

Supporting clients in Egypt - a case study



The Situation in Egypt

During January and February 2011 thousands of anti-government protesters took to the streets across Egypt to demand political change and the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak. The demonstrations and associated political instability had significant ramifications for businesses with operations and employees in the region.

While the uprising was largely peaceful, hundreds of clients in Cairo, Alexandria and across the country were supported with up-to-date information, security advice, as well as medical and security assistance. No crisis is without its challenges and the one in Egypt was no exception. With communication channels blocked for days, significant overland travel restrictions and imposed curfews, the safe evacuation of clients was not without its difficulties.

Timeline of support provided to clients

January 23: Regular contact with members ongoing

Ahead of the planned anti-government protests in several cities across Egypt, regular Daily Digests and Travel Advisories advise members to expect tight security. This included a team of experts already active in the region, with security specialists supporting clients on the ground in Tunisia.

January 25: Security situation becomes tense

As some protests degenerate into violence, our global security team sends email alerts to members providing analysis and advice as security is tightened further in advance of the anti-government 'Day of Anger' on January 28.

January 28: More than 900 members tracked

Using our TravelTracker system, we confirm that there are more than 900 members who are either in Egypt or scheduled to travel to the country. We issue a Special Advisory to members as President Mubarak declares a nationwide curfew and deploys the army. With further clashes between protesters and police focused on Cairo's Tahrir Square, there are growing reports of looting and lawlessness. After Friday prayers, tens of thousands of people join protests in Cairo and other cities to demand that President Mubarak step down. By nightfall, embassies in Cairo are shut down, leaving many foreigners unsure of what to do.

January 29: Crisis Management Team (CMT) in London activated and Incident Management Team (IMT) arrives in Cairo

As the situation deteriorates, we issue our first Stand By Evacuation Notification for members, activate a CMT in London and deploy a mass evacuation support group to supplement the London crisis team. The first member of the IMT arrives and we establish an initial operational capability through one of our existing providers in central



Cairo. Operations teams in International SOS alarm centers in Philadelphia, Paris, Dubai, London and Frankfurt work together to coordinate client requests for assistance. All see an increase in the number of calls about the situation in Egypt. Members call our alarm centers, asking for help to leave the country. Disruption of communications networks makes coordination difficult: internet, mobile and SMS communications are disabled on and off for four days. Despite the curfew, the IMT secures transport through an existing provider in Cairo to a central point from where members can be escorted to the airport.

January 30: Air evacuations start

Protests and clashes with the police continue in Cairo and other cities, despite the overnight curfew. A client liaison group is set up in the London alarm center. The IMT secures an evacuee assembly area at the Fairmont Hotel in Cairo from which point members are escorted to the airport for departure. We carry out our first two evacuations (totaling 287 passengers) to Frankfurt and Paris. We evacuate a further 39 passengers to Dubai. Throughout the crisis, problems arise with individual travelers' visas, which were resolved on a case-by-case basis. At all destination airports, International SOS has reception teams (including medical staff) to receive evacuees and provide assistance with accommodation and onward journeys where needed.

January 31: Looking after members on the ground

Protests become more peaceful as a new cabinet is sworn in, though a heavy security forces presence remains on the streets. The IMT (including a local doctor) looks after members at the hotel and, with the situation on the street

chaotic, ensures that food and drink are available. With clients starting to request evacuation out of Alexandria, the CMT assesses resources and requirements. The crisis has proved very stressful for some members. International SOS provides medical advice and assistance to two patients in Cairo. Connections and local networks prove critical in getting medical support to patients on-the-ground.

February 1: Evacuations continue

Conditions at the airport continue to be crowded and confusing, with delays in processing passengers. Despite this, and the communications difficulties, we coordinate two more evacuation flights to Dubai and Paris.

February 2: Escalation of violence in Cairo

Brutal clashes break out around Tahrir Square where running battles continue, while the unrest is mirrored in Alexandria. Control Risks' consultants on-the-ground assist clients by collecting their employees from locations around Cairo and across Egypt and escort them safely to the evacuee assembly area. For those needing to stay in Egypt, Control Risks provides intelligence, assistance and advice in managing their security needs on the ground, including secure transport to their facilities. Despite communications still being down, we continue to coordinate evacuations. That night a flight takes 97 evacuees to Paris.

February 3: Evacuations extended to Alexandria

Protests continue while pro-Mubarak demonstrations erupt in Alexandria. A member of the IMT travels from Cairo to Alexandria to meet clients and ensure their safe evacuation.



We coordinate a flight from Alexandria to Dubai. Another flight takes around 114 passengers, two dogs and a cat from Cairo to Paris. Nurses from London and Dubai arrive with medical equipment to provide additional on-the-ground assistance. A key part of their role is providing emotional support to frightened and distressed members and their families.

International SOS and Control Risks hold a webinar attended by 422 clients to update them on the situation.

February 5: Medical support provided

The medical team supports members with injuries, ensuring that they are admitted safely to a hospital in London. One client unfortunately suffers a stroke and is evacuated by air ambulance.

February 6 and onwards: Continuing support and assistance

Our teams continue to provide support to members on the ground until after President Mubarak's resignation on February 11. With information scarce, Control Risks' political and security risk analysts provide customized reports for clients on subjects as diverse as the potential impact on the Suez Canal shipping route, future scenarios for Egypt and the potential ramifications of the uprising for clients' businesses across the region. After the crisis, International SOS and Control Risks continue to monitor the situation closely and assist clients with strategic advice and security support for re-entering the country.

A coordinated response

Despite the challenges, support to clients was provided through the close collaboration of the global networks and alarm centers of International SOS and Control Risks. A central aviation desk in London coordinated all aviation evacuation support, sourcing charter aircrafts as well as seats on commercial planes, while our on-the-ground resources were managed through an operations room in Cairo. Throughout the unrest, we provided ongoing commentary and advice online and by email to help keep members safe.

Our support in figures:

- More than 1,250 members were evacuated
- 420 members were evacuated via commercial aircraft
- International SOS and Control Risks fielded a team of 20 security and medical specialists to provide on-the-ground assistance in Egypt

"Thank you for your assistance in safely getting us out of Cairo. We really appreciate and thank you for all your efforts."

Director, Risk Management at an American university