The Rise in Terrorist Attacks in the Western Sahara

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spending more time and effort on the initial data collection could be useful. If the number of false positives can be reduced, it is reasonable to assume that overall costs will also decrease. The Expert Opinion Collection is usually a relatively small part of the overall survey cost, so investing more resources on accurately collecting data early in the process may be a useful approach to improving the LIS cost-benefit ratio.

Conclusion

The initial data collection in an LIS designates communities as potentially impacted by mines and UXO. Distinguishing between suspected positive and false positives early in the process can reduce the costs of the LIS. Based on analysis of the correlation between costs and suspected positives, evidence supports that efficient planning can reduce future survey expenses.

Given the small number of countries that still require an LIS, the outcome of this analysis can give better cost estimates to potential donors and identify the survey parts where savings are most probable in the future. At this stage, with so many Landmine Impact Surveys completed worldwide, rewriting the protocols is likely not useful. Focusing on more efficient implementation and collecting core data in different countries is a better route to cost savings overall. *see endnotes page 83*

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The Rise in Terrorist Attacks in the Western Sahara

The Mauritanian government is taking steps to prevent AQIM’s terrorist acts, including suicide bombings and kidnappings in the region. Added to this threat are the explosives Al-Qaeda is able to obtain from landmines and unexploded ordnance scattered throughout the region after years of conflict in Western Sahara. The United Nations Development Programme and various countries work to remove these landmines and items of UXO, which is complicated by the lack of a Landmine Impact Survey.

In 2009, while driving toward the French embassy in Nouakchott, Mauritania, I suddenly encountered a large blast. As I approached the scene, I saw the worst sight I have ever seen—the results of a suicide bombing explosion. A 20-year-old man had blown himself up trying to kill two innocent embassy staff members while they were exercising. The explosion split the man’s corpse into three parts: His head to stomach was dismembered and lying in the center of the path; his lower part was thrown about 12 meters (13 yards) away; and pieces of his legs and other small bits were strewn about on the pavement. He committed this action during the daytime, in front of everyone, and I saw it myself. Immediately following the attack, fear paralyzed the people nearby. No one wanted to move because they were shocked and revolted by the explosion, and they were worried about additional attacks.

Al-Qaeda’s Terrorism in Mauritania

This was the first suicide bombing in the country and the beginning of many Al-Qaeda el Maghreb Islami (Al-Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb) attacks in Mauritania. For example, the Israeli embassy in Nouakchott was blown up by a grenade and assaulted by terrorist fighters, wounding three people. Three French tourists were killed at Aleg (in the deep country). Finally, AQIM killed French captive Michel Germaineau in retaliation for a French raid that killed six AQIM militants. AQIM had kidnapped Michel Germaineau in Niger on the border with Mali and Algeria, but where he was killed remains unknown.

The Mauritanian government is determined to fight terrorists. Many specialized units in counterterrorism are stationed on the borders between Algeria, Mauritania and Mali. The soldiers comprising these units were highly trained in counterterrorism techniques by American and French experts. In addition, the Mauritanian government essentially provided all the needed equipment to the units (e.g., helicopters, vehicles, radar, an armored personnel carrier, night-vision goggles, etc.).

Using technology and satellite data, Mauritania’s counterterrorism team is gathering accurate intelligence extending beyond the country’s borders to stop the extremists before they can launch new attacks. A joint tactical-operational center was created in Algeria. This center provides updated intelligence information, assesses the security situation and coordinates shared actions against AQIM.

Other bands, arms traffickers and drug dealers are located in the same region as the AQIM fighters and can collaborate with them in terms of resupply or equipment support, although AQIM mem-
Mauritanian Army officers and an official from the NATO Maintenance and Support Agency, during an assessment visit to one of Mauritania’s remote and lightly guarded munitions supply points. It is very tight in the main towns, warehouses, military bases are not built according to modern standards. Some of these ammunition and light-weapons stockpiles and fragile military camps. It is very tight in the main towns, warehouses, military bases are not built according to modern standards. Some of these ammunition and light-weapons stockpiles and fragile military camps.

Various arms and explosive remnants of war that can be utilized illicitly are readily available to terrorists in the Western Sahara region. This area was a battlefield, and it has not been cleared of the UXO. This means AQIM and others can take advantage of this situation to resupply their arms coffers. Moreover, many government weapons stockpiles and military bases are not built according to modern standards. Some of these ammunition and light-weapons stockpiles and fragile military camps. It is very tight in the main towns, warehouses, military bases are not built according to modern standards. Some of these ammunition and light-weapons stockpiles and fragile military camps.

The main mine-action actors are the Mauritanian Army Engineering Corps and a few Mauritanian non-governmental organizations. The United Nations Development Programme, Canada, the United States and France have supported mine-clearance and mine-risk education programs. However, the lack of accurate assessment and Technical Survey, coupled with a lack of good management, have undermined Mauritania’s success in making its lands safe. As a result, mines can still be found in many locations along Mauritania’s northern frontier and these weapons are used by bombers, terrorists or arms traffickers, who can then sell these devices to extremists.

The international community must act quickly to help the greater Western Sahara region solve this issue. Preventing terrorists from obtaining weapons and ammunition is important. Strengthening and better securing warehouses, military premises and camps where arms and munitions are obtainable is one solution; however, the government must also organize an awareness campaign about the danger of these issues and train its personnel to properly store and secure weapons and ammunition. §

see endnotes page 83