

## INDIA'S EXPATRIATE EVACUATION OPERATIONS: BRINGING THE DIASPORA HOME

CONSTANTINO XAVIER

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 capacities, 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;
- 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.

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