroad, including the facilitation of their return, as in the case of the Barbados MFA. Foreign ministries also take every opportunity to impress on exporters and agencies seeking inward investment the value of the commercial diplomacy of their overseas missions. And, in the small number of cases where foreign ministries have actually merged with trade ministries, they have not only promoted coordination, but also moved directly to capture a key political constituency; namely, businessmen. Finally, MFAs in the West now fling open their doors to the representatives of NGOs (even attaching them to conference delegations), academics, and others, not only in order to benefit from their specialist advice, but also to recruit them as domestic allies. In short, it is now widely recognized that it is as important for the MFA to engage in 'outreach' at home as it is for its missions to engage in this abroad.

## **Summary**

In most states today, the foreign ministry must formally share influence over the making of foreign policy with other ministries and executive agencies. Nevertheless, in many of them it retains significant influence via its geographical expertise, control of the diplomatic service abroad, investment in public diplomacy (discussed in Chapter 11), nurturing of domestic allies, and growing acceptance by outsiders that it is well positioned to make a major contribution to the coordination of the state's multidimensional international relationships. Most of these relationships issue, from time to time, in the activity of negotiation, which – even narrowly conceived – represents the most important function of diplomacy. It is therefore appropriate to turn next to this subject.

## Further reading

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Many foreign ministries have their own websites, most of which provide at least a list of the different departments (sometimes even an ‘organigram’), while a few go so far as to give a detailed history of the ministry. In the last regard, the website of the Canadian MFA is outstanding. The back copies of *State Magazine*, available via the US State Department’s website, are also useful.