



INDIA'S EXPATRIATE EVACUATION OPERATIONS

Bringing the Diaspora Home

Constantino Xavier



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About the Author

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Summary

India has extensive experience conducting evacuation operations, but given the rising economic contributions and political influence of Indian citizens abroad and the increasing complexity of these operations, the incentives to ensure the success of future ones are now even greater. As India's diaspora continues to grow, so will the challenges New Delhi faces in protecting this diverse and geographically dispersed population. To overcome these issues, the Indian government will have to institutionalize best practices, bolster its diplomatic and military capabilities, and improve coordination.

Rising Challenges in Protecting a Growing Diaspora

- India has conducted more than thirty evacuation operations across Africa, Asia, and Europe, including its largest-ever civilian airlift of 110,000 people from the Persian Gulf in 1990.
- However, given the lack of any formal doctrine or emergency plan, the success of India's missions has mostly been due to the individual sacrifices of officials from its diplomatic corps, flagship carrier, and armed forces.
- As more than 11 million Indians now reside abroad, and more than 20 million travel overseas each year, the government will no longer be able to rely on heroic, ad hoc efforts and quick-fix solutions.
- Lingering and emerging challenges, including a lack of standard operating procedures and inadequate coordination, will only intensify as evacuation operations become larger in scope and public scrutiny increases.

Building on India's Experience and Expanding Capacity

The Indian government should employ significant diplomatic and military resources to

- assess its evacuation operations and institutionalize best practices;
- develop standard operating procedures, including emergency doctrines;
- train and prepare its diplomatic cadre to operate in hostile environments, and increase coordination with other governments;
- assign a greater role to the armed forces, strengthening their capacity to plan and deploy in tandem with civilian authorities;

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- establish a permanent coordinating mechanism that facilitates communication and joint operations across national, regional, and international levels and bureaucratic and military levels;
- designate a civilian air reserve fleet for evacuation operations to reduce the burden on Air India, whose staff also requires specific training;
- explore new communication technologies to develop consular platforms to identify, monitor, and contact citizens abroad, offering them real-time updates on evacuation procedures; and
- expand efforts to manage public pressure through diplomacy and a communication strategy that appropriately prioritizes Indian citizens over people of Indian origin.

Introduction: The Diaspora's Wealth and Security as a National Interest

An increasing number of states are making the safety and well-being of their expatriate populations a central concern of their foreign policies. Whether for their remittances, security profile, or political influence, migrants are now playing a greater role in a world of unprecedented cross-border mobility. This is particularly true in India's case. The Indian diaspora is now larger, more diverse and geographically distributed, and more politically influential than ever before; thus, it is also becoming increasingly important to India's economic wealth. This large community of overseas Indians includes both expatriates holding an Indian passport and former citizens and other individuals who trace their ancestry back to the Indian subcontinent.

According to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), an estimated 11 million Indian citizens now permanently reside abroad, and almost 16 million people of Indian origin hold other citizenships.¹ The annual average rate of growth of India's diaspora population was 4.5 percent between 2000 and 2015.² Personal remittances are now twenty-nine times what they were in 1990, playing a vital role in the country's economic growth and development policies. Further, many more Indians are traveling abroad—in 2015, the government registered more than 20 million departures, or five times as many as in 2000.³ As a result, the Indian government now has more incentives to track and protect its citizens overseas. Achieving this goal, however, will require increasing its capacity to document, standardize, coordinate, and improve on its current civil and military evacuation operations.

The trend in India reflects the trend worldwide, and thus, there are lessons and best practices to be drawn not only from India's evacuation experiences but also those of other countries. According to the United Nations (UN), the total number of international migrants increased between 1990 and 2015 from 154 million to 244 million—now constituting 3.3 percent of the world's population.⁴ This is also an increasingly diverse group of migrants. Twenty years ago, the migration of low-skilled labor from underdeveloped to highly industrialized economies predominated. Today, however, the patterns are more complex, with short-term and high-skilled labor migrating from one industrialized economy to another and also labor migrating between developing countries.

The Indian diaspora is now larger, more diverse and geographically distributed, and more politically influential than ever before.

Despite their concentration in Western countries, international migrants are also now prevalent in the high-growth economies of the Gulf region, representing demographic majorities in Qatar (91 percent), the United Arab Emirates (88 percent), Kuwait (72 percent), Jordan (56 percent), and Bahrain (54 percent).⁵ Yet, even with these changes in destination, in 2015, two-thirds of all international migrants still lived in just twenty countries (all high-income),

As a vulnerable and dislocated population, migrants are particularly exposed to various risks abroad, including natural disasters, political unrest, and violent conflict.

with the United States topping the list. Today, 72 percent of global migrants are of working age, reflecting the economic motives of their displacement.⁶ Their rising assets and wealth makes these migrants vital to their home economies, whether in terms of deposits and savings, investment, trade, or the transfer of skills and know-how.

The case of remittances illustrates migrants' rising economic significance worldwide: in 2015, a record \$582 billion in remittances was transferred—of which approximately 75 percent went to developing countries.⁷ This amounts to three times the sum of official development assistance and more than the total private debt and portfolio equity flows to developing countries. Such remittances also exceed the foreign exchange reserves of at least fourteen developing countries and are equivalent to at least half of the reserves in more than twenty-six developing countries.⁸

Given their expatriates' immense wealth, governments are designing new programs to reach out and extract their resources and know-how. An increasing number of states therefore identify the security of their diaspora as a key national interest, with important implications for economic growth and domestic stability. By developing targeted diaspora policies, states seek to regulate migrants' pre-departure training, transfer of remittances, and special foreign direct investment clauses; some states also grant them voting rights and political representation. Developing countries have also been allocating greater resources to expand their consular and other support networks for their migrants.⁹

Beyond such periodic measures to secure their diaspora as a prized asset, home states are also more inclined to protect migrants in extraordinary times of crisis. As a vulnerable and dislocated population, migrants are particularly exposed to various risks abroad, including natural disasters, political unrest, and violent conflict in their host country or region. They are often specifically targeted by populist and extremist movements or forced to depart after sudden changes in immigration laws. In such circumstances, governments must act swiftly and decisively to protect the lives and assets of their citizens, which may require evacuating them safely back home.

The Rising Complexity of Evacuation Operations

While India is not a newcomer to conducting evacuation operations, it has traditionally faced significant challenges in deploying its diplomatic and military assets abroad to protect its diaspora. The shortcomings of New Delhi's capacity have been further compounded by its nonaligned posture and consequent reluctance to get involved in conflict zones. However, as these operations become more frequent and complex, India will need to expand its operational capacity and prepare accordingly, including by adopting best practices from other states' emergency plans. Evacuating citizens from abroad is an extremely complex mission in which distance, logistics, security, and coordination pose numerous obstacles. Such operations can assume various forms, and the instruments employed depend on myriad factors, such as geographic location, the nature of the crisis environment, or the size of the population to be extricated.

Table 1 depicts the wide spectrum of complexity and risk of such operations, which determines whether they are mere diplomatic affairs or require the deployment of military assets and coercive force.

Table 1: Complexity and Risk of Evacuation Operations

Lowest	Complexity/Risk	Highest
Small (dozens)	Number of potential evacuees	Large (thousands)
Regional (close)	Location of crisis area	Extra-regional (distant)
Stable/peaceful	On-the-ground environment	Volatile/violent
Friendly/cooperative	Attitude of local government/factions	Hostile
Concentrated	Evacuees' geographic distribution	Dispersed
Phased/long	Maximum time frame	Short

Whether led by diplomatic or military authorities, expatriate evacuation operations are typically divided into four stages: the assessment, planning, operational, and post-evacuation phases. During the pre-evacuation *emergency assessment*—essential to developing an efficient response—on-the-ground information is collected. What is the source of the emergency situation, and what specific threats does it pose to the migrants? How many migrants are

in the country or region, what are their socioeconomic or political profiles and degree of exposure to the crisis, and what actions have they taken or are expected to take?

Depending on the nature of the operational environment (friendly, permissive, or hostile), governments will also have to assess the risk of an evacuation and attempt to open channels of communication with the host government, different factions in the case of a civil war, and other regional states and the international community. This requires domestic coordination among various ministries and civilian and military agencies, inputs from the diplomatic mission(s) in the affected country or region, and the expert analysis of collected intelligence. Ultimately, a decision has to be taken whether to organize a formal evacuation operation.

This leads to the second stage, *evacuation planning*, which is often concurrent with the first phase but hinges on the initial assessment. The central considerations relate to the nature of the operation. Beyond providing mere consular support or reserving a few extra seats on scheduled airplane connections, and depending on their assessment of how long the crisis will last, government officials need to decide whether to call for a civilian airlift or a military-led operation. Depending on the context, number of evacuees, and risk, they must also determine who will lead the operation and what consular, diplomatic, military, transportation, and intelligence resources will need to be deployed. On the coordination front, officials must clarify whether this will be an independent operation or a multinational force in coordination with other states.

Finally, on the operational side, the government needs to ensure that regional base hubs and air bridges are accessible in the region for civilian or military aircrafts and ships to operate from. This complex planning includes important logistical challenges that, given the limited time frame, are unlikely to be fully solved before the operation begins and therefore require continued diplomatic contact. Most importantly, there are important financial considerations at play, given the high cost of these operations.

The third phase relates to the actual *evacuation operation*. This requires deployment of significant human and other resources to the crisis zone. Expatriates have to be contacted and directed to secure assembling points for prescreening. Emergency passports or other travel documents must be issued, and officials also have to negotiate special exit permits for citizens who have overstayed or lost their personal identification documents. Depending on the permissiveness of the environment, the local government or warring factions must be kept informed of the operation and authorize the landing or docking of airplanes and naval vessels, respectively. A direct communication link must be established between the operational headquarters and officials on the ground, including military assets and other neighboring control centers in the crisis region. Authorities have to regulate the sequence of embarkation, making difficult choices on evacuation priority for different expatriate groups. Such

decisions may assume even greater complexity if headquarters also directs the operation to evacuate noncitizens. Finally, officials have to ensure the security of the aerial, naval, or other assets deployed, as they exit from the crisis zone and transport citizens safely back to their home country. These are only a few of the typical tasks and challenges that arise during the evacuation operation.

The fourth phase, *post-evacuation*, is unfortunately often neglected. This phase starts as soon as evacuees have exited the crisis environment and prepare to enter their home country. The disembarkation ports require proper conditions to receive the evacuees. Local authorities have to be instructed to adapt ordinary immigration and customs regulations. As evacuees often arrive in distress, having left most of their assets back in the crisis zone, they have to be provided with special medical, financial, food, shelter, and psychological relief. Finally, adequate coordination among local, national, and regional agencies must be ensured to facilitate the evacuees' arrival and integration in their home country. In the long term, governments must devise policies and support networks that can assist evacuees to re-migrate abroad. While some of these issues should be addressed in the planning phase, the urgency and short time frame of evacuation operations normally dictates that they are implemented on an ad hoc basis. Once the evacuees have landed safely back home, so to speak, most governments consider the operation complete, neglecting this important post-evacuation phase.

Planning to Evacuate: Doctrines and Strategies

The complexity of evacuation operations has increased dramatically in recent decades with the rise in the number of international migrants. Several states have therefore developed extensive expertise and capabilities to evacuate their citizens and, most importantly, they have established standard operating procedures for such contingencies. In the military realm, in particular, noncombatant evacuation operations (NEOs) have been institutionalized as detailed doctrines regulating the command chains and deployment of force abroad. Several countries have established NEO doctrines, including Australia, Brazil, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In 2013, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) also adopted a joint NEO doctrine regulating such operations among its allied member states.¹⁰ Other countries have adopted evacuation plans in which diplomatic and civilian authorities take the lead, in line with India's own preference to let the MEA take the lead.

The United States has the most experience, having conducted hundreds of operations since the mid-twentieth century. In one of the most notable cases, Operation Frequent Wind, in April 1975, American military forces extracted 7,000 people from Vietnam. An equally complex operation was Operation Assured Response, from April to June 1996, which evacuated 2,444 people from Liberia. Between 1988 and 2007, the United States ordered more than

270 evacuations from overseas posts.¹¹ These operations generally were led by the military, even though an ambassador remained formally in charge under presidential authorization. American NEOs are now regulated by an interservice joint doctrine, prepared by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which offers an exhaustive contingency plan including, among other things, pet care, a religious support team, and an evacuation emergency kit with toothpaste and a toothbrush.¹²

Australia, Canada, France, and the United Kingdom have also conducted major evacuation operations.¹³ France has undertaken several operations as well, mostly in Central and sub-Saharan Africa, and developed its NEO doctrine in 2009 under its Chief of Defense Staff.¹⁴ The European Union (EU) has attempted to integrate national country efforts by shifting evacuation operations from the domestic EU Civil Protection Mechanism to its Common Security and Defense Policy.¹⁵ In reality, however, individual member state policies and capabilities still prevail. During the 2011 Libya crisis, for example, operations were led by the United Kingdom and its Noncombatant Evacuation Operation Coordination Cell (NEOCC) based in Malta, which included representatives from sixteen EU states and an EU military adviser and which witnessed the evacuation of 4,500 nationals from seventy-eight countries.¹⁶

Notably, non-Western or less-developed countries have begun to develop their own evacuation capabilities. For example, Brazil's National Defense Policy now enshrines the protection of its 3 million citizens living abroad as a main objective.¹⁷ In 2003 and 2004, the Brazilian government ordered its air force to evacuate citizens from conflict zones in Bolivia and Haiti.¹⁸

China's evacuation operations also have recently expanded. In 2011, Beijing conducted its largest operation to date, extracting almost 36,000 Chinese citizens from Libya by land, air, and sea, as well as 2,100 foreign nationals from twelve countries working for Chinese companies there. This involved the first-ever deployment of a People's Liberation Army's (PLA) large military transport aircraft and that of its navy in such a nontraditional military operation.¹⁹ The PLA is expected to take a leading role in future evacuation operations.

Since 2015, Japan's Legislation for Peace and Security allows its Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to employ, for the first time, military force to rescue Japanese nationals abroad.²⁰ In its joint exercises and doctrinal studies, the SDF has been preparing, for example, to evacuate thousands of Japanese nationals residing in South Korea, and in 2016, it deployed three C-130 transport aircrafts to rescue hundreds of distressed citizens from South Sudan.²¹

In Russia, the Ministry for Civil Defense, Emergencies and Elimination of Consequences of Natural Disasters is responsible for overseeing the "evacuation of citizens of the Russian Federation from foreign countries in case of emergency situation."²² During the 2014–2015 Crimea crisis, Moscow invoked the right to protect Russian citizens and people of Russian origin to deploy

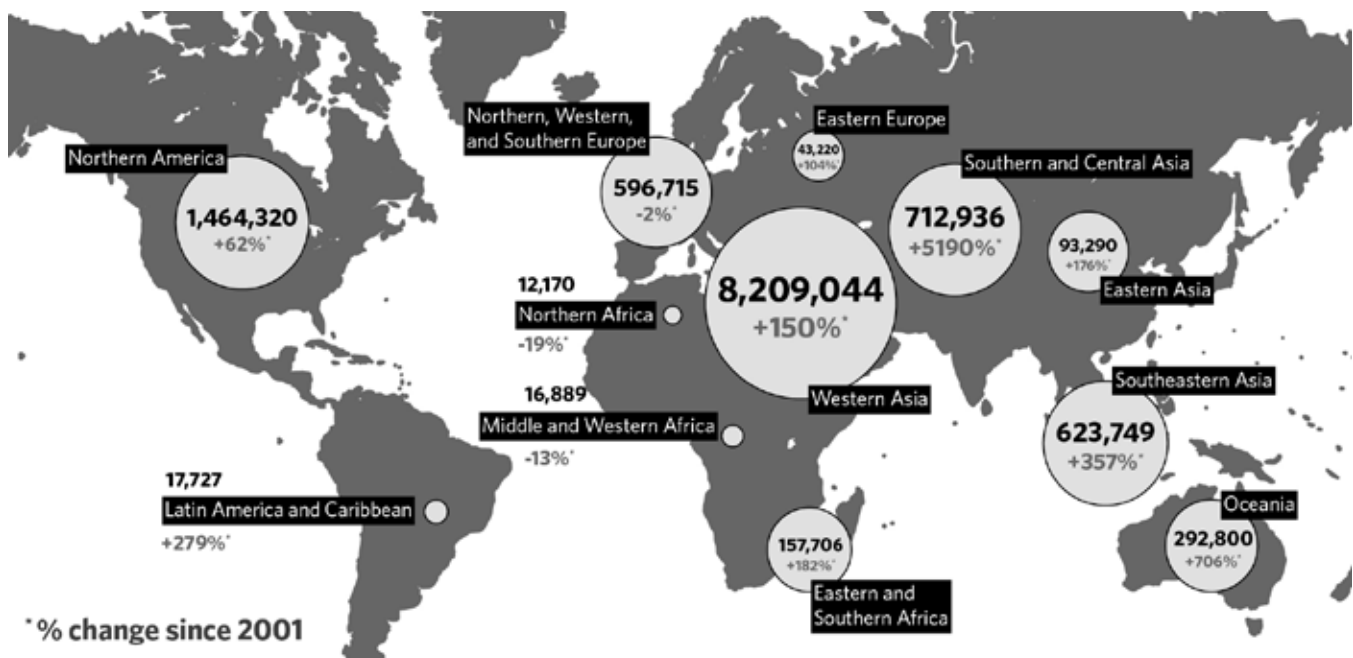
military force in Ukraine, in keeping with a long line of legal thought that classifies military evacuation operations as a sovereign nation's right to self-defense.

While much attention is dedicated to NEO doctrines and their military nature, governments also implement various other emergency plans to protect their diaspora in times of distress. Beyond the strict use of military force, governments have developed increasingly detailed standard operation procedures that coordinate military, diplomatic, and political resources. The Philippines, for example, announced in 2015 a Joint Manual of Operations in Providing Assistance to Migrant Workers and Other Filipinos Overseas.²³ Many countries have also instituted detailed emergency and evacuation plans for their diplomatic missions abroad.²⁴

India's Growing and Changing Diaspora

Given the trend of increased migration and travel from India, it will become increasingly important for the country's government to institutionalize its best practices and learn from the experiences of other countries. As of 2015, India is second worldwide in terms of net migration, with Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as top destinations. Figure 1 illustrates the number of Indian citizens living in various regions worldwide.

Figure 1: Nonresident Indians (By Region)

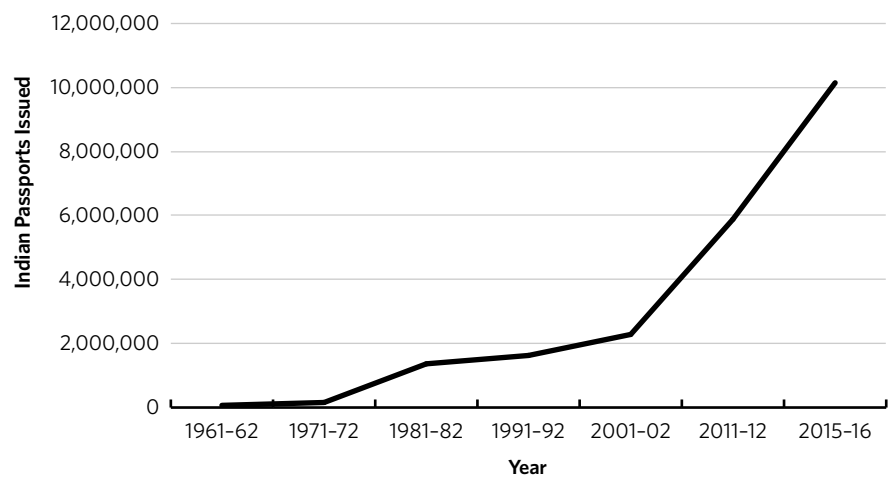


Sources: Ministry of External Affairs, "Population of Overseas Indians," April 2016, http://mea.gov.in/images/attach/NRIs-and-PIOs_1.pdf; and United Nations Statistics Division, "Composition of Macro Geographical (Continental) Regions, Geographical Sub-Regions, and Selected Economic and Other Groupings," September 26, 2016, <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm>.

Note also that the Indian diaspora is an increasingly mobile population. In 2000, only 4.4 million Indians traveled abroad, versus 20.4 million in 2015.²⁵ If the current average growth rate of 11 percent per annum is sustained, at least 30 million Indians will be traveling abroad in 2020.²⁶

Passport issuance provides another telling estimate of mobility. As of 2015, there were 63 million Indian passport holders—up from 57 million in 2014 and 51 million in 2013.²⁷ At the current rate of 5 to 6 million new passport holders per year, which is a rather conservative figure given the exponential growth in the number of first-time travelers abroad, there will be more than 100 million Indian citizens holding a valid passport by 2025.²⁸ Figure 2 depicts the exponential increase in passport issuance.

Figure 2: Indian Passports Issued (excluding missions abroad)



Source: Ministry of External Affairs, annual reports, various years.

With one of the world’s youngest populations, India’s population is expected to peak at 1.7 billion in 2060, and many are likely to seek a new passport and consular support while traveling, working, or studying abroad.²⁹ Keeping track of and monitoring this growing mobile population will pose a significant challenge to the Indian government.

This diaspora is also increasingly diverse—no longer dominated by low-skilled laborers from a few regions in South India or the Punjab. There are now two groupings of migrants: highly skilled professionals, workers, and students and unskilled and semi-skilled workers. The first grouping, with tertiary and higher educational qualifications, has primarily been migrating to developed

countries, particularly Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This flow started in the 1970s and gathered momentum with the migration of information technology professionals in the 1990s. The second grouping of unskilled and semi-skilled workers has mostly been migrating from Kerala and other South Indian states to the Gulf countries and Malaysia, due to the oil boom. However, Indian migration from northern states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar has been increasing.³⁰

In addition to migrants, the global Indian footprint sometimes includes thousands of peacekeeping forces stationed in volatile countries, as well as paramilitary deployments such as the Indo Tibetan Border Police in Afghanistan. Moreover, in 2010, during the annual Hajj pilgrimage, a record number of 171,000 Indian Muslims traveled to Saudi Arabia on nearly 900 flights funded and coordinated by the MEA, which deploys hundreds of government officials every year to ensure the safety of this operation.³¹ This increasing extraterritorial population poses numerous challenges to evacuation operations, which will need to become more flexible to respond to the specific needs of different segments of the diaspora. Table 2 summarizes the various categories of overseas Indians.

Table 2: Complexity of the Diaspora

Type of Migrants		Status and Links to India
Citizens	Short-term travelers	Brief dislocation (a few days or weeks) for tourism or business purposes.
	Temporary expatriates	On temporary assignments abroad for a specific duration (a few months or years) and purpose (mostly studies or business).
	Permanent expatriates	Permanent residents abroad, or dual residency. Frequently known as nonresident Indians (NRIs).
Non-citizens	Overseas citizens of India (OCIs)	Former Indian nationals or relatives of Indian nationals, accorded special immigration and economic privileges. May also hold official tax and other identification documents making them quasi-Indian citizens.
	People of Indian origin (PIOs)	Foreign citizens, with no formal links or official Indian identification but with strong cultural, political, and economic ties to India.

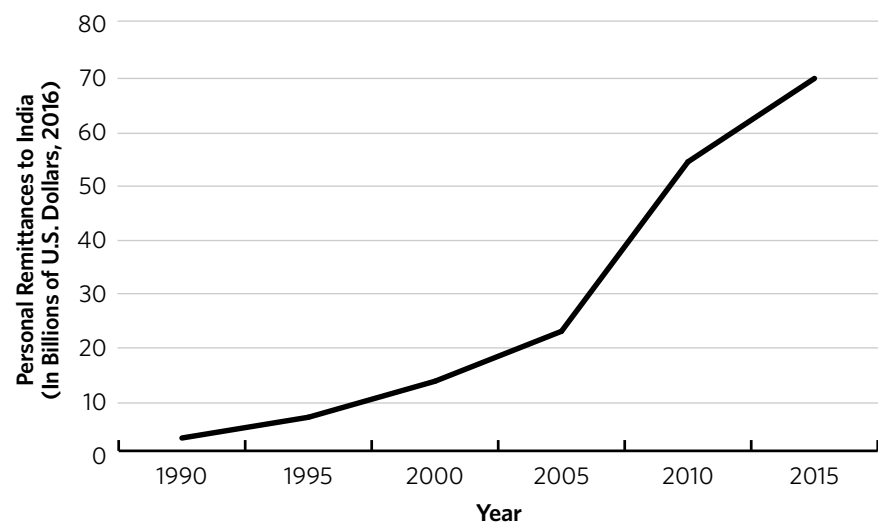
The Indian diaspora is also more geographically dispersed, with Indian citizens now living in almost 200 countries worldwide. The UAE (3 million) and the United States (2 million) are rapidly losing their past preponderance.³² For

example, the growth in the number of people in the United States who were born in India fell from 26 percent to 16 percent between 2005 and 2015. Similarly, the number of Indian immigrants in the UAE has also slowed dramatically in the past five years, rising only 20 percent from 2010 to 2015, compared with an increase of 126 percent from 2005 to 2010. Saudi Arabia now hosts 1.9 million India-born migrants, Kuwait 1 million, and Oman around 780,000, but the relative share of the Gulf has been decreasing as Indians increasingly look for new destinations to settle in Africa, Europe, and Southeast Asia.³³

The current Indian diaspora is wealthier as well, becoming increasingly important to the economic objectives of post-reform India. The rise in remittances has been dramatic (see figure 3), amounting to \$68.9 billion in 2015—the largest transfer to any country worldwide.³⁴ These remittances far exceeded India's earnings from high technology exports (\$17.3 billion in 2014) and constituted 3.3 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) in 2015, compared to just 0.4 percent in the case of China. In some regional states like Kerala, around 30 percent of GDP now comprises remittances.³⁵

According to the World Bank, given the weakening of the Indian rupee, “a surge in remittances is expected as nonresident Indians take advantage of the cheaper goods, services, and assets back home,” which is increasingly important for India to stabilize its balance of payments.³⁶ Far from being a mere obligation or nationalist objective, the safety and well-being of Indian migrants will have an increasing impact on India's economic growth and objectives.

Figure 3: Remittances to India



Source: World Bank, “Personal Remittances Received,” DataBank, http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.CD.DT?end=2015&locations=IN&name_desc=false&start=1975&view=chart.

Building on India's Evacuation Experience

While protecting the diaspora has always been a key mission of the Indian government, New Delhi has not always had the adequate resources to do so. In line with then prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru's policy to encourage overseas Indians to integrate within their host countries, a 1952 government report instructed all diplomatic missions abroad that the "first objective in regard to Indian overseas communities should be to help them to assimilate themselves to local conditions and to identify themselves as closely as possible with the interests of the indigenous population."³⁷ When Indians were targeted by discriminatory policies in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Burma (Myanmar), or Eastern African countries, the Indian government sometimes intervened to mediate but rarely conducted major evacuation operations.³⁸

As the number and economic profile of migrant Indians started to change after the 1970s, the Indian government began to change its diaspora policy. The creation of a special diaspora division in the MEA, followed by a new Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, in 2004, signaled New Delhi's recognition that a new generation of migrants—whether low-skilled labor in the Gulf or wealthy expatriates in Europe and North America—warranted targeted policies and special protection.

Particularly since 2014, the Indian government has dedicated unprecedented attention and resources to these evacuation operations, in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's focus on leveraging the diaspora to facilitate India's economic and political interests abroad.³⁹ The MEA has thus developed an aggressive public diplomacy to brand these operations via social media.⁴⁰

However, beyond the increase in governmental interest in recent years, India has vast experience in conducting expatriate evacuation operations. While there is much research on the doctrines, emergency plans, and standard operating procedures of other countries, little is known about the Indian tradition, leading many analysts to conclude that India is either inexperienced or incapable of safely bringing its diaspora home in times of crisis. In reality, however, over the last few decades, India has conducted more than thirty complex operations to rescue its distressed citizens abroad.⁴¹ Table 3 includes a few examples and offers some details on the logistics involved.

India has conducted more than thirty complex operations to rescue its distressed citizens abroad

Table 3: Indian Expatriate Evacuation Operations (1947–2016)

Abbreviations: AI: Air India; IA: Indian Airlines; IAF: Indian Air Force; IN: Indian Navy; NA: Not available; NRI: Nonresident Indian (Indian citizen); PIO: Person of Indian Origin (foreign citizen)

This is a non-exhaustive selection of major operations.

Time Frame	Country	Evacuees/ Total NRIs	Evacuation Assets, Logistics, and Other Details
July 2016	South Sudan	153/700	Operation Sankat Mochan: Two C-17 aircrafts from Juba. Led on the ground by Minister of State for External Affairs V. K. Singh.
2015	Iraq	7,000/NA	Chartered and scheduled Iraqi Airways aircrafts, mainly out of Najaf. Operational centers set up in Baghdad, Erbil, Karbala, and Najaf.
April 2015	Yemen	6,710/NA	Chartered: 2 AI planes, 17 flights from Sanaa to Djibouti. IN: INS <i>Mumbai</i> , <i>Sumitra</i> , and <i>Tarkash</i> from Yemen to Djibouti. IAF: 3 C-17 Globemasters from Djibouti to India. Most emigrants evacuated via an AI air bridge from Sanaa to Djibouti, then onward to India via AI, IA, and IN.
2014–2015	Libya	3,600/ 5,600	Including 289 evacuees, in August 2014, via chartered ferry from Benghazi. Chartered AI flights from Malta and Tunisia.
May–June 2014	Ukraine	1,000/NA	Special AI flights.
June–August 2011	Yemen	700–800/ NA	Special AI flights.
February–March 2011	Libya	16,400/ 18,000	Chartered 4 AI and 2 commercial aircrafts (JetAirways and Kingfisher Airlines) and 2 passenger ships. IAF: IL-76 (Sirte to Cairo: 186 evacuees). IN: INS <i>Jalashwa</i> , INS <i>Mysore</i> , and INS <i>Aditya</i> .
January–February 2011	Egypt	700/3,600	Special AI flights.
June 2010	Kyrgyzstan	110/NA	IAF: IL-76. Consular support, accommodation, and emergency travel funds on loan.
July 2006	Lebanon	2,300/ 12,000	Operation Sukoon. Naval evacuation to air bridge from Cyprus. Land evacuation for 100 via bus to Damascus. INS <i>Mumbai</i> , INS <i>Betwa</i> , INS <i>Brahmaputra</i> and auxiliary tanker, and INS <i>Shakti</i> . IAF transport aircraft landed in Beirut with relief. Chartered AI planes from Cyprus.

Time Frame	Country	Evacuees/ Total NRIs	Evacuation Assets, Logistics, and Other Details
March 2003	Kuwait	3,500/ 300,000	Special AI flights.
October 1996	United Arab Emirates	60,000/NA	Extra flights by AI. Indian missions issued more than 45,844 emergency certificates to Indians seeking to leave before the expiration of an amnesty period for illegal foreigners.
May 1994	Yemen	1,700/7,000	IAF: IL-76 out of Sanaa, and special AI flights.
August-October 1990	Kuwait/Gulf	170,000/ 200,000	Approximately 500 special AI flights from Jordan and other Gulf countries. Passenger ship from Dubai. Emergency relief ship to Kuwait. IAF: IL-76 for ministerial visit and evacuation. Largest civilian airlift in history.
January 1986	Yemen	800/3,000	About 350 Indians evacuated from Aden at government cost. Another 425 reached Djibouti on their own and evacuated from there to India.
1980	Iraq	11,000/NA	Special AI flights. Assistance for the issue of exit-transit visas, supply of travel documents, transportation, food, and financial loans to finance airfare.
September-November 1972	Uganda	5,000/NA	Mostly PIOs, hosted by India for temporary residence.
1968	Kenya	2,500/NA	India agrees to temporarily host PIOs on humanitarian grounds, providing that they migrate onward to the United Kingdom.
1963-1964	Burma, Southeast Asia	300,000/ 550,000	Consular and financial support for land route evacuation via Northeast India and charter of ships. Up to 25,000 Indians evacuated per week at peak time.
1962-1963	Mozambique	2,300/ 2,400	Chartered passenger ships and financial assistance for detainees of Portuguese colonial authorities.

India's evacuation operations reveal four major patterns:

- The MEA normally serves as the focal organization and contact point for these contingency operations, mostly in coordination with the prime minister's office and other ministries.
- There is a spectrum of operation types, ranging from special consular, logistical, and financial support for repatriation to the creation of emergency coordination cells in New Delhi, to chartering civilian airplanes and vessels to conduct operations, and, finally, the deployment of military capabilities.
- The frequency, size, and complexity of operations have increased in recent years, particularly since the 1990s. The Indian government is now more often called to task to repatriate larger numbers of distressed Indians in increasingly volatile environments.
- The navy and air force are now playing an unprecedented role in the preparation, coordination, and execution of evacuation operations, making use of their new transportation assets to deploy and operate beyond India's regional neighborhood.

The success of some of India's past operations stem mostly from the extraordinary effort and personal risk taken by government officials, especially diplomats serving in conflict zones. However, overall success does not mean there have not been failures and shortcomings. During the 1986 civil war in Yemen, 850 distressed Indians were left stranded waiting for a chartered merchant ship to arrive, while thousands of American, British, French, Russian, and other expatriates were evacuated.⁴² This kind of situation is no longer acceptable. New Delhi can and must do better to ensure the safety of Indians abroad—as a key element of its foreign policy. As India seeks to become a leading global power, it must increase its capacity to protect its citizens worldwide.

Operational Challenges and Policy Recommendations

New Delhi should continue to build on its rich experience. However, it must also realize that there is significant scope for improvement. A larger and increasingly mobile and diverse diaspora poses new communication, coordination, and operational challenges for the Indian government to conduct such future operations efficiently. To ensure the protection and safe homecoming of its migrants, address recurrent shortcomings, and overcome such challenges, the Indian government must strive to (1) learn from the past by adopting best practices; (2) institutionalize standard operating procedures; (3) invest in training and contingency plans; (4) show greater flexibility to involve

and deploy military forces; (5) improve inter-organizational coordination; (6) reduce Air India's financial burden; (7) improve resources to monitor, identify, and communicate with migrants; and (8) develop outreach mechanisms to manage increasingly vocal public opinion.

Learn From the Past

India's experience in evacuating its citizens from crisis situations abroad remains largely understudied. With a couple of exceptions, there are no significant pieces of research or major studies published on India's past operations in the public domain.⁴³ The 2001 *Report of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora*, which set out the basis for India's current diaspora policy, included innumerable recommendations but did not once mention evacuation operations as a necessary instrument of state policy.

Studying India's best practices would help institutionalize them and avoid what a former Indian ambassador laments as "the need to reinvent the wheel every time a crisis erupts."⁴⁴ Reflecting on his 1990 experience in the Gulf, an Indian government official recalled that "there was no proper follow-up to institute SOP [standard operating procedures]. That is our weakness."⁴⁵ A senior Indian foreign service officer with ground experience in the Gulf region emphasized that "experience matters crucially during such [evacuation] operations," and India has a lot of it.

While improvements have certainly taken place, much more needs to be done. In an analysis of the 2011 Libya operation, strategic affairs commentator Rohan Joshi notes that the incident should "trigger a greater analysis and strategic planning for such contingencies" in the long term.⁴⁶ Similarly, naval expert Vijay Sakhujia emphasizes that a "sophisticated strategy and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) will need to be put in place to respond to overseas crises which have a well-oiled system of channels for communications, diplomatic tools, speedy operations and above all, a robust naval and air NEO infrastructure."⁴⁷

In the short term, India may be able to muddle through these operations by mobilizing massive resources and relying on the heroic sacrifices of diplomats, Air India crews, and military officials. Such an ad hoc approach, however, is not sustainable in the long term, and the government must therefore urgently recognize that it cannot continue to gloss over important operational shortcomings and that there is significant scope for improvement.

For example, the evacuation operation in Yemen in 2015—which attracted much public attention given that Modi invested personal political capital and significant governmental resources—was promoted as a perfect success. In reality, however, the first Indians were evacuated several days after a Chinese PLA vessel had successfully left Yemeni shores with hundreds of Chinese citizens on board.⁴⁸

To learn from the past and institutionalize best practices, the Indian government should take the following actions:

- Support policy-oriented research on India's vast experience in conducting evacuation operations. Rather than an academic exercise, such analysis needs to be a public and joint effort that provides scholars with privileged access to official diplomatic and military records and to government officials with on-the-ground experience.
- Document the institutional memory of senior diplomats and military and other government officials that have successfully conducted evacuation operations in recent years. Such efforts would help transmit their expertise and best practices to younger officials.
- Reach out to key stakeholders, associations, and activists in the diaspora that participated in past evacuation operations. By listening to their grievances and suggestions, the government can build on best practices and correct shortcomings.

Develop Standard Operating Procedures

Despite varying local conditions that require flexibility and adaptation, all evacuations include core operations that call for standard operating procedures. The Indian mantra of *jugaad* (muddling through with quick-fix solutions) must therefore be the exception and not the norm.

In the absence of clear procedures for priority evacuations, embarkation processes are often based on ad hoc or personal, political, and economic interests. For example, during his August 1990 visit to Kuwait, diplomat K. P. Fabian recalls how the selection of evacuees was initially left at the discretion of then external affairs minister I. K. Gujral, who began to distribute his business cards as passes to individuals to fly out on priority basis on the IL-76 aircraft transporting him. Fabian was thus suddenly faced with hundreds of Punjabis, “people [who] were essentially wealthy, healthy and were all men,” while thousands of women, children, and elderly camped on the street and in the heat outside the embassy.⁴⁹

To avoid such episodic failures, the Indian government should facilitate an interministerial effort, with contributions from military and intelligence agencies, to develop a manual with standard operating procedures for evacuation operations. The manual should include practical guidelines on implementing the four aforementioned evacuation phases—for example, the following:

- Establish a clear chain of command and division of labor among various ministries, overseas missions, and other organizations involved.
- Identify regional support bases, local assembling camps, and routes for evacuation.

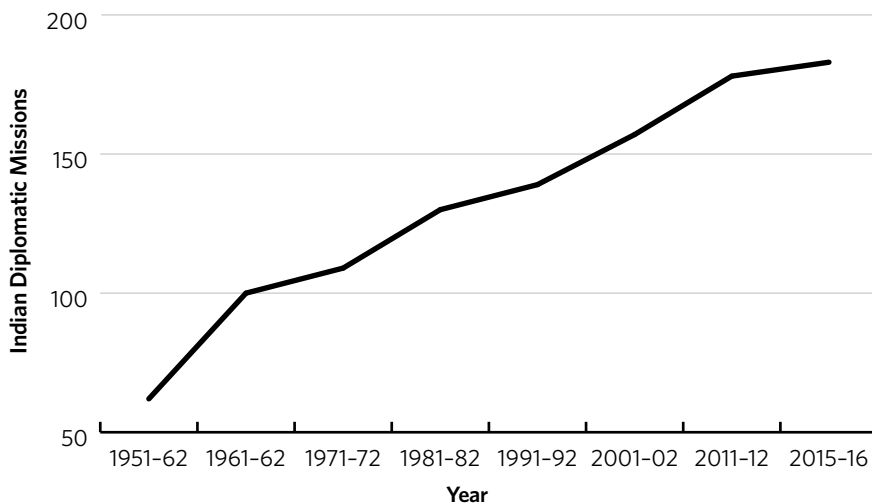
- Adopt country-specific warden systems to communicate with expatriates.
- Sign standing service agreements with local companies providing emergency transportation and relief to avoid lack of supplies and inflated costs during crises.
- Develop criteria regulating priority lists of evacuation and embarkation processes.
- Set out negotiation rules on how to ensure ceasefires and safe passage with local authorities, including warring and hostile factions.

Train, Prepare, and Collaborate

Beyond translating its abundant evacuation experience into manuals with standard operating procedures, the Indian government can also improve its capacity and the effectiveness of future operations by training its officers and increasing their preparedness to operate in complex environments. Particularly in terms of security and logistics, Indian diplomats cannot continue to rely on the sporadic goodwill of local populations or communities of Indian origin.

Besides the safety of its personnel, the Indian government must dedicate more resources to securing its physical infrastructure abroad. New Delhi now has almost 200 diplomatic missions, a 30 percent increase from 1991 (see figure 4). Unlike several Western governments, the Indian government tends to keep its missions open even in extremely hostile environments to reassure and protect its local expatriates. Should its diplomatic installations come under increasing threat from terrorist attacks, the Indian government would have to deploy officers that are trained to operate in active war zones, under constant threat.

Figure 4: Number of Indian Diplomatic Missions



Finally, the success of India's increasingly complex evacuation operations relies on New Delhi's ability to collaborate with other governments. Instead of working in isolation, with its limited capacity, India has to consider investing more in cooperative frameworks—at the political, legal, operational, and military levels—that can facilitate coordinated behavior.

As emphasized by a senior government official, when it comes to complex operations in hostile environments far from India, “practice and preparedness makes perfection.”⁵⁰ To improve on its experience, the Indian government should consider the following actions:

- Offer security training for all incoming Indian Foreign Service probationers on how to operate in active conflict zones, with support from the Indian Police Service or Indian Army.
- Conduct evacuation operation simulations and periodic emergency drills at headquarters in New Delhi and at key missions abroad to increase preparedness.
- Create rapid reaction teams of Indian military, police, and other security personnel that can be deployed as advisory missions to protect diplomatic staff and installations in hostile environments.
- Consider the creation of a NEO coordination group (NCG) and solicit the participation of several Asian states with significant expatriate populations in the Gulf and Indian Ocean regions. This group could model the NCG established in 2000 by several European and North American countries and which was successfully implemented in 2006 during the evacuation in Lebanon.⁵¹
- Encourage Indian diplomatic missions to intensify political and consular dialogue with their counterparts so as to exchange information and prepare joint emergency and evacuation plans.

Involve and Deploy Military Forces

To strengthen India's evacuation capacity, the government could further engage its military when its diplomatic apparatus is overstretched or on-the-ground conditions warrant the deployment of lethal force. While evacuation operations have, in the past, been mostly civilian-led, the changing size and distribution of the diaspora will likely require greater participation by the Indian Armed Forces. This is compatible with military modernization plans over the last decade and the services' increased global presence and interest in developing long-distance operations beyond South Asia.

The navy's and air force's active role in the crises in Lebanon and Libya attests to these widening geopolitical horizons. In 2011, the then chief of naval staff N. K. Verma described NEOs as a new priority for his service:

With the increasing presence of our people and investment overseas, the need to provide security assurance in times of crisis is also growing. In the recent past, the Navy has been called upon to provide relief to our Diasporas in the form of non-combatant evacuation. . . . Given the prevailing strategic uncertainty, it is likely that such instances would increase in the future. Our future maritime strategy must therefore build in the capability to provide requisite security assurances to our Diasporas abroad.⁵²

The navy has, in many ways, already taken the lead, with its 2007 maritime strategy listing “actions to assist the Indian diaspora and Indian interests abroad” as a “likely scenario” for the use of military force. Yet, besides listing “support for the diaspora” as a key driver for maritime cooperation and NEOs as “benign operations,” few details are offered.⁵³ The 2015 version refers to “security of Indian investments and other interests overseas, including [the] Indian diaspora” as a key driver of India’s maritime outlook, but does not mention how.⁵⁴ Similarly, according to a former deputy chief of the Indian Air Force (IAF), the Indian military should play a more active role in NEOs to “project India’s new extra-regional strategic interests and capabilities.”⁵⁵

Beyond clear roles, evacuation operations also require specific material and operational capabilities that will need to inform India’s defense modernization, production, and acquisition objectives, particularly regarding air transport and amphibious landing capabilities, specific training, and interservice and civil-military coordination mechanisms.

On the *material* side, recent modernization efforts will serve India’s future evacuation operations well, with an overall shift from regional/tactical to extra-regional and strategic capabilities. For strategic airlifts, the IAF now has seventeen long-range IL-76MD and is further enhancing this capability with ten C-17 Globemasters—two of which were recently deployed during the Yemen crisis to evacuate about 2,000 people.⁵⁶

Tactical airlifts are especially important for evacuation operations in neighboring countries. For this purpose, India has 119 AN-32, which are crucial for cargo drop and cross-border regional operations in South Asia (with a capacity of about fifty passengers).⁵⁷ The IAF is also acquiring twelve C-130J Super Hercules, and its advanced training and equipment enabled its first-ever nighttime evacuation in 2007.

The navy is also modernizing to enhance its capability to operate with greater autonomy at greater distances. Its amphibious profile has improved dramatically with the induction of the INS *Jalashwa* (deployed to Libya in 2011) and will be further enhanced as India looks to acquire four multirole support vessels.⁵⁸ Other significant resources include nine landing ship tanks, six landing craft, and nine replenishment and support vessels. The navy’s air wing is also being strengthened with four more P-81 maritime reconnaissance aircrafts that can play an important communication and support role during long-distance operations.⁵⁹

Beyond just expanding its material capabilities, the military must simultaneously improve its *operational* expertise. The armed forces' significant experience in conducting humanitarian and other civilian contingency operations abroad will have to be built on for the specific purpose of diaspora evacuation operations. Their experience includes India's contribution to UN peacekeeping missions worldwide since the 1950s, mostly in Africa and Asia; its military interventions and peacekeeping operations in the region, such as in East Pakistan (1971), Sri Lanka (1987–1990), and the Maldives (1988); and its participation in international humanitarian operations such as those in response to the deadly 2004 Asian tsunami or the 2008 Nargis cyclone in Myanmar. Domestic relief operations also offer valuable experience and lessons in civil-military coordination, with India's armed forces often operating in tandem with the National Disaster Management Authority, which comprises eight paramilitary battalions.

India's military experience in emergency response, deployment, and evacuation—both at home and abroad—offers a great asset to be harnessed for the increasing complexity of diaspora evacuation operations. Such missions may have been peaceful in the past, thanks mostly to India's nonaligned stance and diplomatic skills, but there may be less permissive situations ahead that will test the preparedness, capability, and rules of engagement of Indian military forces abroad. To prepare for such contingencies, the Indian government should consider the following steps:

- Direct the Indian Armed Forces, in particular its navy and air force, to develop an Indian NEO doctrine, setting out standard operating procedures for military deployment abroad.
- Designate the Integrated Defense Staff as the nodal organization to improve interservices and civil-military coordination during evacuation operations, especially through its Crisis Management Committee.
- Invest in specific training for military personnel to conduct out-of-area evacuation operations, including through joint exercises with other friendly military services that have greater experience in this domain.
- Adapt military modernization, defense procurement, and production plans to focus on acquiring specific assets that increase India's long-range military transportation, naval, aerial, and amphibious evacuation capabilities.
- Conclude bilateral defense agreements that guarantee the Indian Armed Forces continued access to military support bases in the Gulf and other critical regions to conduct evacuation operations.
- Expand the network of defense attachés at India's diplomatic missions and sensitize them to reach out to host-country armed forces to discuss and prepare contingency scenarios for joint evacuation operations.

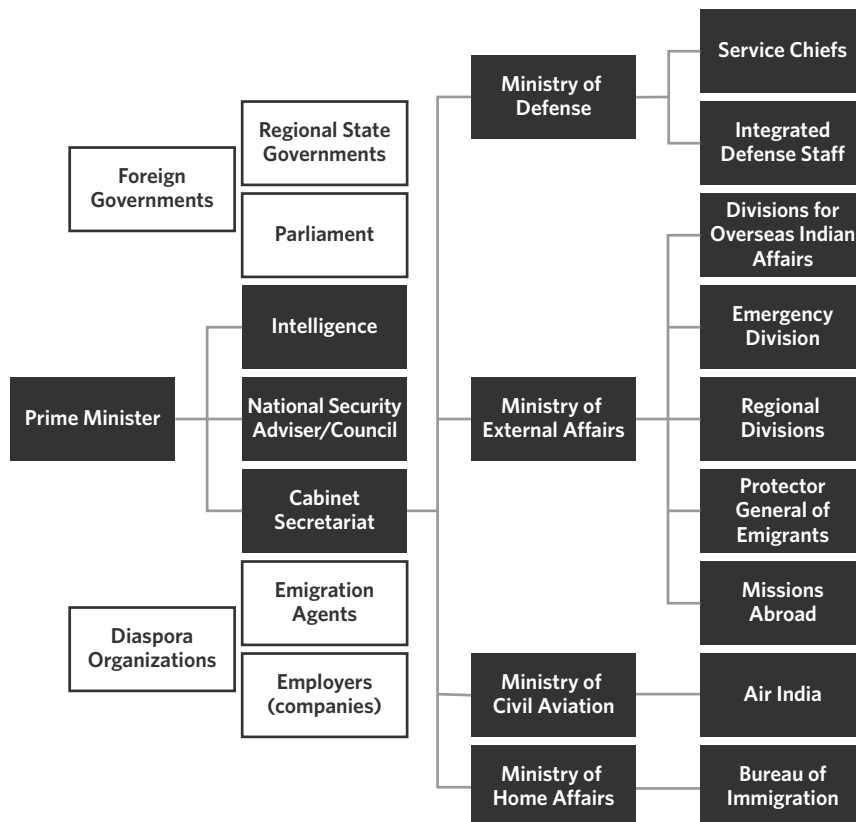
- Train India’s special forces to be deployed and use lethal firepower in hostile environments abroad to safely extricate expatriates taken hostage by hostile forces.

Improve Coordination

When it comes to executing complex overseas evacuation operations in an extremely short time frame and under high risk, attempts at optimal coordination can often be more of an obstacle than a solution. The Indian experience demonstrates how, despite lacking resources and standard operating procedures, evacuation operations have sometimes been realized with relative success.

However, there still is tremendous room for improvement, especially as the MEA assumes more of a coordinating role instead of being the exclusive implementation authority. Evacuation operations now involve a rising number of government organizations, the military services, and nongovernmental pressure and interest groups (see figure 5). Such rising institutional complexity poses a tremendous coordination challenge to future operations.

Figure 5: Organizations Involved in Diaspora Evacuation Operations



There are three levels to this organizational complexity and decisionmaking process. The first is the intragovernmental level. Here, the MEA remains the nodal point for evacuation operations, in close interaction with the prime minister's office. During most crises, the MEA takes the initiative to create a special emergency coordination cell, often housed in the Cabinet Secretariat.⁶⁰ In 2011, for example, the prime minister established an Inter-Ministerial Committee of Secretaries under the chairmanship of the Cabinet Secretary to examine issues relating to the repatriation, relief, and rehabilitation of Indian nationals affected by conflicts in the Gulf, North Africa, and West Asia. State governments concerned were also requested to assist them and provide relief where necessary.⁶¹

The creation of a separate Ministry for Overseas Indian Affairs in 2004 led to frequent functional overlaps, eventually leading to its reintegration into the MEA in 2014. In practice, on-the-ground, diplomatic missions continue to play a leading role through the respective ambassador or high commissioner. As the military becomes increasingly involved, one can expect an increased demand for civil-military coordination challenges between the MEA, prime minister, and Ministry of Defense and military service chiefs.

At the societal level, government agencies must also interact with various pressure groups. In the parliament, under pressure from constituents who have relatives abroad, elected representatives have shown increased interest in the rights of expatriates and the conduct of evacuation operations. Regional state governments and their diaspora agencies have designed their own expatriate support mechanisms. Indian multinational companies operating in conflict zones often have their own plans as well to ensure the safe evacuation of their employees. Finally, diaspora pressure groups, associations and networks, and other civil society pressure groups constantly lobby the Indian government for specific assistance during crises.

Finally, at the international level, coordination and communication must be ensured with other states, multilateral organizations, and multinational forces organizing other evacuation operations. India has traditionally operated in isolation, unlike NATO member states that often deploy (and exercise for) joint operations. As more countries race to evacuate their expatriates from conflict zones, there will be rising competitive dynamics and new coordination challenges that will compel New Delhi to adopt a more collaborative approach.

To overcome these challenges and develop more flexible institutions and greater organizational coordination, the Indian government should, for example, take the following actions:

- Institutionalize a permanent interministerial coordinating mechanism, building on the 2015 experience of the Standing Group for Repatriation of Indian Nationals from Abroad, which facilitated cooperation among the ministries of external affairs, home, defense, shipping, and civil aviation.⁶²

- Incentivize cross-posting of administrative and military officials dealing with diaspora affairs, including in the political and consular sections of diplomatic missions in countries with volatile security conditions.
- Encourage diplomatic mission chiefs in specific regions to meet more regularly to exchange political risk assessments and prepare joint evacuation contingency plans for their regional cluster, rather than working in silos or relying only on New Delhi.
- Facilitate the creation of diaspora emergency cells and contingency plans by regional state governments, following guidelines set out by central authorities.

Reduce Air India's Burden

Air India (AI), the country's national flag carrier, has suffered an exceptional burden in conducting evacuation operations. AI aircrafts and crew have been called into service for innumerable missions in recent years. The most notable example was when it conducted approximately 500 flights during the 1990 evacuation out of Amman, Jordan. In effect, for many decades, Air India has doubled as India's emergency reserve fleet for diaspora evacuation operations.

The financial burden this puts on the airline is not always appreciated. In the aftermath of the 1990 operation, for example, one diplomat recalls that there had hardly been any concern about vetting flight costs beforehand:

When Air India, through the Ministry of Civil Aviation presented the bill, our [MEA] Finance Division initially asked the usual questions but some of which were "unusual." One such question was settled when we were able to convince Finance that there was no way we could have asked for an estimate and got it vetted by Finance before starting the operation.⁶³

AI can thus be immediately pressed into service by a simple Cabinet Secretariat decision via the Ministry of Civil Aviation. Short of a formal evacuation, several crises have also seen the MEA adding special flights on certain itineraries, upgrading the capacity of existing AI connections, offering discount fares, or waving penalties on rescheduling, cancellation, or refund requests by expatriates.

The burden created by such ad hoc utilization is becoming increasingly unsustainable, as AI is now in dire straits and faces competition from private airlines that are not similarly "taxed" with evacuation operations. Commenting on the MEA's chronic delays in reimbursing the airline for such operations, a senior AI official therefore laments that "we really have no choice, they [MEA and other ministries] want us to be private and profitable but then expect us to be at their service all the time as if we were an auxiliary air force."⁶⁴ Beyond

financial costs, AI crews and ground staff also have incurred significant personal risks in their heroic efforts to establish air bridges out of conflict zones.

To mitigate the financial and human burden on AI, the Indian government should take the following actions:

- Establish a permanent civil reserve air fleet that pools aircraft from AI and Indian private airlines for evacuation operations based on pre-established requisition and reimbursement procedures. This could be modeled on the U.S. Civil Reserve Air Fleet, which includes almost 900 stand-by aircraft from thirty-two private airlines.⁶⁵
- Designate and train specific AI crews, especially pilots and ground staff, to operate in active war zones abroad, in collaboration with the IAF.

Identify and Monitor the Diaspora

With a larger and more diverse pool of Indian citizens residing or traveling abroad, the MEA's consular apparatus will face increasing difficulties in tracking, monitoring, and reaching out to expatriates. In the past, this was often achieved through informal consular channels with diaspora networks and community associations, which would keep the mission up to date on the approximate size, profile, and distribution of the Indian community. The MEA also traditionally monitored the outflows of Indian low-skilled citizens through the Ministry of Home Affairs' Bureau of Immigration, in coordination with the Ministry of Labor and the Protector General of Emigrants.

To secure the diaspora, the Indian government has to invest in mechanisms to better identify and monitor the overseas community's mobility patterns. The success of an evacuation operation hinges on accurate estimates of the number and location of expatriate populations. Similarly, extrication has often been delayed by difficulties in establishing the identity of people claiming to be Indian citizens. Monitoring the flows of the Indian diaspora is extremely important in the first phase of any emergency response, when the MEA is required to assess the numbers, profile, and geographic distribution of Indian citizens in any given crisis zone. This poses particular challenges for India's

external intelligence service, the Research and Analysis Wing, which has valuable experience in monitoring the Indian diaspora but mostly for deterrence purposes and to prevent terrorist activities.

Resources will also have to be invested in more proactive missions, such as monitoring the flows of Indian citizens abroad, assessing the volatility of their respective security environments, fostering cooperative links with foreign intelligence agencies, and collecting geographical and other intelligence for possible evacuation operations. A recent report thus emphasizes that Indian diplomatic missions

The Indian government has to invest in mechanisms to better identify and monitor the overseas community's mobility patterns.

“must formulate a method of tracking numbers and location of the Indian diaspora and establish reliable methods of communicating with them in their areas of responsibility.”⁶⁶

To achieve these objectives, the Indian government should consider taking the following steps:

- Encourage its diplomatic missions to provide online consular registration forms for permanent residents, instead of requiring their physical presence.
- Develop an online overseas travel registration platform for all Indian travelers, building on the Consular Services Management System, which is currently restricted to students.
- Utilize new communication technologies (from SMS to WhatsApp) to provide both permanent expatriates and short-term travelers with real-time updates during crises and evacuation operations.
- Consider making the Aadhaar unique identification card compulsory for Indian citizens abroad to facilitate biometric identity verification and reduce identity fraud.
- Continue to crack down on agents and other intermediaries that facilitate the illegal migration of low-skilled and illiterate Indian workers, whose vulnerability during crises poses a significant security liability.
- Sustain investment in pre-departure training of low-skilled workers, informing them of basic rights and security procedures to follow in case of emergency and evacuation.
- Strengthen the human and technological resources of the Central Passport Organization, incentivizing it to work more closely with the Indian Foreign Service consular staff.

Manage a Demanding Public

In an open, plural, and federal democracy like India, where the diaspora’s economic wealth plays an increasing influential role, evacuation operations often come under intense public scrutiny. When the lives and assets of Indians are at risk abroad, civil society organizations mobilize and lobby elected representatives and regional authorities to pressure the central government to take a more proactive stance, which may hinder quiet diplomacy efforts and instead strain bilateral relations and further endanger the safety of overseas Indians.

Domestic pressures are compounded by the diaspora’s increasing political influence, both abroad and in India, and the consequent expectations about how New Delhi should act to ensure these individuals’ safety. Besides the economic influence noted above, NRIs are now allowed to vote in their home constituencies, and there are strong pressures to extend this right to consulates (or even constituencies) abroad.⁶⁷ Indian migrants have, over the last

decade, attained unprecedented influence in foreign capitals—most notably in Washington, DC—and remain politically influential in many other countries with important PIO populations, such as Fiji, Malaysia, and Mauritius.

With India's private and often sensationalist media allowing an unprecedented number of citizens to follow overseas events in real time, the government is often placed on the defensive. As the difference between the citizen NRI and noncitizen PIO diaspora gets blurred, there now are increasing calls

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for India to assume a more interventionist stance on behalf of overseas Indians. Such pressures pose a complex challenge to decisionmakers because, in principle, only Indian citizens are entitled to benefit from evacuation operations. The historical record shows, however, that India has several times given preferential treatment to PIOs, such as in Kenya (1968) or Uganda (1972), as well as to nationals from neighboring countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.⁶⁸ Modi's aggressive new diaspora policy has further raised the stakes by blurring these boundaries. For example, speaking to Indian workers in the UAE, in 2015, he emphasized that "wherever my Indians are, we never see the color of the passport, their link with the motherland is enough."⁶⁹

As more Indians seek additional citizenships and the PIO population increases, this will raise tensions. One analyst therefore cautiously notes that "the issue of safety and well-being of many ethnic Indians living in the Pacific Islands of Fiji, Mauritius in the Indian Ocean, or Indian minority living in distant lands of the Middle East, or even Trinidad and Guyana could trigger a crisis response by the Indian government."⁷⁰

To reduce the potential escalatory effect of domestic pressures, and to continue to successfully execute diaspora evacuation operations, the Indian government could take the following steps:

- Expand its public diplomacy resources to provide domestic and diaspora audiences with real-time updates on the progress and achievements of evacuation operations, based on a communication strategy that privileges transparency without compromising on operational security.
- Embed Indian media representatives more frequently in evacuation operations, especially if the military is deployed. This will allow journalists to transmit more realistic insights into the Indian expatriate community's profile, interests, and ground environment and to moderate expectations back home.
- Continue to reassure the Indian diaspora by ensuring that high-level political representatives—including the prime minister, central ministers, and regional chief ministers—are personally engaged in the success of the operations, whether on the ground or by welcoming evacuees on arrival in India.

- Avoid blurring the boundaries between Indian citizens and people of Indian origin. The former (NRIs) must be the primary—and often the exclusive—priority of evacuation operations. The political leadership must be sensitized to the dangers of signaling any governmental commitment to protect noncitizens of Indian origin, a foreign adventurism that risks overstretching the government’s evacuation resources and entangling India in the domestic affairs of other countries.

Conclusion

The world is witnessing unprecedented levels of migration and mobility, leading to a growing gap between countries’ territorial control and their populations. Governments are responding by developing diaspora policies, including new evacuation doctrines and capabilities. Bringing expatriate nationals home in times of crisis is no longer the concern of only a few high-income countries, mostly in North America and in Western Europe, which traditionally had both the intent and capabilities to conduct such complex missions. As new rising powers are becoming increasingly dependent on the economic contributions and political influence of their expatriates, they are expanding their consular, diplomatic, and military assets to support, defend, and extricate them.

As more than 11 million Indians now permanently reside abroad, and about 20 million travel each year for tourism, business, and other short-term purposes, the Indian government faces increasing challenges to protect its citizens. The diaspora’s security has become an Indian national interest, given that expatriates endow the country with new economic wealth and strategic influence. When natural catastrophes or conflicts erupt abroad, New Delhi is forced to conduct complex evacuation operations to safely bring its people back home.

India is not a newcomer to diaspora evacuation operations, having conducted more than thirty missions across Asia and Africa since 1947. However, given the lack of any formal doctrine or emergency plan, the past success of Indian evacuation missions has mostly been due to the individual sacrifices of officials in its diplomatic corps, flagship carrier Air India, and armed forces.

New Delhi will not be able to continue relying on heroic and ad hoc efforts. Given that the diaspora is expanding and becoming more mobile and assertive, evacuation operations are likely to become more frequent, complex, and distant, which poses challenges to capacity and coordination. As the Indian Armed Forces, in particular the navy and air force, develop new capabilities and interests to operate out-of-area and in support of such contingency operations, there is also a need for a new civil-military balance in decisionmaking, coordination, and operational matters.

New Delhi will not be able to continue relying on heroic and ad hoc efforts.

To protect its migrants and travelers more effectively, the Indian government needs to dedicate significant resources toward building on best practices from the past, developing standard operating procedures, expanding training and preparedness, institutionalizing emergency evacuation plans, and increasing coordination with other states. By enhancing its capacity to conduct evacuation operations and ensure the safety of its citizens abroad, the Indian government will not only be pursuing its immediate national interests but will also be able to credibly project power and assume a leading role beyond its subcontinental shores.

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