

**MARKET
RESEARCH SERIES**

LEBANON EVACUATION SUMMARY

JUNE 7, 2007

Market Research Series Lebanon Evacuation Summary

A devastating 34-day war in July-August 2006 highlighted the explosive nature of tensions along Lebanon's southern border. The Lebanon crisis involved one of the largest mass evacuations post World War II with approximately 50 countries taking part in the efforts to remove nationals from danger.

WorldReach Software, the world's leading provider of consular software, engaged in a market research series with a number of countries to ascertain the types of challenges encountered in Lebanon as well as recommendations for handling crises of a similar nature in the future. We would like to thank the following Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) for agreeing to take part in this activity – Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), German Federal Foreign Office, UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT), the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (in its role as EU President), and the U.S. Department of State.

While initial criticism surfaced from the media on the pace of civilian extraction, the logistical challenges associated with the evacuation efforts were immense. In the first week alone, Lebanon was evacuated of, in excess of 40,000 foreign nationals to Cyprus, Turkey, and Syria. The UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency) estimated that as many as 800,000 people were displaced or affected by the violence (August 3, 2006 press release).

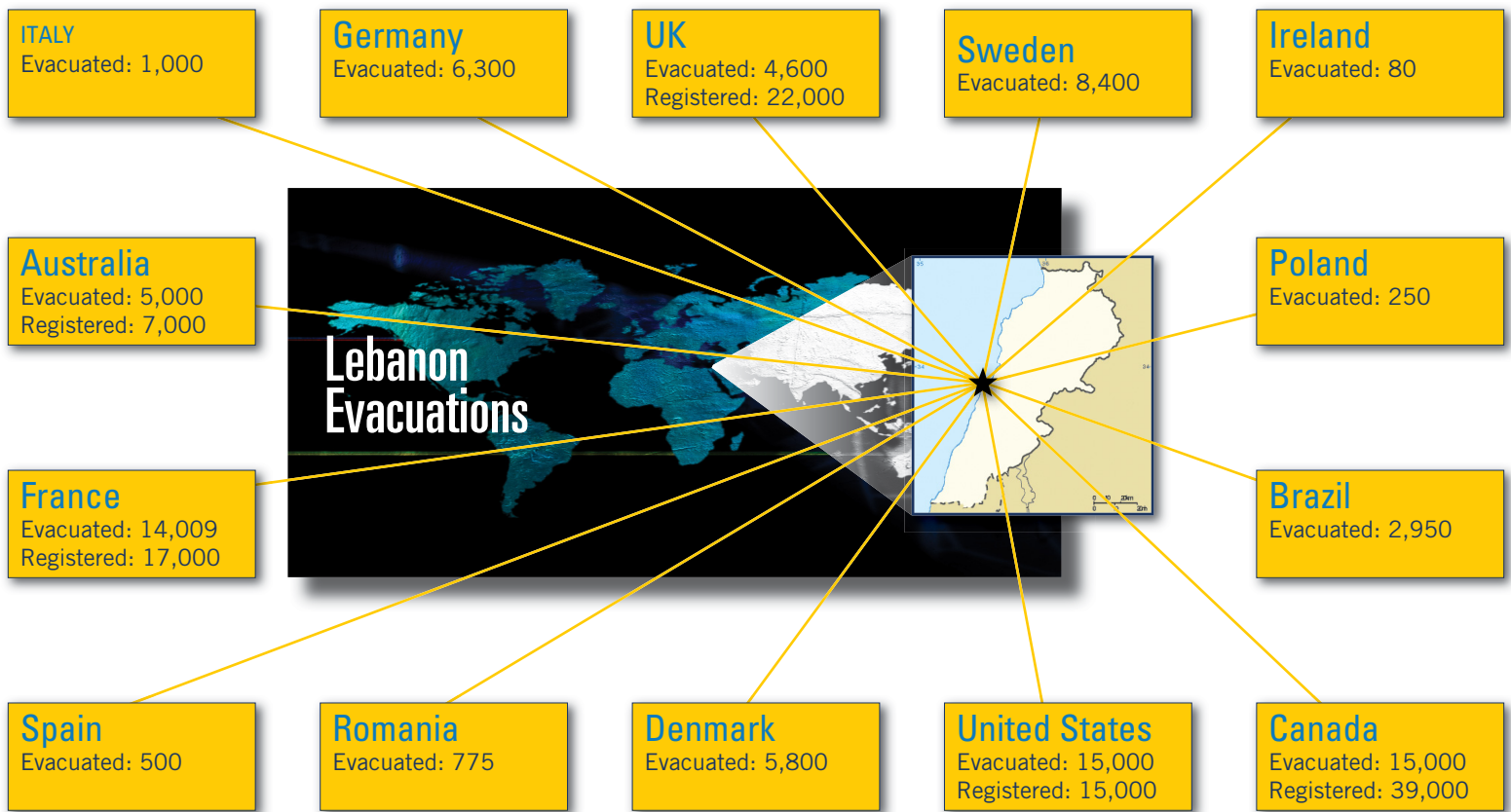
The evacuation efforts were made all the more challenging as result of the damage to key infrastructure and transportation routes. According to the UNHCR, 80 percent of Lebanon's highways and 95 percent of bridges suffered damage. Many countries found themselves faced with the question – how to manage a crisis that doesn't occur on native soil, with resources or assets not under direct control.

While each country involved in the Lebanon evacuation may have had different resources, priorities, and political considerations, the same issues were identified. The nature of the evacuation in Lebanon highlighted both policy and operational issues that could be improved in the future.

Scope of Lebanon Crisis

While approximately 50 countries were involved in the evacuation effort in Lebanon, Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) had an especially large challenge as it had the greatest number of registered citizens of any foreign country trying to evacuate Lebanon. Canada had a large number of foreign citizens in Lebanon. The reason for Canada's large proportion of Lebanese-Canadians stems from Canada's long-standing immigration relationship with Lebanon. In the mid-1970s Canada was one of the few Western countries to adopt special immigration measures to aid Lebanese citizens fleeing the civil war. Ever since that measure Canada has seen a steady growth of Lebanese citizens immigrate to Canada. According to the 1991 census there were 54,605 Canadians of Lebanese descent living in the Country. As of 2002 that number now stands at 250,000 Lebanese-Canadians

The following chart provides estimates from various published media sources of the numbers of people extricated by country.



*Note: the above numbers have been compiled via published media reports and interviews with Ministries of Foreign Affairs. While every attempt has been made to ensure their accuracy at the time of publishing, they can only be interpreted as representative and may not be the official final numbers involved. Please note that some countries may have included non-nationals in their total evacuation numbers.

Policy issues

Large scale evacuations are a unique type of consular crisis that often require special consideration. Three policy issues were flagged as problematic for a number of countries.

Commitment to Repay

One of the larger policy issues that came under scrutiny was the standard policy of having a citizen repay any monies spent by the government in the individual's extraction efforts. A couple of factors tempered the application of this standard policy. Since the last few major consular crises, most notably the 2004 Asian Tsunami, citizens expect a higher quality, full-service treatment from their governments when they are involved in crises abroad. In addition, the involvement of numerous countries provided citizens with an ability to compare their government's service and policies based on what other governments were doing for citizens.

Several countries first announced that citizens would be obligated to repay the cost of evacuation, only to rescind the policy when faced with harsh media criticism and comparison to other countries policies. For example, Canada normally asks citizens to reimburse the government for costs associated with an evacuation from foreign lands. But the federal government decided taxpayers would foot the bill for costs related to the extraction of Canadian citizens from Lebanon. Once precedents are set it is often difficult to go back to the official policy of reimbursement.

Family Members to Extricate

The crisis in Lebanon also challenged many traditional boundaries of family and main registrant. Some countries reported having children listed as the prime registrant and non-citizen family members trying to extricate with them. In some instances, children were sent to spend the summer with their

Lebanese family in Beirut. When it was time for governments to extricate citizens, they found that the child was the only citizen, and they had to be extricated with non-citizen family members.

While a standard policy before the Lebanon crisis may have been just to extricate immediate family members with the main citizen registrant, certain issues such as nannies accompanying children had to be figured into the equation as well. It made many MFAs reconsider the concept of ‘what is immediate family?’ in a crisis situation.

In some cases, special authorization was sought and received for non-citizens included in the evacuation as a special policy decision by immigration authorities.

Funding Crisis Evacuation Costs

The large scale of evacuations required hiring transportation capacity on short notice (planes, buses, ships), setting up temporary evacuation centres (hotels, military bases, sports facilities) and temporary duty with long hours for many consular staff & rapid deployment teams (RDTs). The costs of the Lebanon crisis reached tens of millions for individual countries. Most governments contacted did not have contingency funds of this size and had to get high level political approval for immediate expenditures in the millions. This contributed to some initial delays and also required longer term efforts to actually get the funds into MFA budgets after the crisis.

Operational Issues

Managing any crisis that doesn’t occur on national soil is difficult. Lebanon did present a challenging set of operational issues for a number of countries. These issues were centered on ground response and ultimately impacted the efficiency of the overall consular crisis response.

Recording of Information (Manifests)

Perhaps the largest issue encountered by most if not all MFAs on the ground in Lebanon was the accurate and efficient recording and sharing of passenger information. Manifests, or lists of people boarding or disembarking a means of transportation, were very important with respect to: managing the situation on the ground; providing an accurate picture to the crisis headquarters for resource management; as well as a historical record for future review and reference.

At a minimum, a MFA would require an accurate list of the numbers and names of citizens involved in the evacuation for planning logistics and resources. However, this list is also very important for security purposes – for example, knowing who you are letting into the country. Advance notice for basic security checks is dependent on a useful and accurate list.

Many countries did not have access to any electronic means of capturing pertinent information on citizens boarding boats. For most, a simple hand-written list acted as the official passenger manifest. This of course proved quite problematic when trying to disseminate the information in a usable fashion. Issues such as poor handwriting, fax and scan quality impacted the ability of crisis headquarters to understand the information. A minority of countries were able to utilize handheld computers on site to record information in spreadsheet format to be later emailed back to headquarters. Typically this was unstructured and sometimes transmitted outside normal modes of communication.

The ineffective recording of information on the ground often meant that citizen information had to be captured more than once at different points in the process – frustrating citizens as well as adding to the workload of consular officials. Additionally there were constant variances in counts of people (i.e. number departed, number arrived).

Sharing of Information (Intergovernmental Cooperation)

While the lack of proper manifests presented problems internally among consular crisis groups, it also led to problems with intergovernmental cooperation for other governmental departments who worked closely with MFAs on the crisis (Immigration, Military, Social Services, etc), as well as other national governments. Some national governments offered space on boats and planes to non-citizens; however, these governments were often not able to offer detailed information on these citizens. For example, a call of "We've got three Australians on our boat that arrived at 7am" doesn't provide much detailed information or advance warning for the receiving party.

Some countries did endeavor to share information with the countries on whose behalf they were extricating citizens. For example, France sent Canada a spreadsheet of Canadians on board its vessel which the Canadians received before the boat even entered port. However, this type of information exchanged seemed to be the exception rather than the normal mode of operation.

Proving Citizenship

In an emergency situation such as Lebanon, many citizens often do not have access to proper documentation such as passports, visas, etc. In this instance officials on the ground have to make judgment calls on what pieces of information constitutes evidence of citizenship or close enough ties to the country. Many countries sent immigration experts to Cyprus to try to establish the citizenship of its nationals. Countries had different criteria for establishing citizenship - first name, last name, date of birth, nationality, passport, citizen card, and in some cases where there was no official documentation, anything that offered a close tie on behalf of the individual to their home country (i.e. utility bills).

While immigration officials typically did the screening before evacuees entered the home country, they relied on information collected on the ground by consular officials. The quality and format of this information was very important.

In instances where countries extricated citizens on behalf of another country, the initial citizenship check was in fact done by another national government. These countries may or may not have the same established set of criteria for determining citizenship.

Outbound Communication to Citizens

The ability to reach citizens directly impacted by the crisis as well as the families of those impacted is very important. Not only does governmental outbound communication serve an important purpose of communicating potentially life-saving information to citizens in danger, it also conveys a sense of control over the situation and instills public confidence.

In a crisis situation, having multiple methods of communication to reach citizens is ideal. Some countries made use of email, departmental websites and SMS (Short Message Service) technology as well as media advertisements providing details for evacuation departure points, etc. Used in conjunction with the more traditional phone-out methods, these other forms of outbound communications can ensure that the majority of citizens are well aware of governmental plans.

Knowledge of the Number of Citizens Impacted (Impact of Registration Capability)

Knowing how many citizens are in a country in advance of any trouble or distress is very helpful in coordinating an appropriate response.

While some countries had previously encouraged citizens to register their whereabouts before they travelled to Lebanon, most countries could not accurately predict how many citizens they had in Lebanon based on their pre-crisis registration numbers. Once the tensions escalated and it became evident that a war would soon break out, citizens began to clamor to let their governments know they were in Lebanon so they could get assistance to extricate.

The largest known response to a government's request for citizens to register online was experienced by Canada. At the start of the crisis Canada had approximately 11,000 registrants. Over the initial week of the crisis this number increased to almost 40,000 primarily (+90%) using the departmental website access to an online registration system. This experience seems to indicate that even in a crisis situation citizens can and will register if strongly encouraged to do so using online tools. It would be difficult to see how these additional 25,000 registrations would have been accepted and keyed by consular staff in the same timelines with immediate availability of the information for planning evacuation.

Asset Control

Some countries had a major advantage in the presence of military assets in the region. Military ships could be used to transport citizens out of harms way. Having full control over assets such as ships, helicopters, etc. was cited as a major advantage in the ability to effectively extricate citizens.

By contrast those without military assets had a more difficult time competing for evacuation capacity, in which quick decisions determined the securing of ships and evacuation capability.

Recommendations for Future Crises

While Lebanon was a challenge in many respects, it also offers great lessons identified to help MFAs better prepare and respond to the next large evacuation scenario.

Coordination of Assets - As referenced previously, having control over assets such as methods of evacuation is a major factor in effective consular crisis management. In situations where a country may not have control over assets such as military planes, helicopters etc., having as much control as possible over the rented assets is key.

Definition of Minimum Dataset – While every crisis may be different along with the variety of documentation presented to prove citizenship, it would be helpful in advance of any crisis to have a set agreed upon list of key personal identifiers that would be recognized as sufficient to prove citizenship. Of course, there will always be cases where no documentation is available, and these cases must be closely examined. However, if consular organizations can streamline the process of the majority of individuals who may have proof of name, date-of-birth, passport, etc., this will allow more time to be focused on those who have no documentation.

Similarly, having all countries agree on the same minimum dataset will help when one country is extricating another's citizens and conducting the first check on citizenship. If both countries accept the same data as proof of citizenship, it will aid in the overall coordination of efforts.

Utilization of Existing Technology – there are varying degrees of tools currently in use that could greatly impact the efficiency and effectiveness of consular evacuations in large crises. They range from the very simple to more sophisticated.

- Outbound communication mechanisms such as SMS (Short Message Service), email and websites allow MFAs to push a message to citizens in the affected areas, providing warnings as well as any specific instructions in the event of an evacuation.
- Onsite data capture tools can be as simple as having access to a predefined evacuation spreadsheet that can be uploaded back to a post or headquarters. Ideally these predefined templates can also be pre-populated from the main consular system (i.e. registrants) to aid in the evacuation by reducing any data entry to confirmations.
- More sophisticated options such as portable passport scanners with MRZ readers have been available for a while and in fact some cruise lines use this type of portable technology when docking in remote ports. For large evacuations there is time to deploy this technology with RDTs.
- Online Registration. Encouraging and promoting the availability of a person-based registration system available to citizens via the departmental web site is another way for MFAs to be better prepared in the event of a crisis. Citizens can enter relevant trip and contact information in advance of a trip as well as have the ability to update and maintain their own registration details as contacts change.
- Well-Balanced Teams – Some countries made specific reference to the advantages involved in having a well-balanced on-site team that is comprised of not only consular officials, but also sup-

port from administration & logistics personnel as well as representatives from the various other relevant ministries and agencies. For instance, having counselors available to citizens was greatly appreciated by consular groups as it freed up their time in focusing on individual cases, and allowed them to focus on helping many people.

Conclusion

Many MFAs have already begun the process of implementing changes to their policies and procedures. While the Lebanon crisis proved to be a difficult one to manage, it also provides great lessons to help further improve and enhance consular crisis response especially regarding large-scale evacuations.



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