



Top Three Lessons Learned from Evacuations in 2013

By [Daniel Richards](#)
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In July 2013, when all non-essential U.S. citizens were advised to depart Egypt after the resignation of former President Muhammed Morsi, any crisis response company worth its salt was already deep into planning for its clients there. Having prepared evacuation options well in advance, company professionals focused heavily on advising clients, with on-the-ground security specialists directing communication between in-country staff and their home organizations.

When it comes to executing a successful evacuation in such a scenario, there are lessons to be learned in three areas: preparation, communication, and enterprise situational awareness. While closely intertwined, each yields unique lessons:

Preparation

Consider two levels of preparation, tactical and strategic. At the tactical level, most companies have a good idea about what they need to do in an evacuation. Their plans are fairly sound, and staff in-country understand how to assemble, shelter in place, communicate effectively, conduct a facility shutdown and execute basic evacuation logistics. Security professionals can reinforce the proper steps with a tabletop exercise and plan review.

On a strategic level, the break in planning comes back at headquarters. Does the C-suite know the plan on the ground? There are multi-million-dollar strategic decisions to be made, and a considerable amount of information can be required to make these decisions. Typical questions might include what the amount in lost wages will be, or whether there will be contract breaches in a shutdown and evacuation. The C-suite often does not understand the details of the tactical plan very well.

Why the disconnect? Simply put, executives have day jobs. More often than not, tactical details do not rise to the C-level until there is an emergency. While the boss on the ground in-country is running the operation, who runs it for the CEO? To expect him or her to handle it solo at the last

minute is a mistake. It is critical for C-level executives to understand the plan and the kinds of decisions they will need to make during an emergency that is often far away and in a communication-constrained environment. Security professionals can assist by outlining in advance what information will be needed as well as the mechanisms for collecting required information in a timely manner.

Communication

Consider physical communication. If the government collapses, phones and email could go too. What is the back-up plan? You cannot run an operation on Twitter. You might not have Internet either. Satellite phones can be complicated and expensive. Whose budget will cover them? The companies that plan well have SAT phones at the ready and a cadre of trained operators. On a strategic level, it is extremely important to determine in advance how the C-suite will communicate with a degraded architecture during a crisis. Rehearsing ahead of time will help to iron out such points as how executives at headquarters will communicate with staff in-country. Overall, the need for explicit communication is reduced if the environment lends itself to being understood through enterprise situational awareness.

Enterprise Situational Awareness

Maintaining control over an operation can be difficult, especially when dealing with different time zones and cultures. Everyone is working in the heat of the moment, and details can slip through the cracks. To enhance situational awareness, one recommended technique is to employ a digital log book which captures details of each event. Email chains are messy, and recipients may or may not forward emails to others in a timely fashion. It is all too easy to lose visibility into the sequence of events. It is crucial to see in real-time where people are and to keep track of significant events.

The best situational awareness tools offer more than travel tracking. The most effective add intelligence – an analysis of the situation on the ground – and overlay it with travel tracking, graphic, geo-located representations of key assets, and the potential next steps of the operation. In this way, all essential personnel – including security professionals, home office leadership and logistics support personnel – can track assets and progress of an operation globally and in context every step of the way.

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