

CHALLENGES FOR INDIAN DIASPORA EVACUATION

*An analysis of
capacity evaluation
for evacuation of
Indian Diaspora*

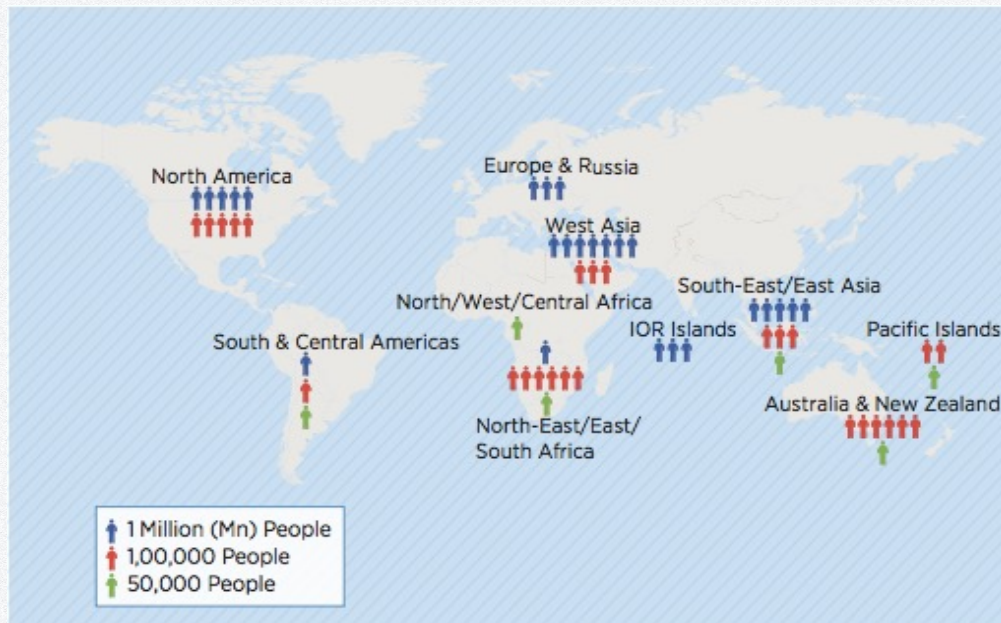
*Prepared by:
Guru Aiyar*

Indian Diaspora — a snapshot

Largest diaspora in the world both in terms of numbers(29 million) and geographical spread.

The highest concentration of Indian diaspora is in West Asia followed by North America.

The Indian diaspora like any other is prone to risks that include ill treatment of workers, denial of rights, loss of property due to expropriation, hijack/kidnap, racial/ethnic political violence, communal riots, economic crises and in worst case—getting caught in a military conflict.



Source: "Ensuring secure seas : Indian Maritime Security Strategy," IHQ of MoD (N) (2015), p 31

Motivation for a Diaspora Evacuation Framework

The current government's proactive outreach, combined with the likelihood that the diaspora might be exposed to multifarious risks in their host countries, implies that the greatest concern for the Indian government will be to achieve a quick and safe evacuation of Indians.

Since 1991, India has been involved in six major evacuations from West Asia.

Mass evacuations have become a recurrent feature and it is very likely that the Indian government will be called upon for similar missions in future.

The present Indian government has opted for a highly proactive outreach towards the diaspora, demonstrated by evacuations in Yemen (2015) and South Sudan (August 2016).

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the merger of the Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) and Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cards to a packed crowd of about 18000 Indians at Madison Square Garden, New York in September 2014. This outreach continued with NRIs in West Asia when the PM told an Indian audience in Dubai in August 2015, "Wherever my Indians are, we never see the colour of the passport, their link with the motherland is enough."

Historical approach for diaspora evacuation

The Indian response to crises traditionally has been ad hoc.

Diplomats in missions/embassies abroad make their own judgements about local logistics arrangements.

The government relies on the use of Air India & Indian Air Force for air evacuation and Navy for sea evacuation.

No dedicated resources for this challenging task.

Absence of a command structure or coordination mechanism.



Indian evacuations from overseas countries since 1991

Proposed 'Whole of Government' approach

Creation of an Overseas Crisis Management Group (OCMG) under the NSA which will be responsible for synchronisation and control of evacuation operations at the apex level. It will coordinate with the military, bureaucracy, civil aviation, railways, and diplomatic missions.

Include emergency clause in carrier licensing with commercial airlines and shipping companies to ensure:

- Availability of aircraft with crew during emergencies
- Compensation structure
- An **Emergency Coordinator** from all transport companies, airlines, shipping and railways with a lateral reporting channel to the OCMG

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the OCMG must have databases of logistics and transportation companies at foreign locations for ready use by Indian Missions abroad.

Diplomatic push to set up overseas coordination points - airfields, ports, bus assembly areas, advanced landing grounds (ALGs) identified in advance.

Maintain good diplomatic relations with countries where Overseas Coordination Points (OCPs) have been set up. For example, Djibouti becomes very important in West Asia for diaspora security.

Wet lease of commercial ships & aircraft from friendly countries.

Create and test scenario-based action plans.

An analysis of the current rate of evacuation

Once the government structures for coordination are in place, it is essential to have an understanding of lift capacity number and analyse the present lift capacity of air and sea assets that can be deployed.

A figure of merit for an asset is the number of people that it can evacuate over a distance per day.

(a) Theoretical sea lift capacity – 31 million people-km/day
This includes all ships under Indian Navy and Shipping Corporation of India (SCI). For example, if the nearest safety point is 1000 Km away, then **sea lift capacity** = 31,000 people x 1000 Km = 31 million people-km/day

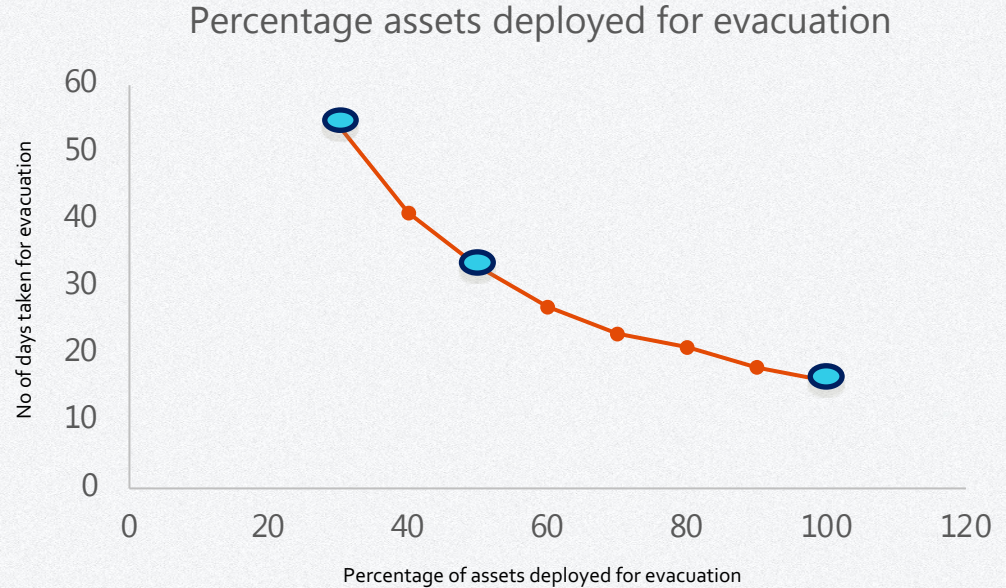
(b) Theoretical air lift capacity – 556 million people-km/day
Including all aircraft—military and commercial. Similarly, for evacuation to safety across 1000 Km, then **air lift capacity** = 5,56,000 x 1000 = 556 million people-km/day

Total strategic lift capacity— (a) + (b) = 587 million people-km/day

An analysis of the current evacuation capacity

Taking Saudi Arabia as example: for evacuating 3 million Indians using existing air assets over 3000 km (distance from Riyadh to Mumbai), it will take 16 days if 100% (which is highly improbable) assets are used, 31 days if 50% assets are used, and 51 days if 30% assets are used.

Note: Varying rates of attrition have not been taken into account



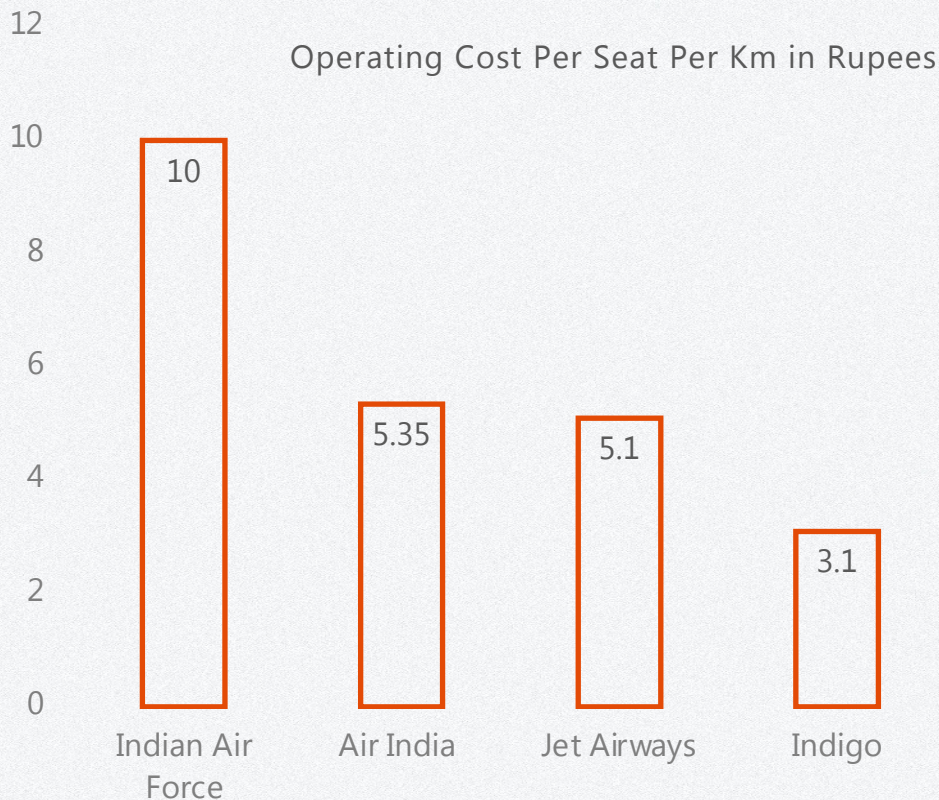
Source: Capacity Analysis for Evacuation of the Indian Diaspora, Takshashila Policy Brief 2016-So4

Cost comparison

For evacuation, it is much cheaper to utilise civil carriers like Indigo compared to Air Force or Air India.

The bar graph opposite shows the total operating cost of each type of asset. For IAF, please see the red line above the bar. The cost of operating C-17 Globemaster is about \$24,000 per hour(fuel only). Cost of air crew, ground maintenance, runway charges etc. are not taken into account. Cost of IAF is about Rs 12 per person per Km.

In contrast, fuel cost of comparable commercial Boeing 737 aircraft is about \$4000 per hour. Evacuation by Indian Air Force is about twice the cost of Air India and Jet Airways. Low-cost Carrier like Indigo is less than one third of Air Force (total operating cost). *It may be cost effective to use commercial aircraft but use of military aircraft and ships is essential for strategic signaling and visibility*



Source: Sindhu Bhattacharya, "Indigo profits: Lowest Cost Structure and highest profit margins?," Firstpost, July 1, 2015; Mark Thomson, "Costly Flight Hours," TIME, April 2, 2013

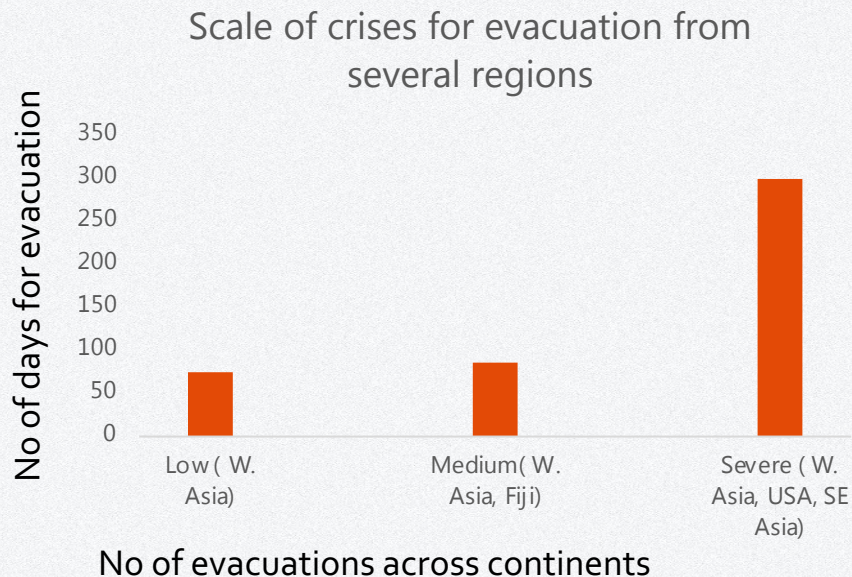
Probable scenario of Handling Multiple Crises across continents

Based on capacity analysis, the graph opposite shows the number of days required to evacuate in multiple crises scenarios.

Low: West Asia – Most of India's past evacuations have been from this region but maximum number has been 1,70,000 over 75 days in 1991. We have adequate capacity for this but challenges abound.

Medium: Current capacity could fall short to meet a medium crisis involving West Asia & Fiji

Severe crisis: Hypothetical scenario. In a severe crisis involving three different continents, evacuation becomes next to impossible as it will take 300 days with all our assets.



Source: Capacity Analysis for Evacuation of the Indian Diaspora, Takshashila Policy Brief 2016-So4

Developing action plans based on capacity and cost comparison

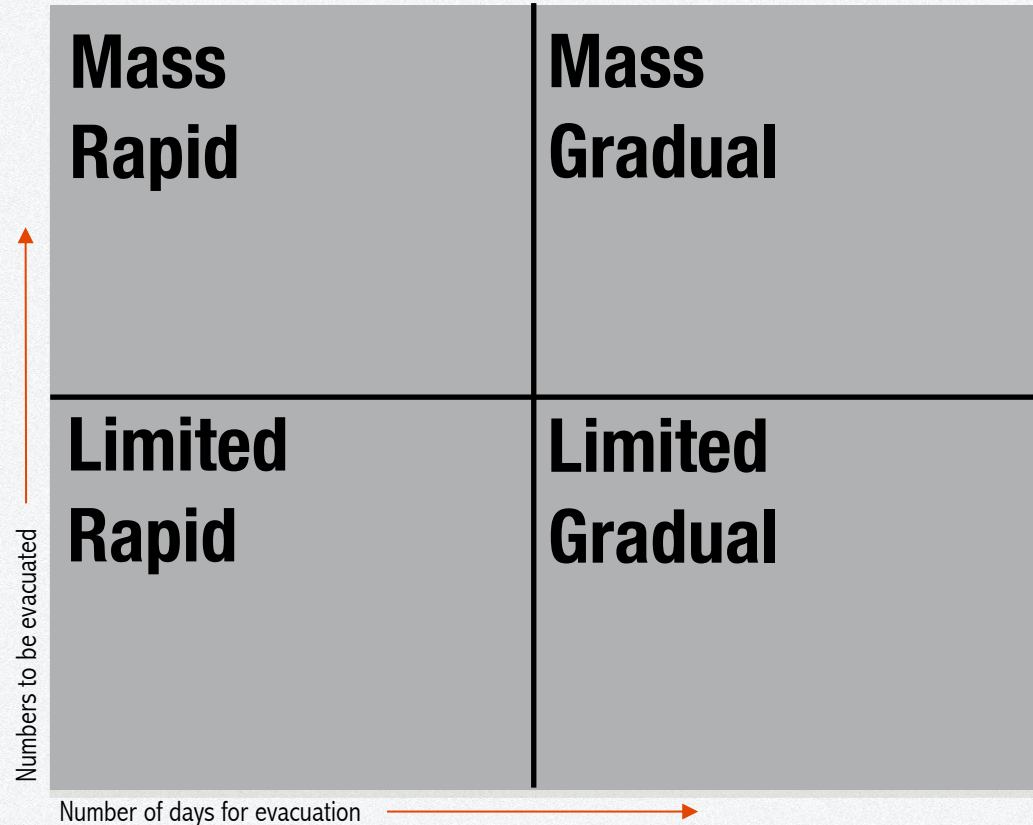
Mass, rapid – Indicates that risk is very high and a large number of people need to be evacuated within a limited time. Such a scenario would require deployment of a large number of air assets with very high cost.

Mass, gradual – Indicates that numbers to be evacuated are large but risk is not very high. Thus the number of days can be increased for evacuation and only ships can be used as carrying capacity is large but speed is less with low cost.

Limited, Gradual – Indicates that number of people to be evacuated are less and risk is not very high. Thus the operation can be slow and calibrated. Low cost

Limited, Rapid – Indicates that numbers are limited and the risk is also very high. Thus, all assets must be used for evacuation. Very high cost.

The Overseas Crisis Management Group (OCMG) can create action plans based on the framework given below



Discussion Points

*This paper was presented at the
Takshashila Roundtable on 3rd November,
2016 in New Delhi for a discussion.*

*The next section captures some of the
discussion points raised.*

The panellists present were:

- *Cmde. Uday Bhaskar (Retd)*
- *Brig. Sanjay Agarwal (Retd)*
- *Brig. Gurmeet Kanwal (Retd)*
- *Amb. Ranjeet Gupta (Retd)*
- *JC Verma*
- *Ravi Bhoothalingam*
- *Manoj Joshi*
- *Rana Banerji*
- *Kunal Singh*
- *Jyoti Malhotra*
- *Nitin Pai*
- *Mohit Satyanand*
- *Dinakar Peri*
- *Jhoomar Mehta*
- *Rohan Mehta*
- *Paran Balakrishnan*

On the government's implicit commitment to the diaspora

Panellist 1: Harmonisation of PIO/OCI cards

By merging of the PIO/OCI cards, the Indian government has signalled that it is committed to the diaspora. This is the trickiest part for the policymaker that is well beyond the mandate of any senior career bureaucrat. The elected politician must address this issue.

It is great to impress the diaspora with promises of investment, Pravasi Bharatiya awards etc. But the most important question is about credibility.

Will the Indian government be able to survive the damage to its reputation should its implicit commitment be called upon and then it is found wanting? India's credibility will be at stake and this question must be answered well before we find ourselves in a crisis situation.

For example, with latest changed political leadership in the US, will such implicit commitment by the Indian government not increase the suspicion with which Indian immigrants are viewed by the locals? This should be analysed and thought out in advance before the Indian government gets committed.

No of days for evacuation are highly optimistic

Panellist 3: The number of days calculated for evacuation are highly exaggerated and does not take into account movement of people to evacuation point. The largest evacuation of about 0.17 million people in 1991 took more than 75 days.

The calculation has been arrived at based on certain constraints and ideal conditions that all people are available at a nodal point. The greatest challenge in any crisis evacuation is getting the diaspora at a single point.

The embassy/mission is located in the capital but the people are scattered across the host nation. In some cases, they may have to transit over land across another country to be airlifted. The expatriates are most reluctant to be evacuated unless there is real threat to their lives and wait almost till the last moment in spite of advisories by the mission. The best way to overcome this would be have tie up with Indian logistic companies who can transport Indians to the focal point of evacuation. The calculations in this brief could serve as a start point for a policy maker.

Panellist 4: One cannot use coercive methods for Indians abroad. Only persuasion. This could be the most difficult thing to do. To persuade. What do you do if people don't listen? During peacetime, we should be able to get all the data about the diaspora at the Indian missions. But people are not willing to share data of their whereabouts.

Reluctance of diaspora to register or sign a form

Panellist 2: Prior to crises, the expatriates must sign a form giving an undertaking to be evacuated to the embassy/high commission. Indian missions find this very difficult.

Prior evacuation, the missions/embassies take a commitment from Indian citizens by making them sign a form. There is a great reluctance on the part of diaspora to register or to sign this form. The embassy cannot use coercive tactics to get the form signed.

As regards tracking, people, especially blue collared workers rather prefer anonymity rather than give their whereabouts to the embassy.

Panellist 3: Use forums by eminent Indians to know & track the diaspora

Informal gatherings during festivals like Diwali or the national events like Independence or Republic Day functions could act as a subtle way to count. The well-off expatriates who have good reputation locally as well as with the mission can be asked to mediate. During evacuations, the eminent Indians could be requested to give shelter, food, medicines etc. for temporary period of 2-3 weeks before Indian government steps in.

Technology for tracking & alerting

Panellist 3: Use of technology

Use of technology like Aadhar numbers for mapping/tracking Indians going abroad & keep details with Embassies/missions could be a first step. This is a very sensitive issue and people cannot be coerced into doing this. It will have to be a nudge. According to a recent Supreme Court verdict, Aadhar is not mandatory. The diaspora have to be convinced that this is for their welfare and won't be used for any other purpose. Alternatively, if people cannot be persuaded to use Aadhar, then passport can be used. It could form the backbone for tracking as it is a mandatory requirement for any citizen who wishes to go abroad.

Panellist 4: Alerting

MEA can explore the possibility of looking into creating an app to alert about possible evacuation. This should not be very difficult given the technology available in the open market.

Exit Visas & Evacuation as a global good

Panellist 2: Amnesty or waive the process of exit visas for evacuation

In crises, host countries could be requested to do away with the mandatory requirement of exit visas. This is a very difficult exercise as some countries (especially in West Asia) are very particular about exit visas. Organising exit visas could prove the most challenging.

Panellist 4: Could evacuation be a 'global good'?

This is a very tough question because in a crisis, everyone needs of help. Humanitarian assistance means there can be no discrimination if citizens of other countries also want to be evacuated. This decision by the Indian government and missions abroad will be guided by operational lift capacity that will always be much lesser than the desired capacity. The issue was also raised in SAARC whether India could take the lead in providing public goods in South Asia region. Some instances of India evacuating foreign citizens were Operation Sukoon in Lebanon (2006) where citizens of Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan were evacuated. In Operation Rahat in Yemen (2015), India evacuated nationals from more than 26 countries.

Further research required

Cost of Land or Sea based evacuation assets

The cost of sea-based asset for transportation per Km has not been captured owing to imponderables like salaries of crew, port charges, security for port, fuel cost etc.

Cost of land-based assets like evacuation by trucks, buses, jeeps, personnel carriers has not been captured.