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United States Government Accountability Office  
Washington, DC 20548

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June 7, 2007

The Honorable Tom Lantos  
Chairman  
The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Foreign Affairs  
House of Representatives

The Honorable Thelma Drake  
House of Representatives

Subject: *State Department: The July 2006 Evacuation of American Citizens from Lebanon*

The evacuation of nearly 15,000 American citizens from Lebanon during July and August 2006 was one of the largest overseas evacuations of American citizens in recent history. The Department of State (State) has the lead responsibility for evacuating American citizens from overseas locations in times of crisis. However, the size and unforeseen nature of the Lebanon evacuation required the assistance of the Defense Department (DOD). Specifically, State needed DOD's ability to secure safe passage for American citizens in a war zone, as well as DOD's expertise and resources in providing sea and air transportation for large numbers of people.

At your request, we have been conducting an ongoing review of State's efforts to plan for, execute, and recover from the evacuation of U.S. government personnel and American citizens from overseas posts. As part of this review, we collected information on State and DOD's efforts to evacuate U.S. citizens from Lebanon in July and August 2006. To address your questions about the Lebanon evacuation, we briefed members of your staff on April 30, 2007, on (1) how State and DOD prepare for evacuations; (2) how State and DOD carried out the Lebanon evacuation; and (3) our observations on State and DOD's successes and challenges in implementing the evacuation. This letter summarizes the main points from our presentation. See Enclosure II for a copy of the briefing slides from that presentation, which we have updated based on technical comments from State and DOD.

To answer our three objectives, we met with State and DOD officials in Beirut, Lebanon; Nicosia, Cyprus; Washington D.C.; and at DOD's Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) headquarters in Illinois. In addition, we reviewed State and DOD documents on preparing for evacuations and other crises, as well as documentation related to the Lebanon evacuation that we obtained from these locations. We performed our work from July 2006 to April 2007 in accordance with generally

accepted government auditing standards. For additional information on our scope and methodology, see enclosure I.

## **Results in Brief**

State and DOD have several tools to prepare for the evacuation of American citizens in a time of crisis. For example, U.S. embassies world-wide are required to develop Emergency Action Plans (EAP) to prepare for emergencies, take part in periodic crisis management exercises, and develop estimates of the number of American citizens in each country. Within DOD, the Marine Corps regularly trains Marine Expeditionary Units on how to conduct evacuations of civilians. State and DOD also have a Memorandum of Agreement to define their respective roles and responsibilities in the event State requires DOD's assistance in carrying out an evacuation.

State and DOD's evacuation of American citizens from Lebanon was an unusually large, complex operation that arose suddenly from an unforeseen international crisis. On July 12, 2006, Hezbollah guerillas kidnapped two Israeli soldiers at Israel's border with Lebanon. Israel responded the next day with a major military assault, bombing Lebanon's airport in Beirut and forcing its closure, blockading Lebanon's ports, and bombing roads and bridges. On July 14, State and DOD began developing a plan to move American citizens from Beirut to Cyprus with helicopters, U.S. military ships, and contracted commercial ships. Although small groups of Americans began leaving Beirut by helicopter two days later—July 16, 2006—the first large group of Americans did not depart by boat from Beirut to Cyprus until July 19. The thousands of Americans arriving in Cyprus began overwhelming local hotels, which were already at close to peak capacity during the height of the summer tourist season. As a result, State arranged for emergency shelter and asked for DOD's assistance in arranging flights back to the United States. The last American evacuees departing on U.S. government-arranged flights left Cyprus on August 2, 2006.

Though State and DOD's evacuation effort was an overall success, the departments were challenged in several areas. State and DOD successfully evacuated nearly 15,000 American citizens from a war zone to the United States in less than a month. This significant accomplishment was the result of State and DOD's ability to develop and carry out an evacuation operation within a rapidly evolving context with uncertain information. We found three key areas where State and DOD faced challenges in evacuating American citizens. First, the magnitude of the Lebanon crisis taxed State's capacity to respond. Second, State did not communicate effectively with the public, including potential evacuees in Lebanon and their family and friends in the United States. For example, State initially restricted Beirut Embassy officials' ability to convey critical information via the media to Americans seeking to leave Lebanon. Third, State and DOD's different institutional cultures and systems impeded their ability to work together; among other things, these differences resulted in miscommunications and possible delays in chartering ships and planes to evacuate American citizens. State is taking some steps to address these challenges. The observations in this report will be incorporated in our broader review of State's efforts to plan for, execute, and recover from the evacuation of U.S. government

personnel and American citizens from overseas posts. We expect to issue that report in September.

## **Background**

At the beginning of the summer of 2006, after the conclusion of a long civil war and periods of unrest spanning several decades, tourists and Lebanese-Americans were returning to visit or stay in Lebanon. While State had a travel warning in place describing recent incidents, such as assassinations, bombings, and demonstrations, and noting that “the potential for violence remains,” the warning did not mention the possibility of a large-scale war breaking out. In July 2006, State estimated that there were about 50,000 Americans in Lebanon.

Shortly after the outbreak of war on July 13, 2006, the U.S. embassy in Beirut was flooded with calls from American citizens seeking to leave. The U.S. Ambassador in Beirut concluded that State, on its own, would not be able to safely evacuate potentially thousands of American citizens from the midst of an ongoing war in Lebanon. As a result, on July 14, 2006, State took the relatively unusual step of asking DOD for military assistance to evacuate American citizens.<sup>1</sup> Although State has conducted more than 80 evacuations of U.S. government personnel and U.S. private citizens over the last 5 years, very few involved DOD. In most of these cases, State was able to rely on commercially available transportation.

## **State and DOD Have Several Tools to Prepare for Evacuations**

State has several tools to prepare for evacuations. For example, every U.S. overseas post is required to have:

- An Emergency Action Plan (EAP) based on State guidance compiled in the Emergency Planning Handbook. The EAP includes planning for specific emergencies and "tripwires" used to determine when to authorize post staff and dependants to leave, order them to leave, close down the post, or initiate the evacuation of American citizens.
- Crisis management exercises (CME), which are emergency simulations intended to improve crisis preparedness. CMEs are conducted every 1 to 2-and-a-half years, depending on the dangers State associates with living at the post.
- An F-77 report, which provides an estimate of the number of Americans in the country.

At State headquarters in Washington, D.C., a Crisis Management Support unit coordinates crisis response with other departments and agencies, supports taskforces that assist posts in handling crises, and trains staff in evacuation

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<sup>1</sup> State can request DOD’s assistance by having its Executive Secretary send a memo to his or her counterpart at DOD. Once the decision has been made to use military personnel and equipment to assist with an evacuation, the military commander is solely responsible for conducting the operations, albeit in coordination with and under policies established by the principal U.S. diplomatic or consular representative in the affected country.

procedures and policy. Several State bureaus are also involved in preparations for possible evacuations. For example, these include the Bureau of Administration, which is responsible for transportation logistics; the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, which generates emergency guidance and oversees planning for crises; and the Consular Affairs Bureau, which interfaces with American citizens abroad. State also encourages, but cannot require, U.S. citizens to register with the department when traveling abroad. According to State officials, this allows State to have better information on the number and location of American citizens in a country should a crisis arise. Pursuant to statutory authority, State has a mechanism for seeking reimbursement from American citizens for commercial transportation costs associated with an evacuation.<sup>2</sup>

Within DOD, the Marine Corps trains Marine Expeditionary Units in evacuating civilians. These units are trained to rapidly plan and execute operations to address regional uncertainties and threats. The training typically includes U.S. embassy officials and other State and U.S. government personnel who might be involved in a crisis response. The other DOD entities involved in the Lebanon evacuation included the Office of the Secretary of Defense, which coordinated interaction with State; TRANSCOM's subcommands responsible for arranging air and sea transport; and two regional commands: Central Command (CENTCOM), which at the time covered Lebanon, and European Command (EUCOM), which covered Cyprus, Turkey, and Israel.<sup>3</sup>

A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between State and DOD addresses the roles and responsibilities of each agency in implementing evacuations. State is responsible for the protection and evacuation of all U.S. citizens abroad and is generally responsible for evacuating U.S. citizens. However, under the MOA, State may request assistance from DOD if it is unable to obtain commercial transportation to support an evacuation. Once DOD assistance has been requested, DOD is solely responsible for conducting the evacuation, in consultation with the U.S. Ambassador. During an evacuation, the MOA calls for high-level coordination between State and DOD through a liaison group that is responsible for evacuation planning and implementation.

### **Evacuation from Lebanon Was Unusually Large and Complex**

The evacuation from Lebanon presented State and DOD with several significant challenges. First, it was conducted during an ongoing conflict where air and land evacuation routes were blocked. In addition, safely navigating sea routes required negotiation with Israel. Second, since the crisis was unforeseen, DOD did not have naval assets immediately available for a sea evacuation. Third, thousands of

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<sup>2</sup> State evacuates U.S. citizens from overseas locations according to 22 U.S.C. 2671(b)(2)(A), which authorizes expenditures from the department's appropriation for Emergencies in the Diplomatic or Consular Service (the "K Fund") for "the evacuation when their lives are endangered by war, civil unrest, or natural disaster of (i) United States Government employees and their dependents; and (ii) private United States citizens or third-country nationals, on a reimbursable basis to the maximum extent practicable..."

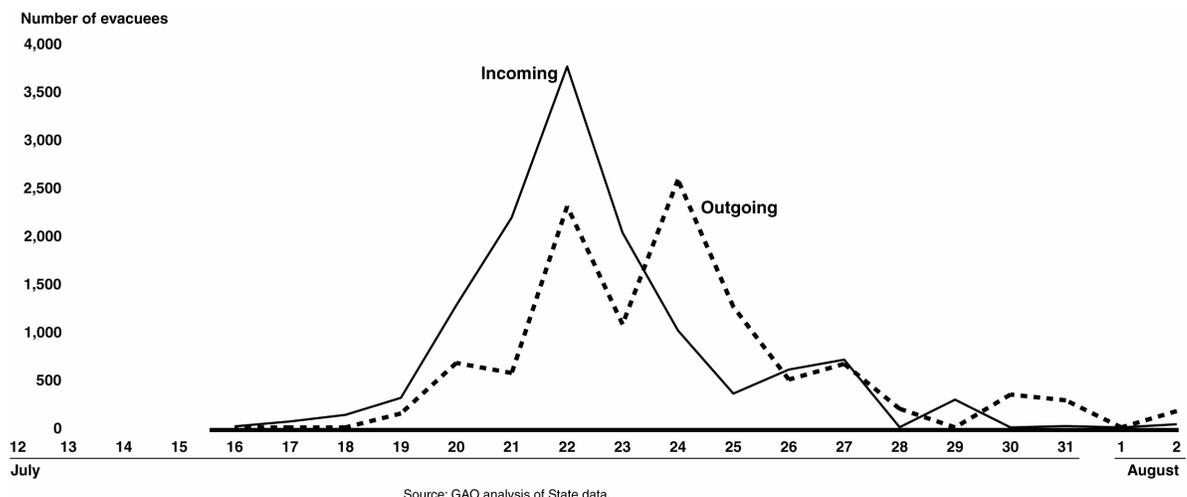
<sup>3</sup> Lebanon is now covered by EUCOM for evacuation purposes.

American citizens wanted to leave Lebanon. State and DOD were also actively engaged in trying to address military, humanitarian, and diplomatic issues related to the wider conflict.

U.S. Embassy officials in Beirut requested DOD’s help on July 14, the day after Israel initiated its bombing campaign. Together, State and DOD developed a plan to sealift thousands of U.S. citizens out of Beirut and airlift several hundred urgent cases, including those who were sick or infirm, to Cyprus via helicopter. DOD designated CENTCOM as the command responsible for addressing the Lebanon crisis. The 24<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit set sail on July 14 from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, a trip that would take 6 days. Meanwhile, on July 15, TRANSCOM posted a bid for commercial ships to assist with the evacuation, and DOD began evacuating small groups to Cyprus via helicopter on July 16. The first U.S.-contracted ship departed Beirut for Cyprus on July 19 with an initial load of more than 1,000 U.S. evacuees. This Lebanese-owned ship was one of several commercial vessels contracted by TRANSCOM during the crisis. U.S. naval ships from the 24<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit began evacuating Americans from Beirut the next day.

By July 23, State and DOD had evacuated almost 10,000 American citizens to Cyprus. These citizens were arriving in Cyprus faster than State could arrange charter flights for them back to the United States (see fig. 1). Therefore, because of the presence of these U.S. citizens, along with citizens from other countries also evacuated to Cyprus as well as visitors in Cyprus during the peak summer tourist season, local hotels were quickly overwhelmed. The U.S. embassy in Nicosia worked with the Cypriot government to arrange for the Americans to stay at the Nicosia fairgrounds, in large exhibit halls normally used for trade shows. The Cypriot government, DOD, State, NGOs, and local businesses provided cots, portable showers, food, entertainment, and other amenities for U.S. citizens until they could be flown back to the United States.

**Figure 1: U.S. Evacuees in Cyprus: Arrivals and Departures**



The evacuation was unusually large, complex, and actually consisted of two distinct evacuation phases: first, removing nearly 15,000 people from the war zone in

Lebanon to temporary safe havens—DOD transported about 90 percent of the U.S. evacuees to Cyprus, and took the rest to Incirlik Airbase in Turkey; and, second, flying them from these safe havens to the United States. Normally, DOD limits its assistance to removing evacuees from danger, and then turns them over to State at a safe haven, where State assists them in making travel arrangements to return home. In the Lebanon evacuation, however, State asked DOD to assist in the transportation of evacuees to the United States. Due to the large numbers of American and other evacuees as well as tourists on Cyprus, regularly scheduled commercial flights were already close to fully booked and there was intense competition for contracting charter flights. TRANSCOM arranged for a combination of commercial charter and military planes to fly the evacuees out of Cyprus and Turkey. TRANSCOM was also using these same resources to move troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, and had to divert some flights intended for that purpose to the evacuation operation. The last Americans evacuated from both Beirut and Cyprus on U.S. government-arranged transport left on August 2, just 3 weeks after the crisis began. Most of the American citizens evacuated to Cyprus returned to the U.S. on flights arranged by DOD.<sup>4</sup> However, according to a State consular official in Cyprus, about 2,000 people who arrived in Cyprus as part of the U.S. evacuation effort made their own arrangements to leave the island.<sup>5</sup>

### **State and DOD Safely Evacuated Almost 15,000 Americans, but Faced Several Challenges**

State and DOD safely evacuated almost 15,000 Americans from an unpredictable war zone with uncertain information regarding the number of U.S. citizens seeking to leave. However, State faced challenges in three key areas that impeded the evacuation efforts—the magnitude of the crisis, State’s shortcomings in communicating with the public, and State’s difficulties working with DOD. State is taking some actions to respond to these challenges.

#### State and DOD Safely Evacuated Nearly 15,000 Americans

State and DOD evacuated nearly 15,000 Americans from a war zone with no U.S. evacuees killed or injured during the course of the operation. Moreover, the departments had to plan the evacuation with uncertain information. According to a high-level official at the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, the unpredictable nature of the war, in which both Christian and Muslim areas were bombed, may have caused greater numbers of people to panic and leave than State had originally anticipated. In addition, a consular official at the embassy noted that State’s announcement, several days into the evacuation, that it would not seek reimbursement for evacuation-related costs may have further increased the numbers of American citizens seeking to leave. Early in the evacuation, State and DOD instituted a vital communication tool—twice

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<sup>4</sup> According to State officials, State chartered some of these flights, and paid for many of the commercial flights arranged by DOD.

<sup>5</sup> State officials noted that State and the Department of Homeland Security considered less than 75 of these individuals to be security risks and denied them permission to board U.S.-bound flights. The officials added that some of those denied permission to go to the United States may have eventually made their way back to Lebanon.

daily video conferences with key officials in both agencies—that was not in State’s emergency plan for Beirut, yet, according to State officials, was critical to the success of the evacuation efforts.

### Magnitude of the Crisis Taxed State’s Capacity to Respond

State’s emergency guidance and post-specific action plan were quickly overtaken by the speed, severity, and scope of the crisis, and Beirut embassy officials said they did not use them. Nearly every aspect of State’s preparations for evacuation was overwhelmed. For example:

- Embassy officials in Beirut told us they did not use the Emergency Planning Handbook or the EAP. The Beirut EAP called for using commercial flights from the airport to evacuate people from the country, but the airport was closed and overland travel was prohibitively risky.<sup>6</sup>
- Consular officials had trouble registering the surging numbers of U.S. citizens who had not registered with the embassy before the crisis and were now seeking the embassy’s assistance in getting out of Lebanon.
- Five days into the crisis, State suspended its policy of collecting promissory notes from evacuees regarding reimbursement for evacuation-related costs; State officials said they viewed this policy as a potential hurdle in the evacuation process.
- State’s Administration Bureau also had difficulty chartering the large volume of flights needed out of Cyprus, and had to turn to TRANSCOM for help. State lacked the manpower, training, and tracking equipment for an operation of this magnitude. For example, State had difficulty determining how many flights it needed.
- The email system at the taskforces coordinating the evacuation was overwhelmed. Information was shared primarily by email and all email messages were automatically sent to all taskforce members, making it difficult to prioritize actions or determine which actions had been completed.

Since the evacuation, State has taken several steps to address some of these issues including:

- Encouraging American travelers to register with State by distributing brochures on how to register as part of the passport application process.
- Sending several cables to all posts detailing various practical lessons learned from the Lebanon evacuation.
- Interviewing U.S. government officials and locally-employed staff in Lebanon, Cyprus, Turkey, and Washington, as well as evacuees, to glean more lessons, with the intention of using the videotaped interviews as a training tool.
- Introducing a web-based portal for sharing information efficiently within State and between State and other agencies.

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<sup>6</sup> Given that sea and air transport were not possible or practical for extricating Americans from landlocked towns in southern Lebanon, the embassy orchestrated a bus convoy to bring them to Beirut. This was an extremely dangerous trip that was closely coordinated with Israeli military authorities and involved very tight timeframes for safe travel between bombing runs.

## State Did Not Communicate Efficiently with the Public

In the crucial first days of the crisis, State did not communicate efficiently with the public. For example, State initially tried to control media contact from Washington, which constrained the Beirut embassy's ability to communicate logistical information in a timely manner to U.S. citizens seeking to leave. Initially, evacuees had a difficult time getting information from State on what to do or where to assemble. Embassy officials in Lebanon stated that people were reassured when State subsequently modified its policy to allow embassy staff to speak directly to the media, and said this contact also served as a vital source of information when other forms of communication were compromised due to the bombing of cell phone towers and power stations.

State's Emergency Planning Handbook provides guidance on communicating with the media in various crisis situations and requires posts to coordinate such contact with Washington. However, the Handbook has no specific guidance for addressing the public during a mass evacuation of American citizens from a war zone, and the Beirut Embassy's Emergency Action Plan has no additional guidance on media communications.

State taskforces in Washington also had difficulty responding to the public because their members did not have adequate training or access to a reliable, centralized source of information. For example, relatives of Americans trying to leave Lebanon were not always able to get through to taskforce hotlines or to obtain consistent information from State about the developing situation in Lebanon and U.S. efforts to aid their loved ones<sup>7</sup>. As a result, State is developing new, web-based tools and training to improve taskforce performance. The tools provide a centralized source of information, with links to the latest situation reports, maps, and other information. The links also eliminate the need for mass emails. After testing an initial roll out of these tools, the Ambassador to Beirut said they were a significant improvement over the system he used to interact with the taskforces during the crisis.

## State and DOD Encountered Difficulties Working Together

State and DOD have different institutional cultures and systems, which impeded their ability to work together. For example, officials at both agencies noted that State and DOD speak different "languages," which made it difficult for State to communicate its needs and the urgency of the crisis to DOD. A case in point presented to us was that, where State officials might request "10 planes," DOD officials would want to know the precise numbers of people and tonnage of equipment to be transported. DOD would then determine the number and type of aircraft needed. State acknowledged these communication difficulties in a cable to all posts that discussed lessons learned from the Lebanon evacuation. The cable urged State officials to "define requests for military assistance in terms of specific requirements" and to "adapt your language when necessary" to military specifications. In addition, State consular and DOD officials in Lebanon and Cyprus use data systems with different classification levels,

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<sup>7</sup> According to State, the Consular Affairs contract call center and task forces responded to more than 25,000 calls from the public, with many coming directly from Americans in Lebanon.

which inhibited the exchange of important logistical information. Compounding these institutional differences, the Memorandum of Agreement between the two agencies does not specify the capabilities and limitations of each, or a threshold at which DOD can take over transportation logistics from State. For example, in situations where a large number of persons are seeking or needing to leave within a short period of time, and commercial transportation resources (e.g., flights) are limited, DOD would likely have more assets to draw on in order to implement the evacuation.

These issues resulted in miscommunications and possible delays in chartering ships and planes. For example, State officials in Lebanon acted quickly after the crisis hit, but had to wait 5 days before the first U.S.-controlled ship began evacuating people from the country. Further, State and DOD were competing for some of the same commercial planes, thereby creating duplicate requests that gave the perception of fewer available planes for contract. Communication challenges between State and DOD also resulted in additional time processing evacuees, since State consular officers did not know that DOD can create passenger manifests more efficiently than they can.<sup>8</sup>

In an attempt to address some of these challenges, State sent two officials from its Administration Bureau to TRANSCOM headquarters for several days to learn more about how TRANSCOM operates and its capabilities, and to develop relationships with key contacts there. State's new taskforce web tools also address information exchange issues with DOD by including a direct link to DOD sites and information.

The observations in this report will be incorporated in our broader review of State's efforts to plan for, execute, and recover from the evacuation of U.S. government personnel and American citizens from overseas posts. We expect to issue that report in September.

### **Agency Comments**

We provided a draft of this report to the Departments of State and Defense. State provided technical comments, which we have incorporated as appropriate. DOD did not comment on the report.

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As agreed with your staff, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 5 days from the report date. At that time, we will send copies of this report to the Secretaries of State and Defense and interested congressional committees. We will also make copies available to others on request. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on the GAO web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

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<sup>8</sup> Despite the difficulties described above, Embassy Nicosia reported excellent civilian-military coordination with Combined Task Force 59 in Cyprus.

If you or your staff have any questions concerning this report, please contact me at (202) 512- 4268 or [fordj@gao.gov](mailto:fordj@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Key contributors to this report include David Maurer, Assistant Director; Joseph Carney; Ian Ferguson; Jon Fremont; and Kay Halpern.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jess T. Ford". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J" and a distinct "T" and "F".

Jess T. Ford  
Director, International Affairs and Trade

Enclosures

### **Scope and Methodology**

To review State and DOD's preparation for evacuations we examined State and DOD documents related to evacuation planning, including State's Emergency Planning Handbook, the Beirut Embassy's Emergency Action Plan, and the Memorandum of Agreement between State and DOD. We also met with State officials in the Diplomatic Security Bureau and the Foreign Service Institute, which oversees crisis management training, and with DOD officials in the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

To review how State and DOD carried out the evacuation, and make observations on these agencies' successes and challenges in doing so, we traveled to Lebanon and Cyprus, where we met with U.S. embassy and host government officials involved in the evacuation. In Lebanon we visited sites where U.S. evacuees were processed and where they boarded transport vessels to U.S. navy ships, as well as the Port of Beirut, where they boarded commercial ships. In Cyprus, we visited the ports of Larnaca and Limassol, where evacuees arrived; the airport at Larnaca, where they boarded flights to the United States; and the Nicosia fairgrounds, where they were housed during the interim. In Washington, we met with the Undersecretary of State for Management; the Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs and other officials from the Consular Affairs Bureau; and officials from the Bureaus for European and Eurasian Affairs, Near Eastern Affairs, Administration, Political-Military Affairs, and Resource Management. We also met with the Crisis Management Support Director and toured State's Operations Center, where the taskforces are located; we visited the taskforce rooms on August 3, 2006, while there was still fresh evidence of their work on the Lebanon crisis. We met with DOD officials in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and TRANSCOM's Military Sealift Command, and traveled to Scott Air Force Base in Illinois to meet with officials at TRANSCOM's headquarters and its Air Mobility Command. In addition, we spoke by telephone with CENTCOM officials in Tampa, Florida. We examined State and DOD documents related to the Lebanon evacuation, including situation reports, lessons learned cables and other documents discussing lessons learned. We obtained and reviewed materials documenting the number of evacuees arriving and departing Cyprus, the contracting of ships and planes, and other materials related to the Lebanon evacuation. We assessed the reliability of this data by interviewing agency officials knowledgeable about the data, and by reviewing existing documents. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable to estimate the number of American citizens evacuated. We performed our work from July 2006 to April 2007 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

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**Briefing for the Staff of the House Committee on  
Foreign Affairs and Representative Thelma Drake  
April 30, 2007**

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**The Evacuation of American Citizens  
from Lebanon in July 2006**

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# The Evacuation of American Citizens from Lebanon in July 2006



Source: Lebanon Internal Security Force.

# Objectives

- We assessed:
  - **CONTEXT:** How State and DOD prepare for evacuations
  - **TIMELINE:** How State and DOD carried out the evacuation of American Citizens from Lebanon
  - **OBSERVATIONS:** What worked well and what challenges were faced by State and DOD

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# Context

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- The Departments of State (State) and Defense (DOD) have several tools to prepare for evacuations
- Several State and DOD entities were involved in the Lebanon evacuation
- The Lebanon evacuation was not a typical evacuation

## Context:

### State tools to prepare for evacuations

**Emergency Planning Handbook (EPH)** – The EPH contains State's emergency policies and procedures, and is a post's principal reference for preparing and revising its Emergency Action Plan.

**Emergency Action Plan (EAP)** – All posts are required to create and periodically update an EAP that includes planning for specific emergencies and "tripwires" used to determine when to authorize post staff and dependants to leave, order them to leave, close down the post, or initiate the evacuation of American citizens.

**Crisis Management Exercises (CMEs)** – CMEs are crisis simulations conducted at all posts every 1-2 ½ years that are intended to improve crisis preparedness.

# Context:

## State tools to prepare for evacuations

**Task Forces** – Task Forces are State’s primary crisis management tools. Task forces facilitate State and interagency coordination and communication in response to a particular crisis.

**Crisis Management Support (CMS)** – State’s CMS unit supports the task forces during crises and trains staff in evacuation procedures and policy. CMS also chairs a Washington-based interagency liaison group.

**Washington Liaison Group** – This interagency body consists of representatives from State, DOD, and other agencies that meet to discuss crisis response and evacuation planning.

**Promissory Notes** – Private American citizens are normally asked to sign promissory notes when being evacuated. State then bills them for what it would have cost them for commercial transport.

**Traveler registration** – State encourages Americans to register with State when traveling abroad, but cannot require them to do so.

**F-77 report** – The F-77 report provides an estimation of the number of private American citizens in a country, based in part on traveler registration, and is used by State and DOD in planning for and conducting evacuations of American citizens.

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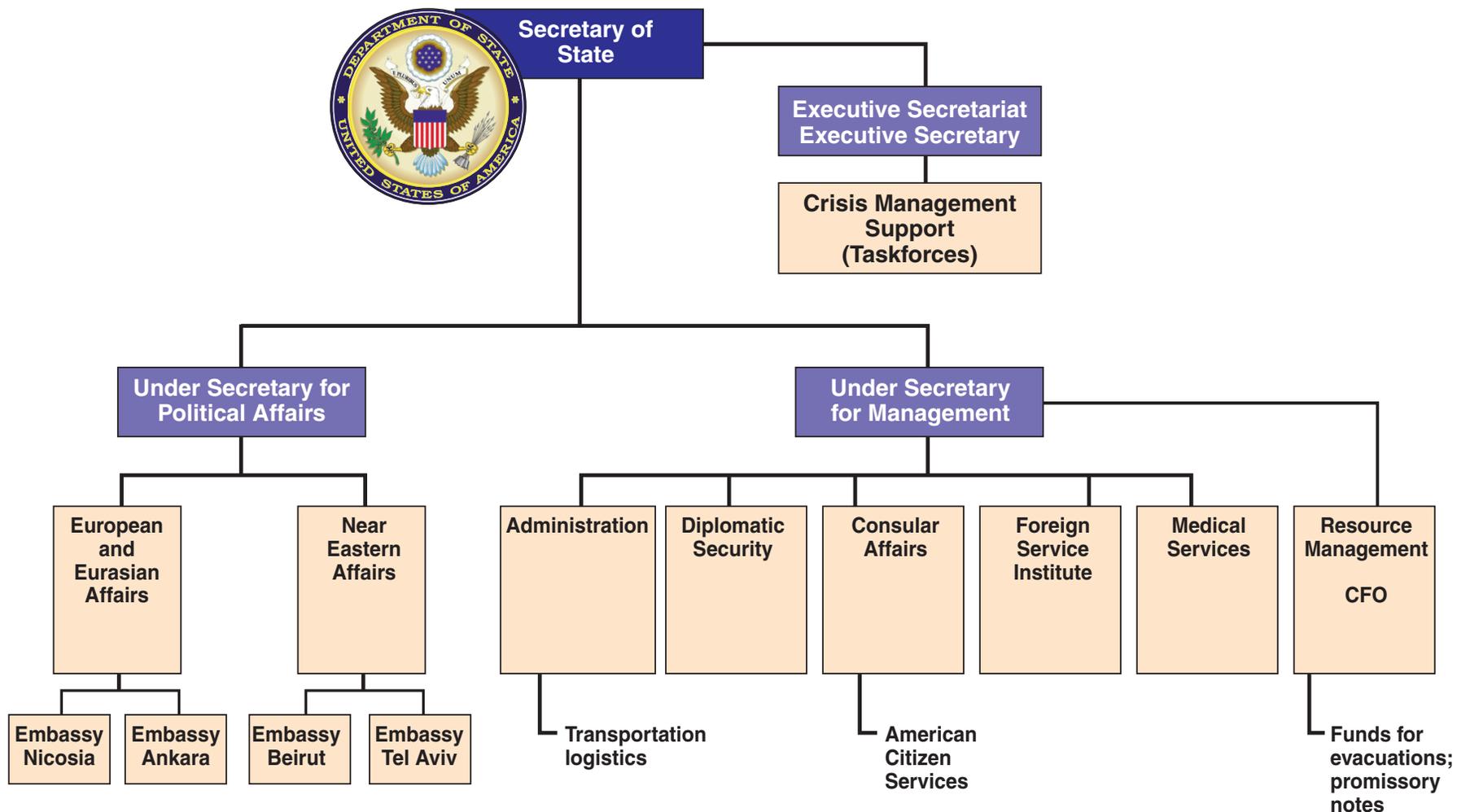
## **Context: DOD and joint DOD-State planning and preparation for evacuations**

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**Memorandum of Agreement (MOA)** – The current MOA between State and DOD on the protection and evacuation of U.S. citizens and other designated persons, which dates from 1997-1998, is meant to define the roles and responsibilities of each agency in carrying out evacuations.

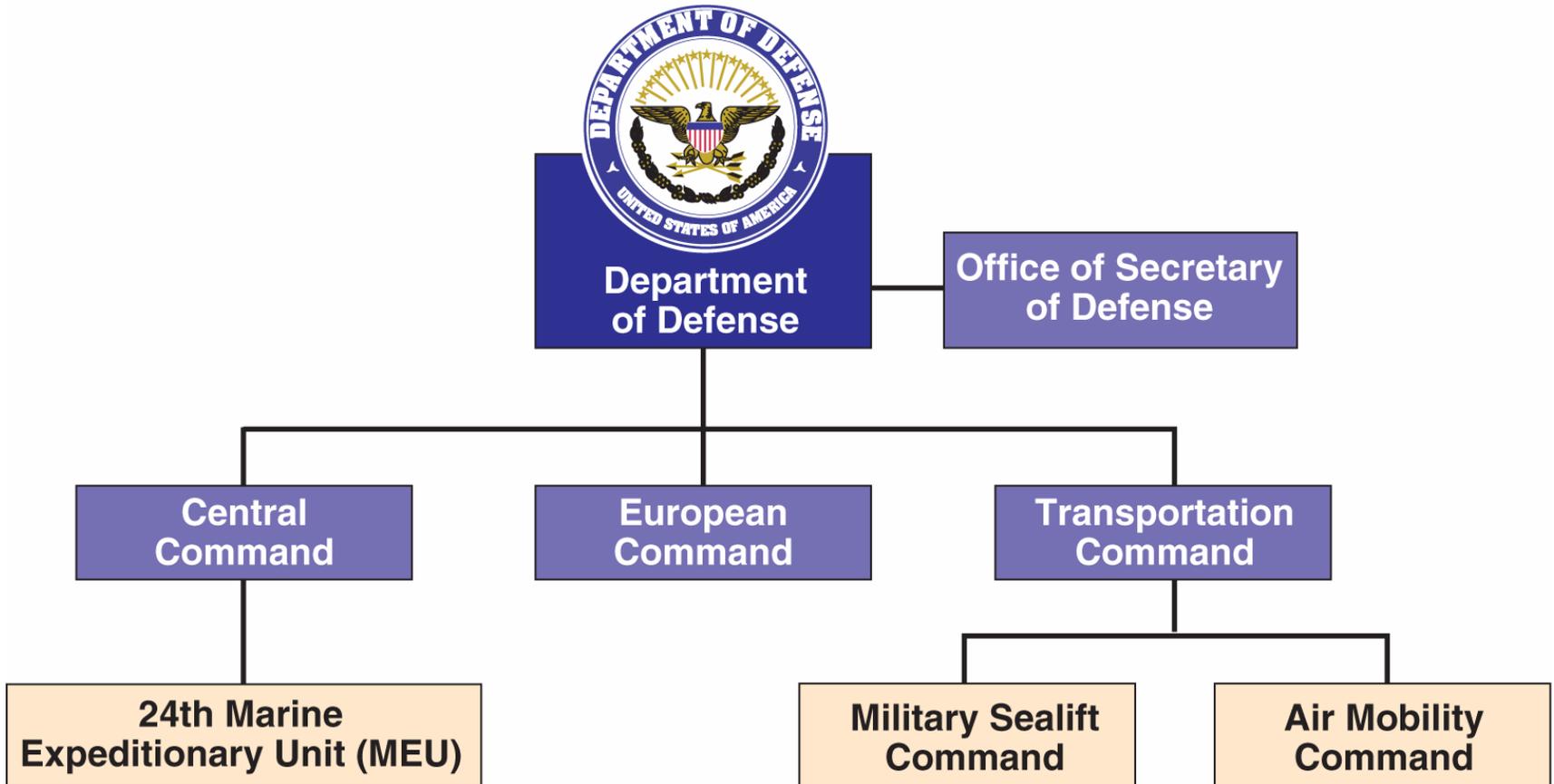
**DOD Training of Marine Expeditionary Units (MEUs)** – DOD regularly trains MEUs in how to conduct noncombatant evacuation operations (NEO). A NEO involves the evacuation of noncombatants, or civilians.

# Context: State entities involved in Lebanon evacuation



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State data; clip art (Corel).

# Context: DOD entities involved in Lebanon evacuation



Source: GAO analysis of DOD data; clip art (Corel).

# Context:

## Lebanon evacuation was not typical

### Typical evacuations

- Unfold with time to assess tripwires and consult EAP
- Involve primarily U.S. government employees and dependants
- Do not usually involve DOD
- Evacuees leave via regularly scheduled commercial flights
- If DOD involved, it takes evacuees out of harm's way but not all the way back to U.S.
- Private American citizens sign promissory notes and subsequently billed by State for cost of commercial transport

### Lebanon evacuation

- Crisis situation developed in less than 24 hours
- Involved massive number – almost 15,000 – of private American citizens
- Required DOD's help
- Involved military ships and planes, as well as DOD contracting of additional, commercial ships and planes
- State and DOD took evacuees to temporary safe haven in Cyprus, then flew them back to U.S.
- Promissory notes initially required, then deemed impractical

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# Timeline

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- The crisis hits
- Planning for evacuation
- Departing Lebanon
- Cyprus arrivals and departures

# Timeline: the crisis

## Wednesday, July 12, 2006

- Hezbollah incursion at Israeli border

## Thursday, July 13, 2006

- Israel bombs Beirut airport; airport closes; Israel blockades port

## Friday, July 14, 2006

- State requests Noncombatant Evacuation Operation (NEO) from DOD
- State authorizes departure for Embassy Beirut non-emergency staff who wish to leave

## Monday, August 14, 2006

- Hostilities end with cease-fire between Hezbollah and Israel



Source: Lebanon Internal Security Force.

# Timeline : planning for evacuation

## Friday, July 14, 2006:

- DOD designates Central Command (CENTCOM) as the command responsible for addressing the Lebanon crisis.
- CENTCOM orders naval ships under its command in the Red Sea to set sail for Lebanon.

## Saturday, July 15, 2006:

- DOD established rules of engagement for Lebanon evacuation based on recommendations from U.S. Ambassador in Beirut and DOD commander.
- Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) posts a solicitation for commercial ships to support the evacuation.

## Monday, July 17, 2006:

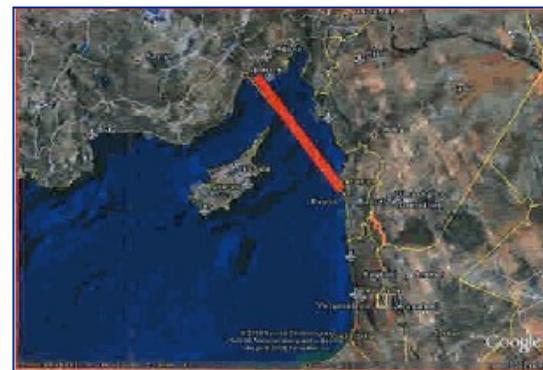
- DOD orders TRANSCOM to give sole source contract to a cruise ship, the Orient Queen

## Thursday, July 20, 2006

- Embassy Nicosia sets up fairgrounds as temporary shelter for evacuees.



Most evacuees were transported to Cyprus (top photo), and some, to Turkey



Source: Defense Intelligence Agency (photos).

# Timeline: departing Lebanon

**Saturday, July 15, 2006** Embassy Beirut issues warden messages and press releases informing American citizens of developing crisis and urging them to register with embassy.

**Sunday, July 16, 2006:** Military helicopters begin ferrying small groups to Cyprus.

**Tuesday, July 18, 2006:** State determines that it is “impracticable to charge reimbursement” from evacuees “in this exceptional case.”



Source: Lebanon Internal Security Force (photos).

# Timeline: departing Lebanon

**Wednesday, July 19, 2006:** The first U.S.-controlled ship (Orient Queen) departs Beirut with over 1,000 U.S. evacuees, one day after arriving in Lebanon.

**Thursday, July 20, 2006:** The first U.S. Navy ship arrives in Beirut, loads over 1,000 U.S. evacuees, and departs for Cyprus.

**Saturday, July 29, 2006:** Last ship with U.S. evacuees departs Beirut with 286 private American passengers.

**Wednesday, August 2, 2006:** Last helicopter departs Beirut with 33 American evacuees.



Source: Lebanon Internal Security Force (photos).

# Timeline: Cyprus arrivals and departures

**Sunday, July 16, 2006:** The first U.S. evacuees begin arriving via helicopter.

**Wednesday, July 19, 2006:** The first flight carrying 145 evacuees departs Cyprus for the United States.

**Thursday, July 20, 2006:** The first U.S.-controlled ship arrives in Cyprus with over 1,000 evacuees.

**Saturday, July 22, 2006:** The number of U.S. evacuees arriving in Cyprus reaches its peak, with 3,755 arrivals.

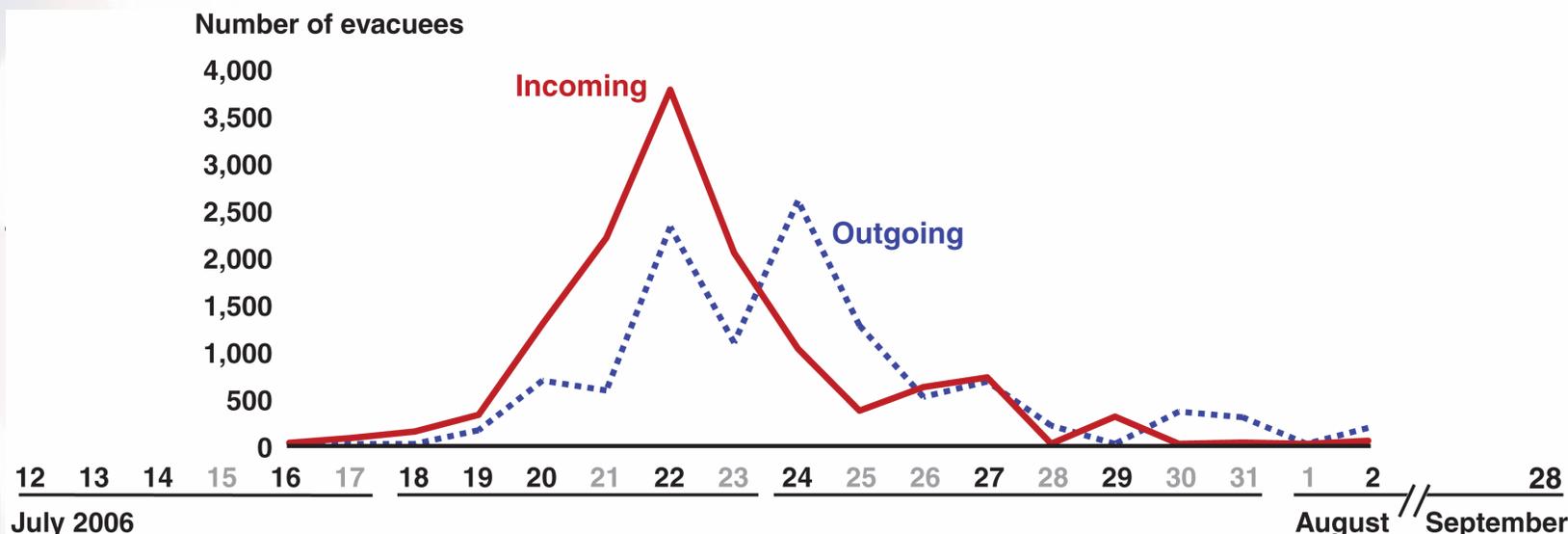
**Monday, July 24, 2006:** The number of U.S. evacuees departing Cyprus reaches its peak, with 2,578 leaving.

**Wednesday, August 2, 2006** The last U.S.-arranged flight leaves Cyprus with 170 American evacuees.



Source: U.S. Embassy, Nicosia, Cyprus (photos).

# Timeline: Cyprus arrivals and departures



**Wed. 7/12:** Hezbollah incursion  
**Thurs. 7/13:** Airport bombed; port blockaded; land routes out of Lebanon problematic  
**Fri. 7/14:** Embassy Beirut requests DOD assistance with evacuation; State authorizes departure for non-emergency staff at Embassy Beirut  
**Sun. 7/16:** Helicopters fly first evacuees out of Beirut

**Tues. 7/18:** French-chartered ship arrives in Cyprus with a few U.S. passengers; State decides not to collect promissory notes  
**Wed. 7/19:** Orient Queen departs Beirut with over 1,000 U.S. evacuees; first plane leaves Cyprus with 145 U.S. evacuees  
**Thur. 7/20:** First U.S. military ship departs Beirut with over 1,000 U.S. evacuees  
**Sat. 7/22:** The number of U.S. evacuees arriving in Cyprus reaches its peak, with 3,755 arrivals

**Mon. 7/24:** The number of U.S. evacuees departing Cyprus reaches its peak, with 2,578 leaving  
**Thurs. 7/27:** State orders non-emergency staff to leave Embassy Beirut  
**Sat. 7/29:** Last U.S. ship leaves Beirut with 286 U.S. evacuees

**Wed. 8/2:** 170 Americans fly out of Cyprus on final U.S. arranged flight; 33 Americans leave Beirut (via helicopter) on last transport out  
**9/28:** State terminates Ordered Departure status for Embassy Beirut

Source: GAO analysis of State data.

# Observations

## What worked well:

- State and DOD safely evacuated almost 15,000 Americans from a war zone.
- State and DOD developed and carried out an evacuation operation within a rapidly evolving context, with uncertain information.
- Twice daily video teleconferences worked well; these were not in EAP.

## Challenges:

- The magnitude of crisis taxed State's capacity to respond.
- State did not communicate efficiently with the public.
- State and DOD encountered difficulties working together.

# Magnitude of crisis taxed State's capacity to respond

- **EPH and EAP quickly overtaken by events:** Embassy Beirut did not use these planning documents because they did not address a crisis of this speed, severity, and scope.
- **Consular officials had trouble meeting registration demand during the crisis:** They admitted that those seeking to leave had difficulty registering.
- **Promissory notes not practical:** State initially attempted to use them but deemed them impractical 5 days into the crisis.
- **State lacked sufficient capacity to arrange air travel:** State had difficulty chartering the large volume of flights needed out of Cyprus and required TRANSCOM'S help to move thousands out of Cyprus, which reduced overcrowding at the Nicosia fairgrounds as the number of evacuees swelled.
- **Taskforce email system overwhelmed:** Emails were sent to all taskforce members, making it difficult to prioritize actions or determine which actions had already been completed.

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# State did not communicate efficiently with the public

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- **EPH and EAP guidance counterproductive:** It constrained Embassy Beirut's ability to communicate logistical information in a timely manner to American citizens seeking to leave.

**State initially tried to control media contact from Washington:** Embassy Beirut officials said American citizens in Lebanon were reassured when embassy staff were subsequently allowed to speak directly to the TV cameras; this also served as a vital source of information when other forms of communication were compromised.

- **Taskforces did not expedite responses to public:** State acknowledged that the public had difficulty getting through to taskforce call centers; taskforce members did not have adequate training or access to a reliable, centralized source of information.

## State and DOD encountered difficulties working together

- **Differences in institutional “languages”** impeded State’s ability to communicate its needs and the urgency of the crisis to DOD.
- **The MOA does not specify** each agency’s capabilities and limitations, or a threshold at which DOD can take over transportation logistics from State.
- **Impaired communication on critical issues**, like the arrival of ships and planes and passenger manifests, due to State Consular and DOD officials’ differing data systems.
- **These challenges resulted in:**
  - miscommunications and possible delays in chartering ships and planes.
  - time wasted processing evacuees, since State consular officers did not know that DOD can create ship passenger manifests more efficiently than they can.

## Actions State has taken after the Lebanon evacuation

- **New web-based tools to improve capacity and communications:** CMS is developing these tools to improve taskforce communications within State, with the public, and between State and DOD, and has begun to use them in responding to current crises.
- **Working with DOD:** The Administration Bureau has sent staff to TRANSCOM to learn more about how TRANSCOM operates.
- **Disseminating lessons learned:**
  - The Consular Affairs Bureau is conducting an “oral history project” to learn more about the Lebanon evacuation and train its staff.
  - The Undersecretaries for Political Affairs and Management, and the Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs have issued cables detailing lessons learned from the Lebanon evacuation.
- **Mechanism to increase traveler registration:** The Consular Affairs Bureau is encouraging American travelers to register with the State Department.

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