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Review of Department of State Evacuations from Wuhan, China in Response to COVID-19

INFORMATION REPORT

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Summary of Review

OIG undertook this review in response to a request made in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (P.L. 116-260). The request, detailed in the House Committee on Appropriations report (House Report 116-444), directed OIG to assess the Department of State's (Department) handling of repatriation¹ flights from Wuhan, China, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. Congress asked that the review include the Department's interagency coordination, its coordination with state and local officials, its communication with the general public, and its implementation of screening and quarantine protocols for those on the Wuhan evacuation flights. OIG also reviewed the Department's communication with Congress and the extent to which the Department conducted lessons learned reviews or other internal assessments following the Wuhan evacuation flights to improve future pandemic emergency preparedness. Overall, OIG concluded that the Department carried out evacuations of over 800 Americans and others from Wuhan effectively and in accordance with applicable policies and guidelines.

OIG found Department personnel coordinated with interagency partners at numerous levels in Washington and in China in planning and carrying out the Wuhan evacuation flights. However, the Department struggled to deliver accurate flight manifests to partner agencies. It later initiated action to study and address the flight manifest process. Furthermore, OIG determined the Department had limited interaction with state and local government officials because Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) had primary responsibility for arrangements at the United States ports of entry and related coordination.

OIG found the Department faced challenges in communicating with American citizens in China, due to Chinese Government internet restrictions, and ultimately used a Chinese web application, WeChat, as a way to communicate effectively, despite those challenges. The Department later recognized the need to assess its use of social media for communicating during a crisis and stated an intention to study the problem. Limited Chinese language skills among consular officers also presented communication challenges to evacuation efforts.

OIG found the Department coordinated with Congress in a variety of ways regarding the Wuhan evacuation flights. However, the Department and other agencies did not provide information about the arrival destination of the first evacuation flight to members of the congressional delegation from California, where the flight ultimately landed. OIG determined this failure to share arrival information was a result of changing circumstances on the ground and interagency decisions to postpone a briefing while the destination was unconfirmed and arrival arrangements were unclear.

¹ Throughout this report, OIG refers to the evacuation and repatriation of official Americans, American citizens and others from Wuhan, China, as "evacuations." Language in 22 U.S.C. § 4802(b) describes the overall responsibility of the Secretary of State to "develop and implement policies and programs to provide for the safe and efficient evacuation of United States Government personnel, dependents, and private United States citizens when their lives are endangered."

With respect to screening and quarantine protocols, OIG found the Department disseminated and implemented medical guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in screening passengers for fever on all five evacuation flights. Following the Wuhan evacuations, the Department conducted several lessons-learned exercises.

In carrying out its review, OIG made three observations that, if addressed, could help improve the Department's handling of evacuations in the future: (1) the role of the Department's crisis manager needs further definition, (2) preparation of flight manifests needs more attention, and (3) use of social media during crises needs improvement. These observations are discussed in more detail in the report. This information report does not contain any recommendations. Although this report does not contain any recommendations, OIG provided a draft of this report to Department stakeholders for their review and comment on the findings. The Department's complete response can be found in Appendix B. The Department's technical comments were incorporated into the report, as appropriate.²

BACKGROUND

Wuhan, in Hubei Province, is the largest city in central China, with a population of 11.2 million. It is a significant industrial base and major transportation hub, with river, highway, high-speed rail, and air links to the rest of China and destinations around the world. The Department established the current consulate general in Wuhan in 2008 to provide emergency services to American citizens in the region and to promote U.S. exports and foster other aspects of commercial and economic relations.³ The Department began construction of new office space for the consulate general in a commercial office building in 2017, which was ongoing at the time of the evacuations.⁴ As of January 1, 2020, approximately 36 official Americans and family members were serving in Wuhan, along with 12 contractors working on the new office project. The consulate general emergency plan that was in effect in January 2020 estimated the number of American citizens residing in the consular district to be approximately 2,250.

Flu-Like Illness Began to Spread in Wuhan

On December 31, 2019, Chinese authorities informed the World Health Organization about a cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan. On the same day, officials at Consulate General Wuhan held a meeting of its Emergency Action Committee to discuss reports of a flu-like illness spreading in the city. The World Health Organization made a public announcement about the illness on January 4, 2020, and eventually designated the disease "coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)." However, Chinese authorities shared few details about the disease in the early weeks of the pandemic.

² OIG also provided the CDC with relevant portions of the draft report for its review. OIG incorporated the CDC's technical comments into the report, as appropriate.

³ The United States previously had a consulate in Wuhan from 1861 until its closure in 1949.

⁴ At the time of the evacuations, the consulate general did not offer full consular services and did not have the computer software to do so. Plans were in place to begin offering full consular services, including visa issuance and U.S. citizen services, once the new consulate general facility was completed.

Wuhan municipal health authorities reported the first death attributed to the virus on January 11. Consulate general officials maintained regular communication with colleagues from the Department and interagency partners at Embassy Beijing while continuing to monitor the situation. Meanwhile, the Chinese Lunar New Year holiday—marked by extended closures of government offices and businesses and billions of people traveling on holiday—took place in late January 2020.⁵ As was common practice, several consulate general and embassy officers had left China on vacation.

By January 20, 2020, the number of reported cases of the novel coronavirus had grown to 198, with three deaths. Due to growing health concerns, the Department's Bureau of Medical Services (MED) sent a medical provider to Wuhan to assist consulate general staff. The medical provider flew into Wuhan shortly before authorities closed the airport. In the early hours of January 23, Wuhan's newly established epidemic command center suspended public transportation, including international air routes, and barred residents from leaving the city, effective at 10 a.m. local time that day.

Department Responded to Wuhan Shutdown With Ordered Departure

In response to the disease outbreak and the transportation shutdown, the Department on January 23 approved an ordered departure of all Americans assigned to Consulate General Wuhan and their family members. Officers assigned to the consulate general who were out of the country were ordered to return to the United States. The consulate general staff members remaining in Wuhan prepared to suspend the consulate's operations and readied themselves and their families for departure. On January 24, the Department established an interagency task force to support the evacuation.⁶ Initial planning in Washington and in Wuhan focused on both overland evacuation and flight options. However, the Department determined the option to travel overland in a convoy of motor vehicles ultimately was too risky based on security, safety, and logistics.

In the meantime, Embassy Beijing assumed responsibility for communicating with American citizens. As of January 25, the embassy reported to Washington that fewer than 100 American citizens had expressed an interest in departing the Wuhan area. Embassy Beijing officials also successfully engaged with the Chinese Government to allow flights into the Wuhan airport, which was closed. The Office of Logistics Management in the Department's Bureau of Administration arranged a charter flight to transport evacuees to San Francisco. However, the original flight service provider notified the Department on January 25 that it had to cancel the planned flight due to concerns that its crew would be required to quarantine during a stopover.

⁵ In 2020, the Chinese Lunar New Year holiday officially began on January 25. Chinese authorities extended the holiday period to February 2, 2020, and some provinces extended the period further.

⁶ The Wuhan Evacuation Task Force was established with the explicit intent to support the ordered departure of official Americans from Wuhan, but it also supported the evacuation of American citizens from Wuhan. The Department's Crisis Management and Strategy Office transitioned the task force to a Coronavirus Global Response Coordination Unit on February 13, 2020.

Department and Mission China Planned and Conducted First Evacuation Flight

Department leaders then turned to MED's Directorate of Operational Medicine (MED/DO/OM), known in the Department as "OpMed," which had a standing contract for medical evacuation support using specialized planes fitted with biocontainment units. At the time, planning focused on a single evacuation flight, with a capacity of up to 240 passengers, managed by MED/DO/OM. Consular staff at Embassy Beijing communicated with American citizens registered in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program⁷ about the availability of seats on the flight and proceeded to build a passenger manifest that included Consulate General Wuhan's American staff, family members, and contractors from the new office project. The proposed manifest included eligible private American citizens and immediate family members on a space-available basis.

Meanwhile, consulate general staff coordinated with local officials to prepare for departure, with some officers and locally employed staff filling in for the colleagues who were away from Wuhan or otherwise unable to come to work due to the transportation shutdown. Officers completed required steps⁸ to suspend operations at the consulate general and at the new office construction site. The medical provider monitored the health of the official Americans, contractors, and family members, and coordinated with MED officials in Beijing and Bangkok and in Washington. The Department also made back-up plans in case any official Americans were unable to depart on the flight due to a fever.

At the airport on the day of departure, consulate general officials, together with family member volunteers and a locally employed staff member, set up and operated stations to process passengers, and coordinated as needed with Chinese authorities. The medical provider and others conducted temperature checks to detect fevers among the manifested passengers and observed the passengers for symptoms such as coughing. Chinese authorities also conducted temperature and immigration checks. A few private American citizens were unable to board the flight due to fever or lack of a passport.

The first evacuation flight departed Wuhan on January 28 with 195 passengers aboard, including all Wuhan-based U.S. Government American personnel and family members and most of the contractors,⁹ as well as 152 additional American citizens. Several manifested passengers pulled out at the last minute for reasons including a change of heart about departing China and an inability to find transportation to the airport. At the time the flight departed, the stated

⁷ The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) is an internet site where U.S. citizen travelers can enroll in mission- and country-specific email lists and receive updates to country specific information, travel alerts, and travel advisories via email. See 7 Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) 044.

⁸ 12 Foreign Affairs Handbook (FAH)-1 Annex K - Drawdown and Evacuation, Addendum 2.1 details the actions required to suspend operations.

⁹ Two of the contractors opted to remain in Wuhan with Chinese national spouses. According to 20 STATE 7502, the cable approving the ordered departure, "It is longstanding Department of State policy to offer private U.S. citizens (including contractors) the same evacuation opportunities and assistance as members of the official U.S. community, when appropriate and feasible, but private citizens cannot be ordered to depart. (Ref: 22 U.S.C. 4801, 22 U.S.C. 4802(b), 22 U.S.C. 2671(b)(2)(A) and Executive Order 12656.)"

destination was Ontario, California, International Airport, via a refueling stopover in Anchorage, Alaska. Passengers deplaned in Anchorage, where CDC and Alaskan health authorities conducted health screening and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) conducted immigration checks.

However, sometime after the flight departed Wuhan, officials changed the flight destination from the Ontario airport to March Air Reserve Base¹⁰ (ARB) in California. The flight arrived on January 29. Passengers initially were told they were in a voluntary quarantine, and all remained at March ARB. However, HHS declared a public health emergency on January 31 and ordered a 14-day quarantine of those repatriated from Wuhan.

Department and Mission China Planned and Conducted Four Additional Flights From Wuhan

Demand for evacuation assistance by American citizens in the Wuhan area more than doubled in the last few days of January 2020.¹¹ To address this demand, the Department began planning additional flights following the successful first flight, while the embassy continued coordinating with Chinese authorities for flight clearances. Because no official Americans remained in Wuhan, Embassy Beijing identified consular officers from across Mission China to assist with follow-on flights. These officers rendezvoused with incoming evacuation flights during refueling stops in South Korea to serve as a consular “fly-away team”¹² aboard the planes. At the same time, the Department coordinated with Mission China and private organizations to bring relief supplies and donations to China on the incoming planes and managed logistics related to the donated items.

The absence of officers who were away for the Chinese Lunar New Year holidays affected the embassy’s ability to support the evacuation flights. In addition, on January 30, the Department issued a voluntary departure authorization for family members and non-emergency staff from Mission China, upgraded the next day to an ordered departure for family members under 21. Because some embassy officers needed to accompany their family members, the ordered departure further depleted the staff available to support the evacuation flights. Volunteers from throughout the embassy assisted the Consular Section in handling communications with American citizens and developing manifests for the next group of flights.

In addition to coordinating approval for the evacuation flights, embassy officials also negotiated with Chinese authorities for permission to allow dual Chinese American nationals, U.S. lawful

¹⁰ Government Accountability Office, *COVID-19 - HHS Should Clarify Agency Roles for Emergency Return of U.S. Citizens During a Pandemic*, (GAO-21-334, April 2021) described actions by HHS and its component agencies, including a January 27 determination that the arrival location in Ontario, California, was insufficient to handle a potentially contagious population and a January 28 decision to move the arrival location to March Air Reserve Base.

¹¹ Department reporting showed the number of requests for evacuation assistance grew from more than 400 to close to 1,000 between January 28 and January 31.

¹² Guidance in 1 FAM 255.1d(5) tasks the Bureau of Consular Affairs Overseas Citizens Services’ managing director with providing training and equipment for “fly-away teams,” which it describes as “experienced officers, ready to be dispatched to augment a Foreign Service post’s staffing at the scene of an emergency.”

permanent residents, and third-country nationals to depart on the flights. Of particular concern was the evacuation of U.S. citizen children living with their Chinese immediate relatives.

A small group of Consulate General Wuhan locally employed staff members worked at the airport for extended periods on the days of departure to help process the passengers for the flights and to coordinate with Chinese authorities at the airport on challenging issues, including how to reconcile incorrect information in flight manifests. The MED/DO/OM flight crew and consular fly-away team members who arrived on the planes also assisted with pre-boarding screening. Additionally, the incoming flights brought and offloaded deliveries of donated personal protective equipment and other items as planned.

On February 4, two additional evacuation flights departed Wuhan with a combined total of 348 passengers. Two final flights departed on February 6, carrying 304 passengers in total. Among the passengers on the last flight out of Wuhan were several dozen Canadian nationals, who deplaned during a stopover in Vancouver, British Columbia. The flights also included U.S. citizen children accompanied by non-citizen immediate relatives.

These subsequent flights deplaned passengers at Travis Air Force Base and Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in California; Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas; and Offutt Air Force Base in Omaha, Nebraska, with transfer to Camp Ashland, Nebraska. Passengers were held in quarantine, managed by HHS agencies, and released after 14 days of monitoring.

A timeline of events and actions related to the Wuhan evacuations is included in Appendix C.

A table showing the key Department role players and their actions is included in Appendix D.

INTERAGENCY COORDINATION

OIG found Department personnel coordinated with interagency partners at numerous levels in Washington and in China in planning and carrying out the Wuhan evacuation flights, as required by applicable standards.¹³ This coordination included high-level interagency meetings at the National Security Council (NSC) attended by the Deputy Secretary and senior leaders of other agencies; a standing interagency policy working group; and the Wuhan Evacuation Task Force (WETF), established by the Department on January 24, 2020. In addition, Embassy Beijing's Emergency Action Committee coordinated planning and logistics from the China side, as required in 12 Foreign Affairs Handbook (FAH)-1 Annex K 2.2-1 and 12 FAH-1 Annex K 5.3-2. Mission personnel, including the Ambassador and acting Deputy Chief of Mission, coordinated with Beijing-based Department of Defense (DoD), DHS, and HHS officials. The NSC led the U.S. Government's interagency process for the crisis response.

¹³ Executive Order 12656, Assignment of Emergency Preparedness Responsibilities, November 18, 1988, requires that the Department consult other Federal agencies, and specifically HHS and the Department of Defense, in conducting evacuations of U.S. citizens abroad.

High-Level Planning Took Place, but an Interagency Liaison Group Was Inactive

The high-level NSC interagency meetings attended by the Deputy Secretary included discussions about the Wuhan evacuations, such as whether evacuees from Wuhan would need to be quarantined upon arrival in the United States. Among the Department officials accompanying the Deputy Secretary to the meetings were those involved with operational planning for the Wuhan evacuation and messaging to private U.S. citizens. The interagency policy working group, also led by the NSC, included Deputy Assistant Secretary-level representatives of relevant Department bureaus, including the Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA), MED, and the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP) as well as the directors of the CDC and the National Institutes of Health's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. Its discussions focused on the safety of U.S. missions overseas, the situation in China, and preventing the spread of the virus to the United States.

However, OIG found the Department-led interagency Washington Liaison Group—which according to a July 1998 Department-DoD memorandum of agreement¹⁴ had basic responsibility for coordinating and implementing plans for evacuations—had stopped holding regular meetings by the time the Wuhan evacuations were planned, and did not play a role in the planning and coordination of the evacuations.¹⁵ Instead, the NSC, through the aforementioned high-level interagency meetings and the interagency policy working group it hosted, led interagency coordination.

The Department's WETF focused on detailed planning. It brought together a range of Department bureaus and offices, including CA, MED, and EAP as well as representatives from partner agencies, including DoD, HHS, and DHS, among others, either virtually or in person. The WETF communicated with task force participants through regular email message updates and in twice-daily teleconferences with Embassy Beijing and interagency partners. In these fora, WETF and participating agencies addressed a wide range of issues, including the timing of evacuation flights, challenges dealing with the Government of China, and requests made to the Department from HHS, the Federal Aviation Administration, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection for flight manifests.

Coordination With Department of Health and Human Services Deviated From Established Practice

OIG found that the Department's coordination with partner agencies followed established practice with one major exception: MED/DO/OM, rather than CA, took the lead role in liaising with HHS. By previously established practice, CA normally acts as lead liaison with HHS

¹⁴ "Memorandum of Agreement Between the Department of State and Defense on the Protection and Evacuation of U.S. Citizens and Nationals and Designated Other Person from Threatened Areas Overseas," July 1998.

¹⁵ Government Accountability Office, *COVID-19 – State Carried Out Historic Repatriation Effort but Should Strengthen Its Preparedness for Future Crises*, (GAO-22-104534, November 2021) included a recommendation that "The Secretary of State should ensure that the Deputy Director for the Office of Crisis Management and Strategy reconvenes quarterly meetings for the WLG, to maintain interagency communication regarding crisis preparedness and response."

to coordinate assistance for U.S. citizens repatriated to the United States as part of its responsibilities to aid American citizens overseas.¹⁶ However, MED/DO/OM undertook direct coordination with HHS agencies, sometimes without CA's participation. This non-standard coordination arose primarily because of MED/DO/OM's ability to provide aircraft and teams capable of evacuating people who were potentially carriers of an infectious disease.

While officials of some HHS agencies told OIG that coordination with the Department was good, other HHS agency officials reported serious problems. For example, CDC officials told OIG that coordination was lacking for the Wuhan evacuations and that they were not consulted until late in planning stages when the evacuation flights were already scheduled.¹⁷ They said the Department did not appear to fully consider the implications its plans had on other agencies responsible for assisting repatriated citizens after they arrived in the United States. For example, they said the failure to consider public health concerns in early planning for the evacuations meant CDC was unable to anticipate or plan adequately to provide public health-related support. CDC acknowledged the Department could have been coordinating with other HHS agencies in the early planning stages but recommended the Department bring public health issues and CDC to the table sooner when responding to future public health emergencies.

Department Struggled to Deliver Accurate Flight Manifests to Partner Agencies

One area of coordination that numerous stakeholders told OIG needed improvement was the production and distribution of required flight manifests. The Department was challenged to deliver accurate flight manifests to partner agencies, particularly to HHS and U.S. Customs and Border Protection, which relied on the Department for accurate information to carry out their responsibilities when the flights arrived in the United States. Consular officers at Embassy Beijing and Consulate General Wuhan lacked an adequate system and process for creating, amending, and transmitting flight manifests, which sometimes resulted in incorrect information being entered into in the manifests. These challenges with the manifests were exacerbated by extensive and changing requirements for passenger information on the manifests from Chinese authorities. For example, the authorities requested as many as 15 data fields in the manifests for each passenger, including the name of the person driving the passenger to the airport and the relevant vehicle's license plate number, for purposes of passing through official roadblocks to reach the airport. OIG notes that CA identified the problem with flight manifests in a lessons learned exercise, which culminated in a July 2021 report.¹⁸ In the report, CA stated that improving the flight manifest process was a key goal and indicated it had initiated action to study and address the problem.

¹⁶ These responsibilities are described in in 7 FAM 391.

¹⁷ Guidance in 7 FAM 361.3c directs post to "ensure that . . . the Division of Global Migration and Quarantine (DGMQ), Centers for Disease Control (CDC), are notified of any medical cases involving serious communicable disease[.]" It provides a 24-hour contact number for the CDC Emergency Operations Center and advises asking for the DGMQ duty officer.

¹⁸ Cable 21 STATE 73804, "Bureau of Consular Affairs COVID-19 Lessons Learned Project: Identifying Challenges and Tasks," July 15, 2021.

Interagency Crisis Preparedness Exercises Contributed to Coordination

OIG determined that many agencies, including the Department, involved in the evacuation flights from Wuhan also participated in crisis preparedness exercises during the years prior to the crisis. MED/DO/OM staff interviewed by OIG cited three exercises conducted from 2016 through 2018 as being critically important at the technical and operational level. These exercises centered around medical evacuations of a few individuals in cases of a highly infectious disease such as Ebola. Although unrelated to a large evacuation in response to a pandemic, the exercises brought some agencies, including the Department, involved in the Wuhan evacuation together for training sessions, which helped build relationships that contributed to the success of the evacuation.¹⁹ In addition, many of the interagency participants, including the Department, in the Wuhan evacuation effort also trained together on an exercise dealing with the evacuation of significant numbers of American citizens from the Korean Peninsula. Although the participants considered these different exercises useful preparation for what they faced during the Wuhan evacuation efforts, MED said that such exercises would be more valuable in the future if they include additional key players such as CDC.

COORDINATION WITH STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

OIG found that while some Department officials interacted with U.S. state and local officials during the Wuhan evacuation efforts, direct interaction with these authorities appeared minimal. Based on interviews and a review of documentation, most interactions with state and local authorities centered on obtaining information regarding quarantine and related arrangements and providing administrative support for those on the first evacuation flight from Wuhan rather than on coordination. While the Department is responsible for planning and initiating evacuation activities overseas, guidance in 7 Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) 391b and the National Emergency Repatriation Plan²⁰ state that HHS is primarily responsible for the planning, coordination, and execution of all evacuation activities within the United States, including coordination of evacuation efforts with state and local governments. (The Department's coordination with HHS is discussed elsewhere in this report.)

¹⁹ MED/DO/OM managed the first two exercises: Tranquil Surge (2016) and Tranquil Shift (2017); HHS' Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response managed Tranquil Terminus (2018). The exercises focused on the technical use of biocontainment units in overseas evacuations and the movement of patients with a highly infectious disease. In addition to HHS and MED/DO/OM, other Federal participants included the Federal Aviation Administration, the Department of Transportation, and DoD. The exercises also included participants from private sector and educational entities such as the National Strategic Research Institute, Phoenix Air Group, and Kalitta Air.

²⁰ The 2016 National Emergency Repatriation Plan describes Federal systems for coordination, notification, deployment, and delivery of evacuation services under the HHS U.S. Evacuation Program. The plan designates HHS as the "Coordinating Agency for Federal emergency repatriation planning and operations within the United States" and states that HHS' responsibility starts upon arrival at the designated point of entry and provides guidance to HHS for working with state and local governments on emergency evacuation.

COMMUNICATION WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Department and Mission China Faced Difficulties Communicating With American Citizens in China and the General Public

During the evacuation from Wuhan, the Department and Mission China faced challenges in meeting requirements to communicate with U.S. citizens resident in or visiting China, making them aware of the COVID-19 threat, and informing them of evacuation assistance options. Chinese Government control of the internet made it especially hard for the embassy and its constituent posts to stay in touch with U.S. citizens. Many U.S. citizens in China were not enrolled in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, a voluntary program that the Department cannot mandate U.S. citizens to use, and thus did not receive messages sent through the program from Mission China or CA, which worked together to provide U.S. citizens in China with up-to-date information, consistent with 7 FAM 1862.

Due to Chinese Government restrictions, U.S. email and social media accounts were not always accessible, and government-controlled mass media relayed only approved information. OIG noted that the embassy did not have a formal plan to deal with those limitations, but instead, it used existing tools to develop a workaround. Many U.S. citizens relied on WeChat, a widely used Chinese social media platform. While not an optimal solution because the Chinese Government controls and monitors the application, Mission China staff quickly developed ways to use WeChat to communicate with the U.S. citizen community, provide regular updates, and maintain contact with them even when they were in transit to the Wuhan airport for evacuation. For example, potential evacuees were able to notify Mission China if they encountered difficulties in reaching the airport, such as being stopped at a roadblock, which allowed the embassy to intervene directly with Chinese authorities to resolve problems.

When CA realized on January 25 that Mission China could not handle the call volume coming in from the general public, the bureau tapped a domestic call center resource. The call center operated from the National Passport Center in New Hampshire and handled much of the call volume concerning Wuhan, freeing up consular resources in Mission China to handle the evacuation itself.

Officers' Limited Language Capability Hampered Efforts

OIG found the lack of language capability among Department officers assigned to Mission China also complicated the evacuation process. The Department routinely trains entry-level officers assigned to the mission to the "2/1 level" in Mandarin.²¹ Many of the evacuees from Wuhan were U.S. citizens who spoke limited English or were older Chinese citizen relatives caring for young U.S. citizens who spoke little or no English. In a normal operating posture, entry-level officers could rely on locally employed staff and more experienced Foreign Service colleagues

²¹ The Department uses the Interagency Language Roundtable Skill Level Descriptions to describe employees' language qualifications. A "2/1" level in a language describes "limited working proficiency" in speaking and "elementary proficiency" in reading, <https://govtilr.org/Skills/ILRscale2.htm>.

to assist with communication. However, with many senior officers on ordered departure and locally employed staff unable to come to the office, the entry-level officers' limited working proficiency in speaking Mandarin placed extra stress on the few officers with strong language skills on the small team working around the clock to assist U.S. citizens. While Mission China ultimately was able to complete the evacuation of U.S. citizens, the limited Mandarin language capability of officers was a challenge noted by Department personnel.

Media Outreach to the General Public Continued During the Evacuation

The COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan was a major international news story that, even in its early stages, was reported by many international media outlets. In its review of email exchanges and based on interviews with officers involved in public diplomacy efforts, OIG found evidence of regular interaction among representatives of the Department, including the Bureau of Global Public Affairs and EAP; other Federal agencies; and Mission China to coordinate messaging and media engagement consistent with 12 FAH-1 H-442. The WETF coordinated with Mission China on strategies for public messaging including the use of social media, in line with 10 FAH-1 H-066a.

COMMUNICATION WITH CONGRESS

OIG determined the Department communicated with Congress in a variety of ways regarding the Wuhan evacuation efforts. Consistent with 1 FAM 311.1b and f, the Department's Bureau of Legislative Affairs (H Bureau) supervised and coordinated the Department's interactions with Congress and coordinated legislative affairs with other executive branch agencies, including the White House Office of Legislative Affairs. In addition, the H Bureau coordinated the Department notification to Congress on funding requirements related to the evacuation flights and anticipated additional resource needs consistent with 1 FAM 311.1d. However, as described in more detail below, members of the California congressional delegation were critical of the Department and other Federal agencies for a lack of information on the destination and arrival arrangements for the first evacuation flight.

Many Department Bureaus, Offices Communicated With Congress in a Variety of Ways

In mid-January 2020, the H Bureau began coordinating with its interagency counterparts to share information about the evolving COVID-19 situation in China with Congress. On January 24, the day after the Department approved ordered departure of all official Americans and family members from Wuhan, Department bureaus and offices communicated with Congress about the ordered departure and evacuation planning. In the following days and weeks, numerous Department officials, including the Deputy Secretary and senior officials from the H Bureau, EAP, CA, MED, and the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, as well as working-level representatives from the WETF, CA, and H Bureau, continued Department engagement with Members of Congress and congressional staff. Department officials also participated in formal hearings and in Department-only and interagency briefings with Members and staff, and communicated through email exchanges, phone calls, and formal written responses to letters sent by Members. CA set up a dedicated

email address where congressional offices could send queries, and H Bureau created a group email distribution to which it sent updates on the novel coronavirus, evacuations, and other Government actions.

Members of Congress Criticized Failure to Provide Information About First Flight's Destination

In late January 2020, several Members of Congress from California publicly expressed disappointment about the failure of the Department and other Federal agencies to communicate with Congress about the destination of the first evacuation flight, which departed Wuhan on January 29 at 4:38 a.m. local time. The Department and other agencies briefed members of Alaska's congressional delegation while the flight was en route to Anchorage but did not conduct a similar briefing with members of California's congressional delegation before the flight landed at March ARB on January 29 at 8:10 a.m. local time. On January 29, CDC issued a media statement on receiving the flight carrying U.S. citizens repatriated from Wuhan at March ARB and the Department spokesperson issued a press statement about the evacuation of U.S. citizens from Wuhan. In addition, on January 29 officials from the Department and other Executive branch agencies held a previously scheduled coronavirus briefing with all House Members, at which the Department briefed about the Wuhan evacuation flight.

OIG found the lack of communication with the California congressional delegation before the flight landed was a result of changing circumstances as to the flight's final destination. OIG reviewed emails showing that Executive branch officials responded to queries from Members of Congress, but without providing details about the flight's destination due to the fluid nature of the situation. HHS' Administration for Children and Families was working with California state authorities to receive the repatriated passengers at a facility in Ontario, California. However, on January 27, the CDC determined that the plans for housing repatriates were inadequate because of the inability to safely separate a potentially contagious population. On January 28, around the time the evacuation flight departed Wuhan, HHS made a last-minute decision to change the arrival destination to March ARB near Riverside, California, where passengers were asked to remain for a voluntary quarantine.²² While it was unclear exactly when the decision was made, internal notifications of the flight's departure from Wuhan still showed the flight's destination as Ontario. In addition, Wuhan staff who had been on the plane told OIG in interviews that when they reboarded the plane in Anchorage at roughly 2 a.m. local time, they were uncertain of where in California they would be landing.

OIG's review of internal Department communications, as well as the Department's communications with the numerous interagency partners involved in the evacuation flights, showed that the decision to postpone a briefing for the California delegation was a result of changing circumstances on the ground and interagency agreement that holding a briefing while the destination was unconfirmed and arrival arrangements were unclear would not be helpful.

²² The voluntary quarantine became mandatory with HHS' imposition of a Federal quarantine order on January 31, 2020.

MEDICAL SCREENING AND QUARANTINE PROTOCOL IMPLEMENTATION

OIG found MED provided guidance, based on CDC protocols, on the screening, assessment, and treatment of evacuees to Consulate General Wuhan personnel present at the airport prior to the first evacuation flight, as required in 16 FAM 812b. Department personnel who carried out the medical screening protocols at the Wuhan airport for the first flight told OIG they conducted temperature checks, asked basic questions about individuals' health, and visually assessed individuals for signs of respiratory symptoms and fever. For the remaining four evacuation flights, MED/DO/OM personnel conducted similar health checks in the airport boarding area, in accordance with CDC guidelines.

For all five flights, MED/DO/OM personnel were on board, and they followed CDC guidelines for the continued assessment and treatment of evacuees while in the air. Interviewees told OIG the planes were configured for biocontainment so that any passengers developing a fever during the flight could be isolated from the other passengers. In interviews with OIG, those in Wuhan and on the flights who were involved in medical screening of evacuees, as well as several others familiar with the medical guidance, emphasized that at the time of the evacuation flights, little was understood about COVID-19. Thus, they stated that they did the best they could with the information available to them at the time. Upon arrival in the United States, MED/DO/OM turned over care of the evacuees to CDC staff who conducted medical screenings and provided other necessary support on the ground. Of the more than 800 passengers evacuated on the five flights, 3 were diagnosed with COVID-19 while in quarantine.

LESSONS LEARNED REVIEWS CONDUCTED

The Department conducted several lessons learned exercises following the Wuhan evacuation. The lessons learned reports identified by OIG were prepared at the departmental, bureau, and operational unit and office level. In addition, Consulate General Wuhan staff drafted ad hoc reports during their quarantine at March ARB. (Appendix E contains a list of lessons learned documents identified in this review.) The broadest lessons learned report—the Department's June 2021 COVID-19 Interim Review—was prepared by the Operations Center's Crisis Management and Strategy office, in accordance with its responsibilities in 1 FAM 022.2-3 to provide crisis management expertise to the Department and to gather and preserve "lessons learned" after critical events, and the Office of Management Strategy and Solutions within the Under Secretary for Management, in line with its role to provide data and analytics to help the Department address foreign policy and management challenges.

The scope and timeframe of the COVID-19 Interim Review and most of the lessons learned reports extended beyond the Wuhan evacuation flights. For example, the COVID-19 Interim Review covered the Department's response to the COVID-19 crisis from December 2019 through December 2020. Several interviewees involved in the Department's response told OIG they lacked sufficient time to produce timely lessons learned reports in the immediate aftermath of the Wuhan evacuation. This was because the Department's response to COVID-19 continued to expand over the months following the Wuhan evacuation as the COVID-19

epidemic became a global health crisis. Rather than devote resources to collecting lessons learned and preparing reports to memorialize the lessons immediately, the interviewees described instead an environment of “continuous learning” and the use of daily meetings to update and improve reaction and response to the expanding crisis.

CONCLUSION AND OBSERVATIONS

OIG concluded the Department carried out evacuations of over 800 Americans and others from Wuhan effectively and in accordance with applicable policies and guidelines. During its review, OIG made three observations, described below, that, if addressed, could help improve the Department’s handling of evacuations in the future. Although some of these observations appeared in lessons learned reviews conducted by the Department, OIG came to its conclusions independently.

The Role of Crisis Manager Needs Further Definition

During the COVID-19 crisis and resulting evacuation from Wuhan, the Deputy Secretary of State served as the Department’s principal crisis coordinator or manager. OIG interviewees closely associated with the leadership structure of the Wuhan evacuation stated the Deputy Secretary was the principal lead for the Department due to the involvement of the NSC and the White House. They said the ability of the Deputy Secretary’s office to direct both policy and management functions made it “the logical place” for the crisis management role. The Deputy Secretary played the crisis manager role, ran the Department’s senior-level crisis management daily meeting, and participated in daily White House meetings. However, 1 FAM 041.1 establishes the Under Secretary for Political Affairs as the “Crisis Manager” for the Department, although the FAM does not include any definition or elaboration on that designation. OIG shared this observation with Department leadership when OIG briefed them on the findings of this review.

Preparation of Flight Manifests Needs More Attention

As discussed earlier in this report, numerous people told OIG about problems with flight manifests. Consular officers said the Consular Task Force database, which 7 FAM 1863.1c advises consular officers to use to create flight manifests, was inadequate for managing the large number of passengers and extensive data required for the Wuhan evacuation flights. HHS officials described receiving inaccurate flight manifests that impeded their planning to assist arriving passengers. Officers on the WETF in Washington said the format of the manifests they received made it difficult to share them with partner agencies. OIG observed that by providing enhanced guidance to consular officers on how to create flight manifests, the Department could help avoid similar problems in future evacuations. OIG brought the flight manifest problems to the attention of Department leadership when they were briefed about the findings of this review. CA also identified the need to improve the flight manifest process in its internal

lessons-learned project, which it documented in a report issued in July 2021.²³ That report indicated that CA had initiated action to study and address the problem.

Use of Social Media During Crises Needs Improvement

The utility of the messaging app WeChat, which was critical to the success of the Wuhan evacuation effort as described earlier in this report, suggests the Department should examine ways to expand its use of social media for crisis communications. OIG brought the need to examine ways to expand the use of social media to aid in crisis communications to the attention of Department leadership when they were briefed about the findings of this review. In its internal lessons learned project discussed above, CA also recognized the need to assess its use of social media for communicating during a crisis and stated an intention to study the problem.

²³ Cable 21 STATE 73804, "Bureau of Consular Affairs COVID-19 Lessons Learned Project: Identifying Challenges and Tasks," July 15, 2021.

APPENDIX A: OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

This review was conducted from August 30, 2021, to January 10, 2022, in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation, as issued in 2020 by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, and the Inspections Handbook, as issued by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) for the Department and the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM).

The Office of Inspections provides the Secretary of State, the Chief Executive Officer of USAGM, and Congress with systematic and independent evaluations of the operations of the Department and USAGM. Consistent with Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, this review focused on the Department's evacuation and evacuation of official Americans and family members, American citizens, and other individuals in response to the transportation shutdown of Wuhan, China due to the novel coronavirus. OIG's specific inspection objectives were to determine the extent to which the Department:

- Coordinated with other Federal agencies, as appropriate, regarding the Wuhan, China, evacuation flights in accordance with applicable Department standards.
- Coordinated with relevant state and local officials regarding the Wuhan evacuation flights.
- Communicated with the general public and Congress regarding the Wuhan evacuation flights.
- Implemented medical screening and quarantine protocols for repatriated Americans on the Wuhan evacuation flights.
- Conducted lessons learned reviews or other internal assessments to improve future pandemic emergency preparedness after the Wuhan evacuation flights.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and taking into consideration relevant guidance, OIG conducted the review remotely and relied on audio- and video-conferencing tools in lieu of in-person interviews with Department and interagency personnel. OIG also reviewed pertinent records; circulated requests for information and compiled the results; and reviewed the substance of this report and its findings with offices, individuals, and organizations affected by the review. OIG used professional judgment and analyzed physical, documentary, and testimonial evidence to develop its findings and conclusions.

Joseph Macmanus (Team Leader), Jill Derderian (Team Manager), Paul Cantrell, Paul Hussar, Matthew Lunn, and Mark Mayfield conducted this review. Other report contributors include Caroline Mangelsdorf, Diana McCormick, and Rebecca Sawyer.

APPENDIX B: MANAGEMENT RESPONSE



United States Department of State

*Bureau of Consular Affairs
Office of the Executive Director*

Washington, D.C. 20522

April 18, 2022

UNCLASSIFIED

TO: OIG/ISP – Sandra J. Lewis, Assistant Inspector General for
 Inspections

FROM: CA – Douglass R. Benning, Acting Assistant Secretary

SUBJECT: Response to Draft OIG Report – Review of Department of State
Evacuations from Wuhan, China in Response to COVID-19, ISP-I-22-19

The Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA) has reviewed the draft OIG inspection report of the evacuations from Wuhan, China. The below stakeholders provide the following comments in response to draft report provided by OIG:

OIG Report Text:

“The Office of Logistics Management, in the Department’s Bureau of Administration, arranged a charter flight to transport evacuees to San Francisco. However, the original flight service provider notified the Department on January 25 that it had to cancel the planned flight due to staffing challenges.” (page 3)

Stakeholder Response: The Bureau of Administration responds that, specifically, the original flight service provider did not execute an evacuation flight from Wuhan in January 2020 because the Government of Japan could not guarantee their crew wouldn’t be quarantined upon arrival from Wuhan. For flight safety and crew rest reasons, the provider needed to switch out crews in Japan after arriving

from Wuhan and before departing for the U.S. The provider stated they could not afford to lose a crew for an extended amount of time as it would impact future business. Saying that staffing challenges was the reason the provider did not execute this January flight is misleading.

OIG Report Text:

“(Appendix D) Bureau of Administration, Office of Logistics Management: Organized initial evacuation flight, which was canceled due to difficulties experienced by charter service provider.” (page 22)

Stakeholder Response: Bureau of Administration comments that this would be better stated as, “Organized initial evacuation flight, which was not executed because the Government of Japan would not guarantee the charter company’s flight crew would not be quarantined during a change of crew in Japan.”

OIG Report Text:

“However, OIG found the Department-led interagency Washington Liaison Group—which according to a July 1998 Department-DoD memorandum of agreement had basic responsibility for coordinating and implementing plans for evacuations—had stopped holding regular meetings by the time the Wuhan evacuations were planned, and did not play a role in the planning and coordination of the evacuations. Instead, the NSC, through the aforementioned high-level interagency meetings and the interagency policy working group it hosted, led interagency coordination.” (page 7)

Stakeholder Response: Executive Secretariat, Office of Crisis Management and Strategy responds that the State Department coordinated the evacuation out of Wuhan, China, through the mechanisms laid out in 1998 DOS-DOD MOA that created the Washington Liaison Group (WLG). As noted on page three, paragraph three of the 1998 DOS-DOD MOA, “Agencies formally convene working groups or task forces to manage drawdown/evacuation and regular contact is maintained between DOS and DOD task forces.” Interagency coordination and discussion remained constant across the interagency, including at the NSC and there were many unknowns related to the novel coronavirus at the time. Consulate General Wuhan’s Ordered Departure was approved January 23, 2020, and coordination of the evacuation began immediately on January 24 with the announcement of the Wuhan Evacuation Task Force with representatives from multiple agencies. The WLG was notified of the Task Force through standard channels on January 23,

2020. Lastly, the first evacuation flight did not depart from Wuhan, China until January 28, 2020, and through the auspices of the Wuhan Evacuation Task Force the details and coordination of the evacuation took place.

The point of contact for this memorandum is Edward Birsner, Senior Advisor to the Executive Director, Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA/EX).

Attachment: OIG Draft Report

APPENDIX C: TIMELINE OF EVENTS AND ACTIONS

December 2019	
Late December	Reports of a new flu-like illness circulated on social media in China.
December 31	Consulate General (CG) Wuhan held an Emergency Action Committee (EAC) meeting to discuss reports of an outbreak of a respiratory illness.
	Chinese authorities informed the World Health Organization (WHO) about a cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan City, Hubei Province.
January 2020	
January 4	In its first public statement on the outbreak, WHO tweeted, “China has reported to WHO a cluster of pneumonia cases—with no deaths—in Wuhan, Hubei Province.”
January 6	U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a “Watch Level 1 Alert” for Wuhan due to “a pneumonia outbreak of unknown cause” and advised travelers to Wuhan to avoid animals, animal markets, and animal products.
January 11	China reported first death due to novel coronavirus.
January 14	National Security Council established a novel coronavirus interagency policy coordination group and began meeting daily.
January 15	Mission China issued a health alert update regarding CDC’s Watch Level 1 Alert (Be Aware and Practice Usual Precautions) for an outbreak of pneumonia in Wuhan, preliminarily identified to be caused by a novel coronavirus.
January 17	Department’s Public Health Working Group continued to monitor developments in China and created an email distribution list for better coordination ahead of the long holiday weekend.
	CDC announced public health screening of passengers coming from Wuhan to begin at three U.S. airports for 2019 novel coronavirus (“2019-nCoV”).
January 21	CG Wuhan held EAC meeting to review novel coronavirus developments (concluded decision points had not been crossed).
	CG Wuhan, Embassy Beijing held joint EAC meeting, determined that no decision points had been crossed.
	CDC announced the first novel coronavirus case in the United States, in a patient who returned from Wuhan on January 15.
January 22	CG Wuhan, Embassy Beijing held joint EAC meeting, again determined that no decision points had been crossed.
	CDC issued a “Watch Level 2 Alert (Practice Enhanced Precautions)” for the pneumonia caused by the novel coronavirus. In addition to advice issued on January 6, CDC also advised that older travelers and those with underlying health issues “should discuss travel to Wuhan with their health care provider.”
January 23	At 2 a.m. local time, Wuhan’s new epidemic command center issued its first order, suspending public transportation and barring residents from leaving the city, effective at 10 a.m.
	CG Wuhan, Embassy Beijing held joint EAC meeting, determined that decision points had been crossed.
	Mission China and the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs requested Under Secretary for Management to approve ordered departure for Wuhan. The Under Secretary approved it later that day.
January 24	Department raised travel warning to Level 4 for Wuhan and Hubei Province. Mission China published the travel warning on its website and sent a notice to citizens registered in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP).
	Additional cities in Hubei Province imposed travel and transport restrictions, putting much of the province of 59 million under partial lockdown.

	Department established a task force regarding the ordered departure from Wuhan.
	Department participated in interagency all-Member briefing for the Senate.
January 25	Chinese New Year. Week-long holiday began. Mission China officially closed from January 24 through January 31.
	Original charter flight provider informed Department that it could no longer provide the flight; focus shifts to Bureau of Medical Services' Directorate of Operational Medicine's (MED/DO/OM) flight capabilities.
January 28	CG Wuhan temporarily suspended operations. ¹
	Evacuation flight #1 departed Wuhan.
	Department participated in an interagency briefing for the Alaska congressional delegation regarding plans for evacuation flight #1.
January 29	Evacuation flight #1 stopped for refueling, immigration and passport control, and CDC health screening in Anchorage, Alaska.
	Evacuation flight #1 carrying U.S. Government personnel, their families, and private U.S. citizens evacuated from Wuhan arrived at March Air Reserve Base (ARB) in California.
	Under Secretary for Management flew to California to greet evacuees at March ARB. Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP) official traveled to March ARB to liaise with and provide support to evacuated official Americans.
	Department approved additional evacuation flights for American citizens in Wuhan.
	Department approved authorized (voluntary) departure for eligible family members and non-essential personnel in Mission China.
	Department participated in interagency all-Member briefing for the House.
	Department spokesperson issued statement on evacuation of Americans from Wuhan.
	White House established the Novel Coronavirus Task Force and began daily meetings, led by Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary. Department of State named the Deputy Secretary as its lead.
January 30	WHO declared the outbreak a "Public Health Emergency of International Concern."
	CDC confirmed person-to-person spread of the novel coronavirus in the United States.
	EAP Assistant Secretary had call with Rep. Bera regarding a potential House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) hearing.
	Department raised travel warning to Level 4 for China.
	Mission China issued public health alert advising of authorized departure for non-essential official Americans and family members in China as of January 29 and the potential availability of seats on additional evacuation flights from Wuhan.
	CG Wuhan officials, in quarantine at March ARB, sent "Wuhan Evacuation Lessons Learned" memorandum to the Office of Crisis Management and Strategy and Wuhan Evacuation Task Force.
January 31	President Trump signed Proclamation 9984, suspending entry into the United States of most foreigners who were physically present in China during the preceding 14-day period, effective February 2.
	HHS declared the novel coronavirus a public health emergency in the United States and ordered U.S. citizens repatriated from Wuhan and housed at March ARB to be quarantined for 2 weeks.
	Mission China again issued public health alert advising of authorized departure for non-essential official Americans and family members in China as of January 29 and the potential availability of seats on added evacuation flights from Wuhan.
	Department upgraded Mission China authorized departure to ordered departure for eligible family members under 21.

¹ CG Wuhan resumed operations on April 22, 2021.

	Department participated in interagency conference call briefing for all Congressional staff.
	Deputy Secretary participated in White House Coronavirus Task Force press briefing.

February 2020

February 1	Department hosted a conference call for staff of the HFAC and the House Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, as well as staff of Members on those committees. The conference call was followed immediately by another conference call for staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, as well as staff of Members on those committees.
February 2	Deputy Secretary had call with HFAC Chairman.
February 3	Department participated in interagency conference call briefing for all Congressional staff.
February 4	Evacuation flights #2 and #3 departed Wuhan, carrying a combined total of 348 passengers.
February 5	Evacuation flight #2 arrived in Travis Air Force Base (AFB) in California; flight #3 transited Travis AFB and continued to Miramar Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS), also in California.
	Deputy Secretary participated in separate interagency all-Member briefings with the Senate and the House.
	Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA) had call with the Massachusetts congressional delegation staff regarding constituent issues related to Wuhan evacuation flights.
February 6	Evacuation flights #4 and #5 depart Wuhan, carrying a combined total of 304 passengers (U.S. citizens, immediate family members, and third country nationals, including several dozen Canadian citizens).
	Department participated in interagency conference call briefing for all Congressional staff.
February 7	Evacuation flight #4 landed at Travis AFB; flight #5 landed in Vancouver, British Columbia, prior to proceeding to Miramar MCAS.
	Deputy Secretary participated in White House Coronavirus Task Force press briefing.
February 8	Department spokesperson issued statement about the evacuation of Americans from Wuhan.
February 11	Quarantine lifted for 195 evacuees from first flight at March ARB; no one in the group was diagnosed with COVID-19.
February 13	The Executive Secretary transitioned the Wuhan Evacuation Task Force to the Coronavirus Global Response Coordination Unit.
February 17	CG Wuhan official's report, shared with Embassy Beijing and Department officials, entitled "The Closure and Evacuation of Consulate General Wuhan in the midst of COVID-19" included a list of lessons learned.
February 26	President Trump named Vice President Pence to lead U.S. Government coronavirus response.
February 27	Department representatives participated in HFAC subcommittee hearing on evacuations from Wuhan, Diamond Princess cruise ship in Japan, and Westerdam cruise ship in Cambodia.

March 2020

"Wuhan Fly-Away Evacuation Lessons Learned Report," prepared by a member of the flyaway team who manned evacuation flights, submitted to senior officials in Mission China.

November 2020

November 30	Department initiated COVID-19 Interim Review to capture lessons learned to date and develop recommendations to improve crisis preparedness and response and operational agility.
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December 2020

December 2	Department requested 24 overseas posts to answer questions from the COVID-19 Interim Review (CIR) to understand how the Department's actions during the pandemic affected posts' ability to advance the Government's overall foreign policy objectives.
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Embassy Beijing transmitted its cable “Mission China Lessons Learned: Ordered Departure” which focused primarily on the embassy’s experience.

March 2021

March 1

The Crisis Management Training team at the Foreign Service Institute’s Leadership and Management School transmitted a cable that compiled best practices and identified lessons learned, based on several dozen crisis management exercises it conducted with posts around the world that focused on the unique challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

May 2021

MED/DO/OM finalized a compendium of challenges faced and lessons learned during the conduct of its operational missions, including the five evacuation flights from Wuhan.

July 2021

July 15

CA transmitted its cable “Bureau of Consular Affairs COVID-19 Lessons Learned Project: Identifying Challenges and Tasks.”

September 2021

September 10

Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources shared the “COVID-19 Interim Review” internally across the Department, noting in his email message, “The CIR analyzes lessons learned, identifies points of friction in policy and processes, and includes recommendations to improve the Department’s ability to confront future crises.”

APPENDIX D: ACTIONS OF KEY ROLE PLAYERS IN THE DEPARTMENT

Deputy Secretary

Led Department's response; represented it in the Deputies Committee, White House Task Force; met with Members of Congress; participated in congressional briefings and press conferences.

Mission China

Embassy Beijing	Coordinated with Chinese Government and with Department; convened interagency Emergency Action Committee and mission-wide interagency (including Department of Defense (DoD), HHS, DHS) Mission China Task Force meetings; sent regular cable updates to Department and interagency partners.
Expanded Consular Section	Led communication with Americans in China; managed flight manifests; supplied consular officers to staff four flights.
Consulate General Wuhan	Coordinated with embassy in joint Emergency Action Committee meetings; took required steps to suspend official operations at consulate and new consulate construction site; coordinated with local officials on the first flight. Its locally employed staff assisted in processing passengers on all flights.

Under Secretary for Management

	Approved requests for ordered and authorized departure, for evacuation flights, and for transfer of funds for emergency evacuation activities; coordinated with interagency partners; traveled to California to welcome evacuees on first flight.
Bureau of Medical Services	Provided medical screening guidance to medical providers in Department and worldwide. Its Directorate of Operational Medicine contractor operated the five evacuation flights. Directorate personnel staffed flights and coordinated with interagency partners.
Bureau of Consular Affairs	Drafted, disseminated travel advisories, other messages to American citizens and public; fielded calls from public; participated on Wuhan Evacuation Task Force and congressional briefings, hearings; coordinated with interagency partners.
Office of Budget and Planning	Made requests to transfer funds to support evacuation activities.
Office of Management Strategy and Solutions	Provided data analysis for COVID-19 Interim Review, an omnibus lessons-learned report.
Bureau of Administration/Office of Logistics Management	Organized initial evacuation flight, which was canceled due to concerns about a possible quarantine for the flight crew.
Bureau of Diplomatic Security	Participated on Wuhan Evacuation Task Force and in interagency meetings; monitored Wuhan security situation.

Under Secretary for Political Affairs

Designated by Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) to be Department's crisis manager, but Deputy Secretary played this role for Wuhan evacuation.

Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs	Led twice-daily calls with Mission China; made ordered and authorized departure requests; co-convened and led the Wuhan Evacuation Task Force; participated in congressional briefings and hearings; sent representative to March Air Reserve Base to assist evacuees from Consulate General Wuhan.
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Executive Secretariat

Crisis Management and Strategy	Co-convened Wuhan Evacuation Task Force; planned for transition from task force to global coordination unit; supported preparation of COVID-19 Interim Review.
Wuhan Evacuation Task Force	Coordinated Wuhan evacuation efforts within Department and with interagency partners, including through notifications to the Washington Liaison Group and Situation Reports.

Bureau of Legislative Affairs

Led coordination with Congress; represented Department in interagency coordination of communication with Congress.

Source: Generated by OIG from information provided by the Department.

APPENDIX E: LIST OF LESSONS LEARNED REPORTS

OIG identified the following lessons learned reports associated with the Wuhan evacuation and the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. Wuhan Evacuation Lessons Learned (January 30, 2020) Staff of Consulate General Wuhan produced a condensed outline of observations and conclusions in bullet format based on their experience in managing the consulate general during the weeks leading up to the evacuation of staff, family members, and American citizens.
2. Lessons Learned – Coronavirus Crisis, U.S. Consulate Wuhan (February 10, 2020) Consulate General Wuhan staff produced a narrative report that addressed the consulate general's strengths and weaknesses in responding to the virus outbreak and subsequent actions taken.
3. Closure and Evacuation of Consulate General Wuhan in the Midst of COVID-19, January-February 2020 (February 17, 2020) This report focused on the consulate general's Regional Security Office's emergency preparedness related to Wuhan and COVID-19. The report states that it was not intended as an exhaustive after-action review or full accounting of the contributions of other posts, bureaus, or agencies.
4. Wuhan Fly-Away Evacuation Lessons Learned Report (March 2020) Embassy Beijing formed the Consular "Fly-Away Team" to accompany medical personnel on evacuation flights for American citizens in Wuhan. This report provides practical advice to consular officers who engage with evacuees during crises.
5. Mission China Lessons Learned: Ordered Departure (December 10, 2020)¹ This cable highlighted operational challenges and lessons learned from evacuating more than 1,000 staff and family members from Mission China posts in January-February 2020. It focused primarily on Embassy Beijing's experience.
6. COVID Crisis: Worldwide Best Practices for Crisis Preparedness, Response, and Recovery (March 1, 2021)² This was a compilation of lessons learned by the Foreign Service Institute's Crisis Management Training team from crisis management exercises it conducted abroad in 2020 focused on the unique challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.
7. OPERATIONAL MEDICINE PROGRAM Operations Briefing Reports, May 2021 This report was a compendium of operations undertaken by the Bureau of Medical Services' Directorate of Operational Medicine from summer 2014 through April 2021. Among other operations, the report includes a discussion of the operational challenges and lessons learned from the Wuhan evacuation flights.
8. COVID-19 Interim Review (June 2021) The Crisis Management and Strategy Office and the Office of Management Strategy and Solutions formed the COVID-19 Interim Review team that produced recommendations for Department leadership and the Enterprise Governance Board. The report contains both recommendations and actions intended to improve Department capabilities to respond to future pandemics and other urgent or

¹ Cable 20 BEIJING 2378, December 10, 2020.

² Cable 21 STATE 17730, March 1, 2021.

emergent events. The report also includes a list of reporting cables and other documents relevant to a broader examination of the Department's response to COVID-19.

9. Bureau of Consular Affairs COVID-19 Lessons Learned Project: Identifying Challenges and Tasks (July 15, 2021)³ The bureau completed a lessons learned project in May 2021 to identify and document successful innovations and workarounds, and to note areas where existing processes and tools fell short. The report includes the project results and timeline for follow up action.

³ Cable 21 STATE 73804, July 15, 2021.

ABBREVIATIONS

ARB	Air Reserve Base
CA	Bureau of Consular Affairs
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DoD	Department of Defense
EAP	Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs
FAH	Foreign Affairs Handbook
FAM	Foreign Affairs Manual
H Bureau	Bureau of Legislative Affairs
HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
MED	Bureau of Medical Services
MED/DO/OM	Directorate of Operational Medicine
NSC	National Security Council
WETF	Wuhan Evacuation Task Force



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