

# Covenant Backed: The US Evacuation of Saigon to an Unknown Future in Kabul

A Monograph

By

MAJ Charles E. Hoke  
US Army



School of Advanced Military Studies  
US Army Command and General Staff College  
Fort Leavenworth, KS

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Name of Candidate: MAJ Charles E. Hoke

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in Kabul

Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Monograph Director  
Amanda M. Nagel, PhD

\_\_\_\_\_, Seminar Leader  
Larry V. Geddings Jr., COL

\_\_\_\_\_, Director, School of Advanced Military Studies  
Kirk C. Dorr, COL

Accepted this 23rd day of May 2019 by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Director, Graduate Degree Programs  
Robert F. Baumann, PhD

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## Abstract

Covenant Backed: The US Evacuation of Saigon to an Unknown Future in Kabul, by MAJ Charles E. Hoke, US Army, 50 pages.

Operation Frequent Wind was the final military-led US evacuation during the fall of the Republic of Vietnam in 1975. Over seventeen hours, 1,047 aircraft sorties flying to and from Saigon rescued 7,006 people ending the United States' three decades of involvement in South Vietnam. Before the final globally televised evacuation moments, a combination of US State Department and civilian transport aircraft and ships over 45 days, extracted 130,000 South Vietnamese citizens, third-country nationals, and US State Department personnel. Understanding the military actions from Operation Frequent Wind is helpful for planners in coordinating successful future evacuations. A possible major evacuation could occur in the future if the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan collapsed. If such a collapse occurred, it is possible the US State Department and the US military would conduct an evacuation of Kabul with 20,000 US and NATO military members operating in the country as of 2017, not including extracting select Afghan citizens, third-country nationals, and US government personnel. The significance of understanding past evacuation successes and failures enables effective planning efforts to overall strengthen US national interests and its reputation in the global community. The aborted and accident-prone evacuation of Iran in Operation Eagle Claw damaged the United States' reputation in the views of both domestic and world audiences. The US military supports the US State Department during evacuation operations. The US military not only plays a vital role in supplying material and personnel resources to enable or break an evacuation, but it is also a critical part in the US government's integration of evacuees into American society.

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## Acronyms

DOS	US Department of State
GCC	Geographic Combatant Commands
NEO	Noncombatant evacuation
PLAF	People's Liberation Armed Forces of South Vietnam

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## Introduction

On the morning of April 29, 1975, American Forces Radio began transmitting Bing Crosby's "White Christmas" alongside weather reports claiming a daily high of 105 degrees with rising temperatures expected on a loop.<sup>1</sup> The song selection appears out of place in a country located within the tropical belt with an unlikely chance of snow, especially in the late spring. The claims of rising temperatures for the day in the second message seems more plausible in the context of the spring season. These two pieces of information serve as the starting signal to alert the last Americans and their allies on the ground in South Vietnam to begin moving to their evacuation points for extraction. It also indicates the beginning of the last US Air Force and US Marine Corps aircraft operations occurring in South Vietnam. To complete the evacuation, four aircraft carriers and one landing platform helicopter ship provided the staging and recovery areas for 1,047 aircraft sorties to operate over a continuous seventeen hour period.<sup>2</sup> This evacuation was a significant moment in diplomatic relations for the United States and the Republic of Vietnam. It began the final motions resulting in the conclusion of three decades of United States' policies in South Vietnam.

Operation Frequent Wind was the US evacuation of the Republic of Vietnam in 1975. Military planning and actions during Operation Frequent Wind are beneficial to future evacuation planning and operations. A possible major evacuation in the future could occur if the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan collapsed due to a Taliban conquest of the US-backed government. It is probable the US Department of State (DOS) and US military would facilitate an evacuation of Kabul if the Taliban conquest of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan did happen. For the parameters of this comparison, environmental and political information from Afghanistan aids in

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<sup>1</sup> Thom Patterson, "Enemy at the Gate," *Cable News Network*, April 2015, accessed February 3, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/04/29/us/vietnam-saigon-evacuationanniversary/Index.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Richard D. Johnston, *Operations Analysis Group Report No. 2-75 Summary of the Evacuation of Saigon, South Vietnam Under Operation Frequent Wind (U)* (San Francisco, CA: Headquarters of the Commander in Chief Pacific, 1975), 48, 88.

framing the problem up to the conditions present in 2017. Afghanistan is not a closed environment and US involvement there is ongoing as of this document.

The significance of recognizing past evacuation successes and losses can enable effective planning efforts to strengthen US global interests overall. Having this data available is relevant because when the United States conducts an evacuation, the operation's triumphs or fiascos influence the United States' reputation and status in the global community. Interest in this topic revolves around the second and third order results, which can have repercussions against the US government if an evacuation fails due to military and interagency relationship debacles. The DOS has jurisdiction over all other government agencies during an overseas evacuation, including the US military.<sup>3</sup> The DOS holds the authority and political opinion in deciding to conduct an evacuation. The DOS does not have the infrastructure or resources to facilitate large-scale evacuations without the support of the US military. If the US ambassador in a foreign country has exhausted all diplomatic measures available to them to safeguard American interests and people's lives, they can order an evacuation. The US military performs an essential role in providing materiel and personnel resources to make an operation feasible or unattainable.<sup>4</sup> For the US military to be successful in conducting evacuation operations in support of DOS directives, it needs to be involved in evacuation planning and training processes alongside the State Department.

Evacuation planning and training are a specific focus and concern for geographic combatant commands (GCC). When evacuations occur in GCC areas, it impacts all of their operations. Diplomatic matters and assigned military objectives shape evacuation operations.

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<sup>3</sup> US Congress, *US Code 22: Foreign Relations and Intercourse* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1986), accessed November 04, 2018, <http://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title22/chapter58&edition=prelim>.

<sup>4</sup> US Departments of State and Defense, *Memorandum of Agreement Between the Departments of State and Defense on the Protection and Evacuation of U.S. Citizens and Nationals and Designated Other Persons from Threatened Areas Overseas* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1998), accessed November 4, 2018, <https://prhome.defense.gov/Portals/52/Documents/PR%20Docs/DOS-DOD%20Memo%20of%20Agreement%20on%20Protection%20and%20Evacuation.pdf>.

Training planners with networking established to their State Department counterparts would significantly impact any future evacuation operations in their regions. A step further would be to create evacuation planners in their commands. George Dixon, the commander of the 9th Mission Support Command in 2014, wrote about the need to create joint support elements for evacuation operations in *Joint Force Quarterly*. The 9th Mission Support Command consists of all the US Army Reserve units located in Alaska, Republic of Korea, Hawaii, American Samoa, Japan, Guam, and Saipan.<sup>5</sup> Those reserve units provide equipment and personnel to support all contingency operations in the Pacific Ocean region, which could include supporting evacuations. Dixon states joint support elements can serve as planners and subject matter experts to improve GCC's responses to evacuations.<sup>6</sup> Doctrine about planning and executing evacuations is in *US Joint Publication 3-68*. GCC staffs do not currently have specific joint support element evacuation planners assigned. The better solution in the interests of planning evacuations and maintaining national interests would be to follow Dixon's recommendations to create new roles and conduct inter-department training between embassy staffs and GCCs.

This research intends to gain a greater understanding of evacuation planning factors. When the DOS requests a noncombatant evacuation (NEO), they expect GCCs to facilitate successful evacuations. Significant problems in the future will arise from the growth of the world's population and mass migration of its people into urban centers, creating conflicts for resources and compounding staging for operational reach. Thus, rising urban populations are creating dilemmas for more frequent evacuations to occur. The United States' national instruments of power will face challenges across the spectrums of peace and war. Studying the results of Operation Frequent Wind is valuable to modern military and state planners. As the

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<sup>5</sup> US Army Reserve, *9th Mission Support Command: About Us* (US Army Reserve, 2018), accessed November 1, 2018, <https://www.usar.army.mil/Commands/Geographic/9th-MS/About-Us/>.

<sup>6</sup> George K. Dixon, "The Need for a Joint Support Element in Noncombatant Evacuation Operations," *Joint Force Quarterly* no. 85 (Winter 2017), 51.

United States proceeds into the twenty-first century, its global hegemony will experience confrontations by other competitors seeking to damage its international influences. A conceivable way for competitor states to do this might be to obstruct the US abilities to conduct evacuations by denying access to critical locations to facilitate evacuations. These interferences could undesirably impact forward basing of available air, sea, and ground platforms, hence denying the United States operational reach to conduct evacuations. This denial of US military capabilities could cause settings where evacuations are untenable and unfeasible.

US military planners are unable to anticipate all future scenarios, but they can implement a step to assist in creating positive unity of effort in protecting US national interests alongside the DOS. A step would be to implement joint training between the State and Defense Departments to improve future contingency evacuation planning. A failed evacuation can damage US global networking and cause it to lose support with other countries. It is essential for planners in the State and Defense Departments to receive joint training in evacuations.

Militarily supported evacuations since Operation Frequent Wind have not been on the same scale, but a future evacuation of Kabul will be of similar or greater complexity as the evacuation of Saigon was in 1975. The United States evacuated 130,000 people from South Vietnam during its last forty-five days of involvement there.<sup>7</sup> The Saigon evacuation came at the conclusion of US diplomatic efforts and served as the last government action to officially end the US presence in South Vietnam. Operation Frequent Wind was a complex evacuation with US State and Defense Departments acting in concert to close out the Vietnam War. Military personnel operating ships, planes, helicopters, and trucks during the final evacuation operation from South Vietnam to the United States enabled the rescuing of 6,968 people on April 29,

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas G. Tobin, Arthur E. Laehr, and John F. Hilgenberg, *Last Flight From Saigon* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2005), VII.

1975.<sup>8</sup> If Operation Frequent Wind had been unsuccessful, the United States' global reputation of promoting democracy could have fallen to the weight of expanding communist countries.

A negative impression on the United States' global reputation could have obstructed its abilities during the Cold War. Luckily, the United States successfully maintained bases in Europe during the 1970s and 1980s, contributing to the USSR's collapse. Partnered nations could have interpreted a disastrous evacuation in Vietnam and then determined they did not wish to take the same risk in aligning themselves with the United States. If a potential future evacuation of Afghanistan were to occur, and it floundered, it could have severe consequences on US policies and support to countering international challengers. The world's political dynamics are always fluctuating, but it is possible to capitalize on historical trends to help forecast future issues or at least open discussions about available options for US State and Defense Department planners.

Across the next five sections, this monograph will analyze the similarities and differences between the ending of the Vietnam War and the circumstances in Afghanistan as of 2017. It will examine military plans, resources, and support for evacuations and how they have impacted US global interests. The chapters' narratives will list past military evacuation operations with linkages between evacuation planning and performance. Planners working to organize future operations can benefit from reviewing past evacuations. Evacuations will continue to be more complex based on increasing population sizes and competition for resources. It is important the national instruments of power be efficient and utilized in tandem to promote the United States' global interests. Evacuations are not single operations or one-time events. Operations in the future will continue to grow more difficult, problematic, and complex as globalization makes changes in the world. Nations will judge every action the United States makes, and evacuations impact US interests and policies.

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<sup>8</sup> Johnston, 4.

Looking into past accounts of US evacuations, section one focuses on the collaboration between the US military and the DOS regarding evacuation operations from 1975 to 2006. Details from previous operations will include facts, figures, and US national interests significant from actions in Cambodia, Iran, Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Lebanon. The material presented demonstrates the US military's efforts in working with the DOS's emergency action plans to coordinate and implement evacuations. Evacuation plans need to be updated and maintained to reflect environmental and political changes. Military and State Department planners require well-organized communication channels because mixed conflicts and commitments will appear across geographical areas simultaneously. Ever-changing environments with innovative technologies, diminishing resources, and fluctuating budgets require regular adjustment to plans. Planners cannot predict the collapse of foreign governments or terrorist attacks on diplomatic offices, but they can plan actions for when those situations might occur. When evacuations occur, they need to be successful to uphold the projection of American power, influence, and prestige.

Highlighting the importance of US global influences, section two equates the 1975 Republic of Vietnam to the 2017 Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to assist in grasping the environments during those periods. Comparing South Vietnam's and Afghanistan's political, economic, and governmental systems alongside battle histories, length of US involvement, positioning in the world, and US opposition interests will be the basis of this chapter. Each country shares a position in which US national instruments of power exist or existed in them for decades. Mutually, they have seen the results of global competition influence their citizens. Vietnam is currently a unified country, while Afghanistan is still in a civil war for the rule of its people and national territory as of 2019. Considering the similarities and differences between the two nations will contribute to detecting the resemblances of possible events and situations resulting in the 1975 evacuation of Saigon. Information could foreshadow a future evacuation in

Afghanistan if the United States ended its involvement there because of an approaching Taliban overthrow of the US-backed democratic regime.

After the comparison of Vietnam and Afghanistan, section three depicts the development, execution, and after-action review of Operation Frequent Wind. It contains data centered around five points during the Saigon evacuation. The first refers to the planned and implemented military evacuation chain of command. The second point covers the registration and tracking of evacuees. The third provides information regarding the distance and duration of transportation assets during the operation. The fourth includes information for the logistical procedures of military and civilians involved. The final one details security concerns during the operation. The success of Operation Frequent Wind enabled the United States to close the door on its involvement in Vietnam. Had it failed, it may have profoundly influenced the United States' decisions and abilities for operational reach and basing to counter Soviet threats during the remainder of the Cold War.

With the details of Operation Frequent Wind presented, section four discusses the current operating environment within US government agencies and joint military planners concerning evacuations. This section includes information about technologies aiding evacuee registration and tracking, modern distance coverages with currently available transportation assets, and interagency training for joint military evacuation operations. This section looks at the United States' reputation and status in the global community with current world surroundings, while focusing on the syncing of joint forces and functions across military and civilian lines of efforts for evacuation operations. Because of the United States' history of successful evacuations, NEOs remains a viable option in its toolbox of choices to offer fellow nations, both allies and competitors alike. If the United States' past evacuations had not been successful, it is likely other nations would be anxious about allowing US diplomats to operate in their countries for fears the US cannot protect its people from outside threats.

Section five will conclude with the significance of understanding past evacuation successes and failures to overall strengthen US global interests and future evacuation missions. It focuses on the importance of recording operational experiences and applying them to enable effective planning efforts for future evacuation planning. If a future evacuation of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan occurred, it would be similar or more complicated for planners than the execution of Operation Frequent Wind was in 1975. The duration of the US involvement in Vietnam and Afghanistan, historically and as of 2017, is the basis of this evacuation planning comparison monograph.

## Historical Military Evacuations

Iranian belligerents angry over United States presence in their country following the Iranian Revolution took control of the US Embassy in Tehran, Iran. In doing so, the Iranians took fifty-three American hostages on November 4, 1979.<sup>9</sup> The Iranians initially attempted to breach the embassy nine months earlier, but their first attempt was ineffective. After the successful second attack, it took the US military planners five months before enacting Operation Eagle Claw to rescue the American hostages. Eagle Claw, a joint operation between the US Army, US Navy, US Marine Corps, US Air Force, and DOS, involved helicopters, airplanes, ground personnel, and a naval carrier. During its staging phase, three of the eight transport helicopters became unusable, and military commanders aborted the evacuation.<sup>10</sup> During the reconsolidation efforts to retrieve US personnel, one of the returning helicopters crashed into a staged C-130, killing eight rescuers. The ill-fated operation demonstrated the weaknesses in the coordination amongst joint military forces and the execution of DOS evacuation planning. US domestic and global

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<sup>9</sup> Douglas C. Lovelace, *Unification of the United States Armed Forces: Implementing the 1986 Department of Defense Reorganization Act* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1996), 4.

<sup>10</sup> History.com Editors, *1980: Hostage rescue mission ends in disaster* (A&E Television Networks, 2018), accessed March 16, 2019, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/hostage-rescue-mission-ends-in-disaster>.



audiences' image of the American military after the botched operation was that of a paper tiger, something which was all roar and no bite.<sup>11</sup> The structure of military forces to be effective in executing US strategies in support of diplomatic missions was lacking. Organizations and command structures were not in sync with friendly objectives and sharing capabilities. Military and state planners need relationships between each other to create the conditions for successful coordinating structures.

Serving the roles as the primary military and diplomatic contributors in the United States' national instruments of power, the US Departments of Defense and State are equally concerned with strategic interests abroad. The US Department of Defense's mission statement includes furnishing a competent Joint Force to guarantee the freedom of the country and preserve American power overseas.<sup>12</sup> The DOS advances progress and stability for the American people. It does this by assuring physical security and market protection while promoting America's external protocols of statecraft, espousal, and aid resources.<sup>13</sup> Together, the Defense and State Departments work in tandem across the ever-fluctuating global spectrum of conflict and peace to ensure US national interests are advantageous across the globe. If either department fails in their assigned missions, then both feel the adverse shocks on US national power in the overarching and interconnected world system.

Simultaneously, the US military supports the Department of Defense's mission, focusing its training and mission objectives on operating in the different continuums of conflicts from peacetime to large scale combat operations. The US military performs in three ranges of operations.<sup>14</sup> NEOs can occur within any of these three areas. The first field is significant

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<sup>11</sup> Lovelace, 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, *Mission* (US Department of Defense, 2018), accessed November 1, 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/>.

<sup>13</sup> US Department of State, *What is the Mission of the US Department of State?* (US Department of State, 2017), accessed November 1, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/discoverdiplomacy/diplomacy101/issues/170606.htm>.

operations and campaigns such as a war. Operation Enduring Freedom from 2003 to 2014 is an instance of a major campaign in the Global War on Terror. The second field is crisis response and limited contingency operations. An example of a limited contingency operation was the US military's border security support in Operation Jump Start from 2006 to 2008. The third field is military engagement, security cooperation, and deterrence. An ongoing deterrence mission for the US military in Europe since 2014 is Operation Atlantic Resolve. The passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act in 1986 forced the US Defense Department to improve its unity of effort across the military branches.<sup>15</sup> Reducing duplicated efforts resulted in empowering GCCs to organize forces and control military operations in their areas of responsibility. A vital operation now found itself under the purview of the GCCs was planning and facilitating NEOs in their designated areas.<sup>16</sup> Mishaps between the military services in the handling of the faulty Operation Eagle Claw in 1979, contributed to the decision for GCCs to take ownership of NEOs.<sup>17</sup>

The DOS usually reserves ordering evacuations only for the most ominous of situations. Environments with conditions involving civil wars or aggressors fighting are typical when the DOS requests the US military to conduct a NEO. When the DOS waits too long to order an evacuation, only the US military or partnered militaries are prepared to support them because the operational environment has become too chaotic with violence stirring. Five evacuations the US military has assisted the DOS with are Operations Eagle Pull in Cambodia, Eastern Exit in Somalia, Assured Response in Liberia, Noble Obelisk in Sierra Leone, and Strengthen Hope in Lebanon. Civil and intrastate conflict existed during these evacuations. The US military positively completed them to protect and promote US global interests despite concurrent national

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<sup>14</sup> US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, *Joint Publication (JP) 1, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), I-14.

<sup>15</sup> Kenneth M. Crowe, *Goldwater-Nichols Act: Time For Reform* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2000), VII.

<sup>16</sup> US Joint Staff, *JP 1, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* 2017, III-8.

<sup>17</sup> Lovelace, 5.

operations and obligations happening at the same time. The United States has experienced threats to its global influence hegemony. Those pressures have driven its involvement in areas around the world since its ascension to the mantle at the conclusion of the Second World War. Its desire to maintain its role as a protector of democracy has made completion of successful NEOs important in its repertoire of diplomatic options.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the United States sought to stop the expansion of communism through containment policies. The United States' actions were related to its speculation of a communist takeover of the world based on domino theory.<sup>18</sup> The theory's primary reasoning was as communist nations became operational, they would spread their beliefs to their bordering countries and communism would spread like dominos falling one upon the other. This presumption led to US involvement in South Vietnam. Towards the end of the United States' efforts there, South Vietnam's neighboring countries of Cambodia and Laos fell to communism. During the toppling in 1975 of the US-supported Cambodian friendly government to communism, the United States conducted an evacuation called Operation Eagle Pull. It enabled the rescuing of US mission staff, dependents, and designated personnel from Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The 276 evacuees retrieved on April 12, 1975 ended the United States' diplomatic efforts in Cambodia during the 1970s.<sup>19</sup> Just four days later, the Khmer Rouge seized control of the country.<sup>20</sup> The United States' presence in Cambodia before the evacuation supported its previous government in its struggles against the Khmer Rouge communist rebels and North Vietnamese soldiers. The United States attempted to stop the spread of communism in Southeast

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<sup>18</sup> Gareth Porter, *Perils of Dominance* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 229.

<sup>19</sup> Gerald O. Anderson and Robert A. Silano, *After Action Report Operations New Life/New Arrivals: US Army Support to the Indochinese Refugee Program* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1977), I-8-A.

<sup>20</sup> History.com Editors, *1975: U.S. Embassy in Cambodia Evacuated* (A&E Television Networks, 2018), accessed November 1, 2018, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/u-s-embassy-in-cambodia-evacuated>.

Asia, but its efforts were not initially effective. From 1975 to 1979, the Khmer Rouge massacred 1.7 million Cambodians to restructure their society.<sup>21</sup> Now, nearly four decades later, the burial grounds of their murdered citizens are tourist attractions, and Cambodia is no longer a communist country. Vietnam, on the other hand, is still a communist country after its reunification war of North and South Vietnam, but its relations with the United States have been improving since 1995 when diplomatic connections restarted.

Civil wars often erupt when governments radically alter their structures. This was the case in 1991 when Siad Barre was the ruling dictator in Somalia until a military coup occurred, igniting a civil war. The Somali civil war arose at the same time while the world was focusing on the coalition buildup of military forces in Saudi Arabia to oust Iraqi forces out of Kuwait. The US military was fixating on its war efforts in the Middle East, but then suddenly it found itself having to reallocate forces to conduct Operation Eastern Exit, the 1991 evacuation of US, Italian, and Russian diplomats and their staffs from the US Embassy in Mogadishu, Somalia.<sup>22</sup> The evacuation transpired because of the rising violence of the Somali civil war and the security threat it presented towards embassy staffs. During the evacuation, friction developed between DOS on the ground and the US military pilots retrieving them because the US embassy moved to a new location after the military conducted its initial evacuation planning survey.<sup>23</sup> The US military adjusted to the ad hoc change and successfully evacuated 281 people. The evacuation was successful despite the lack of cooperative planning coordination between the State and Defense Departments for this operation. Diverting forces away from the growing troop buildup in Kuwait for Operation Desert Storm, the US Defense Department assigned forces to Somalia to complete

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<sup>21</sup> Zoltan Istvan, "Killing Fields Lure Tourists in Cambodia," *National Geographic*, January 2003, accessed November 4, 2018, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/2003/01/news-killing-fields-cambodia-tourist/>.

<sup>22</sup> Adam B. Siegel, *Eastern Exit: The Noncombatant Evacuation Operation (NEO) From Mogadishu, Somalia, in January 1991* (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, 1991), V, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Mark A. Davis, *Joint Considerations for Planning and Conducting NEOs* (Newport, RI: Naval War College, 2007), 7-8.

the evacuation. Historically, this example of concurrent events serves as a reminder to GCCs to create broad plans so they can quickly assist State Department emergency evacuation requests. Five years after the United States diverted forces from Kuwait, a similar force participating in a personnel recovery operation in Croatia was rediverted to conduct a NEO in Liberia.<sup>24</sup>

Liberia in 1996 experienced a reignited civil war after a peace agreement and cease-fire dissolved. Open fighting resumed across the country, surprising international diplomatic staffs and United Nations peacekeepers.<sup>25</sup> Diplomats and peacekeepers began working in the country when the cease-fire was still functioning, but once the fighting resumed, their efforts could not stop the escalating violence. The international diplomats and peacekeepers started fearing for their safety. Several countries ordered evacuations because of the growing sense of dread in Liberia. Operation Assured Response was the United States' portion of the evacuation. The evacuation, carried out by the US military, rescued 2,126 personnel from seventy-six nations.<sup>26</sup> Military resources in Europe rapidly organized and deployed to Liberia to conduct the evacuation. Quickly accomplishing the mission, the US military rescued DOS personnel. Because of this speedy success, the DOS expanded its evacuation request to include additional people not already rescued. The military was available with the right equipment and personnel to accommodate the expansion and promote US global interests.

Another demonstration of an expanding evacuation was Operation Noble Obelisk in 1997. The effort evacuated 2,509 people from Sierra Leone in just five days.<sup>27</sup> The conflict in Sierra Leone gave rise to the demand for an evacuation based on the attempted military coup and former Sierra Leone leader fleeing from the country. The military coup failed, and the outlook in

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<sup>24</sup> John W. Partin and Rob Rhoden, *Operation Assured Response. SOCEUR's NEO in Liberia* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1997), 3.

<sup>25</sup> Partin and Rhoden, 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>27</sup> William M. Kennedy, *Operation Noble Obelisk: An Examination of Unity of Effort* (Newport, RI: Naval War College, 2001), 15.

the country digressed into fighting with disparate armed factions vying for the power of the country. Initially, the US military was only to evacuate DOS personnel from Sierra Leone, but the mission requirements grew to include additional international diplomats and ousted Sierra Leone government officials. The US military followed the DOS's request for the expansion of the evacuation operation. The rescue operation grew from statecraft appeals from friendly nations and the DOS relationships with former Sierra Leone government officials trapped there. The US military's accommodation of the requested expansion of the DOS's evacuation in Sierra Leone strengthened US diplomatic ties with its allies involved.

Rising violence between the Israeli military and several Lebanese militant groups set the stage for Operation Strengthen Hope to safeguard and extract noncombatants from Lebanon in 2006. The evacuation resulted in removing 15,000 people safely from Lebanon.<sup>28</sup> Difficulties sprouted between the DOS and the US military because of distinctive compartmentalized classification authorities and lack of communication network interoperability during the operation.<sup>29</sup> The evacuation was overall successful, but synchronization could have been smoother between the departments. The operation identified the broadening technologically induced deficiencies of not sharing information and barriers of classification levels between the State and Defense Departments. Those missteps were human errors caused by separate internal training regiments and stove-piped data systems.

As seen above, these five historical NEOs from 1975 to 2006 highlight the necessity for the US military to continually improve its evacuation planning based on knowledge management and to share its findings with the DOS. A list of US military capabilities in a region must be available to DOS counterparts regularly so plans can remain current, realistic, and executable. Both departments benefit from a shared understanding of evacuation plans. Transparency

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<sup>28</sup> Paul C. de Marcellus, *Interoperability Issues in Noncombatant Evacuation Operations* (Newport, RI: Naval War College, 2008), 1.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

between the two departments serves to bolster unity of efforts for empowering US global interests. Activities and preparations between the departments regarding evacuation assistance continue to be relevant with twenty-three evacuations arising from October 2012 to September 2016.<sup>30</sup> Maintaining and building interoperability and relationship reinforcement between the two departments needs to continue. The DOS has diplomatic connections to facilitate relationships with other governments, but only the US military has the resources and equipment to recover and securely evacuate people from war zones. On the other hand, the US military cannot plan or execute evacuations without working out details with the State Department to control and promote the US narrative to contribute to concerted actions for the good of the United States.

The United States cannot always detect the outbreak of every civil war or hostile action, but it works to lessen the combative behaviors of other nations to assert American policies. Other nations, especially those with decades of American influence and partnership, have come to expect support during times of catastrophes. Such perceptions come from notions the United States can conduct evacuations of selected personnel if required. The United States maintained sway with the Republic of Vietnam from 1950 to 1975, creating a lasting relationship with the people of South Vietnam.<sup>31</sup> Sensing the fall of the South Vietnamese government in the spring of 1975, the DOS organized Operation Babylift. The operation evacuated 27,000 South Vietnamese and Cambodian children from Southeast Asia to the United States.<sup>32</sup> Operation Babylift, along with Operation Eagle Pull, served as the building blocks for the transportation and logistical network Operation Frequent Wind employed. All three operations fed into the resettlement and integration of Southeast Asian evacuees into American society.<sup>33</sup> The US military demonstrated

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<sup>30</sup> Michael J. Courts, et al., *Embassy Evacuations: State Department Should Take Steps to Improve Emergency Preparedness* (Washington, DC: US Government Accountability Office, 2017), 1.

<sup>31</sup> US Department of the Army, *Department Pamphlet Number 550-55, Area Handbook for South Vietnam* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1967), 53.

<sup>32</sup> Anderson and Silano, ix.

<sup>33</sup> Alan Carter, "The Indochinese Refugee Program: A View from a Camp," *Foreign Service Journal* no. 4 (April 1976), 15.

flexibility during the execution of Operation Frequent Wind as helicopter evacuation zones deviated from pre-planned locations to hastily improvised pickup sites for 7,500 evacuees.<sup>34</sup> The execution of Operation Frequent Wind allowed the United States to conclude the Vietnam War fully. If the military had not conducted the operation, the US public likely would have been upset. Political ramifications at home and abroad would have occurred on US national policy.

Successful evacuations reinforce relationships with allied countries and demonstrate the United States' resolve to honor its commitments to safeguard people who are loyal to it. Evacuations have global political ramifications. Opponents of US national interests can use failed evacuations as precedents to promote their agendas. After Operation Eagle Claw, the Ayatollah used the disastrous and aborted US evacuation to further his political and religious power over his people.<sup>35</sup> Ten years before Operation Eagle Claw and five years prior to Operation Frequent Wind, a RAND study in 1970 forecasted political executions in South Vietnam if the North Vietnamese won.<sup>36</sup> The idea of friendly South Vietnamese dying for their past governmental relationships with the United States influenced the decisions to authorize evacuations from Southeast Asia. At the very least, the evacuation lessened the stigma of the fall of South Vietnam because of failed US efforts. To the average American citizen, Operation Frequent Wind offered an outlet to show the United States was honorable and officially closing its diplomatic and military connections with the Vietnam conflict. Operation Frequent Wind continued the gateway for successful reception of Vietnamese citizens to become integrated into American society.

Evacuation operations tie in with the National Security Strategy to advance US influence in the world. Having allies who trust in the United States' ability to facilitate an evacuation if

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<sup>34</sup> J. E. Rhodes, *The Evacuation of Saigon: Operation "Frequent Wind"* (Quantico, VA: USMC Command and Staff College, 1979), 10-11.

<sup>35</sup> Lovelace, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Elliott Mai, *RAND in Southeast Asia: A History of the Vietnam War Era* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2010), accessed July 19, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/cp564rc.19>.



desired lends itself to setting up collaboration and retribution across partnered nations.

Cooperation and reciprocity show partnered nations how the United States shares responsibilities and burdens along with them.<sup>37</sup> The more partnered nations trust the United States, the more US goods and services can expand across more locations. Evacuation situations generally do not originate in isolation. They form when other issues and problems arise during human conflicts and natural disasters. Unity of effort is essential for the State and Defense Departments to ensure US national interests.

Officially, the US Department of Defense supports the DOS during evacuations.<sup>38</sup> The two departments have taken steps to get memorandums of agreements signed to facilitate coordination between them during evacuation operations.<sup>39</sup> The 1998 memorandum of agreement creates five liaison groups and lists areas of responsibilities and functions for each of them. The five liaison groups are the Washington, European, Central, South America, and East Asia groups.<sup>40</sup> The chair of every liaison group is a DOS officer with their military counterpart in attendance. The liaison groups serve to allow for the planning of all operations intersecting between the two departments and as a first step in sharing information for possible evacuations. The DOS conducts emergency action committees and creates emergency action plans, including the military relationships and tasks to conduct during evacuation operations. Military planning requirements in GCCs should include having planners review emergency action plans yearly with a requirement to submit their feedback to their counterparts in the DOS.

## Vietnam and Afghanistan Conditions

Vietnam and Afghanistan share a long history of warfare in which neighboring countries

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<sup>37</sup> Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 4.

<sup>38</sup> David T. Stahl, *Noncombatant Evacuation Operations in Support of the National Military Strategy* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, 1992), 1.

<sup>39</sup> Courts, et al., 2.

<sup>40</sup> US Departments of State and Defense, 22.

or competing ideologues seek to conquer them. These conflicts shaped their nations' cultures and societies. The earliest accounts of Vietnamese warfare began with the Trung sisters conducting rebellions against the Chinese occupation in Vietnam in AD 40.<sup>41</sup> Back then, Vietnam was fighting for its independence from China. About 1,900 years later, that same fighting spirit has sustained Vietnamese people against French, Japanese, Chinese, British, American, and fellow Vietnamese soldiers in conflicts of occupation up to 1975. Afghanistan can trace its documented warfare back 1,600 years to Genghis Kahn's era.<sup>42</sup> Since the 1800s, Afghanistan has experienced warfare with Britain, the Soviet Union, itself, and the United States. A common thread across warfare in Vietnam and Afghanistan is both nations generally fight invaders or amongst themselves for control of their countries.

US involvement in Vietnam and Afghanistan has ensued over several decades concerning national instruments of power influences. The United States provided weapons and equipment to the Vietnamese to combat the Japanese in the Second World War, aided French colonial efforts in the 1950s, and fought together with the Republic of Vietnam against North Vietnamese communists in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>43</sup> In Afghanistan, the United States provided weapons to the Mujahedin to battle the Soviets in the 1980s and has been working to rebuild the government of Afghanistan since 2002.<sup>44</sup> Each country has experienced democratization of their governments in conjunction with the rise of insurgencies to oppose them, such as the People's Liberation Armed Forces of South Vietnam (PLAF) and the Taliban. Both insurgencies have focused on killing supportive members of the US-backed governmental systems to scare and punish them for working with Americans.

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<sup>41</sup> James S. Olson and Randy Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell, America and Vietnam 1945-2010* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2014), 1.

<sup>42</sup> Donald P. Wright, et al., *A Different Kind of War. The United States Army in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) October 2001 – September 2005* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2010), 13.

<sup>43</sup> Olson and Roberts, 16, 283-291.

<sup>44</sup> Wright, et al., 16.

These murders serve as reminders to South Vietnam and Afghanistan citizens if they support US interests, they will face attacks or executions when the US presence has left. These supportive democratic populations are among those whom the DOS wants to extract during evacuation operations because they back the United States' national interests. During the period of Operation Frequent Wind, the Central Intelligence Agency was able to evacuate 537 out of their 1,900 South Vietnamese personnel.<sup>45</sup> If the United States fails to conduct an evacuation to protect these supportive people, the impact could be damaging around the world. A US evacuation failure could create international fear, causing other countries to exclude US organizations or operations in their area. These disappointments could cause the United States to lose its global influences.

Vietnam and Afghanistan's available resources and abilities to export them influenced their positions in the world. Vietnam was a target for French colonialism because of its coastal location and rubber trade.<sup>46</sup> Rubber was in high demand worldwide after the industrial era. The French preyed on the divided Vietnamese social classes, which date back to AD 40, from the time of Chinese occupation and oppression in Southeast Asia.<sup>47</sup> The rubber trade was a way the French continued a regal-like oversight of the Vietnamese people. Since the French were making money from managing the rubber plantations, upper class Vietnamese functioned as the administrators and governors of the trade. Middle class Vietnamese performed as the business managers, and lower-class Vietnamese served as the workers. Vietnamese society was unfair for much of the population in the lower classes, and internal conflict grew from imbalance. Following France's submission to Germany during the Second World War, Japan occupied Vietnam and treated its

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<sup>45</sup> Frank Snepp, *Decent Interval: An Insider's Account of Saigon's Indecent End Told by the CIA's Chief Strategy Analyst in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1977), 566.

<sup>46</sup> Cao Van Vien, *Indochina Monographs: The Final Collapse* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1985), 4, 58.

<sup>47</sup> Olson and Roberts, 1.

people as servants to the Japanese empire. This subjugation of the Vietnamese led to the rise of the Viet Minh guerrilla fighters under Ho Chi Minh to counter the Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia.<sup>48</sup>

When the Second World War ended, the Allies decided at the Potsdam Conference to accept the surrender of Japanese forces in Vietnam by dividing the country along the seventeenth parallel. The Chinese oversaw the northern sector and the British secured the southern sector.<sup>49</sup> The northern sector became the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and the southern sector became the Republic of Vietnam. After British forces accepted the surrender of Japanese forces in Saigon, France returned to Vietnam and attempted to reinstitute its colonial rule. The class divisions still existed, creating conflict between the Viet Minh and the French-backed government of the Republic of Vietnam, evolving into the French Indochina War from 1945 to 1954.<sup>50</sup> When the French withdrew from the Republic of Vietnam in 1954, Americans begin replacing them as partners with the Republic of Vietnam's democratic government to counter the threat of communism expansion from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

The USSR and China were supportive of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam overthrowing the Republic of Vietnam during the 1960s and 1970s. Countering US interests in the Republic of Vietnam and spreading communism were the goals of the USSR and China. Both states supplied military trainers and weapons to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Communist Vietnamese were cautious about China's support because it has historically treated them as inferior. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam received support from the USSR as it sought to become the communist beacon for the third world. The military leader of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, General Vo Nguyen Giap, tempted the USSR to promote additional backing by offering them naval rights to the Cam Ranh Bay pending the successful communist

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>49</sup> Olson and Roberts, 19.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 21, 42.

unification of Vietnam.<sup>51</sup> Before the United States pulled out of the Republic of Vietnam, it maintained naval rights of the Cam Ranh Bay. The United States was supporting the continued democratization of the Republic of Vietnam to act as a buffer against the expanse of communism across the Asia continent.

Establishing trade and economic corridors were the primary reasons Britain and the USSR-occupied Afghanistan a total of four times combined. During occupation periods, select groups of Afghans worked with the occupiers to establish new governments supportive of their colonizers, but internal opponents to those systems always existed.<sup>52</sup> During the first British expedition to control Afghanistan in the nineteenth century, Britain implanted a favorable monarch to control the country, but the ruse did not pan out.<sup>53</sup> During its second attempt in 1879, Britain managed to convince the Afghan monarchy to sign the Treaty of Gandamak, giving Britain the control of Afghanistan's foreign policy.<sup>54</sup> The treaty lasted until 1919, when Afghanistan gained full independence from Britain through the liberating Treaty of Rawalpindi.<sup>55</sup>

The continued Cold War between the USSR and the United States in the 1970s and 1980s influenced Afghanistan's history. During the period, Afghanistan was a proxy battlefield to counter Soviet expansion. The Soviets orchestrated the overthrow of the Afghan government and installed a communist regime loyal to them. Afghans opposed to the Soviet influences fought back, eventually becoming the Mujahedin. The Mujahedin maintained connections in the northwest frontier of Pakistan for basing and equipment. The United States aided the Mujahedin through supplying weapons and equipment through Pakistani networks. The US weapons enabled

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<sup>51</sup> Sergey Radchenko, "Why Were the Russians in Vietnam," *The New York Times*, March 27, 2018, accessed December 13, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/27/Opinion/russians-vietnam-war.html>.

<sup>52</sup> Wright, et al., 14-15.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 14.

the Mujahedin to keep Soviet forces at bay until the USSR departed the country in 1989.<sup>56</sup> After the Soviets withdrew, so did the US support to Afghanistan. Afghanistan fell into a civil war for control of its people until the Taliban came to power in 1996. US interests in Afghanistan returned in 2001 after the 9/11 Al-Qaeda attacks in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, DC. From 2001 to 2017, the United States led efforts inside Afghanistan to remove the Taliban and create a successful Afghan democratic government. In 2014, Operation Enduring Freedom ended, stopping significant coalition combat against Taliban forces and transferring authorities and main responsibilities to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan government for its wellbeing and maintenance. Since 2014 to 2017, participating in Operation Resolute Support has enabled the United States to continue in its advisory role to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, much as it did to the Republic of Vietnam from 1973 to 1975.<sup>57</sup> World and US influences have shaped around the unique geographies of both countries.

Geographically, the Republic of Vietnam and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan are different. The Republic of Vietnam, now the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, is situated along the South China Sea. Vietnam's colonial heritage of French rule drove the sea trade exportation of its natural rubber resources. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, on the other hand, is a landlocked country with its significant exports being gems, opium, and agricultural products. Trading routes through Afghanistan connecting Europe and Asia are important geographical features. These trade routes were the focus of both the British and the Russians as they attempted to build their empires in Asia.<sup>58</sup>

Vietnam and Afghanistan rely on family and tribal cultures to reinforce social structures. Most Vietnamese during the 1950s to the 1970s generally viewed survival as the most pressing

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<sup>56</sup> Hassan Abbas, *The Taliban Revival: Violence and Extremism on the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 40.

<sup>57</sup> Kenneth Katzman and Clayton Thomas, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2017), 24.

<sup>58</sup> Wright, et al., 14.

matter for the safety of their families above the backing of their government.<sup>59</sup> This survival mentality contributed to the successes of the PLAF holding traction over Vietnamese civilians and gaining footholds in the South Vietnamese countryside. The PLAF was able to do this because South Vietnamese soldiers remained stationary in urban areas and did not venture out on patrols to protect rural citizens. A similar scenario occurred in Afghanistan where religious faith, ethnic backgrounds, and tribal histories are more influential to citizens than nationalism is.<sup>60</sup> The Taliban has been able to challenge the Afghan National Army for control of the countryside in Afghanistan. Afghan National Army losses have forced them to remain concentrated in major urban areas, and thus rural areas are in control of the Taliban.

Politically, the Republic of Vietnam of 1975 and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan of 2017 are presidential democracies. Mutually, the US government has influenced both countries to protect American national interests. In the case of the Republic of Vietnam, it was to stop the expanse of communism and the influence of the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong. In the ongoing example of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, it is to stop terrorist threats against the United States from Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Afghan leadership in 2017, such as President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah, are concerned about the void which would be formed in Afghanistan if the United States left without settlements with the Taliban and Pakistan.<sup>61</sup>

## Operation Frequent Wind

In 1975, Americans and designated nationals met at bus stops once the evacuation signal played on the radio in South Vietnam. Ground transports then took evacuees out of Saigon to Tan

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<sup>59</sup> US Department of the Army, *Department Pamphlet 550-55*, 192.

<sup>60</sup> Wright, et al., 7.

<sup>61</sup> Shahmahmood Miakhel, "How Afghans View the New U.S. Strategy," United States Institute of Peace, August 2017, accessed February 7, 2019, <https://www.usip.org/blog/2017/08/how-afghans-view-new-us-strategy>.

Son Nhut Air Base. Tan Son Nhut Air Base was home to the Defense Attache Office and the Evacuation Control Center, under the command of Brigadier General Richard Carey. As the South Vietnamese guards at the air base began to recognize US personnel were preparing for their final pull out of South Vietnam, they started blocking American evacuation buses from entering the base. To convince the South Vietnamese guards to permit the American ground traffic to enter the base, General Carey ordered US fighter aircraft to conduct flyovers and threatened to destroy the Vietnamese gate guards.<sup>62</sup> General Carey's tactic succeeded, and evacuees entered the base allowing for the follow on extraction of 4,870 people.<sup>63</sup>

Estimating the predicted number of evacuees in South Vietnam prior to Operation Frequent Wind proved challenging for US planners. The initial estimates of the forecasted

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<sup>62</sup> Tobin, Laehr, and Hilgenberg, 93, 104.

<sup>63</sup> Johnston, 47.



evacuation included relocating 197,000 principle people with their families.<sup>64</sup> The plan included

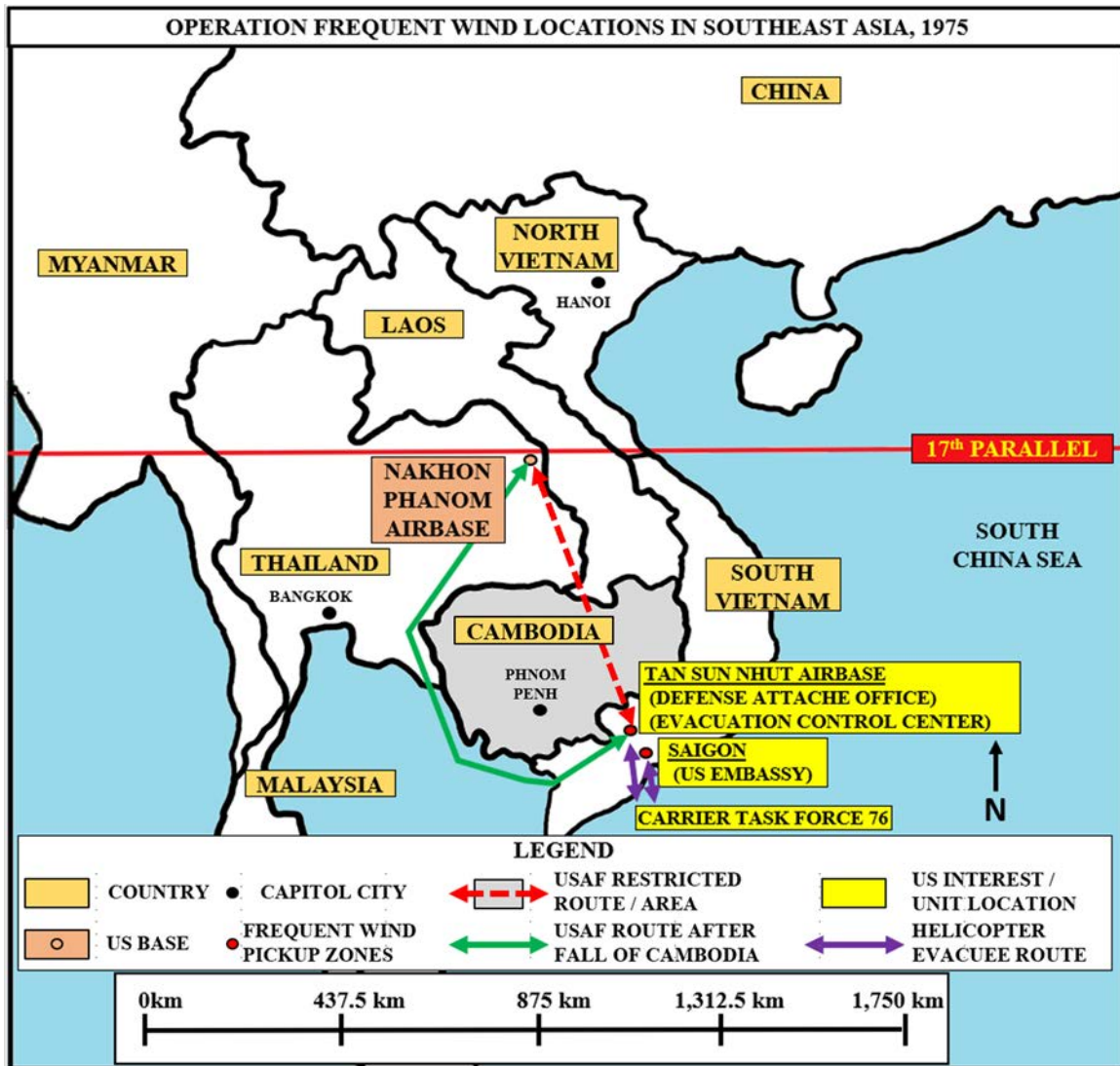


Figure 1. Operation Frequent Wind Locations in Southeast Asia, 1975. Created by the author.

US citizens, key intelligence personalities, Vietnamese cabinet members, Vietnamese legislators, Vietnamese civil servants, Vietnamese police officials, non-government political leaders, religious leaders, and western employees and press. Cutting 15 percent of those numbers on the evacuation forecast, 167,620 evacuees became the actual planning factor for the US government

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

pullout of South Vietnam.<sup>65</sup> Seventeen hours and 1,047 sorties later after Operation Frequent had commenced on April 29, 1975, the evacuation was finally complete. Rotatory and fixed-wing aircraft from the US Air Force, US Navy, and US Marine Corps participated in saving 7,006 evacuees by the end of Operation Frequent Wind. Because of the American troop withdrawal in 1973, no US military aircraft had authorizations to base in South Vietnam before the start the evacuation.

The US policy of Vietnamization withdrew troops from 1969 to 1973, contributing to the uneasy security and power vacuum existing in South Vietnam in 1975.<sup>66</sup> The United States agreed to a cease-fire in South Vietnam with all ground units and aircraft withdrawing from the country by 1973. The cease-fire carried stipulations that no overflights would occur in Northern Vietnam and all US Navy surface ships would remain south of the seventeenth parallel, avoiding North Vietnamese waters.<sup>67</sup> The Joint Chiefs of Staff during the conclusion of the Vietnam War were attempting to withdraw US forces while forecasting that the South Vietnamese military forces were postured to protect their country.<sup>68</sup> The Joint Chiefs, through the US Military Assistance Command Vietnam, denied South Vietnamese requests for heavy ground forces equipment and vehicles, thinking US air power would remain available to support them in their defensive operations against Northern Vietnamese attacks.<sup>69</sup> They were wrong. The North Vietnamese exploited the departure of the US forces and positioned their military to await its final drive into South Vietnam, which happened in 1975.

Over the two years between the redeployment of US forces and the call to conduct the evacuation, the US military found itself with limited resources available in the region. Because of

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<sup>65</sup> Johnston, 19-20.

<sup>66</sup> Willard J. Webb and Walter S. Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam 1971-1973* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2007), 19.

<sup>67</sup> Webb and Poole, 317, 323, 364.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 364.

the ceasefire agreement in 1973, the US 7th Air Force had to depart South Vietnam. It established itself in Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, which was roughly 800 kilometers away from Saigon.<sup>70</sup> Initially, the plan called for any air assistance to fly straight to Saigon over Cambodia, but that changed in 1975. Because of US tensions with Cambodia in early April 1975 due to the communist takeover of its government, aircraft from Nakhon Phanom to Saigon had to circumvent Cambodian air space, making the total distance to cover come out to 1,260 kilometers. The US Air Force C-130s participating in the evacuation could fly that distance in two and a half hours when required, but it was a hindrance which delayed flights for evacuees.

South Vietnamese forces between 1973 and 1975 focused on strengthening defenses in urban cities. Failing to deploy South Vietnamese forces outside of cities enabled the circumstances for the North Vietnamese to modernize and buildup their forces safely in the South Vietnamese countryside and Northern Vietnam without fear of attacks from the South Vietnamese or US air strikes.<sup>71</sup> The North Vietnamese with the PLAF inside of South Vietnam worked on building their support networks in the less-patrolled countryside and infiltrating South Vietnamese positions of power. As an example of a notable infiltration, Sergeant Le Tang was an intelligence examiner working for the Central Intelligence Agency in Saigon, but he was also an undercover captain in the PLAF.<sup>72</sup> Sergeant Tang misled South Vietnamese tracking of advancing PLAF units and personally escorted northern Vietnamese columns of troops into Saigon on the day of Operation Frequent Wind. The dangers of people like Sergeant Tang being in organizations are they would most likely have purview of upcoming evacuation details.

Unpredictable world variables and enemy espionage along with unimpeded PLAF maneuvers profoundly degraded the fighting readiness of the South Vietnamese. Fuel shortages

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<sup>70</sup> Webb and Poole, 325.

<sup>71</sup> William E. Le Gro, *Vietnam from Cease-Fire to Capitulation* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1985), 179.

<sup>72</sup> Alan Dawson, *55 Days: The Fall of South Vietnam* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 17-18.

stemming from the middle eastern Yom Kippur War grounded the South Vietnamese Air Force in 1974.<sup>73</sup> Other blows came from budget constraints and denial of US monetary support to bolster South Vietnamese forces. In early April 1975, President Gerald Ford asked Congress for \$972 million in military and humanitarian aid to assist in avoiding the military destruction of the South Vietnamese government.<sup>74</sup> Congress denied the request. This action, connected with the other variables mentioned above, contributed to the demise of the South Vietnamese government and the beginning stages of the evacuation.

The DOS request for initiating the contingency evacuation planning of South Vietnam was messaged to the US Defense Department on March 25, 1975, from South Vietnamese Ambassador Graham Martin.<sup>75</sup> Ambassador Martin solicited for military sealift craft and four transport aircraft to coordinate with the US Agency for International Development for early evacuations of non-essential personnel beyond the capacity of commercially available flights.<sup>76</sup> Ambassador Martin's efforts started the first phase of the overall evacuation of US personnel out of South Vietnam using US State and Defense Department assets. On April 24, 1975, Congress approved the use of US military forces to protect evacuation operations in South Vietnam.<sup>77</sup> Because of Congress's approval, armed US aircraft returned to South Vietnam.

Since the United States had transitioned to a mentorship role during the last two years of the South Vietnamese government, the DOS maintained the command and control authorities in relations to US government agencies across the country. This negatively impacted US military evacuation flights during Operation Frequent Wind when the military resumed temporary command and control authorities over US assets in South Vietnam. The change and disruption in

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<sup>73</sup> Dawson, 47.

<sup>74</sup> Webb and Poole, 359.

<sup>75</sup> Johnston, 14.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 17, 18.

<sup>77</sup> Webb and Poole, 360.

command and control contributed to a lack of synergy and miscalculations across various airframes, which had different flight speeds, operational reaches, and fuel capacity options. Separate agencies, overstepping channels and failing to follow evacuation communications procedures, overloaded aircraft communication frequencies.<sup>78</sup> These gaps in communications networks impacted the control of operations as each aircraft made several sorties retrieving evacuees from Saigon and Tan Son Nhut Air Base. During the operation, additional complications arose when the various understandings and interpretations of what the actual launch hour was between the joint forces. The US Air Force treated launch hour as the time an aircraft began flight, and the US Navy and US Marine Corps treated it as the time aircraft landed in a landing zone.<sup>79</sup> This confused synchronization between joint operations and the Evacuation Control Center in Tan Son Nhut Air Base.

More changes on the ground in Saigon dealt with security issues and the early closing of the Tan Son Nhut Air Base after the destruction of a US Air Force C-130 there.<sup>80</sup> The closing of Tan Son Nhut Air Base caused an unexpected evacuee massing at the US Embassy in Saigon. The military initially allocated enough aircraft to only evacuate the ambassador, his small residual staff, and his security detachment at the US embassy, but ended up retrieving 2,098 people from there.<sup>81</sup>

Prior to loading evacuees into military aircraft, US embassy personnel were responsible for screening them. The list of eligible evacuees grew when on April 22, 1975 the US Department of Justice granted a waiver to allow Southeast Asian refugees to settle in the United States.<sup>82</sup> Due to the unseen reality of the growing crowds of people seeking evacuation, it is unlikely all the

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<sup>78</sup> Tobin, Laehr, and Hilgenberg, 97.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>80</sup> Johnston, 91.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>82</sup> Mai, 526.

personnel rescued received screening during the helicopter extraction period of Operation Frequent Wind. Making space for rescued people was the priority within the Carrier Task Force 76 evacuation fleet of forty-five vessels.<sup>83</sup> The dumping of thirteen South Vietnamese helicopters into the South China Sea reinforces the precedence of accepting evacuees over saving equipment.

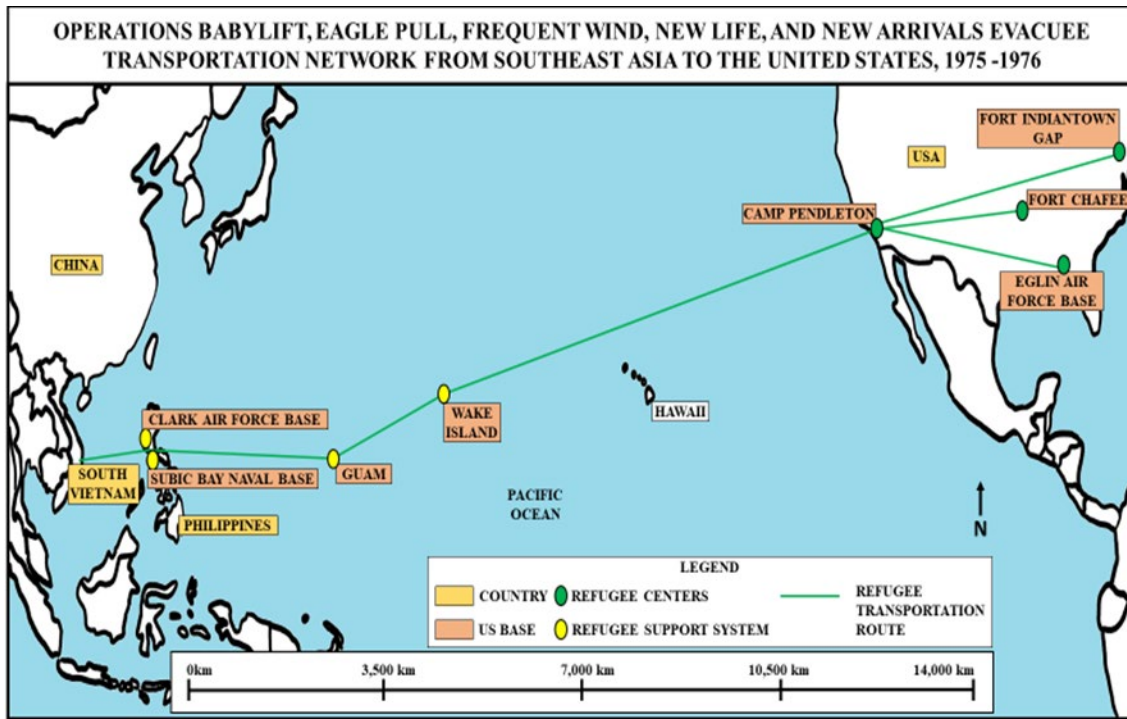


Figure 2. Operations Babylift, Eagle Pull, Frequent Wind, New Life, and New Arrivals Evacuee Transportation Network from Southeast Asia to the United States, 1975-1976. Created by the author.

After Operation Frequent Wind concluded, the subsequent resettlement missions called Operations New Life and New Arrivals began along the former evacuee route used for Operations Babylift and Eagle Pull. It consisted of a refugee support system, housing people in Guam, Wake Island, Clark Air Force Base, and Subic Bay Naval Base before transporting them to centers in the United States at Camp Pendleton, Fort Chaffee, Fort Indiantown Gap, and Eglin Air Force

<sup>83</sup> Johnston, 54.

Base.<sup>84</sup> It was a massive endeavor with \$405 billion appropriated by the US House of Representatives to conduct the resettlement of the Southeast Asian refugees.<sup>85</sup> The resettlement program was a tremendous undertaking, which demands planners in both the State and Defense Departments remember it because of the considerable efforts behind it.

A massive national effort was conducted with the creation of an Interagency Task Force for Indochina to serve as the director of operations for the transportation and integration of 130,000 Southeast Asia refugees.<sup>86</sup> The task force consisted of personnel from “the Departments of State; Defense; Justice; Health, Education, and Welfare; Transportation; Treasury; Labor; Interior; and Housing and Urban Development,” with support from “the US Agency for International Development; US Information Agency; Central Intelligence Agency; Office of Management and Budget; and Immigration and Naturalization Service” working together.<sup>87</sup> The military under the task force facilitated transportation, lodging, feeding, health care, and security of the evacuees both along the evacuation route and inside of the continental United States. Approval from congressional delegations from the states containing the military facilities which were planned to house the evacuees had to be secured by the task force before bringing them into the United States.<sup>88</sup> The military responded quickly to implementing operations at refugee centers with only one to three days of notice to prepare before the arrival of evacuees at their locations.<sup>89</sup> Surprisingly, 1,546 refugees changed their minds about integrating into the United States and repatriated back to Vietnam.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Johnston, 57-58; Anderson and Silano, V-C-1.

<sup>85</sup> Johnston, 58.

<sup>86</sup> Anderson and Silano, ix-xi.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., I-A-4.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., I-B-11.

<sup>89</sup> Anderson and Silano, V-C-1.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., I-C-15.

With the collapse of the South Vietnamese government and evacuation of the last US personnel completed, the United States closed out its costly involvement in Southeast Asia. In the end, the PLAF captured \$5 billion of US-supplied equipment during the seizure of Saigon.<sup>91</sup> Overnight, more than 3 million South Vietnamese were left unemployed, and the unified Socialist Republic of Vietnam became one of the thirtieth poorest countries in the world.<sup>92</sup> Interestingly, one evacuee from Operation Frequent Wind, Viet Luong, and another child refugee from Vietnam, Lapthe Flora, both became brigadier generals in the US Army.

## Current Operating Environment

As of September 2017, western troops serving in Afghanistan under Operation Resolute Support included 15,000 US and 5,000 NATO military members.<sup>93</sup> If evacuating roughly 20,000 military personnel, it would take 197 US Air Force C-17 cargo and troop transports to remove them from Afghanistan. The great effort would require using all 157 C-17s on active duty in the US Air Force and mobilizing eighty-five percent of the C-17s in the Air National Guard to accomplish the mission, not including corresponding aerial in-flight refueling assets.<sup>94</sup> Planning an evacuation using only US air assets is unlikely for the situation in Afghanistan with NATO members present, but the possibility, however remote, emphasizes the magnitude of such an operation. The exact evacuation numbers would need to accommodate State Department personnel, selected Afghan soldiers, and partnered diplomatic employees.<sup>95</sup> Military planners would also have a requirement to comprehend all available coalition transportation assets in the region.

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<sup>91</sup> Snepp, 567.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 570.

<sup>93</sup> Clayton Thomas, *Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy In Brief* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2018), 10.

<sup>94</sup> US Air Force, *C-17 Globemaster III* (US Air Force, 2018): accessed February 28, 2019, <https://www.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/1529726/c-17-globemaster-iii/>.

<sup>95</sup> Thomas, 8-9.



It is beneficial for US military planners across GCCs to be knowledgeable of partnered nations' evacuation planning in case they desire assistance in the future, such as in Afghanistan. Current US military doctrine for evacuation planning in *US Joint Publication 3-68* covers details on roles, coordination, command and control, planning, employment, processing, and repatriation operations. NATO's *Allied Joint Doctrine 3.4.2* provides overview data, national roles, command and control options, planning considerations, employment methods, and logistical support requirements to conduct an evacuation. The United Kingdom's evacuation doctrine, *Joint Doctrine Publication 3-51*, offers the context of responsibilities, planning, implementation, and support of evacuations between the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office and its Ministry of Defence. Australia's evacuation doctrine, *Australian Defence Doctrine Publication 3.10*, explains the connections between its National Security Committee of Cabinet, Defence Headquarters, Headquarters Joint Operations Command, and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in responsibilities, command, and control, planning, and conduct of operations. France's evacuation doctrine, *Joint Doctrine 3.4.2*, is written to provide a general framework between the French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs and its Ministry of the Armed Forces including the actors involved, execution of operations, considerations of legal framework, levels of permissiveness, planning, reception centres, protection zones, and defence attaches guidance in extracting French citizens.

Modern civilian registration and monitoring of evacuees could benefit from the use of biometric tracking. The process of accounting for people from extraction to transportation through integration points to their final destinations could benefit from the use of biometric tracking. Dr. Myra Gray, the Director of the Defense Department G-3/5/7 Biometrics Task Force in 2007, wrote the use of biometrics could make the difference in safeguarding service members.<sup>96</sup> Biometrics can be useful in protecting and maintaining military and state equipment

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<sup>96</sup> Myra Gray, "Terrorism and New Biometrics Technologies," *Security Magazine* no. 11 (November 2008), 81.

accountability during evacuation operations. Such safety measures could be valuable in Afghanistan.

Operational reach and transportation options in the military vary depending on political and diplomatic factors such as resources available and time.<sup>97</sup> Before the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the Shahbaz Air Base in Pakistan and Karshi-Khanabad airfield in Uzbekistan were contracted out to the US military to support the buildup of forces and air transportation into Afghanistan.<sup>98</sup> As those two land-based airfields were preparing north and southeast of Afghanistan, USS *Carl Vinson*, *Enterprise*, *Theodore Roosevelt*, and *Kitty Hawk* aircraft carriers sailed to the Indian Ocean to assist with air operations and helicopter insertions of special operations forces into southern Afghanistan.<sup>99</sup> Helicopter operations required the creation of interim ground-based forward arming and refueling points to allow them to reach Kandahar. Utilizing two airfields and four flight decks allowed the US military to deploy soldiers to Afghanistan within five weeks of the September 11th attacks.

The equipment and supplies carried into Afghanistan throughout Operation Enduring Freedom enabled the buildup of Bagram and Kandahar airfields. As of 2017, however, the Shahbaz Air Base and Karshi-Khanabad airfield are both closed. US airfields in Kuwait or Romania are the destinations for US military chartered flights leaving Afghanistan. An issue arose in 2014 when Iran forced a chartered flight carrying US personnel to land in Bandar Abbas, Iran, for questioning.<sup>100</sup> Flying from Afghanistan to Kuwait over Iran offers the fastest route for US military air traffic, but it also flusters the US and Iranian relations which have not recovered since

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<sup>97</sup> Aimee Gregg, *Optimizing Crisis Action Planning in the Noncombatant Evacuation Operation Setting* (Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, OH: Air Force Institute of Technology, 2010), 129.

<sup>98</sup> Wright, et al., 58-59.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>100</sup> Armin Rosen, "This Loophole Lets the US Use Iranian Airspace to Fly Its Personnel To and From Afghanistan," *Business Insider*, September 2014, accessed February 28, 2019, <https://www.Businesinsider.com/the-us-flies-its-personnel-over-iran-2014-9>.

the problematic Eagle Claw rescue in 1979. Unless political arrangements change with Iran, it is unlikely a US evacuation plan could involve large scale movements through Iran. That political

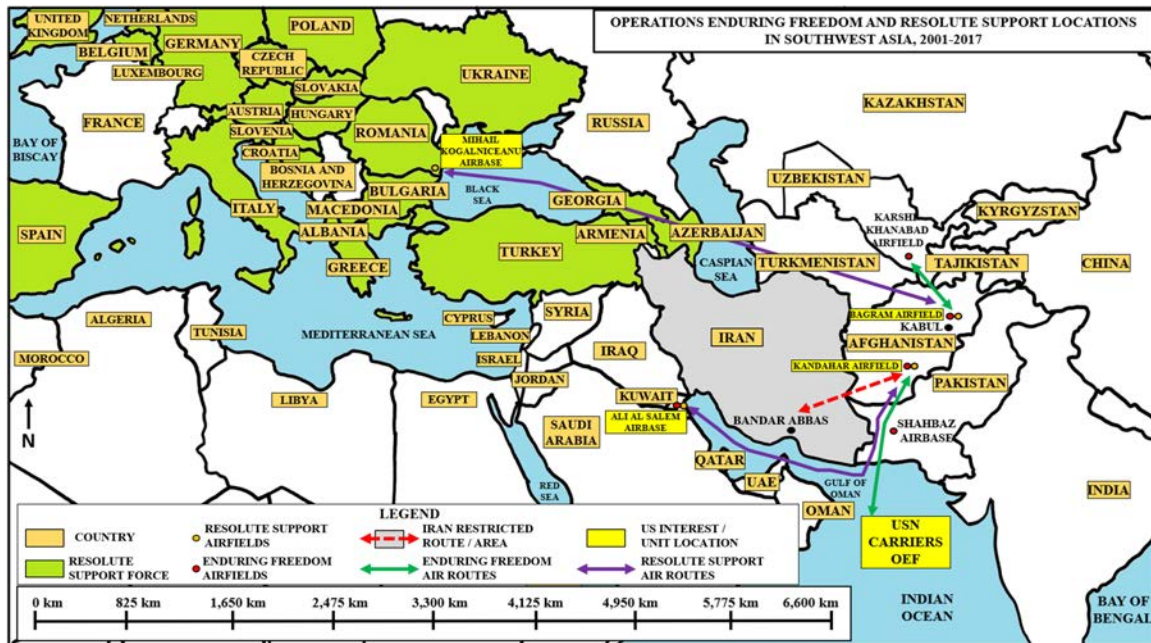


Figure 3. Operations Enduring Freedom and Resolute Support Locations in Southwest Asia, 2001-2017. Created by the author.

boundary would impact the rising cost of evacuating Afghanistan for time distance traveled, fuel costs, and pre-positioned infrastructure to support evacuees. Those factors could negatively influence the United States’ strategic outlook.

Looking at the 2017 *National Security Strategy*, the United States’ reputation and global status are in competition with China, Russia, and Iran for global security initiatives. If the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan collapsed and the United States did not conduct an evacuation, including of Afghans who supported US efforts, it would open a power vacuum in the Middle East. Such a void would invite China, Russia, and Iran to increase their actions to dissolve US relations in the Southwest Asia region further. Problems could start in Afghanistan and then spread into neighboring Pakistan.<sup>101</sup> Opponents challenging US hegemony are implying adverse impacts on

<sup>101</sup> Trump, 39, 50.

US interests such as disrupting a NEO could create a cascading effect on US interests worldwide. An effective evacuation would aid the US narrative in showing it is committed to its international endeavors.

If Afghanistan fell and the United States did not put its best efforts forward to conduct an evacuation, its financial contributions from 2001 to 2017 would be for naught. A successful evacuation including of select Afghan nationals would see a return of the \$126 billion the United States has invested in building the Afghan government and security forces.<sup>102</sup> That return investment would consist of saving people who have shown their devotions to US interests and to the global message of reassuring US allies it will rescue people who support America.

## Conclusion

On the afternoon of April 30, 1975, US Marine Corps Captain Gerald Barry landed for the first time at the US Embassy in Saigon to evacuate Ambassador Martin and his staff. Captain Barry informed the guards on the ground to bring the ambassador to him for extraction but instead, they loaded his helicopter full of sixty-five to eighty Vietnamese evacuees.<sup>103</sup> Captain Barry saw no other options and decided to transport the Vietnamese personnel out to the waiting naval fleet before returning to the embassy to try and collect Ambassador Martin again. In the end, after seventeen continuous hours of flying and fourteen total landings at the embassy, Captain Barry was finally successful at getting Ambassador Martin to board his aircraft by stating the words, “the President sends.”<sup>104</sup> Captain Barry’s mission to evacuate the ambassador did not go according to his originally planned single flight to complete his mission, but because he made that statement, Ambassador Martin finally boarded his aircraft to leave South Vietnam in the early morning hours of April 31, 1975.

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<sup>102</sup> Thomas, 1.

<sup>103</sup> Patterson.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

The story of Ambassador Martin and Captain Barry serves as a reminder for the dialogue between the State and Defense Departments to continue past the planning phase of an operation into its execution. The DOS will avoid ordering a NEO up until the last moments it can, but if it happens, military assets will be committed as fast as possible to complete the mission to safeguard US national interests. If a NEO had occurred in Afghanistan in 2017, US Ambassador John Bass would need to leave when military aircraft went to retrieve him and not postpone the evacuation such as Ambassador Martin did.<sup>105</sup> The loss of an ambassador can further damage US relations in a region or state experiencing a NEO. The significance of understanding past evacuation successes and failures enable constructive planning efforts to overall strengthen US global interests.

It would be in the best interests of the US national government if both the State and Defense Departments increased their interoperability relationships with each other. Mutually, they work towards advancing the US national strategic interests and have done so in the past. Future NEOs are opportunities to promote US hegemony against world threats. Maintaining connections and partnerships around the world, both departments allocating knowledge to each other can enable posturing of efforts to detect igniting civil wars. Sharing planning efforts and stopping over classifications of information are ideal ways to build synergy amongst GCCs and their State Department counterparts. Historical case studies demonstrate collaboration is necessary for evacuations occurring under warfare conditions.

For forecasting purposes, it is excellent for planners to study the similarities of South Vietnam and Afghanistan's histories and US involvements in each location. It is likely the execution of Operation Frequent Wind enabled the positioning of US forces to counter the USSR

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<sup>105</sup> US Embassy in Afghanistan, *John Bass U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan* (US Department of State, 2019), accessed March 28, 2019, <https://af.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/john-bass-u-s-ambassador-afghanistan/>.

during the remainder of the Cold War. The United States' commitment to its allies could benefit its global standings if a future evacuation of Afghanistan happened.

Updating predictions about necessary evacuees in State and Defense Department's NEO plans are crucial. The model used in Operation Frequent Wind enabled the rapid buildup of evacuation forces. Examples demonstrated during the evacuation of South Vietnam showed the added constraints of overflight rights and basing access. It is essential to lay out long term effects and coordinate everything from the start of notification to evacuees to the completion of the integration process of new people into society. Demonstrating those abilities sets the conditions for partnered nations to accept a US presence in their nation.

US and partner nations' posturing of forces to evacuate Afghanistan in a short time process linked to a Taliban militarily overthrow of the Afghan government would require time to assemble. Because forces in Afghanistan are there as a partnered effort between nations, it is beneficial for State and Defense Department planners to be familiar with partnered nations evacuation doctrine. Additional basing opportunities exist with partnered nations having connections to other allies the United States might not have. The use of biometric technology aids the safety of evacuation forces and supports the tracking of evacuees. In protecting US national interests against disappointments like Operation Eagle Claw, NEOs should occur earlier rather than later to allow for future successes.

In conclusion, modern Defense and State Department planners will benefit from studying past NEOs while applying lessons toward their future premeditated operations. A failure to study historical NEOs will lead to planners experiencing unnecessary failures. Maintaining US efforts keen on studying past NEOs will enable planners to envision likely inclinations of future events. As the growth of the world's population and mass movement of people into urban areas increase, conflicts for resources will continue to grow. The spectrums of peace and war challenge the United States' national instruments of power. Lessons learned from Operation Frequent Wind are applicable and valuable to modern planners.

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