



# CANADA'S DIPLOMACY POLICY REVIEW

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## PREPARED BY

*Venus Fung, MA Candidate*

*Natalie Lopez, MA Candidate*



iAffairs 

CFPJ

# Canada's Diplomacy Policy Review

**Authors:** Venus Fung and Natalie Lopez

## Executive Summary

**This review of Canada's diplomacy policy is conducted for the readership of The Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Marta Morgan, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.**

After a review of Canada's foreign policy, we have identified three overarching problems surrounding the current state of Canada's foreign policy strategy and diplomatic forces.

First, is the weak performance of the current government's "Canada is Back" agenda. Tracing back to the Liberal government's transition from a decade-long Conservative leadership, Canada's efforts have been focused on reinserting Canada back as an active player on the global stage. However, Canada's recent loss at the 2020 UNSC bid indicates a disconnection between Canada's ideal image and its reality, where UN peacekeeping promises were kept at a minimum, and where improvement of relations with states such as Iran and Venezuela have little momentum. The latter especially points towards a trend of digital direct diplomacy as Canada remains active in advocating for its objectives through soft diplomacy tools like social media to reach civil communities (see *Past Policies and Critical Decisive Moments*).

Realistically, improved relations with these states are not feasible without foreign service officers on the ground to directly engage with the Canadian government's counterparts. Simply put, a reality that is heavily focused on multilateral engagement is simply not enough, and Canada's weak agenda can be attributed to weak engagements at the bilateral, multilateral, and digital levels. Multilaterally, Canada's engagement can be viewed as selective, evidenced by high-level officials' attendance record at UNGA, G7, and G20 (see *Trends and Indicators*).

The problem in Canada's engagement spans to two other problems: the centralization of GAC operations and digital diplomacy. Centralized GAC operations lead to hurdles and complicated engagement delivered by diplomatic corps at host states, hurting bilateral engagements. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift to digital diplomacy while highlighting GAC's lack of digital policy. The lack of digital policy and appropriate digital diplomacy training has led to public gaffes by government officials in recent years (see *Past Policies and Critical Decisive Moments*). Despite the lack of digital policy, Missions are driving the GAC social media expansion independently, risking inefficient digital engagement and incoherence across GAC's many social media channels.

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This policy review argues that the heart of Canada's disjointed problem lies within its engagements, with Missions being the most effective solution. We present three costed options, alongside important programmatic needs such as training, and evaluation of stakeholders to a **recommendation for GAC to recognize the importance of prioritizing on-the-ground engagement, opening more but smaller missions overseas with flexible implementation** (see *Costed Options*).

With more Missions overseas, an increased Canadian diplomatic presence works to:

- 1) improve bilateral relationship with host states through on-ground direct diplomacy with civil societies, NGOs, Canadian diasporas
- 2) improve digital diplomacy with help in catering online activities and messages through fostered relationships
- 3) improve Canada's multilateral approach with insights earned from on-the-ground engagements serving to inform HQ's shaping of foreign policy

# Abbreviations

<b>GAC</b>	Global Affairs Canada
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNSC</b>	United Nations Security Council
<b>FSO</b>	Foreign Service Officer(s)
<b>HQ</b>	Headquarters
<b>HOM</b>	Head of Mission
<b>MINA</b>	Minister of Foreign Affairs' Office
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organization
<b>MP</b>	Member of Parliament
<b>U.S.A.</b>	United States of America
<b>DMA</b>	Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs
<b>LES</b>	Locally Engaged Staff
<b>CBS</b>	Canada Based Staff
<b>RO</b>	Regional Office
<b>IO</b>	International Organization

# **Background, History and Policy Process**

## **Problems Facing the Nation**

### **Problem 1: The Failing "Canada is Back" Agenda**

Canada's foreign policy has been in in-between waters for a while. In his succession of power from Stephen Harper, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau inherited an uncharacteristically inward, economy-focused Canada, especially in terms of foreign policy. Since then, Canada navigates the delicate situation of "bringing Canada back" to the world stage, while fielding the need to protect the economic well being of Canadians. The attempt to return Canada to its former multilateral glory fell short when Canada failed to secure its high-profile bidding for a seat at the UNSC, losing to Norway and Ireland.<sup>1</sup>

Trudeau announced Canada's bid in the UNSC campaign in 2016 when the Liberal government became the federal governing party.<sup>2</sup> However, in the four years, little was there to showcase ardent suitability for the seat. For example, having limited contribution in the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali<sup>3</sup>, showing no momentum in improving diplomatic relations with Iran and Venezuela, and a UNSC campaign trail that occurred only months before the UNSC was set to vote.

Another attribution to consider is the lacklustre utilization of our diplomatic corps in our host states. So far, Canada has been focused on reinserting itself into the global stage, however high-level multilateralism can only get us so far. Canada's efforts on multilateral engagement fall heavily on the shoulders of the success of on-ground, bilateral engagement. Diplomatic corps need to be building relationships on-ground to inform the bigger picture that is Canada's foreign policy.

This UNSC loss, the second after a failed bidding in 2010 by the former government, demonstrates the reality that the current Liberal foreign policy perhaps is not as stark a contrast in comparison to its predecessor. It also demonstrates a disconnection between Canada that the current agenda envisions, and Canada in reality.

### **Problem 2: Centralization**

Currently, GAC is a centralized operation as most decisions and proposals made in Missions abroad are reviewed by headquarters in Ottawa. For far-off Missions, the centralization of GAC serves as an obstacle in delivering projects on-ground in an efficient and timely manner, it also complicates engagement delivered by the diplomatic corps.

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Centralization has always been a debate in the department, for example, a 2017 meta-evaluation indicates a mixed reaction towards decentralized evaluations<sup>4</sup>. However, with COVID-19, the lack of resources on-the-ground makes it more difficult to implement programming without creating backlogs at HQ.

### **Problem 3: COVID-19 Accelerated Canada's Need for Digital Diplomacy**

In addition, with the absence of direct diplomacy, Canada's diplomacy, therefore, is crossing over to a crucial digital age and relies more than ever on soft diplomacy (see Annex A) tools such as social media to deliver objectives. Keeping in mind the centralization in GAC, and the digital diplomacy performed so far (outlined in the next section), we also question whether the department is in touch with the new realities of the 21st century, whether it is equipped to embrace the power of soft diplomacy in a post-covid, digital age, and whether it is utilizing the potential of digital diplomacy.

### **The Bottom Line**

After evaluating Canada's foreign policy efforts, we have identified several problems surrounding the current state of Canada's foreign policy strategy and diplomatic forces. All relate to issues with engaging international partners.

### **Past Policies and Critical Decisive Moments**

2020	<b>Canada loses UNSC Bid</b> Canada received 108 votes while Norway and Ireland secured 130 and 128 votes respectively. <sup>1</sup>
2020	<b>Trudeau leads UN session on COVID</b> The virtual session aimed to mitigate the devastating social and economic impacts of the pandemic. 50 countries were present, except the U.S.A. and China. <sup>5</sup>
2020	<b>COVID-19 Worldwide Pandemic</b> Canadian missions abroad suspended all in-person activities. CBS are urged to work from home, with essential staff (dominantly LES) being present onsite for services such as Consular, Security, Human Resources. Mission-use of social media transitioned from a soft diplomacy tool to a public service announcement tool, which Canadians abroad utilize to inquire information and seek consular advice.

2019	<p><b>Temporary Closure of Canadian Embassy in Venezuela</b></p> <p>Decision made as Canada, part of the Lima Group regional bloc, demands Venezuela's President Maduro resign after fraudulent re-election, and for opposition leader Juan Guaido to take over.<sup>6</sup> Freeland indicates Canada will continue to advocate for democracy in Venezuela through the Lima Group.<sup>7</sup> This highlights Canada's commitment at a multilateral level, but lacks in on-ground engagement to rekindle the diplomatic relationship.</p>
2018	<p><b>Saudi Arabia Twitter Gaffe</b></p> <p>Freeland issued a statement in support of Tehran's protestors.<sup>8</sup> Disruptive digital diplomacy observed as the issued statement destabilized the corrupt regime, but offered no constructive engagement. Canada lacked a relationship with Saudi Arabia and was also unprepared to handle the aftermath. This highlights the need for a digital diplomacy policy and training.<sup>9</sup></p>
2018	<p><b>73rd Session of the UN General Assembly</b></p> <p>Trudeau declined to deliver Canada's address to the UN General Assembly but passed the opportunity on to Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland.<sup>10</sup> However, she pulled out of the engagement completely.<sup>11</sup></p>
2016	<p><b>Announcement of UNSC Bid</b></p> <p>Trudeau announced Canada's bid for a seat in the 2020 UNSC race as part of his promise to re-engage Canada in multilateralism.<sup>2</sup></p>
2015	<p><b>Trudeau succeeds as Prime Minister</b></p> <p>With the Liberal Party of Canada in power, rhetorics of "Canada is Back" at the world stage, as well as "progressiveness" have been dominant in the policies they introduced.</p>
2014	<p><b>Opening Trade Offices in China</b></p> <p>Canada opened four trade offices in China, bringing the total number of Canadian missions in China to 15: 1 Embassy, 4 Consulates General, 10 trade offices.<sup>12</sup></p>
2013	<p><b>Creation of the Global Dialogue on the Future of Iran</b></p> <p>The government's first attempt in direct digital diplomacy (see Annex A), bypassing the Iranian government through a virtual space where Canada can engage Iranians and promote a discussion on human rights.<sup>1 13</sup></p>



2012	<b>Closure of Canadian Embassy in Iran</b> A temporary closure out of concern of retaliation in Tehran. After all Canadian diplomats had left Iran, Iranian diplomats in Ottawa were expelled and diplomatic relations suspended. Canada continues to pursue a direct digital diplomacy (see Annex A) approach to bypass the Iran government and influence their public. <sup>1</sup>
2012	<b>Closure of Canadian Embassy in Syria</b> Canada closed its embassy because of continuing violence in Syria. <sup>14</sup>

## Trends and Indicators

We examined 3 pillars of Canada’s international presence: on-the-ground, digital, and multilateral. Each of these is an avenue for relationship building and engagement with other states and Canadians abroad.

### On-the-ground engagement

#### The Number of Canadian Missions from the Lowry Institute’s Global Diplomacy Index<sup>15</sup>

Canada’s international presence was compared against a superpower (U.S.A), a middle power of comparable size (Australia), and its successful 2020 UNSC competitors (Norway and Ireland).



Figure 1

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The data suggest that the expansion of overseas missions has been a common trend across the board. However, while Canada and the U.S.A decreased their number of missions due to the closure of their Caracas missions in 2019, Australia, Norway, and Ireland were continuing to expand their overseas presence. This suggests that Canada's overseas representation is stagnating.

While Canada's global footprint is larger than Australia, Norway, and Ireland, our mission presence abroad pales in comparison to other like-minded states, as evidenced by our G20 and OECD rankings. This makes Canada less competitive when exerting influence globally in comparison to counterparts with more on-the-ground engagement.

## **Digital Engagement**

### **The Number of Social Media Accounts at GAC**

Ostwald and Dierkes studied activity on GAC's twitter accounts from 2014 to 2016.<sup>16</sup> Thanks to this study, we can create a baseline for the amount of active Twitter accounts in 2016. This was cross referenced with GAC's official list of social media accounts, which includes English, French, bilingual, and vernacular accounts. Notably, Missions are driving GAC's increasing digital footprint, with both the greatest number of accounts and greatest increase from 2016 to 2020.

	<b>2016</b>	<b>2020</b>
<b>HQ</b>	18	26
<b>RO</b>	Not Specified	12
<b>Missions</b>	262	299
<b>Missions-Multilateral</b>	16	22
<b>TOTAL</b>	296	359

Not included in these numbers are the personal accounts of Heads of Mission. Ministers, and Embassy staff who also share department content.

GAC has also branched out into other forms of digital engagement. As of 2020, the department has a presence on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, LinkedIn, Flickr, WeChat, and Weibo. Additionally, the department promotes podcasts, email subscription lists, and RSS Feeds.<sup>17</sup> These results show that GAC is following the global trend and is continuing to expand its digital presence abroad with Missions leading the way.

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## GAC's Social Media Accounts as of 2020

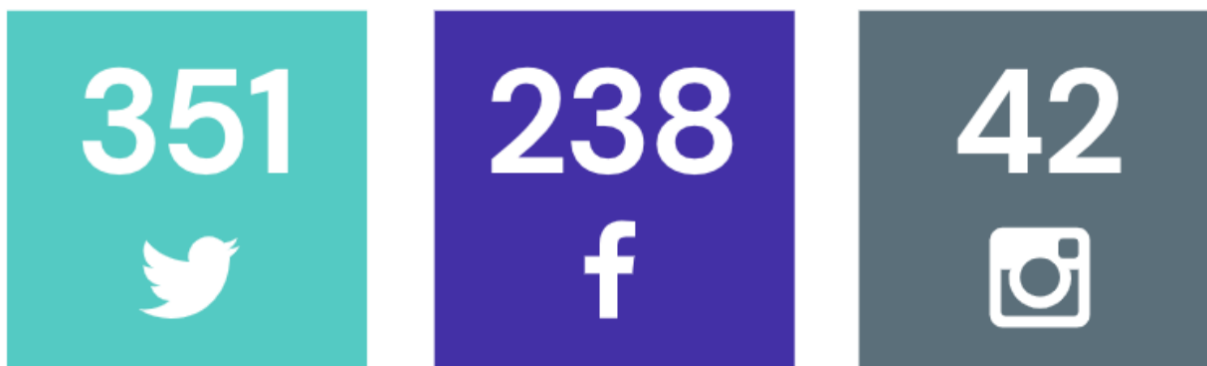


Figure 2

### International Organization Engagement Canadian Attendance at Multilateral meetings

The examined IOs are UNGA, the G20, and the G7.

UNGA is a large multilateral organization with almost universal membership. Canada also has a Permanent Representative to the UN in New York. The G20, and the G7 have select membership and are made up of large economies and like-minded countries. The information is gathered from press releases and media clippings and measures Trudeau's attendance specifically.

Canada is more likely to send high-level officials to the G7/G20 than UNGA

Thus, while Canada is committed to multilateral institutions, we place more importance on attending meetings with allies and large economic partners than in larger, broader organizations. This also demonstrates that Canada's Permanent Representative to the UN gives higher level officials the ability to miss UNGA, whereas this is not an option with the G20/G7.

Despite Trudeau's commitment to multilateralism, Canada still favours bilateral relations over engaging with international organizations

2018 and 2019 are particularly interesting years as in both cases the Canadian Representative to the UN addressed the Assembly on behalf of Canada after several cancellations by higher-level officials. In 2019, the election cycle kept Trudeau and his high-level ministers away.<sup>18</sup> In 2018 however, it was our bilateral relationship with the U.S.A that prevented both Trudeau and Freeland from addressing the UN.<sup>19</sup> Trudeau, however, has never missed a G7 or G20 meeting. G7 and G20 meetings typically involve

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one-on-one meetings between member-state leaders. This may explain why Trudeau is more willing to forgo the UN as opposed to the G20 or G7.

IO	Record	Details
United Nations General Assembly	Trudeau 3/5	2020: Trudeau - virtual address 2019: Ambassador to UN <sup>31</sup> 2018: Ambassador to UN <sup>32</sup> 2017: Trudeau Addresses UN <sup>33</sup> 2016: Trudeau Addresses UN <sup>34</sup>
G20	Trudeau 5/5	Virtual attendance in 2020 <sup>40 41 42 43 44</sup>
G7	Trudeau 4/4 <sup>35 36 37</sup>	2018: Hosted Summit <sup>38</sup> 2020: delayed due to COVID-19 <sup>39</sup>

### Current Policies and Policy Alternatives

According to its **2020-2021 Departmental plan**, GAC focuses on **promoting “Canada’s interests and values through** policy development, diplomacy, advocacy, and **effective engagement.”**<sup>20</sup>



Figure 3

## **Engagement Policy Alternatives**

### **Focus state-to-state engagement and diplomacy in multilateral forums**

Norway, which as a middle power with a small economy that cannot afford to fund a large foreign service, has adopted this strategy. Permanent representative missions make up 10% of Norway's presence abroad, compared to Canada's 6.9%.<sup>15</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs notes that the maintenance of multilateral systems was "Norway's primary foreign policy interest."<sup>22</sup> This approach is less costly than establishing separate embassies and consulates, yet still facilitates diplomatic activities with numerous other governments through their permanent representative missions.

### **Substituting traditional public diplomacy with digital diplomacy**

France and the United Kingdom (UK) are adopters of this approach. France's foreign ministry released its first social media strategy in 2009 and has continued to use its digital platform to promote its country's brand and interact with citizens overseas.<sup>23</sup> In 2012, the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office released its digital strategy which stressed "digital by default"<sup>24</sup> and emphasized the benefits of digital diplomacy's flexible and responsive nature in meeting the needs of its citizens abroad.<sup>25</sup>

### **Isolationism: Closing missions, and ending engagement**

This approach is usually reserved for superpowers who can afford to go alone. The U.S.A. has taken this route under President Donald Trump by withdrawing from several multilateral agreements and the WHO. Canada has also shown isolationist tendencies in the past, including closing our embassy in Tehran and lack of UNGA attendance under Stephen Harper. However, going forward this will not be an option for Canada if it wishes to exert global influence.

# Policy Analysis

## Interests and Values



Figure 4

## Goals and Objectives

The goal of diplomatic engagement, whether in person or digital, is to represent Canada's interests abroad through a "principled and pragmatic approach."<sup>27</sup>

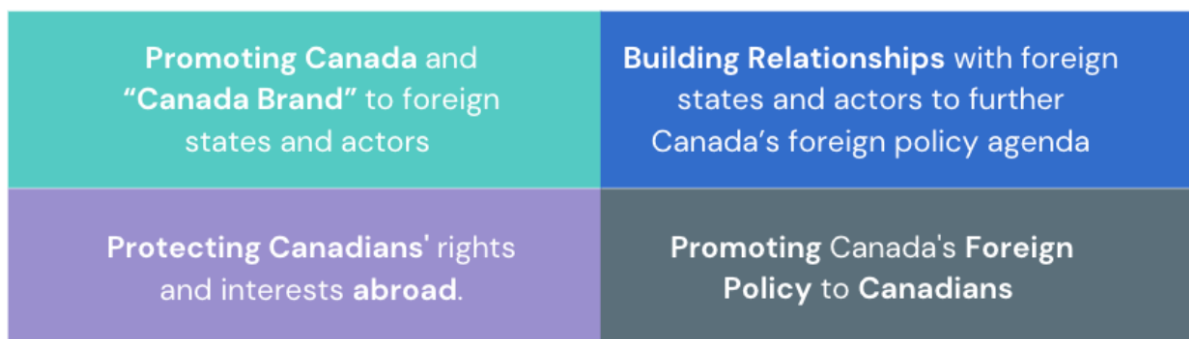


Figure 5

## Stakeholders/Allies and Detractors

	Stakeholders	Allies/Detractors/Mixed	Explanation
1	The Canadian Public	Mixed	Engagement with the public overseas is often in Canadians' best interest. Might detract for economic reasons.
2	Overseas Missions	Allies	Overseas Missions co-operate with GAC to deliver Canada's priorities abroad.
3	Civil Society Groups/NGOs/other communities	Allies	Canada's diplomatic corp can work with civil society groups, NGOs, diasporas, etc in consultations, programming, and policy shaping.
4	Opposition Parties	Detractors	Opposition parties are likely to remain skeptical on the federal government's capital allocation on Canadian diplomacy.
5	Provinces (AB/QC/ON)	Detractors	These provinces have different priorities and are likely to oppose the federal government's capital allocation.
6	Superpowers (China, Russia, USA)	Detractors	For most superpower countries, Canada's multilateral approach would impede on their interest in expanding global influence. (The USA, however, would depend on the administration).
7	Host/Potential Host Countries	Mixed	Depends on what the host country's interests are. If Canadian diplomatic activities + policies > benefit of access for host countries = tension arises.

## Programmatic Needs

### Adequate Funding and Human Resources

To ensure that policy objectives are met in a timely and efficient fashion

### Training for GAC Employees to improve engagement skills

Including traditional skills (negotiation, networking), and digital skills (digital advocacy, social media skills, open government)

### Collaboration with civil society groups at home and abroad

To build connections in foreign countries and creative networks of expertise

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# Recommendation and Implementation

## Costed Options

	1. Recalling FSO, shifting to only on-ground essential personnel for consular service, with digital diplomatic engagement based in HQ.
Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Digital diplomatic work is cost-friendly.</li> <li>- Recalling most FSO ensures their safety, less risk.</li> <li>- Digital diplomatic work may attribute to a bigger reach online.</li> </ul>
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- FSO are no longer on-ground, Canada is unable to acquire valuable insights, and relationships fostered through direct diplomacy.</li> <li>- Transitions to a reliance on summit diplomacy (Annex A).</li> <li>- Digital diplomatic work negates the digital gap in less-developed countries.</li> <li>- Recalling FSO leads to departmental restructuring, likely causing chaos and upset at GAC.</li> <li>- Susceptible to gaffes and misinterpretation online.</li> </ul>

	2. Opening more missions, sending more FSO overseas, allocating more authority to the Missions with a focus on building on-ground bilateral relationships.
Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased presence overseas advocates for Canada's interests with more diplomats able to engage with communities and build essential relations through tailored programming and messaging.</li> <li>- FSO are also able to gain valuable information through these interactions, in turn shaping Canada's foreign policy.</li> <li>- More Missions makes Canada more accessible to Canadians and potential partners in host states.</li> <li>- More missions shorten reaction and travel time, ensuring the safety of Canadians.</li> </ul>
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Opening more missions are expensive.</li> <li>- The cost will likely inflict criticism from opposition.</li> <li>- Potential for message misalignment.</li> </ul>

	3. Restructuring to regional "hub" missions, supplementing with digital diplomacy.
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	<p><b>Hub missions</b> refer to lessening the number of missions while allocating the limited missions strategically to countries where Canada's interest lies. (eg. Geneva and New York for the UN). Hub missions are responsible for overseeing a region and are <b>focused on multilateral engagement</b>.</p>
Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- With less overseas missions, GAC saves money in terms of overhead cost.</li> <li>- Guaranteed on-ground presence at Canada's key interest areas.</li> </ul>
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Key interest areas might be different depending on the governing party, complicated to adapt should there be a party switch.</li> <li>- Limited reach to communities, inconvenient to build necessary relationships on-ground.</li> <li>- Fewer missions lead to limited accessibility for Canadians, risking their safety.</li> <li>- One mission is responsible for juggling different host state files, increasing pressure, and risk of human error.</li> </ul>

## Recommendation

### Modified Option 2: Keeping costs in mind, recognizing and prioritizing on-the-ground engagement, opening more but smaller missions with flexible implementation

The con of cost can be overcome by creating smaller, innovative missions. Flexible implementation achieved through methods of sharing spaces with other states, mobile missions, and cross-accreditation can reduce some mission-related costs.

The increased on-ground presence encourages better engagement with civil societies, NGOs, Canadian diasporas, etc, in turn informing Canadian foreign policy at a multilateral level, while strengthening bilateral relationships with host states. Employing LES also gives Canada more in-depth knowledge about the host state in a cost-effective manner.

**Digital diplomacy** remains important as the world moves further online under the global pandemic. However, the majority control of these tools should rest with mission staff to better engage with host communities after adequate training. Moreover, a digital policy should be built on this premise, providing clear guidelines on conventions so as to maintain coherence across GAC's many social media channels.

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On-ground mission staff should be responsible for building networks, engaging with the host country and with Canadians living abroad.

## Communications Strategies

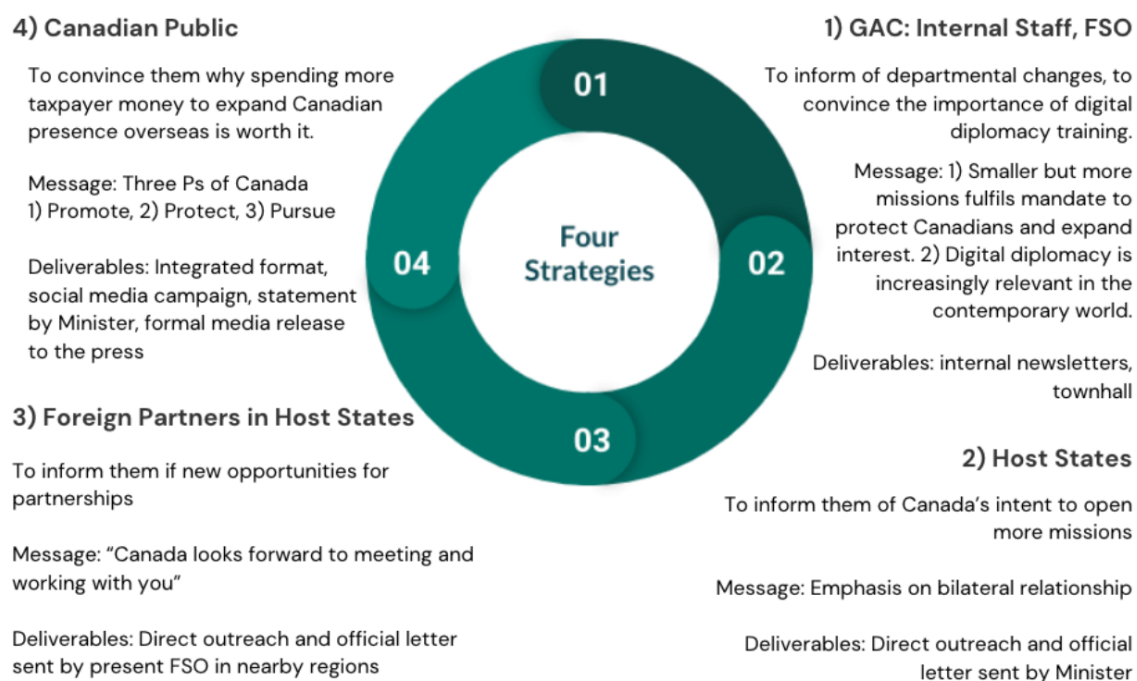


Figure 6

## Timeline and Key Performance Indicators

Phase I - Preparation (6 months)	Phase II - Diplomacy ( 1- 3 Years)	Phase III - Establishment ( 1 Year)
<b>Develop Digital Strategy for Missions</b> Set out expectations and guidelines for Missions engaging with local populations digitally.	<b>Meetings with officials from potential host states</b> Gradual process starting with meetings at international summits and one-on-one conversations between Canadian and foreign officials to official state visits.	<b>Public announcements, Logistics and Preparation</b> Reorganize geographic branches to accommodate new mission(s) Procurement of diplomatic premises. Staffing and training of LES, CBS, HOM for Mission.

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<p><b>Consultations with MINA/DMA/GAC's geographic branches</b> Develop list of locations for new missions with limited presence and strategic value.</p> <p><b>Liaise with Central Agencies</b> Inform of future increase needed to GAC budget.</p>	<p><b>Establish or formalize relations</b> Leverage diaspora populations and civil society groups with ties to Canada in Host country and vice versa.</p> <p>Sign agreement for permanent Canadian diplomatic presence in country.</p>	<p><b>Building network in host country</b> Partner with civil society groups and reach out to Canadian connections in new host country.</p> <p><b>Opening of Mission(s)</b> FSOs Depart for new mission Official opening in state visit by MINA, DMA, or Prime Minister.</p>
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## **Annexes**

### Annex A: The different types of diplomacy mentioned in this review

- **Soft Diplomacy:** also known as soft power, refers to the “ability to persuade through culture, values, and ideas, as opposed to doing so through the use of coercion”<sup>28</sup>
- **Direct Diplomacy:** face-to-face diplomacy, bypassing governments and meeting directly with community
- **Digital Diplomacy:** a strategy that typically includes the usage of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter<sup>29</sup>
- **Summit Diplomacy:** meetings between heads of governments/states, can be instrumental in speeding up negotiations and even domestic decision-making<sup>30</sup>

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