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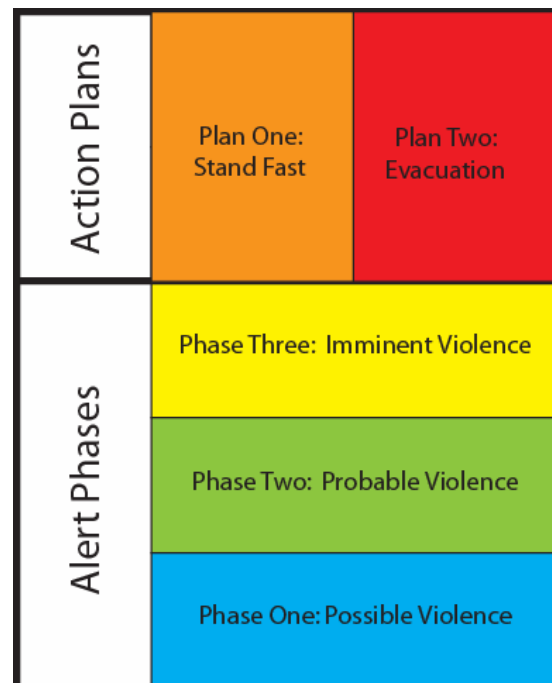
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## Responding to Mass Security Evacuation Situations

By William Irwin, MEDEX Security Director

Recent events in Lebanon have shown how quickly security concerns can escalate and lead to a mass evacuation. For many Americans, this was a time of chaos. They knew trouble was brewing, but were unsure what to do about it, didn't know when or how to leave the country, and lacked the necessary preparations for an organized evacuation. Companies with travelers, schools with study abroad participants, and organizations with aid workers were all impacted by the events in Lebanon.

If you ever have travelers in a similar situation, you may wish to evacuate them, or an evacuation may be ordered by the U.S. Embassy. Such situations usually progress through three alert phases, where travelers prepare for a potential evacuation, and are followed by one of two action plans, determined by whether or not an actual evacuation is ordered. Based upon varying degrees of upheaval, this model should be adapted and



operationalized. Your organization may wish to develop their own, similar model, to help travelers plan, act, and react accordingly to an escalating security situation.

**Alert Phase One, Possible Violence:** Initial preparations are made during this phase. Everyone who may be involved in the situation is notified and placed on alert, and all Americans should register with the U.S. Embassy. At least five days of emergency supplies should be built up, including drinking water and canned food, emergency lighting and spare batteries, portable radios, medications, reading materials, extra mobile phone batteries, and first aid kits. In anticipation of leaving the country, full-fare, unrestricted, open, and dated round-trip first class air tickets should be purchased, and every person's passport should be valid for at least the next six months. Furthermore, all vehicles should be filled with gas, and everyone should have a total of USD 2000 on them: USD 1000 in cash and its equivalent in the local currency.

**Alert Phase Two, Probable Violence:** With all initial plans in place, further preparations are made. Increased tensions could lead to partial or complete evacuation of travelers and expatriates. If you prefer, it is usually easier to have travelers leave the country during this phase than during a full-scale evacuation. However, this may be unnecessary; as order could be restored to the area before an evacuation is essential. If your travelers choose to remain in the country, everyone in the group should gather at a central hotel, and have a secondary location selected in case the first becomes unsafe or unavailable. Now is the time to complete any personal or business affairs, because if an evacuation is ordered, these matters may remain unattended for several days, weeks, or even months.

**Alert Phase Three, Imminent Violence:** The area is on the verge of violence. Typically, it is during this phase that the U.S. government or host country will either order an evacuation or order citizens to stand fast. By the time a security situation reaches this point, there is little

choice but to heed the advice of the government or host country. In the event of an evacuation, travelers may only be allowed to take carry-on luggage, and they should be prepared to be away from the country for a long period of time.

Beyond the three alert phases, there are two action plans. In one plan, a full evacuation is ordered, while in the other plan, people are advised to stay in their homes or the embassy until the security threat has passed.

**Action Plan One, Stand Fast:** This plan should be implemented when imminent violence exists, but an evacuation is not recommended. This is possible when the difficulties involved in evacuating the country outweigh the severity of violence in the country, or the violence is not expected to last long. Rather than evacuating, travelers and expatriates are encouraged to remain in their homes and residences until the security threat has passed. The State Department will notify U.S. citizens of this decision, and may wish to be contacted after the stand fast ends, to ensure the security of American citizens.

**Action Plan Two, Evacuation:** During an evacuation, the withdrawal of businesses and personnel occurs. Usually, the U.S. government will manage the logistics and resources of an evacuation to assist any U.S. citizen trying to flee the country. Depending on the urgency of the situation and the number of people trying to evacuate, this plan can be well organized and easily implemented, or chaotic and disordered. With tensions running high, it is important to be prepared for anything at this point, such as difficulties at border crossings and violent unrest. Families and friends could even be separated in the chaos, creating even more confusion.

Properly preparing for each alert phase and having defined action plans, may make the process a little easier on your travelers. Prior to departing the country, everyone should know what to do during each phase, in the event that they find themselves in a security situation.

*MEDEX offers security planning that can help your organization prepare for an evacuation situation. If you have international travelers, particularly if they frequent areas with high political tensions, you may wish to work with MEDEX to develop your company's own evacuation plan. This can help ensure the health and safety of your international travelers.*

*Contact MEDEX for more information.*



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