

GOSE Op HIGHBROW Lessons Learnt.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The reestablishment of intense conflict between Israel and the Hezbollah in the Lebanon triggered a major evacuation of British Nationals from the Lebanon by the FCO.
- The evacuees were taken to Cyprus by Naval Warships, where they were processed and flown back to the UK.
- London Gatwick (LGW) was initially nominated as the receiving airport (this was later extended to Manchester (MAN), Stansted (STN), and East Midlands Airport (EMA) too) for the evacuees. GOSE informed West Sussex County Council (WSCC), who took the LA lead for the LGW response and reception.
- A total of 5 flights containing a total of 803 passengers landed at LGW over a period of 3 days. 101 of the passenger required assistance of some kind; 79 requiring accommodation (most overnight) and 48 required onward travel.
- The response from the LAs and partners' staff across all disciplines and functions was of the highest order.
- The conclusion post-event is that the LGW's evacuee reception plan is robust and flexible, but a number of improvements were identified and need to be implemented. The direction and information provided by central Government was woefully inadequate; a Lead Government Department (LGD) must be nominated and National Plan, for the reception of evacuees from a Non-combatant Evacuation Operation (NEO), must be developed.

INTRODUCTION

On 12th July, in a cross-border raid, guerrillas seize two Israeli soldiers before retreating back into Lebanon, insisting on a prisoner exchange and warning against confrontation. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert describes the capture of the soldiers as "an act of war".

In response Israeli planes bomb Hezbollah positions in southern Lebanon and troops cross into southern Lebanon for the first time since the military withdrawal of 2000.

On 13th July, Israel announces an air and sea blockade of Lebanon, insisting that Hezbollah will not be allowed to return to its former position along the international border, world powers react to the escalating crisis.

Fighting has continued to steadily increase in intensity: Israel conducts raids across the international border into Lebanon and conducts large scale bombardment of suspected Hezbollah position using artillery and air-strikes; meanwhile the Hezbollah fighters continue to attack Israel with rocket attacks and defend their positions in the south along the border.

On 18th July, the British Embassy (FCO) in Lebanon begins the evacuation of British Nationals from Beirut, named Op HIGHBROW. Evacuees are taken from Beirut by Naval Warships to Cyprus, where they were processed, and then flown back to the UK.

On 24th July, the last of the planned British ships left Beirut; a total of approximately 4,500 British Nationals were evacuated from the Lebanon. No further evacuation is expected.

Despite international efforts to broker a ceasefire, the conflict continues.

RESPONSE

Tues 18th July 1720hrs.

- GOSE is informed by RCU of the arrival of evacuee flights into LGW from Cyprus, on Wednesday pm. Surrey and W Sussex CCs alerted.

Weds 19th July.

- GOSE nominates WSCC as lead LA for LGW reception.
- Conflicting information arises over which airport the flights are going to arrive into. Confirmed as LGW.
- Information on details of the flight arrivals and passengers' requirements is requested from the FCO.
- No specific direction is given or instructions received on information required for each flight i.e. the evacuees requirements on their arrival (e.g. health needs, accommodation needs, transport needs, financial aid, etc).

Learning Point 1: **No department is nominated or volunteered as the LGD, therefore no focal point for acquiring information or its distribution; to government (at all levels), the media or the public.**

- LAs make provisions to provide accommodation for evacuees, although scale of requirement is unknown (**see LP 1**). Concerns arise over the availability of emergency accommodation - how will large numbers of evacuees be housed and where; in the short, medium, and long-term?

Learning Point 2: **No consolidated plans are in place, or a clear estimate, for the regions' capability to provide emergency accommodation, at varying scales and durations.**

- Concerns raised by LAs on the funding of the operation. There was an indication that central government would cover the costs incurred.

Learning Point 3: No National Plan for NEO reception in the UK, therefore no framework to work around.

- Manifest sent by FCO flight is for HMS York not the evacuation flight. Details of passengers finally gained via the aircraft's radio and flight crews' cooperation.

Learning Point 4: FCO intra-departmental communication very poor, unable to obtain the information required.

Learning Point 5: Talking directly to the MOD may be the preferable route for accurate information during a NEO.

Learning Point 6: Speaking to the aircraft directly is an option when information not forthcoming via other means.

Weds 19th July

- Telekit with all GOs, RCU, et al, key points raised
 - Decision to spread flights beyond LGW
 - Which airports to be confirmed (**LP 7 see below**)
 - LGD issue to be resolved (**see LP 1 & 3**) *not resolved*
 - Contact DWP for assistance in financial support for evacuees (**LP 8 see below**) – many evacuees were arriving with without currency (unable to exchange Lebanese money in airport) or credit cards (not widely used in Lebanon)
 - Contact FCO to get information on passenger requirements (**see LP 4, 5 & 6**) *partially resolved*
 - West Sussex is to prepare a checklist/ template of reception arrangement required – based on the previous nights experience – to be distributed to the other LAs to aid their preparations (**LP 9 see below**)
 - Regional Teams are to establish the emergency accommodation capacity of their local authorities (**see LP 2**)
 - DCLG will look at challenges of locating accommodation for the longer term evacuees (over 48hrs), using the 'Kosovo Model' (**LP 10 see below**)
 - No UK officials were provided as in-flight escorts for the evacuees (**LP 11 see below**).

Learning Point 7: No national plan (see LP 3) therefore no breakdown of the capacity and capabilities of the national airports. No thought was given for when is the best time of day to have the

evacuees arrive; most airport and transport functions are minimal overnight.

Learning Point 8: DWP should be informed/ involved from the outset to provide financial aid.

Learning Point 9: A template or checklist should be incorporated within the national plan (see LP 3).

Learning Point 10: This should form part of an integrated plan to build upon regional estimates and plans (see LP 2). A suitable annex to a national plan (see LP 3).

Learning Point 11: UK official escorts should accompany each flight to gather info from the evacuees and to respond to any in flight developments, e.g. to manage evacuees if flight diverted en route.

Mon 24th July

- Telekit with all GOs, RCU, et al, key points raised:
 - There will be no central Government funding for the local authorities involved in helping the evacuees. The LGA will be writing to Ruth Kelly on the matter. We should encourage LA CEOs to write to her also if they are unhappy. If we are able to get an idea of how much it has cost LAs can we send it to RCU, who is on the side of the LAs.
 - There have been 4400 evacuated from Beirut. 2254 have come to the UK; approx 1040 were British citizens. There are 3 families still in Cyprus, due to medical conditions, and 11 other people, who were evacuated from Tyre on a UN ship. There are 2 remaining flights planned but these will be mainly filled with civil servants (FCO/MOD response team staff). Any spare places on flights may be offered to other EU countries but with 2 conditions:
 - There must be vigorous security checks carried out, and;
 - The other countries must make their own reception arrangements to avoid any further financial burden on the local authorities. DCLG Homelessness Division will contact LAs.
 - GOE said they may have been short of volunteers prepared to help out because they have a policy not to pay overtime. RB (and others) said this shouldn't be the case.

Learning Point 12: The issue of funding needs to be addressed in a National Plan (see LP 3).

Fri 28th July

- Wash-up with LGW reception group, key recommendations were:
 - Although the current reception plan is effective, some elements need reviewing; which are:
 - Issuing of ID's and security procedures for non-airport (reception) staff.
 - Coordination processes for this type of incident
 - Competence standards for staff attending
 - Training requirements
 - Use of rail operator in coordinating group
 - Handover procedures
 - That FCO/DCLG/DfT work together with LRF's to develop procedures for this type of event.
 - Defined lines of communication need to be agreed from central government to local response as at times the different feeds were very confusing.

Learning Point 13: **Many of the lessons learnt have not been addressed from earlier exercises and operations; therefore they need to be integrated into the plans, or greater training and exercising are required to overcome these issues.**

| Arrival destination | Arrival Time | No. of passengers | No. requiring assistance | Accommodation required | Onward travel (rail/bus/taxi) | Remarks |
|---------------------|------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|
| LGW | 0130/ 20 th | 94 | 20 | 18 | 16 | Complete |
| LGW | 1300/ 20 th | 222 | 23 | 21 | 14 | Complete |
| LGW | 1800/ 20 th | 296 | 23 | 22 | 10 | Complete |
| LGW | 0615/ 21 st | 80 | 17 | 14 | 4 | Complete |
| LGW | 1030/ 22 nd | 111 | 18 | 14 | 4 | Due 0530hrs |
| | TOTAL | 803 | 101 | 79 | 48 | 5 Flights |

CONCLUSIONS

Regional and Local Level. Although the current local reception plan is effective, it needs to be practiced to maintain the experience and knowledge amongst the partners and some elements need reviewing:

- Defined lines of communication need to be agreed from central government to local response as at times the different feeds were very confusing.
- Issuing of ID's and security procedures
- Coordination processes for this type of incident
- Competence standards for staff attending
 - Training requirements
 - Use of rail operator in coordinating group
 - Handover procedures
- That FCO/DCLG/DfT work together with LRF's to develop procedures for this type of event.

- Continuation of information/communication throughout the response i.e. handovers between staff, arranging escorts and security passes during busy airport times
- Weekends are a weakness; the change in the resource commitment and the fact only duty personnel are usually available is a factor which needs to be incorporated into planning of the response, in order to avoid shortfalls.

National Level. Central government was unprepared, with no LGD and no national plan for managing the UK reception of a NEO

The scale and complexity of the emergency was such that some degree of UK Central Government co-ordination and support was necessary but they failed to:

- react with speed and decisiveness;
- prioritise access to scarce national resources, i.e. an assessment of each of the national airports suitability and available resources¹;
- use data and information management systems to gain a national picture and support decision making, without overburdening front-line responders, i.e. get a clear picture, from the FCO, of when each flight was due and the passengers' details in a timely and accurate fashion.

The information coming out of the FCO was confused and there was a clear lack of internal communication within the FCO. Despite repeated prompting they failed to make full use of the MOD staff in Cyprus to obtain urgently the information required by local responders in the UK.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Regional and Local Level. The recommendations are:

- Defined lines of communication need to be agreed from central government to local response as at times the different feeds were very confusing.
- Issuing of ID's and security procedures
- Coordination processes for this type of incident
- Competence standards for staff attending
 - Training requirements and experience
 - Use of rail operator in coordinating group
 - Handover procedures
- That FCO/DCLG/DfT work together with LRF's to develop procedures for this type of event.
- Continuation of information/communication throughout the response i.e. handovers between staff, arranging escorts and security passes during busy airport times
- Weekends are a weakness; the change in the resource commitment and the fact only duty personnel are usually available is a factor which

¹ Point raised at the London Airports Resilience Forum (31/07/06)

needs to be incorporated into planning of the response, in order to avoid shortfalls.

- Regions' to develop a clear assessment of their ability to provide emergency accommodation, for short, medium and long-term scenarios, within their area.

National Level. The national response and coordination was the critical limiting factor in Op HIGHBROW, there are a number of suggested recommendations:

- CCS needs to provide clarity over the Lead Government Department role for the repatriation of British citizens into the UK, following and emergency. They should review whether FCO should fulfil this role or if another department is more suitable.
- Once the LGD issue is clarified the department needs to develop a robust plan, which should include;
 - the capabilities of each Airport (detailing quiet and busy periods of the day and year)
 - the communications infrastructure of the airport for onwards travel i.e. railways and motorway access
 - the details of the capacity of accommodation in the surrounding areas, in the short, medium and long-term
 - protocol established for the evacuees making a homeless application are not sent back to their point of entry's authority for processing² – if it involved large numbers it would be unmanageable
 - the Battle Rhythm – setting the flow of information up and down the levels of response i.e. in the form of SITREPs
 - the structure for responsibly for funding needs detailed
- CCS needs react with speed and decisiveness to impose on the LGD the urgency to provide the Local Responders with clear, concise and accurate information as early as is possible. Early direction is essential in assisting Local Responders.
- DWP involvement from early an early stage enabled the provision of financial support.
- Flight timings should take into account the overnight noise restrictions (for older aircraft) and limitations on local airport capacity and on ward travel facilities in the quite hours³.
- UK in-flight escorts should accompany all evacuees.
- FCO should agree with MOD procedures for transmitting the passenger manifests for each flight as quickly as possible to the

² Crawley did in fact pick up one family, of two adults and two children, who did pass the habitual residence test on 20th July 2006. After initial placement on the night of their arrival the family did actually then present to London Borough of Barnet, where they had lived until very recently, who refused to take a homeless application and insisted that they return to Crawley as they had been dealt with us at the airport and therefore (in their opinion) were responsible for taking the homeless application.

Crawley accommodated the family for a total of 5 nights until they secured a private rented house in Barnet. Crawley has also taken their homeless application and, as soon as it is determined, will make the necessary referral to Barnet - at the family's request.

³ LGW for example can have quite periods during mid-afternoon – point raised on LGW wash up

reception party, including the details of the passengers' needs on arrival (e.g. health, accommodation, transport, cash, etc).