

NATO Involvement in Evacuation Operations Lessons from Operation ALLIED SOLACE

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Project Overview

For nearly 20 years, NATO Allies and partner countries had military forces deployed to Afghanistan under a United Nations (UN) Security Council mandate.

In February 2020, the United States and the Taliban signed an agreement on the withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan by May 2021. In April 2021, NATO Foreign and Defence ministers decided to withdraw all Allied troops from Afghanistan within a few months.

In summer 2021, following the collapse of the Afghan government and the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, NATO focused on ensuring the safe departure of personnel from Allied and partner countries, and NATO-affiliated Afghans.

In August 2021, more than 120 000 people were evacuated in the Allied airlift from Kabul airport as part of the coalition effort—including around 2000 Afghans working for NATO, and their families.

Operation ALLIED SOLACE (OAS) was the NATO operation to receive NATO-affiliated Afghans evacuated from Afghanistan in Temporary Staging Areas and to arrange their onward transport and resettlement in Allied territories.

OAS was a great success in terms of the number of people evacuated and resettled. However, NATO recognized that there was potential to learn from OAS in order to ensure that future NATO involvement in evacuation operations could be executed with the benefit of the experiences from this operation.

Against this background, the need was identified to analyse and report on NATO's involvement in Evacuation Operations, focusing on lessons from OAS, and to assess the relevance of OAS lessons to future NATO involvement in evacuation operations.



NATO forces received the Afghans and their family members, processing their information to ensure that they were correctly identified and could be offered a place to resettle.

Allied Nations offered the Afghans a place to live and support to settle in their new country.

NATO staff provided life support in the form of accommodation and basic needs until the Afghans and their families could be resettled in an Allied or Partner Nation.

Source for both pictures: [JFC Naples' NATO Afghan Evacuation Mission Newsroom](#).

“More than 120 000 people were evacuated in the Allied airlift from Kabul airport as part of the coalition effort—including around 2000 Afghans working for NATO, and their families.”



Picture courtesy of JFC Naples. Over 100 former NATO Afghan employees and family members began their journey to resettlement. With the support of NATO's high-readiness Response Force, the Afghan evacuees departed temporary facilities in Kosovo on a chartered civilian airline flight.

Methodology

The JALLC project team collected data from several sources. They reviewed approximately 200 relevant documents, and conducted 38 interviews with approximately 50 interviewees. They also developed a questionnaire that asked subject matter experts for their judgement on the likelihood of NATO involvement in different potential future Evacuation Operation scenarios. The lessons identified from this process were used to develop recommendations. The JALLC recommends specific ways NATO can ensure it is better prepared for involvement in potential future Evacuation Operations.



Pictures courtesy of [JFC Naples' NATO Afghan Evacuation Mission Newsroom](#).

Key Lessons Identified

Updated doctrine for NATO involvement in Evacuation Operations

The range of scenarios envisaged for NATO involvement in an Evacuation Operations in doctrine does not fully cover some of the conditions experienced in OAS. Although OAS was unique in terms of the circumstances under which it occurred, and while NATO subject matter experts consider that it is overall very unlikely that NATO will need to conduct any type of evacuation operation in the future, it is still conceivable that any future NATO evacuation operation could involve conditions that are not currently covered in NATO doctrine. Therefore, NATO doctrine needs to be updated to provide guidance for a wider range of potential evacuation situations.

Prior planning for rapid and effective performance

Advance Plans are critical to enable NATO forces to respond quickly and efficiently and are especially important in evacuation operations where thousands of lives may be at risk from delays. NATO should ensure it has evacuation operation advance plans in place as appropriate. These plans may be generic contingency plans or region-specific plans.

Best practices for flexibility and adaptability of NATO forces in crisis

Allies showed immense resolve and commitment to find ad hoc solutions to generate the force elements needed for OAS. These ad hoc solutions included using the Joint Logistics Support Group to act as the coordinating Joint Task Force HQ, drawing on nearby reserve and over the horizon forces, and contracting local civilian medical support. Some of these ad hoc solutions are potential best practices for rapidly generating forces in the future.

Project Team

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