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Office of Inspector General  
United States Department of State

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ESP-25-02

Office of Evaluations and Special Projects

July 2025

# **Evaluation of the Department's 2023 Evacuation of Embassy Khartoum**

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# HIGHLIGHTS

Office of Inspector General  
United States Department of State

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## What OIG Evaluated

In April 2023, U.S. Embassy Khartoum, Sudan, suspended its operations, and the Department of State (Department) ordered the departure of U.S. direct-hire employees and their dependents due to the continued threat from armed conflict in Sudan. U.S. forces evacuated 76 American staff of the embassy. The Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted this evaluation to assess whether the Department followed lessons learned from other recent evacuations in the evacuation of Embassy Khartoum, what challenges existed to Department officials in the evacuation, and what support was provided to individuals whose consular documents were in the embassy's possession.

## What OIG Recommends

OIG made two recommendations to the Bureau of Diplomatic Security to ensure that all emergency action planning and drills fully account for Sensitive But Unclassified (SBU) material that must be destroyed in a crisis and that Emergency Action Plans fully address coordination with nearby posts in crisis-response operations. OIG also recommended to the Bureau of Consular Affairs to develop and implement guidance to ensure that consular sections at U.S. embassies fully account for all passports in their possession for processing and return passports to the owner while waiting for documentation or approvals.

July 2025

OFFICE OF EVALUATIONS AND SPECIAL PROJECTS

## Evaluation of the Department's 2023 Evacuation of Embassy Khartoum

### What OIG Found

The Department has generally improved its crisis preparedness policies, infrastructure, and training in response to embassy evacuations and applied these lessons to the evacuation of Embassy Khartoum. For example, Embassy Khartoum made significant improvements to its emergency preparedness based on lessons learned from an authorized departure due to civil unrest in October 2021. Specifically, Embassy Khartoum expanded its communications capability and the Alternate Command Center's medical capability.

However, Embassy Khartoum did not incorporate some lessons learned from previous evacuations that were reflected in challenges the embassy faced in the evacuation. For example, the embassy's emergency planning did not incorporate regional coordination with appropriate U.S. embassies. In addition, the emergency planning did not account for the significant amount of SBU materials that required destruction prior to the evacuation.

Finally, OIG found the Department could not provide a definitive accounting of the passports and other documents in Embassy Khartoum's possession that were destroyed prior to the evacuation. Individuals who had left their documents with the embassy for visa processing, including U.S. citizens, thus lost critical documents during the crisis and faced challenges in securing replacements.

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## OBJECTIVE

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On April 22, 2023, U.S. Embassy Khartoum, Sudan, suspended operations and ordered the departure of U.S. direct-hire employees (USDH) and eligible family members (EFM). Department of State (Department) regulations require that all U.S. missions abroad develop and maintain emergency action plans. For example, the Department's Foreign Affairs Handbook (FAH) states that following any "large scale event, emergency, or crisis," an affected post's Emergency Action Committee (EAC) must produce a lessons learned cable and that the Office of Crisis Management and Strategy (CMS) should facilitate the review and refine crisis management and response procedures.<sup>1</sup> The Regional Security Officer (RSO) at the affected post may also separately document lessons learned, focusing on the security-related aspects of the crisis, which are collected by the Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS).

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted this evaluation to assess whether the Department followed lessons learned from other recent evacuations in the planning, execution, and follow-up to the evacuation of Embassy Khartoum, what challenges existed to Department officials in the evacuation, and what support was provided to individuals whose consular documents were in the embassy's possession.

## BACKGROUND

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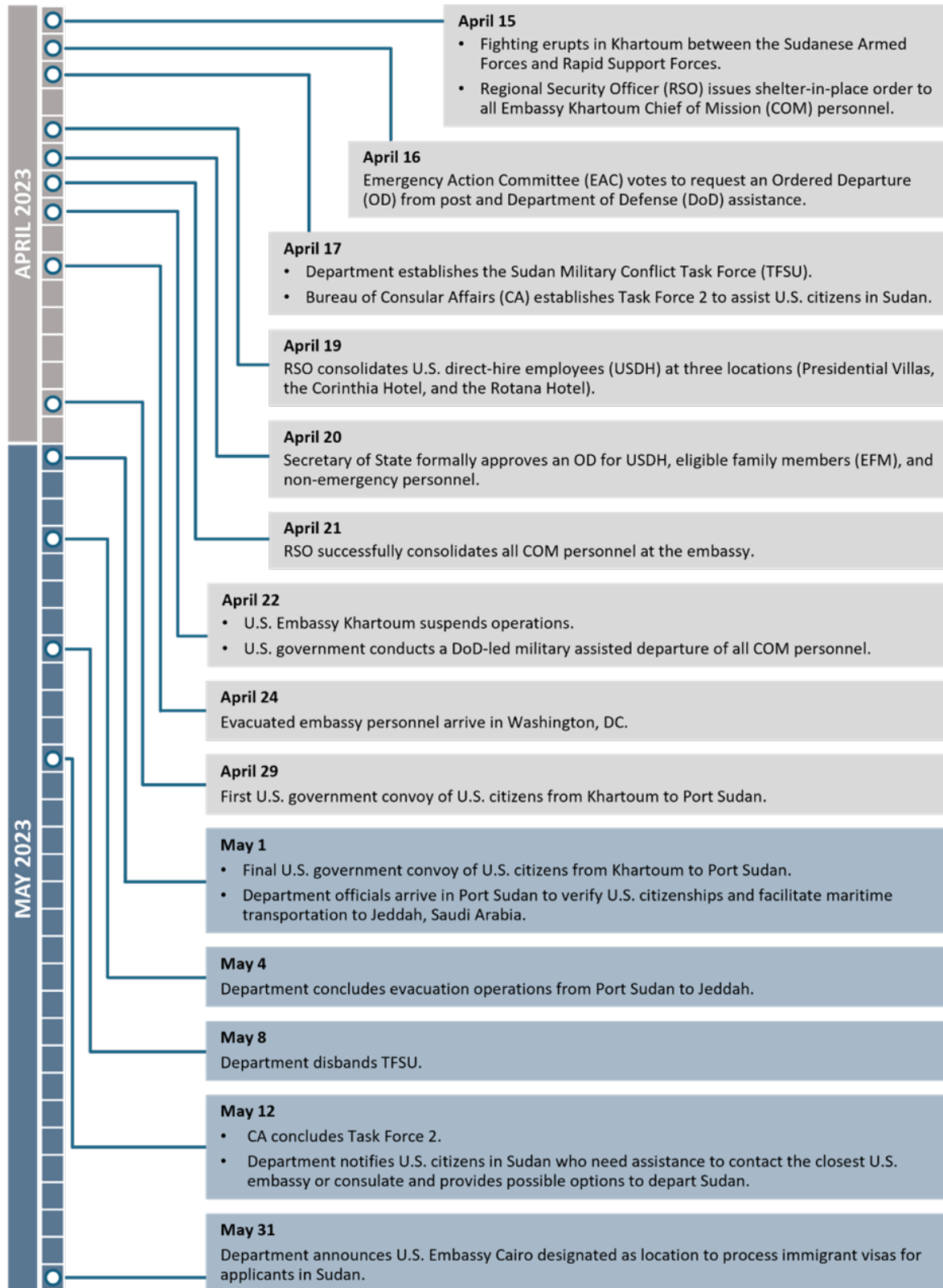
On April 15, 2023, fighting broke out in Khartoum between the Sudanese Armed Forces and a paramilitary militia, the Rapid Support Forces. As a result of this conflict, diplomatic and humanitarian missions in Sudan were subjected to widespread and targeted attacks on personnel, facilities, and movements. On April 16, Embassy Khartoum's EAC voted to seek an Ordered Departure (OD) and requested Department of Defense (DoD) support. On April 17, the Department established the Sudan Military Conflict Task Force (TFSU) to monitor the situation and support Embassy Khartoum.

On April 20, the Secretary of State formally approved an OD for USDH employees, EFMs, and non-emergency personnel. The next day, the RSO in Khartoum successfully consolidated all Chief of Mission (COM) personnel at the embassy. On April 22, the U.S. government commenced a DoD-led Military Assisted Drawdown of 76 USDH and EFMs. Embassy Khartoum evacuees arrived in Washington, DC, on April 24. From April 29 through May 4, the Department and DoD worked with partner nations to support the evacuation of U.S. citizens from Sudan. All U.S. personnel were successfully evacuated from Sudan in extremely challenging circumstances. Figure 1 shows a timeline of events.

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<sup>1</sup> 12 FAH-1 H-235a.

Figure 1: Sudan Evacuation Timeline, April 15 to May 31, 2023



Source: OIG-generated based upon Department of State documentation related to the Sudan evacuation.

## **Crisis Management at the Department**

### ***The Operations Center***

The Operations Center (S/ES-O), located within the Office of the Secretary's Executive Secretariat (S/ES), serves as the Department's "communications and crisis management center."<sup>2</sup> S/ES-O is composed of two units: The Watch and the Office of Crisis Management and Strategy (CMS).<sup>3</sup> The Watch serves as "the initial point of contact for posts experiencing any type of emergency or crisis."<sup>4</sup> CMS officials monitor global events to anticipate potential crises, assist posts and bureaus with contingency planning, and train and brief Department personnel and other agencies on task force and evacuation procedures and policies.<sup>5</sup> During a crisis, CMS "serves as the crisis monitor/advisor for the Department's senior leadership and the Departmental coordinator for evacuations" and oversees task forces formed in response to a crisis.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Task Forces***

S/ES-O generally becomes involved in a crisis when it becomes too big for a regional bureau to handle on its own.<sup>7</sup> A task force may be formed when a situation or event requires "the sustained and close attention of the Department."<sup>8</sup> The FAH describes task forces as "the Department's primary crisis management tool" and their purpose is to "facilitate Department and interagency communication and coordination related to a particular crisis."<sup>9</sup>

### ***Task Force Organization***

Task forces are convened by CMS and led by the affected regional bureau. Relevant stakeholders within the Department send employees to staff the task force and represent their bureau, and interagency partners may also be present.<sup>10</sup> Once a task force is up and running, the main table in the task force room has a certain number of permanent chairs for the people or bureaus represented on the task force.

The Operations Center suite in the Harry S. Truman Building includes three connected task force spaces: task force rooms 1 (TFR1), two (TFR2), and three (TFR3). Each room is equipped with more than a dozen workstations for participating Department bureaus and interagency

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<sup>2</sup> Department of State, *About Us – Executive Secretariat*, <https://www.state.gov/about-us-executive-secretariat/>.

<sup>3</sup> 12 FAH-1 H-023.1-2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> The Department's mission is carried out through six regional bureaus, each responsible for a specific geographic region of the world.

<sup>8</sup> 12 FAH-1 H-021.

<sup>9</sup> 12 FAH-1 H-023.1-3.

<sup>10</sup> The Bureaus of Administration, Consular Affairs, DS, Diplomatic Technology, Global Public Affairs, Intelligence and Research, and Medical Services (MED) are commonly represented on a task force.

officials. Movable glass wall panels can be used to combine or partition the rooms as needed. This functionality allows the Operations Center to run three concurrent task forces or to easily accommodate overflow of one task force.

### ***Post-Crisis Documentation of Lessons Learned and After-Action Reviews***

The FAH requires EACs to produce a lessons learned cable within 30 days following the termination of an authorized or ordered departure “to summarize the incident, analyze what happened, identify best practices, recommend or document areas for improvement, highlight gaps, and document lessons learned.”<sup>11</sup> CMS is responsible for collecting the Department’s lessons learned cables after a crisis. CMS stores these in its virtual Lessons Learned Library, which is available to all Department personnel on the Department’s internal website. The FAH further requires posts to “integrate lessons learned . . . into preparedness activities such as updating the [Emergency Action Plan] and conducting training, drills, and exercises.”<sup>12</sup>

Following an evacuation, the RSO at the embassy or consulate may also document lessons learned in an after-action review (AAR). DS’s Operations Planning and Innovation Unit (OPI) also conducts AARs with bureau-wide focus. The AARs are internal documents, intended to identify successes and deficiencies and recommend solutions to improve DS policy and operations going forward. DS collects and maintains the AARs in the DS Center for Lessons Learned, a virtual library accessible to all DS employees.

### **The Emergency Action Committee and Emergency Action Plan**

All posts are required to have an EAC and must prepare an Emergency Action Plan (EAP).<sup>13</sup> The EAC is responsible for “guid[ing] post in preparation and execution of emergency planning, response, and recovery.”<sup>14</sup> As part of the EAC’s emergency planning responsibilities, it must develop, keep current, and annually certify its post’s EAP.<sup>15</sup>

The EAP is the primary source of guidance for posts on preparing for and responding to various emergencies.<sup>16</sup> It is based on the requirements and provisions of 12 FAH-1, the Department’s Emergency Planning Handbook, which “serves as the principal reference for the post in preparing and revising its [EAP].”<sup>17</sup> It is organized into four separate documents: (1) Immediate Action Guide, (2) Master Emergency Contact List, (3) Decision Points, and (4) Post Planning

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<sup>11</sup> 12 FAH-1 H-235(a)-(b).

<sup>12</sup> 12 FAH-1 H-235(d).

<sup>13</sup> The Chief of Mission (COM) is responsible for the security of the mission and all U.S. government personnel on official duty abroad and their authorized dependents; the EAC assists and advises the COM on this responsibility. The COM appoints employees to serve on the EAC and selects one of them to serve as the EAC chair. 12 FAH-1 H-231.

<sup>14</sup> 12 FAH-1 H-233.2.

<sup>15</sup> 12 FAH-1 H-233.

<sup>16</sup> 12 FAH-1 H-122.

<sup>17</sup> 12 FAH-1 H-013.

Guide.<sup>18</sup> The Immediate Action and Post Planning Guides provide response plans for all emergencies contained in the 12 FAH-1 Annexes.<sup>19</sup> The Decision Points framework requires the EAC to develop post-specific normal operating assumptions, risk indicators, and mitigating actions to consider. The operating assumptions provide a contextual baseline of post's unique operating conditions.<sup>20</sup> Risk indicators reflect events, threats, or changes in circumstances (internal or external to the host nation) that require the EAC to evaluate the possibility of increased risk to the health, safety, and security of the mission; U.S. government personnel and accompanying family members under COM security responsibility; U.S. private citizens; and other U.S. government interests.<sup>21</sup> Finally, post's list of consolidated actions to consider should cover the full spectrum of increasingly aggressive actions post may take to mitigate risk.<sup>22</sup> CMS provides recommended standardized language for each element of the Decision Points framework, including preparations for destroying documents, evacuating the embassy, and suspending operations.

The FAH notes that the EAP's efficacy is based on three criteria, one of which is that it is viable.<sup>23</sup> For an EAP to be viable, it must include information that "accounts for post's unique circumstances including: post's personnel structure, physical infrastructure, capabilities and limitations of post to respond to emergencies, and the host government's capabilities and limitations."<sup>24</sup>

12 FAH-1, Annex K provides guidance for posts to follow to evaluate the need for, scope of, and organization of a drawdown of post personnel due to the crossing a decision point or an unforeseen event. If the Department determines an OD is the appropriate action, it requires the mandatory departure of all family members and designated employees.<sup>25</sup> If the OD coincides with a suspension of operations, a post must review its holdings of classified information, firearms, and other sensitive materials and determine the amount to be safe-havened or destroyed.<sup>26</sup>

The FAH requires posts' EAPs to include information about how they will coordinate with nearby posts during a crisis as well as guidance and checklists for receiving evacuees from another post or country. An EAP must describe post's "plan to coordinate with [constituent and

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<sup>18</sup> See 12 FAH-1 H-038.

<sup>19</sup> The annexes are hazard-specific checklists that provide roles and actions for how to potentially respond to various events, organized by scenario and phase. The Immediate Action Guide provides response plans for sudden-onset crises that require immediate actions to ensure life-safety, such a bomb, fire, or weapon of mass destruction event, and the Post Planning Guide provides post-specific information and response plans for all other crises, such as civil disorder and evacuation. 12 FAH-1 H-031, H-038.

<sup>20</sup> 12 FAH-1 H-752.1.

<sup>21</sup> 12 FAH-1 H-752.2.

<sup>22</sup> 12 FAH-1 H-752.3.

<sup>23</sup> The other two criteria are that the EAP must be accurate and useable. 12 FAH-1 H-031.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> 12 FAH-1, Annex K 2.2-1(c)(5).

<sup>26</sup> 12 FAH-1, Annex K Addendum 2.1(1).

neighboring posts] during a crisis, including which resources post plans to obtain from nearby post(s) and which resources post plans to provide to nearby posts(s).”<sup>27</sup> This section, “Coordination Between Nearby Posts During a Crisis,” is located in the Post Planning Guide. 12 FAH-1, Annex L requires EAPs to include background information on the receipt of evacuees from another post or country, checklists for preparing to receive them, and checklists for their actual arrival.<sup>28</sup> This plan is intended to be activated when the post is designated as an intermediate or final safe haven; if it expects to be a transit point for large numbers of evacuees; or when “large numbers of U.S. citizens are expected to arrive as a result of a crisis in a nearby area, either in-country or from outside.”<sup>29</sup>

## **Recent Evacuations**

The April 2023 evacuation of Embassy Khartoum was the third evacuation of a U.S. embassy in 2 years. In April 2021, the Department ordered departures for non-essential employees from U.S. Embassy Kabul, Afghanistan and, in August, fully evacuated the embassy. Additionally, from October through December 2021, Embassy Khartoum initiated an authorized departure (AD) following a military coup d’etat in Sudan. Finally, in February 2022, U.S. Embassy Kyiv, Ukraine, suspended operations.

## **Records Management**

The Department policies and processes for records disposition include that each office or post is responsible for carrying out an active records disposition program in accordance with policy and procedures set forth in the FAM. All Department personnel are responsible for creating, using, maintaining, preserving, and disposing of the Department’s records and information pursuant to the appropriate records disposition schedule.<sup>30</sup>

The Department’s management controls for consular operations at overseas posts include a training component. Specifically, officers and locally employed staff (LES) must be adequately trained to carry out their responsibilities correctly. This includes not only functional and operational knowledge but also an awareness of the importance of the function and the reasons for ensuring management controls over the operations. Each post should have a written orientation and training program for new arrivals, and, in addition to local on-the-job training, posts should encourage LES to complete the appropriate Foreign Service Institute correspondence courses.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> 12 FAH-1 H-732(c).

<sup>28</sup> 12 FAH-1, Annex L 1.1, .2.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> 5 FAM 418.10(b)(1).

<sup>31</sup> 7 FAH-1 H-645.2(a); 5 FAM 416(d).

## **Destruction of Sensitive Materials**

The underlying goal of 12 FAH-1, Annex E’s policy on destroying sensitive materials is to prevent classified national security information, as well as Sensitive But Unclassified (SBU) information and materials, from being compromised by reducing the quantity of classified and SBU material held at posts. Under normal conditions, all diplomatic posts abroad are required to maintain holdings of classified and SBU material at or below levels described in the Records Management Handbook (5 FAH-4), any supplements thereto, or applicable records disposition requirements of tenant agencies. Such classified and SBU material is not limited to paper; it also includes electronic media. Other categories of sensitive materials include consular foils, stamps, blank passports, and equipment for processing such documents, as well as monetary instruments including currency.<sup>32</sup>

Destruction of classified and SBU material is performed by cleared U.S. citizen personnel and by authorized means only (e.g., shredding, degaussing, chemical immersion, disintegration or burning).<sup>33</sup> The FAH requires those at post responsible for emergency destruction to conduct “functional exercises” at least twice a year.<sup>34</sup>

## **Related OIG Work**

A March 2023 OIG inspection of Embassy Khartoum found that the embassy faced significant challenges staffing USDH positions and had multiple internal control shortcomings, which may have impacted evacuation efforts.<sup>35</sup> For example, in addition to staffing gaps, the Consular Section lacked a written orientation and training program for backup consular officers and temporary duty consular officers. Additionally, Embassy Khartoum’s records management program did not comply with Department standards for records oversight and retirement. For example, the embassy had not archived principal officer and program paper records since 1995.

In October 2024, OIG issued an audit report on the Department’s disposition of sensitive security assets in advance of evacuations from Embassy Kabul and Embassy Kyiv.<sup>36</sup> Over the course of the audit, OIG identified challenges related to the Department’s approach to documenting and applying lessons learned from previous post evacuations. In response, OIG issued a Management Assistance Report in September 2024 based on its finding that the

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<sup>32</sup> 12 FAH-1, Annex E 1.1(a).

<sup>33</sup> OIG’s Office of Audits also reviewed the safeguarding and destruction of sensitive assets, including special protective equipment and armored vehicles, at other posts. Therefore, this evaluation did not address those assets and focused on the destruction of classified and SBU documents, including passports. OIG, *Audit of the Disposition of Sensitive Security Assets at U.S. Embassies Kabul, Afghanistan, and Kyiv, Ukraine*, AUD-GEER-25-01, October 2024.

<sup>34</sup> “Functional exercises allow response teams to validate their emergency readiness, procedures, and resources by performing their duties in a simulated operational environment.” 12 FAH-1 H-766.1(a).

<sup>35</sup> OIG, *Inspection of Embassy Khartoum, Sudan* (ISP-I-23-13, March 2023).

<sup>36</sup> OIG, *Audit of the Disposition of Sensitive Security Assets at U.S. Embassies Kabul, Afghanistan, and Kyiv, Ukraine* (AUD-GEER-25-01, October 2024).

Department did not take a consistent approach to preparing lessons learned reports following evacuations.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, when the Department produced such reports, it did not have an established process to systematically review those reports or determine what changes were necessary based on those lessons learned. As a result, the Department experienced the same difficulties over again in multiple evacuations.

## FINDINGS

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### **The Department Improved Aspects of Crisis Preparedness and Response Based on Lessons Learned From Prior Evacuations, but Further Action Is Required**

OIG found that Embassy Khartoum implemented lessons learned following its AD in 2021, but did not have the opportunity to review or implement lessons learned from the Department's evacuation of Embassy Kabul in the same year. However, the Department implemented several lessons learned from the Embassy Kabul evacuation. The changes implemented—including improvements to crisis response facilities, technology, and management of personnel—facilitated the evacuation of Embassy Khartoum.

#### ***Embassy Khartoum Implemented Facility and Procedural Improvements Based on Lessons Learned From the October 2021 Authorized Departure***

Embassy Khartoum initiated an AD from October through December 2021 as the result of a military-led coup d'état of the Sudanese government. Post personnel reviewed lessons learned from that AD and proactively implemented changes in emergency planning, preparations, and infrastructure accordingly. DS personnel noted that embassy leadership was supportive of the improvements to emergency preparedness.

Following the AD, the embassy requested that the Foreign Service Institute's Crisis Management Training Division revise its crisis management exercise—scheduled for March 2022—to include a review of actions during the AD and to provide feedback and guidance.<sup>38</sup> The division agreed, and the RSO stated that the discussion helped the embassy take a “hard look” at needed improvements.

Embassy Khartoum personnel used lessons learned to improve preparedness and infrastructure. The 2021 coup d'état cut commercial internet, landlines, and cell phones for more than 5 weeks and the embassy had to primarily conduct operations from the Alternate Command Center (ACC) located at its primary residential facility, the Presidential Villas Housing Compound. As a result of lessons learned during those operations, Embassy Khartoum personnel improved the capacity of the ACC.

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<sup>37</sup> AUD-GEER-24-32.

<sup>38</sup> The Crisis Management Training Division conducts training and crisis management exercises at all U.S. posts abroad at regular intervals. The exercises are developed and facilitated to assess post's emergency preparedness, knowledge of Department policy, and EAP. 12 FAH-1 H-766.

Department officials stated that, at the time of the AD, the ACC had only two OpenNet-enabled computers and that these could only be logged into by two specific officials.<sup>39</sup> Embassy Khartoum personnel made substantial improvements to the ACC to allow up to 10 people to work there and installed redundant communications options for use in the event of the loss of mainline communications. Additionally, embassy personnel repurposed equipment at the embassy compound to enable the ACC to remotely activate the embassy's Imminent Danger Notification System—a loudspeaker system—and camera monitoring. They implemented biweekly radio checks for all personnel, and the RSO issued radios to key LES to use in the event of communications outages. Embassy Diplomatic Technology officers implemented monthly tests of all communications systems at the ACC. The embassy also developed emergency staffing procedures to ensure that local guard and surveillance detection coverage could be activated in the event of communications cuts.

Embassy personnel expanded trauma treatment capacity at the ACC and hosted a Bureau of Medical Services (MED) provider to train more than 100 LES and U.S. government personnel in March 2022. Finally, embassy personnel increased the emergency food and water supplies and established a water supply separate from the municipal system.

In addition to facilities improvement, the embassy proactively disseminated lessons learned from the AD to all staff. For example, embassy personnel hosted biannual preparedness workshops. In addition, Embassy Khartoum personnel regularly stressed emergency procedures awareness and preparedness recommendations for staff. For example, DS personnel stressed the requirement to maintain at least 7 days of emergency food, water, medicine, and essential supplies to all new arrivals to post. The RSO assessed that enhancing the ACC was critical to the successful evacuation of USDH and EFMs from Khartoum.

***Embassy Personnel Did Not Consider Lessons Learned From the Evacuation of Embassy Kabul, Afghanistan, and Lessons Learned From Sudan May Not Have Been Disseminated***

The Department's publicly released *After Action Review on Afghanistan* (March 2022) (hereinafter *Afghanistan AAR*) identified several recommendations for how the Department could better prepare for "future situations that involve complex crises in unstable operating environments with the possibility of a large-scale evacuation."<sup>40</sup> In September 2023, the Under Secretary for Management wrote in a letter to OIG that the Department's efforts to apply lessons learned from the evacuation of Embassy Kabul—presumably referring to the aforementioned recommendations—had strengthened the Department's response to subsequent crises, which included Sudan.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> OpenNet is the Department's SBU intranet network.

<sup>40</sup> Department of State, *After Action Review on Afghanistan*, page 4 (March 2022), <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/State-AAR-AFG.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> "[T]he Department is fully committed to continuing to apply lessons learned from this evacuation, with a focus on improved communications, resources, and preparedness. These efforts have already strengthened our response to subsequent crises around the world, aided the protection of U.S. citizens abroad, and enabled the Department to offer support to foreign nationals who work within and assist our diplomatic missions. Tens of thousands of people—our dedicated professionals and family members, other embassy employees, American

Echoing previous OIG findings that the Department had not established a process to implement lessons learned into emergency planning, it is not clear that Embassy Khartoum considered operations outside of its direct experience when conducting its emergency planning and the subsequent 2023 evacuation. Neither the DCM nor the RSO had reviewed the *Afghanistan AAR* prior to the evacuation of Khartoum. That document made a recommendation related to document destruction at high threat posts, which proved to be a serious issue during the evacuation of Embassy Khartoum. A CMS official told OIG that the *Afghanistan AAR* was controlled within the Department and that they were only able to read a hard copy of the document that had to be checked out from a Department official responsible for controlling its dissemination.

The RSO told OIG that, while writing his report on lessons learned from the Sudan evacuation, he reviewed AARs going back to 1991 and noted that the same lessons learned appear again and again, but no one seemed to be learning them. He also told OIG that he had not received any feedback on his report, nor had he seen it disseminated anywhere in the Department. However, he provided trainings at the Foreign Affairs Security Training Center that incorporated some lessons from Embassy Khartoum.

OPI wrote its own AAR of the evacuation. This AAR used some of the RSO's experiences included in the RSO AAR but focused on the broader DS Bureau response to the crisis. OIG learned that DS did not officially conduct any cross-event analysis that included the Embassy Khartoum evacuation to identify trends to inform future evacuation planning. DS included OPI's AAR in the DS Center for Lessons Learned, an internal website where the report is available to RSOs posted worldwide.

After TFSU disbanded, CMS developed a lessons learned report to identify key problem sets and best practices related to the task force experience.<sup>42</sup> As part of this effort, CMS asked all nearby posts involved in the evacuation to submit lessons learned cables and compiled participant responses from surveys, interviews, and focus groups across the Department. The Deputy Director for CMS told OIG that the Department made changes based on the lessons learned, some of which are mentioned below.

### ***Applying Lessons Learned From the 2021 Evacuation of Afghanistan Improved the Department's Crisis Management Capabilities***

Several recommendations from the *Afghanistan AAR* focused on strengthening the Department's crisis communications, information sharing, and response capabilities. OIG found that the Department implemented several *Afghanistan AAR* recommendations and deployed

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citizens, and nationals of many other nations—have benefited from these improvements as we responded to unfolding crises in Sudan, Ukraine, Ethiopia, and Niger.” OIG, *Information Brief: OIG's Review of the Department of State's Evacuation of U.S. Embassy Kabul, Afghanistan* (AUD-MERO-23-33, September 2023).

<sup>42</sup> S/ES, Information Memorandum for Acting Deputy Secretary Nuland (D) and Under Secretary Bass (M), “Lessons Learned from the Sudan Military Conflict Task Force” (September 1, 2023).

them in its response to the Sudan crisis.<sup>43</sup> Some Department employees interviewed by OIG had difficulty identifying changes in policy that directly stemmed from Afghanistan or that were implemented at the time of the Sudan crisis. Subsequent (or overlapping) crises may produce similar or recurring lessons learned or may further inform the Department's implementation of a particular lesson learned. Additionally, lack of resources may further hinder the Department's ability to act on a lesson learned. Therefore, when a change in Department policy or procedure occurs, it may be the product of a combination of several crises or lessons learned.

#### *New Task Force Spaces Improve Collaboration*

At the time of the Embassy Kabul drawdown and evacuation, the Operations Center suite was undergoing renovations. As a result, elements of the Afghanistan task force were "physically scattered," operating out of five different locations in the Harry S. Truman Building. This arrangement impacts a key purpose of task forces: streamlined communications. In its recommendations, the *Afghanistan AAR* recognized the need for task force elements to be co-located with sufficient space to add more elements if needed.<sup>44</sup>

In fall 2022, the renovations were completed and the Operations Center returned to its suite on the seventh floor of the Harry S. Truman Building. The improvements included the addition of the three interconnected task force rooms. TFSU was the first crisis task force to use the new spaces, and feedback collected by the Operations Center indicated a positive reception: "Participants largely praised these new rooms, which allow for greater co-location and collaboration of task force participants."<sup>45</sup> Over the course of the crisis, TFSU eventually outgrew TFR1 and overflowed into the other two rooms. CMS found that TFR3 was "underutilize[ed]" and determined that, in future crises, it would start task forces there.<sup>46</sup>

#### *New Digital Platforms Improve Information Sharing and Emergency Assistance to U.S. Citizens*

The inability of task force elements to be in close physical proximity was not the only issue affecting collaboration during the Afghanistan evacuation. The *Afghanistan AAR* found that knowledge management and communication among and across various task force lines of effort was also problematic.<sup>47</sup> This finding resulted in recommendations to develop and

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<sup>43</sup> The *Afghanistan AAR* contained five pages of recommendations. Examining whether (and how) all of them had been implemented would have exceeded the scope of this evaluation. Therefore, the *Afghanistan AAR* recommendations discussed herein are those that were identified during interviews or by OIG as having a clear nexus to the Sudan crisis response.

<sup>44</sup> In full, the *Afghanistan AAR* recommended that "The Operations Center must have the technology, equipment, and surge capacity/space to simultaneously run multiple task force elements in close proximity to one another." Department of State, *After Action Review on Afghanistan*, page 16 (March 2022).

<sup>45</sup> S/ES, Information Memorandum for Acting Deputy Secretary Nuland (D) and Under Secretary Bass (M), "Lessons Learned from the Sudan Military Conflict Task Force" (September 1, 2023).

<sup>46</sup> When OIG toured the Operations Center and task force spaces in fall 2024, TFR3 was being used for the Israel-Hizballah Conflict Task Force.

<sup>47</sup> This was especially true regarding information on the number, whereabouts, and safety of private U.S. citizens still in Afghanistan. Department personnel made tens of thousands of individual phone calls to directly contact U.S. citizens to determine if they were in Afghanistan and wanted to leave and to provide evacuation-related

improve software to more efficiently share information and track cases of U.S. citizens in need of crisis assistance.<sup>48</sup> The Department developed two new digital platforms in response to these recommendations: the Operations Response Interagency Online Network (ORION) database and the Consular Affairs Crisis Management System (CACMS). The Department used these platforms during the Sudan crisis response.

CMS developed ORION to improve collaboration, information sharing, and situational awareness between Department offices and interagency partners during a crisis. ORION features a dashboard that aggregates and displays real-time information from various sources to create a common operational picture.<sup>49</sup> ORION displays information about post facilities, breaking news events, cables, personnel accountability, maps, weather, and consular data. Upcoming events such as coordination calls between the task force and post, daily briefs, and evacuation flights are also shared on the dashboard. CMS also has data-sharing agreements with several Department bureaus to centralize their data on the ORION platform. Information is also gathered from external sources, such as news outlets and social media reports.

Before ORION's debut, CMS primarily managed information flow during a crisis using Microsoft Excel and Outlook. ORION was used for the first time during the Sudan crisis as a pilot program. Although it lacked many of the functionalities mentioned above because it was an early version of the platform, it "allowed task force representatives to quickly gain a more comprehensive idea of the situation on the ground and in the region compared to previous crisis scenarios."<sup>50</sup>

The Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA) developed CACMS to replace its legacy crisis management platform, Consular Task Force (CTF).<sup>51</sup> One CA official told OIG that the Department's COVID-19 repatriation effort and the Afghanistan evacuation "broke" CTF and highlighted the need for

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information. Additionally, the "overwhelming volume" of calls and messages from other government agencies, Congress, and the public inquiring about individual cases mostly regarding at-risk Afghans exacerbated the issue and placed a further strain on resources and personnel. Department of State, *After Action Review on Afghanistan*, pages 13-14 (March 2022).

<sup>48</sup> In full, the *Afghanistan AAR* recommended that "The Department should invest in crisis management software that can provide a common operating picture and synthesize appropriate information from across the organization. Most important, it needs a case management system that is compatible with other relevant Department systems, is interoperable with interagency platforms, and allows for tracking Congressional and other special interest cases while ensuring privacy safeguards and protection of PII. Mobility is of critical importance, and those working [temporary duty] or remotely must have the equipment and access to the system they need." Department of State, *After Action Review on Afghanistan*, page 16 (March 2022).

<sup>49</sup> DoD defines a common operational picture as "a single identical display of relevant information shared by more than one command that facilitates collaborative planning and assists all echelons to achieve situational awareness." DoD, *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (March 2017) <https://www.tradoc.army.mil/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/AD1029823-DOD-Dictionary-of-Military-and-Associated-Terms-2017.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> S/ES, Information Memorandum for Acting Deputy Secretary Nuland (D) and Under Secretary Bass (M), "Lessons Learned from the Sudan Military Conflict Task Force" (September 1, 2023).

<sup>51</sup> Development of CACMS by the Office of Consular Systems and Technology began in late 2021 after the Afghanistan evacuation and was gradually rolled out to posts until CTF was decommissioned in July 2022.

modernization.<sup>52</sup> Primarily, CTF lacked online capability to collect and manage U.S. citizen evacuation requests. During a crisis, individuals requesting assistance shared their information with consular sections at post. Consular staff then manually entered the information into spreadsheets that required printing. One of the *Afghanistan AAR*'s findings noted that the “lack of a centralized case management system to track and collate inquiries and a number of other communications and information management challenges added to the difficulties the Department faced.”<sup>53</sup>

CACMS is a cloud-based application that integrates several consular crisis response duties—communication, consular services, evacuation assistance, and reporting—into a single platform. In real time, CACMS can track requests for crisis-related consular assistance, communicate directly with affected U.S. citizens, and monitor citizens’ welfare and whereabouts. At the end of a crisis, CA can disable CACMS’ public-facing part of the website. Although no longer publicly visible, it is still visible to staff on the back end of the system, as are data related to the evacuation.

CACMS features a live dashboard presenting information extracted from submissions, such as the total numbers of crisis intake form submissions received; active cases; individuals wishing to leave the country (and those who have already left); and requests for passports, visas, or evacuation assistance. CA officials told OIG that, in every crisis, the task force, Department officials, and interagency partners have an “insatiable desire” to receive the latest numbers of potential evacuees and U.S. citizens requiring assistance. To meet this demand, CA staff can generate reports and export information from CACMS to share with relevant stakeholders.

#### *Improvements to Task Force Staffing Based on Recurring Recommendations*

Historically, Department task forces were staffed by volunteer employees. When the Department established a task force, the bureaus involved would call for employees with relevant skills or experience to volunteer to serve on the task force. The *Afghanistan AAR* found that consistent task force staffing was an issue and recommended that a system be implemented to easily identify experienced employees to serve on a task force.<sup>54</sup> The lessons learned developed after the Sudan crisis again noted the Department lacked a system to identify potential task force volunteers.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> See Government Accountability Office, *COVID-19: State Carried Out Historic Repatriation Effort but Should Strengthen Its Preparedness for Future Crises* (GAO-22-104354, November 2021).

<sup>53</sup> Department of State, *After Action Review on Afghanistan*, page 14 (March 2022).

<sup>54</sup> The *Afghanistan AAR* attributes the inconsistent task force staffing to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, officials identified task force staffing as a recurring challenge and said it takes valuable time away from S/ES-O leadership to overcome, especially during the initial establishment of a task force and for task forces that last for several weeks.

<sup>55</sup> The TFSU lessons learned stated, “The Department continues to handle task force staffing on an ad hoc basis that varies from bureau to bureau. Many task force representatives served one-off shifts, resulting in little continuity and the constant need for on-shift training for new participants. . . . The absence of standardized Department task force staffing guidance and participant pools negatively affected task force continuity and morale. The Department lacks a system to identify personnel who could serve as task force leaders and

This recurring recommendation resulted in the creation of the Rapid Response Corps (RRC). The RRC is a cadre of Department personnel trained and prepared for task force service. Most bureaus are required to identify two percent of domestic staff eligible to participate on the RRC. Those selected to join the RRC are trained on task force operations and are subject to a 6-month renewable service period. If S/ES-O activates the RRC within the service period, its members are notified and are expected to be available to report for task force service within 24 hours. As a result of the RRC, the pool of task force participants has become increasingly “professionalized.” In addition, the Department now provides various flexibilities to task force participants.<sup>56</sup>

### **Embassy Khartoum Staff Faced Records Management Challenges in the Destruction of and Accounting for Sensitive Materials**

Embassy Khartoum staff could not take classified or SBU materials, including passports and visas in the embassy’s possession for visa processing, out of the country because all such materials were destroyed due to space and weight limitations on the aircraft leaving the embassy. Initially, there was confusion and a delay in destroying documents because some Embassy staff were trapped outside of the embassy compound. The previous destruction drills had not accounted for personnel being absent from the compound, leaving only the Marine Security Guards operating with two cleared U.S. citizen personnel.<sup>57</sup>

### ***Staffing Gaps Hampered Embassy Khartoum’s Ability To Manage and Destroy Sensitive Materials***

According to an Embassy Khartoum employee and Department officials, the embassy was short staffed, many positions were unfilled at the time of the OD, and many other positions were filled by people working outside of their area of expertise or training. These factors contributed to a lack of understanding about what needed to be destroyed and how long it would take. The Department’s *Afghanistan AAR* recommended that high-threat posts be held accountable for “reducing holdings of classified and other sensitive materials.” In the lead up to the Sudan evacuation, the Embassy Khartoum Deputy Chief of Mission, in her role as the head of the EAC, told section heads to be aware of the documents in their section’s possession and that they were responsible for document destruction. An Embassy Khartoum official told OIG that

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participants.” S/ES, Information Memorandum for Acting Deputy Secretary Nuland (D) and Under Secretary Bass (M), “Lessons Learned from the Sudan Military Conflict Task Force” (September 1, 2023).

<sup>56</sup> Volunteers for TFSU “reported the lack of designated parking and reimbursement mechanisms would likely affect future volunteer interest, as volunteers are essentially required to pay transportation costs for their participation.” One of the TFSU findings noted that “the Department does not provide task force participants parking spots, possess a task force transportation reimbursement mechanism, or offer participants premium compensation for irregular working hours or to those who are not entitled to overtime pay.” S/ES, Information Memorandum for Acting Deputy Secretary Nuland (D) and Under Secretary Bass (M), “Lessons Learned from the Sudan Military Conflict Task Force” (September 1, 2023).

<sup>57</sup> Twelve Marine Security Guards were assigned to Embassy Khartoum, and they helped destroy classified material, weapons, and SBU documents.

because evacuations are rare, Department personnel mostly think of classified information that must be destroyed and do not consider or plan for the other sensitive records that need to be destroyed in the event of an OD. For example, most Embassy Khartoum destruction drills focused only on classified materials with little or no attention to SBU/Personally Identifiable Information (PII) information or other items.

OIG reviewed documentation of evacuation drills that ostensibly accounted for document destruction. However, Embassy Khartoum personnel underestimated the volume of SBU material to be destroyed and expressed a lack of knowledge as to the proper procedures to destroy equipment. Classified materials were destroyed within hours. However, it took several days to destroy all SBU documents due to the volume, available personnel, and insufficient equipment. Shredders became inoperable after 2–3 days of continuous use forcing post to use “burn pits” until they could be repaired.

The Embassy Khartoum RSO reported that the destruction of classified material was an easy process because drills had focused almost entirely on destroying classified documents. However, there had been no drills on what to do with SBU/PII materials, visa foils and applications, personnel records for LES, and contract documents. He said that the United States Agency for International Development had paper contract documentation going back 30 years. Many sections did not understand what constituted PII or where their PII was stored, which added to the length of time it took to destroy those materials. It became apparent very quickly that personnel did not understand what shredding and burning everything would entail.

Multiple embassy personnel told OIG that the Consular Section had a significant backlog of material that had to be destroyed, with one individual stating that he spent two entire nights assisting the Consular Section with the destruction of sensitive materials. The Consular Section, like other sections, was short staffed. A CA official told OIG that, following the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent budget constraints, CA had a “significant staffing gap” and it took the Department a long time to resume hiring and get people through language training. Embassy Khartoum’s Consular Section was supposed to have three officers, but two of those positions were unfilled for 4 or 5 years prior to the OD. OIG’s March 2023 inspection of Embassy Khartoum found that three out of the seven LES working in the Consular Section had left at the end of 2021 and that it took between 8 and 9 months to fill the positions.<sup>58</sup> Just prior to the OD, the Consular Section had a Consular Chief, seven LES, and a Department Fraud Prevention Analyst. At full staffing, the Consular Section would have two USDH, eight LES, and an EFM position. At the time of the OD, the Consular Chief was out of the country and a second-tour Political Officer served as acting chief in his absence. Two other second-tour Public Diplomacy Officers at Embassy Khartoum had consular commissions but one was out of the country and neither had prior experience with American Citizen Services (ACS), a component of CA that provides assistance to U.S. citizens living or traveling abroad, such as passport assistance; legal assistance; and tracking consular reports of birth abroad (CRBA), arrests, and deaths. In

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<sup>58</sup> ISP-I-23-13.

addition to their unfamiliarity with consular operations, each of the individuals providing back-up support had their own primary responsibilities to perform.

OIG's inspection recommended that the embassy develop and implement a written consular training and orientation program in accordance with Department standards. Embassy Khartoum concurred with the recommendation and noted that it developed and published the programs. When asked for additional details about the training and orientation, CA responded that "the consular officer at post notes the consular training and orientation programs were generic in nature and designed to give a basic consular overview as new staff were onboarded." However, the training did not cover the emergency destruction of consular items. Additionally, the Consular Officer could not say when post began using the new materials or whether consular staff completed the training prior to the crisis that led to the evacuation.

Records management and destruction of sensitive materials was an issue for Embassy Khartoum's Health Unit as well. In February 2023, as part of a MED initiative to collect old records from high-threat posts, the Health Unit shipped out all paper records of staff who had departed post.<sup>59</sup> This led to fewer documents in the Health Unit's possession, but all remaining documents had to be destroyed because they contained PII. The Medical Provider destroyed the documents herself, in addition to caring for patients and collecting next-of-kin information for embassy staff, because she had no LES or other staff to assist her.

MED's proactive efforts to reduce the Health Unit's paper holdings greatly reduced the amount of time and effort the Medical Provider had to spend on destruction. The Medical Provider told OIG that even with the reduced number of records, it was still a heavy task and she was glad MED had shipped out old records. Additionally, she stated MED's recent implementation of an electronic medical records system would have further reduced the paper holdings and given her more time to focus on patient care. Given what happened in Sudan, other bureaus and post sections would benefit from such efforts or practices.

Embassy Khartoum did not possess proper tools for the destruction of documents and equipment, nor were staff adequately trained to use the equipment available to them. One of the RSO's lessons learned recommendations was that each embassy should have had a "destruction kit." The Marine Security Guard AAR also made several recommendations regarding destruction, including that posts should identify alternate burn pit site locations and maintain a "weapons destruction kit" with equipment necessary to dispose of weapons. RSO staff had to retrieve chop saws and blunt objects from an embassy warehouse to destroy this equipment. The lack of a destruction kit and a clear formula for destruction forced staff to improvise. They used shredders to destroy documents, then resorted to burn barrels, and burn pits when shredders broke down. Additionally, staff used sledgehammers to destroy equipment, but when a sledgehammer punctured a lithium-ion battery in the Information Program Center, the room filled with smoke. Another Embassy Khartoum staff member

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<sup>59</sup> MED initially intended to collect records from all posts, but due to resource constraints, ultimately focused on posts in countries that were more unstable with a higher risk of records loss.

commented that they did not receive adequate training on destruction procedures prior to their posting in Khartoum.

***Consular Staff Challenges From Destroying Travel Documents Led CA to Modify its Guidance***

Passports of visa applicants or other individuals' passports held by a U.S. embassy are considered sensitive materials according to 12 FAM 541(b)(1) and 12 FAH-1, Annex E 1.1(a). According to the Managing Director of CA/OCS, CA normally tracks cases for passports and visa applications in the Immigrant Visa, the Non-Immigrant Visa, or the ACS-Plus systems, and, ideally, if a post destroys a passport, it adds a case note in the respective system noting the destruction date.

Prior to the April 2023 OD, applicants left their passports or visas at the embassy for processing which created a backlog of immigrant visa cases waiting for approval. Embassy Khartoum also held passports for non-immigrant visa applicants. The Consular Chief described the backlog as "drawers full of immigrant visa cases." The Information Management Officer confirmed that he assisted with the destruction of documents including passports and visas from U.S. citizens and others.

The Department reported that Embassy Khartoum destroyed 190 Sudanese and third country national passports and 49 U.S. citizen passports. Upon their arrival at U.S. Embassy Cairo, Egypt, CA sent a team to assist ACS with its attempt to reconstruct a spreadsheet of immigrant visa applicants so they could determine the applicants' locations and try to get individuals appointments in other countries and expedite passport processing. CA then realized that more than half of the 200 passports in their records were expired and only between 70 and 90 passports were from recent cases and still valid.

During the evacuation, the CA Country Officer advised the Acting Consular Section Chief at Embassy Khartoum to take U.S. passports and CRBAs out of Sudan if he could, but if not, he should destroy them. The Acting Consular Chief tried to copy the biographical page of the U.S. citizen passports and CRBAs, and to track non-American documents that were destroyed. He told OIG that he remembered passing that information to CA headquarters, but he could not provide further details. Embassy personnel estimated that they destroyed the passports of 10 or 15 non-immigrant visa applicants, although the Acting Consular Chief could not remember the exact number of destroyed documents.

According to CA, the Acting Consular Chief and the Consular Section compiled spreadsheets of any destroyed passports prior to the evacuation of embassy personnel on April 22, 2023. However, when asked about the spreadsheets, the Acting Consular Chief could not recognize them or recall compiling them. The spreadsheets tracked which documents staff destroyed "to the best of post's ability" given the short timeline between when they were told to destroy documents and when they evacuated Sudan. Staff at post were unable to scan bio pages of visa applicants' documents prior to destruction. Staff prioritized maintaining records of documents related to ACS, such as U.S. citizen passports and CRBAs. The Department confirmed it had

spreadsheets that captured some of the information related to the destroyed documents, but not all.

A senior Department official told OIG that the issues surrounding the passports contributed to one of the most significant lessons learned from the Sudan evacuation. The Department destroyed the documents to protect them from falling into someone else's hands, but it ended up "causing a lot more trouble than it was worth." CA approved new guidance for 12-FAH-1, Annex K that clarifies guidance on the disposition of passports during a crisis. Specifically, CA advised that consular sections should make every effort to return foreign passports and prioritize removal over destruction, given the impact this has on an individual's ability to travel. However, while CA provided clarifying language for the policy, DS has the lead on changes to that section of the FAH, which are still pending. Though DS is still finalizing the updates to 12 FAH-1, Annex K, CA said it proactively engaged with embassies or consulates in or at risk of crisis—such as the embassies in Bangladesh, Haiti, and Lebanon—to create a plan for returning passports to applicants prior to any evacuation. Department officials told OIG that during subsequent evacuations, CA did everything it could to get passports out of the consular section and back to their owners to reduce the number of documents embassies had on hand.

## **Regional Posts Provided Critical Assistance to Evacuees Despite a Lack of Planning**

The effects of a crisis resulting in an AD or OD and the evacuation of U.S. citizens are not isolated to the individual country; posts in nearby countries or regions may be called on to assist. Indeed, the evacuation of U.S. citizens from Sudan required coordination with and assistance from U.S. diplomatic missions in Africa and Europe.<sup>60</sup>

### ***Nearby Posts Received Evacuees, Provided Consular and Medical Services***

Department posts in countries sharing a border with Sudan supported the evacuation of Embassy Khartoum's USDH, LES, and private U.S. citizens through various means. Nearby missions engaged in diplomacy with host countries to secure their cooperation with (and, if needed, approval of) the evacuation efforts.<sup>61</sup> Because the COM evacuation involved a brief

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<sup>60</sup> Specifically, the U.S. missions in Cyprus, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Germany, Saudi Arabia, and South Sudan provided key assistance.

<sup>61</sup> For example, U.S. Embassy Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, "expend[ed] significant political capital" to obtain permissions from the Government of Ethiopia "for military overflights and landings in Ethiopia, as well as the use of a military airfield as [a forward staging base]" that supported the DoD's airlift of COM personnel. Cable 23 ADDIS ABABA 1132, "Ethiopia/USAU: Sudan Evacuation Highlights Importance of U.S.-Ethiopia Relations," July 3, 2023. Across the Red Sea, the U.S. Mission to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia "immediately solicited broad host government support for potential evacuees," and "[r]epeated conversations between the Ambassador and senior embassy officials with their [Saudi Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense] counterparts ensured the Saudis involved the United States in their evacuation planning efforts and operations, much more so than other foreign missions in Saudi Arabia." Specifically, the U.S. Consulate in Jeddah "leveraged its relationship with the [Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs] to secure crucial Saudi support for evacuees early in the crisis." Cable 23 JEDDAH 262, "Saudi Arabia: Post's Crisis Preparedness Assists Sudan Evacuees," July 5, 2023. At U.S. Embassy Nicosia, Cyprus, "[t]he Embassy's

stop in Ethiopia before travel to Djibouti, the Medical Provider at U.S. Embassy Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, evaluated the capabilities of medical facilities near the military airfield where they would land and “provided a trauma supply bag for potential life-threatening casualties.”<sup>62</sup> Nearby posts assisted LES and private U.S. citizen land border crossings into the host country, providing visa processing services, emergency passports, and repatriation loans.<sup>63</sup> Other embassies also sent employees for temporary duty assignments to the locations directly involved in evacuation efforts to augment their consular and medical services.<sup>64</sup>

***Previous Crises and Lessons Learned Cables Highlight Importance of Regional-Level Crisis Coordination, but Post Emergency Action Plans Fall Short***

Assistance from nearby posts has been cited as a critical feature of recent crises. The Government Accountability Office’s report on the Department’s COVID-19 repatriation effort found that lessons learned cables “indicated the importance of coordination between posts.”<sup>65</sup> During the evacuation of Afghanistan, U.S. missions in the Middle East and Europe supported the “lily pads” to process evacuees before onward travel to the United States.<sup>66</sup> In Sudan, OPI noted in its AAR that support from neighboring posts was broadly viewed as a positive contribution to the success of the Sudan evacuation and that “every effort should be made to keep regional offices involved in crisis planning at the earliest opportunity.”<sup>67</sup>

However, despite this recurring pattern, posts’ EAP sections pertaining to regional crisis coordination are underutilized and tend to contain boilerplate language. Embassy Khartoum’s EAP sections on coordination and receipt of evacuees fell short of what is considered a “viable” EAP, as did the current EAPs of four nearby posts that provided support, received evacuees, and produced lessons learned cables documenting their assistance: Embassies Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Cairo, Egypt, Nicosia, Cyprus, and Consulate General Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.<sup>68</sup>

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relationships with [Republic of Cyprus] officials . . . helped facilitate seamless coordination with the host government.” Cable 23 NICOSIA 584, “Cyprus: Lessons Learned from the Sudan Evacuation,” August 8, 2023.

<sup>62</sup> 23 ADDIS ABABA 1132.

<sup>63</sup> See 23 ADDIS ABABA 1132; Cable 23 CAIRO 1040, “Egypt: Embassy Cairo Response to Sudan Crisis,” September 20, 2023.

<sup>64</sup> For example, Embassy Nicosia’s small consular section was augmented by temporary duty support from U.S. Embassies Beirut and Athens and said their prompt arrival “contributed to the successful repatriation of evacuees.” 23 NICOSIA 584.

<sup>65</sup> Government Accountability Office, *COVID-19: State Carried Out Historic Repatriation Effort but Should Strengthen Its Preparedness for Future Crises*, pg. 23 (GAO-22-104354, November 2021) (“In Djibouti, post staff coordinated with Embassy Addis Ababa, in Ethiopia, to obtain flight clearances and landing permissions.”).

<sup>66</sup> See *National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2023, Section 5275 Interim Joint Report*, pg. 3 n.4 (June 23, 2023) [dhs-and-state-oig-interim-report-pursuant-fy23-ndaa-section-5275-2023-06-23.pdf](https://dhs-and-state-oig-interim-report-pursuant-fy23-ndaa-section-5275-2023-06-23.pdf) (“Lily pads – located in Bahrain, Germany, Kuwait, Italy, Qatar, Spain, and the United Arab Emirates – were used to temporarily shelter people evacuated from Afghanistan.”). See also Isaac D. Pacheco, Amanda McCarthy & Luis A. Jimenez Jr., *State Magazine, A Global Response* (November 2021) <https://statemag.state.gov/2021/11/1121feat01/> (reporting on the assistance provided by American diplomats in Germany, Kuwait, and Qatar to the evacuation effort).

<sup>67</sup> OPI, *After Action Review: Sudan Evacuation* (April 2023).

<sup>68</sup> See Cable 23 STATE 59674, “Sudan Evacuation Lessons Learned,” May 25, 2023; Cable 23 ADDIS ABABA 1132, “Ethiopia/USAU: Sudan Evacuation Highlights Importance of U.S.-Ethiopia Relations,” July 3, 2023; Cable 23

The coordination section of Embassy Khartoum's EAP Post Planning Guide simply refers to the EAP's Master Emergency Contact List, which provides a table containing contact information for several nearby posts.<sup>69</sup> Neither Embassy Khartoum's Post Planning Guide nor its Master Emergency Contact List describe how it would coordinate with nearby posts during a crisis. Also, the checklists for receiving evacuees are copied directly from the FAH and do not contain information or tasks specific to Sudan.<sup>70</sup>

The coordination section of the nearby posts' EAPs follow a similar format. Rather than referring to the Master Emergency Contact List, the nearby posts are listed out with contact information. Underneath the nearby post name and contact are two questions: "What resources do you plan to receive from this post in an emergency?" and "What resources do you plan to provide this post in an emergency?" All four nearby posts answer "N/A" to these questions. Additionally, their EAP checklists for receiving evacuees are identical to the FAH, except for Embassy Nicosia, which conducts "extensive planning" with its host country, Cyprus, for receiving evacuees.<sup>71</sup>

The lessons learned cables produced by nearby posts further suggest these EAP sections were underutilized. For example, Embassy Addis Ababa noted in its Sudan lessons learned cable that its EAP "focuses on emergency preparedness for Mission Ethiopia and does not have a specific strategy for organizing the evacuation of neighboring posts despite Addis Ababa's Bole airport being a major hub for the African continent."<sup>72</sup> For this reason, the embassy's Health Unit used the EAP's casualty response plan to prepare for the arrival of Embassy Khartoum evacuees. Additionally, Embassy Cairo reported challenges assisting Sudan evacuees attempting to cross

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JEDDAH 262, "Saudi Arabia: Post's Crisis Preparedness Assists Sudan Evacuees," July 5, 2023; Cable 23 NICOSIA 584, "Cyprus: Lessons Learned from the Sudan Evacuation," August 8, 2023; Cable 23 CAIRO 1040, "Egypt: Embassy Cairo Response to Sudan Crisis," September 20, 2023.

<sup>69</sup> The nearby U.S. posts listed on Embassy Khartoum's Master Emergency Contact List were Embassy Cairo, Embassy Addis Ababa, Embassy Pretoria, Embassy Nairobi, and Embassy Djibouti.

<sup>70</sup> See 12 FAH-1 Annex L 2.2 ("Using the checklists below, post must list the procedures that post personnel will follow to prepare to receive evacuees. . . . Sample procedures containing Department guidance are listed. Additional roles can be added as needed.").

<sup>71</sup> The "Receipt of Evacuees" section of Embassy Nicosia's EAP states that "due to its geographic location and operating environment, [it] is a likely Intermediate Safehaven or Safehaven Destination in a regional crisis." See also 23 NICOSIA 584.

<sup>72</sup> 23 ADDIS ABABA 1132. OIG did not review the 2023 version of Embassy Addis Ababa's EAP, but notes the current EAP mentions the importance of Addis Ababa Bole International Airport in one of its Decision Points operating assumptions: "Bole International Airport is one of 12 airports in Africa with direct flights to the United States; Bole airport is an active transit hub for the continent, as well as for other U.S. Missions in the region." Additionally, one of its documented risk indicators is when "[c]onditions at another U.S. Embassy in the region require significant support from Embassy Addis Ababa or lead to the evacuation of USG personnel or private U.S. citizens to Embassy Addis Ababa, compromising the embassy's ability to provide its normal services and straining embassy resources."

the border into Egypt due to a lack of detailed understanding of Egyptian land border procedures.<sup>73</sup>

The lack of comprehensive, post-specific strategies for responding to regional crises requires regional bureaus and posts to respond extemporaneously to a crisis, which can delay response time and place great strain on resources and personnel. Thoughtful and strategic development of these EAP sections will adequately prepare posts to support a nearby post in crisis or fleeing U.S. citizens. Simply restating the FAH's checklists provides baseline standards and guidance, but those checklists fail to account for post's unique circumstances or highlight the host government's capabilities and limitations.<sup>74</sup> Ideally, identifying these attributes would make use of information and data already available to EACs, such as those contained in EAPs or gathered by the U.S. Special Operations Command Integrated Survey Program. EAP sections that are adequately post-specific would enable the EAC and post personnel to anticipate and overcome various scenarios (such as differences in a host country's entry procedures between land-border crossings and airport arrivals).

### **The Department Evacuated Some U.S. Citizens From Sudan but Destruction of Travel Documents Presented Challenges**

In addition to evacuating Embassy Khartoum's USDH and EFM, the Department reported helping 2,000 other individuals depart Sudan. This included approximately 340 U.S. citizens and their immediate family members who departed via flights arranged by partner nations. Additionally, the Department worked with DoD to arrange and facilitate three overland convoys from Khartoum to Port Sudan, which assisted 700 individuals. Beyond U.S. citizens, the Department also assisted legal permanent residents, LES, and nationals from allied and partner countries. Following the departure of USDH from Sudan, LES played a crucial role in facilitating the safe departure of U.S. citizens.

Embassy Khartoum, like all overseas posts, was required to maintain a list of potential evacuees in its "F-77 Report of Potential Evacuees," which is also known as the F-77 Report. According to Department guidance, the report plays a central role in evacuation planning because it provides the figures the Department and DoD rely upon when planning for and conducting evacuations. CMS publishes the final version of all F-77 Reports. Because the United States does not track when its citizens leave the country, the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) is useful for

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<sup>73</sup> In full, the lessons learned cable stated, "While Post had a detailed understanding of airport procedures and contacts at major airports, Post lacked a detailed understanding of how Egyptian land borders functioned. This knowledge gap delayed assistance to U.S. citizens and caused us to provide incorrect or inaccurate information to a number of individuals." 23 CAIRO 1040. Similarly, Embassy Addis Ababa's cable included a recommendation that it "be more familiar with Ethiopian immigration and citizen services procedures, as the process at the Ethiopia-Sudan border is different than at Bole Airport." 23 ADDIS ABABA 1132.

<sup>74</sup> 12 FAH-1 H-031.

planning in crises abroad.<sup>75</sup> STEP allows CA to validate the identities of U.S. citizens who have registered with the program and anticipate how many may need assistance. However, because STEP participation is voluntary, the Department does not have an exact count of the number of U.S. citizens in Sudan at the time of the evacuation. For example, Embassy Khartoum's F-77 Report listed 20,845 potential evacuees, including 17,100 U.S. citizens at the time of the evacuation.<sup>76</sup> A CA official told OIG that CA used to provide specific numbers but is transitioning to providing a possible range of evacuees to make clear that CA does not have an exact number.

### ***The Department Communicated With and Helped Evacuate U.S. Citizens***

Following the outbreak of fighting, CA's Directorate of Overseas Citizens Services (CA/OCS), the office responsible for providing consular protection and services to U.S. citizens abroad, initially communicated with U.S. citizens in Sudan by distributing emails through the Message Alert System for Citizens Overseas Tool (MASCOT). The first MASCOT message sent to U.S. citizens told them to shelter in place, and not to do anything. The message contained the contact information (phone number and email) for Embassy Khartoum staff and CA/OCS staff. CA/OCS also communicated with U.S. citizens who previously signed up through STEP, advising them to let the Department know if they were in Sudan. According to one Embassy Khartoum official, within 24 hours, U.S. citizens "flooded" CA/OCS with emails and calls requesting assistance to get out and reported that they were trapped with fighting happening around them.

Even though there are other ways to communicate with people broadly such as radio, social media, or websites, to communicate to someone individually, CA staff had to pick up the phone or send an email. CA's primary means of communicating with people individually through CACMS is by email, although in Sudan, CA also received requests for information and communicated with people through WhatsApp.<sup>77</sup> Through CACMS, CA staff could send mass emails and WhatsApp messages to all U.S. citizens requesting assistance, or they could choose to send more focused messaging to U.S. citizens in specific locations or evacuation groups.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> STEP is a messaging and alert system that travelers can enroll in to receive communications from U.S. embassies and consulates of their choosing for a specified amount of time. During a crisis, posts will send security alerts through STEP.

<sup>76</sup> CA Press Guidance from May 2023 noted that the F-77 Report number is an estimate to be used for planning purposes, not a count of the U.S. citizens in the country. As of May 3, 2023, CACMS showed 4,222 active cases and 1,019 cases listed as successful departures. Additionally, in CACMS, U.S. citizenship is self-reported, so the actual number of U.S. citizens is likely lower.

<sup>77</sup> The use of WhatsApp for crisis communications follows an *Afghanistan AAR* recommendation that the Department "actively support mobile-friendly communication platforms such as non-enterprise apps like WhatsApp and Signal." The messages sent from CACMS are different from those disseminated to U.S. citizens via STEP. If the crisis intake form is opened to request assistance, that information is sent via STEP. When someone submits the crisis intake form, CA staff can contact them directly to conduct welfare checks or to provide specific instructions on evacuation.

<sup>78</sup> WhatsApp was not yet fully integrated with CACMS during the Sudan crisis, so CA staff had to take contact information from CACMS to reach out individually to WhatsApp users.

Once CA established its Sudan Task Force (Task Force 2) on April 17, 2023, and opened a web page for the Sudan crisis, U.S. citizens could request emergency consular services, such as passport or evacuation assistance, by submitting a crisis intake form.

Each submission receives a unique case number and profile within CACMS.<sup>79</sup> Any updates to a specific case, such as congressional inquiries, communications between CA and the individual, or information on whether they have left the country, are logged and tracked on their profile. These updates are applied in real time, providing CA with the most up-to-date information on the specifics of any given case.<sup>80</sup> Because of the ability to track and update cases in real time from anywhere, Task Force 2 volunteers in Washington, DC and at posts around the world can seamlessly monitor and respond to U.S. citizen requests for consular assistance and relieve the post in crisis of that responsibility.<sup>81</sup>

Moving groups of U.S. citizens overland during a crisis is dangerous and requires more planning than moving by air. Therefore, evacuation on U.S. government-facilitated flights is preferred. However, because fighting was so intense and the airport in Khartoum closed so quickly, evacuating U.S. citizens by air was not feasible. In Sudan, CA used CACMS to track different types of departures: flights out with partner nations, the bus convoy to Port Sudan, a military vessel, and private ferries. CACMS allowed a single case worker to see all the transportation options available and the templates to provide that information to U.S. citizens trying to evacuate. For individuals deemed eligible for evacuation assistance, CA case workers could use CACMS to assign cases to a specific evacuation method. These assignments create “pre-manifests” for Department and interagency partners with information on who will be boarding a particular evacuation flight, bus, or other mode of transport. According to a CA/OCS official who was heavily involved in TFSU, while DoD contracted vehicles to get U.S. citizens from Khartoum to Port Sudan, CA focused on compiling evacuation manifests and organizing ships to transport evacuees from Sudan to Saudi Arabia. While some people were independently able to use overland routes to get out of Sudan, CA was not directly involved in this means of evacuation.

In support of the evacuation of U.S. citizens, a response team consisting of CA, DS, and military personnel was sent to Port Sudan to secure the area and process U.S. citizen evacuees before

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<sup>79</sup> CACMS has a “merge” feature to allow CA case workers to combine duplicate cases in the event an individual submits multiple requests, or if an individual in country and a family member in a different location each submit a request for assistance. During the Sudan crisis, case workers generated specialty reports to flag potentially duplicate submissions. A case worker would then have to review the potential duplicates and determine if they were in fact the same person. The process for merging duplicate submissions has since simplified, CACMS can now flag potential duplicates based on similar names or identical birth dates or passport numbers.

<sup>80</sup> CACMS is accessible to CA staff from anywhere in the world and does not require a connection to OpenNet.

<sup>81</sup> A best practice identified in the *Afghanistan AAR* was CA’s use of consular employees posted around the world to provide 24/7 support. CA repeated this practice during the Sudan crisis and, in a response to an OIG request for information, stated in part that “[t]he utilization of DETOs [domestic employees teleworking overseas] and remote workers in different time zones significantly enhanced our flexibility and provided better coverage after hours, demonstrating the value of flexible and geographically varied taskforce and workforce.”

boarding vessels to Saudi Arabia.<sup>82</sup> CA also provided support to the U.S. Consulate General in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to receive and assist evacuees arriving at King Faisal Naval Base and Jeddah Islamic Port.<sup>83</sup> Remote assistance from the CA task force, specifically through use of CACMS and by taking over management of Embassy Khartoum's ACS email inbox, allowed Embassy Khartoum's Consular Section to focus solely on destruction and evacuation efforts. CA provided similar support to Consulate General Jeddah; Sudan-related emails to Jeddah's ACS were directed to the CA task force, who used the information "to capture essential data on U.S. citizens and [legal permanent residents] in Sudan to populate [CACMS] and relieve pressure on Post, freeing up valuable resources on the ground. CACMS answered nearly 200 email inquiries."<sup>84</sup>

CA closed the public CACMS portal for Sudan on May 12, 2023, when Task Force 2 officially ended. After that, CA sent out an alert that anyone requiring assistance should contact a nearby embassy that was still open. As of October 2024, CA was still assisting U.S. citizens trying to leave Sudan as individual cases when U.S. citizens reach out to the Department. In these cases, CA's assistance is limited to communicating with citizens because it cannot provide transportation assistance. CA generally encourages citizens to get themselves to a third country such as Saudi Arabia or Egypt, if they can, where they can access consular services.

***Post's Compliance With the Department's Document Destruction Policy and Lack of U.S. Presence Following the Evacuation of Embassy Staff Compounded Difficulties for U.S. Citizens Trying To Depart Sudan***

Embassy Khartoum consular staff followed Department protocols by destroying passports of U.S. citizens applying for consular services because those documents could not be returned to their owners prior to the evacuation. However, these actions subsequently posed hardship for individuals who wanted to evacuate but whose documents had been destroyed.

CA/OCS was limited in what assistance they could provide to U.S. citizens because of the intensity of the fighting. Their focus was on getting USDH (and some U.S. allies) out of Sudan, and once that occurred, they were limited because the U.S. government no longer had a physical presence in Sudan. According to the Managing Director of CA/OCS, because of this, there were no consular staff left to identify and communicate with U.S. citizens or coordinate assistance later in the evacuation. This meant the Department had to rely on partner countries that still had a presence in Sudan to help evacuate U.S. citizens. Eventually, the Department was able to get CA and DS personnel into Port Sudan on Saudi vessels, and CA officials told OIG this made a huge difference in their ability to help people. CA/OCS worked with Mission Saudi Arabia, Embassy Cairo, and other regional partners to assist U.S. citizens who had crossed the Sudan border and those who arrived on ships from Port Sudan.

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<sup>82</sup> OPI, *After Action Review: Sudan Evacuation* (April 2023); Specifically, two consular officers, two DS agents, and two defense attachés traveled to Port Sudan. TFSU, Situation Report #29 (May 1, 2023)

<sup>83</sup> 23 JEDDAH 262.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

Based on the challenges caused by the lack of a consular presence in Sudan, CA told OIG that for as long as security conditions allow, it is “essential for embassy officers to remain in country to facilitate U.S. citizen evacuations. Every effort should be made to provide adequate security to enable the consular section to continue processing critical travel documents and coordinate departure options during a crisis. When this is not possible, plans must be put in place to ensure U.S. citizens have safe, viable options to depart prior to evacuation of Chief of Mission personnel.”

CA notified U.S. citizens whose passports or other documents were destroyed. Following the OD and the end of the U.S. government’s presence in Port Sudan, CA had no ability to provide in-country assistance to U.S. citizens unless they could reach a U.S. mission in another country. Once U.S. citizens managed to leave Sudan, CA/OCS could assist them by providing travel documents, booking airfare to the United States, and providing loans for emergency medical and dietary needs. CA/OCS cannot provide long-term housing, but has, in past evacuations, provided emergency subsistence loans to allow U.S. citizens to stay in a hotel for a few days.

If a U.S. citizen could make their way to a U.S. embassy, staff could generate a new passport for them at no charge. However, this left U.S. citizens needing to attempt to cross the Sudanese border into neighboring countries without travel documents. Generally, the U.S. government would not allow someone to cross into Sudan to deliver travel documents. In five or six cases, CA/OCS generated passports for family members in South Sudan, handed them to one of the family members, typically the U.S. citizen family member, and had them cross back into Sudan and deliver the passports to the rest of their family so they could get out. CA also acknowledged that “U.S. citizens who attempted to depart Sudan with non-U.S. citizen family members reported more challenging experiences related to third country entry/exit regulations and an inability to obtain Sudanese passports.” Mixed families had the toughest time exiting Sudan because it was difficult to leave without travel documents. A U.S. citizen with a passport had to decide to leave or stay with their family.

When asked about feedback on the Department’s evacuation efforts, CA responded that Department officials participated in several events with Sudanese community leaders and representatives in the United States. “During these conversations, we heard largely positive feedback regarding assisted departure of and information sharing with U.S. citizens. However, some were critical of the decision to evacuate embassy personnel before private U.S. citizens, particularly in comparison with partner nations.”

## **CONCLUSION**

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OIG found that Embassy Khartoum personnel made significant improvements to crisis preparedness and emergency facilities in response to lessons learned from the AD in October 2021. OIG also found that the Department made significant improvements to crisis management operations procedures and capacity at the headquarters level in response to previous embassy evacuations.

However, as noted in other recent OIG work, the Department does not have an established system to disseminate lessons learned from embassy evacuations to its personnel. OIG found that lessons learned from Afghanistan were not widely shared throughout the Department, so Embassy Khartoum personnel could not familiarize themselves with them. Specifically, the lessons learned report from the evacuation of Kabul included recommendations related to document retention, an issue that had a significant impact on evacuation efforts at Embassy Khartoum. Indeed, as noted above, the Khartoum RSO told OIG that while writing their AAR of the April 2023 evacuation, they reviewed previous after-action reports and found that the same lessons came up repeatedly.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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In its September 2024 Management Assistance Report, OIG recommended that the Department develop a systematic methodology to capture and utilize lessons learned following post evacuations. Similarly, in the Department's March 2022 *Afghanistan AAR*, the authors recommended the Department create a "central repository" of lessons learned. OIG's findings in this report demonstrate the importance of implementing these recommendations. In addition, OIG makes the following recommendations:

**Recommendation 1:** The Bureau of Diplomatic Security should ensure that high threat posts conduct a full inventory of the sensitive documents in their possession that would require destruction in the event of evacuation and incorporate the volume of sensitive documents into their respective emergency action training, drills, and planning, including an explicit estimate of the time it would take to destroy current and actual holdings of Sensitive But Unclassified materials.

**Management Response:** In its June 27, 2025, response, the Bureau of Diplomatic Security concurred with this recommendation.

**OIG Reply:** Based on this response, OIG considers this recommendation resolved. OIG will consider this recommendation closed when the Bureau provides documentation that it took this action.

**Recommendation 2:** The Bureau of Consular Affairs should develop and implement guidance to ensure that consular sections at U.S. embassies fully account for all passports in their possession for processing and return passports to the owner while waiting for documentation or approvals.

**Management Response:** In its June 11, 2025, response, the Bureau of Consular Affairs concurred with this recommendation.

**OIG Reply:** Based on this response, OIG considers this recommendation resolved. OIG will consider this recommendation closed when the Bureau provides documentation of the new guidance.

**Recommendation 3:** The Bureau of Diplomatic Security, in coordination with the Office of Crisis Management and Strategy, should review post Emergency Action Plans to ensure that they fully and comprehensively address coordination with nearby posts in crisis-response operations.

**Management Response:** In its June 27, 2025, response, the Bureau of Diplomatic Security concurred with this recommendation.

**OIG Reply:** Based on this response, OIG considers this recommendation resolved. OIG will consider this recommendation closed when the Bureau provides documentation that it took this action.

## APPENDIX A: PURPOSE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

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The Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted this evaluation from February 2024 to May 2025. The evaluation focused on Department of State (Department) adherence to guidance and lessons learned, resulting challenges faced by Department employees during the evacuation, and the assistance to U.S. citizens and other individuals who lost consular documents during the evacuation.

OIG interviewed Department personnel involved in the evacuation both at Department headquarters in Washington working with the Sudan Military Conflict Task Force and at Embassy Khartoum. OIG interviewed personnel from the Bureau of African Affairs, Bureau of Consular Affairs, Bureau of Diplomatic Technology, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, Office of Crisis Management and Strategy, Bureau of Medical Services, and the Bureau of Global Talent Management. The purpose of the interviews was to develop a thorough understanding of events surrounding the evacuation and how the individual personnel responded to the crisis.

OIG reviewed Department guidance in the Foreign Affairs Manual and Foreign Affairs Handbook regarding records management and disposition. OIG also reviewed guidance regarding post emergency preparedness, then compared the guidance to relevant provisions in Embassy Khartoum's 2023 Emergency Action Plan, and the current Emergency Action Plans for Consulate General Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and Embassies Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Cairo, Egypt, Djibouti, and Nicosia, Cyprus. Finally, OIG personnel conducted a tour of the Department's Operations Center and Task Force headquarters.

OIG shared a draft version of this report with the Department and incorporated its comments as appropriate.

OIG conducted this evaluation in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation as issued by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (December 2020).

## APPENDIX B: BUREAU OF CONSULAR AFFAIRS RESPONSE

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United States Department of State

Bureau of Consular Affairs

June 11, 2025

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TO:            OIG – Jeffrey McDermott, Assistant Inspector General for  
                  Evaluations & Special Projects

FROM:         CA – John L. Armstrong, Senior Bureau Official

SUBJECT:     Response to Draft OIG Report – Evaluation of the Department’s  
                  2023 Evacuation of Embassy Khartoum (ESP-25-XX)

The Bureau of Consular Affairs has reviewed the draft OIG inspection report and its recommendations as outlined on page 29 of the “Evaluation of the Department’s 2023 Evacuation of Embassy Khartoum.” As noted below, CA concurs with OIG recommendation 2.

**OIG Recommendation 2:** The Bureau of Consular Affairs should develop and implement guidance to ensure that consular sections at U.S. embassies fully account for all passports in their possession for processing and return passports to the owner while waiting for documentation or approvals.  
(Action: CA)

**Management Response:** CA concurs with this recommendation.

[REDACTED]

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## APPENDIX C: BUREAU OF DIPLOMATIC SECURITY RESPONSE

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United States Department of State

Washington, DC 20520

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

June 27, 2025

Read by \_\_\_\_\_

### Info Memo for Acting Inspector General Arne B. Baker

FROM: DS – Paul R. Houston, Acting Assistant Secretary *P.H.*  
*6-27-25*

SUBJECT: (U) Evaluation of the Department's 2023 Evacuation of  
Embassy Khartoum

(U) Below are the Bureau of Diplomatic Security's responses to  
Recommendations 1 and 3 of the subject report.

**(SBU) Recommendation 1:** The Bureau of Diplomatic Security should ensure that high threat posts conduct a full inventory of the sensitive documents in their possession that would require destruction in the event of evacuation and incorporate the volume of sensitive documents into their respective emergency action training, drills, and planning, including an explicit estimate of the time it would take to destroy current and actual holdings of Sensitive But Unclassified materials.

**(U) DS Response 06/18/2025:** DS concurs with this recommendation.

**(SBU) Recommendation 3:** The Bureau of Diplomatic Security, in coordination with the Office of Crisis Management and Strategy, should review post Emergency Action Plans to ensure that they fully and comprehensively address coordination with nearby posts in crisis-response operations.

**(U) DS Response 06/18/2025:** DS concurs with this recommendation.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

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AAR	after-action review
ACC	Alternate Command Center
ACS	American Citizen Services
AD	authorized departure
CA	Bureau of Consular Affairs
CACMS	Consular Affairs Crisis Management System
CA/OCS	CA's Directorate of Overseas Citizens Services
COM	Chief of Mission
CMS	Office of Crisis Management and Strategy
CRBA	consular reports of birth abroad
CTF	Consular Task Force
DoD	Department of Defense
DS	Bureau of Diplomatic Security
EAC	Emergency Action Committee
EAP	Emergency Action Plan
EFM	Eligible Family Member
FAH	Foreign Affairs Handbook
FAM	Foreign Affairs Manual
LES	locally employed staff
MED	Bureau of Medical Services
OD	ordered departure
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OPI	Operations Planning and Innovation Unit
ORION	Operations Response Interagency Online Network database
PII	Personally Identifiable Information
RRC	Rapid Response Corps
RSO	Regional Security Officer
S/ES	Office of the Secretary's Executive Secretariat
S/ES-O	Operations Center, Office of the Secretary's Executive Secretariat
STEP	Smart Traveler Enrollment Program

TFR	task force room
TFSU	Sudan Military Conflict Task Force
USDH	U.S. direct-hire employee

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