

# Lessons learned

## Lessons Learned from the Last Deployment of a CRER<sup>1</sup> (Gabon, February 2008)

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*A Non-combatant Evacuation Operation (NEO) is defined as a security operation aiming at the protection of French citizens residing abroad by evacuating them from an area under an imminent and significant threat which may affect their security.*

*When, in a state in crisis, this security is seriously exposed, French political authorities can decide to evacuate the community of French citizens. If the local security context does not allow to envisage an evacuation by civilian means, political authorities can require the commitment of armed forces to ensure its execution.*

### GENERAL FRAMEWORK

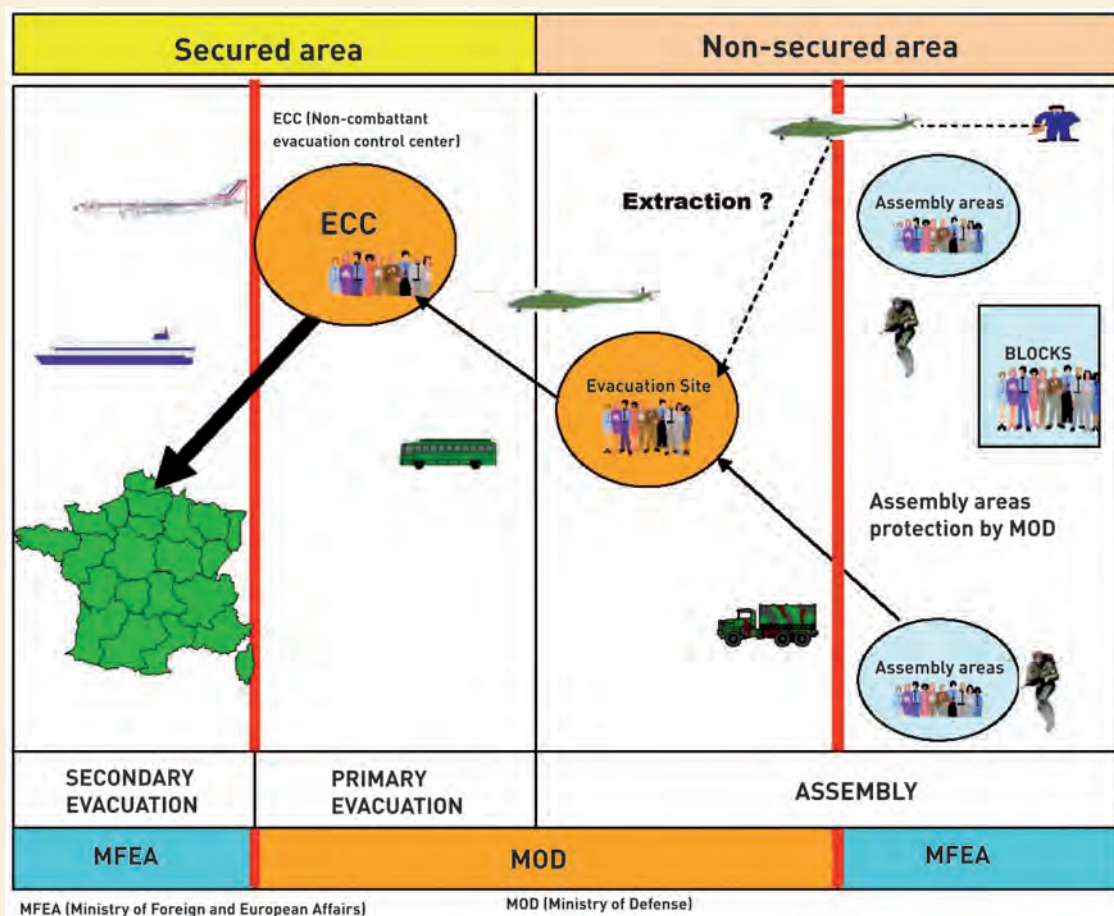
Subsequently, within the scope of their general missions, the armed forces shall be capable to participate, after a political decision, at any time and any place, in the security of French citizens abroad.

If need be, the action of the armed forces consists in planning and carrying on an operation aiming at evacuating citizens, from their homes or from regrouping areas, by military resources towards a safe haven. The CRER, an **evacuation control center** is usually deployed there; such phase is called **extraction or primary evacuation**.

Consular authorities then take care of arranging the repatriation of eligible personnel from the CRER, in principle to their country of origin. This phase is

designated as the secondary evacuation.

But the political instability of a number of countries, in conjunction with the increasing number of citizens, especially those residing temporarily abroad are turning this **mission endlessly more complex**.



This means that units from the *FLT* (French Land Logistic Force) in charge of this mission, shall prepare for this task by developing specific know-how. Moreover, evolutions, either political or military, lead us from now on to envisage this kind of operation in a clearly multinational environment. This implies an inter-agency cooperation which is indispensable for a successful mission. Finally, the **key for success** of these operations lies in **a capability for immediate reaction**. This was illustrated by the HQ of 1<sup>st</sup> Logistic Brigade during the deployment of a *CRER* in Libreville in 2008 to carry out the evacuation of French and European citizens expatriated in Chad.

## THE CRER: A SPECIFIC KNOW-HOW

The *FLT* is specifically tasked to set up a *CRER*. This role constitutes one link in the overall noncombatant evacuation system implemented by the French Armed Forces Staff. A *CRER* is **under command of one of the two logistic brigades HQs** and manned by one of the four CSS/transportation battalions<sup>2</sup>.

The *CRER* is **conducting a CSS mission** enabling the pre-positioned forces to preserve their core mission. **It is established on a site where eligible personnel are protected and supported by the armed forces in a view of their evacuation to their homeland**. It is the last staging area under the responsibility of the armed forces. All tasks related to reception, administration, support prior to the secondary evacuation are carried out there.

This is also the **privileged place for the armed forces to collect all accounts** that can facilitate evacuations and enable a better understanding of the political-military situation in support of the forces either already committed or to be committed.

The *CRER* is, **as much as possible, deployed in a perfectly secured area** in the host nation or possibly in a third country. In priority, it is located in an area with air and/or sea port facilities. These are needed to continue the evacuation to the homeland. It can be merged with this embarkation point if

the threat is low. However, it shall be different in case of a significant operation or a threat on the embarkation point. It can be deployed in the premises of the pre-positioned disposition and located in the vicinity of the theater. For operations of evacuation of a strong community of eligible personnel, it can be required to deploy several *CRERs* on one or two different sites (as it was the case for Baliste 2006). A NEO may then last from one to several weeks.

Its **tasks** consist in:

### - Reception:

- Receive eligible personnel in and inform them of the general situation,
- Take security measures<sup>3</sup>,
- Register identity information,
- Assemble and prepare evacuation and transportation of eligible personnel,
- Coordinate embarkation operations,
- Ensure, if need be, the transportation up to the embarkation site, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (*MAEE*<sup>4</sup>).

### - Support:

- Provide health support<sup>5</sup> (medical and psychological) to eligible personnel,
- Be prepared to accommodate and feed them.

### - Report:

- Inform the operation commander about the number and identity of eligible personnel,
- Maintain liaisons with civilian and military authorities.

The *CRER* is characterized by **its capability to:**

- take on registration tasks started by pre-positioned (either sovereignty or presence) forces or consular authorities<sup>6</sup>,
- deploy in a couple of hours a full disposition of registration of eligible personnel,
- inform commanders on the nature and number of people being registered and evacuated.

Moreover, it composes **an indispensable structure for coordination between the force and the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs**. Its functions consist in the last stage of primary evacuation

and enable the transfer of responsibility from one Ministry to the other.

**The *CRER* is modular.** It is articulated around a computerized registration system of citizens<sup>7</sup> which can be deployed alone with a 2-3 day self-sufficiency. **Additional modules** (Alpha, Bravo and heavy *CRER*) are only composing a capacity reinforcement deployed in relation to the mission duration and the number of citizens to be evacuated.

**Two *Alpha-CRERs* are permanently on alert**, one on a 72-hour notice the other on 9-day.

Recent operations conducted between 2002 and 2006 reveal that the ***Alpha-CRER* is the most frequently deployed module** as its logistic weight is compatible with current military airlift capabilities. Two *Alpha-CRERs* can be successively deployed in case of a difficult operation requiring the evacuation of citizens from two different areas.

**The *Alpha-CRER* can be split into two parts**, an advance party (forward registration team *EVACINFO*) and an additional module. In the early stages of a crisis, it is adequate to deploy the forward registration team module in the same time than the Foreign Ministry team.

Then the *CRER* commander, arriving in the advance party, can reconnoiter the site, prepare the implementation of the *CRER*, start contact with the force commander (*COMANFOR*), authorities and diplomatic authorities, and start the deployment and initialization of the citizen registration software.

To achieve this difficult mission, **the HQs of logistic brigades are very regularly conducting evacuation exercises with their battalions**. In all cases, these self-trainings are reviewed in order to refine the procedures and orientate the commanders' decisions in case of a real commitment. They also reinforce combined-arms brigades during planned exercises (such as the *CRER* in Fréjus with 21<sup>st</sup> Marine Infantry Battalion<sup>8</sup> during Exercise ANVIL 2008).

# Lessons learned

## AN ESPECIALLY HIGH REACTION CAPABILITY: CHAD 2008



121<sup>e</sup> RT

### INTER-AGENCY CO-OPERATION: A STANDING PARTNERSHIP

Decided at the highest political level under the ambassador's recommendations, **noncombatant evacuation is launched and monitored by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MAEE), which is responsible for the security of French citizens abroad.** When a military operation is decided, it is planned and conducted under the authority of the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces (CEMA). The CEMA then holds the **operational command of the committed force.** Considering the strong inter-agency feature of this kind of operation, a **close cooperation** shall be in place between **the armed forces and MAEE offices** in the phases of anticipating, preparing and running the action.

**In most cases, a non-combatant evacuation goes beyond the strictly national framework.** According to diplomatic agreements or strong historical links, France takes care of the evacuation of other nationals, granting them eligibility, in the same way than French citizens. In this case, a close cooperation shall be maintained with the diplomatic services of the concerned countries. During the Chad evacuation in February 2008, 79 nationalities were identified among the evacuees.

Besides that, **a non-combatant evacuation generates transfers of populations** which should be submitted

to the consent of the involved states (including those used for transit on their territory). When poorly controlled, these transfers may facilitate isolated attempts of illegal immigration. This aspect highlights the primary importance of coordination measures to be implemented on the ground between the force commander, the French consular representation, the deployed **MAEE** team, the **CRER** and the diplomatic authorities of the various countries involved (especially for controlling and screening people).

Entitled persons to be **evacuated under designation by consular services** are: French citizens, dual-nationals, European citizens and other nationals in the scope of defined diplomatic agreements.

In order to maintain and improve the cooperation between the two Ministries, **exercises conducted by the HQs of logistic brigades allow for the participation of consular agents from MAEE** either as initial training or as improvement of procedures and exchanges between the two partners. These improvements enabled the **CRER** military commander, in Lebanon in 2006, then in Gabon in 2008, to send, from the theater, data files that can be used immediately by the crisis cell of the Foreign Ministry. Finally, it is not unusual in case of a real commitment to find consular agents and servicemen knowing each other because they participated either to a common exercise some weeks before or a previous actual evacuation.

During the week before **Friday 1 February 2008**, columns of rebels opposed to Idriss Deby were moving towards Chad. As soon as Friday, confrontations occur in the capital N'Djamena.

On the same day, in the evening, **the Joint Operations Planning and Command and Control Center (CPCO<sup>9</sup>) decided to place the CRER on «GUEPARD» alert under 24 hours.** All alert personnel were then joining Monthléry base, the last element arriving on Saturday 2 February in the morning.

The **Alpha-CRER** to be deployed was **under command of the HQ 1<sup>st</sup> logistic brigade.** It was also tasked to provide the forward registration system (**EVACINFO**). It was composed of a CSS/medical support team from 121<sup>st</sup> Transportation Battalion, a 2-provost team, an INMARSAT – a French satellite communication system - team from 41<sup>st</sup> signals battalion and an information collection team from **GR<sup>10</sup>** in Metz.

Once formed, the party joined Villacoublay air base on 1400 hours and took off towards Istres at 1700 hours in order to be provided with a pediatric package.

When in Istres, the party was informed that **the CRER will not be deployed in Ndjamen**a but in Libreville due to the very poor security conditions on the airport of the Chad's capital. **On Sunday 3 February 0500 hours, the CRER landed in Gabon** and deployed within 6<sup>th</sup> Marine Infantry Battalion. The latter could then resume its usual activities.

**Two hours after landing, the CRER was operating.** It "processed" and registered its first aircraft of evacuees. It delivered the reports required by the force commander and the crisis cell from **MAEE.**

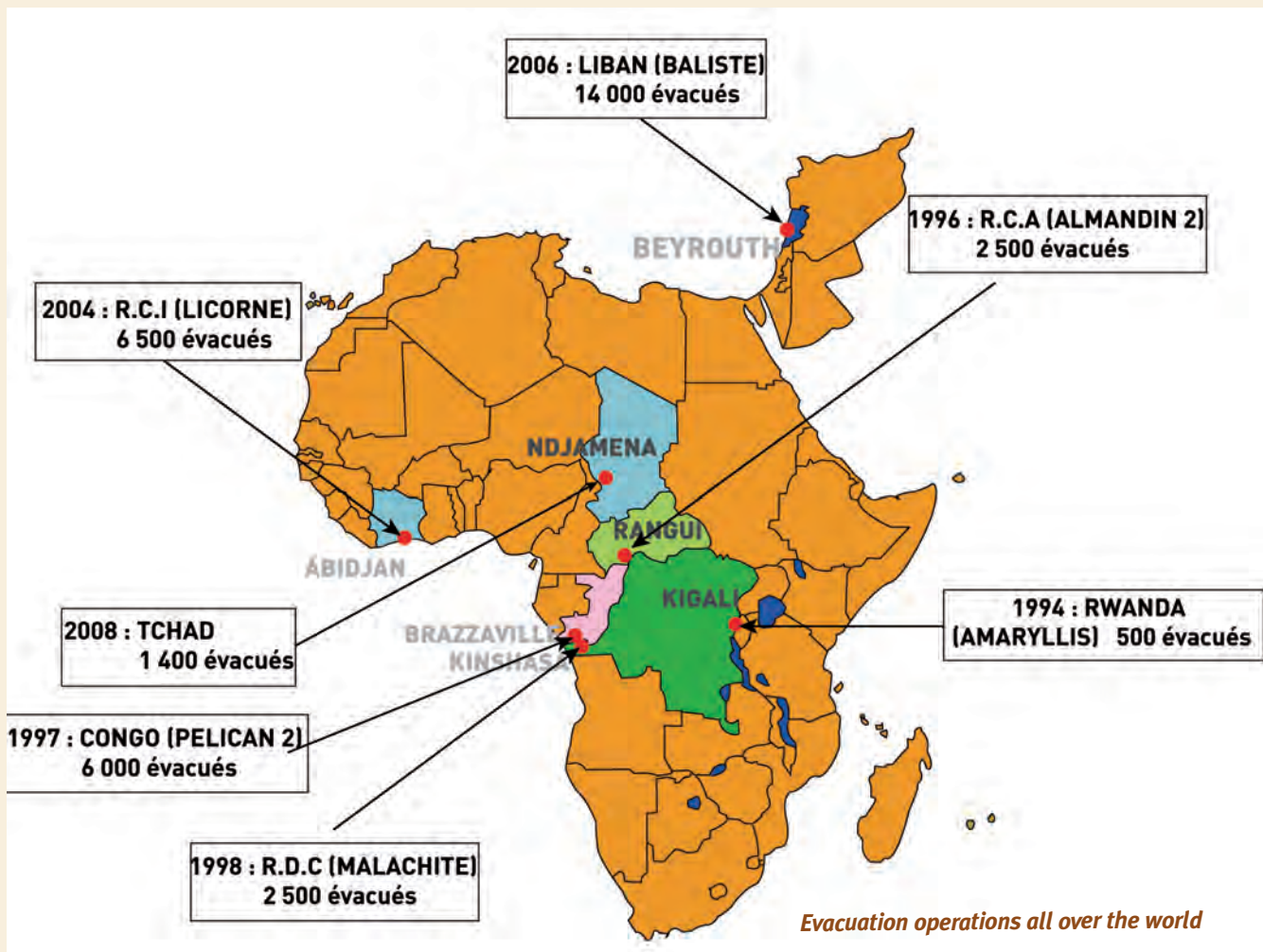
**The evacuation of noncombatants from Chad was organized in two stages: a primary evacuation from Chad to Gabon** by tactical aircraft (C130 and C160); 19 rotations were carried out between N'Djamena and Libreville, airlifting some 1,384 people.

**A secondary evacuation from Libreville and mainly to Paris** but also towards other destinations in relation to the requests voiced by nationals and the resources made available by the various embassies and international organizations.

Four flights were chartered to Paris by *MAEE* between 3 and 6 February. From 7 February, seats were booked by *MAEE* on the scheduled Libreville-Paris airline.

Some nationals preferred to go in neighboring countries (Senegal, Cameroon...)

- 1 *CRER* : centre de regroupement et d'évacuation de ressortissants = Evacuation Control Center (ECC)
- 2 121<sup>e</sup> RT/RS (Monthéry), 503<sup>e</sup> RT/RS (Souge), 511<sup>e</sup> RT/RS (Auxonne) and 515<sup>e</sup> RT/RS (La Braconne).
- 3 Evacuees are selected by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The armed forces are not in charge of it.
- 4 *Ministère des Affaires étrangères et européennes* : US equivalent would be the Department of State.
- 5 In some cases, level 2 health support is provided from a Navy ship (TCD or BPC amphibious ships).
- 6 This enables the armed forces to focus on security and MAEE to focus on secondary evacuation.
- 7 EVACINFO system.
- 8 21<sup>e</sup> RIMa.
- 9 *CPCO* - Centre de planification et de conduite des opérations.
- 10 *GRI* - Groupement de recherche de l'information = Information Collection Element.



At the end, **1,384 people from 79 different nationalities** were evacuated from N'Djamena. All components, *CRER* location, close cooperation with *MAEE*, the French Ambassador and Consul, Gabon's authorities were put together to make this deployment successful. **The success was widely emphasized by the evacuees themselves. It was also by the community of ambassadors or consular authorities** from other nations present in Libreville who attended and accompanied their own fellow citizens in these difficult circumstances.