
HUMANITARIAN DEMINING

By

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The Problem

Land mines left in the ground after the cessation of hostilities are a significant threat to human life, social organization and economic development throughout the world. As many as one hundred countries worldwide are affected materially by this danger, with estimates of the number of land mines in place ranging from sixty to eighty million. Neither the \$300 to \$1,000 estimated to neutralize one landmine in place, nor the \$100 to \$3,000 estimated to provide a prosthetic device for each of those who survive an encounter with a landmine, begins to convey the true cost of these hidden killers. The treatment and rehabilitation costs of the victims, the inability to repatriate refugees and internally displaced persons, the economic disruption from unusable farm land, disruption of markets and slaughtering of livestock, and a wide variety of environmental problems associated with mined areas combine to add a staggering burden to many countries. Generally, these are the countries of the world least able to deal with the problem on their own.

While it is impossible to estimate the worldwide dollar cost of this problem, the human cost is clearer. The International Committee of the Red Cross estimates that approximately 26,000 people a year worldwide are victims of land mines—a staggering one victim every twenty minutes—and this statistic does not refer to combatants. These victims could be children playing in a field or roadway, farmers tilling soil, young or old persons gathering firewood or a displaced person approaching his or her former home. As a recent Human Rights Watch publication summarized the problem, “Land mines are inherently indiscriminate weapons recognizing no cease fire and, long after the fighting has stopped, continue to maim or kill the children and grandchildren of the soldiers who laid them”.

The Response

The U.S. government’s response to this problem is coordinated under the “Demining 2010 Initiative”, a government-wide effort to build effective international coordination and sustainable support—from public and private sources—toward a mine-safe world by the year 2010. The specific objectives of the U.S humanitarian demining program are to reduce the number of civilian landmine casualties, return refugees and internally displaced persons threatened by land mines to their homes, and enhance the political and economic stability of those nations affected by land mines.

Humanitarian demining efforts within the Department of Defense began in the early 1990s, and led to the codification of our current authority for the use of DoD resources in this endeavor in the *1997 Defense Authorization Act*. Specifically, that legislation amended Section 401 of Title 10, USC, which had previously authorized a variety of other DoD humanitarian assistance efforts, to include humanitarian demining. The legislation restricts U.S. military personnel from directly engaging in humanitarian demining, and places limits on the amounts of material aid that can be provided by DoD to countries participating in this program.

Essentially, the DoD role is to train persons from participating mine-affected countries to become trainers of deminers and managers of demining programs. This leads to the establishment of a sustainable, indigenous demining capability in the participating country. In addition to our contribution toward achieving the overall U.S. government humanitarian demining goals, U.S. military forces involved, in particular Special Forces Groups, realize training benefits that support their own missions, such as military to military contacts, country infrastructure and cultural familiarization, language and training skills. To date, DoD humanitarian demining programs have benefited more than 30 countries, and have been responsible for the training of fully 25 percent of the world's deminers. DoD costs to date for these efforts are in excess of \$115 million, and are supported under the Defense Department appropriation for Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid (OHDACA).

The Program

The primary responsibility for approving and coordinating the U.S. government's humanitarian demining program rests with an interagency working group (IWG), chaired by the Department of State and vice-chaired by the Defense Department. Upon receipt of a foreign government's request for inclusion in the demining program through the American embassy there, the Department of State coordinates an interagency assessment of the appropriateness of that country's participation. This assessment is forwarded to and reviewed by the IWG. With IWG approval, the individual departments and agencies to be involved in the effort begin specific planning.

Typically, the DoD components of a humanitarian demining program include assistance to host nations in the following:

- developing a mine action center to coordinate the country's internal demining activities;
- developing and implementing a program of mine awareness education to prevent deaths and injuries.
- training host nation personnel to be demining trainers.

The "train the trainer" portion of our effort is usually the most extensive, and includes training in demining techniques as endorsed by the United Nations, emergency medical procedures, mine data survey and information management, and mine awareness program development. The Defense Department is allowed by law to give equipment and other support to host nations only as it is directly related to the provision of this training. Often, therefore, the Defense Department will conduct the start-up phase of a country's humanitarian demining program, turning a developed program over to the Department of State for further support and sustainment.

Defense Department humanitarian demining programs vary somewhat from country to country, depending on specific needs. Train the trainer programs must be tailored to the unique demining challenges faced in each country in such things as types of mines implanted, topography, level of experience of host nation personnel, and available infrastructure for training. Examples of recent programs include combined demining training of military personnel from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, conducted in Tbilisi, Georgia, and the successful completion

train of the trainer programs in Bosnia, Mozambique, Moldova, Namibia, Rwanda, Swaziland and Zimbabwe

Conclusion

The United States is a world leader in the effort to rid mine infected countries of the many debilitating effects of land mines left in place after armed conflicts. The Department of Defense is a major contributor to this effort. In coordination with the Department of State and other U.S. government agencies, we are active in every part of the world where landmine problems exist. Our efforts have been both significant and successful, providing numerous nations the ability to deal, themselves, with their landmine problems, while affording U.S. military personnel valuable mission related experience. Our impact on other nations in this endeavor is illustrated in the following excerpts from a recent letter to Defense Secretary Cohen from Moldavian Minister of Defense Boris Gamurri:

“It is an honor to inform you that within the period of May 4 to August 9, 2000 the servicemen of the Moldavian National Army have fulfilled a combat mission on the demining of the eighty-five hectares of mined area located near the village of Pohrebe. The mission was successfully fulfilled thanks to the government of the USA assistance, which had supplied the mine clearing equipment. This equipment has demonstrated its high performance and contributed considerably to the moral-psychological climate among the servicemen, assuring the execution of the mission in the fixed terms and without accident. Using this opportunity I would like to express to you my sincere gratitude for the supply of the demining equipment and the training of Moldovan servicemen, which has substantially contributed to the execution of this mission.”

About the Author

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