

Meet Our Neighbours: Canada's Allies During Times of Crisis

Good neighbours are there when you need them, lending an essential cooking ingredient, providing support in local disputes and even inviting you over if the power goes out or your basement floods. In times of international crisis, Canada also relies on trusted neighbours—from countries that work in lockstep with us when issuing travel advice to fellow missions that offer refuge to Canadians.

Such neighbourliness has deep historical roots and is a staple of emergency management. It has been crucial in recent situations around the world.

“We are not alone,” says Scott Corcoran, Deputy Director of Emergency Planning in the Emergency Management Bureau.

One of Canada's key collaborations with friendly countries dates back to the Second World War, Corcoran explains. The “Five Eyes” alliance, made up of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States, was established for the purpose of sharing information and intelligence.

Over the years, defence departments in these countries have been greatly influenced by the alliance and its diplomatic offshoot, the “Colloque.” Members speak regularly on matters such as the issuing of consistent travel advisories, “to ensure that no one is caught unaware or is jumping ahead,” says Corcoran. Colloque collaboration can include everything from emergency planning to assisted departures, such as when, in February 2011, Canada took the lead in the evacuation from Alexandria, Egypt, chartering a plane and processing various nationals for the flight to Amman.

During the civil unrest in Côte d'Ivoire, Canada was assisted by the United States and France, says Brent Bell, Emergency Planning Officer for Sub-Saharan Africa. For a couple of weeks in February, Canada temporarily closed its mission in Abidjan to the public and moved some of its operations to the U.S. embassy for security reasons.

By April, Canadian officials were also collaborating closely with the French, who have significant interests and resources in Abidjan. These resources include a military presence and, next to the airport, an air base where a number of Canadians were sheltered and from where some of them were evacuated at the height of clashes between UN forces and former president Laurent Gbagbo's “young patriots.”

“When times get rough you have to know who to call,” Bell says.

Thanks to a range of ad hoc arrangements and bilateral agreements, Canada represents or is represented by “friendlies” in many places. For example, in 1999, Mexicans offered assistance to Canadians after the closing of our mission in Belgrade following the NATO bombing campaign. Today, Canada represents Israel in Cuba and Venezuela, as well as Jamaica in Moscow. A



Taking the lead: Catherine Gérin-Lajoie, the deputy management consular officer for Jordan and Iraq, processes passports and creates the manifest of evacuees in the hall of the airport in Alexandria, Egypt.

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consular sharing agreement with Australia covers a number of countries and deals with everything from basic registration to the evacuation of each other's nationals.

Corcoran says that, given the growing number of emergencies and consular incidents, such cooperation among countries is increasingly necessary. “It's a different world,” he adds. “There's a lot more collaboration going on and willingness to assist—knowing the pendulum could swing the other way.”