



Intelligence

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Getting Out in a Hurry

When personnel are trapped in a foreign country during a crisis, companies often turn to groups that specialize in evacuations.

WHEN THE RECENT demonstrations throughout Egypt began turning violent, officials at Middlebury College in Vermont quickly decided to evacuate the 22 Middlebury students who were studying in an Arabic program in Alexandria, along with two staff members. But getting the students out of the country proved too difficult a task for the school's insurance provider.

Michael Geisler, vice president for language schools, schools abroad, and graduate programs, turned to evacuation company Global Rescue for assistance. The Boston-based company chartered private flights to get the students

and staff out of Alexandria and on their way back to the United States.

Sometimes, there will also be a government effort. In this case, the U.S. State Department initiated an evacuation effort to get people out of Egypt, but those evacuees still had to reimburse the U.S. government, and the private evacuations were quicker in many cases.

Insurance companies and global evacuation companies offer all sorts of services for getting clients out when dangerous situations arise or when emergency medical care is needed. It's necessary to do research on what exactly is covered by each company and

policy; for example, many insurance plans cover only medical evacuation, not emergency mass evacuation.

Another issue is whether the provider can deliver in a crisis. The college's original insurance company was expected to pick up the students and take them to the airport but that never happened. By contrast, Global Rescue had security personnel on the ground working on the Middlebury case within three hours of signing the contract with the school. Global Rescue has the resources to deal with such situations on the fly and to provide hands-on attention. Its security officers, many of

whom are former military, escort clients to the airports or evacuation points.

Other companies have similar services. Travel Security Services, which is a joint venture between International SOS and Control Risks, had an evacuation assembly area set up at a hotel near the Cairo airport but clients had to find their own transportation to that meeting location; at that point, they were escorted to their plane and taken care of by the company.

Evacuation services do not come cheap. International SOS charges an average \$80-\$90 per person for a 10-day trip, according to spokesperson



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Meghan Moran, and rates can be higher depending on the types of services the policy includes. Global Rescue starts its medical-only membership at about \$329 per person per year, according to CEO Dan Richards, but he points out that the figure can roughly double when you add in evacuation and crisis response. And when companies or indi-

evacuations. Communication was spotty as the Internet and cell phone service was down intermittently for long periods of time. “We had a lot of landline numbers, so we did communicate, believe it or not, by the old landline. It’s always good to know that we can fall back on that,” says Puig. He adds that the most challenging part of the evacuations in

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viduals call a company to arrange service while they are already in the midst of an emergency and are not existing clients, they will be charged the cost of the evacuation, which can be pricy, says Richards. Geisler acknowledges the high price, but he says in this instance, “you get what you pay for.”

Often, a company is only as good as its regional contacts. Although Middlebury’s original insurance provider had no trouble performing medical evacuations and helping when things were less chaotic in the area, it could not get a plane to the students when they desperately needed it.

International SOS maintains regional flight desks all over the world, according to Alexander Puig, regional security director of the Americas for International SOS. Global Rescue not only had a plan to charter planes, it had backup plans for ground and maritime options in case flight plans fell through, says Richards.

There were numerous challenges involved in the Egypt

Egypt was dealing with the Cairo airport; there were a lot of logistics involved in getting planes in and out and having the appropriate crews and ground services on hand.

It was also challenging transporting individuals to the airports due to the abundance of checkpoints and the curfews. Still, rescue service providers were able to successfully complete thousands of evacuations during the crisis.

Geisler was impressed with Global Rescue, and in particular, he appreciated the company’s professionalism and availability. The company had someone standing by at the operation center to communicate with school officials, says Geisler.

“They asked some really good questions about what our operations were like, what the scope of it was, what our communication systems were,” Geisler says. Additionally, he notes that the company offers the option of being retained initially in an advisory role “and then you contract them on a per-service basis.”