Clearing the Way in Chad: Assessment, Access and Impact

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol11/iss2/10

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The Mines Advisory Group began working in Chad in late 2004 with the objective of demining the water points in several of the war-torn provinces in the northern portion of the country. MAG formulated a three-phase plan that was extremely well-executed, even while dealing with the harsh desert climate, achieving its objectives before the deadline and under budget. A total of 21 watering points and 28 paths to water points were cleared, while 84 areas were identified as dangerous. The work had a particularly positive effect on the local nomadic populations, who make a living traveling, often through areas identified as dangerous. The work had a particularly positive effect on the local nomadic populations, who make a living traveling, often through areas identified as dangerous.

The third phase of operations saw the completion of the remaining high-priority tasks in Borkou and Ennedi and the expansion of activities into Tibesti. This expansion was made possible by the signing of a peace agreement between the Chadian government and the Movement for Democracy and Justice in Chad in August 2005 allowing MAG to continue working in and around Zouarke. This project marked the first time an international nongovernmental organization had visited the communities in this remote but highly contaminated part of Chad. It was a breakthrough in terms of providing much-needed humanitarian mine-action services and support to the peace-building efforts of the government in the area.

A series of successive conflicts between 1977 and 1996 left much of Chad littered with landmines, unexploded ordnance and significant numbers of small arms and light weapons. Information gathered in the course of a Landmine Impact Survey conducted in 2000–2001 highlighted the extent and socioeconomic impact of mine and UXO contamination in Chad, particularly in the north. Unfortunately, the LIS team was unable to reach the northern province of Tibesti due to ongoing fighting in the area at the time of the survey. To address the problems faced by local populations living amid these items, the Mines Advisory Group started operations in Chad in late 2004 with a project funded by the U.S. Department of State’s Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in its Bureau of Political-Military Affairs. This three-phase initiative focused initially on restoring access to water points in Borkou and Ennedi provinces and in the last phase, Tibesti province. In the arid desert environment of northern Chad, access to water is a key factor in the survival of desert communities and a crucial consideration in terms of trade and economic development. Following this withdrawal of Libyan troops in 1987, many of these water points were suspected of contamination.

In the first phase of the project, MAG conducted a rapid assessment of clearance activities to date. This evaluation provided additional findings for the Information Management System for Mine Action database and allowed the effective prioritization of key water access-related tasks for the next phase of activities. The second phase involved deploying a team to conduct the Technical Survey and, as appropriate, the clearance of water-access points and munitions caches, and the marking of impacted roads and tracks in Borkou and Ennedi.

Humanitarian Impact

A key distinguishing feature of MAG’s work in Chad was the direct benefit to both nomadic and settled populations. Northern Chad lies at the heart of historic trading routes across the Sahara from North Africa to sub-Saharan Africa, and the nomadic populations provide the economic link between the two regions, crossing vast areas of often heavily contaminated land. While there is no doubt that the decontamination of any area is of huge benefit to all communities, there is often little attention given to nomadic communities, which play an important role in sustaining the whole region and face particular dangers in the course of their movements and activities. Both nomadic and settled populations are heavily reliant on these water points, which are rare in the deserts of northern Chad.

MAG’s efforts in the northern provinces, often working in difficult and extreme conditions, have ensured increased access to water for local populations and resulted in the opening of the Route des Puits, or the Road of Wells, in the Koro-Toro region. This road had been closed since 1987; it is a main access route to the north, with a number of suspected contaminated wells (as well as contaminated land) along the length of it. This clearance represented a key project achievement as work in this inhospitable terrain was an arduous task, but its clearance meant a material contribution to improving access to water for local and nomadic populations.

Though the nomadic populations themselves are by their very nature somewhat elusive, they have been quick to make use of the recently decontaminated water points, as evidenced by newly planted date palms around the water points. The nomads plant date palms where they have access to water and visit them once or twice a year to harvest them, trading the dates in exchange for goods. MAG has thus far cleared 21 water points and marked 28 routes to ensure access to the water points is safe and unhindered.

In April 2006, following the violent clashes that took place when rebel forces entered N’Djamena seeking to overthrow the government, MAG was unable to deploy to the north due to the ongoing security situation. MAG was specifically asked by the Chadian High Commission for National Demining to support its teams in conducting battle-area clearance in the capital, providing an immediate emergency response in the three weeks following the fighting. The teams completed 11 BAC tasks and nine explosive-ordinance-disposal responses in N’Djamena, thus ensuring that the explosive debris of conflict did not pose an ongoing threat to local populations.

MAG was successful in building a relationship with the local authorities and communities. Local people provided the MAG teams with information that enabled the identification and destruction of several Man-Portable Air-Defense Systems, shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles also known as MANPADS), including seven SAM-7’s and one Stinger. Challenges and Lessons Learned

There is no doubt that operating in Chad presented particular problems and challenges, not the least of which was the requirement for the teams to work in isolated and restrictive conditions for long periods of time. This difficult operating environment presented logistical challenges, and Mission Aviation Fellowship supported MAG by ensuring that neces-
Survey and Ordnance Disposal in the Polisario-controlled Areas of the Western Sahara

Due to a 15-year war, Western Sahara has a number of unmarked territories full of explosive remnants of war. Landmine Action, a nongovernmental organisation from the United Kingdom, has taken several measures to improve the situation in Western Sahara. In addition to surveying, marking and reporting, one of LMA’s chief intentions is to train members of the local population in an explosive-ordnance-disposal programme.

Project Background

The 16-year long military conflict left Western Sahara littered with mines and explosive remnants of war. The densest concentration of mines and ERW is found to the east of the berm, the 2,400 kilometer (1,491 mile) earthwork fortification that runs the length of Western Sahara and divides the Moroccan and the Polisario-controlled zones. The berm is part of a series of walls, ditches and minefields constructed by Moroccan forces between 1981 and 1987. Mines and ERW are found near settlements throughout areas now under Polisario control that were previously captured and temporarily occupied by the Polisario. They would also impede a repatriation of Saharawi refugees from the five camps in southwestern Algeria in the event that a political settlement is reached on Western Sahara’s sovereignty issue.

Objectives

In October 2006, Landmine Action, a U.K.-based NGO, began conducting a survey of the threat mines and ERW posed in the northern sector of the Polisario-controlled zone. One of the objectives for Landmine Action is to analyse the survey data to assess and prioritise land in terms of need and feasibility of the marking, clearance, removal and destruction of ERW and mines. Since the start of 2007, Landmine Action has been carrying out the marking, clearing, removal and destruction of the ERW. The organisation’s project offers a long-term solution to the problem through the establishment of a local demining and explosive-ordnance-disposal capacity.

The strategy and structure of the survey were in accordance with the recommendations of a United Nations Mine Action Standards 2 (UNMAS) study and the UNMAS guidelines. The ERW pose a risk to local civilians, particularly nomadic populations, as well as United Nations and NGO personnel traversing the Polisario-controlled zone. These threats might be encountered by Western Sahara refugees from the five camps in southeastern Algeria in the event that a political settlement is reached on Western Sahara’s sovereignty issue.

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The survey was conducted in October 2006 and March 2007 by Landmine Action under the guidance of the International Mine Action Standards 3 (UNMAS) project. The project identified a number of areas that were suitable for the establishment of a local demining and explosive-ordnance-disposal capacity. The strategy and structure of the survey were in accordance with the recommendations of a United Nations Mine Action Standards 2 (UNMAS) study and the UNMAS guidelines. The ERW pose a risk to local civilians, particularly nomadic populations, as well as United Nations and NGO personnel traversing the Polisario-controlled zone. These threats might be encountered by Western Sahara refugees from the five camps in southeastern Algeria in the event that a political settlement is reached on Western Sahara’s sovereignty issue.

The Future

Having achieved its objectives ahead of time and under budget, MAG closed the project at the end of January 2007. MAG’s expansion of activities into the Tibesti province represented the first time an international nongovernmental organization worked in the province and was well-received by the communities in the area. It has enabled MAG to build a more detailed picture of the high levels of contamination in and around Zouarke. By December 2006, MAG had identified 840 contaminated areas in and around Zouarke. By December 2006, MAG had identified 840 contaminated areas in and around Zouarke.

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