

While this act of recognition is essentially legal in nature, the relevance of certain political considerations is recognized in modern international practice. There is, therefore, scope for the exercise of some discretion.

Further questions we ask ourselves are:

--Has the Government in question expressed its willingness to fulfill its international obligations?

--Is it achieving acceptance by a significant number of states, especially those which view recognition broadly as we do?

In case of doubt in the matter of recognition, one must go back to the basic principle, that entering into relations with a state is a question of national interest, and not an act of approbation or a sign of particular friendship.

To illustrate in modern terms the disadvantages of breaking relations in order to show disapproval of policies or actions, we have the various situations that have occurred since the six-day war of 1967 in the Middle East. A number of the Middle Eastern States broke relations with Britain, France and the United States. Nonetheless, these states recognized the need for some form of continuing direct contact. The old practice of another state being designated to look after the interests of those with which relations had been broken, was adapted to fill the need for essentially uninterrupted relations on a broad range of subjects. The original practice involved the mission taking over the interests of a state whose mission had departed, in an occasional presentation of a note, or other communication. Very often, no officials of the departed state remained. This situation was found to be inadequate and a so-called "interests section" was established, under the flag of the protecting state.

It was often housed in the former premises of the departed state, but with a new flag and new plaque on the door. These interests sections were in several cases, very large, and headed by a senior official, even of ambassadorial rank. In fact, one had a full blown diplomatic mission under another name. There were, however, numerous disadvantages. The head of the so-called interests section had no normal right of access to officials and was hampered in a number of ways in the performance of his job.

Short of breaking relations, in a situation where there is no particularly warm regard between states, there are a number of other actions that can be taken to indicate this. Ambassadors may be withdrawn and a less senior official appointed Chargé d'Affaires. The mission can lie low in its social contacts with the regime; it can be represented at official ceremonies and events by a very junior officer. Many signs and symbols can be used. But it is important to use them sparingly since excessive use can give an impression of pettiness and prevent the kind of dealings which should go on between governments in their own interests.

The act of entering into relations with a new regime is also an indication of what exactly is meant by continuing relations. When the decision is taken by the Canadian government to continue relations with a state where there has been a violent change of regime, this is often done by finding some very routine matter and writing a note to the new incumbents. It may be no more than a simple acknowledgement of a circular note from the foreign ministry informing, for instance, that the foreign ministry would be closed on such a date for some local holiday. No fulsome expression about continuing relations is involved, only an indication that "we wish to continue to conduct official business with your country".